

President of Turkish bishops' conference stabbed to death

VATICAN CITY – The president of the Turkish bishops' conference, Bishop Luigi Padovese, was stabbed to death June 3 at his home in Iskenderun, said the Vatican nuncio in Turkey.

Archbishop Antonio Lucibello confirmed the death of the 63-year-old bishop, reported Vatican Radio.

ANSA, the Italian news agency, reported that Bishop Padovese was stabbed in his home.

Bishop Padovese, the apostolic vicar of Anatolia, was scheduled to be in Cyprus June 6 to participate in Pope Benedict XVI's Mass in Nicosia and receive from the pope the working document for the special Synod of Bishops on the Middle East. The bishop had been part of the synod's planning council.

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said, "What has happened is terrible" and reminds people of the murder of Father Andrea Santoro, who was murdered in Turkey in 2006 by a young man suffering from psychological disturbances.

"We pray that the Lord will reward (Bishop Padovese) for his great service to the church, that Christians would not be discouraged and that, following his strong witness, they will continue to profess their faith in the region," the spokesman said.

Born in Milan, the bishop joined the Capuchins and was ordained to the priesthood in 1973. He was named a bishop and apostolic vicar of Anatolia in 2004.

Capuchin Father Carlo Carloni, a member of the Capuchin generalate in Rome, said members of the order were awaiting more information. Phone calls to Bishop Padovese's office went unanswered.

Before being assigned to Turkey, he taught patristics at the Pontifical Antonianum

University in Rome and served as director of the university's Institute of Spirituality for 16 years.