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Pope Leo XIV answers a question from Elise Allen, senior correspondent at Crux, during an interview at the pope's residence inside the Vatican's Palazzo Sant'Uffizio July 30, 2025. The biography of the pope is titled, *Leo XIV: Citizen of the World, Missionary of the XXI Century*, and it will be published in Spanish by Penguin Peru Sept. 18. (CNS/Courtesy of Crux)



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Pope Leo XIV called on U.S. bishops to take the lead in actively engaging President Donald Trump, and said his nationality gives him more sway among an American episcopate that was often at odds with his predecessor.

"To continue to raise some of the issues, especially about questions of human dignity, of promoting peace in the world, which [Trump] at times has made clear he wants to do, in those efforts I would want to support him," Leo said according to transcripts of an interview with the Catholic news outlet Crux released Sept. 18. But, he said earlier, "it would be much more appropriate for the leadership in the church within the United States to engage him, quite seriously."

"The United States is a power player on the world level, we have to recognize that, and sometimes decisions are made more based on economics than on human dignity and human support," he said.

Related: Pope Leo's 1st formal interview: Wage inequality, Elon Musk, peace and polarization

The interview with Crux's Elise Ann Allen was conducted July 30 as the second of two 90-minute interviews for a biography on the pope to be released in Spanish in Peru. Allen told The Washington Post that the pope was allowed to preview the biography before publication and to make changes. He agreed to cooperate in part because “he liked that idea of having a say in the telling of his own story,” Allen told the Post.

Discussing the Middle East, Leo criticized the lack of a clear U.S. response under Trump to "alleviate the suffering of the people, the innocent people in Gaza," which he said is "obviously of great concern."

The pope said in the July interview that the Holy See could not at that time officially label the war in Gaza as a genocide. A team of experts commissioned by the U.N.'s Human Rights Council concluded that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza in a report published on Sept. 16.



Pope Leo XIV talks to visitors and pilgrims during his weekly general audience in the Paul VI Audience Hall at the Vatican Aug. 27, 2025. He ended the audience with a strong appeal for an end to the fighting in Gaza. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

A Chicago native and the first pope from the United States, Leo said his nationality could "make a difference eventually with the bishops in the United States," giving the messaging out of Rome more credibility among the American episcopate than under Pope Francis.

"The fact that I am American means, among other things, people can't say, like they did about Francis, 'He doesn't understand the United States, he just doesn't see what's going on.' I think that's significant in this case," Leo said.

Francis' tensions with the U.S. episcopacy were well documented and occasionally spilled into public view. The late pope removed the firebrand conservative Bishop Joseph Strickland from his post leading the Diocese of Tyler, Texas, in November 2023, and Francis sharply criticized the "very strong, reactionary attitude" of the U.S. church in response to a question about his critics in the United States, including American bishops, earlier that year.

In February, Francis sent a letter to American bishops denouncing the U.S. government's mass deportation program under Trump and countering a claim from Vice President JD Vance that Catholic teaching justifies prioritizing care for U.S. citizens over migrants.

As cardinal and prefect of the Dicastery of Bishops, the future Pope Leo reposted an article on X from the National Catholic Reporter with the headline: "JD Vance is wrong: Jesus doesn't ask us to rank our love for others."

"I don't plan to get involved in partisan politics. That's not what the church is about," Leo said in the Crux interview. He added that in a conversation with Vance he "talked about human dignity and how important that is for all people, wherever you're born."

"Obviously, there's some things going on in the [United] States that are of concern. We continue to look for ways to at least respond and raise some of the questions that need to be asked," he said.



Pope Leo XIV speaks with Elise Ann Allen of Crux on July 30, 2025. (Crux photo)

Conversation, but no change to church teaching

On matters of church teaching, Leo said he is not looking to enact doctrinal change but to continue an attitude of inclusion for the church and promote conversation around contentious issues.

Though he has expressed a desire to continue his predecessor's legacy of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the church, Leo noted that for many Catholics outside the West, sexual identity is "not a primary issue in terms of how we should deal with one another."

"I confess, that's on the back of my mind, because, as we've seen at the synod, any issue dealing with the LGBTQ questions is highly polarizing within the church," he said. "For now, because of what I've already tried to demonstrate and live out in terms of my understanding of being pope at this time in history, I'm trying not to continue to polarize or promote polarization in the church."

"I think it's very important, again, to understand how to accept others who are different than we are, how to accept people who make choices in their life and to respect them," the pope said. "I find it highly unlikely, certainly in the immediate future, that the church's doctrine in terms of what the church teaches about sexuality, what the church teaches about marriage, [will change]," he added.

Leo's Sept. 1 meeting with Jesuit Fr. James Martin, a prominent advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusivity within the church, was widely interpreted as a signal of continuity with the priority on inclusivity established by his predecessor. Days later, the Italian bishop who celebrated Mass for a Jubilee pilgrimage of LGBTQ+ Catholics in Rome said the pope had personally encouraged him to do so.

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On the question of ordaining women to the diaconate, Leo struck a cautious tone, affirming that no change is currently on the table.

"I at the moment don't have an intention of changing the teaching of the church on the topic," he said. "I think there are some previous questions that have to be asked."

He offered a similarly measured response on debates surrounding the pre-Vatican II form of the Mass, which has become a flashpoint in certain ecclesial circles following restrictions introduced under Pope Francis.

"I'm not sure where that's going to go," Leo said, linking the issue to the "process of polarization" within the church: "People have used the liturgy as an excuse for advancing other topics. It's become a political tool and that's very unfortunate."

Leo shows his administrative chops

In addition to improving internal coordination, Leo is also looking to reset perceptions of the Vatican's finances, which he said are "not the crisis that people have been led to believe."

"I've been on a couple of the different councils since I've been here," he said, referring to his role in the Curia prior to the papacy. "Things are going to be OK, but we do have to continue the process of reform that Francis began."

While acknowledging lingering financial challenges — including pensions and recovering from pandemic-era revenue losses — Leo said he's "not losing sleep" over the situation but emphasized the need to regain the trust of the faithful in its stewardship.

On the clergy abuse crisis, Leo acknowledged that many in church leadership remain "novices" in walking with survivors and said learning to support victims will require collaboration with professionals outside the church. "I think there is one of the areas where we continue to need the help of professionals to assist us with that and to accompany the victims," he said.

While insisting that the church cannot be defined solely by the sex abuse crisis, Leo emphasized it remains a central and unfinished task.

"I think this is a real crisis, the other one not so — finances — that the church has to continue to address because it's not solved," he said.

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