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Pope Francis greets people gathered on the streets of Luxembourg to see him pass by in the

Pope Francis greets people gathered on the streets of Luxembourg to see him pass by in the popemobile Sept. 26. He will next spend three days in Belgium. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Luxembourg — September 26, 2024
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Pope Francis on Sept. 26 used an eight-hour visit to one of the least populated but most secularized countries in Europe to cast a renewed vision for a church that is willing to "evolve" in order to evangelize the modern world.

"The church within a secularized society needs to evolve, mature and grow," said the pope during his brief stay here, as part of a Sept. 26-29 trip to Luxembourg and Belgium.

The pope's remarks came in a meeting with Luxembourg's Catholic community at the city's Notre Dame Cathedral, where he echoed the words of the country's Jesuit Cardinal, Jean-Claude Hollerich, who said that the church must always be willing to be in dialogue with the world around it.

Hollerich, who the Jesuit pope made a cardinal in 2019, has become one of Francis' top advisers and is one of the lead organizers of Francis' ongoing synod on synodality, a years-long consultation process on the future of the Catholic Church.

And by almost all accounts, that future here in Luxembourg seems bleak. In the last 10 years, only one new priest has been ordained and only 6% of self-identified Catholics say they attend Mass each week.

Even so, the pope insisted that the faithful "cannot close ourselves off in sadness, resignation or resentment." While he said the church must remain faithful to its "perennial values," Francis insisted that evangelization must go beyond "simple pastoral care to one of missionary proclamation."

"In order to do this, the church must be ready to evolve," he said, noting that being a missionary is not about quotas or proselytization, but "rather our desire to make known to as many brothers and sisters as possible the joy of encountering Christ."

> 'The church within a secularized society needs to evolve, mature and grow.'
> —Pope Francis
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The Catholic Church, the pope said, must be open to "*todos, todos, todos*" ("everyone, everyone, everyone") — repeating a line he first used at the 2023 World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, that has become one of his favorite maxims.

"The spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of welcoming, of openness to everyone; it does not admit any kind of exclusion," said Francis. "I encourage you, therefore, to be faithful to this legacy, and to continue to make your country a friendly home for those who knock at your door seeking help and hospitality."

During remarks earlier in the day to the government and civil authorities, Francis made a similar plea to the country's leadership, saying that the country's vast wealth meant it had a special duty to help the disadvantaged.

"We must not abandon peoples or social groups on the margins," said Francis, who observed that half of the country's inhabitants are migrants in need of welcome and

integration.

On a trip to the heart of Europe and in a country that was twice invaded during the 20th century, Francis lamented that the continent is witnessing a reemergence of social rifts and divisions leading to destruction and death.

"It seems that the human heart does not always remember the past and periodically goes astray and returns to the tragic path of war," the pope said in a speech delivered in the very square where, in 1944, the country was liberated by U.S. forces.

Recalling this history, the pope pleaded that "exaggerated forms of nationalism and pernicious ideologies may finally be left behind."



Pope Francis, seated next to Luxembourg's Prime Minister Luc Frieden, speaks to government authorities, members of the diplomatic corps and local representatives at the Cercle Cité in Luxembourg Sept. 26. He said the country's vast wealth meant it had a special duty to help the disadvantaged. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Luxembourg may be a small country, he observed, but in the same way it has proven instrumental in the project of European integration, Francis said it can still remind the world of the "advantages of peace as opposed to the horrors of war … and the benefits of cooperation between nations as opposed to the harmful consequences of hardening positions and the selfish and short-sighted or even violent pursuit of one’s own interests."

Following his brief visit here, the pope now heads to the capital of Europe where he will spend three days in Belgium, meeting with government leaders in Brussels and marking the 600th anniversary of the founding of the Catholic University of Leuven.

En route to Luxembourg, the 87-year-old pope — who earlier this week canceled a day of meetings due to what the Vatican described as mild flu symptoms — came to the back of the plane to thank journalists for accompanying him on the visit, though he forewent the customary individual greetings.

Luxembourg's dreary weather is expected to be matched in Belgium — a likely fitting backdrop for a country where the church finds itself in the middle of a major storm after decades of clergy abuse and cover-up that risks overshadowing the pope's visit.

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This story appears in the **Francis in Luxembourg and Belgium** feature series.
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