News
Justin McClellan at CNS

Justin McLellan interviews Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City for Catholic News Service after Coakley celebrated the ordination Mass for 18 new deacons from the Pontifical North American College in St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican Sept. 28, 2023. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)



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The National Catholic Reporter announced today that Justin McLellan will join the publication as its new Vatican correspondent, effective July 14. A seasoned journalist known for his multilingual fluency and multimedia storytelling, McLellan steps into the role at a pivotal time for both the Catholic Church and NCR.

McLellan's reporting career has already taken him deep inside the halls of Vatican power. He most recently served as Rome correspondent for Catholic News Service (CNS), where he delivered award-winning coverage of Pope Francis and the inner workings of the Holy See. His career also includes work at Rome Reports, an independent Vatican-based television news agency, where he honed his skills in video production and translation, contributing to projects praised by church leaders, including former Cardinal Robert Prevost, now Pope Leo XIV.



Justin McLellan will join the National Catholic Reporter as its new Vatican correspondent July 14, 2025. (Courtesy of Justin McLellan)

"Justin is a skilled journalist whose multilingual capabilities and deep Vatican sourcing will be invaluable," said NCR Executive Editor James Grimaldi. "With great writing and multimedia talents, Justin will deliver the kind of reporting of Pope Leo that continues the 60-year-old tradition of comprehensive, thoughtful, insightful and groundbreaking coverage of the Vatican that has made NCR the place to go for news about the Catholic Church."

McLellan brings a global lens to his reporting. "I'm a native of Delaware — and therefore a fan of all things Philadelphia sports," he said. "My mother is from Guayaquil, Ecuador, and I grew up in a Spanish-speaking household and learned how to pray in Spanish from my dear late grandmother."

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That early cross-cultural foundation would become a defining strength. At the University of Notre Dame, he earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and theology with a minor in Italian — a decision sparked by a desire to dive deeper into life's big questions. "I dropped a political science major to further pursue the questions that really interested me," he said.

McLellan's relationship with the Vatican began during a study-abroad semester in Rome, where he lived with what he described as "a very talkative host family" who helped him gain fluency in Italian. After graduating, he returned to Rome to work for Rome Reports before joining CNS, expanding his skill set to include photography and social media journalism.

Pope Francis shakes hands with Justin McLellan during a meeting with members of the Interna

Pope Francis answers a question from then-Catholic News Service correspondent Justin McLellan aboard the flight to Rome from Lisbon, Portugal, on Aug. 6, 2023, after the World Youth Day. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

"With CNS, I covered both assemblies of the Synod of Bishops on synodality and two of Pope Francis' international trips: to World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon and to Corsica, France," McLellan said. "I also reported on his death and the conclave that elected Pope Leo XIV, whom I had met and interviewed personally in his earlier role as prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops."

McLellan's appointment coincides with a historic momentum for NCR. The publication's recent coverage of the conclave that elected Leo earned global recognition. NCR also won more than 70 Catholic Media Association awards this year, including the prestigious St. Francis de Sales Award for news editor Carol Zimmermann.



Pope Francis shakes hands with Justin McLellan during a meeting with members of the International Association of Journalists Accredited to the Vatican (AIGAV) at the Vatican January 22, 2024. (Courtesy Justin McLellan)

McLellan said he's ready to carry the torch forward. "I'm now excited to write the next chapter with the National Catholic Reporter, both in my career and in the life of the church," he said. "I hope to bring its readers, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, the faithful story of this new and remarkable pontificate."

"As someone whose life has spanned three continents just as the new pope's, I'm especially interested in how his multicultural background shapes his ministry and decision-making," he said.

Grimaldi said that McLellan was the top candidate among an impressive array of applicants, many of whom applied after seeing NCR's successful conclave coverage that drew the attention of journalists around the world.

"We are thrilled to have Justin join NCR. His deep expertise in global affairs and exceptional fluency in multiple languages, combined with his outstanding storytelling across various platforms, will enhance our peerless coverage and insights into the Vatican and its global impact," he said.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks with Catholic News Service Correspondent Justin McLel

Democratic California Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks with then-Catholic News Service Correspondent Justin McLellan during a summit, titled "From Climate Crisis to Climate Resilience," outside the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican May 16, 2024. (CNS photo/Lola Gomez)

"Justin's hiring reaffirms NCR's longstanding commitment to Vatican coverage, a cornerstone of our journalism for six decades."

Founded in 1964 The National Catholic Reporter is the most widely read independent Catholic news outlet in the U.S. that provides reporting and commentary on the Catholic Church and broader global issues. Readers can access its work for free at NCRonline.org.