

Sainthood congregation recommends Pope be named venerable

VATICAN CITY - Members of the Congregation for Saints' Causes met May 8 to consider the cause of Pope Pius XII and apparently voted to recommend that Pope Benedict XVI formally declare him venerable.

Passionist Father Ciro Benedettini, vice director of the Vatican press office, confirmed the congregation had met, but since the result of the vote still had to be presented to the pope he would not say May 9 what the result was.

Italian newspapers, citing unnamed sources, said the congregation's cardinals and archbishops recommended that Pope Benedict formally recognize that Pope Pius lived the Christian virtues in a heroic manner.

Once the pope issues a decree recognizing heroic virtues, the candidate is referred to as venerable. Before a candidate can be beatified, the pope also must issue a decree recognizing a miracle attributed to the candidate's intercession. A second miracle is needed for canonization.

The newspaper Corriere della Sera reported May 9 that a minority of the congregation members had voted "no," urging Pope Benedict to delay issuing a decree until there is "a more favorable climate," particularly regarding the ongoing controversy over Pope Pius' actions during World War II.

However, a Vatican source told Catholic News Service in Rome May 9 that the congregation's vote was unanimously in favor of issuing the decree.

Jesuit Father Peter Gumpel, the promoter of Pope Pius' cause, was out of town May 9 and unavailable for comment.

Pope Pius led the Catholic Church from 1939 to 1958; immediately before his election, the then-Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli was the Vatican secretary of state.

For years, controversy has raged over whether Pope Pius did and said enough in defense of the Jews and other victims of the Nazis.

The May 8 vote of the congregation members was based on a review of a six-volume, 3,000-page “positio” or position paper prepared by the promoters of Pope Pius’ sainthood cause. The report, given to the Vatican in 2004, included sworn testimony from witnesses, historical documents and a review of literature – both neutral and negative – pertaining to the Vatican’s actions during World War II.

In New York, Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, urged Pope Benedict to indefinitely suspend the canonization process for Pope Pius until secret World War II Vatican archives are declassified and fully examined “so that the full record of the pope’s actions during the Holocaust may finally be known.”

Until then, Foxman said May 10, Pope Pius’ record with the Jews during the Holocaust will “continue to be shrouded and a source of controversy and contention.”