

Papal mass in Berlin may move to Nazi-built stadium, organizer says

VATICAN CITY - So many people want to see Pope Benedict XVI celebrate Mass in Berlin in September that organizers are considering holding the event in an Olympic stadium built under Adolf Hitler, the papal trip planner said.

More than 50,000 people have requested tickets for the Sept. 22 event, Alberto Gasbarri told Catholic News Service. That puts the original Berlin site planned for the Mass, which holds from 20,000 to 25,000 spectators, out of the running, Gasbarri said.

The stadium, built to hold the controversial summer games of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, holds between 70,000 and 80,000 people, he said.

And if requests continue at the same pace, Gasbarri said, "that will be too small as well."

In that case, another location will have to be found. The Nazi-built stadium is just one option the Vatican is considering because of its capacity to hold large crowds, he said. A final choice will be made when Gasbarri visits Berlin at the end of June, he said.

Gasbarri pointed out that Pope John Paul II had celebrated Mass in the Olympic stadium in 1996.

The Sept. 22-25 visit will be Pope Benedict's third trip to his home country since his election in 2005.