Vatican
Vatican News



Montse Alvarado, president and chief operating officer of EWTN News Inc., the EWTN Global Catholic Network, is pictured in an undated photo. (OSV News/courtesy EWTN Global Catholic Network)



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Pope Leo XIV has added another woman among the ranks of the Roman Curia, naming the president and chief operating officer of EWTN's news division as prefect of the Dicastery for Communication.

Maria Montserrat "Montse" Alvarado was named the dicastery's prefect on June 2, the first time a non-consecrated laywoman has been appointed to such a role*, in a surprising move given the U.S.-based TV network's previous public flare-ups with Pope Francis. She will begin in the role Nov. 1.

Alvarado, a Mexico native and naturalized U.S. citizen who holds degrees from Florida International University and The George Washington University, has sat at the helm of EWTN News since March 2023, prior to which she was the founding anchor of the networks' weekly news program "EWTN News In Depth."

The Eternal Word Television Network, founded in 1981 by a Poor Clare sister known as Mother Angelica, began as a TV network in an Alabama garage. Today, it claims to reach 435 million television households in more than 160 countries and across several languages, and owns several brands, including The National Catholic Register newspaper, the former news organization Catholic News Agency, which is now known as EWTN News, and the digital media site ChurchPop.

Before joining EWTN, Alvarado was executive director of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a Washington-based nonprofit law firm specializing in religious liberty cases. A 2017 opinion essay in The Wall Street Journal said that Alvarado saw herself in that role as "a defender of all religion" who worked "on the front lines of America's culture wars."

Alvarado is active with a number of organizations championing conservative causes, serving on boards for the Patients' Rights Action Fund, which advocates for protections for vulnerable adults in places where physician-assisted suicide is legal; the GIVEN Institute, the libertarian Acton Institute and Benedictine College, a

conservative Catholic school in Kansas. She is also a consultant to the United States' bishops' conference's committee for religious freedom.

Alvarado met with Leo along with Archbishop Nelson Pérez of Philadelphia on Sept. 6, 2025, ahead of the pope's participation in the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis, which was streamed by EWTN. She also attended the release of the pope's encyclical at the Vatican in May.

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Leo's move to appoint Alvarado comes about five years after his predecessor seemed to take aim at EWTN's coverage of the church and his papacy. Though Francis did not cite EWTN by name, it was widely perceived he was referring to the American TV network when he critiqued a television channel "that has no hesitation in continually speaking ill of the pope" for being "the work of the devil." At the time, Alvarado was an anchor at EWTN, a post she held from 2021-2024.

During that time, a Spanish bishop banned EWTN from his diocesan television station just two days after his installation in order to "favor the diocese's communion with the Successor of Peter." Cardinal Robert McElroy of Washington, then bishop of San Diego, told Spanish magazine Vida Nueva soon after that he would not broadcast EWTN on his diocesan media either and that the network worried him "because it represents a giant of economic and cultural power connected to a religious viewpoint that is fundamentally critical of the pope."

Alvarado told Reuters last year that while Francis' comment was made in 2021, he later blessed a movie produced by EWTN's Irish unit. She said that the network's mission is to "defend the church, to share the teachings of the church with the world — and to use our talents to that end, to be a platform for other people who want to do the same."

While EWTN has faced criticism for how it covered Francis and perceived bias toward conservative politics in the United States, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese wrote in 2023 that its Catholic News Agency brand, now known as EWTN News, and some of its global coverage had become "mandatory reading for Catholic news junkies like myself" because of the decline of other Catholic media.

The move by Leo, the first U.S.-born pope, to install a fellow American marks a shift in the dicastery's leadership whose previous two leaders were Italian.

She replaces Paolo Ruffini, who had been prefect since 2018 and in July will turn 70, the age at which lay Vatican officials must offer their resignation to the pope.

Ruffini made headlines in 2024 for defending the continued use of artwork by Marko Rupnik — a former Jesuit accused of spiritually and sexually abusing multiple women — on Vatican websites. Rupnik's artwork was removed from the sites in June 2025, one month after Leo's election to the papacy.

The dicastery, or Vatican department, that Alvarado will lead is responsible for communications coming out of the Vatican and encompasses the Holy See's official news outlet, Vatican News, the Holy See Press Office which handles relations with external media outlets (including National Catholic Reporter), the Vatican's publishing house and a laundry list of other entities engaged in getting out the pope's message.

In recent years, the dicastery, with more than 500 employees, has tried to curb spending. According to Vatican budget figures from 2022, the dicastery and its various media outlets cost about 40 million euro (about $43.4 million) in 2021, or 25% of the Vatican budget.

Francis, meeting with members of the Dicastery for Communications in 2024, said the dicastery must "have a little more discipline regarding money."

"You must find a way to save more and find other funds, because the Holy See cannot continue to help you as it does now," he said.

**This story has been updated to note that Maria Montserrat "Montse" Alvarado is the first non-consecrated laywoman to become a prefect. Consolata Missionary Sr. Simona Brambilla is the first woman to lead a Vatican dicastery.*

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