News
Vatican



Pope Francis leads the opening of the 91st judicial year of the Vatican City state court during an audience in the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Feb. 15, 2020. In mid-March Pope Francis updated the norms governing the Vatican City State judiciary system. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — March 16, 2020
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Pope Francis updated the laws that govern the Vatican judicial system in an effort to establish greater transparency and independence, particularly in financial and criminal matters.

The pope said the new measures, issued "motu proprio," on the pope's own accord, March 16, are meant to emphasize that the administration of justice is not just a "temporal necessity."

"The cardinal virtue of justice, in fact, enlightens and synthesizes the very purpose of the judicial power proper to each state in order to cultivate the personal, generous and responsible commitment of those invested with the jurisdictional function which is, above all, essential," the pope wrote.

The updated laws will replace the previous legislation on the Vatican's judicial system issued by St. John Paul II in 1987.

The Vatican press office said that the updated law was necessary in the wake of financial, economic and criminal regulatory reforms, as well as the Vatican's "accession to important international conventions."

At the same time, the Vatican said, it "preserves and ensures the specificity of Vatican law, which recognizes the canonical system as the first source of legislation and the first criterion of reference for interpretation."

Confirming the independence of the Vatican's judicial system and judges, the measures state that judges are "hierarchically dependent only on the Supreme Pontiff" and must exercise their duties with impartiality.

Vatican judicial authorities also have direct use of the Vatican police force and are granted Vatican citizenship during their terms, the legislation states.

The Vatican tribunal is comprised of a president and four judges. The pope increased the tribunal membership by one, and further specifying that at least one of the judges must serve full time and exclusively in the Vatican judicial system.

He also specified the judges "are chosen among university professors and among jurists of evident reputation, with proven experience — judicial or forensic — in civil, criminal or administrative matters."

The Vatican's prosecutor's office, known as the office of the Promoter of Justice, will also exercise its functions autonomously and independently from the tribunal, according to the new legislation.

In addition, Francis updated the requirements for lawyers of the Roman Rota, the Vatican tribunal that mainly handles marriage cases. Those wishing to enroll in the Roman Rota's bar association must also be registered with the bar association of their state of residence.

Lawyers for the Roman Rota are also required to show "proof of knowledge of canon law and Vatican law," the motu propio states.

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