

## Pope Francis reforms marriage annulment process



Pope Francis today announced a reform of marriage annulments delegating power to local bishops to oversee a speedier and simplified process.

With two documents, issued *Motu Proprio*, the Pope has given power to the local bishop to judge annulment cases and allowed for “increased brevity” in the legal process by removing the requirement for a second judgment.

Currently, a decree of marriage nullity requires a review of the first decision or “sentence.”

The new rules mean in certain cases a bishop can provide a quick annulment to couples. Church annulments rule that a marriage has been invalidly contracted: however, there have been complaints for many years that the process is laborious and inaccessible to many Catholics.

Last September, Pope Francis announced a commission to look at a reform of the process.

In an introductory letter to *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* (Meek Judge, Lord Jesus), which was issued today only in Latin and Italian, Pope Francis admits that an “abbreviated process of judgment might put the principle of the indissolubility of marriage at risk.”

As a result, however, he has “desired that, in such cases the Bishop himself shall be constituted judge, who, by force of his pastoral office is with Peter the greatest guarantor of Catholic unity in faith and in discipline.”

Furthermore, the rules allow for appeals in annulments to be heard by the local metropolitan see which gives increased responsibility to local churches.

In announcing the changes, Pope Francis also called for a “gratuity of procedure to show the Church is a generous mother” when it comes to annulments. Currently, those wishing to obtain an annulment are required to pay a fee but Francis has said the process should be free. It is understood that the changes

aim at that being the case.

Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus announces changes to canon law that effect the Latin-rite Catholic Church. The second document Mitis et misericors Iesus (Meek and Merciful Jesus) makes similar changes to canon law for Oriental Churches.

They come into effect on 8 December to coincide with the start of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

Christopher Lamb in Rome-The Tablet