



PROCESS

GETTING FROM A TO B: Seeing people through the annulment process (part 4)

In our past few issues, we have reflected on the annulment process in an effort to help pastoral ministers assist people through it in more knowledgeable and effective ways. We conclude our reflection with a look at the *vetitum* and *monitum*.

If neither party appeals an affirmative decision of the judges at the conclusion of a case, the decision takes effect, the marriage is officially declared null, and the parties are free to enter a new marriage in the Church *all other requirements of the law being observed*. One of the requirements of the law is the demand placed on pastoral ministers preparing couples for marriage to ensure “nothing stands in the way of its valid and licit celebration” (canon 1066), and one of the things that can stand in the way of a valid and licit celebration of marriage is a *vetitum* or *monitum*.

A *vetitum* is a prohibition forbidding the person on whom it is placed from marrying in the Church. A tribunal normally takes this step when a person’s prior marriage has been declared null for psychological reasons. Since psychological issues serious enough to invalidate a person’s marital consent (severe personality disorders, for example) are often permanent in nature, the person is prohibited from marrying again because any future marriage will also be invalid for the same reason, unless and until the person seeks appropriate treatment to manage his or her condition.

That is why, in order to lift the prohibition, the person must receive a favorable evaluation from a psychological professional, assuring the tribunal that the issues that caused the prior marriage to be invalid have been successfully dealt with by the person and are not an obstacle to a new marriage. Normally, this means that the person and his or her intended spouse will make an appointment with Catholic Charities Counseling Services for a series of three sessions, at the end of which the counselor who has evaluated them will send the tribunal a report. If it is favorable, the tribunal will lift the *vetitum*, and the person will then be free to marry.

A *monitum* is a warning to the pastoral minister preparing a person for marriage that the person’s prior marriage was declared null because he or she excluded something essential to marriage from his or her consent, what is known as simulation. This could happen, for example, if the person did not intend for his or her first marriage to be permanent but simply wanted to see if it would work out and, if not, he or she intended to leave the marriage. In such a case, the pastoral minister must make sure that the person now fully understands and intends marriage and all that it includes. Having done so, the minister will write to the tribunal, assuring us that this is the case, at which point we would then lift the *monitum*, and the person would be free to marry.

Thus ends this discussion of the annulment process. Hopefully we all learned something along the way that can help others. Until next time, keep the faith, love God’s people, and always honor the code!

