

Pope selects new diplomat to U.S. Archbishop Pietro Sambini to succeed Montalvo: Archbishop Pietro Sambini to succeed Montalvo

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The Vatican's chief ambassador to Israel has been appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as the church's top ambassador to Washington and the U.S. church.

Archbishop Pietro Sambini, a 67-year-old Italian and a veteran diplomat, will succeed Gabriel Montalvo as the papal nuncio, or ambassador of the Holy See. Montalvo has held the post since 1998 and retired when he reached age 75.

The Vatican's representative to Israel since 1998, Sambini, who recently has had to defuse tensions between the two, negotiated the church's call for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and worked with Israeli officials to overcome Vatican objections to tax policies on church-owned sites in Israel.

As nuncio, Sambini will have a key role in the appointment of U.S. bishops as he vets candidates to fill open seats in the church hierarchy.

Sambini is Benedict's third high-profile appointment for the U.S. church. Last month, Benedict named Bishop George Niederauer of Salt Lake City to be archbishop of San Francisco, filling the seat left vacant when Archbishop William Levada was named to take the pope's old job as chief guardian of Catholic doctrine. *-Religion News Service*