



The Vatican has attacked reports in the Italian media linking Pope Benedict XVI's resignation to the alleged discovery of a network of gay prelates as attempts to influence the cardinals in their choice of a new pontiff.

The Vatican secretariat of state said in a statement: "It is deplorable that as we draw closer to the time of the beginning of the conclave ... that there be a widespread distribution of often unverified, unverifiable or completely false news stories that cause serious damage to persons and institutions."

The statement was made as Pope Benedict XVI had his final meeting with senior clerics, lamenting the "evil, suffering and corruption" that have defaced God's creation in a final address to Vatican officials.

Benedict spoke on Saturday at the end of a week-long spiritual retreat coinciding with Lent, the period of 40 days (excluding Sundays) leading up to Easter. For the past week, Italian cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi has led the Vatican on meditations that have covered everything from the family to denouncing the "divisions, dissent, careerism, jealousies" that afflict the Vatican bureaucracy.

**TVNL Comment: But, did you hear a denial???? Just asking....**

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