

Catholics to celebrate feast of St. Patrick two days earlier in 2008

DUBLIN, Ireland – Catholics worldwide will celebrate the feast of St. Patrick two days earlier next year after the Vatican gave permission to move the feast day to avoid a conflict with Holy Week.

Traditionally St. Patrick and all things Irish are celebrated March 17. However, in 2008, March 17 falls on the Monday of Holy Week and, according to church law, the days of Holy Week and Easter rank above all others, so the solemnity of St. Patrick must be moved to another date.

When the conflict became apparent, officials from the Irish bishops' conference wrote the Vatican's Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments. The congregation approved the move earlier this year, but it only was made public in mid-July.

A source at the Irish bishops' conference who did not wish to be named told Catholic News Service that the bishops were "keen to keep a link with the civic celebrations by moving the feast to the nearest Saturday, in this case March 15."

"We hope that this will facilitate the religious celebration of the holy day while not interfering too much with people who wish to celebrate the importance of St. Patrick's Day as a symbol of all things Irish," he said.

It is the first time in almost 100 years that the feast of St. Patrick will not be celebrated March 17. In 1913, the same conflict occurred, and in that case the church marked the feast April 1.

According to historians, March 17 is the traditional date given for the death of St. Patrick, and his feast has been celebrated on this day since the seventh century.

A spokesman for St. Patrick's Festival, the committee that organizes the civic celebrations in Dublin, said, "Parades and other cultural events will continue on the traditional feast day of St. Patrick, March 17."

St. Patrick's Day is a centerpiece in Ireland's tourism calendar, with an estimated 1 million people visiting annually to take part in celebrations.

St. Patrick is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland in the year 432, and his preaching won the Emerald Isle the title of "land of saints and scholars."

The next time St. Patrick's Day will fall during Holy Week will be 2160.