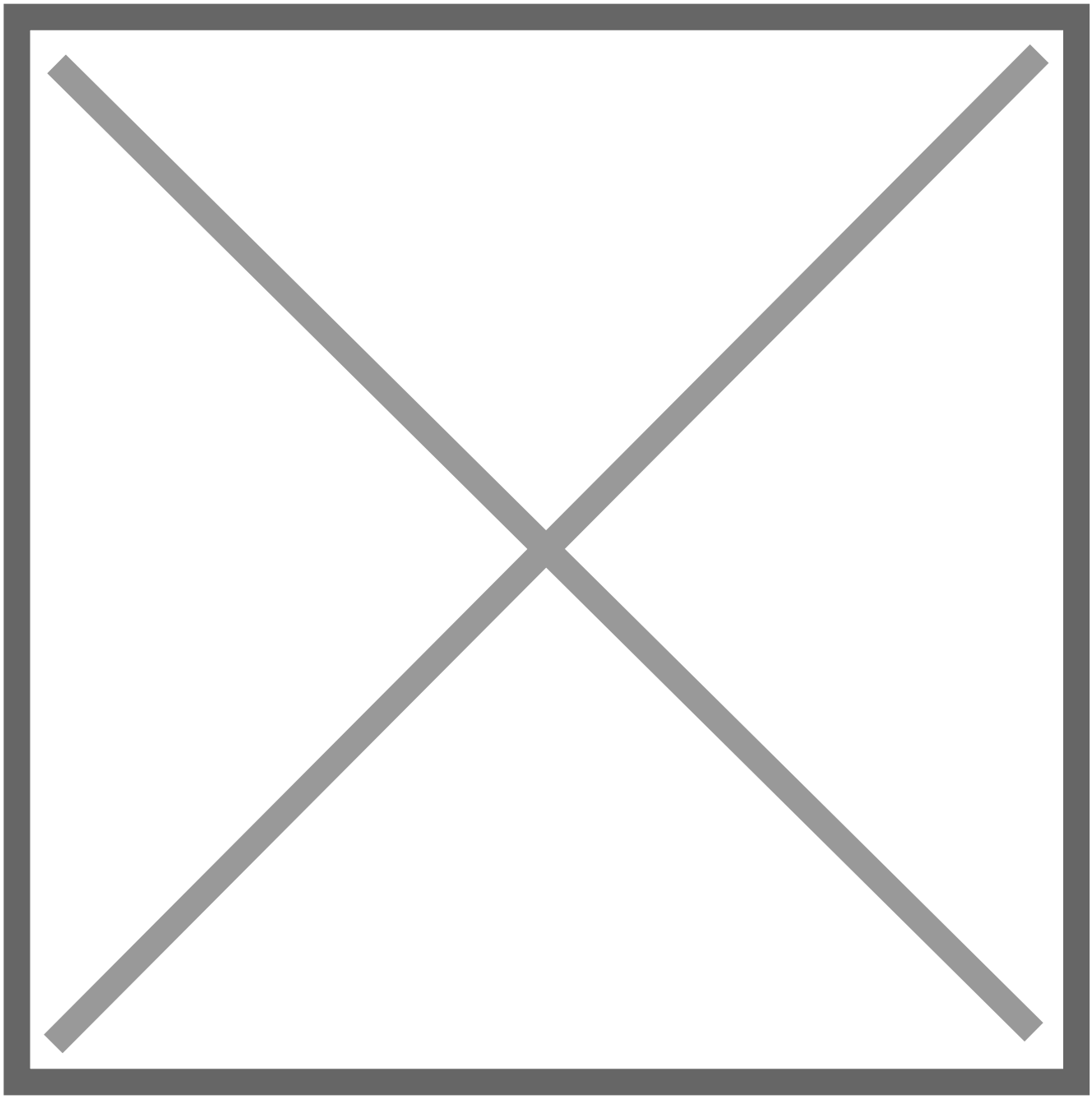
Vatican
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Pope Leo XIV waves as he boards the papal plane ahead of his first apostolic journey to Turkey and Lebanon, at Fiumicino Airport, near Rome, Nov. 27, 2025. Ahead of the first anniversary of Pope Leo XIV's election, the French bishops' conference confirmed on May 6, 2026, that the pope is officially expected to visit France in late September. (OSV News/Reuters/Remo Casilli)

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Ahead of the first anniversary of his election to the chair of St. Peter, it was announced that Pope Leo XIV is officially expected to visit France in late September, the French bishops' conference confirmed May 6.

During the visit, French bishops suggested Leo will travel to Paris and to the Marian Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes. "I have had several working sessions with the pope, including one last week, during which we drafted a preliminary itinerary," Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseille, president of the French bishops' conference, said in the press release.

The French bishops have not yet announced the exact date of the papal visit. For several weeks now, rumors have been circulating in the Paris region that it could take place around Sept. 19. Some bishops have communicated this date to their parish priests so they can adjust their parish schedules accordingly. But this remains to be confirmed by the Vatican.

In March, Aveline, who frequently visits the Vatican, had already openly informed the bishops of France during their spring plenary assembly that he had invited Leo.

September was mentioned in the media as a favorable time. The visit would then fall just before the start of the campaign for the upcoming presidential elections, which

will take place in the spring of 2027, and which will bring an end to Emmanuel Macron's two five-year terms as president of the republic.

On April 10, Macron confirmed that he, too, had invited Leo during his meeting with the pope at the Vatican. Among the members of the delegation accompanying Macron to the Vatican was the rector of the Sanctuary of Lourdes, Fr. Michel Daubanes.

"It is absolutely clear that the pope is coming to Lourdes!" he later exclaimed in a video interview from the Sanctuary of Lourdes, broadcasted April 24. "We are eagerly awaiting him!"

As of May 6, the day of the announcement, logistical preparations for the pope's visit were well underway in Lourdes. "We have developed a preliminary program with the presidency of the bishops' conference and with the Archdiocese of Paris," Bishop Jean-Marc Micas of Tarbes and Lourdes told OSV News. "It is planned that the pope will celebrate a solemn Mass on the sanctuary's lawn and preside over the torchlight procession in the evening, before spending the night there, though we are awaiting confirmation from the Vatican."

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"The 320 employees of the Sanctuary of Lourdes are absolutely delighted by this prospect," Micas added. "But we now need to assemble larger teams to manage such an event and to continue welcoming the pilgrims and the sick who will come at that time. We must encourage people to come then, without letting themselves be intimidated by the security measures," he said, adding with emotion: "It will be a great celebration!"

For the bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes, the pope's visit is "really a great joy."

"I spoke with him about it last June, and he assured me that he truly wanted to come," he explained. "He has already been to Lourdes twice before, when he was 19 and when he was 29. That was quite a while ago," Micas said.

Commenting on the projected visit of the first American pope to Lourdes, Micas said that "many Americans are attached to Lourdes," adding that many arrived at the Sanctuary for the Order of Malta pilgrimage, which took place from May 1 to 5. "And

in 2022, the four-month tour of the relics of St. Bernadette, to whom Our Lady appeared in Lourdes, was a huge success," in the U.S., Bishop Micas noted. "Since then, I have met with American bishops who are ready to host them for a longer period — a full year," he said.

For Micas, the pope's visit is "of great importance not only for the sanctuary, but also for all those attached to it throughout the world."

"I am currently in Southern Italy where I see images of Our Lady of Lourdes in every parish," the bishop told OSV News. "All over the world there are people attached to Lourdes, starting with the sick, for whom Lourdes is of great importance."

In Paris, the pope is expected to visit Notre Dame Cathedral, as well as the Collège des Bernardins, although nothing has yet been officially confirmed. Located very close to Notre Dame, the Collège des Bernardins is a former Cistercian college of the historic University of Paris, dating from the 13th century, which the Archdiocese of Paris has renovated to serve as a venue for high-level intellectual and cultural gatherings.

Pope Benedict XIV visited the site on Sept. 12, 2008, to deliver a speech to cultural figures and political leaders. He then traveled to Lourdes as well.

Pope Francis made three apostolic trips to France: to Strasbourg in 2014, to Marseille in 2023 and to Corsica in December 2024 for specific occasions and a brief time. The state visit to France, however, has never been planned, and Francis did not intend to visit Notre Dame in 2024 as it was reopened five years after the fire that had devastated it on April 15, 2019.

Leo bears a name of French origin and has repeatedly expressed his desire to visit France officially. "He has expressed, on various occasions, the great esteem he holds for our country and its spiritual history," Aveline said in the press release. "His visit would be an opportunity to share with the pope what our Church in France is experiencing, and to be encouraged by his words."

The statement from the bishops' conference said that "pending the Holy See's official announcement of this apostolic journey, the bishops of France invite all the faithful to keep the preparation for this event in their prayers."

This story appears in the **Pope Leo in France** feature series. View the full series.