



A pedestrian walks past Holy Name Cathedral in Chicago's calls for prayers, Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2026, for Pope Leo XIV after his lung cancer diagnosis. (AP/Nam Y. Huh)

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Gail Spreen goes most days to Mass just a few blocks from her home in Chicago, but the service at Holy Name Cathedral on Wednesday — dedicated to Chicago-born Pope Leo XIV — felt different.

"Knowing that everybody is behind him, it was very special to be there today," Spreen said. "The church was full and everybody was praying. You could just see all those prayers going up and being received."

Catholics in Chicago and around the world met the news of Leo's lung cancer diagnosis with shock, concern and support for the 71-year-old, whose candor around his health broke with the Vatican's tendency to be tight-lipped around papal health. Leo himself announced that he had a nodule and was undergoing surgery, which [confirmed](#) that he has [lung adenocarcinoma](#), the most common type of lung cancer. Surgeons on Tuesday removed the lower lobe of his right lung.

Spreen, whose husband died from cancer, said the pope going public with his diagnosis can "wake up the whole world" to the importance of early detection.

"If the pope can have cancer, anybody can," she said.

The first American-born pope, Leo [undertook his ministry in Peru](#), but he was born in 1955 in the south side Chicago neighborhood of Bronzeville and grew up in suburban Dolton, near St. Mary of the Assumption, where he attended Mass and elementary school.

[He later studied theology](#) at the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago in Hyde Park and taught in local Catholic schools, including at St. Rita High School. Leo is also a White Sox fan, a fact embraced by the team.

Cardinal Blase Cupich, the archbishop of Chicago, encouraged fellow Chicagoans and people worldwide to "join me in asking the Lord to return this son of Chicago to wellness."

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"He has much more good work to do, many more wise words to preach and many more ways to inspire others," Cupich said in a statement.

Earlier Wednesday, students at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Academy made get-well cards and a care package, complete with a White Sox blanket, to send to the Vatican. Fr. Charles Rubey, a [retired priest](#), planned to offer a Sunday Mass in the apartment where he lives in the suburbs of Chicago.

"I'm praying very hard, asking God to spare him illness, so he'll be successful in the treatment," he said.

"I think he's a hero," Rubey said of Pope Leo. "He's highly revered here, highly loved."

The Vatican said late Wednesday that the pope had celebrated Mass with his secretaries in the afternoon in a special chapel set up for him on the 10th floor of the hospital. He had also resumed his regular diet and begun walking.

For Katrina Coker, Leo has been an authentic embodiment of true Catholicism, which she said should be open and welcoming and loving. Coker of Johns Creek, Georgia, said it was meaningful to her that she happened to be in Chicago this week and she wanted to attend Mass in his hometown to pray for Leo's recovery.

"I feel somewhat of a kindred spirit, and hopefully he can get a little bit of healing from home," she said. "I think there's just so much more that he can do, and I pray that he gets well soon."