

Obama to Visit Pope During European Visit in March

U.S. President Barack Obama plans to visit with Pope Francis at the Vatican in March during a trip to Europe, the White House said on Tuesday.

Obama is scheduled to meet with the pope on March 27 in a trip that will include stops in the Netherlands, Belgium and other parts of Italy, it said in a statement.

It will be the first meeting between the two men, who share a focus on addressing the gap between rich and poor.

"The president looks forward to discussing with Pope Francis their shared commitment to fighting poverty and growing inequality," the White House said.

Pope Francis, who took the helm of the Roman Catholic Church in March 2013, has led an effort to simplify the church and focus on the needy. Known for being frugal, he has appealed to people to help the poor, offered to drive his own car and chosen cardinals to emphasize his concern for poorer nations.

In December, Obama quoted the pope in a speech and pledged to focus his final term in office to tackling the growing gap between rich and poor in the United States.

The trip also marks Obama first official visit to two European Union bodies – the European Council and the European Commission – the White House added. He will be in Brussels on March 26 to meet with presidents of the two institutions.

In the Netherlands, Obama will attend the Nuclear Security Summit to discuss progress in securing nuclear materials and efforts to prevent nuclear terrorism with other world leaders, the statement said.

The president will also meet with Italian leaders in Rome, it said.

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