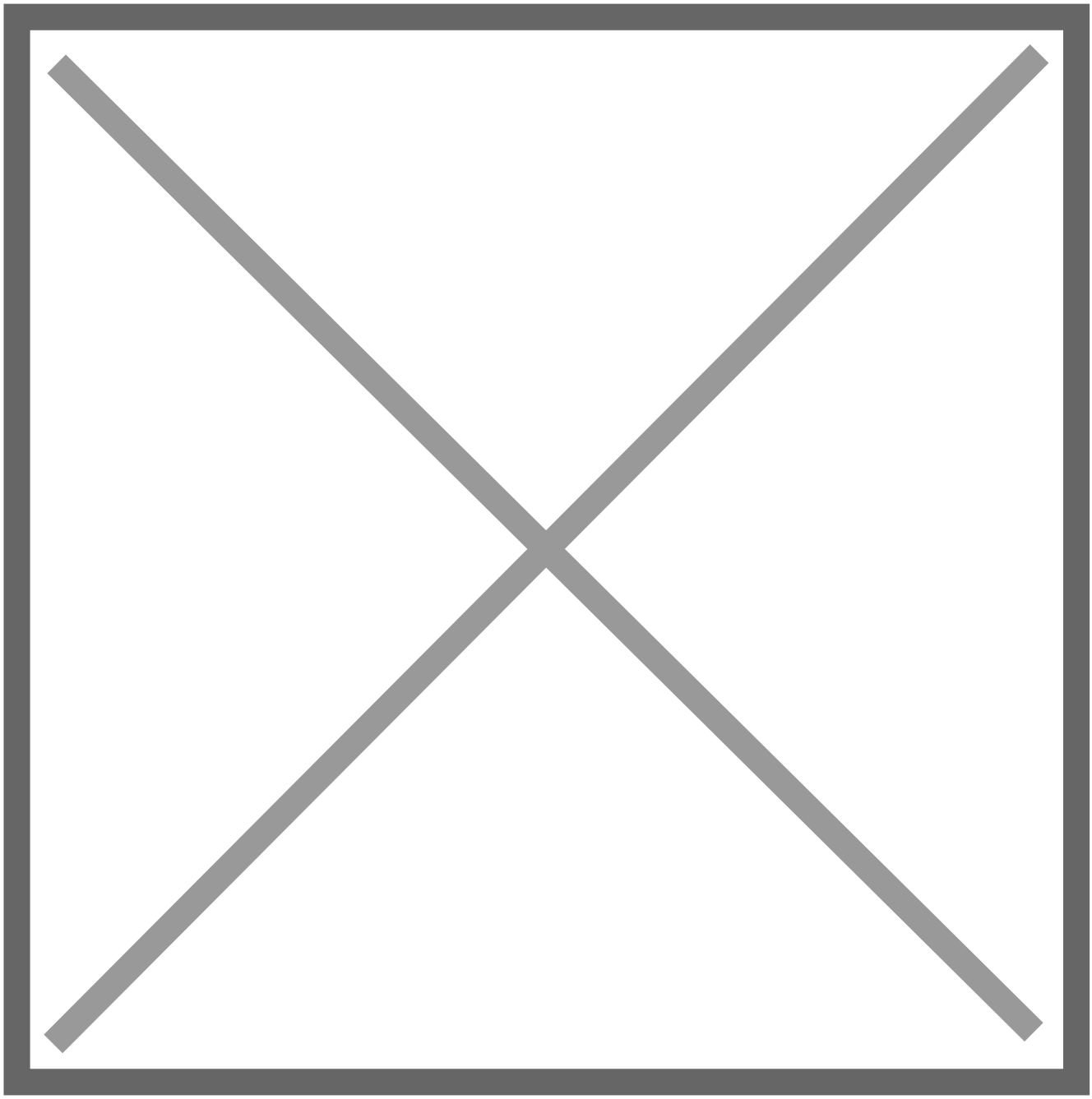
Vatican
Vatican News



Pope Leo XIV waves after meeting with participants in the general assembly of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Clementine Hall at the Vatican June 1, 2026. During the meeting, Leo praised Venerable Fulton Sheen as "a light of faith, hope, and love" whose radio and television broadcasts brought the Gospel to millions of Americans — including the pope himself as a child. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

Courtney Mares

View Author Profile



OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — June 2, 2026
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Pope Leo XIV praised Venerable Fulton Sheen on June 1 as "a light of faith, hope, and love" whose radio and television broadcasts brought the Gospel to millions of Americans — including the pope himself as a child.

Speaking at a Vatican audience with members of the Pontifical Mission Societies, the pope called it providential that the beloved archbishop will be beatified during the centennial year of the Pontifical Mission Societies he once led as the national director of the U.S. Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

"Archbishop Sheen was a light of faith, hope, and love that shone through the radio and television media for decades," Leo said.

"I myself am a witness of his evangelization when I was growing up," the pope added. "His broadcasts touched millions with the hope of the Gospel and his initiatives and efforts resulted in enormous spiritual and material aid to the Churches in areas of first evangelization."

The beatification of Sheen is scheduled for Sept. 24 in St. Louis. His beatification had previously been postponed by the Vatican in 2019. Sheen was declared venerable in 2012. Beatification is the final step before canonization; Sheen will require one more miracle attributed to his intercession to be declared a saint.

"May our new Blessed be an example for all of the National and Diocesan Directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies throughout the world," the pope said.

Leo, 70, has said that he watched Sheen's television program as a child. The American pope was elected last year on Sheen's birthday.

Born in El Paso, Illinois, on May 8, 1895, Sheen was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Peoria on Sept. 20, 1919. He went on to become one of the most recognized Catholic voices in American history, rising to national prominence during the 1930s and 1940s as host of "The Catholic Hour" on NBC radio.

Beginning in 1952, then-Bishop Sheen reached tens of millions of viewers each Tuesday evening through his television program "Life Is Worth Living." Armed with little more than his intellect, charisma, a cape and a chalkboard, he won an Emmy Award for best television personality after his first season, famously thanking his writers: "Matthew, Mark, Luke and John."

Throughout his 60-year priesthood, Sheen sought to conform himself more closely to Christ by observing a daily Eucharistic Holy Hour, what he called "the hour that makes my day."

He also was intensely devoted to the Mother of God.

For 16 years, Sheen served as the national director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, one of the four Pontifical Mission Societies, during which he sought to form American Catholics in missionary spirituality and identity and help raise funds to spread the faith and build the Church across the globe.

Advertisement

According to Msgr. Roger Landry, the current national director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the U.S., Sheen donated more than $10 million of his media earnings to the missions during his lifetime, raised $200 million for missionary work (the equivalent of nearly $2.1 billion today) and left 40% of his estate along with book royalties to the ongoing work of evangelization.

"It would be almost impossible to enumerate the churches, schools, seminaries, convents and monasteries that exist today because of his work, not to mention the

amount of dioceses sustained and programs underwritten because of his efforts," Landry said.

Sheen died Dec. 9, 1979, in New York City, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, after nearly two years of declining health following open-heart surgery.

During the audience with the Pontifical Mission Societies, Leo called 2026 "a year truly rich in missionary milestones," noting that this year also marks the 100th anniversary of World Mission Sunday, established by Pope Pius XI at the request of the Pontifical Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

This year's World Mission Sunday falls on Oct. 18, under the theme "One in Christ, united in mission."

"In a world increasingly marked by division, war and conflict among nations and peoples, the four Pontifical Mission Societies … render an invaluable service to the Church's mission of proclaiming Christ, the Prince of Peace and the incarnate revelation of Divine Love for humanity," Leo said.

"Let us therefore continue our missionary journey with joy and renewed zeal," he said. "In all that we do for the work of evangelization, may we always place Jesus Christ at the center, embracing the beautiful Gospel principle expressed by John the Baptist: 'He must increase, but I must decrease.'"