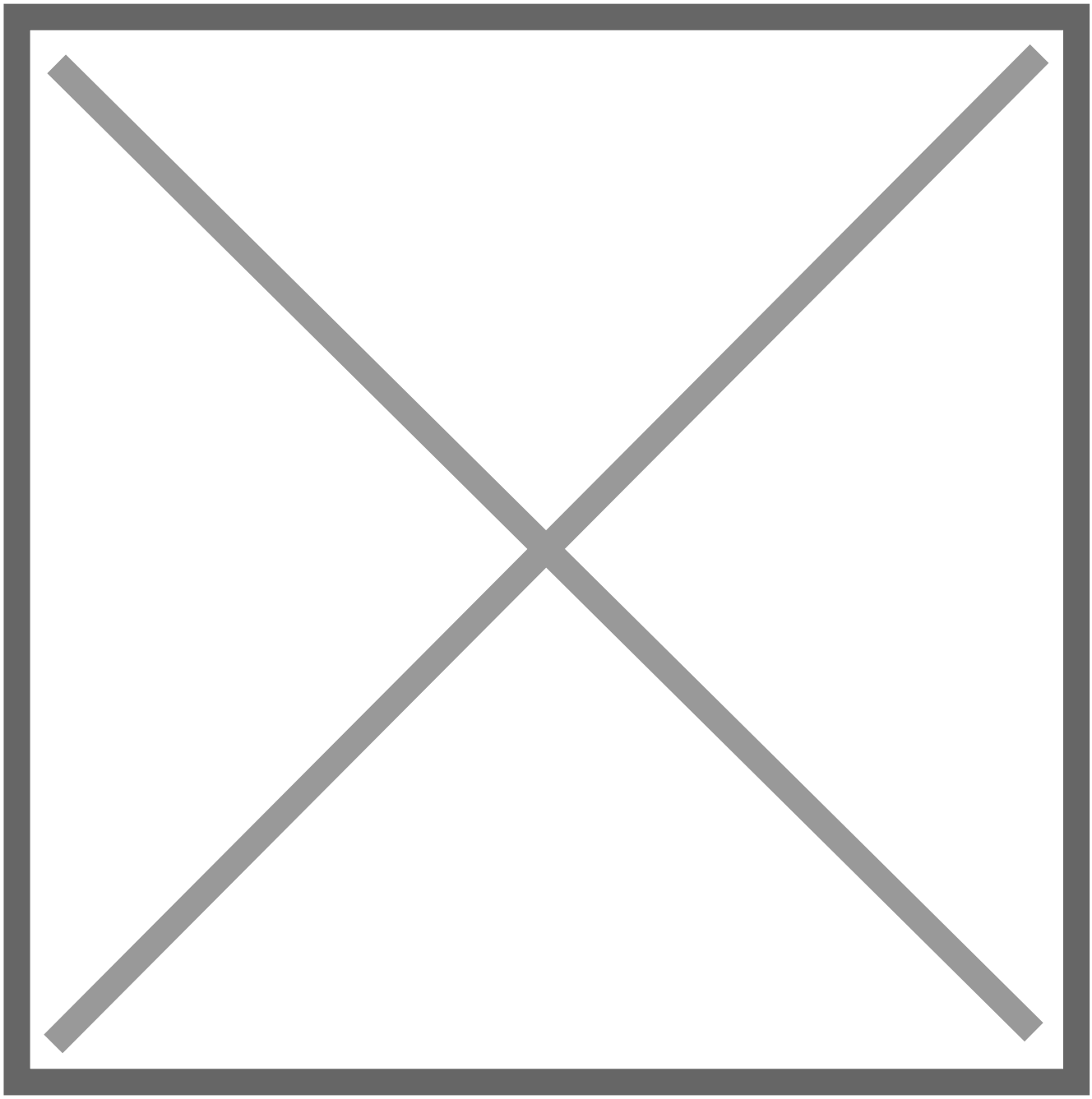
Vatican
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Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, with red sash, views the damage at Sacred Heart School near Beirut's port area Sept. 4, 2020, one month after the city suffered double blasts. (CNS/Courtesy Maronite Archdiocese of Beirut)



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Vatican City — January 14, 2025
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The Vatican's top diplomat met with papal representatives to various Middle Eastern countries to discuss possible avenues toward peace in the region and the state of the Catholic Church there.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, met in Amman, Jordan, with the Vatican ambassadors to: Bahrain, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Syria and Yemen. The meeting took place as part of the cardinal's visit to Jordan to consecrate a new church built on the site traditionally believed to be where Jesus was baptized along the Jordan River.

During their Jan. 13 meeting, the diplomats discussed the "ongoing crisis in the region, the political and ecclesial condition of each country, the signs of hope that can be glimpsed in some, the serious humanitarian situations faced by the people most affected by the conflicts, and the need for solidarity from the international community," the Vatican said in a statement.

Together, they expressed hope "that the hostilities can soon end on all fronts and the Middle East can be a land of peace, where Christians remain an essential component for fraternal coexistence among the various religions and for the progress of the respective countries," the statement said.

On the same day, Parolin also had a phone call with Joseph Aoun, president of Lebanon and a Maronite Catholic, to congratulate him on winning election and taking office Jan. 9. The cardinal "expressed best wishes to him, assuring him of his prayers," the Vatican said. "He also expressed pleasure with the timely appointment of Mr. Nawaf Salam as prime minister."

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Lebanon had been without a president for more than two years since Michel Aoun's presidential term ended Oct. 30, 2022, after which the Lebanese parliament made 12 unsuccessful attempts to elect a new president. Despite sharing the same surname, Michel and Joseph Aoun are not related.

Joseph Aoun was commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces before being elected president. According to Lebanon's 1943 National Pact between the country's religious groups, the country's president and the commander of the armed forces must be Maronite Catholic, the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, and the speaker of the parliament must be a Shia Muslim.

Pope Francis has often praised Lebanon as a model of religious dialogue, and he called on the nation to be "a land of tolerance and pluralism, an oasis of fraternity where different religions and confessions meet," during a 2021 meeting with Lebanon's Christian leaders at the Vatican.

According to 2023 data on Lebanon's population, about 32.2% is Shia Muslim, 31.2% is Sunni Muslim and 30.5% is Christian.