Opinion
Guest Voices



Pope Leo XIV sits with Elise Allen, senior correspondent at Crux, for an interview at the pope's residence inside the Vatican's Palazzo Sant'Uffizio July 30, 2025. (CNS/courtesy Crux)



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When Pope Leo XIV was elected, many people asked me about him. My response was that we would have to wait six months to a year before we really understand who he is.

Four months after his election, in an interview with Elise Ann Allen of Crux, Leo began to reveal himself. He came across as a smart but careful canon lawyer who is not going to reject the reforms of Pope Francis, but neither is he going to quickly move beyond them.

Leo revealed himself as much by what he did not say as by what he did. No memorable quote is in the interview as there was in Francis' first interview, when he said, "I am not going to obsess over abortion." Nor is there any response like "Who am I to judge?" which Francis said at a 2013 press conference answering a question about gay priests.

Like a good lawyer, Leo answered the questions without making headlines. He seemed to not want to risk saying anything that could be misinterpreted.



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. (CNS/courtesy Crux)

This confirmed what we saw on the day of his election, when his first words were from written text, whereas Francis' words on his election day appeared to be spontaneous. Everyone remembers Francis' informal "buona sera" (good evening) from St. Peter's balcony and him asking the people to pray over him before he blessed them. Can you remember anything Leo said or did on his first day, other than the fact that he was dressed like Pope Benedict?

But Leo is not Benedict. His answers were not heavily dosed with complicated theology and philosophy like Benedict or John Paul II. His answers were clear but nuanced — as a good lawyer.

Leo never distanced himself from Francis during the interview, even on controversial issues.

Asked about gay couples, Leo said, "What I'm trying to say is what Francis said very clearly when he would say, 'todos, todos, todos,'" which, when translated, means "everyone, everyone, everyone."

He, like Francis, approved blessing gay people like everyone else, but criticized doing it as a public ritual as some wanted.

"In Northern Europe they are already publishing rituals of blessing 'people who love one another,' is the way they express it," he said. This "goes specifically against the document that Pope Francis approved, Fiducia Supplicans, which basically says, of course we can bless all people, but it doesn't look for a way of ritualizing some kind of blessing because that's not what the church teaches."

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Likewise, he is going slow on the issue of women deacons, which he noted has "been studied for many years now." Like Francis, he said, "I at the moment don't have an intention of changing the teaching of the church on the topic." He, like Francis, said he worried about clericalizing women.

But he also raised new questions, noting that the deaconate has not been promoted in parts of the world. This is especially true in Africa, where bishops preferred having catechists rather than deacons.

"Why would we talk about ordaining women to the diaconate," he asked, "if the diaconate itself is not yet properly understood and properly developed and promoted within the church?"

While some had hoped that Leo would liberalize use of the traditional Latin Mass, here he noted, as Francis did, that "you can say Mass in Latin right now. If it's the Vatican II rite there's no problem." Like Francis, he said he believed "that part of that

issue, unfortunately, has become — again, part of a process of polarization — (that) people have used the liturgy as an excuse for advancing other topics. It's become a political tool, and that's very unfortunate."

Additionally, he said he believed that "'abuse' of the liturgy from what we call the Vatican II Mass was not helpful for people who were looking for a deeper experience of prayer, of contact with the mystery of faith that they seemed to find in the celebration of the Tridentine Mass." He believes that "if we celebrate the Vatican II liturgy in a proper way," the desire for the Tridentine Mass would decline.



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But he gave some hope to supporters of the Tridentine Mass by indicating that he plans to "sit down with a group of people who are advocating for the Tridentine rite," something Francis would not do. Leo's willingness to talk with Tridentine Mass supporters comes from his commitment to synodality, a signature feature of Francis' papacy. But Francis criticized supporters of the Tridentine Mass for being ideological and out of communion with the church, while Leo seems willing to connect in a synodal way with its supporters — still realizing that ideological commitments may hinder conversation.

Leo appears very committed to synodality, which he described as "an attitude, an openness, a willingness to understand, speaking of the church now, that each and every member of the church has a voice and a role to play."

He pointed to the process of prayer and reflection "that was used in the recent synod, which has been called 'conversation in the spirit.'" But he indicated he is not locked into only one way of being synodal: "There's many ways that that could happen, of dialogue and respect of one another. To bring people together and to understand that relationship, that interaction, that creating opportunities of encounter, is an important dimension of how we live our life as church."

Leo is not going to return the papacy to the authoritarian model of the past. He, like Francis, will allow and even encourage conversation and dialogue. He is not afraid to say he has not made up his mind on some issues and that he hopes we can come together and resolve problems in a synodal manner.

But the synodal process does not turn the church into a democracy. Those who know Leo say he will listen to everyone but eventually make a firm decision even if it disappoints some people.

Under Leo, I expect we will have fewer surprises and headlines than we did under Francis, but he has not changed the course of the Barque of Peter. He is not turning the ship around, nor is he shouting, "Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead." Rather, it is "steady as she goes."