

Implementation of Tridentine ruling frustrates some

VATICAN CITY – A year after Pope Benedict XVI opened the way to wider use of the Tridentine Mass, implementation of the papal directive is drawing mixed reviews from its target audience.

Catholic traditionalists remain grateful for the pope's document and say it has given them a certain legitimacy in local church communities, as well as greater practical access to the old rite.

But some – backed by a Vatican official – have complained that bishops and pastors continue to place obstacles in the way of groups seeking the Tridentine liturgy.

On a long-term issue, traditionalists are pleased at new efforts to instruct priests in celebrating Mass in the older rite. Meanwhile, those who envisioned Tridentine Masses popping up in every parish are somewhat frustrated.

"We're only looking at one calendar year, and we know that in the church these things take time. But the problem – dare anyone say this? – the problem is the bishops. Because you have bishops who aren't on board," said John Paul Sonnen, an American Catholic who lives in Rome.

Mr. Sonnen and about 150 others attended a small but significant conference in Rome in mid-September on the theme: "'Summorum Pontificum': One Year After."

"Summorum Pontificum" was the title of the pope's 2007 apostolic letter that said Mass celebrated according to the 1962 Roman Missal, commonly known as the Tridentine rite, should be made available in every parish where groups of the faithful desire it. In his letter, the pope said the Mass from the Roman Missal in use since 1970 remains the ordinary form of the Mass, while celebration of the Tridentine Mass is the extraordinary form.

The response to the papal letter varied around the world. In the United States, many bishops – even those not enthusiastic about the new policy – took steps to explain it

to their faithful and put it into practice.

But in Europe and Latin America, conference participants said, there's been less favorable reaction.

"In Italy, with just a few admirable exceptions, the bishops have put obstacles in the way of applying ('Summorum Pontificum')," Monsignor Camille Perl told the Rome conference.

"I would have to say the same thing about the major superiors of religious orders who forbid their priests from celebrating Mass in the old rite," Monsignor Perl said.

Monsignor Perl is vice president of the Pontifical Commission "Ecclesia Dei," which oversees implementation of the papal document, so his words carried weight. Italian newspapers reported his comments under the headline "The bishops are boycotting the pope."

Two Brazilian priests attending the conference complained that they're facing a similar situation in their country.

"I think there's a great desire on the part of young priests to learn the older rite. But we don't study it in seminaries, and the bishops don't cooperate on that," said Father Giuseppe Olivera of Sao Paolo.

Monsignor Perl said letters received by his commission indicate considerable interest in setting up local Tridentine Masses in France, Great Britain, Canada, the United States and Australia. He said there have been fewer requests for the older Mass in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Cardinal Dario Castrillon Hoyos, who heads the "Ecclesia Dei" commission, said recently that Pope Benedict would eventually like to see the Tridentine rite offered in every parish. But for now, in the pope's own Diocese of Rome, a single church, Santissima Trinita dei Pellegrini, has been designated as a "personal parish" for traditionalists.

That's a solution that appeals to some dioceses, especially those that include large cities, but it tends to separate traditionalists from other local parishes. It also seems

to put bishops in charge of the decision of where and when a Tridentine Mass is offered, instead of the local pastor, as indicated by "Summorum Pontificum."

Father Joseph Kramer, pastor at Rome's Santissima Trinita church, said that so far his parish is attracting a lot of younger people and those over 50, but not many in between and few young families.

In general, he said, it's important for traditionalist Catholics to make it clear that they accept the changes of the Second Vatican Council, in order not to frighten off "normal" Catholics who might be attracted to the older rite.