



Many questions find their way to the Office of the Tribunal and Matrimonial Concerns. While these questions involve specific people and cases, the answers often prove helpful to others who work with people preparing for marriage or seeking a declaration of nullity. Barb Bettwy, the former director of our office, hit on the brilliant idea of publishing a newsletter to share this useful information.

Wishing to continue that practice, but not wanting to put fresh wine into old wineskins, I re-present our newsletter under the new heading *Marriage Matters*. I hope that, by enhancing the canonical understanding of those generous souls who prepare couples for marriage or assist divorced persons seeking a declaration of nullity, our pastoral care will be made stronger by a more solid canonical foundation.

Fr. Marc Stockton
Judicial Vicar

EXACTLY HOW LONG IS THE LONG ARM OF THE LAW?

New clerical assignments in our diocese have placed many deacons and priests in posts that they've never had before. Often this raises canonical questions they've never faced before, such as: From whom do I request a dispensation for marriage? Can I assist at the marriage of an Eastern rite Catholic? Where do I send a person seeking an annulment? At the root of all of these questions is the canonical concept of the power of governance.

Secular legal systems refer to it as jurisdiction, but it means the same: the authority of a person, like a diocesan bishop, or institution, like a tribunal, to perform a legal action. The basic document where we find the scope of the authority of different persons and institutions in the Church is the Code of Canon Law (in case you somehow lost your copy, it is available online for free). To understand the power of governance, we need to first understand the scope of the code itself.

The very first canon states: "The canons of this code regard only the Latin Church." Therefore, the Code of Canon Law normally only affects Latin rite Catholics. This is why, for example, Latin bishops cannot grant dispensations to Eastern rite Catholics – the authority granted by the code to Latin bishops does not extend to Eastern Catholics. This is also why, for example, we cannot declare the marriage of two non-Catholics null due to lack of form. Non-Catholics are not bound to observe canonical form; only Catholics are.

Understanding the limited scope of the code is crucial for understanding the scope of the power of governance. We will explore that topic in future issues of *Marriage Matters*. Meanwhile, keep the faith, love God's people, and always honor the code!

