

WORLD & NATION

Pope on vacation prior to July, August trips

By John Norton
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II transferred to his summer residence outside Rome for a quieter-than-usual stay before his late-July trip to Canada for World Youth Day.

In an apparent concession to his increasing frailty, the 82-year-old pontiff journeyed July 8 by car instead of helicopter to Castel Gandolfo, a papal estate that sits on a hill over a lake 13 miles southeast of Rome.

The Vatican said that unlike previous years, the pope would hold his weekly



general audiences in the villa's small courtyard rather than return to Rome, unless the need to accommodate larger crowds of pilgrims required holding the gathering at the Vatican.

While at his summer residence, the pope's appointment book has been cleared of all private and special audiences, the Vatican said.

The pontiff's three-car motorcade, escorted by Italian police vehicles, exited the Vatican walls at 10:35 a.m., cheered by several hundred Romans and curious

tourists.

A Vatican press official told Catholic News Service this was the first time that he could recall that Pope John Paul had traveled to his summer villa by motorcade. The official speculated that the car would be more comfortable than the helicopter and did not involve climbing steps, which in recent months the pope has found increasingly difficult.

Pope John Paul has held a general audience at Castel Gandolfo only once before: an abbreviated one in the summer of 1996. He canceled a public Mass the next morning because of what was first identified as an intestinal disorder, but later

turned out to be appendicitis.

Until 1975, all of Pope John Paul's immediate predecessors held their summer general audiences at Castel Gandolfo. Pope Pius XII, who died in 1958, built a special hall for the gatherings that was inaugurated and used by Blessed John XXIII.

Pope Paul VI initiated the modern practice of holding summer audiences at the Vatican to accommodate jubilee year pilgrims in 1975.

Pope John Paul was to interrupt his stay at the summer villa to make a July 23-Aug. 2 trip to Canada, Guatemala and Mexico and a trip to Poland, Aug. 16-19.

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