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A tribute sign to Pope Leo XIV, formally Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, is displayed outside a hot dog stand in the Dolton suburb of Chicago, May 9, 2025, where Leo grew up as Robert F. Prevost. The manager said the pope's two brothers used to stop by there for hotdogs — with no ketchup, a signature Chicago hotdog. (OSV News/Simone Orendain)

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Chicago — May 14, 2025
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"In honor of Pope Leo XIV, I'm going to have a thin crust pizza," said Augustinian seminarian Br. Nathan Fernandes, a former chef at a fine dining Italian restaurant, in a tongue-in-cheek nod to the Chicago-born pope's now permanent home in Rome.

Best known to this year's set of seminarians from the Augustinian Midwest Province as Cardinal Robert F. Prevost, the native Chicagoan had just been elected pope the day before, on May 8, and the seminarians were taking a breather from the media frenzy that had descended on their formation house's quiet block in Chicago's Hyde Park.

But as details of Leo's past life come to light, many are struck by his Chicago roots and his Chicago-ness.

Fernandes, a Canadian, told OSV News he knows in Chicago he's swimming against the tide of deep-dish pizza that is a big part of this town's signature fare.

And it's a tide that Louis Prevost said he believes his youngest brother, Pope Leo XIV, still rides.

"I think it's a place like Giordano's," Louis Prevost told OSV News. On the phone from his home on the southwest coast of Florida, he referred to what he thought was his brother's preference, one of the city's popular deep dish pizza joints. He said, with his brother Rob going off to seminary at 13, at the same time that he was drafted to the military, he remembered more of the pope's childhood preferences.

"He liked cooking, he liked Italian food," confirmed Augustinian Fr. John Lydon, a college classmate and longtime friend from Leo's missionary days in Peru. "After he studied at (Catholic Theological Union, graduating in 1982), he had gone to Italy for

his doctoral degree in canon law. So he would prepare pizza for us."

Lydon, the formator of the seminarians, stood at the sunlit front steps of the theologate where the pope used to be the formator in the early 2000s. He told OSV News the pizzas then-Father Prevost made were not deep dish.

"We were in a poor place, living more simply than you can imagine here in the United States. So you had to make the pizza go for a lot of people, the crust had to be thin. He liked, and we talked about, Chicago-style pizza. But in Peru in the '90s … that would have been luxurious," said the formator, himself a Canadian.

Louis Prevost, 73, said his "baby brother" ate just about everything that was placed in front of him, and still does today. He said among other typical Chicago food, Leo would prefer a Chicago-style hotdog — no ketchup, which is usually on a poppy seed bun with onions and bright green pickle relish among other toppings. And he had just learned that another Chicago staple, the Italian beef sandwich, was being marketed with hot or sweet peppers as "The Leo" for a limited time at Portillo's, a Chicago hotdog and sandwich chain. But he said he couldn't recall if his brother was actually an Italian beef type.

He and his brothers grew up in a deeply Catholic home in a south suburb on the edge of Chicago, where the rosary was said every night before dinner. Louis Prevost said the family had fish on Fridays, which he himself "grew to not like." Leo, on the other hand, had "no problem with it," and apparently, neither did the 69-year old have any problem with entirely exotic foods that he would tell his big brother about on the phone while traveling around the world as prior general of the Augustinians.

He described one occasion when then-Father Prevost, Augustinian prior general, ate a special delicacy at a restaurant with a delegation of leaders in an Asian country. It was a plate of moving seafood that he was told should be swallowed.

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Louis Prevost, a retired chief petty officer with the Navy, said he had his own share of eating unfamiliar food. But he had to interrupt his brother's story. "It's one thing to eat fried calamari. But when they're alive and you can feel them trying to save themselves, wriggling back up (your throat) … I was like, 'Stop! Don't tell me

anymore!'" He said his brother simply took it with no complaints.

"They made him feel welcome and he accepted it gratefully, gracefully and continued in good graces with these people. … Who knows how much they spent to put that together for him and why would he (say no)? What would they think? Oh, no. He's not that kind of guy," said Louis Prevost.

Since the three boys were mostly tennis players, Louis Prevost said Leo didn't follow all the city's big-name sports teams like the Chicago Bulls (basketball), nor the Bears (football) and certainly not the Cubs on the city's Northside. "He was big into baseball" but "he was a big (White) Sox fan." Years later in the late '80s through the '90s in Peru, his then-superior in the Augustinians' vicariate, a fellow Southsider, said being so far from home, they dropped hardcore preferences and supported all Chicago teams, even the Cubs.

Louis Prevost described the family's regular outings to distinctly Chicago destinations like yearly trips to State Street at Christmas time to look at the storefront of Marshall Field's department store. For more than a century the famous displays of dolls and toy animals in motion depicted Christmas scenes. That would be followed by a meal at the Berghoff, an iconic German fine dining restaurant at the heart of downtown Chicago, where Louis said the restaurant offered special treats for children.

Louis Prevost said their father used to take them to Chicago landmarks that satisfied their curious children's minds: the Museum of Science and Industry in Hyde Park, the Field Museum of Natural History and the Art Institute, both downtown. The eldest brother found art boring, but said his youngest brother most likely would have liked the Art Institute.

Louis Prevost pointed to his brother's decades living outside of the U.S. in the developing world, as a missionary in Peru, and then in Rome, along with knowing multiple languages and extensive international travels visiting Augustinians, holding leadership roles assigned by the late Pope Francis, combined with a distinctly Chicago upbringing. He said, as a Catholic, he couldn't think of a more well-rounded background for a pontiff as leader of the church now.

"He went to places where I didn't expect there to be Catholics; China, Korea, Japan … India or even Pakistan. These places, 'we have Augustinians there,'" he recalled his brother saying."'I have to go there to promote the faith' and that's what he did.

He went to all these places, maybe some with a little trepidation, but he did it. And I look at it and think, OK, what does it take to be pope? Well, you ought to know the people you're trying to shepherd, right?"

On a personal note, Fr. Thomas Joseph White, the American rector of the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, told OSV News May 12 that "seeing the pope in a White Sox jersey at a 2005 World Series game in Chicago fills me with a mix of healthy spiritual joy and serious bemusement."

"It's a little soon to say, but I would predict that the people of Chicago are going to lose their minds because the pope is going to do something like say Mass in the White Sox stadium, and it's going to be a White Sox fan as pope saying Mass in the stadium. And there's going to be people dressed like the Blues Brothers holding up signs that say: 'We're on a mission from God.' I think it'll be, you know, very colorful."

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This story appears in the **Looking for Leo in History** and **Pope Leo XIV** feature series.