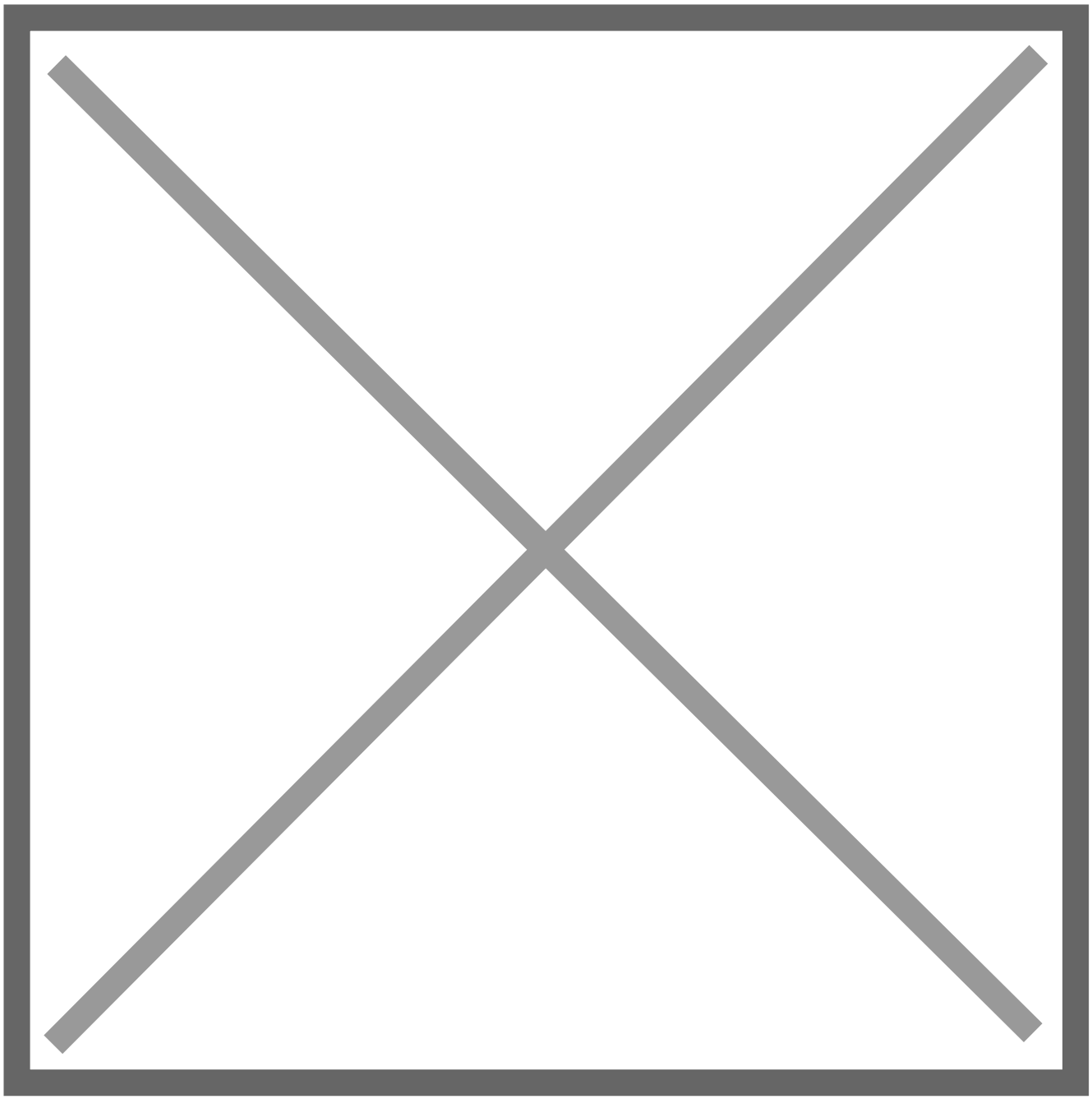
News



Pope Leo XIV celebrates Mass at the Basilica of St. Augustine in Annaba, Algeria, April 14, 2026. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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One year in, Pope Leo XIV's papacy has been rooted in truth, unity and love — the distinct gifts of his religious order, the Order of St. Augustine — making him a shepherd who leads with a blend of bridge-building and truth-telling, according to those who know him well and from afar.

A panel made up of a brother bishop, a brother in the order, a student, an academic and a journalist each shared their take on the first American pope's pastoral and prophetic style a year after his election at the Augustinian-run Villanova University April 28.

"He embodied the very essence of caritas, showing that the pursuit of truth is empty, if it does not begin with a heart that beats in solidarity with those who suffer," said Jaisy Joseph, assistant professor of theology and religious studies at Villanova. "In many ways, this Augustinian spirituality that shapes Leo's pastoral heart, also contributes to a much-needed, prophetic voice."

Joseph underscored Leo's message to the diplomatic corps at the beginning of the year, "warning that … 'war is back in vogue.'" In his first year, he "has challenged the global community to choose a different path. One, where our relationships are shaped by the heart, rather than a negotiation of power."

Joseph said Leo's "pastoral and prophetic approach offers a profound guiding light."

"By embodying unity, truth and love, Leo demonstrates that these are not merely abstract ideals, but a dynamic blueprint for active global citizenship," she added.

On that campus, where Leo, as young Robert Prevost, completed his undergraduate degree in math in 1977, students have pondered what it has meant to have one of their ranks in the seat of Peter.

Hannah Kalamarides, a civil engineering major graduating this year, said there has been a lot of excitement around the pope having walked their halls. But this also has brought something more significant.

"We cannot claim that we have a Villanovan pope if we're not also willing to take on the responsibility of what that means," she said. "It means that we need to continually search for the truth. And it means that we need to always treat the people in front of us with human dignity and support common good. And we need to be unapologetic in our search for that."

Kalamarides, the school's first synodal fellow with Villanova's Office for Mission and Ministry, participated in the Jubilee Year for the Synod in Rome in October. There, she said, she was struck by the way Leo led the young people gathered toward looking "higher, to take what we had originally thought, and to become more Christlike."

Since Leo's election to the papacy May 8, 2025, Cardinal Robert McElroy of Washington has observed the pope's handling of divisions in the Church "by seeking to integrate the different elements within the life of the Church and the leadership of the Church."

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"And he's particularly done that concretely here in the United States. ... And in the United States, there has been, as you're well aware, polarization within the bishops on certain issues of public policy. And the pope has guided us in a certain way toward an integration that has resulted in, last November at the conference meeting, a greater commitment, both of unity and substance, and unity in terms of education, energy and commitment, on any issue that I've ever seen in my 15 years

of being bishop," said McElroy.

McElroy also remarked on Leo's approach to "synodality" furthering the Church practice of listening to the concerns of others across a very broad spectrum, which was a hallmark of Pope Francis' papacy.

He said, "Pope Leo is dedicated to truly bringing it into the heart and the soul, the life of the Church, in all of those dimensions, as a pastoral action, to animate us in our pastoral life. With the core elements of synodality ... inclusion, conversation, dedication to the Eucharist and to the Word of God, that have (us) walking together in a pilgrimage on this earth."

Augustinian Fr. John Lydon, who lived and served with Leo in northwest Peru for 10 years in the 1990s, said synodality was part of his close friend's priesthood decades before Francis brought the concept forth.

"Both of us were young priests. We began in Peru, our pastoral ministry, and we were taught by the Augustinians that were already there ... about building a Church of the laity, and dividing the Church up and going to the people, not having the people come to you. That's part of his DNA, in priesthood," said Lydon.

"I am totally convinced that that's going to be a guiding principle of his pastoral vision, that we're all co-responsible for the Church. And we all have to play a part in the life of the Church," he said.

Lydon also gave an example of Leo remaining true to the Augustinian charism of veritas — truth. In receiving credentials from ambassadors of 13 countries in December, the pope stressed "the Holy See will not be a silent bystander to the grave disparities, injustices and fundamental human rights violations in our global community."

"It's a speaking of truth from a moral lens. It's the speaking of truth, which we don't maybe always want to hear," said the priest.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV's First Year** feature series. View the full series.