

Process pertaining to Annulments

Diocese to restructure the Tribunal

BRIDGEPORT—Bishop Frank J. Caggiano has announced plans for the restructuring of the Diocesan Tribunal, which will result in the closing of the office on December 1, 2015, and reopening on February 1, 2016.

The changes are a response to the September 8, 2015, Apostolic Letter by Pope Francis entitled *Mitis iudex dominus Iesus* (MI), regarding the restructuring of the Tribunal's (diocesan court) process pertaining to marriage annulment cases. The new law will take effect on December 8, 2015.

The bishop has asked Msgr. Dariusz Zielonka, a canon lawyer, to serve as adjutant judicial vicar for the month of December. On January 1, 2016, Msgr.

Zielonka will officially assume the role of judicial vicar in the diocese. In this new role, he will serve both as a judge in the Tribunal, and as director of the Tribunal responsible for canonical affairs of the diocese. Msgr. Zielonka will also continue to serve as pastor of St. Jude Parish in Monroe.

"I have every confidence in Msgr. Zielonka, who led us so well through the recent synod general session process. His training as a canon lawyer, organizational skills and embrace of new technology will begin a new era for the Tribunal consistent with directives of our Holy Father," the bishop said.

The bishop also announced that the diocese would no longer charge fees related to the annulment process.

The Tribunal is the forum in which the judicial authority of the bishop is exercised. It is responsible for investigating and adjudicating matters that need to be resolved according to the norms and procedures established by Church law. Most of the work of the Tribunal is devoted to processing marriage nullity cases.

The bishop said that the diocese has already begun preparing for the implementation of the new canon law because the changes are extensive and will involve new procedures.

In making the announcement, the bishop praised Msgr. Jerald Doyle, judicial vicar, and Msgr.



NAMED TO HEAD the restructured Diocesan Tribunal, Msgr. Dariusz Zielonka, a canon lawyer, will officially assume the role of judicial vicar on January 1, 2016. Msgr. Zielonka, pastor of St. Jude Parish in Monroe, previously served as director of the Fourth Diocesan Synod. (PHOTO BY AMY MORTENSEN)

James Cuneo, adjutant judicial vicar, who have guided the work of the tribunal for four decades.

"I would like to express my sincere appreciation for their many years of faithful service in the Tribunal. They have processed hundreds of marriage nullity cases during their ministry in the diocese. Both of them will retire as of December 31, 2015, with our gratitude for their deeply faithful and valued service," the bishop said.

"As the people of our diocese know, in addition to serving as judicial vicar, Msgr. Doyle very ably and faithfully served as diocesan administrator after Bishop William E. Lori's departure. For his leadership and all his service we owe him a great deal of gratitude. Likewise, Msgr. Cuneo has brought great perspective, learning and wisdom in his service as adjutant judicial vicar and was recognized for his spiritual guidance of the St. Thomas More Society at the recent Red Mass for legal professionals," said the bishop.

The bishop added that both men will be available to serve as resources to the diocese in matters of canon law.

Msgr. Zielonka said the temporary closing of the Tribunal offices would allow for the many important changes that have to be made in order to make the Diocesan Tribunal ready for the transition. He added that the planning phase now underway

has allowed the diocese to study the differences in processes and research proper canonical, human resources and technological solutions.

The restructuring over the next two months will involve re-indexing of the current files and setting priorities; implementation of the new technologies (hardware and software) to manage court cases and canonical procedures; training of the Tribunal staff and the diocesan clergy; and development of new forms and literature for Petitioners, Responders, Advocates, and the clergy.

Msgr. Zielonka said there is much interest and some misinformation because of extensive media coverage that surrounded the Pope's comments on the annulment process.

"The media's coverage of the new procedural law issued by Pope Francis was quite extensive. Unfortunately, their interpretation of the new law was not always accurate and sometimes even misleading. I invite you to read about the new procedures on the diocesan website," said Msgr. Zielonka, who prepared an analysis of the law and practical points about it.

Those who have already submitted their cases will be assigned priority status in the new Tribunal, and he expects that all will be processed faster with new procedures.

"Likewise, under the new norms, any sentences issued by

the new Tribunal will not be required to go for approval of the Second Instance Tribunal in Hartford. The Petitioner, Respondent or Defender of the Bond might choose to appeal the decision to the Second Instance, but if not, Bridgeport Tribunal's decision will become executable within 15 days of the sentence," he said.

An annulment is a declaration by a Church tribunal (a Catholic Church court) that a marriage thought to be valid according to Church law actually fell short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding marriage consent. The party who petitions the Tribunal is called the "Petitioner" and the other party is called the "Respondent."

Msgr. Dariusz J. Zielonka

Msgr. Dariusz J. Zielonka, was named director of 2014 Diocesan Synod by Bishop Frank J. Caggiano in March 2014, and pastor of St. Jude Parish in June 2014.

He served as priest secretary to Bishop William E. Lori and vice chancellor of the diocese from 2002 to 2009. In 2008, he was named Chaplain to His Holiness with the title of Monsignor, receiving Papal Honors from Pope Benedict XVI.

In March 2013, he was appointed a judge to the Marriage Tribunal after completing his graduate studies at Catholic University of America, where he earned a doctorate in canon law, *Juris Canonici Doctor*; J.C.D.

Msgr. Zielonka, 47, was born in Piotrków Tryb, Poland. He entered the archdiocesan seminary in Łódź, Poland, and completed his theological studies at Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary in Wynnewood, PA.

He was ordained at Saint Augustine Cathedral in 1995 by the late Edward Cardinal Egan, then Bishop of Bridgeport. Msgr. Zielonka served as parochial vicar at St. James Parish in Stratford and St. Aloysius Parish in New Canaan prior to becoming priest secretary. He is also a secretary of the Diocesan College of Consultors.

As part of its restructuring, the Tribunal will introduce a new website outlining the new process and including online forms. Please check the Tribunal section of the diocesan website at www.bridgeportdiocese.com.

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