

Vatican closes monastery that attracted aristocrats, dancing nun

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) The Vatican has closed the monastery of a fourth-century Roman basilica on account of "liturgical and financial irregularities" that included performances by a nun who had once been a lap dancer.

The Vatican cited "behavior not consonant with the monastic life" at the monastery attached to the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, which houses some of the Catholic Church's most venerated relics.

The monastery had become well-known in recent years for its links to Rome's high society, and for sponsoring a televised Bible-reading marathon by celebrities, including Pope Benedict XVI in 2008.

That same year, pop singer Madonna visited the church and reportedly admired its collection of relics, which include pieces of the "True Cross," and a bone supposedly from the finger that St. Thomas put inside Jesus' wounds following the Resurrection.

Two years ago, the Vatican removed the monastery's abbot, the Rev. Simone Fioraso, who is said to have been a fashion designer in Milan before entering religious life. Fioraso became known for cultivating the monastery's benefactors among Italian aristocracy.

The monastery also hosted shows by Sister Anna Nobili, a former lap dancer whose unconventional performances involving a crucifix can still be seen on YouTube.

The Rev. Ciro Benedettini, deputy director of the Holy See Press Office, said the Vatican had ordered approximately 20 Cistercian monks still living at the church to move to other monasteries in Italy, ending

a 450-year presence by their order at Santa Croce. Monks have been living at the monastery since the 10th century.