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Victor Mooney meets Pope Leo XIV at St. Peter's Basilica for the Jubilee of Sports in June 2025. (Vatican Media)

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Victor Mooney's biking pilgrimage this month in Europe ended with a special gift to Pope Leo XIV during a Jubilee audience, the latest effort from the New York Black Catholic to promote Holocaust remembrance.

The more than 620-mile "Pilgrimage on Wheels" across Poland also honored the legacy of Francis and made stops at various Catholic shrines and concentration camp memorial sites. It ended with a symbolic four-mile cycle across the city of Rome on June 14 to the Basilica of St. Mary Major — the gravesite of the late pontiff.

The pilgrimage began June 2, with Mooney biking from Warsaw to Lublin, with stops at the Jasna Góra Monastery (site of the famed Black Madonna of Częstochowa), Auschwitz, St. John Paul II's hometown of Wadowice, Kraków, the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Kraków, and the Majdanek concentration camp. Mooney planned the trek in honor of the #WeRemember campaign organized by the World Jewish Congress.

A veteran of the pilgrimage scene, the 59-year-old Mooney has previously made trips raising awareness for various causes, including a series of attempts to cross the Atlantic by boat for HIV/AIDS awareness. He made Black history when he completed the 5000-mile journey from the Canary Islands to Brooklyn between 2014 and 2015, while also raising awareness about antisemitism and the need for peace in the Holy Land.

That trip notably included a shark attack, which temporarily halted the journey, and an encounter with pirates in Haitian waters before finally landing in New York. In 2021, he was invited to the Vatican for World AIDS Day, where he met Pope Francis.

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Mooney has also made headlines by way of his H.R. 1242 Resilience Project, named after a 2018 Congressional bill that created a commission to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of African slaves to Virginia in 1619.

Mooney's latest pilgrimage, inspired by Francis' witness and his Jubilee Year under the theme "Pilgrims of Hope", was enhanced midway by an invite from the Holy See to attend the Jubilee of Sports, taking place from June 14-15. There, he met Leo and gifted him two pennants connected to his biking journey.

"I've seen two popes in my life and I couldn't even imagine that I would see another," he told The Tablet, "but God works in mysterious ways."

In addition to sharing a greeting and prayer with Leo — the first modern pope of African descent — Mooney also connected with one of the notable names from the funeral of Francis in Kielce Gussie, a Black Catholic who served as the English-language lector.

Along with the tokens presented to the new pontiff, Mooney donated his pilgrimage bike to Gemelli University Hospital, where Francis spent most of his final weeks before suffering a fatal stroke in April.

"This act of generosity not only demonstrates a personal commitment to solidarity but also represents a symbol of hope and strength for those who face difficult challenges," the hospital said in a statement, noting that it will benefit one of their young patients.

"The bicycle, in the hands of a boy or a girl, will be a tangible message of courage and community."

This story was originally published in Black Catholic Messenger.