

VATICAN "JOYFUL" AT SERBIAN PATRIARCH INVITE

New Orthodox Leader Proposes a 2013 Meeting With Pope

VATICAN CITY, JAN. 28, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- A Vatican spokesman says a proposal from the new patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church to plan a meeting with Benedict XVI is "very encouraging."

Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, director of the Vatican press office, affirmed this today in response to comments from Patriarch Irinej Gavrilovic.

The 80-year-old patriarch, elected last Friday, gave his first press conference today. He suggested the possibility of organizing an ecumenical event with the Pope in Nis, where Constantine was born. The event would commemorate the 1,700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan, which ended anti-Christian persecution in the Roman Empire.

Father Lombardi told the Belgrade paper Blic that this is a suggestion "we welcome with great joy."

Referring to the predecessor of Patriarch Irinej, Father Lombardi added: "This is a sign that the dialogue that began at the time of Patriarch Pavle will be continued with the new patriarch.

"It would be nice if he would make a step further in order that we meet and see the possibilities for cooperation."

Father Lombardi noted that it is too early to talk about an itinerary for what could be a 2013 papal visit to Serbia, but he assured that the Holy See is following the situation with great interest.

The patriarch said at the press conference that a papal visit "could perhaps be the occasion for our two Churches to establish a first contact, and with a bit of luck, to continue this contact and set out on a new path."

He added: "This new path should be Christian and sincere with the desire of establishing one Church of Christ."

The press conference itself was historical because the Serbian patriarchs had not previously used this method of communication.

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