

Priests in Madrid allowed to lift excommunication for abortion

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Catholic priests at this week's World Youth Day (WYD) celebrations in Madrid will be specially empowered to lift the excommunication of anyone who seeks forgiveness for having undergone or assisted in an abortion.

The special authorization from Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco of Madrid applies to "all priests lawfully approved to hear sacramental confessions" who are present in Madrid through Aug. 22.

Priests will be able to readmit "truly penitent" Catholics who are guilty of the "crime of procured abortion," according to the archdiocese. Abortion is among several grave sins, including desecration of the Eucharist and violation of the seal of confession, that result in automatic excommunication.

The penalty applies not only to a woman who chooses to have an abortion, but also to those who render "formal cooperation in abortion," including the medical personnel involved.

Ordinarily, only specially designated priests may lift such excommunications, but this year's WYD, which will bring an estimated 500,000 pilgrims to Madrid, features a "festival of forgiveness" in the city's Buen Retiro park.

Two hundred temporary confessionals have been set up, and on Saturday morning (Aug. 20), Pope Benedict XVI will personally hear the confessions of three young people.