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Pope Francis gives his blessing at the Generali Convention Center in Trieste, Italy, for an event during Italian Catholic Social Week July 7, 2024. Also in the photo are Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, president of the Italian bishops' conference, left, and Archbishop Luigi Renna of Catania, Italy, right. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Vatican City — July 19, 2024
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Pope Francis' visit to Luxembourg and Belgium Sept. 26-29 will come just 13 days after wrapping up the longest trip of his pontificate.

After visiting Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste and Singapore Sept. 3-13, the pope will travel to the tiny European nation of Luxembourg Sept. 26 and neighboring Belgium Sept. 26-29, traveling to Brussels, Leuven and Louvain-la-Neuve.

He will stick to the traditional essentials: greeting top-level government officials, meeting with local Catholics, celebrating an open-air Mass and meeting privately with his fellow Jesuits.

The main focus of the trip to Belgium is to mark the founding of the oldest Catholic university in the world, the Catholic University of Leuven, which celebrates its 600th anniversary during the 2024-2025 academic year.

Founded in 1425 with a decree by Pope Martin V, today the university is split into the Dutch-speaking KU Leuven, located in Leuven, and the French-speaking UCLouvain, which was moved to Louvain-la-Neuve. The pope will meet with professors at the Dutch-speaking school and students at the French-speaking campus.

Lingering tensions between the Dutch-speaking Flemish in the north and the French-speaking Walloons in the south have led to constitutional amendments granting these regions formal recognition and autonomy, according to The CIA Factbook.

Of Belgium's nearly 12 million residents, 57% are Catholic, more than 5% are Protestant and other Christian denominations, 6.8% are Muslim, 9% are atheist and 20% are nonbeliever/agnostic, according to the factbook.

The capital, Brussels, serves as the capital of the European Union, hosting the headquarters of the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the

formal seat of European Parliament, the European Council. It is also the headquarters of NATO.

Along with Belgium, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was among the six countries which founded the European Economic Community in 1957. It then became part of the European Union.

About half the size of Delaware, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a constitutional monarchy and nearly three-quarters of its population of 670,000 are Christian. Of those who are Christian, 63.8% are Catholic. About 2.6% of the population are Muslims and 23.4% of the population do not identify with any religion, according to EU statistics.

Francis created the country's first cardinal when he elevated its archbishop to the College of Cardinals in 2019. Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, 65, is a Jesuit, a member of the pope's advisory Council of Cardinals and the relator general of the Synod of Bishops on synodality.

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The last time a pope visited Luxembourg was St. John Paul II in 1985 and the last time for Belgium was in 1995 when St. John Paul went to Brussels for the beatification of St. Damien De Veuster.

Here is the detailed schedule of the pope's trip released by the Vatican July 19. Times listed are local, with Eastern Daylight Saving Time in parenthesis.

Thursday, Sept. 26 (Rome, Luxembourg, Brussels)

— 8:05 a.m. (2:05 a.m.) Departure from Rome's Fiumicino airport.

— 10 a.m. (4 a.m.) Arrival at Luxembourg Findel International Airport in Luxembourg and official welcome.

— 10:45 a.m. (4:45 a.m.) Courtesy visit with Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg at the Grand Ducal Palace.

— 11:15 a.m. (5:15 a.m.) Meeting with Prime Minister Luc Frieden.

— 11:50 a.m. (5:50 a.m.) Meeting with authorities, members of the diplomatic corps and local representatives at the Cercle Cité. Speech by pope.

— 4:30 p.m. (10:30 a.m.) Meeting with the Catholic community in Luxembourg's Cathedral of Notre-Dame. Speech by pope.

— 5:45 p.m. (11:45 a.m.) Farewell ceremony at Luxembourg Findel International Airport.

— 6:15 p.m. (12:15 p.m.) Departure from Luxembourg Findel International Airport to Brussels.

— 7:10 p.m. (1:10 p.m.) Arrival at Melsbroek Air Base near Brussels, Belgium, and official welcome.

Friday, Sept. 27 (Brussels, Leuven)

— 9:15 a.m. (3:15 a.m.) Courtesy visit with King Philippe of Belgium at the Castle of Laeken in Brussels.

— 9:45 a.m. (3:45 a.m.) Meeting with Prime Minister Alexander De Croo.

— 10 a.m. (4 a.m.) Meeting with authorities and local representatives. Speech by pope.

— 4:30 p.m. (10:30 a.m.) Meeting with university professors at the Dutch-speaking KU Leuven. Speech by pope.

Saturday, Sept. 28 (Brussels, Louvain-la-Neuve)

— 10 a.m. (4 a.m.) Meeting with bishops, priests, deacons, religious, seminarians and pastoral workers at the Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Koekelberg. Speech by pope.

— 4:30 p.m. (10:30 a.m.) Meeting with university students at the French-speaking UCLouvain. Speech by pope.

— 6:15 p.m. (12:15 p.m.) Private meeting with members of the Society of Jesus at St. Michel College.

Sunday, Sept. 29 (Brussels, Rome)

— 10 a.m. (4 a.m.) Mass at King Baudouin Stadium. Homily by pope and Angelus.

— 12:15 p.m. (6:15 a.m.) Farewell ceremony at Melsbroek Air Base near Brussels.

— 12:45 p.m. (6:45 a.m.) Departure by plane from Melsbroek Air Base near Brussels to Rome.

— 2:55 p.m. (8:55 a.m.) Arrival at Rome's Fiumicino airport.