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Retired Pope Benedict XVI is seen in a file photo praying with his brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger in his private chapel at the Vatican. (CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Retired Pope Benedict XVI is seen in a file photo praying with his brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger in his private chapel at the Vatican. (CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters)

Retired Pope Benedict XVI left the Vatican June 18 for his first sojourn abroad since renouncing the papal ministry in 2013, in order to visit his ailing 96-year-old brother in Germany.

In a statement to NCR confirming the visit to Regensburg after several reports in German-language media outlets, Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Benedict was accompanied by his secretary, Archbishop Georg Ganswein, two medical professionals, and several security guards.

Bruni did not say when Benedict would be returning to the Vatican. He said the ex-pontiff would "spend the time necessary" for the visit.

Benedict, aged 93, is the former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. His brother, Msgr. Georg Ratzinger, is known to be in ill health.

The Vatican did not say how Benedict had traveled to Germany, but flight tracking sites indicated an Italian Air Force plane had left Rome's Ciampino Airport that morning bound for Munich, about 80 miles south of Regensburg.

Italian reports indicated that Pope Francis visited with Benedict shortly before the ex-pontiff left for Germany.

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In a statement, the diocese of Regensburg asked that people respect the private nature of Benedict's visit.

"It is a bedside visit," said the diocese. "It may be the last time that the two brothers, Georg and Joseph Ratzinger, see each other in this world."

The diocese said Benedict would be staying at the diocesan seminary during his visit, and that "the date of his return journey has not yet been determined."

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