

Bush invited to meet with Sant'Egidio Community in Rome

ROME – U.S. President George W. Bush has been invited to visit the Sant'Egidio Community, a Catholic lay community known for leading high-profile peace negotiations as well as being active in the fight against the death penalty and HIV/AIDS.

The White House received the invitation but as of May 23 still had to decide if the president would visit with the community's leaders, sources in Rome told Catholic News Service. Bush is scheduled to be in Rome June 8-9.

Sant'Egidio spokesman Mario Marazziti told CNS that until the president's schedule was finalized there was no comment on the proposed visit.

Bush was set to have his first formal audience with Pope Benedict XVI June 9 after participating in the summit of leaders of the Group of Eight industrialized countries in Germany. Bush also was scheduled to visit with Italian political leaders during his two-day stop in Rome.

The Rome-based Sant'Egidio Community, present in 70 countries, played a key role in securing a 1992 peace accord in Mozambique. It also promoted peace negotiations and initiatives for other war-torn areas like the Balkans and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The community actively lobbies for a global moratorium on the use of the death penalty and provides HIV testing, counseling and free drug therapy to people with AIDS in six African countries.