

# Church hierarchy was willed by God to ensure unity

VATICAN CITY – The hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church was willed by God to ensure unity in faith, Pope Benedict XVI said.

The church “is not a place of confusion or anarchy where each person can do what he wants at the moment,” the pope said March 7 at his weekly general audience.

The pope’s speech marked the beginning of a new series of audience talks on the “apostolic fathers,” the first and second generation of church leaders after the Twelve Apostles.

Pope Benedict began the series by focusing on St. Clement, the bishop of Rome at the end of the first century, and on his letter to the Christian community in Corinth.

St. Clement wrote the letter to address “the serious problems” the Corinthians were experiencing, the pope said. “In fact, the priests of the community had been deposed by some young challengers,” he said.

Exhorting the Corinthians “to reconcile in peace, renew their faith and affirm the tradition that they had recently received from apostles,” St. Clement’s letter “is the first exercise of the primacy of Rome after the death of St. Peter,” the pope said.

Pope Benedict said the letter is particularly important because it demonstrates that “the concern of the church of Rome, which presides in charity over all the other churches,” was an idea accepted as far back at the first century.

In the letter, St. Clement “calls the faithful to humility and fraternal love, two values essential for being church,” he said, but he also “reminds them that the Lord himself established where and by whom he wanted liturgical services to be performed.”

Explaining that each member of the community has a specific role, the pope said, St. Clement emphasizes that “the distinction between laity and hierarchy does not signify opposition in any way,” but simply affirms that within the community

different people have different roles.

“The church, he teaches us, is not a place of confusion or anarchy where each person can do what he wants at the moment. Each person in this organism ... exercises his ministry according to the vocation he or she has received,” Pope Benedict said.

St. Clement also made the concept of apostolic succession explicit, the pope said, by affirming that God sent his Son, who chose the apostles, who chose the next generation of community leaders so that “everything proceeds in an orderly fashion according to the will of God.”

The church is not a place to exercise “our thoughts and ideas, because it is first of all a gift of God and not our creation,” he said.