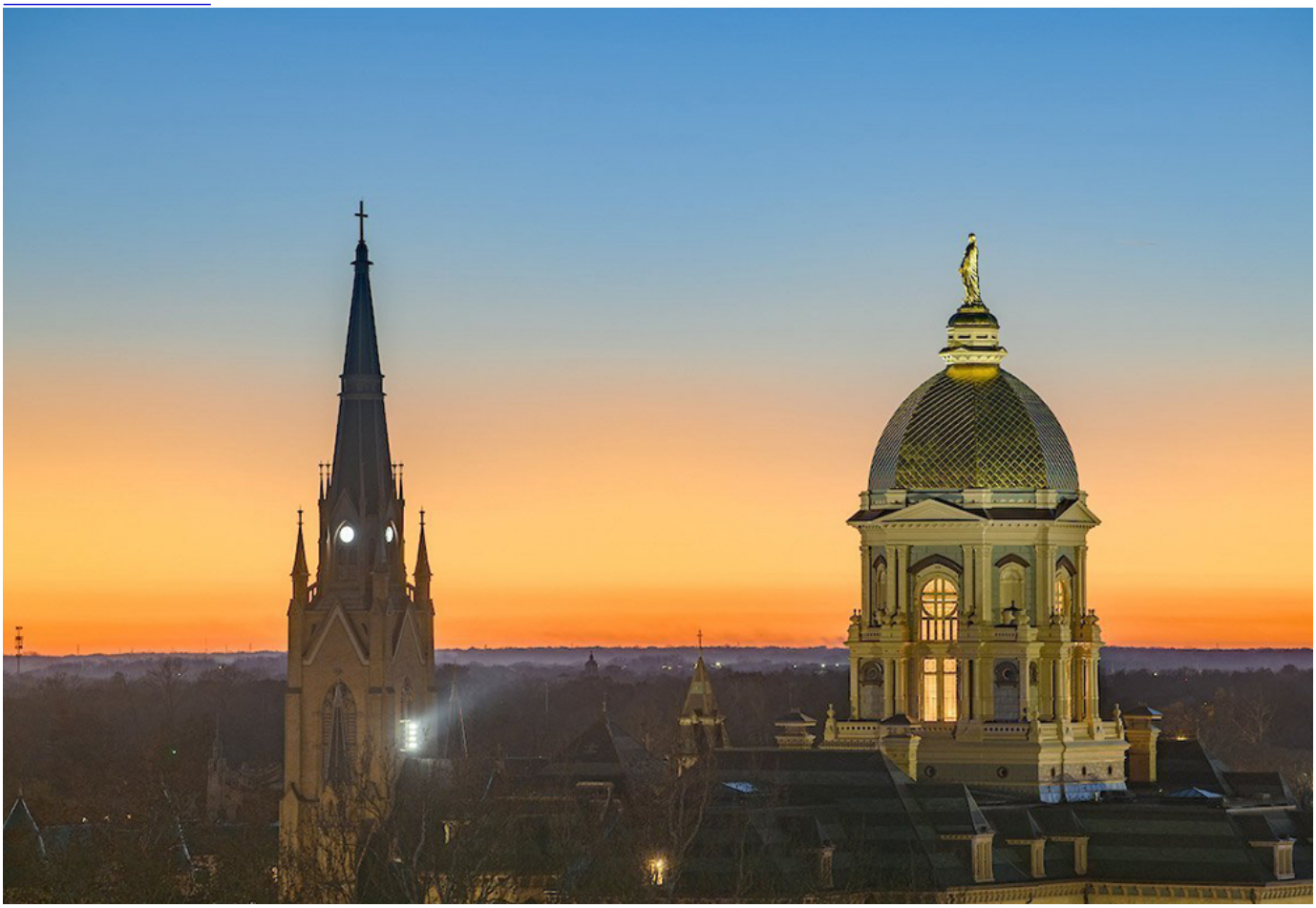
Vatican

Vatican News



The sun sets over the main building and Basilica of the Sacred Heart steeple on the campus of the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, Nov. 23, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy University of Notre Dame/Matt Cashore)



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The American influence in the Vatican continues to grow with Pope Leo XIV at the reins of the Catholic Church.

Amid larger shake-ups in the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, one of the most public-facing Vatican offices, the first U.S.-born pope on Tuesday tapped three experts from U.S. institutions to advise the Catholic Church's central office dedicated to promoting social justice. All three are affiliated with the University of Notre Dame.

The three U.S.-linked appointments are:

- Clemens Sedmak, an Austrian-born professor of social ethics and director of the university's Nanovic Institute for European Studies housed in the Keough School of Global Affairs;
- Fr. Emmanuel Katongole, a Ugandan native and Notre Dame professor of theology and peace studies, specialized in African theology;
- Kathryn Koch, president and CEO of the asset management firm Trust Company of the West who is also a Notre Dame graduate and member of the university's board of trustees.

The eight other appointments announced on Aug. 18 included four consultors from Italy, and other experts from Burkina Faso, Switzerland, Australia and India.

As consultors, the experts are called upon to advise the dicastery on particular issues within their area of expertise.

The latest appointments are yet another sign of the Indiana-based university's growing influence in the Vatican under Leo's leadership.

In March, the pope named another Notre Dame professor and board member, Holy Cross Fr. Dan Groody, a member of the dicastery. That same month, Notre Dame university launched a major partnership with the Vatican's Laudato Si' Center for Higher Education to promote the study and practice of integral ecology.

In November, the pope will also meet with the Notre Dame men's and women's basketball teams when they are in Rome to tip off their seasons against Leo's alma mater, and college basketball powerhouse, Villanova University.

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The newly appointed consultors will contribute to the work of the dicastery as it undergoes its own period of transition following the June appointments of Salesian Sr. Alessandra Smerilli as prefect of the dicastery and Cardinal Fabio Baggio as pro-prefect.

Sedmak, the social ethics professor, said in comments emailed to National Catholic Reporter that his academic background, including a 2023 book on the subject, attempts to show that integral human development "is not just a slogan, but can also be realized on the ground."

"What I can bring [to the dicastery] is the wisdom of many young students caring about integral human development and my own interest in the enactment of Catholic social teaching in policies, projects, programs, and everyday life," he wrote.

The professor, whose research focuses on social ethics, poverty and theories of justice, wrote that the values of the church's social tradition "of human dignity, common good, option for the poor, care of creation" are especially important today "in times of an erosion of established global rules and an established post WW-II world order."

"In this sense, the pope is leading a counter-discourse to the discourse of power and violence and encourages counter-practices," wrote Sedmak.

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