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Vatican pledges to restore trust, transparency in search for truth

Carol Glatz Catholic News Service | May. 29, 2012

Paolo Gabriele, private assistant to Pope Benedict XVI, is seen at left in the front seat of the popemobile as the pontiff arrives to lead his general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on May 2. (CNS/Paul Haring)

VATICAN CITY -- The Vatican said it is committed to restoring a sense of trust and transparency as it seeks the truth behind leaks of letters written by Vatican officials to each other and Pope Benedict XVI.

Paolo Gabriele -- the pope's private assistant accused of having a cache of illicitly obtained Vatican documents -- was still under arrest and would face his first round of formal preliminary questioning by Vatican judges "later this week or early next week," Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi, Vatican spokesman, said Tuesday.

The spokesman confirmed that an unspecified number of other individuals also had been questioned by Vatican police recently, a process that could be expected to continue, but no one else had been charged or arrested.

Gabriele has been able to meet and speak with his lawyers and his wife regularly, and is "very serene and calm," said his chief counsel, Carlo Fusco, in a written statement released Monday.

Lombardi said Monday the Vatican "is committed to seeking to restore as soon as possible a climate of transparency, truth and trust."

"The pope is informed about everything and can't help but be saddened, however, he remains serene" concerning the latest crisis, Lombardi told journalists.

Gabriele, the dark-haired assistant often pictured sitting in the front seat of the popemobile next to the driver, was arrested the evening of May 23 by Vatican police after private Vatican documents were found in his home, which is on Vatican territory.

Gabriele, who had been serving Pope Benedict since 2006, had performed his regular duties the morning of the day of his arrest, suggesting perhaps that Vatican police did not find enough evidence until later in the day, Lombardi said.

Gabriele's arrest was part of a Vatican investigation into a series of document leaks, popularly referred to as "VatiLeaks" in the media.

The leaks began in January with the publication of letters written by Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano when he was secretary-general of the Governor's Office of Vatican City State. The archbishop, who now is nuncio to the United States, warned of corruption, abuse of power, a lack of transparency in awarding Vatican contracts and opposition to financial reforms.

Later leaks included a letter from a Vatican official questioning the current reform of the Vatican's finance laws.

Lombardi told journalists Monday the leaks' scandal and the recent dismissal of the president of the Vatican Bank were "distinct and separate" cases. Bank president Ettore Gotti Tedeschi was fired Thursday by the bank's board of supervisors, who censured him for neglecting his duties amid worsening management problems.

"The only thing the vote of no-confidence of president Gotti Tedeschi and the arrest of Gabriele have in common is the fact that they happened around the same time," the Vatican spokesman said.

Meanwhile, Fusco, Gabriele's lawyer, said in a written statement Monday his client told a Vatican judge that he "will offer his utmost collaboration."

However, Gabriele's formal testimony will only come after his two lawyers have completed studying the case, the statement said.

"Therefore, (Gabriele) will respond as soon as possible to every question and will collaborate with investigators in order to ascertain the truth," wrote the lawyer, who added he and his client have been friends from childhood. Fusco said he holds his friend in "great esteem."

Lombardi said Tuesday that in the next few days, Piero Antonio Bonnet, a Vatican magistrate, would begin the second stage of the formal inquiry, questioning Gabriele in the presence of his two lawyers and Nicola Picardi, another Vatican magistrate, who conducted the preliminary investigation.

Lombardi said the investigation would continue until enough evidence has been collected and then Bonnet would either call Gabriele to stand trial or would acquit him, Lombardi said.

In April, Pope Benedict appointed a committee of three retired cardinals to investigate the document leaks; the cardinals turned to the Vatican gendarmes for assistance.

Dozens of private letters to Pope Benedict and other confidential Vatican correspondence and reports, including encrypted cables from Vatican embassies around the world, were leaked to an Italian journalist, Gianluigi Nuzzi. He published the documents in a book, *Your Holiness*, which was released May 17. While some of the leaked letters are gossipy, others include allegations of serious financial misconduct.

In a statement two days later, Lombardi called the publication of the letters for commercial gain a "criminal act" and said the Vatican would take legal action. The publication, he said, violated the right to privacy and the "freedom of correspondence" of Pope Benedict, the letter writers and the pope's closest collaborators.

In the book's introduction, Nuzzi said the main source for the texts told him he was acting with a "small group" of Vatican insiders concerned about corruption and a thirst for power within the Vatican. According to his source, Nuzzi said, none of the people giving him documents knew who the others were.

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