

# Papal patience causes chafing among some Vatican bureaucrats, media

VATICAN CITY – More than two years into his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI has proven to be a very patient decision-maker – so patient that even some of his Vatican bureaucrats are chafing a little.

“There are all these decisions that you thought were already made, and then nothing happens,” one Roman Curia official said in early June.

The examples abound:

- The pope’s letter to Chinese Catholics, announced in January, has yet to appear.
- The papal document widening use of the Tridentine Mass, reportedly ready since last fall, is still awaiting publication.
- A consistory to name new cardinals, expected in June by most Vatican officials, has apparently been put off until the fall.
- A slew of key appointments, including the replacement of several Roman Curia heads who are past retirement age, keep getting deferred.
- The streamlining of Vatican communications agencies, rumored to have been one of the pope’s priorities following his election in 2005, still has not happened.

Why are things taking so long? The main reason, according to those inside the Curia, is that the pope believes some of these questions call for consultation and fine-tuning, rather than snap decisions.

“Documents like the one on China clearly require careful preparation, consultation and review, not only on the general lines of the text but also in particular expressions,” said Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman.

He noted that once a document is finally approved, additional time is needed for translations. The translation phase in where the letter on China is said to be lingering.

As for curial appointments, Father Lombardi said replacing department heads may seem simple to outsiders, but such nominations are often tied to a whole series of other appointments or changes. Therefore a “concordance of circumstances” may be needed before they are announced, he said.

“One thing is clear: The style of this pope and his governance is to not allow himself be pressured or hurried, but to take all the time necessary,” Father Lombardi said.

Journalists seem to be the ones most impatient with the pope’s patience. A recent article in the Rome newspaper *Il Messaggero*, under the headline “The Curia Waits, the Pope Doesn’t Decide,” spoke of a growing “climate of uncertainty” inside the Vatican.

“This proceeding with excessive prudence seems to have caught even the highest officials of the curia off-balance,” the newspaper said.

Some Vatican sources dismissed such speculation, saying these kinds of projects have always taken time, especially at the beginning of a pontificate. What has whetted the media’s appetite is that several of the initiatives have been pre-announced, they said.

One apparent decision by the pope has struck some as a reversal of an earlier move: The Vatican recently said the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue would get its own president.

In 2006 the pope had placed the council under the wing of the Pontifical Council for Culture, in a move widely seen as the beginning of sweeping reform of the Roman Curia. The restoration of the interreligious council’s autonomy is now seen as a signal that the pope does not want to be viewed as downgrading the Vatican agency that dialogues with Islam.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, said in late May that the new head of the interreligious council would be named soon. But there was no clue when

the nomination would actually come, and “soon” has taken on new meaning under Pope Benedict.

Last October, Vatican officials promised that the papal letter liberalizing use of the Tridentine Mass was ready and would be published sometime soon. When Cardinal Bertone said in June that people “shouldn’t have to wait long” to see the document, there was much scoffing and smiling among reporters.

The pope apparently has decided to wait until this fall to name new cardinals. Sources say nominations will come in October, with a consistory in November. By then there will be at least 16 openings in the 120 “under-80” cardinals who can vote in a conclave.

Top Vatican appointments are bound to come, especially in agencies where the current head is past retirement age, including the congregations for Eastern Churches and Saints Causes, the Pontifical Council for Culture, and the Prefecture for the Economic Affairs of the Holy See.

For months, imminent replacements also have been rumored for the positions of assistant secretary of state and master of papal ceremonies.

Meanwhile, while the media focus has been on big appointments and big documents, the pope has had plenty of other things to occupy his time and energy.

During a three-week period in late May and early June, for example, he held 61 separate audiences, made 44 nominations, gave 25 speeches or sermons, presided over three major liturgies, created four new saints and approved decrees for 17 other sainthood causes.

The pope is also believed to be working on the second part of his work on Jesus of Nazareth; the first volume was published this spring.