

Archdiocese: Mexico's Fox didn't get special treatment for annulment

MEXICO CITY - The Archdiocese of Leon has denied that former Mexican President Vicente Fox was given preferential treatment over the annulment of his first marriage.

The archdiocese reported in early January that it was told Dec. 22 that Fox was free to remarry in a Catholic ceremony because the Tribunal of the Roman Rota at the Vatican had granted his petition that his first marriage be annulled.

"The process was followed normally," Archbishop Jose Martin Rabago of Leon told reporters Jan. 4. "Talk that dispensations are only granted to the rich and only in exceptional forms ... that's a lack of knowledge of what happens in ecclesiastical tribunals."

The archbishop, whose archdiocese includes the Fox family ranch, added that the entire process took roughly nine years and the process cost the former president less than \$350.

Mr. Fox married his former campaign spokeswoman, Marta Sahagun de Fox, in a civil ceremony in 2001 and the couple have stated that they wish to be married in a religious ceremony. The former president was married to Lilian de la Concha from 1972 until 1991.

Ms. Sahagun's first marriage already had been annulled.

Mr. Fox broke his silence on the annulment during Epiphany festivities Jan. 6 when he told reporters: "We always knew ... the verdict. Effectively, there wasn't any doubt."

No wedding date has been set.

The topic of Mr. Fox and Ms. Sahagun marrying in a religious ceremony has been controversial in Mexico due to perceptions of the powerful being treated differently from ordinary Catholics. In addition, Ms. Sahagun was viewed as trying to use her husband's office to make a run at the presidency in 2006 and has been fending off unproven allegations that her sons were involved in influence-peddling.

The results of a psychological assessment of the former president – a reason for granting the annulment – also raised eyebrows.

The Vatican “declared null the religious marriage of former President Vicente Fox to Lilian de la Concha because it was proven afterward that he had serious personality disturbances at the time of having the ceremony,” Bishop Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel of San Cristobal de Las Casas said in late December.

The bishop added that every diocese had an ecclesiastical tribunal available to all Catholics for reviewing possible annulment cases.

Fox was president of Mexico from 2000 to 2006.