

Five things to know about Pope Leo XIV

by [Claire Giangravé](#) and [Roxanne Stone](#)

May 9, 2025



Newly elected Pope Leo XIV appears on the central loggia of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican shortly after his election as pontiff on May 8. (AP Photo/Domenico Stinellis)

For the second conclave in a row, the College of Cardinals shocked the watching world with its choice for the next pope. Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost was a long-shot favorite, precisely because he was from the US—conventional wisdom being that a pope should not be drawn from a global superpower. But on Thursday, the smiling man who emerged from behind the red curtains in St. Peter's loggia was a Chicago-born, Peruvian missionary—and the youngest man to don the white zucchetto in nearly 50 years.

But who is Robert Francis Prevost, now Pope Leo XIV, and what might we expect from his papacy?

1. Prevost has a global background

Robert Francis Prevost, 69, was born and raised in Chicago's south suburbs, attending the (now closed) Church of St. Mary of the Assumption. His father, Louis Marius Prevost, of French and Italian descent, was a World War II veteran and school administrator. His mother, Mildred Martínez, of Spanish descent, was a librarian. He has two brothers, Louis Martín and John Joseph. After studying math and philosophy at Villanova, he returned to Chicago to attend the Catholic Theological Union in Hyde Park, on Chicago's South Side, from 1978 to 1982, according to [CBS Chicago](#).

He left the US to serve as a missionary in Chulucanas, Peru, shortly after his ordination until 1986. In 1988, he led the Augustinian seminary in Trujillo, Peru, where he held several important posts and taught canon law. He became a Peruvian citizen in 2015, after Francis appointed him to lead the Diocese of Chiclayo. He is a fluent Spanish speaker and issued a greeting to his diocese in Spanish after becoming pope.

In addition to Spanish and English, Prevost [also speaks](#) Italian, French, and Portuguese and can read Latin and German.

2. Prevost is a member of the Order of St. Augustine, having served twice as its head.

Leo is a member of the Order of St. Augustine, the only Augustinian in this conclave. The order, founded in 1244 under Pope Innocent IV, follows a rule of life that emphasizes communal living, prayer, fasting, and modest living. Augustinians are also known for evangelizing.

Prevost joined the order in 1977 and became the leader of the Augustinian of Our Mother of Good Council in Chicago, overseeing the order in the Midwest. In 2001, he was chosen to become the head of the global Augustinian order, a position he held for two consecutive terms until 2013, traveling to the 47 countries where the Augustinians are present. Throughout his leadership in the order, he placed a special emphasis on missionary work, especially in Latin America. He later continued to have an important role in the order, proving his leadership and management abilities.

3. As head of the Dicastery for Bishops, Prevost may have played a role in sidelining a prominent right-wing US bishop.

Francis tapped then-Cardinal Prevost to take over the Vatican's oversight of the appointment of bishops in January 2023. In this influential position, he assisted in selecting the bishops to be placed around the world. He also aided Francis in dealing with rogue or misbehaving bishops, including Joseph Strickland, who was removed from his Diocese of Tyler, Texas, after Strickland's sharp criticism of Francis's pontificate. Prevost brought on three women in 2022 to aid him in the selection of bishops, a first in the department's history.

4. On hot-button issues, including LGBTQ inclusion and women's ordination, Prevost has kept a low profile.

Prevost was relatively mum on the very issues about which many Vatican watchers are keen to know his stance. He gave a few nods in his greeting Thursday that signaled his papacy may be a continuation of his predecessor's. He named synodality, dialogue, and bridge-building as priorities, in addition to peace, but broke with Francis by reviving the tradition of wearing a mix of red and white, in addition to a burgundy stole. Francis, who emerged in only white, was known for his turn toward a more modest papacy.

Speculation abounds as to how the first US pope will interact with President Donald Trump and his administration, including the Catholic Vice President JD Vance. There are X posts attributed to Prevost circling the internet, in which the then-cardinal was critical of both.

5. With the name Leo XIV, Prevost inherits a legacy of reform and social justice.

Leo has been a relatively popular name for popes—the fourth most popular, in fact. Prevost's most recent predecessor, Pope Leo XIII, who reigned from 1878 to 1903, is sometimes referred to as the first modern pope, overseeing a church that was responding to a time of rapid industrialization and globalization. Leo XIII published the encyclical *On New Things* in 1891, which promoted the rights of workers and the need to fight injustice and help the poor. —Religion News Service