News
Vatican
Vatican Judge Venerando Marano listens as the president of the Vatican City State tribunal, G

Pope Francis meets Msgr. Alejandro Arellano Cedillo during an audience with members of the Roma Rota at the Vatican in this Jan. 25, 2020, file photo. The pope has appointed Arellano to preside over a Vatican commission to verify progress on the pope's reforms of the marriage annulment process in the dioceses of Italy. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Concerned at the slow pace of adopting his reforms of the marriage annulment process, Pope Francis has established a Vatican commission to encourage and verify progress in the dioceses of Italy.

"Each bishop who does not yet have his own ecclesiastical tribunal must seek to erect one or at least endeavor to make this possible," the pope wrote in his document formally establishing a pontifical commission to monitor and assist the Italian dioceses. The document was published Nov. 26.

Many of Italy's more than 200 dioceses do not have their own tribunals but refer cases to one of 18 regional tribunals in the country. However, Pope Francis has been encouraging the Italian bishops to set up diocesan tribunals since 2015 when he promulgated reforms to the process for verifying the validity or nullity of a marriage.

The pope's reforms, published in two documents — "Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus" ("The Lord Jesus, the Gentle Judge") for the Latin-rite church and "Mitis et Misericors Iesus," ("The Meek and Merciful Jesus") for the Eastern Catholic churches — reformed sections of canon law dealing with requests for the declaration of the nullity of a marriage.

The documents emphasize the role of the local bishop in judging cases and accompanying couples. The reform also streamlined the process and insisted it be free of charge or as close to free as possible.

"The judicial ministry of the bishop by its very nature presupposes closeness between the judge and the faithful, which in turn creates at least an expectation on the part of the faithful that they will have recourse to the **tribunal** of their bishop," the pope wrote in establishing the new commission.

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While the Code of Canon Law allows a bishop to have recourse to another tribunal, the pope said, that possibility is to be seen as exceptional.

Pope Francis also asked the Italian bishops' conference to "equally distribute to the dioceses the human and economic resources" necessary to complete the reform process.

The pontifical commission, he said, will be set up at the Roman Rota, a Vatican court dealing mainly with marriage cases. Msgr. Alejandro Arellano Cedillo, dean of the Roman Rota, will be president of the commission, while two judges of the Rota and Bishop Vincenzo Pisanello of Oria, Italy, will be commission members.

"The task of the commission will be to ascertain and verify the full and immediate application of the reform of the process of matrimonial nullity" in the dioceses of Italy, the pope wrote, "as well as to suggest to the same churches whatever is deemed opportune and necessary to support and help the fruitful continuation of the reform, so that the churches in Italy may show themselves to be faithful, generous

mothers in a matter closely linked to the salvation of souls, as was urged by the majority of my brothers in the episcopate at the extraordinary Synod on the Family."