

Papal secretary visits pope's Christmas attacker

VATICAN CITY - Pope Benedict XVI's personal secretary visited the woman responsible for knocking the pope down during a Christmas Eve Mass.

Monsignor Georg Ganswein, papal secretary, visited Susanna Maiolo at the psychiatric hospital in Subiaco, outside of Rome, where she was transferred Dec. 25.

The papal secretary made the private visit to Maiolo "to show her the Holy Father's interest in her situation," the papal spokesman, Father Federico Lombardi, said in a written statement Jan. 3.

While the Vatican did not specify when the visit occurred, the Italian daily Il Giornale said Monsignor Ganswein met with Maiolo Dec. 31.

The newspaper said the monsignor brought her a rosary and told her that the pope had forgiven her and believed she hadn't meant any harm. It added Maiolo, a dual Italian-Swiss citizen, had previously received extensive psychiatric care in Switzerland.

The Vatican statement said the legal proceedings against Maiolo, which were being carried out by the Vatican's judicial system, would continue until it came to a conclusion.

A Vatican prosecutor was gathering information from doctors evaluating Maiolo's mental state and from Vatican security reports. The prosecutor was to make a recommendation to the Vatican tribunal, which will then make the final ruling.

She may be pardoned and acquitted of any crime, handed over to Italian or Swiss authorities, or handed down a sentence, Father Ciro Benedettini, vice director of the Vatican press office, told Catholic News Service Dec. 28.

Maiolo, 25, jumped a security barrier at the start of the Dec. 24 liturgy as Pope Benedict processed into St. Peter's Basilica. As Vatican guards tackled her to the ground, she was able to grab the pope's vestments, causing him to lose his balance and tumble to the floor.

The woman, who was not armed, was taken away by papal guards. She showed signs of mental instability and was taken to a psychiatric hospital about 45 miles outside of Rome for what the Vatican called "mandatory clinical treatment."

The pope appeared unharmed after the Dec. 24 incident, but French Cardinal Roger Etchegaray, 87, suffered a broken hip and underwent hip replacement surgery Dec. 27.