

Schools have the right to limit free speech. But how much should they?

Ellen K. Boegel

[America \(Jesuit\) Magazine](#)

From [Halloween costumes](#) to prom dresses, Facebook posts to commencement addresses, school administrators are required to make difficult decisions regarding appropriate limits on free speech and expression. For the educational community, the summer is a good time to review, reflect on and possibly revamp current policies.

Dress codes

Headaddresses, tattoos and form-fitting clothing present increasingly complicated challenges for school administrators seeking to balance the values of fun, comfort and fashion with individual and community sensitivities, educational and social propriety, contractual and statutory provisions and, for public educational institutions, constitutional requirements.

[As evidenced by the 2015 Yale controversy](#) and [the 2016 creepy clown scare](#), Halloween costumes create problems at all educational levels. In addition to safety concerns regarding weapons and dangerous props or materials, codes of conduct at many schools prohibit “offensive” or “hostile” conduct.

Application of conduct restrictions to one-time occurrences, such as the wearing of an insensitive costume, is problematic. Public and private school students have due process and/or contractual rights (based on student registration and tuition payments) that require clearly articulated dress codes; vague and subjective terms are unenforceable. In addition, public school students enjoy [First Amendment rights](#) that protect

expressive clothing.

Restrictions on the speech of public college-level students must be “narrowly tailored to serve a significant government interest.” Public secondary and elementary school students are granted less extensive [free speech rights](#). Apparel that “materially disrupts classwork or involves substantial disorder or invasion of the rights of others” may be prohibited. Clothing with lewd or sexually explicit messages and those that are viewed as encouraging illegal drug use also may be banned in secondary and elementary schools.

Nevertheless, school administrators should use their authority sparingly lest they become enmeshed in even more disruptive (and expensive) litigation. In Pennsylvania, for example, a middle school’s unconstitutional prohibition of “I ♥ Boobies” cancer awareness bracelets engendered a lawsuit that lasted four years and cost taxpayers close to \$400,000 in legal fees.

Gender-conforming clothing requirements at public schools are prohibited by the [Equal Protection clause](#), but reasonable restrictions may be placed on feminine and masculine attire. This means a female student should not be forced to wear a skirt or dress and a male student should not be prohibited from wearing a skirt or dress, but restrictions can be placed on skirt and dress lengths. Dress code restrictions are more common on feminine attire, which has led to [the #iammorethanadistracted movement](#).

Private schools that accept federal funds must abide by Title IX gender discrimination protections, but religious schools with religious objections are exempt. Thus, religious schools can impose gender-specific clothing restrictions but that does not shield them from [student discontent and publicized controversy](#), often involving prom attire.

Legal rights are not self-enforcing; many unlawful codes and enforcement practices persist. Students and parents who object

to overly restrictive policies must comply, negotiate or sue. [A recent CNN story](#) highlighted the ingenuity of one family who used a marker to disguise their son's non-complying decoratively shaved hair. School officials who want to avoid conflict and litigation should dispense with judgmental and gender-biased rules and then collaboratively create and uniformly apply standards designed solely to promote safe and effective learning environments.

Campus Speech

[Public college](#) and university students enjoy full free speech rights. Federal and state anti-harassment laws only may be used to limit public university speech when it is so objectively severe or pervasive that it reasonably can be determined to interfere with another student's ability to learn.

University officials also may place reasonable time, place and manner restrictions on student speech and may impose additional restrictions on spaces considered limited public fora, such as lecture halls reserved solely for curriculum-related events. Nevertheless, students and student groups with myriad controversial viewpoints must be given equal access to campus facilities. The [twice-cancelled appearance by Ann Coulter at the University of California, Berkeley](#), illustrates the difficulty of meeting these constitutional requirements while protecting the safety of the entire campus community.

The "special characteristics of the school environment" enable secondary and elementary public school administrators to regulate classroom speech and school-sponsored speech to a greater extent than permitted on public college campuses. Most states have anti-bullying laws that promote inclusiveness and prohibit harassment. As with dress codes, non-disciplinary discussions that lead to cooperative compliance are better than banning speech that does not pose a realistic threat or is objectively harmful or disruptive. One [public high school](#)

teacher learned this lesson the hard way when he lost a lawsuit brought by a student disciplined for stating, "[I don't accept gays because I'm Catholic.](#)"

[Private school](#) students are not protected by the First Amendment and are subject to all clearly articulated speech restrictions. Moreover, private schools may prohibit or invite any speaker to a school forum. As was evidenced by [student protests during Vice President Mike Pence's commencement address](#) at the University of Notre Dame, however, freedom from government involvement does not eliminate controversy. Private schools that accept federal funding are subject to civil rights laws and, except when based on religious considerations, may not permit harassment of students based on disability, race, gender, religion or national origin. State anti-bullying laws generally do not apply to private schools.

Social media posts

Out-of-school expression on social media is of growing concern to public and private school administrators. Although the forum is different, the same legal principles apply.

Public universities may impose disciplinary action when restrictions are narrowly tailored to serve a significant government interest. Protecting fellow students from discriminatory or harassing conduct is a significant government interest, but derogatory social media posts may be prohibited only when they amount to an actual threat or objectively impair the educational environment. Posting bomb threats on the internet may be prohibited, but lewd online behavior and off-campus criticism of teachers and principals should be tolerated. Private schools may adopt whatever restrictions are deemed appropriate and clearly communicated to students and parents.

Teachers understand the tremendous risks and benefits of free expression, and administrators understand there is no pleasing

some people (parents, students or teachers). The best-reasoned and most clearly written code of conduct will not prevent every controversy nor quell every protest, which, in a free society, should not be the goal. Education, rather than litigation, is the best tool we have to create respectful environments for the free exchange of ideas. Town hall meetings, student-designed codes of conduct, inclusive lesson plans and academic presentations may do more to achieve compliance with reasonable guidelines than threats of discipline.

Making student buy-in a priority does not guarantee unanimity, but it does increase understanding of school policies and defeat claims of ignorance, which is, after all, an important educational goal.

[Melania Trump reveals she is Catholic: The First Lady shares her faith with the world after meeting the Pope as the first Catholic to live in White House since JFK](#)

[Daily Mail](#)

When

[Melania Trump](#) recited The Lord's Prayer before a Melbourne, [Florida](#) presidential rally in February, the Internet went hog

wild.

Now we know one reason why the first lady began with 'Let us pray' and '[Our Father who art in heaven](#)' when she introduced the president that evening: She's a practicing [Roman Catholic](#).

Her spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham confirmed that to DailyMail.com on Wednesday, hours after [Pope Francis](#) blessed a rosary for her at the Vatican.

The last Catholics to live in the White House were [John F. Kennedy](#) and his wife Jackie. Melania and her son Barron will move to [1600 Pennsylvania](#) Avenue over the summer.

Mrs. Trump did more than just show up for a [Papal audience](#).

She spent time in prayer at the Vatican-affiliated Bambino Gesù (Baby Jesus) Hospital, and laid flowers at the feet of a statue of the Madonna.

She also prayed in the hospital chapel and read to a young Greek boy in need of a donor heart – holding his hand in the Intensive Care Unit while camera shutters snapped.

The almighty may have heard her.

'Upon landing in Belgium, I learned a young boy and his family who had been waiting for a heart transplant was informed that the hospital has found a donor,' she said in a statement.

'I read a book and held hands with this special little one just a few hours ago, and now my own heart is filled with joy over this news.'

The first lady later tweeted about the development with the hashtags '#Blessings' and '#Faith.'

In another tweet, she sent 'blessings to all' after her Papal audience.

Mrs. Trump told Pope Francis at the Vatican that she was

looking forward to going to the hospital 'for the bambinos.' She later called the visit 'very moving.'

'To spend time speaking to and coloring with children who have such a positive spirit despite illness was an amazing gift,' she said.

'The time I spent with the little ones in the Intensive Care Unit is something I will never forget, and I will pray for each of them daily.'

It's unclear when Mrs. Trump became a Catholic. The president is a life-long Presbyterian, and they were married in a Florida Episcopal church.

Growing up as the daughter of a Communist Party member in rural Slovenia, her family maintained the outward appearances of being atheists, according to people in her childhood village of Sevnica who [spoke to DailyMail.com](#) in late 2015.

Accordingly, Melania and her sister were not baptized and did not make their First Holy Communion with other children their age.

It's still not clear when Mrs. Trump was baptized into the Catholic faith. Grisham did not immediately respond to a question about that detail.

But the Trumps have been in a reflective religious mood since arriving in Saudi Arabia last Saturday. That frame of mind persisted throughout their time in Israel.

The president addressed 55 world leaders from Arab and other Muslim-majority nations in Riyadh, imploring them to be part of 'a coalition of nations who share the aim of stamping out extremism and providing our children a hopeful future that does honor to God.'

In Jerusalem he visited the famed Western Wall, slipping a written prayer between the centuries-old stones as custom

permits.

He 'marveled at the monument to God's presence and man's perseverance,' he said Tuesday in a speech at the Israel Museum.

'I was humbled to place my hand upon the wall and to pray in that holy space for wisdom from God,' Trump told an audience of Jewish officials.

'This city, like no other place in the world, reveals the longing of the human heart – to know and worship God.'

Trump issued a proclamation on Wednesday calling for a national 'day of prayer for permanent peace' on May 29, the upcoming Memorial Day holiday.

'On this ceremonious day, we remember the fallen, we pray for a lasting peace among nations, and we honor these guardians of our inalienable rights,' he said.

'I designate the hour beginning in each locality at 11:00 a.m. of that day as a time when people might unite in prayer. I urge the press, radio, television, and all other information media to cooperate in this observance,' Trump added.

[President Trump Declares a National Day of Prayer for 'Permanent Peace'](#)

Bob Eschliman
[Charisma News](#)

Memorial Day was once meant to honor the sacrifice of those who lost their lives in the service of their country.

While it remains that way for many Americans, for most in more recent times, it's become the "unofficial start of summer," and a day of picnics, barbecues and retail shopping sales. President Donald Trump is asking the country to take a step back and recognize the day as it was meant to be celebrated. Additionally, he's asking the country to set aside one hour, beginning at 11 a.m. locally, for prayer for permanent peace.

The president signed his annual Memorial Day proclamation on Wednesday night. It states:

Memorial Day is our nation's solemn reminder that freedom is never free. It is a moment of collective reflection on the noble sacrifices of those who gave the last measure of devotion in service of our ideals and in the defense of our nation. On this ceremonious day, we remember the fallen, we pray for a lasting peace among nation and we honor these guardians of our inalienable rights.

This year, we commemorate the centennial anniversary of America's entry into World War I. More than 4.7 million Americans served during The [Great War](#), representing more than 25 percent of the American male population between the ages of 18 and 31 at the time. We remember the more than 100,000 Americans who sacrificed their lives during "[The War to End All Wars](#)," and who left behind countless family members and loved ones. We pause again to pray for the souls of those heroes who, one century ago, never returned home after helping to restore peace in Europe.

On Memorial Day we honor the final resting places of the more than one million men and women who sacrificed their lives for our nation, by decorating their graves with [the Stars and Stripes](#), as generations have done since 1868. We also proudly fly America's beautiful flag at our homes, businesses, and in

our community parades to honor their memory. In doing so, we pledge our nation's allegiance to the great cause of freedom for which they fought and ultimately died.

In honor and recognition of all of our fallen service members, the [Congress](#), by a joint resolution approved May 11, 1950, as amended (36 U.S.C. 116), has requested the president issue a proclamation calling on the [people of the United States](#) to observe each Memorial Day as a [day of prayer](#) for permanent peace and designating a period on that day when the people of the United States might unite in prayer. The Congress, by Public Law 106-579, has also designated 3:00 p.m. local time on that day as a time for all Americans to observe, in their own way, the [National Moment of Remembrance](#).

NOW, THEREFORE, I, [DONALD J. TRUMP](#), [President of the United States of America](#), do hereby proclaim Memorial Day, May 29, 2017, as a day of prayer for permanent peace, and I designate the hour beginning in each locality at 11:00 a.m. of that day as a time when people might unite in prayer. I urge the press, radio, television and all other information media to cooperate in this observance.

I further ask all Americans to observe the National Moment of Remembrance beginning at 3:00 p.m. local time on Memorial Day.

I also request the governors of the [United States](#) and its territories, and the appropriate officials of all units of government, to direct that the flag be flown at half-staff until noon on this Memorial Day on all buildings, grounds and naval vessels throughout the United States and in all areas under its jurisdiction and control. I also request the people of the United States to display the flag at half-staff from their homes for the customary forenoon period.

Trump vows to use presidency for peace after 'fantastic' talks with Pope Francis

AFP

US president Donald Trump vowed on Wednesday to use his US presidency to promote global peace after meeting Pope Francis for the first time.

The two men sidestepped deep differences over issues ranging from the environment to the plight of migrants and the poor.

"Honor of a lifetime to meet His Holiness Pope Francis," a star-struck Mr Trump wrote on Twitter before leaving Rome for Brussels and the next leg of his first overseas trip as US president.

"I leave the Vatican more determined than ever to pursue PEACE in our world," he added.

In Brussels, a city he once dubbed a "hellhole", Mr Trump faced thousands of protesters ahead of his first summits on Thursday with leaders of Nato and the European Union.

The US president sparked fears of an end to Nato when he dismissed the world's biggest military alliance as "obsolete" while on the campaign trail and mortified the EU by backing Brexit.

Mr Trump said that the most important issue during his time in Belgium was terrorism after the "horrible situation" in the English city of Manchester, where a suicide bomber killed 22 people in an attack late on Monday night.

“We are fighting very hard, doing very well under our generals. Making tremendous progress,” he told [Belgian prime minister](#) Charles Michel.

“But when you see something like what happened a few days ago you realise how important it is to win this fight. And we will win this fight.”

Mr Trump left Rome declaring his determination for peace following his keenly anticipated encounter with Pope Francis, the 80-year-old former Jesuit priest who has made championing the poor and the third world major themes of his papacy.

In their world view and tastes, the Argentine pontiff who eschews the use of the palaces at his disposal and the billionaire president appear worlds apart.

But despite the pope looking initially grim-faced, both men ended up mostly all smiles, relaxed and even jovial.

Accompanied by his wife, Melania, and daughter Ivanka, Mr Trump met the pontiff in the private library of the [Apostolic Palace](#), the lavish papal residence which the pope decided not to live in, instead opting for more modest lodgings.

“He is something,” Mr Trump later said of his host. “We had a fantastic meeting.”

There was even a light-hearted moment when Pope Francis made an apparent allusion to Mr Trump’s imposing physical size.

“What do you feed him on? Potica?” Pope Francis asked Melania, in a reference to a calorie-laden cake that comes from her native Slovenia and is pronounced “potteezza”.

Mr Trump also told the pope he was committing more than US\$300 million (Dh1.1 billion) to help prevent or tackle famine in Yemen and several countries in Africa.

The Vatican described the discussions as “cordial” and

emphasised the two men's joint opposition to abortion and shared concern for persecuted [Christians in the Middle East](#).

The pope presented Mr Trump with a medallion engraved with an olive tree, the international symbol of peace.

He also gave the president copies of the three major texts he has published as pope, including one on the environment which urges the industrialised world to curb carbon emissions or risk catastrophic consequences for the planet.

Mr Trump, who has threatened to ignore the Paris accords on emissions and described global warming as a hoax, vowed to read them.

* [Agence France-Presse](#)

[Major Media Outlets Pick Up Adventist LGBT Stories](#)

[Jared Wright](#)

[Spectrum Magazine](#)

Stories of [LGBT+ Adventists](#) and their families have caught the attention of major news organizations, pointing both to the power of the stories and their uniqueness as accounts from within the faith community. Two stories in particular—one about an Adventist pastor who [came out as bisexual](#) and another about the Adventist [parents of a transgender daughter](#)—have received national media coverage.

Last month, Alicia Johnston announced to her congregation, the Foothills Community Church in [Chandler, Arizona](#), and to her employer, the [Arizona](#) Conference of [Seventh-day Adventists](#),

that she was resigning from her full-time pastoral role over her “complete disagreement with the Adventist Church on its teachings on [LGBT people](#).” Johnston revealed that she identifies as bisexual, and described the story leading to her resignation in a 27-minute video message.

Johnston’s [video went viral](#) on social media, and after coverage in Spectrum, the story was picked up by [Religion News Service](#), [NBC News](#) and other major outlets.

Johnston said the experience of sharing her story with such a wide audience has been ultimately a positive one. “I have never been as honest about myself and spoken with as much frankness about my experience with [God](#) than I did in that video, and to have it resonate so deeply with so many people is truly affirming,” she said. However, Johnston sought to deflect the spotlight. “It’s not about me and my sexuality at all,” she said. “It’s about discussions that desperately needed to happen and queer people in our communities that need to be seen and heard.”

She said that any number of closeted Adventist pastors could have made a similar video and said she was “overwhelmed with the honor and responsibility that it was me.” Noting that she is one of many people in the Adventist Church to have come out, she said, “God used my coming out to bring hope and courage to a lot of people.”

In the month that has followed her coming out, Johnston has taken time for self care—a trip to the ocean and the opportunity to “meet and reconnect with some incredible people in the Adventist queer community,” she said. She has focused on writing and public speaking engagements, but without anxiety about what might come next professionally, she said.

NBC News also [picked up](#) the story of Teagan Widmer, a transgender software engineer from the Bay Area, and her parents, Kris and Debbie Widmer, after their story was

featured in the [“Outspoken”](#) video series. Kris Widmer has served as a [Seventh-day Adventist](#) pastor for more than three decades. In the video, Debbie and Kris describe the struggle they experienced coming to terms with the changes their family experienced and the paradoxical way their faith community left them feeling isolated after Teagan came out.

[Teen Vogue](#), [Refinery29](#), and [LGBTQ Nation](#) were among the outlets that covered the Widmers’ “Outspoken” story. That the stories of Alicia Johnston and the Widmer family hit national media was no accident. Eliel Cruz, an LGBT activist, faith organizer and [Andrews University](#) alum, used extensive connections with religion reporters and LGBTQ reporters to help the stories spread.

“Realistically, mainstream media doesn’t care about Adventist stories. They don’t pay attention to it,” Cruz said. He attributed the oversight to Adventism’s insularity and its relative foreignness to most North American media. However, Cruz noted that journalists have picked up stories he pitched them both because they are “really interesting stories” and because he can contextualize Adventist stories in ways reporters unfamiliar with Adventism might not be able to.

The upshot has been many eyes on the two stories in a short time, something that left the Widmers taken aback.

“Debbie and I are amazed at the response to the video—41K views in three weeks,” Kris Widmer said. “We realize it is a unique perspective in Christianity to hear the struggle from parents, especially those who work for the church, to share their journey,” he said. Such openness about LGBT+ experiences is indeed rare for people of faith in general, let alone the Seventh-day Adventist community.

However, the media attention also had some negative repercussions for the Widmers. Kris noted that the “Outspoken” video went live the day before he preached his final sermon at

the Antioch Seventh-day Adventist Church in Antioch, California, prompting at least one attack website to opine that he was resigning over a conflict with the Adventist Church. "That is not true," Kris said. He stated that he resigned from the Adventist pastorate to pursue chaplaincy work with Adventist Health.

"I have not been defrocked as an ordained minister. I go forth with [the church's] continued blessing and approval and ordination...to be present with the sick and the dying as a chaplain, rather than administrate and preach and try to grow a local congregation as a pastor."



Kris, Teagan and Debbie Widmer. Photo by Stephen Eyer / Watchfire Films.

Debbie Widmer lamented the online sharing of a condemnatory video by people who never bothered to get in touch, "even people we know," she said. "None of them have ever gotten in touch with us to hear our story or our reasons or what we meant by what we said."

She added that the coverage was initially overwhelming. "It felt a little bit like a pressure cooker, since the media outlets need their story 'now'," she said. "We didn't have a lot of time to think through our responses like we might have wanted. It's been a bit of a roller coaster."

Still, Debbie expressed optimism about the film's potential.

“We hope that many lives will be impacted by our story and relationships will be healed.”

Kris added, “We are greatly encouraged by the notes, emails and messages that have said, ‘Your video was amazing, it prompted me to have a conversation with a mother, a father or other family member. I came out to my parents...and then I showed them your video. And it has been OK after that.’”

“Since our video has helped more than one LGBT person in this way, we know it has truly been worth it,” he said.

For Daneen Akers and Stephen Eyer of Watchfire Films, the producers of the “Outspoken” video series who also helped film and produce Alicia Johnston’s video message, the media response has been important for its potential to effect change. In a newsletter to supporters, they wrote,

Of course it’s always nice to have great media coverage, but that’s not why we are so thrilled with all of these articles. What this coverage means is that the likelihood of a LGBT young person (or their parents) coming across these films is higher, and seeing a story like these when you are struggling is a huge help in realizing you are not alone. One of the trans advocates who wrote said directly, ‘This film will save lives.’

That is the power of honest, courageous storytelling.

Donald Trump, Pope Francis

Meet, Vow to Fight for 'Life, Freedom of Worship'

[The Christian Post](#)

President [Donald Trump](#) and [Roman Catholic Church](#) leader [Pope Francis](#) met on Wednesday at the [Vatican](#) where they spoke for 30 minutes in private, and vowed to fight together for life, peace, and freedom of worship.

"Honor of a lifetime to meet His Holiness Pope Francis. I leave the Vatican more determined than ever to pursue PEACE in our world," Trump posted on [Twitter](#) following the meeting.

[BBC News](#) reported that the two world leaders held a 30-minute private meeting, with the Vatican later explaining that they talked about their shared commitment to "life, freedom of worship, and conscience," and expressed hope that they can collaborate "in service to the people in the fields of healthcare, education and assistance to migrants."

They also reportedly talked about the "promotion of peace in the world through political negotiation and interreligious dialogue," along with the need to protect Christian communities in the [Middle East](#), which are suffering at the hands of [Islamic extremists](#).

[Catholic News Service](#) noted that Francis presented Trump with a split medallion held together by an olive tree, symbolizing peace.

"It is my desire that you become an olive tree to construct peace," Francis said, to which Trump replied: "We can use some peace."

The Vatican leader also gifted copies of his documents "The Joy of the Gospel," on the family, and "Laudato Si.'" on the

environment, which the billionaire businessman promised to read.

Trump presented Francis with a box containing five of Martin Luther King Jr.'s books, including a signed copy of *The Strength to Love*.

Francis and Trump [have clashed](#) on some issues in the past, such as the president's vow during the 2016 election campaign to build a massive wall at the Mexican border in order to keep illegal immigrants and traffickers out of the country.

Francis went as far as to say that building such walls is "not Christian," but did not comment on the [border fence](#) that already exists between [California and Mexico](#) that was built during former president Bill Clinton's administration in 1993. Trump, who is Presbyterian, previously said it was "disgraceful" for the pope to question his faith.

There appeared to be no sign of major disagreements during Trump's visit, with the U.S. President calling it a "fantastic meeting."

When saying his goodbyes with Francis, Trump said: "Thank you, thank you. I won't forget what you said."

[Reuters](#) reported that he later told reporters about how meeting the pope went: "Great. He is something. He is really good."

Trump's visit to the the Vatican is part of a nine-day foreign tour, which has already seen him deliver speeches in Saudi Arabia and Jerusalem.

'I won't forget what you said,' Trump tells pope after meeting at Vatican

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVCm1-toVFg>

Gerald O'Connell

[America Magazine](#)

President Donald Trump and Pope Francis, two leaders with contrasting styles and differing worldviews, met at the Vatican City on Wednesday, setting aside their previous clashes to broadcast a tone of peace for an audience around the globe.

Mr. Trump, midway through his grueling nine-day maiden international journey, called upon the pontiff at the Vatican early Wednesday where the two had a private 30-minute meeting laden with religious symbolism and ancient protocol. While this is the normal length of time for such face-to-face meetings with heads of states it was perhaps shorter than many had expected for this first encounter between the two world leaders.

According to a summary provided by the Holy See, the pope and president talked, among other things, about “the promotion of peace through negotiation and inter-religious dialogue, with special reference to the Middle East and the protection of Christian communities.”

In their private conversation and in a subsequent one with two of the pope's top advisors—Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the secretary of state, and Archbishop Paul Gallagher, secretary for relations with states, a Vatican statement said the two leaders discussed their “joint commitment in favor of life, and freedom of worship and conscience” and expressed the hope

for “serene collaboration between the State and the Catholic Church in the United States, engaged in service to the people in the fields of healthcare, education and assistance to immigrants.”

Surprisingly, the summary included no mention about “care for our common home” or climate change, but that does not mean the issue was not addressed in the two conversations that lasted a total of 80 minutes.

The president, accompanied by his wife and several aides, had arrived at the Vatican just after 8 a.m. local time. The president greeted Francis in Sala del Tronetto, the room of the little throne, on the second floor of Apostolic Palace Wednesday morning.

The visit began with a handshake between the two men. Mr. Trump could be heard thanking the pope and saying it was “a great honor” to be there. They then posed for photographs and then sat down at the papal desk, the pope unsmiling, as their private meeting began.

The audience started in a somewhat tense manner, with both looking rather serious and conscious of its importance, but it ended in a much relaxed, warmer and friendly way, with many smiles and some jokes. Significantly, as he bade Pope Francis farewell, Mr. Trump said, “Thank you, thank you, I won’t forget what you said!”

At the end of their private conversation, Mr. Trump presented his delegation, which included his wife, Melania, his daughter Ivanka and her husband Jared Kushner, the national security advisor, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson. After receiving the entire delegation, Pope Francis escorted him to a table in the center of the room for the traditional exchange of gifts.

Mr. Trump began the gift exchange telling Francis, “This is a gift for you. These are the books of Martin Luther King. I

think you will enjoy them. I hope you do.”

Pope Francis looking clearly pleased responded, “Thank you, thank you very much!”

The first pope from the Americas, for his part, gave the U.S. president a medallion of the Olive branch of peace as he does to many heads of state and explained its significance, saying, “It’s our hope that you may become an olive tree for peace.”

“We could use peace!” Mr. Trump responded.

Francis then gave the president the three main documents of his pontificate: “The Joy of the Gospel,” which is his programmatic document; the encyclical “Laudato Si’,” which highlights the urgent need to combat climate change; and “The Joy of Love,” his post-synod exhortation on the family. He explained that these are documents that he wrote for Catholics and that they relate to “the family, the joy of the Gospel and the care of our common home—the environment.” He also gave Mr. Trump a copy of his Message for the World Day of Peace 2017, which focuses on the politics of non-violence, and said, “I signed it personally for you.”

After exchanging gifts, the pope led the president back to their original positions under the magnificent painting of the Resurrection of Jesus, by the famous Italian artist Perugino, for a final photo-op. And before the delegation departed he gave a gift to each one starting with the president.

When he came to Melania, he said with a smile, “Do you give him *potizza* to eat?” *Potizza* is a traditional rich Slovenian cake given for dessert which Francis likes.

Mr. Trump laughed and commented, “Delicious!”

After Melania, the pope then greeted Ivanka Kushner and her husband, Jared, in what seemed like a family gathering, as the

president and his wife looked on.

His predecessor, Barack Obama, had a private audience with Francis at the Vatican in 2014 that lasted 50 minutes. But the timing on Wednesday was tight as Francis had his weekly Wednesday general audience, the thousands of pilgrims on hand forced Trump's motorcade to enter Vatican City from a side entrance rather than the grand entrance through St. Peter's Square.

Mr. Trump is the 13th incumbent president of the United States to meet a reigning pope in the Vatican since Woodrow Wilson visited Pope Benedict XV on Jan. 4, 1919. Four popes have visited the United States in that same period, starting with Paul VI on Oct. 4, 1965. Francis went there from Sept. 22 to 23, 2015. This was the 30th meeting between a U.S. president and a pope over the past 100 years.

The content of their private conversation has not been revealed. This is normal, as Francis explained on the flight back from Cairo at the end of April. When a reporter asked what he had discussed in his private conversation with the Egyptian president, the pope replied, "Generally when I am with a head of state in private dialogue, that remains private, unless, by agreement, we say 'let's say on this point, we'll make it public.'"

The same is true today. Pope Francis will not reveal what has been said, unless he and the president have jointly agreed to make a specific point or points known.

After the papal audience, a Vatican official accompanied the president and his top advisors, Mr. McMaster, Secretary Tillerson and Mr. Kushner, for private talks with two of the pope's most trusted senior collaborators: the Italian-born secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who is Francis' right-hand man, and the secretary for relations with states, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the first Englishman ever to hold

that post. They talked together behind closed doors for 50 minutes, suggesting they went into the issues in considerable depth.

During that time, Vatican officials treated the first lady to a guided tour of the Pauline chapel and Sala Regia, and once the president had concluded his conversation at the Secretariat of State, they escorted him, Mrs. Trump and the U.S. delegation for a guided tour of the Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Basilica. This was an unusual honor, one rarely given to heads of state, but one that will surely have pleased the president.

Following that tour, the presidential motorcade left the Vatican for the Quirinale to meet the Italian president, Sergio Mattarella, and then drove to the Villa Taverna, the residence of the Italian ambassador, where he had lunch with Italy's prime minister, Paolo Gentiloni. The first lady drove to the Bambino Gesù, the largest pediatric hospital and research center in Europe, financially supported by the Vatican, which stands next to the North American College where future priests for the United States are trained.

Ivanka Trump drove to the Sant'Egidio international lay community's headquarters in Trastevere, where she met some women victims of human trafficking.

The meeting between pope and president, which concluded Mr. Trump's tour of the world's largest monotheistic religions, provided powerful imagery to Catholic voters back in the United States. The two collided head-on early last year, when Francis was sharply critical of Mr. Trump's campaign pledge to build an impenetrable wall on the Mexican border and his declaration that the United States should turn away Muslim immigrants and refugees.

Mr. Trump arrived in Rome Tuesday evening, his motorcade closing a busy Italian highway just after rush hour and

prompting hundreds of onlookers to briefly step out of their gridlocked cars to gawk at the fleet of armored vehicles. He spent the night at the U.S. ambassador to Italy's residence.

In recent days, Pope Francis and Mr. Trump have been in agreement on a need for Muslim leaders to do more against extremists in their own communities. But there are few other areas where their views align.

The president's prior anti-Muslim rhetoric—including his musing that Islam "hates" the West—is the antithesis of what the pope has been preaching about a need for dialogue with Muslims. Pope Francis also differs sharply with Mr. Trump on the need to combat climate change and economic inequality.

Mr. Trump's visit to the Eternal City comes after two stops in the Middle East where he visited the cradles of Islam and Judaism. In Saudi Arabia, he addressed dozens of Arab leaders and urged them to fight extremists at home and isolate Iran, which he depicted as menace to the region. And in Israel, Mr. Trump reaffirmed his commitment to strong ties with the nation's longtime ally and urged both the Israelis and the Palestinians to begin the process of reaching a peace deal. No details or timetable have yet to be established for negotiations.

But while Mr. Trump received extravagantly warm welcomes in Riyadh and Jerusalem, the reception could grow much cooler now that he's reached Europe, site of widespread protests after his election. Climate change activists projected the words "Planet Earth First" on the massive dome of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Tuesday night and protests are expected Wednesday in Rome and later in the week when Mr. Trump travels to Brussels for a NATO meeting and Sicily for a G7 gathering.