



THE M-B FORM: CAN I GET A WITNESS?

The Office of the Tribunal and Matrimonial Concerns relies on many different forms in our service of people preparing for marriage or seeking an annulment. One of the most commonly used in both processes, and one about which there is much confusion, is the M-B form.

The M-B form is an affidavit, or a written declaration, through which a witness testifies to certain facts. The testimony of witnesses is necessary because both marriages and annulments have legal consequences in the Church. To legally establish a fact, except in cases when an official document, such as a baptismal certificate, is present, canon law requires corroboration, that is that the same fact is declared to be true by multiple persons. That is why, when M-B forms are required, we ask that two be submitted.

For marriage, M-B forms are used to establish the fact of baptism, the freedom of the party to marry, and, if the

bride is under nineteen or pregnant, that she is entering the marriage freely without any undue pressure. M-B forms are used to establish the fact of baptism and the freedom of the party to marry if the party is non-Catholic or in the absence of an official baptismal certificate. In such cases, along with the section identifying the witness, please complete parts one and two of the form. We also ask that at least one M-B be submitted if a Catholic party is personally unknown to the priest or deacon preparing the couple for marriage. In such a case, please complete the witness identification section and parts one (if no baptismal certificate is present) and two of the form.

M-B forms are used for annulments only in lack of canonical form cases. They are used to establish the facts that a person was baptized Catholic, married outside of canonical form, and never had that marriage sanated or validated in the Catholic Church. In such cases, please complete the witness identification section, part one, and the relevant questions in part two of the M-B.

That is what the M-B form is and when and how to use it, but who makes a good witness? Minimally, the person must be at least

fourteen years of age and of sound mind. Ideally, the witness would also have firsthand knowledge of the facts about which he or she is testifying (e.g. he or she was present at the baptism), which makes family members, especially parents, good witnesses. However, as long as the witness has arrived at his or her knowledge of the facts by reliable means, even if not firsthand (e.g. he or she was told that the person was baptized by someone who was there), he or she can serve as a witness.

Finally, please note that other dioceses may have different requirements regarding the M-B form. For example, the Diocese of Pittsburgh requires two M-B forms for both parties in a marriage, even for Catholics. If a couple you are working with needs a permission or dispensation and resides in another diocese, please contact our office to see if additional M-B forms are required.

That's it for the M-B. Until next time, keep the faith, love God's people, and always honor the code!

