

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

January 24, 2014 at 3:15pm

Pope says judgments on annulments must be impartial and pastoral

by Francis X. Rocca by Catholic News Service

Vatican City — Addressing the Vatican court primarily responsible for hearing requests for marriage annulments, Pope Francis said judges on church tribunals should show "imperturbable and impartial balance" as well as the "delicacy and humanity proper to a pastor of souls."

The pope made his remarks Friday to officials of the Roman Rota, at a meeting to inaugurate the tribunal's judicial year.

"You are essentially pastors," he told the officials. "As you carry out your judicial work, do not forget that you are pastors. Behind every file, every position, every case, there are persons who wait for justice."

Pope Francis has said that church law on marriage is a topic that exemplifies a general need for mercy in the church today, and that it will be among the subjects of discussion at this October's extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the "pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization."

In his speech to the Rota, the pope said a judge on a church tribunal must sympathize with the "mentality and legitimate aspirations" of the community he serves, and thus render "justice that is not legalistic and abstract, but appropriate to the needs of concrete reality."

Such a judge "will not be content with superficial knowledge of the reality of the persons who await his judgment, but will recognize the need to understand deeply the situations of the parties," the pope said.

"The legal dimension and the pastoral dimension of ecclesial ministry are not in conflict," Pope Francis said. "The church's legal activity, which takes the form of service to the truth in justice, has in fact a profoundly pastoral meaning, because it is aimed at the good of the faithful and of the edification of the

Christian community."

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