Vatican
Pope Francis leads his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican Aug. 25. (CNS/Paul H

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Nicosia, Cyprus — August 31, 2021
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Pope Francis will visit Cyprus in December, making him the second Roman Catholic pope to ever travel to the eastern Mediterranean island nation, a Cypriot official said Aug. 31.

The official said the pope's two-day visit will take place Dec. 2-3 when he will hold talks with Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades. Little else is known about the pope's itinerary. The official, who is knowledgeable about the plans for the visit, spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he's not permitted to speak publicly.

The Vatican spokesman, Matteo Bruni, didn't confirm or deny the trip, saying in an email to the AP: "Some trip hypotheses are under study for the autumn but it's premature to speak about them."

Anastasiades had announced after a 2019 visit to the Vatican that Francis would be travelling to Cyprus in 2020, but the pandemic caused the trip to be delayed.

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Francis' predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI was the first pope to travel to Cyprus in 2010.

Primarily Greek Orthodox Cyprus has a small, but vibrant Latin community of more than 2,400 people who can trace their roots to Crusaders who settled on the island after the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin in the 12th century. Ethnically split Cyprus also has a large Muslim population who mostly live in the breakaway, Turkish Cypriot north.

Cyprus was the initial stop on St. Paul's first journey to spread Christianity in the first century and he converted the island's Roman governor Sergius Paulus to the faith.

Cyprus is also linked with St. Lazarus — the man who according to Christian scriptures was resurrected by Jesus. Fearing persecution, Lazarus fled to Cyprus and was appointed a bishop.