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Pope transfers nuncio from Australia to Israel

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI named Archbishop Giuseppe Lazzarotto, the former nuncio to Australia, to be the new nuncio to Israel and apostolic delegate in Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories.

The appointment of the 70-year-old career Vatican diplomat was announced Saturday.

Lazzarotto, who had served at the Vatican diplomatic mission in Israel from 1982 to 1984, told Vatican Radio he was looking forward to returning, though he recognizes being nuncio is "an important challenge."

"It is a challenge I accept with joy because I think it's important to continue the work that my predecessors did with great commitment and generosity," he told the radio.

Lazzarotto succeeds Archbishop Antonio Franco, 75, who retired after six years in the post.

The new nuncio said his hope is that the commitment to dialogue and peace, a commitment shared by the vast majority of people living in the Holy Land, will continue to grow and that people would work each day, "step by step, so that the path toward peace finally would be open to all."

Lazzarotto had served in Australia since 2007. Before that, he was nuncio to Ireland for seven years.

The archbishop's service in Jerusalem was not his only experience of diplomatic work in the Middle East. He was ordained an archbishop in 1994 when he was named the Vatican's first nuncio to Jordan and, simultaneously, nuncio to Iraq. He held the posts for six years.

He was ordained to the priesthood in 1967 and entered the Vatican's diplomatic service in 1971. Besides postings in Jerusalem, he worked at Vatican embassies in Zambia, Belgium and Cuba.

Israel also has a new ambassador to the Holy See. Zion Evrony, 63, was born in Iran, and his family immigrated to Israel when he was a year old. He arrived in Rome on Aug. 1 and is waiting to present his letters of credential to Pope Benedict.

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