The Catholic Church presumes that all marriages – even those not blessed in the Catholic Church – are valid, binding two people together for life. The Catholic Church also presumes that the two parties came to this union of their own free will -- fully adult and fully aware of the mutual responsibilities of a married couple -- and they would continue to grow in grace and love until death separates them.

SO, WHAT IS AN ANNULMENT?

In our imperfect world, though couples divorce. The Church – at the request of one of the partners – can examine the circumstances of the union to determine if essential elements were missing from the very beginning of the relationship. This request is made by initiating a legal process commonly called an annulment.

What might an essential element be? Perhaps one or both of the individuals were too young -- too immature -- to understand or take on the responsibilities of a marriage. Perhaps one party suffered an addiction, grew up in an abusive environment, or was not open to children. Pre-nuptial signs such as “cold feet”, “pre-marital jitters”, or “second thoughts” may really have been indicators pointing to some deeper personal problems or developmental issues that eventually led to some serious problems in the marriage itself and its dissolution.

HOW DO I START?

The Peoria Diocese has identified and trained lay parishioners as Notary-Auditors is to assist individuals desiring to begin the process. At St. Patrick’s, Barbara Wysocki has served in this capacity for over ten years. You can contact her at (217-367-5014 or bwysocki16@gmail.com) or you can contact the parish office (217-367-2665) to set up an appointment.

She, like all advocates, is well-versed in the proceedings that inform and shape a case; she will advise and offer suggestions as the case is assembled; she can offer emotional support as a case evolves.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PURSUING AN ANNULMENT?

The legal process enables the diocesan Tribunal Office to investigate the circumstances of a marriage and determine if it was truly sacramental.

More importantly, this process – with the benefit of hindsight -- can inspire reflection and healing on the part of those most involved. It affords an occasion and a grace to face the past, rather than ignore it, enabling one to move forward as a baptized person, discovering our truer self.