Opinion
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Pope Leo XIV greets visitors and pilgrims as he arrives in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican for his weekly general audience Aug. 20, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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Pope Leo XIV is reportedly moving back into the papal apartments in the Apostolic Palace. And, in a first, he also is planning to bring some friars with him.

The move should not surprise anyone, nor should it be seen as a repudiation of his predecessor Pope Francis. In 2013, when he became pope, Francis chose to live in the Domus Sanctae Marthae, a Vatican guesthouse on the other side of Vatican City from the apostolic palace. He said he could not live in isolation, and needed to be around people.

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This year, before the conclave to elect a new pope, several cardinals raised the necessity of moving back into the papal apartments during the pre-conclave meetings known as general congregations. The issue was not a desire to restore a sense of grandeur or remoteness to the papal office. The issue was cash.

It turns out that it is expensive to provide security for two venues instead of one. Francis continued to use the papal apartment to receive official guests, such as visiting dignitaries. And, he always delivered the Angelus on Sundays and Holy Days from the study in the papal apartment. So, security had to be provided there as well as at the Domus Sanctae Marthae where he lived. Further complicating security, just over the wall of the Vatican City State from the Domus Sanctae Marthae is an Esso gasoline station.



"The School of Athens," a fresco by Raphael in the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City (Wikimedia Commons/Vatican Museums)

Visitors to the Vatican Museums tour other parts of the Apostolic Palace. The magnificent Stanze of Raphael put the "palace" into "Apostolic Palace." The four rooms contain magnificent frescoes including the "School of Athens," one of the great masterpieces of Renaissance art.

The actual papal apartment is not lavish at all. I have been in far fancier private homes here in the U.S. That said, the views over Rome are tough to beat.

Leo's decision to bring three or four friars to live with him is certainly in keeping with the culture of the Augustinian order, to which he belongs. The Rule of St. Augustine, ironically devised for secular clergy not a religious order, put a great deal of emphasis on living in community. During his time as cardinal prefect of the Dicastery of Bishops, the future pope would often go over to the Augustinians' motherhouse for morning prayer and Mass, or for lunch, to be in the company of his fellow friars. Like Francis, Leo does not want to be isolated.

We can hope that the move does not undo one of the signature achievements of Francis: He broke up the court atmosphere that surrounded previous popes. Ask yourself these questions: Do you remember the name of Pope Benedict XVI's

secretary? Archbishop Georg Gänswein. Pope John Paul II's secretary? Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz. Both men exercised enormous, and sometimes unhelpful, influence over the popes they served, limiting and permitting access to those they favored.



Tourists look at one of the Raphael rooms at the Vatican May 3, 2021. (CNS/Paul Haring)

By contrast, can you name Francis' secretaries? Most people can't. What is more, at the front desk of the Domus Sanctae Marthae guesthouse, there was a folder and anyone could put a note for the pope in it, and the notes would be collected and given to him daily. Leo is well-advised to make sure that his move does not isolate him. Having housemates will help.

We are all trying to understand more about our new pope, and comparing everything he does to the decisions his predecessors took is a natural place to start. But we should be patient and let Leo show us, not tell us, who he is.

One thing is already clear. Like St. Augustine, Leo has a knack for not letting attention rest on him, but redirecting that attention to Christ. In this age of media personalities and internet influencers, that ability to redirect attention away from oneself requires a great deal of humility. It is also precisely what the church needs.