

Pope Benedict to make fall visit to Rome synagogue

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI will make his first visit to the synagogue of Rome in the fall, the city's Jewish community announced.

Riccardo Pacifici, president of Rome's Jewish community, made the announcement March 12 on an Italian television program.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, confirmed the pope had accepted the invitation for a fall visit, although an exact date had not been set.

Rabbi Riccardo di Segni, the chief rabbi of Rome, told an Italian newspaper March 13 that he had invited Pope Benedict several times, "including in the wake of the recent polemics" over the pope's lifting the excommunication of a traditionalist bishop who has denied the full extent of the Holocaust.

A papal visit to the synagogue and meeting with the Rome Jewish community "is possible because after many serious incidents, there have been important clarifications" from the pope and the Vatican about the Holocaust, the evil of anti-Semitism and the importance of improved Catholic-Jewish relations, Rabbi di Segni told the newspaper *Il Messaggero*.

Pope John Paul II made history in 1986 when he became the first pope to visit the Rome synagogue.

Pope Benedict visited a synagogue in Cologne, Germany, in 2005 and a synagogue in New York in 2008. During a May visit to Jerusalem, the pope is scheduled to pray at the Western Wall, Judaism's holiest site.