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Pope Leo XIV greets American singer-songwriter, poet, and artist, Patti Smith during a private audience at the Vatican's Apostolic Palace July 31, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

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The "Godmother of Punk," rock icon Patti Smith, appeared to fight back tears upon meeting Pope Leo XIV at the Vatican on Friday (July 31).

The pope, in turn, responded with a disarming "How do you do?"

An edited video of the meeting published by the Vatican showed Smith seated in front of Leo's desk and saying "Hi" while wearing a broad smile, to which the pope responded "Hi" before breaking into laughter.

Smith, 79, was in Rome to perform a show in the city's Circus Maximus on July 27. Although she does not consider herself Catholic, the rock legend wore a Franciscan Tau cross during her audience with the pope.

Fr. Antonio Spadaro, secretary of the Dicastery for Culture and Education, who was present for the meeting, described the encounter on X as "a long audience that felt more like a conversation between two people discovering they were old friends, sharing memories woven from words and music, dreams, visions, and hopes — both from yesterday and for today."

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Smith met Pope Francis in 2013 and sang at the Vatican's Christmas concert in 2014 and 2017, meeting the pope again that year.

Despite facing public backlash from fans and some Catholics for singing at the Vatican in 2014 — the opening line of her debut rock album "Horses" is, "Jesus died for somebody's sins but not mine" — she said then: "I like Pope Francis and I'm happy to sing for him. Anyone who would confine me to a line from 20 years ago is a fool!"

After Francis' death in April 2025, Smith said in an interview with Vatican News that she felt "very comforted that a man with such simplicity and such an expansive view was here with us in the world."

Like Leo, Smith was born in Chicago, but she mostly grew up in New Jersey. She was raised as a Jehovah's Witness with what she described as "an austere faith, culturally and artistically."

Yet during Pope Benedict XVI's pontificate, Smith said she had begun studying the life of St. Francis of Assisi, and had hoped that the next pope would take his name and be an advocate for the environment. "I’m not a Catholic, but I still wanted a Pope Francis," she said.

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