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Pope Francis delivers his speech during his weekly general audience in the Pope Paul VI hall at the Vatican, Wednesday, Feb. 22, 2023. Pope Francis has a bad cold and has opted to skip speeches he was set to deliver Thursday, Feb. 23, 2023 to visiting groups of priests and scientists, the Vatican said. Francis, 86, did meet with young Orthodox priests and monks and members of the Max Planck Institute, the German research organization that is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. (AP Photo/Andrew Medichini, File)

by The Associated Press

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Pope Francis canceled one audience and skipped speeches he was set to deliver Feb. 23 because of a bad cold, the Vatican said.

Francis, 86, did meet with young Orthodox priests and monks and members of the Max Planck Society, the German research organization that is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. But because of a "bad cold," Francis merely had printed copies of his remarks handed out and didn't read them aloud, the Vatican said in a note.

He later canceled a planned audience with members of an Italian YMCA group, the Holy See said in its daily bulletin.

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On Feb. 22, Francis coughed repeatedly during Ash Wednesday services that he presided over at a Roman church, and opted not to participate in the traditional procession that inaugurates the church's Lenten season.

This time of year in 2020, just as the coronavirus pandemic was starting to hit Italy, Francis also suffered a bad cold that forced him to cancel several days of official audiences and his participation in the Vatican's annual spiritual retreat. The Vatican had already scrubbed the retreat for this year in favor of personal spiritual exercises.

The Argentine pope had part of one lung removed as a young man because of a respiratory infection, and in 2021 had a chunk of his colon removed because of an intestinal inflammation. He has been using a wheelchair and cane since last year because of strained knee ligaments and a small knee fracture that have made walking and standing difficult.