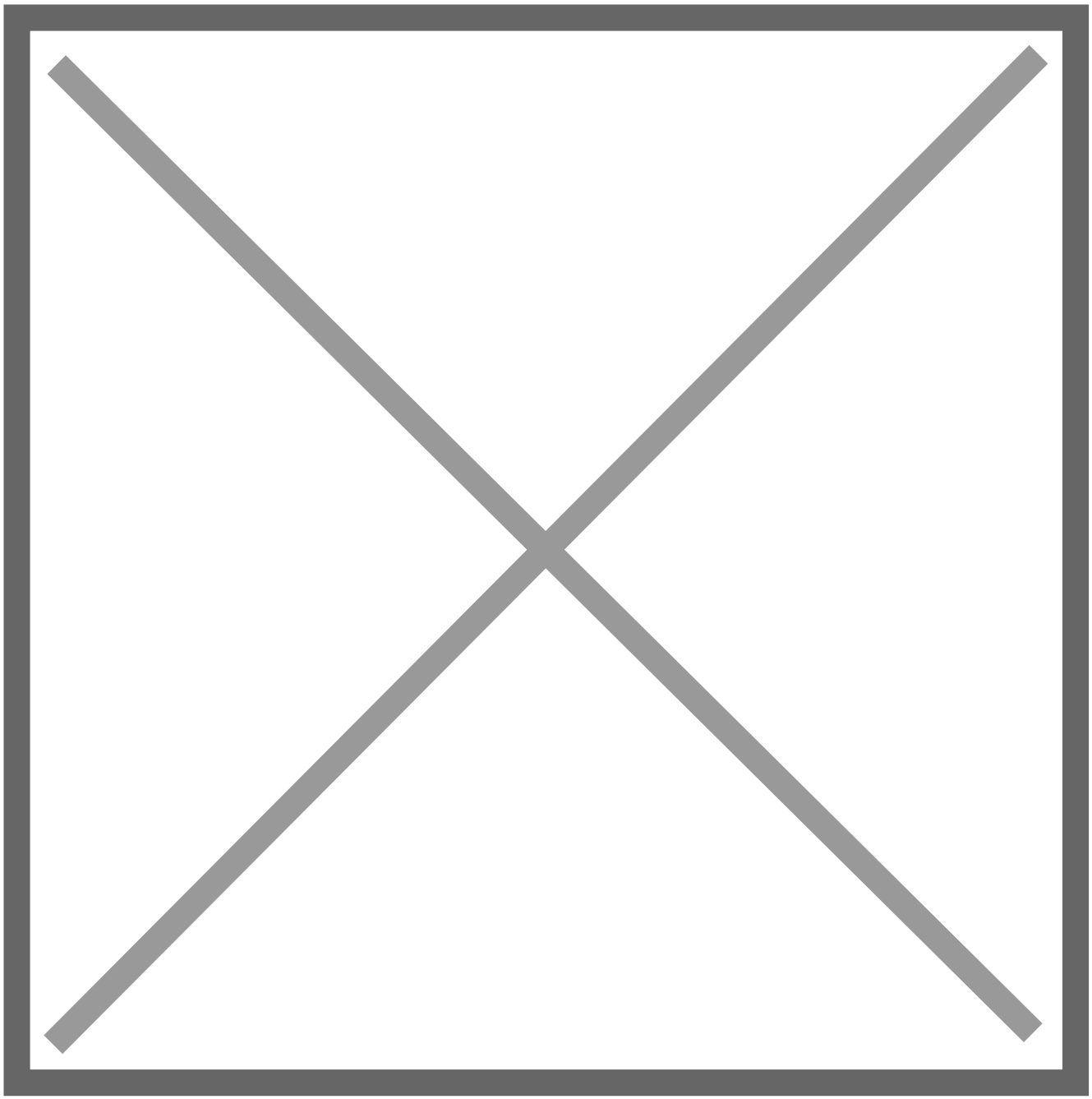
News



Lisa Koester of Imperial, Mo., is seen in this undated photo with her husband and son. Recently diagnosed with two forms of lung cancer, Koester told OSV News that Pope Leo XIV’s experience with the disease has given her a sense that she is not alone as she undergoes treatment. (OSV News/Lisa Koester)

Gina Christian

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A Missouri woman diagnosed with lung cancer told OSV News that Pope Leo's diagnosis with the same disease has helped strengthen her own Catholic faith amid her illness.

"The fact that I shared such a diagnosis with the pope — I'm kind of touched," said Lisa Koester. "I felt like I wasn't alone."

The 64-year-old Koester, a resident of Imperial, Missouri, said she'd been getting regular lung screenings for "at least eight to 10 years" as a former smoker.

Recently, she said, "they found something."

Her physician, Dr. Nirmal Veeramachaneni of Saint Louis University and SSM Health, immediately ordered a positron emission tomography, or PET, scan, which uses a radioactive tracer to detect early signs of cancer, as well as heart and neurological disorders.

Koester received the scan results in late August while spending time with her family.

"My son had just moved back from Utah and got engaged," she said. "We were sitting in their new home and I got the results of my test, and I just started crying. My husband was crying, my son was crying, because we knew it was something. Even though it was only the size of a grape, that's big enough."

Koesler said that through their tears, she and her family resolved to face their cancer experience with courage.

"We just started saying, 'These are the cards that have been dealt to us. This is God's plan for me, and this is what we have to work through,'" she recalled.

With a localized mass detected, she said, surgery was ordered "before it spread into the chest wall."

First came a battery of pre-operative tests — and a month of waiting before entering the hospital.

Koester said "a lot of prayer" sustained her during that in-between period.

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