Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Francis is seen in the chapel of his suite of rooms at Rome's Gemelli hospital March 16,

In the first photo of Pope Francis since he entered hospital 31 days ago, the pontiff is seen in the chapel of his suite of rooms at Rome's Gemelli hospital March 16, 2025. The Vatican press office said the 88-year-old pope concelebrated Mass. (CNS/Vatican Press Office.)



by Christopher White

Former Vatican Correspondent (2021-2025)

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Rome — March 15, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Vatican on Sunday released the first photograph of Pope Francis since he entered the hospital a month ago to treat bronchitis, further indication that the pontiff's health continues to improve.

The photo shows the pontiff in the chapel of his suite of rooms at Rome's Gemelli hospital where the Vatican press office said the 88-year-old pope concelebrated Mass.

Earlier in the weekend, the Vatican said that doctors are decreasing his mechanical oxygen supply during the night.

"The clinical conditions of the Holy Father remained stable, confirming the progress highlighted in the last week," said a Vatican statement released at 6:55 p.m. local time on Saturday (March 15).

The bulletin said that while Francis continues to receive high-flow oxygen therapy through nasal tubes during the day, he is being weaned off the mechanical ventilation he has used at night for nearly two weeks.

The report is the latest briefing from the pope's medical team since their March 12 update that Francis' most recent chest X-rays confirmed that he is continuing to heal from double pneumonia.

Advertisement

Although the pope's doctors announced earlier this week that the pontiff is no longer in imminent danger, he still has pneumonia and chronic bronchitis, resulting in what doctors call a "complex" medical picture.

The pope is in his fifth week at Rome's Gemelli Hospital, and the Vatican has refused to speculate about a timeline for his release.

Francis continues both respiratory and physical therapy, and tonight's medical bulletin noted that "these therapies, at present, are showing further, gradual improvements."

At noon on Saturday, the Vatican announced that Francis, on March 11, approved a three-year plan focused on implementing the reforms initiated by his recent synod on synodality. The announcement is being widely viewed in Rome as a strong signal that Francis intends to continue as pope, despite speculation of a potential resignation following his prolonged hospitalization.

Read more:
Document
Letter to bishops on synod implementation 3.15.25.pdf

The push to make the Catholic Church more synodal — less clerical and encouraging greater participation of all its members — has been a signature project of Francis' papacy. A report at the conclusion of October's synod meeting called on the church

to overhaul its seminary formation programs, involve the laity in the selection of Catholic bishops and to allow for greater participation of women in the church's leadership.

The new timeline includes diocesan and continental evaluation stages that will culminate in a Vatican assembly in October 2028. The decision to approve and publish the timeline while the pontiff is in the hospital indicates not only his desire to increase momentum for the synod's implementation but to ensure that it remains a priority for the global church.

The letter released March 15 was signed by secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Mario Grech. "The Holy Father hopes that this phase, as outlined in the Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis Communio* (n. 7, arts. 19-21), receives particular attention so that synodality is increasingly understood and lived as an essential dimension of the ordinary life of local Churches and the entire Church," he said in the letter to bishops.



Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, celebrates a Mass to pray for Pope Francis with ambassadors accredited to the Holy See in the Pauline Chapel of the

Apostolic Palace at the Vatican March 14, 2025. Bishops and priests working in the Secretariat of State concelebrated. (CNS/Vatican Media)

On Friday (March 14), Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin — the Vatican's secretary of state — celebrated Mass in the Pauline Chapel of the Apostolic Palace for diplomats and ambassadors accredited to the Holy See to pray for the pope's recovery.

"We gather in prayer this morning for the intention of the Holy Father’s health, that he may recover and return soon among us," the cardinal said in his homily.

Earlier this week, on March 13, Francis celebrated the 12th anniversary of his election as pope. To mark the occasion, hospital staff presented the pontiff with a cake, decorated with 12 candles.

The Italian postal service announced this week that it has received a surge in letters being sent to the pope and the Vatican — resulting in up to 330 pounds of additional mail per day since the pope entered the hospital.

This story was updated on March 16 to publish the first photo of Pope Francis since he entered the hospital.

The National Catholic Reporter's Rome Bureau is made possible in part by the generosity of Joan and Bob McGrath.

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