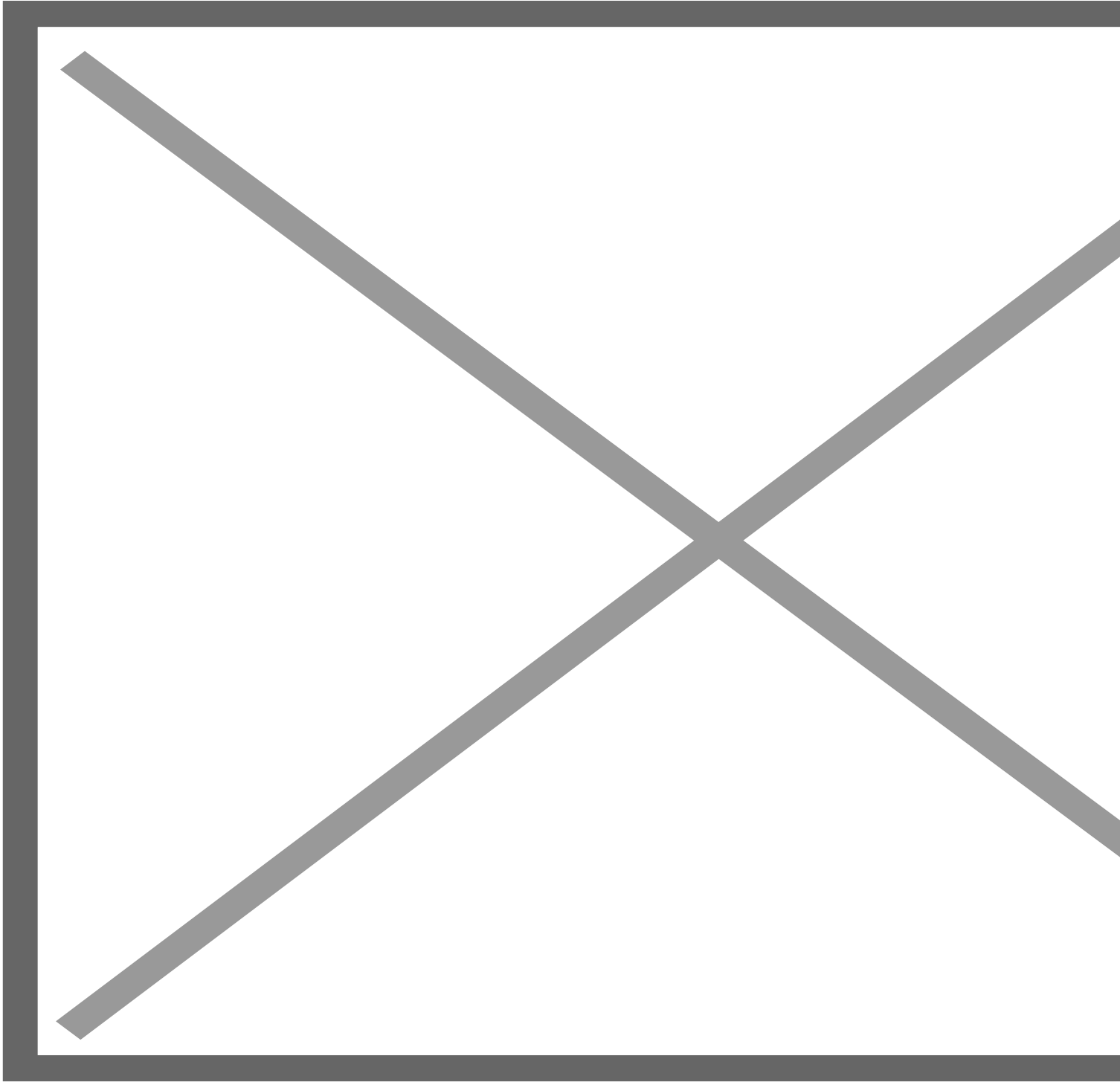


In historic appointment, Pope Leo names US journalist to Vatican communications office

by [Aleja Hertzler-McCain](#)

June 4, 2026



EWTN News president and COO Montse Alvarado with Pope Leo XIV on September 6, 2025, at the Vatican.
(Vatican Media)

Pope Leo XIV has named Maria Montserrat “Montse” Alvarado, the current president and COO of US-based Catholic media giant EWTN News, to lead the Vatican’s communication office, the Vatican announced Tuesday. Just under 40, Alvarado will be the youngest person to lead a Vatican dicastery in recent memory and the first woman who is not a religious sister to be a Vatican prefect, a task historically reserved for cardinals.

Alvarado began hosting *EWTN News in Depth* in early 2021, several months before Pope Francis criticized “a large Catholic television channel,” widely believed to be EWTN, for “continually speaking ill of the pope” and attacking the church. She became president and chief operating officer in 2023.

However, church observers say she has never been part of the anti-Francis wing of the church, and her allies praise her leadership expertise and dedication.

“ She loved Pope Francis, and since the beginning she has been supporting of Pope Leo XIV,” José Manuel de Urquidi, a leader in digital evangelization who sat at then-Cardinal Robert Prevost’s table at the Synod on Synodality, said in an interview. “ The Holy Father will have someone who’s extremely smart and full of God helping him spread Christ’s message into this world in the best way possible,” he said.

De Urquidi said Alvarado doesn’t fall into “a false dichotomy” about what it means to be Catholic, neither focusing solely on doctrine and liturgy nor on social issues. “ She really knows Matthew 25:35 is how we’ll be judged at the end of our lives, but she’s also at the same time just a missionary full of love for Christ and his church and truth,” he said.

Massimo Faggioli, a papal biographer, said that despite some people reading the appointment as “political,” or even as a “ move in order to appease Donald Trump,” he reads it differently, especially because Alvarado has not been one of the EWTN voices critical of the last two popes.

“ I think it’s more about personal skills, and being a laywomanEnglish-speaking—that’s the most important thing,” he said.

Faggioli, currently working on a book titled *Leo XIV and the Global Church: Unity and Peace*, did acknowledge, “Pope Leo has made many decisions with the goal of bringing more unity in the church, and I think it’s an appointment that could be functional to bringing in the fold Catholics that are of a more conservative persuasion.”

“ I was recently told by a dear friend to thank God for the doors that open that we never knock on,” said Alvarado in a statement. “While this appointment was unexpected, I receive it with a sincere desire to serve the Holy Father as he begins his pontificate.”

Alvarado was born in Mexico City and grew up in Miami. “ She’s been extremely close to Latinos living in the US in her work,” said de Urquidi.

She spent over a decade working for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a nonprofit firm that has an undefeated record representing clients at the Supreme Court. During her tenure, which included jobs in communications, operations, development and strategy, before becoming executive director in 2017, Becket won cases defending religious schools’ right to dismiss a teacher, a woman’s right to provide anti-abortion counseling outside clinics, faith groups resisting contraception mandates, a Muslim in prison denied the right to grow a beard and a Catholic foster care agency that did not agree to certify same-sex couples.

She told the Archdiocese of San Antonio's television channel last year that despite studying arts in high school, "I was always interested in kind of changing the world." She said her father had worked in politics, then in media and that she watched him make that transition, "so I was always interested in that."

Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley, president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, expressed gratitude for the appointment in a press release that noted that Alvarado had "interactions" with the USCCB and its bishops while at EWTN and Becket.

"We are grateful for her work as a Catholic journalist, faithfully covering the work of the bishops, and also for her advocacy and dedication to upholding religious freedom and human dignity at the Becket Fund. On behalf of the Conference, I assure her of our prayers as she continues to serve the universal Church with her unique talents," Coakley said.

The Vatican Dicastery for Communication oversees Vatican print communications, including the Vatican newspaper, as well as radio, photos, audio, video, the press office for outside correspondents, and the Vatican publishing house.

Kim Daniels, director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University, said Alvarado, a friend, is "an experienced leader and manager, and she's a real professional, and she'll bring a great deal to the communications reform efforts at the Vatican."

Alvarado will replace Paolo Ruffini in November, which will be after Ruffini's 70th birthday. Ruffini, who was appointed in 2018, was the first lay person to lead a Vatican dicastery.

James Martin, editor at large at Jesuit magazine *America* and a consultant to the dicastery, praised Ruffini's tenure. "He's just a very kind, thoughtful, prayerful, hardworking man," Martin said.

Ruffini faced some criticism toward the end of his tenure because the Vatican communications office continued to use art by Marko Rupnik, a Jesuit priest accused of sexually abusing multiple women, in online communications. He [defended](#) the decision to Catholic media professionals in 2024, saying, "As Christian(s), we are asked not to judge."

Faggioli said one of the greatest significances of Alvarado's appointment was the movement "towards a less Italian Vatican" and a greater emphasis on reaching non-Italian speakers.

Daniels, a former member of the communications dicastery, agreed that Alvarado's Mexican American background and her experience at EWTN position her well to reach a global audience.

"The church is a global institution of 1.4 billion members spread around the world, and the internationalization of Vatican communications is an important goal," Daniels said.

She also celebrated Alvarado's contributions as the first woman who is not a religious sister to lead a dicastery. "It's a real gift to the church to have a nonreligious laywoman in the leadership of the Vatican's largest dicastery," said Daniels. "It shows that laypeople bring great gifts to these kinds of professional roles, and have so much to add to reform of the church."

Martin said Alvarado's appointment builds on Pope Francis's emphasis on empowering women in church leadership. "It's a fulfillment of what Pope Francis asked for, which was more 'incisive' roles for women in leadership positions in the Vatican," he said. Just months before Francis's death last year, he appointed Sister Simona Brambilla to lead the Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, the

first woman prefect of a Vatican office.

Alvarado's age also stands out. She is currently 39 years old, according to Catholic-Hierarchy.org.

“ By Italian standards, she's a baby,” Faggioli said. “ Italy is really a gerontocracy,” where people appointed to important positions in their 50s are considered young, Faggioli said.

“This is a signal of change,” Faggioli said. —Religion News Service