Vatican
Vatican News
Votive candles and flowers are seen at the base of a statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's

Votive candles and flowers are seen at the base of a statue of St. John Paul II outside Rome's Gemelli hospital Feb. 19, 2025, where Pope Francis is being treated for double pneumonia. (CNS photo/Pablo Esparza)



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Pope Francis continues to improve and the 88-year-old pontiff remains without fever and with a well-functioning heart, as he carries on his hospital recovery from double pneumonia.

"The clinical conditions of the Holy Father are slightly improving," said a Feb 20 Vatican bulletin released at just after 7:30 p.m. local time. "He is without fever and his hemodynamic parameters continue to be stable."

Francis has now spent seven days in hospital, after first being admitted for a respiratory tract infection on Feb. 14. By Feb. 18, the Vatican acknowledged that the pope's condition had deteriorated and that he was battling pneumonia in both lungs.

Medical reports have repeatedly described the pope's clinical condition as "complex," but in recent days, Vatican statements have trended in a positive direction.

A brief statement released earlier on Thursday noted the pope was able to have breakfast sitting in an armchair.

Notwithstanding the long hospitalization, papal advisers have advised against alarmism. Vatican sources note that the pope continues to breathe on his own, but also acknowledge a lengthy hospitalization is likely. To date, Francis' longest hospitalization was a 10-day stay in 2021 following an intestinal operation.

Despite the pope's closely watched medical care, business is proceeding mostly as usual around the Vatican.

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High-profile cardinals are continuing to travel, nominations of new bishops are being rolled out and visitors participating in events related to the 2025 Jubilee Year are flowing through St. Peter's Square to make a pilgrimage through the Holy Door.

Even so, the pope's medical crisis has managed to cast a shadow over many of these activities.

At a Feb. 20 Vatican press conference for an upcoming initiative promoting peacebuilding around the Mediterranean, many of the questions circled around the octogenarian pope's health.

Barcelona's Cardinal Juan José Omella Omella told reporters that while he doesn't have a holistic understanding of the pope's medical records, "it seems that he is doing much better."

Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseille, France, joked that hospitalization is the only way to get the notoriously stubborn Francis to take a break.



Spanish Cardinal Juan José Omella Omella of Barcelona leans to listen to Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseille, France, who were both at a news conference at the Vatican Feb. 20, 2025, to present a peace and dialogue initiative for young people around the Mediterranean Sea. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

The seemingly positive prognosis hasn't prevented a flurry of speculation about who could possibly succeed the pope in a future papal conclave or whether the pope might resign.

While Francis has frequently praised Pope Benedict XVI's historic decision to voluntarily resign in 2013, he has also expressed his conviction that he believes the papacy is for life and that popes should only resign in exceptional circumstances.

However, in an interview published on Feb. 20, retired Italian Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi suggested that if Francis felt he could not do the job in a manner that would allow him to travel and engage with people, he might consider resigning.

"There is no question that if he was in a situation where his ability to have direct contact, as he likes to do, to be able to communicate in an immediate, incisive and decisive way, then I think he might decide to resign," said the cardinal.

Despite being sidelined, however, the ailing pontiff seems ready for a fight.

According to an article published in the Italian newspaper Corriere della Sera, Francis is said to have told Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni when she visited him on Feb. 19 that he was aware that there are those eager to see him leave the scene.

"Some have been praying for the pope to go to heaven," Francis reportedly told the prime minister, "but the Lord of the Harvest thinks it best to keep me here."

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This story appears in the **Pope Francis' health crisis** feature series. View the full series.