

THE DIOCESE OF WEST TENNESSEE GUIDELINES

Petition for Godly Judgment

Title I, Canon 19

(revised May 28, 2003)

1. In the consideration of request for favorable Godly Judgments, the Bishop depends primarily on the recommendation of the applicant's rector or priest-in-charge of the congregation. When the officiating clergy person is not the rector of the applicant, the rector's permission for the wedding to occur on his/her church property should be included in the request.
2. The reviewing of the petition by the Bishop will be done expeditiously. However, the Bishop asks that you allow up to thirty (30) days for his response as provided for in the Canons. No date for the proposed marriage should be established prior to the receipt of the Bishop's favorable judgment. At this point in the process, the couple is on the timetable of the Church rather than on their own.
3. All provisions of Title I, Canon 18 as well as Title I, Canon 19 shall apply in consideration of making a petition for a favorable Godly Judgment.
4. When consent has been given in another jurisdiction for a marriage that is to be held in The Diocese of West Tennessee, the judgment of that jurisdiction will be accepted, but a letter requesting the written consent of the Bishop of West Tennessee is required.
5. Because of the pastoral issues needing to be worked through by those entering into remarriage, request for judgment for those seeking a second marriage should be made no sooner than one year after the final divorce decree has been granted. For those seeking a third marriage, request should be made no sooner than two years after the final divorce decree has been granted. Favorable Godly Judgment request for fourth marriages (or more) are not likely to be granted. However, the Bishop recommends that the couple, in consultation with the applicants' respective clergy persons, consider civil marriage with the option of applying for the blessing of the Church after one year.
6. Please include the following information with the application you make for judgment:
 - a.) Completed Information Form
 - b.) Certified copy of the Final Divorce Decree (from each previous marriage)

- c.) A comprehensive letter from the officiating clergy person stating how many pre-marital preparation sessions you have had, with whom, and how long, and covering, at a minimum, such issues as:
- how long the man and woman have known each other;
 - why they and you think the marriage failed and what has been learned by the couple in this respect;
 - your personal feelings about the prospects for the new marriage's success;
 - if children are involved, how they feel about this, and plans for them;
 - are the minor children of former marriages being cared for financially and otherwise;
 - are spouses employed outside the home – what they do;
 - will the jobs require frequent absence from family, particularly during this new formative period;
 - financial stability;
 - health;
 - your assessment of their spiritual maturity;
 - will they be active in the Church;
 - your plans for post-marital counseling and/or continued contact; and
 - your recommendation as to whether or not this couple should be granted a favorable Godly Judgment.
- d.) If the couple is currently married through a civil ceremony and is seeking the blessing of that marriage, please provide a copy of all pertinent documentation of that marriage.

7. In the case of divorce, permission must be granted for the blessing of a marriage as well as for a marriage service itself. The same application procedure and guidelines for the blessing of a marriage following a civil ceremony as for a marriage service within the Church apply.
8. The parties shall be instructed that continuing concern must be shown for the well-being of the former spouse(s) and any children of the prior marriage(s).
9. A solemnization of any marriage under Title I, Canon 19, should be reported to the Bishop within ten (10) days after the wedding on the form provided with the judgment.

Note: From time to time, for pastoral reasons, the clergy person meeting with the couple in pre-marital counseling may wish to request that separate letters from the man and the woman be written to the Bishop that indicate:

- Their personal conclusions about why their prior marriage(s) failed;

- What was learned from the process;
- What they will do in this marriage to help prevent this happening again.

Such letters have included personal statements about the individual's faith in our Lord, his/her commitment to the Church, and their respective feelings about the permanency of marriage. While the Bishop is open to receiving such letters from the couple, it is not a prerequisite expectation for his consideration of the petition from the clergy person. The Bishop's primary focus will be on that recommendation and his trust in the judgment of the officiating clergy person within the context of that ongoing pastoral relationship and the framework provided by these guidelines.