News
Vatican



In this Oct. 24, 2020, file photo, Vatican Swiss Guards wear masks to curb the spread of COVID-19 as they stand attention at the Vatican. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, File)

by The Associated Press

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Vatican City — October 4, 2021

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Three Vatican Swiss Guards who have refused to be vaccinated against COVID-19 upon Holy See orders have voluntarily left the storied corps to return to Switzerland, a Swiss Guard official said Oct. 3.

Lt. Urs Breitenmoser told The Associated Press that all Swiss Guards had been asked to be vaccinated "to protect their health and that of the others they come into contact with as part of their service."

"Three members of the Guard have chosen not to adhere to that request, voluntarily leaving the corps," Breitenmoser said in a statement.

Three other guardsmen are temporarily suspended from duty while they await vaccination, he said.

The prime duty of the all-male corps, with its colorful uniforms and plumed helmets, is to protect the pontiff. The members stand guard during papal ceremonies as well as at the various entrances of the tiny, independent walled city state near Rome's Tiber River. During the pandemic, the guardsmen on duty don protective surgical masks.

Pope Francis, who has been vaccinated against COVID-19, has repeatedly stressed the altruistic and health value of receiving the shots during the pandemic.

Breitenmoser noted that last month the head of the Pontifical Commission of Vatican City State had issued an ordinance that people entering Vatican areas need either to be vaccinated or have a recent negative test. That includes tourists wanting to see the Vatican's treasures, including Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel.

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