

[Vatican](#)



Pope Leo XIV holds up the book of the Gospel as he celebrates a mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, Thursday, Oct.8, 2026, for the annual opening of the academic year at pontifical universities, joining Rome's 22 pontifical institutions and numerous others worldwide. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

Nicole Winfield

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

Vatican City — October 9, 2026

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Pope Leo XIV took a first step Friday to lay the groundwork for the eventual conclave that will elect his successor: He appointed Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle as the new dean of the College of Cardinals, elevating his profile as a papal contender in the process.

Tagle, 69, who heads the Vatican's evangelization office, replaces the 92-year-old Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re.

The dean of the college plays a significant role in a papal transition and is often considered a top contender for the papacy himself. He celebrates the funeral of the previous pope and then helps run the closed-door meetings of cardinals before the vote to discuss the needs of the church going forward. If he is under age 80 at the time of the conclave, he also plays a role in running the secret election in the Sistine Chapel to elect a new pope.

After a pope is elected, it's the dean who asks the winner if he accepts the job, and the name he wants to be called.

According to the Vatican announcement Friday, Leo approved the election of Tagle as dean that was made by a half-dozen cardinals who hold the most senior rank within the college. Tagle was the youngest member of the group, suggesting the cardinals intended their new dean to be in the job for a while.

Tagle, the former archbishop of Manila, had himself been seen as a possible contender in the 2025 conclave that elected Leo. The high-profile position of dean now raises Tagle's "papabile" profile even further for a future conclave, where he would be a leading contender to be Asia's first pope.

There is recent precedent for such a promotion: Then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger was dean of the college when he was elected Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

Another rumored contender to be dean was Cardinal Pietro Parolin, 71, Pope Francis' secretary of state who is still in the job and was himself a top contender in the 2025 conclave.

With just months to live in early 2025, Francis extended the mandate of Battista Re to keep him on the job as dean, even though he was a decade beyond the Vatican's normal retirement age. Francis' decision underscored how much he wanted a loyal cardinal to run the conclave after he died even if Battista Re was not a contender himself.

At the same time, Francis added a new cardinal into the senior ranks of the college in a move that immediately boosted his profile as "papabile," or having the qualities of a pope: Cardinal Robert Prevost, the future Pope Leo XIV.

Advertisement