

Pope says his weekly prayers in Arabic for first time to show support for Christians in the Middle East

- **Arabic becomes seventh language added to Pope's weekly prayers**

By Eddi Wrenn

Pope Benedict XVI has delivered a prayer in Arabic for the first time during his weekly general audience. More than 20,000 people heard the Pope's prayers in Arabic, part of a new effort by the Vatican to show support for Christians in the Middle East.

The Pope today first delivered his own brief greeting in Arabic: 'The pope prays for all the Arabic-speaking people. God bless you all.'

Then a priest translated the Pope's prayers into Arabic.



Pope Benedict XVI added the Arabic language to his weekly prayers and added that he prayed for all Arabic-speaking people

The Vatican said it was adding Arabic to the six languages, aside from the original Italian, typically spoken during the general audience, to remind Catholics to pray for peace in the Middle East.

The prayers are usually delivered in English, French, Spanish, German, Polish and Portuguese.

Khalid Hussain, a Pakistani-born Muslim tourist visiting St. Peter's Square, praised the initiative, saying 'I think it will bring a lot of audience into what the pope is saying'.

The Pope also praised the Second Vatican Council, which began 50 years ago this week and ran for three years, calling it a 'compass' for the Catholic Church 'in the middle of the storms'.

The Council brought 2,250 bishops together and created 15 'constitutions' which helped reform the Vatican.

A mass in St Peter's Square on Thursday will launch a 'Year of Faith', to celebrate the exact anniversary of the start of Vatican II.



The Vatican is reaching out to Middle Eastern Christians, making Arabic the seventh translated language, alongside the original Italian

Last week, Pope Benedict's ex-butler Paolo Gabriele was found guilty of stealing confidential papers from the pope and sentenced to 18 months in jail - but he is expected to shortly be granted a pardon.

Gabriele, 46, was given the prison term on October 5 for his role in one of the worst scandals to hit the Vatican in recent years, involving allegations of infighting, intrigue and nepotism, and corruption.

Prosecutors in the so-called 'Vatileaks' case had asked the Vatican court for a three-year sentence for the ex-butler - who had collected a huge number of stolen documents at his apartment within the Vatican.

But the presiding judge Giuseppe Dalla Torre reduced the sentence on the grounds of Gabriele's service to the Church and his apology to the Pope for betraying him.

The Vatican's spokesman Federico Lombardi said after the verdict that the Pope was 'very likely' to pardon Gabriele, who claimed he had been motivated by a desire to root out 'corruption and evil' at the heart of the Church.