

Pope Pledges Good Relations With Jews

Pope Francis reached out on Thursday to Rome's Jewish community, saying he hoped he would be able to contribute to furthering good relations between Catholics and Jews.

The new pope sent a message to Rome's chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, inviting him to his inaugural Mass at the Vatican on March 19.

"I sincerely hope to be able to contribute to the progress that relations between Jews and Catholics have enjoyed since the Second Vatican Council," he said, according to a statement on Vatican Radio.

Francis said he hoped to be able to contribute to "a spirit of renewed collaboration".

Relations between Catholics and Jews improved greatly after the 1962-1965 Second Vatican Council, which issued a landmark statement repudiating the concept of collective Jewish guilt for Jesus's death and urged dialogue with all religions.

Both of Francis's immediate predecessors, Benedict XVI and John Paul II, visited Rome's main synagogue.

The Rome Jewish community is the oldest in the diaspora and plays a guiding role in Catholic-Jewish relations worldwide.

World Jewish organizations welcomed the election of Francis, who maintained good relations with the Argentine Jewish community when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires.

"There is much in his record that reassures us about the future," said Abe Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League in the United States.

In 2010, the future pope published a book on inter-faith dialogue together with Argentine Rabbi Abraham Skorka.

In Israel, the Chief Rabbinate of the Jewish state said Francis's past "good relations with the Jewish people are well known" and was confident his pontificate would develop them further.