

Retired pope travels to Germany to visit his brother

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – Retired Pope Benedict XVI, who is 93 years old, traveled to Germany to visit his ailing older brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, who is 96.

The Vatican press office confirmed that Pope Benedict went to Germany June 18 to visit his brother.

“The pope emeritus is now in the city of Regensburg, where he will spend the time necessary,” said Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office.

Pope Benedict was accompanied by his personal secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, one of the consecrated laywomen who cares for him and his household, a doctor, a nurse and the vice commander of the Vatican gendarme corps, Bruni said.

The two brothers, who were ordained to the priesthood together in 1951, have always been close. While his brother was pope and even after he stepped down from the papacy, Msgr. Ratzinger would come to the Vatican to spend Christmas and a summer holiday with his brother.

The two also had a sister, Maria, who died in 1991.

While Father Joseph Ratzinger pursued advanced theology studies, served as a professor and an archbishop before moving to the Vatican as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and then as pope, Msgr. Ratzinger became famous as director of the renowned Regensburg boys’ choir from 1964 to 1994, when he retired.

A statement posted June 18 on the website of the Diocese of Regensburg said, “It may be the last time that the two brothers, Georg and Joseph Ratzinger, see each other in this

world," so it asked people "to leave this deeply personal encounter private."

The diocese said there would be no "photos, public appearances or meetings" beyond the private encounters of the two brothers.

The retired pope, who apparently was flown to Germany by the Italian air force, landed in Munich late in the morning and was met by Bishop Rudolf Voderholzer of Regensburg, who accompanied him to the city.

Pope Benedict will be staying at the Regensburg seminary, the diocese said. "The date of his return journey has not yet been determined," it added.

Italian news reports said that before Pope Benedict left the Vatican, Pope Francis met with him at the Mater Ecclesia Monastery in the Vatican Gardens where the retired pope lives.

The Diocese of Regensburg said, "The pope emeritus made the decision to visit his brother in Regensburg shortly after consulting Pope Francis."

Updating its statement June 19, the diocese said Pope Benedict went directly to his brother's house to see him and celebrate Mass with him.

"Exhausted by the exertion of the journey, the pope emeritus retired to the seminary in the afternoon, only to return to his brother in the evening," the statement said.

Waking in the seminary June 19, it said, Pope Benedict was treated to a "real Bavarian breakfast," including fresh pretzels.

Later in the day, he was expected to celebrate Mass with his brother for the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and then enjoy some traditional apple strudel, the diocese said.