

# Vatican says ordinations for traditionalist society 'illegitimate'

VATICAN CITY – The ordinations of 20 new priests for the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X are “illegitimate, period,” said the Vatican spokesman, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi.

Although Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of the society’s four bishops in 2009, Father Lombardi said, he made it clear that until the society had reconciled fully with the Vatican – particularly regarding its position on doctrinal questions – its members have no official standing in the church.

The group ordained four priests in mid-June in Winona, Minn., 12 new priests in late June at its headquarters in Ecône, Switzerland, and 4 new priests July 3 at its seminary in Zaitzkofen, Germany.

Responding to reporters’ questions July 5, Father Lombardi quoted from the letter Pope Benedict wrote in 2009 explaining the status of the society: “As long as the society does not have a canonical status in the church, its ministers do not exercise legitimate ministries in the church. ... In order to make this clear once again: Until the doctrinal questions are clarified, the society has no canonical status in the church, and its ministers ... do not legitimately exercise any ministry in the church.”

Father Lombardi said, “The ordinations are, therefore, to be considered illegitimate.”

The Vatican spokesman declined to comment on the discussions that the society’s leaders began with the Vatican after the pope lifted the excommunications.

In February, Bishop Bernard Fellay, superior general of the Society of St. Pius X and one of the bishops whose excommunication was lifted, said reconciliation talks with the Vatican would soon be coming to an end, but with little change in the views of either side.

In an interview published on the society’s website, he said that in addition to

disputes over the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council, new problems have been created by the beatification of Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict's call for an interreligious prayer meeting in Assisi, Italy, in October.

Bishop Richard Williamson, another of the four bishops, reportedly did not participate in the ordinations in Germany. The lifting of Bishop Williamson's excommunication set off a wave of criticism of the Vatican because he has denied the extent of the Holocaust.

Just two days after the ordinations in Zaitzkofen, lawyers represented him in a German courtroom, where he is appealing a conviction on charges of denying the Holocaust.