

Address Potential Marriage Questions Prior to the Rite of Acceptance

One of the most complex aspects of the RCIA process are marriage questions—particularly of *former* marriages—that need to be addressed and clarified. For if one has been in a prior marriage, and if that marriage is determined to be a valid bond, then any present or future “re-marriage” places the candidate and his or her spouse potentially in an invalid and sinful relationship. When the added dimension of initiation sacraments is added, it is all the more difficult: for, having been received into the full life of grace in the Church, the newly-received may be in a position of returning to a relationship that is sinful and contrary to the new life in Christ just begun.

For these and other reasons, it is important to address marriage questions early in the initiation process. Bringing up former marriages with one you have just met and who may not be convinced that he or she should even join the Church is not ideal, especially since the breakup of former relationships is a painful memory. At the same time, it is not pastorally advisable to wait too long into the process, since if a marriage does need to be examined, this often takes time and may be cause to delay full initiation and the convalidation of a present union. Ideally, marriage questions should be addressed prior to the Rite of Acceptance or the Rite of Welcome.

To assist coordinators in receiving sacramental information from inquirers—and as a way to get to know each person in the process—three forms, developed by the [Association for Catechumenal Ministry \(ACM\)](#) and found in the [ACM Leader’s Manual](#), can be used:

1. [Adult Inquirer Information Form](#): this form collects the most general information, from simple contact information, religious history, marriage status, and general questions about what the inquirer may be seeking in the RCIA process. It is best filled out *in person* with the inquirer before the process begins or shortly thereafter, and it provides a great opportunity to get to know each inquirer (so don’t just hand it out and have it returned at a later date). In fact this interview can be an occasion, perhaps the first, where you can come to know in an intimate way the life and story of this particular inquirer: it is far more than simply “information gathering.”
2. [Current Marital Status Follow-Up](#): this form collects relevant information for those who are engaged, married, or divorced, and instructs the Leader on what he or she ought to do if the Marriage Tribunal needs to be contacted.
3. [Previous Marriage Information](#): this form begins to collect information on previous marriages of the inquirer or his or her fiancé or spouse.

To be sure, charity and sensitivity are required when addressing or asking questions about previous marriage. It is better to begin asking them early in the process rather than later, thus avoiding any last-minute work, chaos, and frustration for the Leader, the Tribunal, and—most of all—the candidate.

To order the ACM’s Leader’s Manual (\$35), contact the [Office for Sacred Worship](#).