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New US ambassador to Vatican arrives in Rome

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ROME
The new U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, Miguel Diaz, arrived in Rome and said he was eager to help expand the "special relationship" between the United States and the Holy See.

Diaz, a 45-year-old Catholic theologian, arrived with his wife and four children at Rome's Fiumicino airport Aug. 27, six days after he was sworn in as ambassador in Washington. He was expected to present his credentials to Pope Benedict XVI at a ceremony later this summer.

"I look forward to the coming weeks as my family and I put down new roots in Rome. I will be honored to serve President (Barack) Obama and the American people in my new role, and it will be a unique honor to meet his holiness, Pope Benedict XVI," Diaz said in a statement released by the U.S. Embassy to the Holy See.

"I welcome the opportunity to deepen and expand upon the special relationship that has evolved between the United States and the Vatican over the past 25 years of formal diplomatic ties," he said.

The embassy said it would work with the Vatican to establish a date as soon as possible for Diaz to present his credentials letter to the pope. The pope was residing at his summer villa outside Rome until the end of September, and maintaining a reduced schedule of official meetings.

The formal presentation of credentials offers the pope and the new ambassador a chance to give speeches that touch on relations between the two states.

Diaz, a professor at St. John's University and the College of St. Benedict in Minnesota, is the first Hispanic and the first theologian to represent the United States at the Vatican.

A native of Cuba who came to the United States as a child with his parents, he was the first of his family to attend college. He is a former president of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians and a board member of the Catholic Theological Society of America. He is fluent in Italian, Spanish and French.

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