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Newsweek's report: 'Obama Meets the Pope, Makes It Out Alive'

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NCR Today

Holly Bailey filed this report:

President Obama just wrapped up his visit with Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican. We'll have to wait for word later from administration officials on what exactly the two talked about in their private sit-down. And no doubt the Vatican will have its own take. But reporters at the White House press file at the G-8 site in L'Aquila were able to see some of the visit on feed provided by official Vatican TV. Obama first met one-on-one with the pope, where the two exchanged the usual greetings as the president was escorted into Benedict's private apartment. The two leaders then went into the Papal Library, where Obama sat on one side of a very fancy wooden desk and Benedict sat on the other. As dozens of photographers captured the moment for eternity, Obama made small talk. "You must be used to having your picture taken," the president said. The pope, with a faint smile, nodded. "I'm still getting used to it," Obama told him. The pope gave him a careful look. "You must be getting tired," Benedict finally said, referring to Obama's lengthy foreign sojourn his week. Obama's response was inaudible.

A few minutes later, Vatican TV suddenly cut to a feed that showed Obama and Benedict standing in a corner of the library, and First Lady Michelle Obama, dressed in a black dress and black lace head veil, had joined them. All three were smiling. There was no sign of the Obama daughters on Vatican TV's footage, though reporters had been told they would be there. Your Gaggler did get to watch Obama introduce the pope to members of his inner circle, who looked collectively thrilled. Among those on hand: National Security Adviser Jim Jones, Deputy Chief of Staff Mona Sutphen, Senior Adviser David Axelrod, Press Secretary Robert Gibbs and NSA adviser Denis McDonough.

Upon meeting, Gibbs and McDonough kissed the pope's hand though other advisers, including Axelrod, who is Jewish, did not. Obama, Michelle and the aides posed for a group picture with the pontiff. For the record, McDonough, who confessed to reporters earlier this week that he was pretty excited about this event, looked the happiest we've ever seen him.

Afterwards, Benedict handed out official papal swag: boxes of blessed Catholic rosaries for the women and medals for the men. He presented the president with a painting of St. Peter's Square and an autographed copy of *Caritas in Veritate*, his recently-published take on the church's social teachings. (Do you think he meant that as a hint?) Obama, meanwhile, presented the pope with his gift: a stole that had been placed on the remains of St. John Neumann, the first naturalized U.S. citizen to named a saint. The group bid their good-byes, and it was done. The whole thing lasted a little less than an hour. The president is now on his way to Ghana, the final stop on his trip.

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