

Pierbattista Pizzaballa appointed to Jerusalem Catholic post

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [October 25, 2016](#) issue

Pierbattista Pizzaballa, an Italian Franciscan known for being friendly toward Jewish people and Israel, now heads the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The pope made him an archbishop and appointed him to the role of apostolic administrator for an area including Israel, Palestine, and Jordan—one of a handful of patriarchates in the Catholic Church. He took his post in late September. His predecessor, Fouad Twal, had reached the retirement age of 75.

Pizzaballa holds the role until the pope chooses a new patriarch, though there is no specified length of time. William Shomali, auxiliary bishop of the Latin Patriarchate, told Vatican Radio that Pizzaballa has been received positively and knows the area well.

From 2004 to 2016, Pizzaballa was the custodian of the Holy Land, which includes care for holy places, pilgrims, and about 400 friars and sisters. He used his role to speak about the plight of Middle Eastern Christians, including Palestinian Christians emigrating because of the political situation.

John L. Allen Jr., writing for *Crux*, an independent Catholic media outlet, called the choice of Pizzaballa “head-turning.” He cited the fact that Arab Christians from the patriarchate—which has a majority Arab membership—have occupied the role for the past three decades.

Also, “a segment of the clergy in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem has long looked on him with suspicion because of his closeness to Israel and Jewish culture,” Allen wrote. Yet he is not an “apologist for Israel,” having been outspoken about lack of police response to Israeli extremist attacks on churches as well as being against the wall Israel constructed between the West Bank and Jerusalem. Neither has he been afraid to criticize Palestinian leaders, according to news reports.