Vatican



Capt. Lorenz Keusch poses for reporters during the presentation of the Swiss Guard Mezza-Gala uniform in the Swiss Guard Barracks at the Vatican, Oct. 2, 2025. (AP photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

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The world's oldest army has new uniforms.

But don't worry: The Swiss Guards' famed blue, yellow and red Renaissance-style billowy garb isn't going anywhere. Rather, the pope's army on Thursday (Oct. 2) unveiled an additional uniform for nonceremonial, formal occasions, such as a diplomatic reception or official dinner outside the Vatican walls.

Col. Christoph Graf, the Swiss Guards commander, donned the new duds at a presentation ceremony in the army's barracks ahead of the annual swearing-in ceremony Saturday of 27 new recruits.



Lt. Col. Loic Marc Rossier, left, and Capt. Lorenz Keusch pose for reporters as they present the Swiss Guard Mezza-Gala uniform in the Swiss Guard Barracks at the Vatican, Oct. 2, 2025. (AP photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

Graf explained that the new black wool uniform, with two rows of buttons, a yellow and white belt and Mao-style collar, is actually a faithful rendition of a centuries-old suit worn by Swiss Guard officials that went out of use in 1976.

The corps tried an update a decade ago, didn't like it, and commissioned a more faithful version that will get its first official use at a gala reception Friday on the eve of the swearing-in. An unnamed benefactor footed the bill for the uniforms, worn by just the senior ranks, which cost around 2,000 euros ($2,300) apiece, officials said.



From left, Capt. Lorenz Keusch, Col. Christoph Graf, Lt. Col. Loic Marc Rossier and Vice Cpl. Eliah Cinotti attend a press conference on the occasion of the presentation of the Swiss Guard Mezza-Gala uniform in the Swiss Guard Barracks at the Vatican, Oct. 2, 2025. (AP photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

The world's oldest and smallest army

The corps, which historians consider the oldest standing army in the world, was founded in 1506 by Pope Giulio II. Tradition has it that he was so impressed by the bravery of Swiss mercenaries that he asked them to defend the Vatican. Ever since, for more than 500 years, Switzerland has been supplying soldiers to the Vatican to staff an army of 135 men.

Usually, the swearing-in ceremony is held on or near May 6 to commemorate the day in 1527 when 147 guardsmen died while protecting Pope Clement VII during the Sack of Rome.

This year's ceremony was postponed following the death in April of Pope Francis and the conclave that elected Pope Leo XIV.

The new uniform is one of several outfits the guards wear. The most famous is the "Gala Uniform," which despite popular legend was not designed by Michelangelo. Rather, it was designed by Commander Jules Repond in the early 1900s and is based on the colors of the Medici family, according to the corps' website.

Visitors to the Vatican will also see guards policing the city state's main entrances in navy uniforms topped with a beret.



A view of the Swiss Guard Barracks at the Vatican, Oct. 2, 2025. (AP photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

A new barracks that may, or not, have women

This year's ceremony comes as plans are progressing to renovate the aging barracks for the guards to make better use of the space and increase the number of dormitory-style rooms that could, in theory, one day allow for female recruits.

There are currently no such plans, but the barracks' cramped housing has long been cited as one of the reasons why women couldn't be admitted. The new architectural plans call for a flexible configuration of the buildings that could, if the pope were to approve it one day, allow for a female section, said Jean-Pierre Roth, president of the foundation created in 2016 to raise money for the renovation of the barracks.

"This is not our decision," he stressed. "The only thing we have done is that when everything is ready, if we want a special section for females, it's possible, no

problem."

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The renovation process is complicated given Vatican City is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which means any renovation must be approved by the U.N. body's technical experts. The Vatican received the first green light to its architectural plans in 2023 and is expected to present revised plans in the coming weeks, Roth said.

Roth, the former president of the Swiss National Bank, said 48 million euros had so far been raised in cash and financial pledges, but that construction costs in Rome had increased significantly since the first budgets were prepared and that a new fundraising appeal would be launched in 2026.

Originally, there were hopes to unveil the new barracks in 2027, the 500th anniversary of the Sack of Rome. Now, the hopes are that the construction can begin in 2027, Roth said.



Dario, a new Swiss Guard poses for photos in the Swiss Guard Barracks at the Vatican, Oct. 2, 2025. (AP photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

A big year for new recruits

The criteria for entry into the army are strict: Guards must be Swiss, male, practicing Catholics, aged 19-30, at least 1.74-meters (5-foot-7-inch) tall and have an "impeccable reputation. They must be in good health, have a high school diploma or equivalent and have completed Swiss military training.

They need a driver's license and be willing to serve for at least 26 months. Most guards are unmarried, but recruits 25 and older are allowed to marry if they have already served for five years and pledge to stay on for another three.

One of the new recruits being sworn-in on Saturday, identified by the corps by his first name, Dario, for security reasons, said he grew up knowing of the guards because his father had served from 1989-1991, and decided to join himself after attending a friend's swearing-in ceremony in 2023.

Dario started in January, and has already been on duty during one of the most momentous years in recent Vatican history: A Jubilee year that brought millions of pilgrims to Rome, and the death of one pope and the election of another.

"What we have experienced now in this one year alone, other Swiss Guards haven't experienced in their whole service time," he said. Speaking in the barracks' courtyard, Dario said there were a lot of hours of extra work, but that's what the job is all about.

"You are here to serve, not to go on vacation in Rome," he said.