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Pope Francis waves and uses a cane to walk across the front of a large group of children wear

Pope Francis greets children of Vatican employees attending a summer camp in the Vatican's Paul VI audience hall July 18, 2023. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Carol Glatz

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Treated to songs, gifts and a paper medallion designating him "hero," Pope Francis visited children attending a summer camp at the Vatican.

About 250 children of Vatican employees welcomed the pope, who greeted the children and counselors, and posed for pictures July 18. He spoke to the kids, who ranged in age from 5 to 13, and answered their questions, according to a report by Vatican News.

"What message can we bring to our heroes, our parents?" a young boy named Edoardo asked. Francis invited them to show gratitude and always tell their parents, "Thank you," for all they do to raise them.

A child named Elena asked the pope who his superheroes are. "Grandparents," he said, because they possess so much wisdom "and that is why it is important" to talk to them.

Raffaele asked the pope how they can be heroes "in the digital world." The pope said they should focus on technology's "usefulness" in such a way that the tools serve the person and not the other way around.

The pope received a color drawing of himself with dozens of the kids' signatures, two handmade plastic bracelets and a large paper medallion held by a blue ribbon which he promptly pulled over his head. It said "hero" in Italian and pictured St. Peter's Basilica and a smiling pope saying, "peace."

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Two children gave the pope a backpack and T-shirt from the summer program telling him he could bring these with him on his upcoming trip to Lisbon for World Youth Day.

Other children held up a large colorful poster the kids made showing a large hornet's nest hanging in a tree surrounded by bees and the words, "You help us to 'bee' heroes," reflecting the theme of this year's camp dedicated to honeybees and heroes.

The large hall, which normally seats thousands for audiences with the pope, was turned into an indoor playground with bouncy houses and huge inflatable slides, some shaped like ships, including a sinking Titanic.

The summer program, running from July 3 to Aug. 4, is organized by the Salesians and the private associations, Play It and "Tutti in una Festa." The program offered the children activities such as swimming, tennis, games, crafts and educational initiatives aimed at building friendships and values.

The children sometimes receive other special guests, such as chefs from Rome's "Gelato Academy" who came and explained how Italian "gelato" is made, Salesian Fr. Franco Fontana, a chaplain at the Vatican overseeing the program, told Vatican News July 13.