Vatican
Vatican News
The hands of Pope Francis, holding a rosary, are seen as he lies at rest in his coffin in the cha

The hands of Pope Francis, holding a rosary, are seen as he lies at rest in his coffin in the chapel of his residence, Casa Santa Marta, at the Vatican April 21, 2025. (CNS/Vatican Media)



Brian Fraga

Staff Reporter

View Author Profile



Chris Herlinger

View Author Profile
cherlinger@ncronline.org



Brian Roewe

NCR environment correspondent

View Author Profile

broewe@ncronline.org

Follow on Twitter at @brianroewe

Join the Conversation

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

April 21, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Catholic Church is in mourning.

Catholics around the world expressed their sadness and non-Catholics sent their condolences upon hearing the news of Pope Francis' death at age 88 on Easter Monday.

Catholic bishops, priests and religious, intellectuals, activists, organizational leaders, as well as politicians, religious leaders, global organizations and more issued statements and wrote social media posts reflecting on the legacy of the first Jesuit pope who as an Argentine was also the first pontiff from the Americas.

"Pope Francis will long be remembered for his outreach to those on the margins of the Church and of society," said Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In a prepared statement, Broglio said that Francis, who was elected pope in March 2013 after Pope Benedict XVI's surprise resignation, "renewed for us the mission to bring the Gospel out to the ends of the earth and offer divine mercy to all."

American cardinals Blase Cupich of Chicago, Timothy Dolan of New York, Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey and Robert McElroy of Washington D.C., released their own statements expressing both sorrow and gratitude for Francis' 12-year papacy.

"The finest memorial we can offer is to re-form our hearts as Pope Francis asked — to see our brothers and sisters, to listen to them and to offer our prayers and actions that all may experience the fullness of God's promise," Cupich said.



Thousands of people gather in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican to pray the rosary for the repose of the soul of Pope Francis April 21, 2025, the evening of his death. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

Tobin described Francis as "a man of deep faith, profound humility, and unshakable hope — a servant whose tireless call to care for the poor and the marginalized will continue to inspire the Church for generations to come."

Dolan, who was criticized for his comments in February suggesting then that Francis was near death, said on April 21 that it was appropriate that the pope's last public appearance occurred on Easter Sunday as Christians the world over celebrated the resurrection of Jesus.

"He touched us all with his simplicity, with his heart of a humble servant," Dolan said.

McElroy, meanwhile, said that Francis' vision of a synodal church would stand as "an enduring legacy of Pope Francis in his fidelity to the Second Vatican Council and its

call to preach the Gospel in the modern world."

Our Lady of Apostles Sr. Mary Barron, president of the International Union of Superiors General, said in a statement that the organization stands "united in mourning this immense loss with the global Catholic community — a loss not only for our religious communities but for the entire world."

"Pope Francis's life was a radiant testimony of service, humility, mercy, and a profound love for all of creation," Barron said. "His enduring commitment to inclusivity, justice, and care for those rejected by society, those who struggle on the margins, has deeply inspired us to live more fully the Gospel call to love and service."

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, who served as Pope Francis' secretary of state, stands by the pope's c

Cardinal Pietro Parolin views the body of Pope Francis in a wooden coffin in the chapel of the pope's residence, Casa Santa Marta, at the Vatican April 21, 2025. Parolin, one who is seen as a potential next pope, served as Pope Francis' secretary of state. (CNS/Vatican Media)



The Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception displays funeral bunting after news of the death of Pope Francis on April 21, 2025. (NCR photo/Rhina Guidos)

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious lauded the pope's "character, warmth and deep humility, as well as the numerous contributions he has made throughout his papacy [that] have made an enormous impact on the world, the Catholic Church, and on our lives personally."

In particular, LCWR singled out Francis' leadership style, saying he "embodied the values that he held throughout his priesthood: that people who are hurting and in need must be given our highest priority, that leaders must spend time on the margins listening to those whose perspectives may differ from their own, and that we must be fearless in speaking out in the face of all that goes against gospel teachings."



Dozens of reporters set up cameras outside St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 21, 2025, as news of Pope Francis' death spread. The Argentine pope died at 7:35 a.m. that morning at the age of 88. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

Leaders sound off on Francis' papacy

Catholic institutions across the map also joined in mourning Francis. Caritas Internationalis called him a "beacon of compassion, justice, and unwavering commitment to the dignity of every human person."

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA said Francis' spirit would endure in the organization's work accompanying refugees and other forcibly displaced people. Francis made caring for migrants and refugees a key theme of his papacy.

"We will honor his legacy by continuing that work in earnest in these challenging times for our world," JRS/USA President Kelly Ryan said.

Francis was a "modern-day prophet," said Catholic Charities USA President and CEO Kerry Alys Robinson, one who read the signs of the times and awakened many to a meaningful change in behavior within the church and the world.

"More than any public figure of his time, Pope Francis emulated what he advocated," Robinson said. "His authenticity came from his radical belief in God and commitment to be Christlike. He said what he meant, and his actions matched his words with uncommon consistency. Pope Francis exuded empathy."

Pax Christi International thanked Francis for his tireless commitment to peace and "for teaching us to walk together towards a reconciled and nonviolent world."



A woman prays inside Buenos Aires' Metropolitan Cathedral in Buenos Aires, Argentina, April 21, 2025, after the death of Pope Francis was announced by the Vatican. Francis, formerly Argentine Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, died April 21 at age 88. (OSV News/Reuters/Agustin Marcarian)

Lorna Gold, executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement, said Francis' legacy would be defined by his dedication to caring for the environment, including through his two papal texts on ecological matters, "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home" and *Laudate Deum*.

"Pope Francis has contributed toward care for our earth and fighting climate change in ways that we will fully understand in the course of time," she said.

Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, an organization that advocates for LGBTQ Catholics, said Francis was a "gift to the church and to the LGBTQ+ community" for his efforts in seeking to make the Catholic Church a more welcoming space to gay and transgender people.

"Francis was not only the first pope to use the word 'gay' when speaking about LGBTQ+ people, he was the first pope to speak lovingly and tenderly to them," DeBernardo said.

On the issue of clergy sex abuse, Francis pushed for reforms, including his 2019 promulgation of *Vos Estis Lux Mundi*, which established new norms to hold bishops and religious superiors accountable for their handling of sex abuse cases. But advocates for clergy sex abuse survivors said Francis' record on accountability was mixed at best.

Reacting to the pope's death, the Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests said Francis "refused" to enact a universal zero tolerance law for abuse and cover-up. Anne Barrett Doyle, co-director of BishopAccountability.org, which tracks the Catholic Church's handling of clerical sex abuse, said Francis "refused to make the necessary changes" to assure justice for survivors.

Advertisement

Biden, Vance among leaders who issue statements

Holy Cross Fr. Robert Dowd, president of the University of Notre Dame, said Francis inspired many "through his heroic and prophetic ministry."

"The Holy Father's life and witness call us to awaken from indifference to the suffering of others, to embrace our responsibilities to one another and to be agents of faith, hope and love for a world in need," Dowd said.

Former U.S. President Joe Biden, a Catholic politician who in 2021 met with Francis during a time when some outspoken American bishops wanted to ban the president from receiving Communion for his stance in favor of abortion rights, said on his Facebook page that the pope would be remembered "as one of the most consequential leaders of our time."

"As Pope, he was a loving pastor and challenging teacher who reached out to different faiths," Biden said. "He commanded us to fight for peace and protect our planet from a climate crisis. He advocated for the voiceless and powerless. He made all feel welcome and seen by the Church. He promoted equity and an end to poverty and suffering across the globe."

Vice President JD Vance, who converted to Catholicism as an adult and met briefly with Francis at the Vatican on Easter Sunday, wrote on X that his heart went out to "the millions of Christians all over the world who loved him."

"I was happy to see him yesterday, though he was obviously very ill," he said, adding that he would always remember the homily the pope gave in the early days of COVID. "It was really quite beautiful. May God rest his soul," said Vance, whose theological defense of the Trump administration's mass deportation strategy earned him a rare rebuke from Francis in February.

Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-California), the first female Speaker of the House and a San Francisco Catholic, said in a statement: "His Holiness Pope Francis personified our sacred responsibility in the Gospel of Matthew to honor the spark of divinity in the least of our brethren — championing the poor, the worker, the refugee and the immigrant." She said his leadership was perhaps most evident in his commitment to addressing the climate crisis.

Outside the Catholic Church, the range of reactions to Francis' death was wide, with condolences coming from heads of state, to Apple CEO Tim Cook and even Formula 1 Racing.

President Donald Trump, whose hardline rhetoric on migration over the years at times prompted criticisms from Francis, wrote on X that he was ordering the United States flag to be flown at half-staff at the White House and at federal buildings until sunset on the day of the pope's interment.

The European Commission also lowered their flags on Monday in honor of the pope's death, as global leaders also shared their sympathies. Among them: King Charles III, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, French President Emmanuel Macron, as well as the heads of Israel and the Palestinian territories, and Russia and Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy noted that Francis had prayed for peace in war-torn Ukraine. "His life was devoted to God, to people, and to the Church. He knew how to give hope, ease suffering through prayer, and foster unity," Zelenskyy said.

Francis' efforts to strengthen relationships across ecumenical and interfaith lines were reflected in the outpouring of sentiments from Protestant and non-Christian faith leaders.

"We give God thanks for his extraordinary life and the moral leadership that inspired and challenged the world to love as God loves," Episcopal Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of Washington D.C., wrote.

Ronald S. Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress, called Francis "a true moral leader, a man of deep faith and humanity, and a steadfast friend to the Jewish people."

Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, the grand imam of Al-Azhar, mourned Francis as a "distinguished humanitarian and dear friend." Offering his prayers and condolences, the Dalai Lama said Francis "dedicated himself to the service of others, consistently revealing by his own actions how to live a simple, but meaningful life."

The best tribute one can pay to Francis, the Dalai Lama said, "is to be a warm-hearted person, serving others wherever and in whatever way we can."

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, whom Francis referred to as "my dear brother," said in a video translated by the Orthodox Times that the Argentine Jesuit was "an example of genuine humility" and "a true friend of

Orthodoxy."

"Eternal be your memory, Brother Pope Francis," Bartholomew said.

This story appears in the **The Legacy of Pope Francis** feature series. View the full series.