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Pope Francis has agreed with a recommendation by the Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life to postpone by one year the next gatherings of the World Meeting of Families and World Youth Day.

"Because of the current health situation and its consequences on the movement and gatherings of young people and families," the World Meeting of Families in Rome will be pushed back until June 2022 and World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, will be pushed back until August 2023, the Vatican announced.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the dicastery, told Catholic News Service April 20 that now is the time his office would be signing contracts with hotels and airlines if the World Meeting of Families were still to be held in 2021, "but no one knows what will happen," so it seemed prudent to push the meeting back a year.

The dicastery also would not hold two large gatherings during the same summer, so that was one reason World Youth Day was pushed back, he said.

The other reason, Farrell said, is that although people are talking about "returning to normal" and government leaders are making plans for phasing out lockdowns and

reopening businesses, "we do not believe travel will be that extensive" anytime soon.

The dicastery has canceled all international meetings until January 2021, although it is planning for a few young people from Panama, where World Youth Day was celebrated in 2019, to hand the World Youth Day cross to a few young people from Lisbon Nov. 22, the feast of Christ the King.

The handoff originally was scheduled for April 5, Palm Sunday, but was postponed because of the lockdowns and travel bans in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus.

If the young representatives from Panama and Portugal are not able to travel to Rome in November, Farrell said, Panamanians and Portuguese already living in Rome will participate in the event.

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