

## For the Vatican, summer begins today

John L. Allen Jr. | Jul. 7, 2010 NCR Today

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*Rome*

Famously, the Vatican has its own sense of time, and today is a good reminder of the point. In the rest of the Northern Hemisphere summer officially began this year on June 21, but in the Vatican summer really begins today, after the conclusion of Pope Benedict XVI's General Audience in St. Peter's Square, when the pontiff heads for Castel Gandolfo.

The Prefecture of the Papal Household has announced that while Benedict is at his summer residence, all private and special audiences will be suspended, and for the next three weeks (July 14, 21 and 28), there won't be any general audiences either.

In effect, that means Benedict won't be doing much official business for the rest of the month. Among other things, that could afford him time to put the final touches on the second volume of his book *Jesus of Nazareth*. The pope told American Rabbi Jacob Neusner, whose writings Benedict quoted extensively in the first volume, that the manuscript was essentially complete in a meeting in a January. The writing had been slowed down last summer when Benedict broke his wrist at the start of his summer vacation.

Located roughly 27 miles southeast of Vatican City, Castel Gandolfo is one of the *Castelli Romani*, small towns nestled in the hills by Lake Albano. The total residential community is roughly 9,000, although on Wednesdays when the pope holds a general audience, or when there's some other special event, the population swells considerably.

The papal palace in Castel Gandolfo was built between 1623 and 1629 by Pope Urban VIII, though the first pope to pass summer there, in the relative cool of the hills, was Alexander VII. In the 18th century, a nearby villa was added to the papal estate. With the collapse of the Papal States in 1870, popes no longer summered in Castel Gandolfo, having declared themselves "prisoners of the Vatican." With the Lateran Pacts of 1929, the papal estate at Castel Gandolfo was declared "extra-territorial" Vatican property, and Pius XI resumed the traditional summer break.

The Jesuit-run Vatican Observatory was installed at Castel Gandolfo in 1934, in order to have a clearer view of the sky away from the bright lights and smog of Rome. Some additional grounds were also added which today host a small agricultural enterprise.

One bit of papal trivia: The total size of the papal estate at Castel Gandolfo is actually larger than the territory of the Vatican city-state. The pope's summer residence stretches over 136 acres, while the Vatican is confined within 108.

Though most business slows down in the Vatican while the pope is away, it doesn't stop altogether. Sometime in the next few days, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is expected to release a revision of the

church's rules for handling cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergy. In the main, those revisions simply codify "special faculties," or exceptions to the rules, issued in 2002 and 2003, which were intended to speed up the process of weeding abusers out of the priesthood.

As a matter of canon law, "special faculties" expire when the pope who issues them dies, so they were re-authorized by Benedict XVI in 2005. The effect of the new revision is to make the faculties officially part of the law.

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