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Pope Leo XIV holds a consistory with cardinals from around the world at the Vatican Jan. 8, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)



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Little is known publicly about the closed-door conversations held among the world's cardinals when they gathered in Rome last week for Pope Leo XIV's first extraordinary consistory.

But a leaked document distributed to cardinals during the meeting shows that, had the topic been taken up, discussion of the liturgy would have been framed firmly around the further application of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

Although the liturgy was not the focus of the Jan. 7-8 meeting of the 170 cardinals meeting in Rome, traditionalist Catholics were buoyed by the news that the liturgy would be among the topics proposed for their discussion.

Yet those hopes were dashed when it was announced that only two of the four topics proposed would be discussed in depth and that a "vast majority" of cardinals opted instead to discuss the church's mission and synodality. Reform of the Roman Curia was also sidelined.

Following the consistory, a document prepared to guide discussion on the liturgy, first reported by the Italian daily Il Giornale and later circulated online by writer Diane Montagna, shed light on how that conversation would have been framed.

The text, written by Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, was distributed to cardinals but never formally discussed, since the liturgy was not selected as a focal topic for the consistory's working sessions.

Yet in the document, Roche provides a defense of *Traditionis Custodes*, the papal decree that restricted the celebration of the Pre-Vatican II Latin Mass and provoked outrage among many traditionalist Catholics.

By limiting the older form of the Mass, Pope Francis "pointed the way to unity," Roche wrote, by establishing the reformed liturgy as "the sole expression of the *lex orandi* ('rule of prayer') of the Roman Rite."



Pope Leo XIV prays Jan. 8, 2026, during a consistory he held with cardinals from around the world at the Vatican. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

The liturgy has become a flashpoint for traditionalist Catholics who say their form of worship was unjustly targeted by Francis, who argued that restrictions were necessary to foster unity within the Latin rite.

Pope Benedict XVI relaxed rules around celebrating the pre-Vatican II Mass during his pontificate, but the use of that form was "a concession that in no way envisaged their promotion," Roche wrote.

"The reform of the Liturgy wanted by the Second Vatican Council is not only in full syntony with the true meaning of the Tradition, but constitutes a singular way of putting itself at the service of the Tradition," he wrote.

Quoting St. Pius V, the cardinal wrote that "there ought to be only one rite for celebrating the Mass."

Roche also stated that "the application of the Reform suffered and continues to suffer from a lack of formation."

"The primary good of the unity of the Church is not achieved by freezing division but by finding ourselves in the sharing of what cannot but be shared," he wrote.

The morning before the consistory began, Leo began a catechesis series at his general audience in which he described the Second Vatican Council as the "guiding star of the church's journey today."

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Ultimately, the consistory's discussions focused on the mission of the church in light of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation widely regarded as the roadmap of his pontificate and on synodality.

The guiding document for discussion of *Evangelii Gaudium* was prepared by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. According to Il Giornale, Fernández emphasized that evangelization should not be understood as "an obsessive proclamation of all the doctrines and rules of the Church."

He also called for renewed attention to preaching, urging that homilies not remain fixated on "the same doctrinal, moral, bioethical, and political issues."

The document guiding discussion on synodality was authored by Cardinal Mario Grech, secretary-general of the Synod of Bishops, who stressed the need to foster synodal practices at all levels of church life.

The text prepared for discussion on reform of the Roman Curia was written by Cardinal Fabio Baggio, undersecretary of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, who articulated the need for a Curia at the service of the pope and of the world's bishops.

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