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Pope Francis greets retired Pope Benedict XVI at the Mater Ecclesiae monastery after a consis

Pope Francis greets retired Pope Benedict XVI at the Mater Ecclesiae monastery after a consistory for the creation of 20 new cardinals in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2022. Looking on is Archbishop Georg Gänswein, the retired pope's private secretary. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Rome — December 28, 2022
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Editor's note: *This story has been updated to include a statement from the Vatican press office*

Pope Francis asked for prayers for retired Pope Benedict XVI on Dec. 28, saying he is "very sick."

The pope's request came during his weekly general audience, where he added that the 95-year-old supports the church "in silence."

Francis went on to "ask the Lord to console him and support him in this testimony of love for the church until the end."

Benedict XVI was elected pope on April 19, 2005 until he resigned on February 28, 2013, becoming the first pope to voluntarily abdicate the papacy in nearly 600 years. Since then, he has lived in the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery inside the Vatican, where he has been largely withdrawn from public life.

Following the pope's request for prayers, a Vatican statement said the retired pope's conditions had been aggravated in "the last few hours" due to his advanced age.

"The situation at the moment remains under control, constantly followed by doctors," it said.

The statement also noted that following the Wednesday audience, Francis visited Benedict XVI at the retired pope's residence.