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Pope Leo XIV meets with former classmates who graduated from the lower school of St. Mary of the Assumption in Chicago in 1969 after the general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 18, 2026. (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Once a young teenager wearing a cap and gown for his eighth-grade graduation photo in Chicago, today the famous former-student posed for a reunion picture wearing his papal zucchetto and cassock at the Vatican.

Pope Leo XIV, who graduated from the lower school of St. Mary of the Assumption on the city's South Side in 1969, greeted and reminisced with 10 of his 82 former classmates after the general audience in St. Peter's Square March 18.

"Sorry! I'm nervous," laughed Sherry Stone (née Blue) after a small sign saying, "God bless you Pope Leo," slipped from her grasp when she reached out to shake the hand of her former classmate — Robert F. Prevost.

The pope proudly held up their old graduation photo as they posed for another photo together, almost 60 years later.

"Here he is, our friend, the pope," Jerome Clemens told the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano, pointing to the black-and-white image of the 13-year-old Prevost. Clemens then showed the back of the class photo with Prevost's old autograph and his new one that was signed, "Leo XIV."

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Among the small gifts they brought was the 2025 fall issue of "Air Chicago," a color magazine produced for passengers coming through Chicago's O'Hare and Midway airports, whose cover story was the election of a pope from Chicago.

The group came to Rome and the general audience to show their camaraderie and embrace once again their former classmate — now the 266th successor of St. Peter, the newspaper reported.

John Riggio told the newspaper about the close-knit atmosphere at the school, saying it was more like a family.

In fact, the pope's mother, Mildred Agnes Prevost, worked there as a librarian and was also actively involved with the school and parish, Stone said.

She told The Lansing Journal last May, right after her classmate's election by the College of Cardinals, that she had remembered him making a comment when they were young, "that he wanted to grow up to be pope."

"When he was in the conclave, I thought, 'Could it be him? Could Bob be the new pope? No, probably not,'" Stone had told the Journal. "When I saw that it was him, I was just amazed. I was crying tears of joy."

She had said he was kind, humble and well-liked by his classmates. "He was a super nice guy, but not nerdy."

Following his middle school graduation, Prevost went on to attend the Augustinians' St. Augustine Seminary High School near Saugatuck, Michigan, where he graduated in 1973, followed by enrolling in Villanova University, an Augustinian college located near Philadelphia, where he earned a Bachelor of Science degree in mathematics in 1977.