Vatican



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Pope Francis' one-day visit to Geneva in June will be an occasion to highlight the "longstanding and rich collaboration" between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, said the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

At a March 2 press briefing about the pontiff's June 21 trip to the Swiss city, Cardinal Kurt Koch said the journey is meant to help the Catholic Church and the World Council "continue to respond together to the challenges of our time."

Vatican spokesman Greg Burke confirmed the pope's planned visit to Geneva March 2. The visit, which comes during the World Council's 70th anniversary year, had previously been announced by Swiss authorities.

Francis will be the third pontiff to visit the World Council's headquarters, following visits by Popes Paul VI in 1969 and John Paul II in 1984.

Koch said the program for the Francis' trip was still being discussed but that Francis is also expected to meet with the president of the Swiss confederation, Alain Berset, and to celebrate a Mass for the Catholic community of Geneva.

Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, the World Council's general-secretary, said at the press briefing that his organization sees Francis' coming visit "as a sign of hope … for all who long and pray for unity of the church in the world [and] for those who work and pray for peace and justice."

"We see this as a great encouragement," said Tveit. "It's an affirmation of our shared focus on the need for our fellow human beings and to do together what we can do together."

The World Council of Churches was established in 1948 as an international organization of Christian churches and has the goal of fostering unity in fellowship, service and mission. Its members are spread across 348 churches of the Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Old Catholic traditions.

The Roman Catholic Church is not a member but has an official dialogue with the council and cooperates with it in various programs.

Asked about why the Catholic Church does not become a full member of the World Council, Tveit said: "We live very well with the relationship we have today."

"We don't focus on this question of membership but we focus on what we can do together," he said.

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