

Vatican is studying possible papal trips to Korea, other Asian nations

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A possible papal trip to South Korea for an Asian youth gathering in August is under consideration as are invitations to the Philippines and Sri Lanka, the Vatican spokesman said.

"It's true" an invitation for Pope Francis to visit South Korea "is being studied," but the Vatican is not ready to confirm the trip will take place nor announce dates, Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi told journalists Wednesday.

He said the possible trip to Korea would be to coincide with the 4th Asian Youth Day in Daejeon, South Korea, scheduled for Aug. 10-17.

Lombardi also said "it's true there are invitations" for the pope to visit the Philippines and Sri Lanka and that a possible trip to those countries is being studied, "but it is not for this year."

Pope Francis had told reporters July 28 during a flight back to Rome from Brazil, his first foreign journey, that "papal trips are always good."

The pope had said he already had invitations to go to Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

"I must go to Asia," he said, because Pope Benedict XVI did not manage to visit the continent in his eight-year pontificate and Asia "is important."

There are more than 5 million Catholics in South Korea, according to Cardinal-designate Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state. He recently celebrated Mass with members of the Pontifical Korean College in Rome to mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and South Korea.

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