

# Catholic Courier

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## Code's relevance explored

When lay Catholics hear the phrase Code of Canon Law, they may well envision a massive, dust-covered tome filled with archaic church legislation lacking any relevance to their lives. Yet local canon law experts say that perception couldn't be further from the truth.

While it's true that the Revised Code of Canon Law is often published in the form of a large book, the code's canons, or rules, have in one way or another touched the life of every practicing Catholic. Canon law deals with everything from the sale of property to sacraments, the rights of Catholics and relationships among them, said Father Daniel Condon, diocesan chancellor and director of legal services.

"The same material that civil law deals with, the church law deals with," Father Condon said, noting that church entities are subject not only to canon law, but also to the civil law of the jurisdiction in which they are situated.

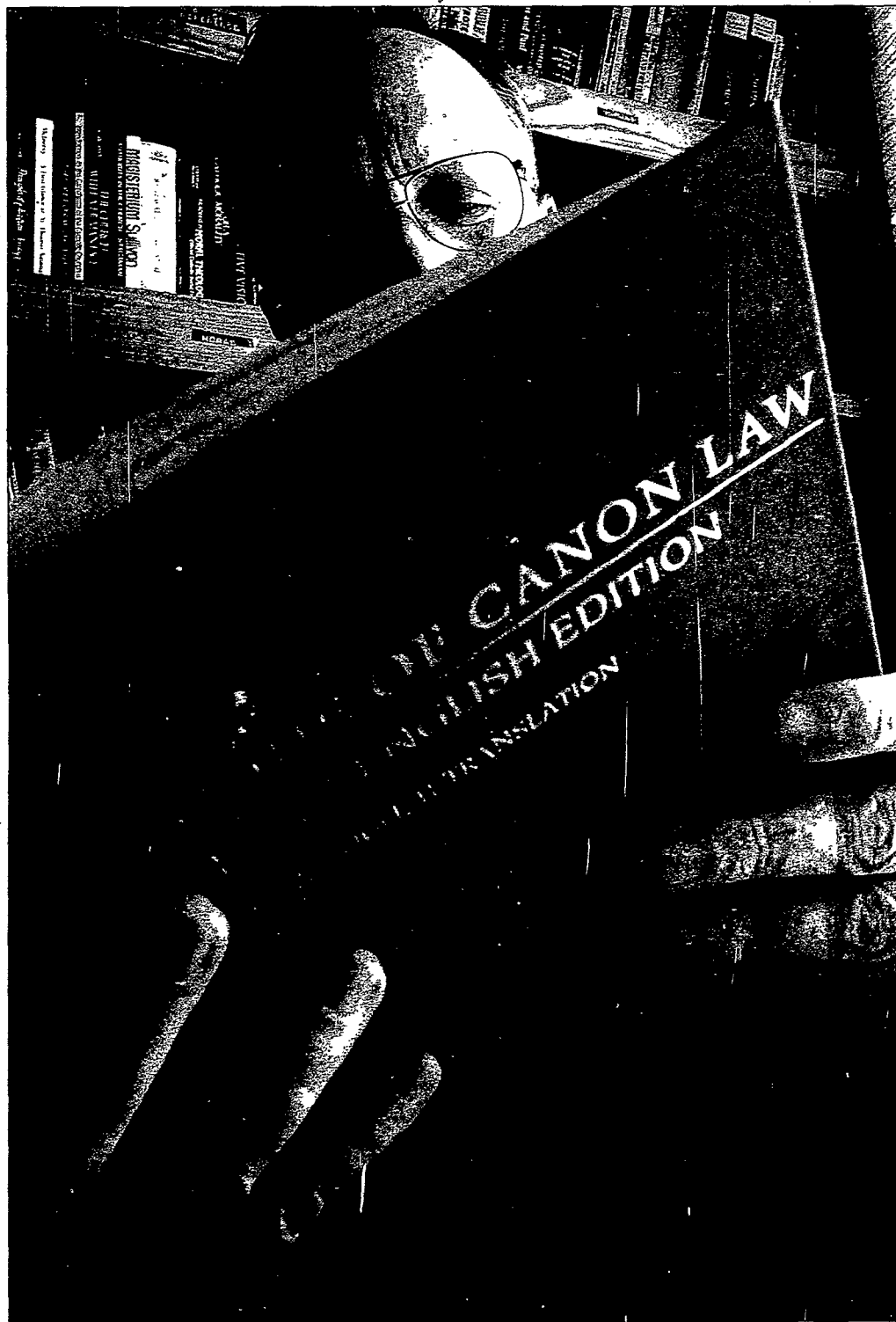
Church laws have existed in different forms for centuries, but it wasn't until 1917 that they were compiled into the Code of Canon Law. When Pope John XXI-II announced in 1959 his intention to convene the Second Vatican Council, he also announced his intention to update the laws of the church.

The revisions did not take place until after the council's conclusion, however, so that new developments and the spirit of the council could be incorporated into the code. The revised code was promulgated by Pope John Paul II on Jan. 25, 1983, and took effect on Nov. 27 of that year.

The church "needs some kind of legal structure. As much as a spiritual organization, we're a temporal, physical organization," observed Father Kevin McKenna, former diocesan chancellor and pastor of St. Cecilia's Parish in Irondequoit. Father McKenna has written two books and numerous articles about canon law, and served as president of the Canon Law Society of America from 2001-02. Part of the code's purpose, he said, is to "make sure we don't trample on each other."

A great deal of the code is devoted to the sacraments, which Father McKenna said is natural, since most Catholics connect with the church through these rites. These canons are intended to protect the dignity

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Father Kevin McKenna, former diocesan chancellor and pastor of St. Cecilia's Parish in Irondequoit, glances through his copy of the Code of Canon Law. He noted that a significant change in the code, which was revised in 1983, was the expanded role of the laity.

Story by Jennifer Burke • Photos by Mike Crupi