Vatican



Massimiliano Strappetti, left, watches Pope Francis walking in the Paul VI hall on the occasion of the weekly general audience at the Vatican, Wednesday, Aug. 3, 2022. Francis has promoted the Vatican nurse whom he credited with saving his life to be his "personal health care assistant." The Vatican announced the appointment of Massimiliano Strappetti, currently the nursing coordinator of the Vatican's health department, in a one-line statement Thursday.(AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

by Associated Press

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Pope Francis has promoted a Vatican nurse whom he credited with saving his life to be his “personal health care assistant.”

The Vatican announced the appointment of Massimiliano Strappetti in a one-line statement issued August 4. Strappetti, the nursing coordinator of the Vatican’s health department, accompanied Francis on a difficult trip to Canada last month.

Francis, 85, last year credited Strappetti with having accurately ascertained an intestinal problem that led to the pope's 10-day hospital stay in July 2021 to remove 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon that had narrowed.

“A nurse, a man with a lot of experience, saved my life,” Francis told the COPE radio of the Spanish bishops' conference in the months after his surgery.

Francis noted that Strappetti's intervention was the second time a nurse had saved his life. A nurse in his native Argentina decided in 1957 to double the amount of drugs the future pope, then known as Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was prescribed after part of his lung was removed due to a respiratory infection, he recalled.

Francis has a personal physician, Dr. Roberto Bernabei, who was appointed last year. Bernabei is an internist and geriatric specialist at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome.

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The pontiff has had a series of health problems in the past year, most significantly strained ligaments in his right knee that sharply reduced his mobility. After months of magnetic and laser treatments, Francis can walk short distances with a cane or walker, though he also uses a wheelchair.

Strappetti was on hand to help with the wheelchair during Francis' general audience August 3. He coordinates the nurses of the Vatican's small health care system, which provides basic care for Vatican employees and their families.

Strappetti’s appointment was announced days after he and a doctor accompanied Francis on his weeklong “penitential pilgrimage” to Canada to atone for the Catholic Church’s role in the country’s residential schools for Indigenous children. Francis always travels with a doctor and nurse who are on call in case he has health

problems. Strappetti, for example, was on hand when Francis issued his main apology and received a feathered headdress from Indigenous leaders.

On the flight home from the trip, Francis said he would have to slow down his future travels and maybe resign one day.

“This trip was a bit of a test. It’s true you can’t do trips in this state, maybe we have to change a bit the style, reduce, pay the debts of the trips that I still have to do and reorganize,” he said. But he added that “the door is open” to also resign if he can’t carry on.