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Vatican News



A poster of Pope Leo XIV is displayed for sale outside the Sanctuary and Monastery of Las Nazarenas in Lima, Peru, Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2026, ahead of Leo's upcoming visit in November. (AP/Martin Mejia)

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Lima, Peru — October 15, 2026
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Roman Catholics across South America responded to news of Pope Leo XIV's lung cancer diagnosis with an outpouring of prayers and support, along with concerns about whether the first American pope will make his highly anticipated and physically demanding visit to the region next month.

Across the three countries on his itinerary — secular Uruguay, predominantly Catholic Argentina and Leo's adopted homeland of Peru — government officials wished the 71-year-old pontiff a swift recovery, church leaders urged patience and the faithful gathered to pray.

The Vatican said Wednesday that Leo was recuperating as expected after surgery and that the trip remained on his schedule. But Peruvian President Keiko Fujimori was more cautious, telling reporters that his recovery could take "several weeks, longer than expected," potentially forcing changes to the Nov. 6-17 itinerary.

The trip would follow an ambitious itinerary

The 12-day South American tour would be the longest of Leo's papacy so far, covering more than 31,000 kilometers (19,000 miles) on a dozen flights and two helicopter rides. Across Uruguay and Argentina — two countries last visited by a pope in the 1980s — Leo would celebrate Masses and meet with worshippers, clergy and political leaders in six cities.

The longest leg of the trip would take Leo to Peru, where he spent 20 years as a missionary and bishop of the coastal city of Chiclayo. From the capital, Lima, he is scheduled to travel north to his former diocese, then on to the ancient Inca capital of Cusco high in the Andes and the Amazonian city of Pucallpa. The thin mountain air in Cusco, roughly 3,400 meters (11,150 feet) above sea level, could pose a particular challenge so soon after Leo's lung surgery.

Church officials in Argentina, the homeland of Leo's predecessor Pope Francis, urged parishioners to put the pontiff's well-being ahead of their excitement over the

country's first papal visit in four decades.

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"Sometimes we think selfishly about his coming, but the first thing we need to think about is his health," said Cardinal Ángel Rossi, the archbishop of Córdoba, one of Leo's planned stops.

Leaders across Argentina's deep ideological divide, from right-wing President Javier Milei to his left-wing rival, Buenos Aires Gov. Axel Kicillof, joined in wishing the pope a speedy recovery.

"All of Argentina stands with His Holiness in affection and prayer," said Milei, who was raised Catholic but has more recently explored conversion to Judaism.

In neighboring Uruguay, where Leo's visit is expected to energize the Catholic minority in a country that officially celebrates Christmas as Family Day, Cardinal Daniel Sturla, the archbishop of Montevideo, tempered hopes for the historic visit.

"The news that the pope himself announced on Sunday has left us all pretty concerned. And then learning about the surgery and its results ... well, all of that alerts us to the possibility that there could be some changes," Sturla told The Associated Press at the Archdiocese of Montevideo. "It's possible that the visit could be postponed a little or that the schedule could be made somewhat less demanding."

Peru eagerly awaits Leo's homecoming

In Chiclayo, one of Peru's largest cities, excitement over Leo's anticipated homecoming turned to apprehension after his diagnosis.

"Because of the affection that we feel for the Holy Father, who is also our bishop, we're worried about his health and about what will come next," said the Rev. Elmer Uchofen, who recalled how the future pope helped bolster oxygen production capabilities during the coronavirus pandemic, waded through mud in rubber boots to aid flood victims and celebrated Mass with prisoners in Chiclayo.

Betania Marina Rodríguez, who leads a local association for Venezuelan migrants in Chiclayo and also worked closely with Leo, said she felt a collision of conflicting emotions.

"We all want him to be healthy and strong," she said. "But we also long to see him, hear him and receive his blessing."

In Lima, Peruvians crossed themselves and recited the rosary before a life-size silicone statue of the pontiff outside a church. Others gathered at the centuries-old Las Nazarenas Monastery, home to a revered image of the crucified Jesus that draws vast religious processions each October.

Teresa Ramírez, 73, clutched red, white and yellow roses — the combined colors of the Peruvian and Vatican flags — at the monastery as she offered her blessings to the man she called "the most beloved Peruvian in the world."

Leo, born Robert Prevost in Chicago, became a Peruvian citizen in 2015 and renewed his national identity document last year after becoming pope.

"There's still time for him to come to Peru," Ramírez said. "May our heavenly Father's will be done."

At a nursing home in the Peruvian port city of Callao, another stop on Leo's planned itinerary, Mayela Medina, 52, expressed hope that the prayers of millions of Peruvians would bring comfort to the convalescing pope.

"I went through dark days and long nights when I struggled to breathe," she said, recalling her own battle with respiratory illness. "I pray to God with all my soul that he does not feel abandoned."

This story appears in the **Pope Leo in Uruguay, Argentina and Peru** feature series. View the full series.