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Pope, artists rebuilding 'alliance' with church

by Francis X. Rocca by Religion News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI will receive hundreds of prominent artists from around the world at the Vatican this November in an effort to restore a historic "alliance" between the church and the arts.

The meeting, plans for which were announced at a Vatican press conference on Thursday (Sept. 10), will take place on Nov. 21 in the Sistine Chapel.

Some 480 prominent figures from fields including painting, sculpture, architecture, literature, music, cinema, theater and dance have been invited to hear musical performances and a lecture by the pope.

A Vatican statement stressed that the Sistine Chapel's size would limit attendance, adding that it would have been impossible to make a guest list "that did not exclude someone, however famous or acclaimed."

So far, 100 invitees have already responded, 76 positively, the Vatican announced. Among the confirmed guests are the movie director Giuseppe Tornatore and the composer Ennio Morricone, both Italians and Oscar winners, and the American theater director Robert Wilson. The deadline to RSVP is Sept. 30.

The meeting will mark the 45th anniversary of a similar encounter hosted by Pope Paul VI, also in the Sistine Chapel, and the 10th anniversary of a "Letter to Artists" by Pope John Paul II.

Benedict has made reasserting the Christian roots of Western culture an important theme of his papacy, and addressed the topic in a lecture to French intellectual leaders in Paris in September of last year.

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