

Obama, president of U.S. bishops hold private meeting

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama met for half an hour March 17 with Chicago Cardinal Francis E. George, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the White House and the USCCB announced.

Brief statements issued by the White House and the USCCB said little more than that the two presidents had met for a private, 30-minute afternoon session in the Oval Office.

The meeting was not included in President Obama's daily schedule released to the press and no mention was made of it by either organization until it was over.

"The president and Cardinal George discussed a wide range of issues, including important opportunities for the government and the Catholic Church to continue their long-standing partnership to tackle some of the nation's most pressing challenges," said the White House statement. "The president thanked Cardinal George for his leadership and for the contributions of the Catholic Church in America and around the world."

The statement from the USCCB said: "The meeting was private. Cardinal George and President Obama discussed the Catholic Church in the United States and its relation to the new administration. The meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes.

"At the conclusion, Cardinal George expressed his gratitude for the meeting and his hopes that it will foster fruitful dialogue for the sake of the common good," the USCCB statement added.

Mercy Sister Mary Ann Walsh, USCCB director of media relations, said she expected no further information about the meeting to be released.