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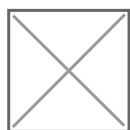


Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, speaks with the media after concelebrating Mass at Holy Family Church in Gaza City Dec. 21, 2025, during his Christmas pastoral visit. He arrived prior to Christmas in a sign of closeness with a community that endured two years of war. (OSV News/Courtesy of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem)



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People have a deep desire to return to their lives despite the dire and complex situation in Gaza following two years of war, Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Latin patriarch of Jerusalem, said at an annual Christmas press conference on Dec. 22.

Straying from tradition, the patriarch did not read from a prepared statement but said he would rather "have a dialogue" with the journalists. Cardinal Pizzaballa had just returned from a weekend Christmas visit to the Holy Family Parish compound in Gaza together with the general vicar of the Archdiocese of Jerusalem, Auxiliary Bishop William Shomali, where they celebrated Mass with the parishioners Dec. 21.

The patriarch and his small delegation also toured the neighboring area including tents of displaced families along the seafont, the Al-Ahli (Baptist) Hospital, a medical clinic affiliated with the Union of Churches, the Caritas Gaza Office, a Catholic Relief Services aid distribution point and Al-Azhar University. They also visited St. Porphyrios Greek Orthodox Church, meeting with the parish priest as a

sign of Christian unity.

"There is stress about returning to life after two years of war. The conflict is still there. All the problems are still there, of course," he said. After having lived in survival mode for two years, members of the tiny Christian community — now numbering only some 500 people — are beginning to ask questions about the future, he said.

"What we felt is the desire to return to life. So they want to talk about the future, our community. They wanted to celebrate Christmas joyfully. And of course, at the same time also all the questions they put aside in these two years now are coming out. What about us? What about the future? What about children? Now all the questions, also maybe the tiredness, of these two years are coming out," he said. "And the questions about the future are there and very concrete."

While some members of the remaining Christian community are beginning to think of emigrating, they are still waiting to see how the situation unfolds, he said, noting that life is not always necessarily easier for immigrants in other countries. Nevertheless, he said, he did fear the number of Christians who remain in Gaza would be much fewer than there have been.

As always, he said, he learned from the community how they are able to be "joyful despite everything," especially the children.

Following a tenuous ceasefire brokered by U.S. President Donald Trump, which has laid out a complicated roadmap of sorts for disarming Hamas and rebuilding the Gaza Strip, it is time to "look forward and not remain focused on the negative consequences of the war," said Pizzaballa.

Both sides accuse each other of breaking the fragile ceasefire, with Israel still waiting for the return of the body of Ran Gvili, the last Israeli hostage remaining in Gaza. For its part Hamas, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants, says almost 400 Palestinians have been killed by Israel since the truce began.

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In response to a journalist's question, the patriarch said he hopes the "Trump plan will continue."

"We know that it's not ... that simple as people think, but it's the only roadmap we have, so we have to continue with this," he said. The patriarch acknowledged that there would be a lot of "difficulties" and "misunderstandings" regarding the disarmament of Hamas, one of Israel's conditions for the ceasefire.

"I think the Arab countries and those who are in relations with Hamas should work a lot in order to convince them about this. We are convinced that Gaza needs to turn the page and to have a completely different future."

Noting that the church does not enter directly into political questions, he emphasized its opposition to the use of violence.

"We saw the result it brought and we are against all of this concerning the future," he said.

Pizzaballa and Shomali described a landscape of destruction with buildings left in rubble, mountains of garbage, people living in tents and many children in the streets because of a lack of open educational frameworks. Hospitals face a critical shortage of medical supplies — especially antibiotics — and properly sterilized instruments in hospitals leading to preventable deaths, they said.

At the same time some shops and restaurants are reopening — though sometimes with nothing to offer — and universities are attempting to resume classes under precarious conditions, Pizzaballa said.

While there is no longer famine in Gaza, and food is available — many people are not working and have no cash. United Nations organizations, CRS and the Latin Patriarchate among others have been providing assistance for the needy, said Pizzaballa. Providing needed medicines, equipment and antibiotics will also be a priority, he said.

"Things are changing every day so it's very difficult to foresee what is necessary to do, because once you decide one thing, in a week, things can change again," he said. "We have to be very ready to see what is necessary and to be proactive. Our role as the church also is to facilitate, to create this network with other organizations in order to be there and to support as much as possible."

He said from a human perspective it would be difficult to speak about hope at the moment, but Christmas is the celebration of the meaning of hope.

"Jesus ... didn't wait for the history to be perfect and the human situation to be favorable. He entered history as it was. This is also a lesson for us," said Pizzaballa. "But in this reality we cannot limit ourselves just to denounce, accuse and blame, but also (we must) be committed to rebuilding, becoming those who want to ... rebuild from the human devastation."