

Pope OKs stricter norms for mandatory feast days

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI has approved stricter guidelines for determining which saints will be remembered with mandatory feast days throughout the Latin-rite calendar of the Catholic Church.

The General Roman Calendar, the universal schedule of holy days and feast days, is so packed that more selectivity is needed, according to new norms and a commentary published in the official bulletin of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

The pope determines who makes the universal calendar based on recommendations from the congregation, the commentary said. And, according to the new norms published in the bulletin in mid-May, those recommendations will be more difficult to obtain.

“A saint can be inserted in the general calendar because of the significant and universal importance of his or her spiritual message and effectiveness as an example for a broad category of members of the church,” said the norms, approved by Pope Benedict in December.

Special consideration will be given to saints from countries not already represented in the general calendar and from underrepresented categories, such as laypeople, married couples and parents, the norms said. In addition, the norms said, 10 years should have passed since the canonization ceremony to ensure ongoing, widespread devotion.

The process for adding a candidate, it said, should begin with a two-thirds favorable vote from the bishops’ conference where the saint was born, lived or died. In addition, the congregation will ask the opinion of at least three other bishops’ conferences on different continents.

“The numerous beatifications and canonizations celebrated in the past few years by the supreme pontiff have underlined concretely the multiple manifestations of

holiness in the church," the commentary said.

But, it said, hundreds of new saints also has meant greater competition for the limited free dates on the universal calendar, dates used to remember saints with a local importance and to keep the tradition of remembering Mary on Saturdays not already dedicated to an obligatory feast.

In his more than 26-year pontificate, Pope John Paul II proclaimed more than 480 saints; by comparison, all of his predecessors between 1594 and 1978 canonized a combined total of 302 saints, according to Vatican statistics.

Pope Benedict XVI added his 10th saint to the church's rolls when he presided over a canonization May 11 in Brazil.

The year does not have enough days to include all the saints in the universal calendar, particularly when Sundays and holy days are subtracted.

The congregation's commentary said, "it will be difficult in the future to make further additions if certain criteria are not rigorously applied."