



Pope Leo XIV waves as he arrives at the Vatican Library on the day of his 71st birthday, Sept. 14, 2026. (AP/Andrew Medichini)

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Vatican City — September 15, 2026

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Pope Leo XIV celebrated his 71st birthday on Monday, Sept. 14, but it was Vatican employees who got the gift.

The Vatican published a papal decree repealing 2021 salary cuts that Pope Francis had imposed on many Vatican employees as part of the Holy See's COVID-19 cost-saving measures.

In the decree, Leo said the salary-containing measures "can now be overcome, in the certainty that the institutions of the Holy See and the Vatican City State will continue, through various means, their commitment to ensuring economic sustainability."

The unpopular salary cuts had included a 10% cut on pay for cardinals and smaller percentage salary cuts for office heads and lower-ranking priests and nuns. Biennial pay raises were frozen for senior lay employees, though lower-ranking lay employees continued to receive raises.

Francis had reasoned at the time that the cuts were necessary to save jobs, given the Holy See was also facing a structural deficit, estimated then at around 70 million euros, and a 1 billion euro (\$1.14 billion) pension fund shortfall.

The pandemic closed the Vatican Museums for months, depriving the Holy See of one of its main sources of revenue. The Vatican's coffers also suffered from investment and currency fluctuations.

Leo, a math major and former superior general of his Augustinian religious order, is known to be adept at financial matters and reading balance sheets. His brother, John Prevost, recently told Italian broadcaster Mediaset that the pope helped him out recently with a question he had about filing his taxes.

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Soon after he was elected, Leo said the Vatican's financial situation wasn't nearly as bad as he thought and that Francis had made some important reforms. However, Leo has spent much of his early pontificate amending or outright reversing some of Francis' financial decisions.

In another decree published Monday, Leo canceled Francis' plans to move some of the Vatican's secret archives and library holdings out of the city state and onto the grounds of a pontifical university across town. Francis had decided on the move because the material was outgrowing its current storage spaces, which include a vast underground bunker.

Leo said "unprecedented opportunities have arisen to create new spaces" within Vatican City itself. He ordered the construction of a new building on a current parking lot to house the material, which includes ancient manuscripts and entire archival collections from past popes, religious congregations and benefactors.

Leo visited the Vatican Apostolic Library on Monday, and noted that it was particularly fitting to be celebrating his birthday with its staff since his mother was a librarian.

"I'd just like to say that God, in his providence — and sometimes with a touch of humor — always reminds us that he is with us," Leo told the staff. "Many of you may not know that my mother was a librarian, and today I'm here on my birthday specifically to say hello to all of you."

The library and archive are open to scholars and researchers for study. A small exhibition space is also open on a weekly basis to the general public in the library, with reservation and pre-purchased tickets.

Leo was at the library Monday to inaugurate an exhibition about water, the first installment in a new five-year cycle titled "Catastrophe and Marvel." It features a giant design of a wave attached by scaffolding to the library's facade by the French artist JR.