News



U.S. Vice President JD Vance, right, and second lady Usha Vance stand next to Louis Prevost, brother of Pope Leo XIV, and his wife, Deborah, left, at the inauguration Mass of the new pope's pontificate in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican May 18, 2025. U.S. President Donald Trump and Vance met Louis and Deborah Prevost at the White House May 20. (OSV News/Jacquelyn Martin, pool via Reuters)



Aleja Hertzler-McCain

View Author Profile

Religion News Service

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

May 26, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Catholic leaders hope the pope's relationship with his brother will help Catholics in the US learn to better love each other in spite of political differences.

Just hours after Pope Leo XIV was announced from the loggia, his two brothers began making headlines. John Prevost, the middle brother, took an agonizingly long time to answer Leo's first papal call, as documented by The Associated Press. Then the eldest brother, Louis Prevost, appeared on Piers Morgan's show to discuss his incendiary Facebook posts.

And on May 21, Louis Prevost again got social media chattering after Margo Martin, U.S. President Donald Trump's special assistant and communications adviser, posted a photo of Louis Prevost and his wife meeting with President Trump and Vice President JD Vance.

In the days after Leo's election, his eldest brother's past posts supporting Trump got media attention, not only for Louis Prevost's allegiance to MAGA, but also for content that included slurs and conspiracy theories. And, while neither the pope's nor his older brother's social media posts are now publicly accessible, Leo's social media revealed that in his last posts before becoming pope he reposted sharp criticisms of the Trump administration's immigration policy.

This glimpse into a potentially divided family has stirred speculation and sympathy from the wider watching world.

" I do think God gave us a little bit of a gift in just showing us this normal family on the global stage," said Kathryn Jean Lopez, religion editor at the National Review. " I don't care what your politics are. The two brothers humanize (Leo) in ways that you could not script."

Advertisement

While Catholic experts told RNS that Louis' connections with Trump are unlikely to make a significant political impact in the church or the government, they expressed hope that the pope's relationship with his brother may help U.S. Catholics learn to better love each other despite political differences.

Lopez said recent popes have been treated like a "public enemy" or a "savior-like figure" and wondered if his brothers might help Leo escape either portrayal.

When a young Robert Prevost was becoming ordained to be a priest, his brother Louis was serving in the Navy. The elder Prevost has said he was always more conflict-oriented than his little brother.

Nichole Flores, associate professor of religious studies at the University of Virginia, said that having "profoundly different" siblings is a relatable experience and echoed that Leo's brothers make him seem "normal."

But also, said Jason King, director of the Center for Catholic Studies at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, within the pope's family, " you've got this division really in the home that we're facing as a country, lots of other countries are facing, that sometimes the church is facing."



Pope Leo XIV, formerly Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, waves at the conclusion of his inauguration Mass at the Vatican May 18, 2025. He is the first U.S. pope in history. (OSV News/Reuters/Guglielmo Mangiapane)

Vanessa Corcoran, a historian and advising dean at Georgetown University, believes that for Leo, who may be shaping up to release major teaching on artificial intelligence, " it's fitting that he is someone that, like many of us, is learning how to build bridges with people whose political opinions, social media presence is different from our own."

Corcoran highlighted that the focus on the pope's siblings is "unusual" for the modern papacy because many recent popes have been older than the 69-year-old Leo and have not had many living siblings. They also have not been on social media.

Neither are there good historical comparisons for the pope's siblings meeting heads of state.

The Medici and the Borgia families, prominent during the Italian Renaissance, produced four and two popes, respectively. But those families had "political influence from the larger family really through bankrolling the Vatican," said Corcoran of the wealthy patrons, famous for supporting artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael.

" We're not seeing financial influence like that," said Corcoran. "We don't have these family dynasties that influence papal politics in the same way."

> " I don't care what your politics are. The two brothers humanize (Leo) in ways that you could not script."
>
> — Kathryn Jean Lopez
>
> Tweet this

While Flores said it was possible some conservative Catholics found affirmation in Louis Prevost's meeting with Trump, and King, of St. Mary's University, speculated the Trump camp might be using the moment to portray a closeness to the pope, all of the experts dismissed the idea his oldest brother might shape Leo's relationship with Trump.

For King, Leo's relationship with his brother is a good place to watch for the pope's unity agenda.

" If the pope is able to find a way to both say that kind of language and that kind of attacks on other humans' dignity, that's not allowable, but then find some way to stay in relationship with Louis," said King, "that would be a constructive sign."

He's also hoping Leo will push the U.S. bishops to unify their country's church and speak against the Trump administration's divisive attitude toward " vulnerable human beings."

Flores, an expert on democracy and theology, said this is a moment where many different camps of Catholics have aspirations for Leo. Some are hoping he will push the U.S. church toward a more robust embrace of social teaching and away from the idea that immigration policy is a question of "prudential judgment." Others hope he will unify the church around "the dignity of life" and allow Latin liturgies to flourish.

How Leo will meet or disappoint those expectations is yet to be seen, but Flores said she hoped watching Leo interact with his brothers will help the church " continue to reflect on the broader social significance of families." The scholar explained, " Families aren't socially isolated units that function in the private sphere."

And Lopez, from the National Review, added, " We've had such a hard time in the United States in recent years when it comes to politics and personal relationships, and I just hope the Prevosts make us be human again and just love one another in the midst of political differences."