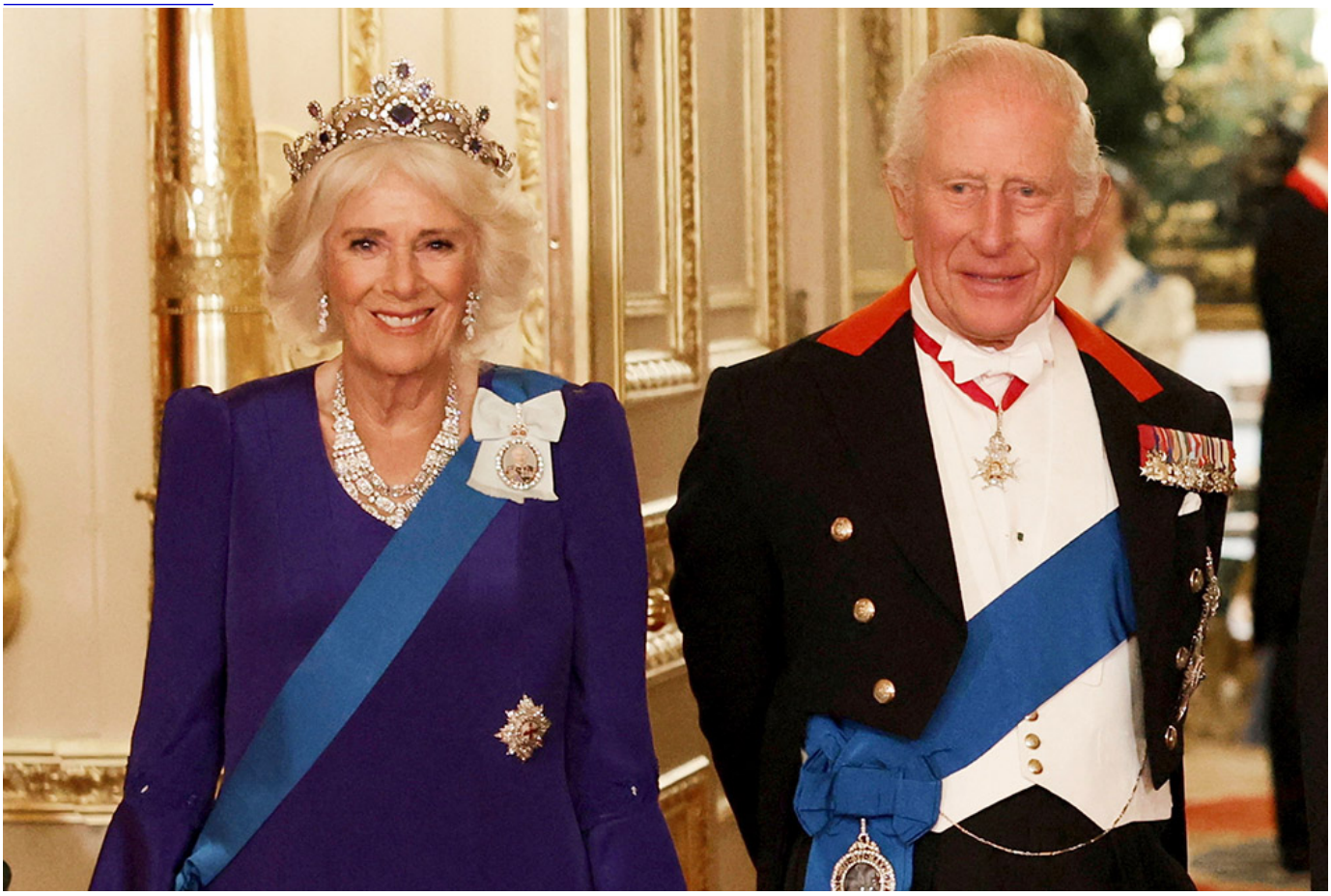
Vatican

Vatican News



Britain's Queen Camilla, left, and King Charles III, right, pose for a photo before a State Banquet at Windsor Castle, in Windsor, England, Sept. 17, 2025. (Phil Noble/Pool Photo via AP, file)

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Vatican City — October 17, 2025

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The Catholic Church and Church of England, divided for centuries over issues that now include the ordination of female priests, will take a historic step on the path to unity next week when Britain's King Charles III and Pope Leo XIV pray together in the Sistine Chapel, officials said Friday.

The Oct. 23 ecumenical prayer service, drawing on the shared concern for care of God's creation, marks the first time since the Reformation that the heads of the two Christian churches pray together.

Buckingham Palace and Vatican officials on Oct. 17 announced details of the two-day trip that Charles and Queen Camilla will undertake on Oct. 22-23, a visit that was scheduled for April but was postponed after Pope Francis' final illness, shortly before his death.

Charles, who is titular head of the Church of England, strongly wanted to visit the Vatican during the 2025 Holy Year, a once-every-quarter century celebration of Christianity. In doing so, he is following in the footsteps of his late mother, Queen Elizabeth II, who visited during the 2000 Jubilee, said Msgr. Flavio Pace, secretary of the Vatican's office for promoting Christian unity.

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During the visit, Charles will be given a formal new title and recognition at a pontifical basilica that has strong, traditional ties to the Church of England, St. Paul's Outside the Walls. The title "Royal Confrater," is a sign of spiritual fellowship and will be given to Charles along with a special chair decorated with his coat of arms that will remain in the basilica for Charles and his heirs to use, officials said.

Anglicans split from the Catholic Church in 1534 when English King Henry VIII was refused a marriage annulment. While popes for decades have forged warm relations with the Church of England and the broader Anglican Communion on a path toward greater unity, the two churches remain divided over issues such as the ordination of female priests, which the Catholic Church prohibits.

Significantly, the Archbishop of Canterbury-designate, Sarah Mullally, will not join the king and queen since she hasn't been formally installed as the Church of England's spiritual leader. She is the first woman to hold the position, which is considered the first among equals in the broader Anglican Communion, which has more than 85 million members spread across 165 countries.

In her place, the archbishop of York will preside with Leo in the Sistine Chapel service, which will feature hymns sung by members of the royal choirs alongside the Sistine Chapel choir, Pace said.

Pace dodged a question about whether the Sistine Chapel service would have gone ahead as planned had Mullally been installed in time and joined the king and queen on the visit. He noted past joint statements of the Catholic and Anglican churches acknowledging their differences over women's ordination but insisting that such obstacles shouldn't prevent theological dialogue from continuing.

Charles and Camilla's trip was originally scheduled for April as part of a joint Vatican-Italy state visit. After Francis got sick, the king and queen went ahead with the planned four-day leg in Italy, and briefly greeted Francis at the Vatican just a few weeks before he died.

Read this next: Sarah Mullally named the first female Archbishop of Canterbury