

**TEXAS STATE COURT  
CATHOLIC DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAS**

**Guidelines for Accepting Non-Practicing Catholic Women  
As Members of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas  
In the State of Texas**

PREFACE: The State Chaplain, Clergy Consultant, and members of the State Board are often asked whether “non-practicing” Catholic women can be accepted as members of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas. We felt it necessary to prepare a standard response to this question for all officers and members of CDA courts within the State of Texas.

The bylaws of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas were amended at the national convention in Tampa, Florida, when Grace Rinaldi was National Regent, to allow Catholic women who are divorced and remarried outside of the Church to be members of the organization under some conditions. The discussion began while Edna Jane Nolte was the National Regent and was based upon statements made by Pope John Paul II and upon the recommendation of the National Chaplain, Most Reverend William G. Curlin, Auxiliary Bishop of Washington.

We hope this information will help clarify existing confusion and foster “Unity and Charity” within the CDA courts of Texas.

**I**

Requirements for membership in the Catholic Daughters of the Americas are covered by ARTICLE III – MEMBERSHIP in the bylaws of the organization. ARTICLE III, Section 1 – MEMBERSHIP states,

***“Catholic lay and religious women, 18 years of age and older, who love and support the Church and desire to participate in social and charitable activities, shall be eligible for, and entitled to, membership in THE ORDER.”***

The present wording was recommended by the National Chaplain at the time, Most Reverend William G. Curlin. In a letter to the National Regent, Miss Edna Jane Nolte, dated March 26, 1993, the bishop wrote the following:

“I am writing in reply to your question concerning the CDA accepting women who are divorced as members of the Catholic Daughters.

I think it is important that we are mindful that divorced Catholics are not automatically guilty or have personal blame; oftentimes they are the innocent party. As such they are entitled to participate in the full sacramental life of the Church.

The question of Catholics who are divorced and are remarried outside the Church is another matter. As a priest I have always encouraged them to attend Mass and to participate in the social and charitable activities of the Church. Many have proven edifying in their devotion to the poor, the sick and the homeless. Often they are the “victims” of a prior tragic marriage. While not approving of marriage outside of the Church, I believe it is important that we use every means available to encourage them to remain as close as possible to the Church. This is especially important when the possibility of a later remarriage in the Church may materialize. They need to see the Church as a loving mother. May I respectfully recommend that the requirement that an applicant be a “practicing Catholic” be changed to a Catholic who loves and supports the Church.

A pastor surely can verify the truth of this (love and support) on behalf of his applicant.....”

*[from Bishop Curlin’s letter to Edna Jane Nolte dated 3/26/1993]*

The following Vatican news article was also used to support this decision.

**Parishes Urged to Welcome the Divorced and Remarried**

VATICAN CITY – While Catholics who are divorced and civilly remarried cannot participate in the Eucharist, they must be welcomed as members of the church and encouraged to participate in parish life, Pope John Paul II said.

“To all those in need, the Lord, moved by mercy, reaches out simultaneously with the requirement of the truth and the oil of charity,” the pope said January 24 to members of the Pontifical Council for the Family. Members of the council, which includes prelates and married couples, were holding their primary assembly at the Vatican.

*[Source from which this article was copied and the year of publication is unknown.]*

**II**

When a Catholic woman who is divorced and remarried outside the Church is being considered for membership in CDA, we recommend that you follow these guidelines:

(1) Consult the pastor of the person being considered for membership or the court chaplain. CDA bylaws require that the applicant “love and support the Church and desire to participate in social and charitable activities.” Bishop Curlin, in the letter quoted above, stresses that the pastor is the one who “can verify the truth of this (love and support) on behalf of his candidate,” and usually has knowledge of their involvement in parish life. This initial step should take place before the proposed candidate is invited to be a member of CDA, and will help prevent embarrassment that may arise from dealing with such a sensitive issue.

(2) All CDA members MUST follow the rules of the Church. A member who is in an invalid marriage outside the Church is not allowed to receive the Holy Eucharist. A member or court officer should be an example for other Catholic women. Violation of Church law should not be tolerated under any circumstances.

(3) All qualified members of a CDA court are eligible to hold an office in the court. The temporary inability to participate in the sacramental life of the Church does NOT prevent members from holding office.

(4) Encourage members to visit with their pastor and discuss steps necessary to have invalid marriages annulled so their present marriage can be validated and they can once again participate in the Sacramental life of the Church.

(5) Educate your members on Church teachings regarding this issue. Court chaplains could address the topic during the “good of the order” portion of a meeting. This knowledge will ease some of the tension when your court welcomes new members who are “good” Catholics, but, because of circumstances, temporarily cannot receive the Eucharist.

(6) Do not judge others! This is a sensitive matter and often painful for those affected to talk about. CDA can be an instrument of healing for these members. Let’s practice our motto of “Unity and Charity” and leave judgment to the One who is worthy to judge and truly “knows our hearts.”

We hope these guidelines will help all CDA members in Texas better understand the rationale behind this change in our bylaws adopted at the National convention in Tampa, Florida (1996).