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Chicago's Mayor Brandon Johnson attends a press briefing in Rome, Thursday, May 28, 2026. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

by Associated Press

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Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson on Thursday invited Pope Leo XIV to visit his native Chicago next year during a private meeting with the pontiff at the Vatican.

In a letter that Johnson handed to the pontiff, the mayor recalled Pope John Paul II's visit to Chicago and Mass in Grant Park on Oct. 5, 1979, "forever remembered as the most spiritually inspiring day in Chicago history."

"Your Holiness, you were a young priest-in-training at the time. Perhaps you were there. Perhaps you would consider a repeat Papal visit nearly 50 years later to share your own message of hope, unity and service," Johnson wrote.

Johnson, who grew up the son of a pastor, invited the pope to say Mass in Grant Park in 2027, noting that Chicago is home to one of the largest Catholic populations in the United States.

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It's at least the second official invitation that Leo has received to visit the United States. U.S. Vice President JD Vance invited Leo soon after he became pope last May.

Leo was born Robert Prevost in 1955 in the South Side of Chicago neighborhood of Bronzeville and grew up in suburban Dolton, near St. Mary of the Assumption, where he attended Mass and elementary school.

He later studied theology at the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago in Hyde Park and taught in local Catholic schools.