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Pope meets, forgives Christmas Eve attacker

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | Jan. 13, 2010

VATICAN CITY -- As a sign of his forgiveness, Pope Benedict XVI met with the woman responsible for knocking him down during a Christmas Eve Mass, a papal spokesman said.

The pope met with Susanna Maiolo after leading his weekly general audience Jan. 13 in the Vatican's Paul VI hall, Father Federico Lombardi said in a written statement.

In a private room of the audience hall, the pope held a brief meeting with Maiolo and members of her family in order to "demonstrate his forgiveness," to see how she was doing and to "wish her good health," the statement said.

Maiolo told the pope she was sorry for what had happened during the Christmas Eve Mass, the Vatican said.

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, she was able to grab the pope's vestments, causing him to lose his balance and tumble to the floor.

She was taken for mandatory psychiatric evaluation to a hospital in Subiaco outside of Rome and released Jan. 9. While hospitalized, she received a visit from the pope's secretary, Msgr. Georg Ganswein, who wished to show the pope's concern for her situation, according to a Vatican statement.

Lombardi said in his Jan. 13 statement that the legal proceeding against Maiolo, which was being carried out by the Vatican's judicial system, would continue until it came to a conclusion.

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