News



A man holding a rosary and U.S. flag reacts as Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, who has chosen the papal name Leo XIV, appears on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican May 8, 2025, following his election during the conclave. (OSV News/Reuters/Dylan Martinez)



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Surprise, hope, excitement and pride were reflected in many of the initial reactions to Cardinal Robert Prevost on May 8 emerging on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica as Pope Leo XIV.

Prevost, a 69-year-old Chicago-born Augustinian friar who has spent much of his ecclesial career abroad, is the first pope born in the United States, a development once thought to be near impossible among Vatican experts.

Kansas City, Kansas, Archbishop-elect Shawn McKnight — the last archbishop appointed by Pope Francis — told National Catholic Reporter that he was "floored, stunned and full of hope."

Dominican Sr. Barbara Reid, president of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where Prevost graduated with a Master of Divinity in 1982, told NBC News Chicago that she was not prepared for the news.

"We are overjoyed that someone who is beloved and known to us is now the beloved leader of the whole entire church," Reid said. "We like to say we form ministers for the world church, with a global perspective and with the heart of a missionary. Certainly now Pope Leo XIV embodies those characteristics."

Writing on his social media platform, President Donald Trump said it was "an honor" to realize that Leo XIV is the first American pope.

"What excitement, and what a Great Honor for our Country. I look forward to meeting Pope Leo XIV. It will be a very meaningful moment!" Trump wrote.



Students from Everest Academy in Lemont, Ill., cheer May 8, 2025, react after it was announced that Chicago-born Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost was elected as the next pope. (OSV News/Reuters/Vincent Alban)

Political leaders in Illinois also responded on social media to Leo XIV's election.

"Everything dope, including the Pope, comes from Chicago! ... We hope to welcome you back home soon," Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson wrote on X.

Sean Callahan, president and CEO of Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. church's international humanitarian agency, described Leo XIV's election as a "momentous occasion for American Catholics."

"Pope Leo XIV's global experience will surely have an impact on his papacy," Callahan said in a prepared statement. "He has seen, firsthand, the struggles that our sisters and brothers around the world are experiencing. We are confident that he will be a voice for the voiceless and a fierce supporter of human dignity for all people."



Phyllis Zagano (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)

"It is extraordinary that we have an American pope," said Phyllis Zagano, a senior research associate-in-residence at Hofstra University in Hempstead, New York.

Prevost "has given a great example with the choice of name, a man who will build and continue Francis' commitment to Catholic social teaching," Zagano told NCR. "He has global experience and is very much in line with the synodal reforms of Francis."

Noting Prevost's position as head of the Vatican office that nominates candidates for the episcopacy, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese said in an email to NCR that Prevost would

have been on "everyone's list" of papal candidates if he were Italian.

"Most of us thought a U.S. cardinal would never become pope, but Prevost got strong support from cardinals from Latin America where he worked for 20 years," said Reese, a senior analyst with Religion News Service. Reese said Prevost, a naturalized citizen of Peru, is multilingual and has a reputation as a listener.

"He will carry forward the legacy of Pope Francis," Reese said.

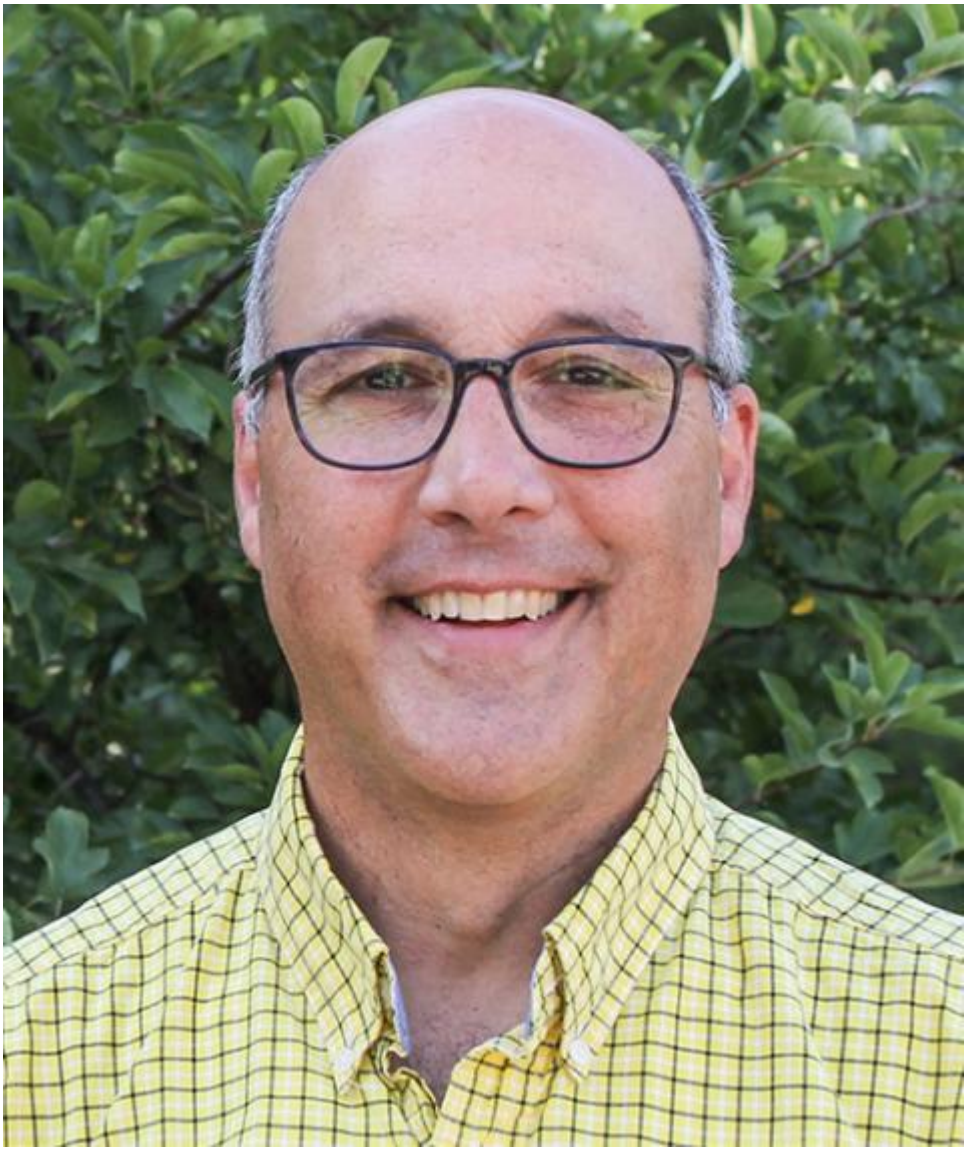
That Leo XIV is already being seen as a pope who will continue on the reforming path set by Francis was celebrated by liberal-leaning groups such as the U.S. nonprofit Catholics Vote Common Good.

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"As progressive American Catholics, our prayers have been answered," said Denise Murphy McGraw, national co-chairperson of Catholics Vote Common Good. McGraw described Leo XIV as a "common good pope" who is as committed to social justice "as we are."

"It's a new day for modern American Catholicism and we look forward to working tirelessly to help engage as many progressive Catholics in the United States as possible," McGraw said in a prepared statement.

Dan Misleh, executive director of Catholic Climate Covenant, based in Washington, D.C., noted that Leo XIV acknowledged Francis twice during his first appearance and expressed his gratitude for the late pope's leadership while emphasizing the universality of the church.



Dan Misleh (EarthBeat photo/Brian Roewe)

"We are also grateful that he believes in a synodal Church: one that is open to dialogue, meeting, listening, welcoming everyone, and finding common ground for the good of the Church and all of the world," Misleh said in prepared remarks.

Eric LeCompte, executive director of the religious development group Jubilee USA Network, described Leo XIV as being "a strong voice for the Catholic Church's social mission to address poverty."

"The selection of the name of Leo XIV is a special acknowledgement of the need to support the poor and workers," said LeCompte. He added in a prepared statement that the new pope has "a strong sense of how important the global Church is to

address global challenges."

Michelle Loris, professor and director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut, said she expects Leo XIV to continue with Francis' work to lead a synodal and missionary church that brings God's love to all people.

"He seems to be a gentle, humble and spiritual man," Loris told NCR. "He seems to be a pastor for all the people of God."



Lorna Gold (CNS/Vatican Media)

Like many, Lorna Gold, executive director of the Laudato Si' Movement, was surprised to hear of the first American pope. But she told NCR that the global

network of Catholic organizations working on environmental issues was "absolutely thrilled" by the new pope's name selection.

"In choosing Leo XIV, he's really recalling Pope Leo XIII, who was somebody who broke the mold and shifted the attention of the church onto the pressing issues of the time. ... We are expecting Leo XIV to walk in the footsteps of Pope Francis on the journey of synodality and in care for creation and care for the poor, and especially in the times that we're living in, coming with a message of peace for all of humanity and all of creation."

Meanwhile, Leo XIV's life and ministry reflect "a deep devotion to the Virgin Mary," said Neomi DeAnda, executive director of International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton, Ohio. She noted that one of his first acts as pope was leading the crowd at St. Peter's Square in the recitation of the Hail Mary.

"He has publicly expressed his faith in her and entrusted Pope Francis' health and well-being to her care," DeAnda told NCR. "He emphasizes Mary as a source of consolation, hope and help for all who seek her, especially in times of illness or suffering. His coat of arms features a blue background with a white fleur-de-lis, symbolizing the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception."

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> —Michelle Loris
>
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Francis DeBernardo, executive director of New Ways Ministry, a U.S. group that advocates for LGBTQ Catholics, issued a prepared statement where he noted a New York Times report that said then-Fr. Prevost in 2012 spoke to bishops about how "Western news media and popular culture fostered 'sympathy for beliefs and practices that are at odds with the Gospel.' " The New York Times reported that Prevost "cited the 'homosexual lifestyle' and 'alternative families comprised of same-sex partners and their adopted children.' "

DeBernardo said in his statement, "We pray that in the 13 years that have passed, 12 of which were under the papacy of Pope Francis, that his heart and mind have developed more progressively on LGBTQ+ issues, and we will take a wait-and-see

attitude to see if that has happened."

Mitchell Garabedian, a Boston attorney who has represented hundreds of clergy sex abuse victims, said in an email to NCR that he hopes Leo XIV will "actually create effective programs to help clergy sexual abuse victims try to heal, screen and supervise priests and prevent clergy sexual abuse."

"The Catholic Church has to understand that the safety of innocent children cannot be sacrificed for an outdated and inexcusable need to protect the reputation of the Catholic Church," Garabedian said.

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This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.