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Pope Francis meets Archbishop Georg Gänswein, personal secretary to the late Pope Benedic

Pope Francis meets Archbishop Georg Gänswein, personal secretary to the late Pope Benedict XVI, in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican in this May 19, 2023, file photo. Pope Francis has directed Archbishop Gänswein to return to his home diocese of Freiburg in southwest Germany without an assignment by July 1. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Rome — June 24, 2024
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One year after relieving Archbishop Georg Gänswein, the longtime personal secretary to Pope Benedict XVI, of his Vatican duties and sending him home to Germany without an assignment, Pope Francis has named the controversial prelate as the Vatican's ambassador to Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia.

The appointment was announced on June 24 in the Vatican's daily bulletin after months of speculation that Francis might reverse course and give the former prefect of the papal household a new job.

While it is customary for personal secretaries of the popes to leave the Vatican following the death of the individual they served, it is unusual for them to exit

without a new role. But Gänswein occupied a unique position for nearly 10 years, serving both a retired pope and the current pope, which he himself described in 2013 as a "challenge."

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For years, Gänswein and Francis had an uneasy relationship that was strained even further when Gänswein published a tell-all book in 2023 describing alleged disagreement between Francis and Benedict and where he said that he and Francis never established "a climate of trust."

In June 2023, Gänswein returned to his former home of Freiburg, Germany, where he did not have a permanent job. Earlier this year, on Jan. 3, Francis received Gänswein in a private audience and soon thereafter reports began to circulate that he might soon receive an appointment within the Vatican's diplomatic corps.

Gänswein, now 67, first moved to Rome in 1993, where he would go on to serve the late pope for a quarter of a century. He worked as an official under then-Cardinal Joseph Ratizinger at the Vatican's doctrinal office, and when Ratzinger was elected pope in 2005, Gänswein was named as his personal secretary.

Although he did not study at the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the training school for Vatican diplomats, as former head of the papal household, he has years of experience interacting with heads of state and global leaders.

The prelate is fluent in Italian, Spanish, German, English, French and Latin. He will succeed Archbishop Petar Rajič, who in March of this year was appointed to serve as the Holy See's ambassador for Italy and San Marino.