Vatican

Vatican News



Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, center, talks to Msgr. Leonardo Sapienza, left, as she arrives with her partner Andrea Giambruno, second from left, and her sister Arianna (partially hidden) at The Vatican, Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2023 for an audience with Pope Francis. (AP Photo/Domenico Stinellis)

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Rome — January 10, 2023
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Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, who came to power on a campaign motto of “God, Family, Fatherland” made her first official visit to see Pope Francis on Jan. 10, fulfilling what she said was a hoped-for opportunity to better understand the Argentine pontiff.

Meloni spent 35 minutes with Francis alone, before she met with the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and the foreign minister. The Holy See said the talks with Parolin focused on the fight against poverty, family issues and Italy’s demographic problems — a big concern for both Meloni and Francis who have lamented Italy’s low birth rate. The war in Ukraine and migration were also discussed, according to a press statement.

Meloni, whose far-right-led coalition won September national elections, has spoken at length about her Catholic faith and has been a high-profile participant in Italy’s conservative Family Day rallies aimed at promoting “traditional” family values. During the 2016 edition she announced she was pregnant with her first child, Ginevra, who accompanied her to the audience with Francis Jan. 10, along with her partner.

Meloni has assured Italians she won’t roll back abortion rights, but she has vowed to pass initiatives to provide alternatives and to better support families to help reverse what Francis has called Italy's “demographic winter.”

She has made clear her affection for and admiration of Pope Benedict XVI, calling him a “giant that history will never forget.” She attended his funeral and joined the public viewing of his body in St. Peter’s Basilica following his Dec. 31 death, and ordered all public buildings in Italy to lower their flags at half-staff in his honor — an action not even taken by the Vatican.

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In her autobiography “I am Giorgia,” Meloni wrote that she was somewhat perplexed by Francis, saying she sometimes felt like she was a “lost sheep.”

“I’ve never allowed myself to criticize a pope, but I admit I haven’t always understood Pope Francis,” she wrote. “I hope one day to have the privilege of speaking with him, because I’m certain that his big yes and direct words will give sense to what I don’t understand.”

Francis, for his part, has wished Meloni well and urged the center-left opposition to work constructively and responsibly with her government — the first far-right-led coalition in Italy since the end of World War II and its first ever headed by a woman.

During Jan. 10’s audience, Meloni gave Francis an angel figurine from a collection of hundreds that she has in her home. She also gave him two books: one for children about Mass that was written in 1955 by Maria Montessori, Italy’s famed educator, and a 1920 edition of a book containing the writings of the pope’s namesake, St. Francis of Assisi.

Francis, for his part, gave the premier copies of his main writings, as well as a bronze sculpture of a child helping another get up, bearing the words “Love, Help."