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Before Obama, Michelle to arrive at Vatican

John L. Allen Jr. | Jul. 10, 2009 NCR Today

By JOHN L. ALLEN JR.
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While U.S. President Barack Obama is not expected to arrive at the Vatican today until around 4:00 pm local time, First Lady Michelle Obama should get here more than an hour before, along with her daughters Malia and Sasha, her mother Marian Robinson, and longtime friend Kaye Wilson, for an extensive guided tour.

Mrs. Obama's motorcade is expected to pull up at a side entrance around 2:45 pm in Rome, meaning 8:45 am on the East Coast in America. The party will first get a tour of St. Peter's Basilica, including the tombs of the popes that lie beneath the basilica's main floor, before heading into the Apostolic Palace.

The famed Sistine Chapel has been closed ahead of Mrs. Obama's visit, to allow for a private tour. She will also be shown the Sala Regia, or "Regal Room," where popes once received monarchs, and which is today used for grand Vatioan events. The party will also walk through the rest of the first and second floors of the Apostolic Palace.

At the end of her tour, the First Lady and the rest of her party will join the official American delegation, in order to meet the pope after his private exchange with the president.

President Obama is scheduled to meet first this afternoon with the Vatican's Secretary of State, Italian Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, for roughly ten minutes before spending an anticipated fifteen minutes in a private conversation with Benedict XVI.

Immediately afterwards, the Obamas will head to the airport in order to depart for Ghana, where they are scheduled to be the guests of honor at a state dinner tonight.

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