

Pope greets Tour de France cyclists, urges respect of values in sports

LES COMBES, Italy – World-class cyclists racing in the Tour de France received special greetings from Pope Benedict XVI.

The pope sent “cordial greetings to all the athletes and organizers of the race” July 21, the day the tour passed near the village of Les Combes, where he was spending his vacation July 13-29.

The competitive cyclists rode through the northern Italian region of Valle d’Aosta on stage 16 of the 21-stage Tour de France.

The 99-mile, mountainous 16th stage started in southern Switzerland, passed through northern Italy and ended in eastern France.

Running July 4-26, the 2,175-mile Tour de France will end in Paris on the Champs Elysees.

In his message, the pope said he was thinking of all those who were taking part in sports activities or participating in athletic competition this summer. He expressed his hopes “that their commitment to sports may contribute to the integral development of the person” and that sports would be respectful of moral and educational values.

Before the 16th stage, U.S. cyclist and seven-time Tour winner Lance Armstrong was in second place overall, running 1 minute, 37 seconds behind his Astana teammate, Spanish rider Alberto Contador.

Contador won the Tour in 2007.