

Jerusalem patriarch says pope's May trip to focus on Christian unity

Judith Sudilovsky Catholic News Service | Mar. 27, 2014
Jerusalem

When Pope Francis visits the Holy Land in May, he will follow the pattern he set last year in Brazil by meeting with the leaders of the three nations he will visit as well as with the less fortunate.

But the trip also will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the historic meeting between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, and it is for that reason the theme of the trip is: "So that they may be one."

Church officials released the pope's official schedule for the May 24-26 visit and confirmed that Pope Francis will meet Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, considered "first among equals" of the Orthodox bishops, May 25 in Jerusalem and again the following day. On May 25, the two are scheduled to sign a joint declaration.

"We are called to be one, and the pope is coming to remind us of this and renew the spirit of unity and fraternal love," Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal of Jerusalem told a news conference Thursday. "The logo and the motto that have been chosen for this pilgrimage focus in on this desire for unity."

The official logo of the pilgrimage depicts the embrace of Sts. Peter and Andrew, patrons of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the patriarch added.

Twal said Pope Francis has requested modest welcoming ceremonies throughout the visit. In Amman May 24, he will meet with Jordan's King Abdullah and Queen Rania. The following day, in Bethlehem, West Bank, Pope Francis will meet Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. In Jerusalem May 26, he will meet with Israeli President Shimon Peres and separately with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

In Jordan, the pope will meet with refugees and disabled young people. In Bethlehem, he will eat lunch with Palestinian families at the Franciscan Convent of Casa Nova, following which he will greet children from the Dehiyshe, Aida and Beit Jibrin refugee camps at the Phoenix Center of the Dehiyshe Refugee Camp.

The pope will celebrate two public Masses during his visit; at the International Stadium in Amman and in Bethlehem's Nativity Square. Twal said he hoped travel restrictions would be eased to allow Christians from Gaza to attend the Bethlehem Mass. He also said a special place would be made for Christians traveling from Israel's Galilee region to the Mass in Bethlehem.

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