



By: TA | AP Insight

100 days of Pope Leo XIV – have the expectations of believers and the Church been met?



Pope Leo XIV showed continuity with his predecessor Francis, but with restraint, he returned the focus from the papacy to the Church and its mission.

When Pope Leo XIV **surprised** tens of thousands of young people at a recent Holy Year celebration with an impromptu popemobile romp around St. Peter's Square, it almost seemed as if some of the informal spontaneity that characterized Pope Francis' 12-year papacy had returned to the Vatican.

But the message Leo delivered that night was all his own: In seamless English, Spanish and Italian, Leo told the young people that they were the "salt of the Earth, the light of the world." He urged them to spread their hope, faith in Christ and their cries of peace wherever they go.

As Robert Prevost marks his 100th day as Pope Leo this weekend, the contours of his pontificate have begun to come into relief, primarily where he shows continuity with Francis and where he signals change.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway is that after 12 sometimes **turbulent** years under Francis, a certain calm and reserve have returned to the papacy.

Leo seems eager above all to avoid polemics or making the papacy about himself, and wants instead to focus on Christ and peace.

That seems exactly what many Catholic faithful want, and may respond to what today's church needs.

"He's been very direct and forthright ... but he's not doing spontaneous press hits," said Kevin Hughes, chair of theology and religious studies at Leo's alma mater, Villanova University. Leo has a different style than Francis, and that has brought relief to many, Hughes said in a telephone interview.

"Even those who really loved Pope Francis always kind of held their breath a little bit: You didn't know what was going to come out next or what he was going to do," Hughes said.

An effort to avoid polemics

Leo has certainly gone out of his way in his first 100 days to try to heal divisions that deepened during Francis' pontificate, **offering** messages of unity and avoiding controversy at almost every turn.

Even his signature issue — **confronting** the promise and peril posed by artificial intelligence— is something that conservatives and progressives alike agree is important.

Francis' emphasis on caring for the environment and migrants often alienated conservatives.

Leo offered the Holy See bureaucracy a reassuring, conciliatory message

Closer to home, Leo offered the Holy See bureaucracy a reassuring, conciliatory message after Francis' occasionally authoritarian style rubbed some in the Vatican the wrong way.

"Popes come and go, but the Curia remains," Leo told Vatican officials soon after his May 8 election.

Continuity with Francis is still undeniable

Leo, though, has cemented Francis' environmental legacy by **celebrating** the first-ever ecologically inspired Mass. He has furthered that legacy by giving the go-ahead for the Vatican to turn a 430-hectare (1,000-acre) field north of Rome into a vast solar farm that should generate enough electricity to meet Vatican City's needs and turn it into the world's first carbon-neutral state.

He has fine-tuned financial transparency regulations that Francis initiated, tweaked some other decrees to give them consistency and logic, and confirmed Francis in deciding to

declare one of the 19th century's most influential saints, John Henry Newman, a "doctor" of the church.

But he hasn't granted any sit-down, tell-all interviews or made headline-grabbing, off-the-cuff comments like his predecessor did.

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In marking the 80th anniversary of the U.S. atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki last week, he had a chance to match Francis' novel declaration that the mere possession of nuclear **weapons** was "immoral." But he didn't.

Compared to President Donald Trump, the other American world leader who took office in 2025 with a flurry of Sharpie-penned executive decrees, Leo has eased into his new job slowly, deliberately and quietly, almost trying not to draw attention to himself.

At 69, he seems to know that he has time on his side, and that after Francis' revolutionary papacy, the church might need a bit of a breather.

One Vatican official who knows Leo said he expects his papacy will have the effect of a "calming rain" on the church.

Maria Isabel Ibarcena Cuarite, a Peruvian member of a Catholic charismatic group, said it was precisely Leo's quiet emphasis on church traditions, its sacraments and love of Christ, that drew her and upward of 1 million young people to Rome for a special Jubilee week this month.

Ibarcena said Francis had confused young people like herself with his outreach to LGBTQ+ Catholics and approval of blessings for same-sex couples.

Such gestures went beyond what a pope was supposed to do and what the church taught, she thought.

Leo, she said, has emphasized that marriage is a sacrament between men and woman. "Francis was ambiguous, but he is firm," she said.

An Augustinian pope

From his very first appearance on the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica, Leo has **insisted** he is first and foremost a "son of St. Augustine."

It was a reference to the fifth century theological and devotional giant of early Christianity, St. Augustine of Hippo, who inspired the 13th century religious Augustinian order as a community of "mendicant" friars.

Like the other big mendicant orders of the early church — the Franciscans, Dominicans and Carmelites — the Augustinians spread across Christian Europe over the centuries.

Today, Augustinian spirituality is rooted in a deep interior life of prayer, living in community, and journeying together in search of truth in God.

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"I see a kind of Augustinian flavor in the way that he's presenting all these things," said Hughes, the theology professor who is an Augustine scholar.

Leo joined the Augustinians after graduating from Augustinian-run Villanova, outside Philadelphia, and was twice elected its prior general.

He has visited the Augustinian headquarters outside St. Peter's a few times since his election, and some wonder if he will invite some brothers to live with him in the Apostolic Palace to recreate the spirit of Augustinian community life there.

A missionary pope in the image of Francis

Leo is also very much a product of the Francis papacy. Francis named Prevost **bishop** of Chiclayo, Peru, in 2014 and then moved him to head one of the most important Vatican jobs in 2023 — vetting bishop nominations. In retrospect, it seems Francis had his eye on Prevost as a possible successor.

Given Francis' stump **speech** before the 2013 conclave that elected him pope, the then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio essentially described Prevost in identifying the church's mission today: He said the church was "called to go outside of itself and go to the peripheries, not just geographic but also the existential peripheries."



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Prevost, who hails from Chicago, spent his adult life as a missionary in Peru, eventually becoming bishop of Chiclayo.

"He is the incarnation of the 'unity of difference,' because he comes from the center, but he lives in the peripheries," said Emilce Cuda, secretary of the Pontifical Commission

for Latin America.

Cuda said during a recent conference hosted by Georgetown University that Leo encapsulated in "word and gesture" the type of missionary church Francis promoted.

That said, for all Leo owes to Bergoglio, the two didn't necessarily get along.

Prevost has recounted that at one point when he was the Augustinian superior, the then-archbishop of Buenos Aires expressed interest in assigning an Augustinian priest to a specific job in his archdiocese.

"And I, as prior general, said 'I understand, Your Eminence, but he's got to do something else' and so I transferred him somewhere else," Prevost told parishioners in his home state of Illinois in 2024.

Prevost said he "naively" thought the Francis wouldn't remember him after his 2013 election, and that regardless "he'll never appoint me bishop" due to the disagreement.

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