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People enter the Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire basilica in Lourdes, southwestern France, Tuesday Sept. 8, 2026 . (AP/Fred Scheiber)

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Pope Leo XIV's forthcoming trip to France, which marks the first official papal state visit to the country in 18 years, is expected to attract more than 1 million people, according to the Bishops' Conference of France (CEF).

The four-day visit, which starts on Sept. 25, will include popemobile rides, an open-air Mass in central Paris and a stop in Lourdes, one of Catholicism's most important pilgrimage sites.

The trip is "important for the country hosting him, but more broadly ... the pope will also have very important things to say to the entire world," Cardinal Jean-Marc Aveline, president of the bishops' conference, said on Tuesday.

The visit will begin in Paris, where Leo will meet with President Emmanuel Macron at the Élysée Palace, before delivering a speech at the headquarters of UNESCO, the U.N.'s cultural agency.

Leo will then travel by popemobile along a 2.5-kilometer (1.6-mile) route through central Paris as church bells ring across the city. Organizers say as many as 150,000 people could gather to welcome him.

He will later celebrate vespers at Notre Dame Cathedral and end the day with a prayer vigil with young people at France's national stadium.

Crowds will gather in the French capital the following day for an open-air Mass at Place de la Concorde. At least 500,000 people are expected along the Champs-Élysées and near the Arc de Triomphe, an area Leo will cross in the popemobile, organizers said. The Mass will be shown on 42 giant screens along the avenue.

That same day, Leo is to meet with migrants at the Maison Bakhita, a social support and integration center, before meeting with recently baptized Catholics.

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Pilgrimage in Lourdes and European message in Metz

The pope will travel to Lourdes, in the foothills of the Pyrenees in southwestern France, where he will meet seven survivors of sexual abuse who were assaulted as

children or adults.

"I think the Church, like society as a whole, has become aware of the terrible reality of sexual abuse," Pierre-Antoine Bozo, spokesperson for the bishops' conference, said. "It now recognizes that reality and is trying to provide as much support as possible to survivors of abuse, to help them, if possible, move beyond the trauma they have experienced."

Leo will conclude his time in Lourdes by taking part in one of the sanctuary's signature rites, the rosary and torchlight procession.

He will then move on to Metz, near France's borders with Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany, for a visit intended to give the trip a European and international dimension, according to the CEF.

Leo is expected to deliver a speech on Europe's roots, peace and unity at a conference center named for Robert Schuman, a French statesman regarded as one of the Founding Fathers of European integration. Schuman, a Catholic, was declared "venerable" in 2021, a step in the Catholic Church's sainthood process.

There will be a popemobile ride through the streets of Metz to the city's Gothic cathedral — known as "the Good Lord's Lantern" — which has one of the largest expanses of stained glass in Europe, creating colorful displays of light inside the building.

Fundraising campaign for visit

Sylvain Guillebaud, deputy secretary-general of the CEF, said the pope's visit is expected to cost the Catholic Church 27 million euros ($31 million). A major fundraising campaign was launched at the beginning of the summer, and 5.5 million euros ($6.4 million) has been raised so far, he said.

In addition, the French state will provide support by deploying security forces and other public services to ease visitors' experience.

The trip will be Leo's fourth foreign visit of the year. He made a day trip to Monaco in March, visited four African nations in April and traveled to Spain and the Canary Islands in June.

The Vatican also confirmed this week that Leo will make his first trip to Latin America as pope in November, visiting Uruguay, Argentina and Peru. He served in Peru for more than three decades.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo in France** feature series. View the full series.