

Vatican: Pope not taking church backward with Tridentine decree

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI is not taking the church backward with his decree on wider use of the Tridentine Mass, the Vatican's spokesman said.

The spokesman, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, said the papal document, released July 7, was a reconciliatory gesture to "a relatively small number of people" attached to the old liturgy.

Although the Tridentine rite predates the Second Vatican Council, the pope's move should not be seen as undermining the council or liturgical reform, the Vatican spokesman said in a statement released with the document.

"It does not impose any return to the past. It does not want any weakening of the authority of the council or the authority and responsibility of bishops," Father Lombardi said.

The spokesman said the pope's commitment to the new liturgy is clear in the simple fact that he celebrates it regularly and willingly and has spoken eloquently about its richness.

"Therefore we have no reason to fear. Benedict XVI will not make us turn back, but will lead us ahead, keeping us firmly on the path of continuity in the historic progress of the church," he said.

In his four-page letter, the pope eased restrictions on the use of the 1962 Roman Missal, which was standard before the new Order of the Mass was introduced in 1970. The papal decree was issued "motu proprio," a term that reflects the pope's

personal initiative in the matter.

Father Lombardi said the pope made his decision despite objections from some other church leaders because he was convinced that the move would not become a source of division in the church.

“Whoever may want to appeal to this ‘motu proprio’ to generate tensions instead of increasing the atmosphere of reconciliation would radically betray its spirit,” Father Lombardi said.