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2012 papal trip to Mexico, Cuba being studied

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Vatican officials are at an advanced stage in studying the possibility of a papal trip to Mexico and Cuba in the spring of 2012, the Vatican spokesman said.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the spokesman, told reporters Nov. 10 that the nuncios to Mexico and Cuba have been told to inform those governments that "the pope is studying a concrete plan to visit the two countries, responding to the invitations received" from them.

Father Lombardi said a definite decision regarding a trip in the spring should be made within a few weeks. The fact that the nuncios were asked to inform the governments demonstrates the advanced nature of the planning, he said.

The Mexican government and Mexican Catholics repeatedly have said they'd like Pope Benedict to visit "and he is happy to finally be able to respond," the Jesuit said. The pope went to Brazil in 2007, but would like to visit a Spanish-speaking country in the region and Mexico is the largest of them.

"Cuba is another country that really wants to see the pope," he said, and a papal visit could offer great encouragement to the people and the country "in an important period of their history."

Father Lombardi said the timing would be related to the 400th anniversary of the discovery of the image of Our Lady of Charity of Cobre, the patroness of Cuba.

"Just looking at a map, you see that Cuba and Mexico are in the same direction from Rome, so it's logical to combine in a single trip these two countries, rather than others that would require a longer and more complex itinerary," the spokesman said.

He excluded other countries being added to the trip and said that because of the altitude of Mexico City, it

is unlikely the pope would visit the Mexican capital. "The best alternatives" will be studied immediately, he said.

With the Latin American bishops committed for the past four years to a program of new evangelization, he said, the papal trip to Mexico and Cuba would be a fitting way to prepare the entire church for the Year of Faith, scheduled to begin in October 2012.

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