

Demand for papal Christmas Eve Mass tickets exceeds supply

VATICAN CITY - Tickets for Christmas Eve Mass with Pope Benedict XVI were in high demand and short supply this year.

There were not enough tickets available for all the people who wanted to attend the liturgy in St. Peter's Basilica, according to the Vatican.

"The demand for tickets far exceeds the number of places that will be available," said Christian Brother Christopher Kierans, who handles requests in English for the Prefecture of the Pontifical Household.

The basilica holds 7,000 people for Christmas Eve Mass, which this year begins at 10 p.m. Those without tickets were being invited to take outdoor seats in St. Peter's Square and follow the ceremony on two large video screens.

Although the total request for free tickets was not available, the Vatican stopped accepting written requests early in December. Some people living in Rome who have traditionally received tickets were informed by fax that they could not be accommodated this year.

Monsignor Roger C. Roensch, head of the bishops' office for U.S. visitors to Rome, said he had asked the Vatican for about 2,000 tickets for the Christmas Eve Mass. He eventually received only 1,700 tickets for distribution to the U.S. pilgrims, school groups and religious orders that had sent in written requests.

Monsignor Roensch was recommending that the nearly 300 people left without Christmas Eve Mass tickets attend Mass at St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas

morning. Afterward, he said, they could attend the pope's message and blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city of Rome and the world) in St. Peter's Square where tickets were not needed.

The Church of Santa Susanna, the parish for Americans in Rome, also had to stop accepting requests for tickets to the papal Christmas Eve Mass because the large demand made it impossible to guarantee fulfilling all the requests.