

Dear Brothers & Sisters,

I write to you in order to give a little more information about my summer studies for Canon Law. Being as this is my fourth summer, I figured that this is all old hat...except that there are always new people joining our parish family. So, I apologize for not sharing this sooner.

Canon Law is just a fancy name for Church Law. It's not CANNON law...I'm not studying gun powder & cannon balls. The word canon comes from the Greek word κανών (*kanon*). It is the root of the word "cane" in English. It was the idea of a reed or cane that was used to measure. Eventually it became **the** standard used to measure things. The word canon eventually came to mean those things that are the standard or rules. We hear of the *canon* of scripture being those books officially accepted by the Church as authentically inspired by the Holy Spirit. One definition states that Canon Law "is the system of laws and legal principles made and enforced by the Church's hierarchical authorities to regulate its external organization and government and to order and direct the activities of Catholics toward the mission of the Church." Certainly a boring definition that tries to encapsulate all the Canon Law covers.

Fr. Ron Zgunda & Fr. Steve Lintzenich will be filling in for me sacramentally when I am in DC. They will be here for **Saturday Confessions from 4-4:45 pm, Saturday 5 pm Mass, Sunday 9 am & 4:45 pm Masses** as well as **daily Mass on Tuesdays & Thursdays at 8 am**. The one exception is with our **Summer Event weekend. Saturday, June 3 Mass will be at 4 pm and Confessions from 3-3:45 pm**. They won't be here for daily Mass on Wednesday at 6:30 pm or Friday at 8 am. I'm certain that you will make them feel welcomed in my absence. Doug Rasler has agreed to take on more administrative duties during my two months in DC. So, please know that he will be the one to take the point on any larger issues that need attention. I know that the staff and people at Holy Redeemer will do much to help out where needed in my absence.



Saint Meinrad

Although I've been studying Canon Law for the last three years, its history in my life is a bit longer. Every seminarian studies Canon Law as one of their required classes in seminary. After my class at Saint Meinrad, I also took an elective class in Canon Law about Marriage & Annulments. My professor for that class was a priest from Louisville by the name of **Fr. Chuck Thompson** (*sound familiar?*). He was a canon lawyer himself who was also stationed in a parish, chaplain at the local Catholic high school besides coming over to Saint Meinrad to help teach some classes. I enjoyed the class, but only thought it would help me with understanding annulments of marriage and assisting those wishing to seek one. As seminarians, we regularly joked about who was going to get sent off to study Canon Law as if it were a punishment. Almost 7 years after my ordination it just so happened that Fr. Chuck Thompson was ordained to be **Bishop Charles Thompson**.



I was pastor at Sacred Heart in Vincennes & St. Philip Neri in Bicknell when Bishop Charles was ordained. Less than 6 months later, I received a call from his secretary that he wanted to talk. My heart sank and I immediately feared that he was going to ask me to study Canon Law. I met with him a week later and found that it was to speak about the possibility of going to St. John the Evangelist, Daylight as pastor. My heart lifted as he hadn't mentioned Canon Law.



I didn't get away that easily though. About a month after I had started at St. John I was helping out at the youth retreat Source & Summit. As I was leaving there on Saturday, the Bishop was leaving at the same time. He stopped me and asked me the dreaded question: "Have you ever thought about studying Canon Law?". I told him that I didn't really think I wanted to do that because I didn't want to be *stuck* in the Tribunal office for my priesthood. The Tribunal office is where a

Canon Lawyer works in the Diocese. He proceeded to tell me that he didn't think that we had the *luxury* of having a priest full-time in the Tribunal. He explained his hope to have a number of priests who would have a Canon Law degree so that they could be full-time in Parishes and spend some time each week in the Tribunal. He invited me to think about attending a two weeklong institute on Marriage, Annulments and the Marriage Tribunal. I did go to the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC that summer and learned much. I even became a bit more open to the idea of studying Canon Law.



That fall, I started an internship in the Tribunal on Thursday afternoons. It was a time to learn more about annulments, which are the bulk of the work of the Tribunal, as well as how the Tribunal functions. In my time there, I had learned more about how Canon Law is used in the Diocese particularly in regards to marriage annulments.

Through the summer institute, Tribunal internship & much prayer ("*O Lord, are you sure this is where you want me????*") I felt God's call even stronger to begin studies in Canon Law. Catholic University of America has three different tracks to receive a degree in Canon Law. One track is two full *calendar* years. The other is three full *academic* years. The last is five summers (*June & July*). I couldn't see myself leaving St. John behind to study, especially since I had just become pastor of Holy Trinity as well in January of 2014. So, I applied and was accepted to start studies June and July of 2014 at the Catholic University of America. I will (*God willing*) graduate in 2018 with a Licentiate of Canon Law or J.C.L. (*Latin: Juris Canonici Licentia*). The licentiate is an advanced degree offered by Pontifical Universities, those Catholic Universities established or approved directly by the Holy See.

I was a little nervous about starting up studies after being out of school for 10 years. God is certainly good though & He has blessed me to be a good student in that things come fairly easy and I am diligent in my studies. The last three years (*I have 1 class each fall & spring semester between summers*) have been good. It is certainly easier to study when I am in DC and not keeping my normal schedule of ministry like here in the parish. Being gone isn't easy as I miss out on the summer months here in the parish...& with my family as well. I also have to move back into "dorm living" where my office, bedroom, living room and part of my bathroom are in fact the same room. There is a common bathroom and shower facilities on each floor. There is a cafeteria as well for 3 meals a day. In the grand scheme though it's all that I really need.

To help share a little more about my studies and time in DC, we have a page on the parish website that you can visit. I'll be using Apple's photostream to post photos & provide some insight into what I'm doing. I'll try to answer any "non-business" email, but will direct other thing back to the staff. If you'd like to drop me a note, or maybe even a care package (*chocolate is my favorite*) please feel free to do so. My address will be:

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I ask for your prayers as I go off to study that I might find a healthy balance of prayer, studies and taking care of myself. As I prepare to leave, I am excited for this new adventure, but also slightly sad knowing that I will miss the months of ministry and interaction with everyone while I am gone. God knows what He is doing better than I know in my own life though, so trusting in Him brings me great peace. I pray that you have that same peace in these months ahead.

God Bless,