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## Cardinal George celebrates mass in Cuba

by Catholic News Service



Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, Vatican foreign minister, right, talks with Havana's city historian Eusebio Leal during a visit to the Belen Convent in Old Havana June 20. (CNS photo)

### **SANTIAGO DE CUBA, Cuba**

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops visited Cuba's most revered religious site, the sanctuary of the Virgin of El Cobre, celebrating Mass with several Cuban bishops there as well as at the cathedral of the country's second-largest city during a two-day trip to the country.

The visit by Cardinal Francis E. George June 23-24 was part of an exchange between the U.S. and Cuban churches, said Archbishop Dionisio Garcia Ibanez of Santiago, president of the Cuban bishops' conference.

"This visit ... adds to our mutual understanding, because we have always encountered understanding from the North American church," Archbishop Garcia said.

He added that the U.S. church has long been in solidarity with the Cuban bishops, who have hosted visits from their U.S. counterparts many times.

Welcoming Cardinal George and his companions to the Mass at the Metropolitan Basilica Cathedral of Santiago, Archbishop Garcia said "we are seeing here a sign of the unity of the church, a sign that there is another world where it is possible to dream of and build a world of solidarity and brotherhood."

Accompanying the cardinal were Msgr. David Malloy, general secretary of the USCCB; Jimmy Lago, Chicago Archdiocese chancellor; two other priests, Father Daniel A. Flens, and Father Richard Simon; and Margarita Garcia, a lay Hispanic ministry leader, all from Chicago.

In addition to the two liturgies, the group visited other religious and historic sites in the Santiago Archdiocese, located in the southeastern part of the island.

In his homily at the cathedral June 24, Cardinal George expressed joy at reaching Santiago, "land of the Gospel and saints," the Cuban bishops conference reported on its website. Noting that it was the feast of St. John the Baptist, he reminded the congregation of the saint's call to diminish oneself so that Jesus could increase in one's life.

"Only Jesus can give meaning to our lives," he said.

Archbishop Garcia recalled that he had been Cardinal George's guest in Chicago in 2009, "when we talked about the reality of the Cuban and North American churches."

Cardinal George and Archbishop Garcia were joined for the Mass at the sanctuary in El Cobre by Bishop Emilio Aranguren Echeverria of the Diocese of Holguin, and Bishop Alvaro Beyra Luarca of the Diocese of Santisimo Salvador de Bayamo-Manzanillo.

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Cardinal George's visit followed by just days an official and pastoral trip to Cuba by Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, the Vatican's foreign minister. Archbishop Mamberti participated in a national social ministry conference and various official government events, including a meeting with Cuban President Raul Castro.

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