



church near the Vatican and dumped them in the River Tiber. The wooden statues, which depict a pregnant woman and represent an indigenous Virgin Mary, were presented to Francis at the start of the synod but critics consider them to be pagan. Paolo Ruffini, the Vatican's communications chief, said the theft was "a stupid stunt". The four statues were stolen from the Santa Maria in Traspontina church on Monday. The stunt was filmed by the perpetrators. "In the name of tradition and doctrine, an effigy of maternity and the sacredness of life was dumped in contempt," said Ruffini. He added that the "violent and intolerant gesture" had "passed from hate on social media to action".