

Museum opens doors to visitors

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[Kenneth Hilario](#) Reporter *Philadelphia Business Journal*

The National Museum of American Jewish History is getting into the papal game, and will be providing temporary lodging for seven groups during the papal visit, Sept. 26-27.

National Museum of
American Jewish History

The groups, which booked through website Philadelphia Pilgrimage, include St. Joseph Preparatory High School from Boston, Providence College from Rhode Island, Matignon High School from Massachusetts and the University of Akron from Ohio.



PHOTO BY M. KENNEDY FOR GPTMC

The seven groups will bring a total of 350 people staying at the museum, which can accommodate up to 400 people in the available spaces, said Ellen Weiss, facilities rental and event planning manager.

The groups will be utilizing the museum's event spaces and galleries, including its 5,210-square-foot ballroom, and second-, third- and fourth-floor preview galleries and Freedom Experiences at 2,350 square feet each.

The groups will arrive Saturday morning, Sept. 26, to drop off their belongings and come back later that night to sleep, Weiss said. They will come back for their bags after their excursions on Sunday between 7-11 p.m. and depart.

The groups will be bringing their own sleeping bags and Philadelphia Pilgrimage will be providing most of the accommodations, Weiss said.

The reason why a Jewish institution would be participating in what is largely a Catholic event may not be obvious at first, but it's part of its mission.

"A key part of our mission is to be an open door to all," spokeswoman Yael Eytan said. "The stories we tell are universal stories that can apply to anyone in any background."

The museum has a number of stories and objects that "tell the story of the shared struggle for religious liberty that both Jews and Catholics experienced," Eytan added. "A key pillar is to build bridges with other communities."

The museum will be putting on display the original 1790 letter from George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, which the museum has on a long-term loan for seven more years.

The document underscores "the new nation's commitment to religious liberty and equality for people of all faiths," the museum said.

Alongside that letter, the museum will display a similarly themed letter Washington wrote to the Roman Catholic community that same year, which the museum has on loan from the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

The documents will be on display side by side from Sept. 22 through Oct. 4.

Pope Francis is expected to speak at Independence Mall on Saturday, Sept. 26, to address the themes of religious liberty and immigration.

"It makes perfect sense not only to welcome these pilgrims, but anybody who will be here during the World Meeting of Families and papal visit," Eytan said.

The museum opened *Lyle, Lyle, Crocodile and Friends* on Aug. 27, an exhibit addressing the importance of friendship, sharing and family — values celebrated during the World Meeting of Families event. It will run through Nov. 1.

The museum will be open until 8 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 26.

Kenneth Hilario covers hospitality, restaurants and takes on general assignments and breaking news.