

Vatican wants to revive church's role in fighting the Mafia

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Vatican officials traveled this week to the island of Sicily, the heartland of the Mafia, to promote the church's role in fighting organized crime.

The Vatican says it wants to show that the best way to respond to the Mafia is through the promotion of a "culture of dialogue and legality."

The "Courtyard of the Gentiles," a Vatican-sponsored initiative aimed at bridging the gap between Christian and secular culture, organized the two-day event in Palermo, Sicily's main town.

The agenda included a speech by Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, and a roundtable with priests, prosecutors and Mafia experts.

The conference ended Friday night (March 30) with an interfaith festival on the steps of Palermo's cathedral, organized by the grassroots anti-Mafia movement "Addio Pizzo."

The Catholic Church in Italy has often been accused of being too timid towards the Mafia.

Event organizer Bishop Antonino Raspanti admitted that the church "has not condemned strongly enough," the mafia in the past. But "things have changed," he said, and there is no doubt that the "Mafia is anti-human and anti-religious."