



PRESS RELEASE

**Pope Francisco confirms visit to Panama
from January 23rd to 27th, 2019 on the occasion of WYD**

Panama City, Panama, July 9th, 2018 .- The Holy See announced at 10 am today (Panama time) that Pope Francis received the invitation of the Panamanian Government and Bishops, and will visit this Central American country from January 23rd to 27th, 2019, on the occasion of the 34th World Youth Day.

"This announcement gives an immense joy to the whole organization of WYD and we are encouraged by the certainty that the 'Peter' who will officially come to Panama will be Pope Francis," said the Archbishop of Panama and President of the Local Organizing Committee of WYD Panama 2019, Monsignor José Domingo Ulloa Mendieta.

In the last *ad limina visit* of the Panamanian Bishops to the Vatican (April 2017), when they asked Pope Francis if he assured his presence at WYD in Panama, the Holy Father answered them smiling, "Do not worry, Peter will go" .

Enthusiasm

Monsignor Ulloa led a special ceremony in the Archdiocese of Panamá to share the official announcement of the visit of the Holy Father, accompanied by the President of the Republic of Panama, Juan Carlos Varela, and the Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See in the country, His Most Reverend Excellency Mirosław Adamczyk.

"With this news from the Pope, I emphasize that WYD is this country's project for which both the State and the Church are responsible, and that is why we must collaborate in this joint venture so that it yields fruits for the nation and the world," added the Archbishop.

Monsignor Ulloa stressed that "WYD is one of the mega-events of the Catholic Church that shows the best face of the youth of the world and that it can only be understood through faith that great masses create a Christian environment, warm, cheerful, friendly, with people who do not know each other; people who share as brothers and sisters without having a common language or culture."

President Juan Carlos Varela said he was honored to receive one of the greatest spiritual leaders in the world. He added that WYD 2019 is not only from Panama, but from all of Central America, and that WYD can count on the greatest support from the Government, as well as hospitality and the hearts of the Panamanian people.

The President stressed that WYD will have support in matters of safety, health, emergencies, and logistics because it is a massive and historic event for the country.

Axes of the Visit

The Archbishop indicated that during his stay, in addition to participating in the main events of World Youth Day, "Pope Francis will consecrate the Cathedral Basilica Santa Maria la Antigua, located in the Old Quarter of the city", a colonial monument that is more than 220 years old and that has been subjected to radical restoration with support from the public sector.

"This will be a very special moment for our local Church in which we will be gathered under the care of the Vicar of Christ, all the national clergy, religious men and women, representatives of lay movements, as well as pastoral agents of all the parishes of the Archdiocese," said Monsignor Ulloa.

Víctor Chang, Executive Secretary of the Local Organizing Committee of the WYD Panama 2019, announced that the Holy Father is expected to meet with Central American Bishops, authorities of the three branches of government, representatives of civil society, and leaders of the diverse faith communities of Panama.

In this preliminary stage of planning the agenda, we are exploring the possibility of Pope Francis meeting with young people living on the margins, those bearing with infirmities, and those who because of their situation cannot participate in the central acts, expressed Chang.

It is expected that His Holiness will meet privately with a representative group of young people from the five continents with whom he will discuss his vision of the world and faith. The details of Pope Francis' agenda in Panama will be announced officially in November of this year.

During the announcement of the visit of the Holy Father, Monsignor Ulloa and President Varela introduced the leaders of the commission who, on the Panamanian side, will coordinate the papal trip: Víctor Chang, Executive Secretary of WYD, and Mr. Roberto Zúñiga, Director of Protocol of the Panamanian State.

