

# Vatican sees end to Russian Orthodox rift

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VATICAN CITY (AP) — Relations with the Russian Orthodox church have vastly improved, possibly paving the way for a papal visit to Moscow or a historic meeting between the Pope Benedict XVI and the Orthodox patriarch outside of Russia or the Vatican, a senior Vatican cardinal says.

Cardinal Walter Kasper told Vatican Radio "we have overcome all the tensions in recent years."

He spoke after meeting with Archbishop Hilarion, head of external relations for the Moscow patriarch's office.

Kasper said "yes" when asked if a trip to Moscow was a "little bit closer" but said that was not on the agenda for the moment.

More likely was a meeting between Benedict and Patriarch Kirill in another country.

"They are not refusing a meeting with pope: this will probably not take place in Moscow or Rome but in a third location," Kasper said.

The previous pontiff, John Paul II, was frustrated in his efforts to visit Moscow, a trip that would be seen as an important sign that differences between Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity were being narrowed.

The Moscow church blocked any visit, accusing the Vatican of poaching for converts in Russia and other traditionally Orthodox lands of the former Soviet Union. The Vatican always denied the charge.

Kasper said the two churches plan to resume theological talks soon in Cyprus.

As part of signs of an improving climate, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev told Italian reporters in July that Moscow wants to improve its ties with the Vatican.

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