

Pope to meet Obama July 10 during evening audience

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI will welcome U.S. President Barack Obama to the Vatican July 10 for an audience scheduled to begin at 4 p.m.

Obama will visit Italy July 8-10 to participate in the Group of Eight summit, a meeting of leaders of the world's wealthiest nations. The meeting will be held in L'Aquila, site of a devastating earthquake in April.

After the G-8 summit, the president and his wife, Michelle, are scheduled to fly to Ghana, arriving late July 10.

Although Pope Benedict usually meets heads of state and government in the morning, the Vatican agreed to host Obama's first visit to the papal palace the evening before he flies to Africa.

It is not clear whether Miguel Diaz, a theology professor tapped by Obama to be the new U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, will be present for the meeting. As of June 23, the Senate hearing for the new ambassador's confirmation was not on the public schedule of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

Discussions between popes and U.S. presidents usually focus on common concerns regarding world events and the church's concerns over issues or policies with special moral relevance. So in addition to discussing ongoing tensions in the Middle East, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the situation in Iraq, Pope Benedict likely will bring up his concerns regarding abortion policy in the United States and renewed government permission for embryonic stem-cell research.