

Pope urges stronger sense of Christian marriage

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy – Pope Benedict XVI urged bishops in Benin to strengthen the sense of Christian marriage among Catholics.

In Benin, where polygamy is common, pastors should help guide couples not only when they are preparing to wed but also throughout their married life, the pope said.

He made the remarks in a meeting Sept. 20 with the bishops of Benin, who were making their “ad limina” visits, in which they travel to the Vatican every five years to report on the status of their dioceses. The African country has slightly more than 8 million people, about 23 percent Christian, 10 percent Muslim and 65 percent followers of indigenous beliefs.

Bishop Antoine Ganye of Dassa-Zoume, president of the Benin bishops’ conference, told Vatican Radio that polygamy, officially banned by a 2004 law, was an unfortunate holdover from the country’s ancient traditions.

The pope said overcoming obstacles to the proper understanding of marriage was one of several pastoral challenges in Benin. In liturgical matters, he said, there was a need to incorporate acceptable local traditions while rejecting elements that could sow confusion among Catholic worshippers.

The pope said solid formation in the faith was essential for Catholics to examine local traditions in the light of Christian beliefs.

In their worship and in witnessing the Gospel, he said, Benin’s Catholics should be a visible presence in society. To be effective evangelizers, they must be motivated by an intense spiritual life and a deep friendship with Christ, he said.

The pope also praised the generally good relations between Christians and Muslims in Benin. In order to avoid intolerance, he said, the bishops should keep promoting dialogue based on mutual awareness and respect between followers of the two faiths.