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As more Europeans are vaccinated and coronavirus cases continue to decrease, organizers of the upcoming 52nd International Eucharistic Congress in Budapest, Hungary, are optimistic that pilgrims will be able attend the event in September in person rather than online.

At a news conference in Budapest May 13, the organizers told journalists they are preparing for an "offline congress," which will culminate with the closing Mass Sept. 12 celebrated by Pope Francis in the city's Heroes' Square.

Although the Vatican has not officially confirmed the papal visit, the pope told journalists he planned on celebrating the final Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress and hinted at a possible visit to Slovakia.

"Budapest is a two-hour drive from Bratislava. Why not pay a visit to the Slovaks?" he asked March 8 during a news conference aboard the papal flight from Iraq.

According to the organizers of the eucharistic congress — Auxiliary Bishop Gábor Mohos of Esztergom-Budapest, Tünde Zsuffa, head of communications, and Fr. Kornél Fábry, secretary general of the event — the Sept. 5 opening will include "a

grandiose opening ceremony featuring a 1,000-member choir."

Filipino Archbishop Jose Palma of Cebu "will travel the longest distance, nearly 11,000 kilometers [6,835 miles] to be part of this event," the congress' website stated.

Also confirmed to be taking part in the congress are Archbishop Piero Marini, president of the International Committee for the International Eucharist Congress; South Korean Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-jung of Seoul; Brazilian Cardinal Orani João Tempesta of Rio de Janeiro; Iraqi Cardinal Louis Sako, the Chaldean Catholic patriarch; and Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah, former prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

At the closing Mass, a 120-member Hungarian Opera orchestra and choir, as well as "a grand choir of 2,080 singers arriving from all corners of Hungary, will be among the performers," organizers said.

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