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Orthodox Patriarch to Rome for Pope's Installation

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ANKARA — Bartholomew I, the spiritual leader of the world's Orthodox Christians, is heading to the Vatican to attend Pope Francis' installation Mass, the first time an ecumenical patriarch is attending a papal investiture since the churches split nearly 1,000 years ago, a church official said Monday.

The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches were united until the Great Schism of 1054, which was precipitated largely by disagreements over the primacy of the pope.

Francis' predecessor, the now-retired Pope Benedict XVI, had made uniting all Christians and healing the split a priority of his pontificate.

The powerful Russian Orthodox Church, the largest of the more than dozen Orthodox churches, welcomed the election of Francis as a step toward better relations.

(AP)

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