Vatican
Vatican News
Pope Leo XIV welcomes Jesuit Father James Martin, an author and editor at large at America r

Pope Leo XIV welcomes Jesuit Fr. James Martin, an author and editor, to the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Sept. 1, 2025. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Nicole Winfield

View Author Profile

Associated Press

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

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

Vatican City — September 1, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Leo XIV met Monday (Sept. 1) with one of the most prominent advocates for greater LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Catholic Church and encouraged his ministry, just days before a planned Holy Year pilgrimage of LGBTQ+ Catholics to the Vatican in a sign of continued welcome.

Fr. James Martin, a New York-based Jesuit author and editor, said Leo told him he intended to continue Pope Francis' policy of LGBTQ+ acceptance in the church and encouraged him to keep up his advocacy.

"I heard the same message from Pope Leo that I heard from Pope Francis, which is the desire to welcome all people, including LGBTQ people," Martin told The Associated Press after the audience. "It was wonderful. It was very consoling and very encouraging and frankly a lot of fun."

The meeting, which lasted about a half-hour, was officially announced by the Vatican in a sign that Leo wanted it made public.

The audience was significant because it showed a strong sign of continuity with Francis, who more than any of Leo's predecessors worked to make the Catholic Church a more welcoming place for LGBTQ+ Catholics. From his 2013 quip, "Who am I to judge?" about a purportedly gay priest, to his decision to allow priests to bless same-sex couples, Francis distinguished himself with his message of welcome.

In a photo released by the Vatican, Martin is seen meeting Leo in the pope’s private library, w

Fr. James Martin meets with Pope Leo in the library of the Apostolic Palace, where the pontiff greets heads of states, cardinals, bishops, major religious leaders and dignitaries. By meeting Martin in the library and announcing the meeting, some saw a public statement of support for Martin's ministry with LGBTQ+ people. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

> "I heard the same message from Pope Leo that I heard from Pope Francis, which is the desire to welcome all people, including LGBTQ people."
> —Fr. James Martin
>
> Tweet this

During his 12-year papacy from 2013 to 2025, Francis met on several occasions with Martin and named him an adviser in the Vatican's communications department and a member of his big multi-year meeting on the future of the church. Still, Francis never changed church teaching saying homosexual acts are "intrinsically disordered."

Leo's position on LGBTQ+ Catholics had been something of a question. Soon after he was elected in May, remarks surfaced from 2012 in which the future pope, then known as Fr. Robert Prevost, criticized the "homosexual lifestyle" and the role of mass media in promoting acceptance of same-sex relationships that conflicted with Catholic doctrine.

When he became a cardinal in 2023, Catholic News Service asked Prevost if his views had changed. He acknowledged Francis' call for a more inclusive church,

saying Francis "made it very clear that he doesn't want people to be excluded simply on the basis of choices that they make, whether it be lifestyle, work, way to dress, or whatever."

Prevost then underlined that doctrine had not changed.

"But we are looking to be more welcoming and more open and to say all people are welcome in the church," he said.

Martin, who knew Prevost from their time working together in the synod on the church's future, said he wasn't worried about Leo's views given Martin always had found him to be "a very open, welcoming, inclusive person."



Fr. James Martin, a New York-based Jesuit, shows a commemorative photograph of Pope Leo XIV during an interview with The Associated Press just outside St. Peter's Square in Rome, Monday, Sept. 1, 2025. (AP/Maria Selene Clemente)

"But it's wonderful to hear this continuation," Martin said, adding that Leo told him his priorities are to work for peace and unity, citing in particular the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza and Myanmar.

"But he also wanted to remind people that this is a church for 'todos, todos, totos,'" Martin said, quoting Francis' famous line in Spanish about how the church is open to everyone, todos.

Martin helped found Outreach, a ministry promoting LGBTQ+ acceptance, which will participate in a big Holy Year pilgrimage Sept. 5 and Sept. 6 sponsored by Italian LGBTQ+ Catholic group "Jonathan's Tent." Significantly, the pilgrimage of about 1,200 people includes a Mass at the Jesuit church in Rome celebrated by the second-highest member of the Italian bishop's conference.

Read this next: How Pope Francis holds powerful sway over the 2025 conclave

Advertisement

The pilgrimage is not officially sponsored by the Vatican, but is listed on the Vatican's calendar of Holy Year events. Vatican officials say such a listing doesn't signify endorsement, but is merely a logistical help to those groups that wish to organize pilgrimages and walk through the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica.

But the pilgrimage and Martin's audience nevertheless send a signal that is consistent with church teaching "that Jesus reaches out to people on the margins," Martin said.

The message he received from Leo was "that if people were happy with Pope Francis' approach to LGBTQ Catholics, they're going to be happy with Pope Leo's approach. And he asked me to continue what I'm doing, which was very encouraging," Martin said.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.