Vatican
Vatican News
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)

Cindy Wooden

View Author Profile

Catholic News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — April 5, 2023
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Almost two years after updating a section of the Latin-rite Code of Canon Law dealing with crimes and punishment, Pope Francis promulgated a similar update to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

Titled "Vocare Peccatores" (To Call Sinners), the document begins by explaining the purposes of punishment in church law are "the restoration of justice, the correction of the offender and the reparation of offense and harm."

Signed March 20, the document was published only in Latin by the Vatican April 5. The changes go into effect June 29.

As with the Latin code, which was updated in June 2021, the updated code for the Eastern Catholic churches incorporates a series of laws and procedures promulgated over the past 15 years to protect children, promote the investigation of allegations of clerical sexual abuse and punish offenders.

St. John Paul II promulgated the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches in 1990.

Advertisement

In his update, Francis said that since then it was necessary "to consider some new offenses; to enunciate certain precepts more clearly so that they may be more easily and surely applied; introduce some technical improvements, for example, concerning the right to self-defense."

The drafting of the new text, he said, was overseen by the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, which carried out "extensive consultations" and worked with the Dicastery for Eastern Churches.

Bishop Juan Ignacio Arrieta, secretary of the Dicastery for Legislative Texts, told Vatican News the new norms explain "much more clearly when church authorities" must intervene. The description of cases is "more precise" and "the penalties that must be imposed are also clearer."

The Eastern code, he said, "also has been harmonized with the Latin discipline in so many aspects, such as the abuse of minors and the safeguarding of the sacraments."