Chancery Checklist for Processing Marriage Documents  (May 2016)

Before issuing any testimonial letters (or any required dispensations or permissions for the celebration of a marriage, thus allowing that marriage to take place), diocesan chanceries need to satisfy themselves that nothing stands in the way of the valid and lawful celebration of that marriage. Therefore, in addition to the Marriage Preparation Form, duly completed, there should also be sent to the Chancery the originals of ……

(for a Catholic)

- a baptismal certificate or certificate of reception into full communion with the Catholic Church (the date of issue should be no more than six months in advance of the date of the wedding, since the certificate helps to establish the person’s freedom to marry)
- a certificate of confirmation, if this is not shown on the baptismal certificate
- a letter of freedom to marry from each parish in which the person has lived for a significant period (for more than 1 year) since becoming of marriageable age
- if the Catholic party has been married before, then written evidence clearly establishing freedom to marry will be necessary. This could be
  - death certificate of their previous spouse
  - declaration of freedom in lack of canonical form cases, or
  - decree of nullity from a matrimonial tribunal.
  - Please note….(unless the first marriage has been dissolved by death and a death certificate has been presented) every request for a second marriage must be referred to the Chancery; and no definite arrangement should be made for the marriage to take place until permission has been received from the Chancery.

(for marriages between a Catholic and a non-Catholic)

- a request for a dispensation or for formal permission for the proposed marriage, which should indicate that the cautiones required by canon 1125 have been administered by the priest/deacon preparing the couple for marriage

(for a non-Catholic)

- if we are told that the non-Catholic has not been married previously, then written evidence testifying that the person has never been married and is not related to his/her intended spouse
  - Typically this could be a letter or written statement signed by the non-catholic’s parents, or by other relatives or longstanding family friends of good standing who have maintained a close and continuous acquaintance with the non-catholic party throughout his/her life.
    - Such a letter might be in the following terms:  I [full name], currently residing at [address], am the [father/mother] of [full name and address of non-catholic party] who intends to marry [full name of catholic party] in [name and location of church of wedding] on [proposed date of wedding]. I declare that [name of non-catholic party] has never before been married in any way to another person. The letter should be duly signed and dated
  - If no-one can be found to provide such independent evidence, then a formally sworn affidavit by the non-catholic party themselves before a commissioner for oaths to the same effect would suffice.) A form of affidavit can be supplied by the chancery
- baptism? if the person is baptized, then a copy of their baptismal certificate should be included (the date of issue is not significant, since for non-Catholics the baptismal certificate does not serve to establish a person’s freedom to marry); if the person is not baptized, then for completeness a short addition should be made to the above evidence of freedom stating that the person is not baptized
- if the non-Catholic has been married before, then there will need to be some documentation that establishes the person’s freedom to marry. This could be
  - death certificate of their previous spouse
  - declaration of freedom in lack of canonical form cases (but only if he/she was previously married to a Catholic), or
  - decree of nullity from a matrimonial tribunal.
Every request for a second marriage must be referred to the Chancery (unless the first marriage has been dissolved by death and a death certificate has been presented); and no definite arrangement should be made for the marriage to take place until permission has been received from the Chancery.

If the wedding is proposed to take place outside a parish where either party actually has a residence qualification, then the permission of the proper parish priest should be given on the form.

A parish priest may give permission for a Catholic to marry a baptized non-Catholic provided the required promises have been made and the form completed and signed.

If either party was previously married (unless the previous spouse has died and a death certificate is presented), the diocesan tribunal will need to be involved.

Please do not forward to the Chancery originals of the civil Superintendent Registrar’s certificates for marriage (the blue certificates).

Copies of all material sent to the Chancery should (in case post goes astray), prudently, be retained in the parishes.

The Chancellor must always be contacted in each of the following cases, ie if

- one party is unbaptized
- the parties are related by blood, marriage, or adoption
- the parties are already civilly married and wish the marriage to be validated
- proof of baptism cannot be obtained for the Catholic
- the parties wish to marry other than in a Catholic Church
- neither party has any fixed address
- where a party is under natural obligations (arising from a previous union) towards another person, or children (c 1071.1)

If there are present any other concerns regarding the youth or maturity of either partner, circumstances of the marriage, family pressure, or if you would have difficulty in completing the marriage preparation form, please contact the Chancellor for advice.

Marriages where there are doubts about civil validity should not be celebrated without advice from the Chancellor and a lawyer, and in all cases need the positive specific permission of the Bishop before proceeding.

In an emergency, if the Chancellor is unavailable, please contact a Vicar General.

Philip White
Chancellor
19.05.16