Vatican
Vatican News



Vice President JD Vance attends a press conference in the East Room at the White House in Washington Feb. 4, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Leah Millis)



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 — April 17, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

U.S. Vice President JD Vance is heading to Rome over Easter weekend on a visit that could offer the high-profile Catholic convert a chance of a public reconciliation with Pope Francis following his nasty row with the pontiff and the U.S. bishops over immigration policy earlier this year.

Vance is set to arrive here in the Italian capital on Good Friday (April 18) on a visit primarily aimed at deepening the Trump administration's ties with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni.

The vice president is currently scheduled to meet with the Vatican's secretariat of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and is likely to attend one of the Holy Week liturgies.

Pope Francis' participation in the Vatican's Easter celebrations will be limited due to his ongoing recovery from double pneumonia. But that doesn't mean Vance won't at least have a brief encounter with the 88-year-old pontiff during his time in Rome.

During Francis' five-week hospitalization, Vance took to social media to request prayers for the ailing pontiff. But it came just after a bruising public spat with the U.S. bishops that ultimately led to a rebuke from the pope.

Less than a week after being sworn in as the nation's first-ever Republican Catholic vice president, Vance went on a major American television network and suggested that financial interests motivated the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' work on behalf of migrants and refugees.

Vance doubled down on those claims and went on to invoke an ancient theological concept known as *ordo amoris* in an attempt to defend the Trump administration's migration crackdown.

Advertisement

In an nearly unprecedented letter to the U.S. bishops, the pope — while not directly naming Vance — explicitly rejected that theological interpretation.

"The true *ordo amoris* that must be promoted is that which we discover by meditating constantly on the parable of the 'Good Samaritan,' that is, by meditating on the love that builds a fraternity open to all, without exception," wrote the pope on Feb. 11.

Vance later attempted to smooth over some of that conflict.

During a Feb. 28 speech at the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast, the vice president said that he was "surprised" by the papal pushback and that he didn't think it was constructive for Christians to fight with each other.

As Vance now prepares for his first ever tête-à-tête with the pope and his top deputies, he will walk a diplomatic tightrope — both attempting to appease his anti-immigrant boss and base, while also seeking to repair relationships with leaders of his own church.

Vance's upcoming trip

Vice President JD Vance travels to Rome, Vatican City and India April 18-24.

- April 18 — Vance plans to meet with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and with Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin.
- Vance, who became Catholic in 2019, is expected to participate in Holy Week ceremonies, the Associated Press said.
- An embassy announcement did not say whether Vance would attend the Good Friday Liturgy of the Lord's Passion in St. Peter's Basilica on April 18 or Easter morning Mass in St. Peter's Square April 20.
- Vance and the second family also will travel to New Delhi, where the vice president plans to meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and then travel to Jaipur and Agra, India.
- Vance's visit to India is his first. His wife, Usha Vance, is the daughter of immigrants from South India.

—via the Associated Press and Catholic News Service

Stephen Schneck, who served as the longtime director of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University of America, said that Francis and Trump both have focused on refugees and migrants, but they approach

the topic as "polar opposites."

"While Pope Francis has begged the world for mercy, care and welcome for these 'least' among us, President Trump evidences glee in deporting, excluding and callously dismissing them," Schneck said in an interview. "I cannot remember when tensions between the United States and the Vatican have been more fraught."

Ken Hackett, who served as U.S. ambassador to the Vatican from 2013 to 2017, said that Vance faces a difficult task in reconciling his administration's policies with the positions of his church.

"I struggle to find areas of complementary between the policies and practices of the Trump administration and those of the pontificate of Francis," he said.

Hackett said that there could be common ground on issues such as advocacy for persecuted Christians and opposition to human trafficking. But he noted that those concerns must be contrasted with the Trump administration's treatment of Muslims, Haitians and denying due process to immigrants.

Still, the Vatican is long accustomed to awkward encounters with high-profile visitors with whom it doesn't always see eye-to-eye.

Meloni's harsh crackdown on migrants in the pope's backyard led many to predict that the two leaders would be on a collision course. Instead, they have found common cause in opposing surrogate motherhood and attempting to boost European birthrates. And the current leader of the pope's homeland, Argentinian President Javier Milei, went from calling the pope an "imbecile" on the campaign trail to sharing frequent laughs and hugs during their meetings.



Pope Francis speaks with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at the Group of Seven summit in Borgo Egnazia, Italy, June 14, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Emilce Cuda, secretary of the Vatican's Pontifical Commission for Latin America, told NCR that "the pope in no way interferes in the internal political affairs of countries."

"He only speaks out in support of those who suffer, and always within the limits of the Catholic Church," said Cuda.

Victor Gaetan, author of a history of Vatican diplomacy said that "the Vatican's diplomatic method concentrates on finding common ground, collaborating on shared interests, not on condemnation."

When Vance arrives at the Vatican, there will be plenty of areas of disagreement, but this will be dealt with privately, behind closed doors, Gaetan said.

"I suspect Francis the pastor can't help but want to bless Vice President Vance, a self-described 'baby Catholic,' " who joined the church six years ago.

Yet because of the explicitly Catholic dimension of their disagreements — with Vance attempting to use the church's theology to help justify policy positions that put him sharply at odds with the pope — Schneck noted that this has only heightened the tensions leading up to Vance's visit.

"Vance knows he's created a Catholic stink," Schneck said. "The vanity of his imagined Catholic theological expertise when he defended cuts to humanitarian programs by citing Augustine's ordo amoris drew a sharp papal rejoinder."

Now, Schneck said, Vance is gunning for a "photo op to lessen the stink. He wants the photo to legitimate him in the public eye as a good Catholic."

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