Vatican
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A green book and a blue book stand next to each other on a red background

Code of Canon Law books for the Latin and Eastern Catholic churches are pictured in Rome at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in this Sept. 15, 2016, file photo. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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Vatican City — April 3, 2023
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Saying he wanted to protect the rights of members of religious orders facing expulsion, Pope Francis made small changes to canon law, giving them more time to appeal their dismissals.

The changes, announced by the Vatican April 3, apply to both the Code of Canon Law for Latin-rite Catholics and to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

Even when a serious reason motivates the dismissal of a member of a religious order, canon law gives that person a right to know the reasons, to offer a defense and to appeal a decision.

The current Latin-rite code said that for a decree of dismissal to be valid, it "must indicate the right which the dismissed possesses to make recourse to the competent authority within 10 days from receiving notification."

A similar paragraph in the code for Eastern-rite Catholics gave a period of 15 days for the person to appeal.

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Francis ordered the change of both codes to give a person 30 days to appeal. The change goes into effect May 7.

The Synod of Bishops in 1967 drew up a list of principles that should guide the Code of Canon Law, which was being rewritten at the time, insisting that the rights of individuals in the church be defined and guaranteed.

Ordering the lengthening of the period to submit an appeal, Francis wrote that efforts to guarantee the rights of individuals "becomes relevant especially in the most delicate events of ecclesial living, such as procedures concerning the legal status of persons."

The Latin code's 10-day period and the Eastern code's 15 days, he said, "cannot be said to be congruent with the protection of the rights of the person."