



DIOCESE OF SACRAMENTO

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THE TRIBUNAL

15 September 2015

To: Pastors, Parochial Vicars, Deacons, and Parish Staff
From: Rev. Mark R. Richards, Judicial Vicar *MR*
Cheryl M. Tholcke, Moderator of the Tribunal Chancery *cmt*

There is much interest in Pope Francis' recent Motu Proprio, *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus*, on the reform of canonical procedures in annulments in the Code of Canon Law. We are receiving many phone calls and e-mails from parishes and Catholics in general. High on the list of questions are: "Can my case be changed to the shorter process?" and "Is my annulment free?"

The first thing to be aware of is that the changes initiated by Pope Francis do not take effect until December 8, 2015.

Please, also remember that this document is addressed to the universal Church, and that some of the changes the Pope has called for will have greater impact in other countries than in the United States. The media is highlighting "sound bites" that do not provide an accurate picture of the current state of the annulment process in the U.S. nor how the changes will affect individual dioceses and their tribunals. In addition, there are many websites and blogs that are weighing in on the changes, including some who are fearful that the Holy Father is changing Church teaching about the indissolubility of marriage. Canon law reflects the teaching of the Church; it does not create Church teaching. Pope Francis is addressing the processes by which the Church investigates the validity of marriages submitted for an annulment, not changing Church teaching.

Tribunals (and their bishops) and canonists across the country are becoming familiar with the Holy Father's changes to the procedures in annulment cases. We are also awaiting the official English version of *Mitis Iudex*. Some changes, such as the elimination of the mandatory review at Second Instance, are clear, and will significantly reduce the time to process a formal case by several months. Other innovations, such as the abbreviated process, require further study. As we begin to "unpack" the changes and make application to our diocese, we will keep pastors, parochial vicars, deacons, and lay advocates updated on all changes in our procedures, paperwork, and timelines. In addition, our web page will be updated as these changes are implemented.

Thank you for your patience and interest during this time of transition.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us:

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