

What is Involved and Do I Want to be a Case Sponsor?

Considerations

The first expectation is that you have a clear understanding of what we as the Metropolitan Tribunal are about and your role as a case sponsor. Remember you are the first contact the client has with us and a confident, non-judgmental, caring, and professional demeanor is essential to how the client will view the Church, the judicial process, and the Tribunal.

Secondly, a Case Sponsor should have the ability to meet with the client approximately two to four times prior to completing and forwarding the completed paperwork into the Tribunal. Experience has shown that one or two meetings are rarely sufficient to establish an honest rapport with your clients or to get from them sufficient information in order to complete the required paperwork. In many cases it takes a few meetings until your clients are comfortable enough with you to fully confide to you the more intimate details of their lives with their former spouses. So take your time, establish some form of professional relationship with them, it can speed up the case in the long run.

This is not to say that you are their advocate, each party is assigned a canonical advocate by the court. Nor are you the client's counselor. Your role is that of liaison between the court, your client, and your pastor. Communication with the Tribunal and your client is essential to your ministry. There may be instances where the court might contact you regarding witnesses, testimony, witnesses, or other issues pertinent to the particular case and would be asking your assistance in order to facilitate the arrangements with the Petitioner. In some cases the Petitioner may have ceased communication due some particular circumstance that has arisen in the Petitioner's life; the Case Sponsor is instrumental in bringing these circumstances to the attention of the Tribunal.

There is an expectation that your relationship with the client will be maintained throughout the process and that you communicate with him or her regularly regarding the progress in the case. There would be times when it would be appropriate to contact the Tribunal for an update and this contact should be made with your client's advocate in the court.

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Another requirement would be a competency in regard to the basic Tribunal procedures, requirements, and a portion of the law pertaining to the recognizing possible grounds. It is important even after the training to have a complete grasp on everything. This training is developed in order to give you a firm basis on which to build a professional competency, which will come as your experience increases.

There is also the element of confidentiality. As a case sponsor you will be intimately involved in the very private, painful, enraging, and sometimes embarrassing details of your client's life. You might hear about past physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, reproductive dysfunction, decisions or reactions made in situations due to gross immaturity, mental disease or addictions among other issues.

Given the type of information you will be handling it should be obvious that these are not topics that should be discussed with anyone with the exception of your pastor and this court. Simply put, any case sponsor who breaches confidentiality will no longer be able to function in this ministry and their association with the Tribunal will be terminated immediately.

So before you decide whether or not to accept your pastor's request to become a case sponsor ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I ready to be the face of the Church to someone seeking a decree of invalidity?
- Can I be non-judgmental?
- Can I keep confidentiality?
- Am I good at paperwork?
- Do I have the time to devote to this ministry?
- Can I meet with clients often enough to truly help them?
- Am I ready to learn about Tribunal procedures during a two day training session?
- Am I willing to work in my parish and with the Tribunal to assist with this ministry?

If you have answered yes to these questions,
the ministry of Case Sponsor may be for you.

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Confidentiality and Security

As has been consistently repeated, as a Case Sponsor you will be intimately involved with the details of your clients' lives, and those details must be guarded at all costs. You may discuss details of a case with your **pastor only**. Please have a place where you can secure any active case files, and have the ability to appropriately destroy any closed files.

You should have a private place to meet with your clients which meet diocesan requirements for the protection of yourself and your client. In most cases the parish can and does supply these facilities. For your personal and professional safety and the safety of the client, remember an interview should never be conducted in a client's home.

There have been questions in the past regarding the presence of current spouses in the interviews. As a rule this should be discouraged, however depending on the circumstances it may be beneficial to the **initial** interview in order that the spouse can understand the general process. If the spouse is present during the initial interview it is important that he or she be told that you cannot discuss the case with them as it is not their case and your client is the Petitioner.

This is your client's case and there may be essential details of his or her life that he or she does not wish to reveal to his spouse regarding his prior marriage. It is due to this fact that the current spouse cannot be present for the factual interviews. Maintaining confidentiality for a Case Sponsor **does** mean that you are not allowed to discuss the case with **anyone** except the pastor. Remember this "anyone" that you **cannot** discuss a case with **does include** the current spouse.

Case details include but are not limited to;

- Any and all personnel identification information.
- Any and all discussion of any case or any of its components.
- Any other aspect of any particular case past or present.

Simply stated any breach of confidentiality will mean your disassociation with this Tribunal and any ministry associated with it.

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Practical Do's

- Do remember that you represent the Church when working with your clients.
- Do be compassionate and non-judgmental of your clients
- Do maintain a **professional** relationship with your client; remember you are not their counselor.
- Do remember to be honest with your clients regarding the process and what is required to open a case with the Tribunal.
- Do be honest with your client regarding what may be asked of them by the Tribunal
- Do have the ability to contribute the time necessary to your clients in order to best prepare their cases. This would include 2-4 meetings with the client in order to build a professional and trust relationship.
- Do **hear** your client's story and react appropriately. In some cases you may wish to refer the client for pastoral or professional counseling if it is necessary. If this situation presents itself speak with your pastor regarding any referral.
- Do be competent and professional in your ministry. Take advantage of training opportunities.
- Do discuss appropriate witnesses and the testimony that they may be able to give in the case.
- Do contact the Tribunal if there are any significant changes or issues that have arisen in any given case.
- Do call the Tribunal if you have any questions regarding a specific case or if you are asked a question you are unable to answer.
- Do find yourself a good spiritual director whom you can confide in. This will be essential to you when you need to decompress or evaluate your ministry.
- Do recommend that your client find a pastoral or professional counselor in order to bring about a sense of closure and healing in the process.

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The Courts

Judicial Vicar: Msgr. Luis Zarama

1st Court: (Even Case Numbers)

- Fr. Michael Onyekuru Presiding Judge
- Dr. Diane Barr Collegiate Judge and *Ponens*
- Msgr. Edward Dillon Collegiate Judge
- Elyn Macek Defender of the Bond
- Robert Brooks Auditor
- Br. Nicholas Wolfla Chief Auditor *
- Theresa Goldman Notary
- Dorothy Wesselmann Advocate
- Joe Tovar Advocate

2nd Court, (Uneven Case Numbers)

- Msgr. Stephen Churchwell Presiding Judge
- Dr. Diane Barr Collegiate Judge and *Ponens*
- Msgr. Edward Dillon Collegiate Judge
- Rev. Mr. Alfred Samoranski Defender of the Bond
- Catherine McCarty Auditor
- Judith Bailey Notary
- Dr. David Castronovo Chief Advocate*
- Jean Guettler Advocate

(* indicates supervisory position and has responsibilities in both courts.)