# Pope Leo XIV becomes the first American pontiff amid a changing Church and global political landscape



# The First American Pope: Pope Leo XIV

In a historic turn for the Roman Catholic Church, Robert Francis Prevost has assumed the papacy as Pope Leo XIV, marking him as the first American pontiff in history. The announcement of his election on May 8, 2025, followed just two days of deliberation within the Vatican conclave, culminating in white smoke billowing from the Sistine Chapel. His appointment resonates profoundly not only within religious circles but also across the broader socio-political landscape, particularly in the United States, where public reaction has been fervent.

Born in Chicago and rooted in the suburb of Dolton, Prevost's background is as diverse as it is compelling; he holds dual citizenship in both the United States and Peru. His earlier roles, notably as bishop of Chiclayo in Peru and leader of the Vatican office responsible for appointing bishops, have positioned him as an established figure within the Church hierarchy. The dualistic nature of his upbringing and mission work reflects his ability to traverse cultural divides, a skill that is expected to be vital as he addresses pressing issues facing the Church today.

Pope Leo XIV's papacy emerges at a time fraught with challenges. He is tasked with navigating the complexities of LGBTQ+ matters, confronting past scandals related to sexual abuse, and re-evaluating the role of women within the Church. His conservative stance on certain issues, alongside previous allegations concerning the handling of abuse cases, will likely draw significant scrutiny as his tenure unfolds. There is hope that his diverse experiences might offer a pathway for greater inclusivity and dialogue, particularly as Church leadership grapples with changing societal norms.

The new pope's election represents not merely a symbolic shift but also a potential realignment within the Church's global outreach and social policies. Prevost's intention to uphold the legacy of his predecessor, Pope Francis, is evident in his initial speeches, where he underscored the importance of advocacy for marginalized voices and a commitment to social justice. His choice of the name Leo XIV, inspired by St. Francis's 13th-century companion, further suggests a continuation of the reformist agenda that has characterised Francis’s papacy.

Beyond ecclesiastical concerns, Prevost’s election comes at a pivotal moment for U.S.-UK relations, with both nations recently agreeing on an economic deal that aims to enhance bilateral trade. The terms of the agreement include significant reductions in tariffs—most notably a drop from 27.5% to 10% on British-made cars and the elimination of tariffs on British steel exports. These financial negotiations reflect a growing emphasis on fostering closer ties as geopolitical tensions continue to evolve, a backdrop against which Pope Leo XIV's diplomatic prowess may also come into play. His unique standing as the U.S.-born pontiff could provide beneficial leverage in discussions of international cooperation and mutual understanding.

Moreover, the political climate in the United States, particularly under the leadership of President Donald Trump, may influence the nature of Pope Leo XIV's engagement with American Catholicism. His appointment was celebrated by Trump, highlighting a historic milestone that could forge new pathways for dialogue between the Church and political spheres, particularly on contentious issues like immigration and environmental responsibility. With increasing division within American society, the new pontiff's approach to these dialogue opportunities will likely shape the Catholic Church's influence in national conversations.

Pope Leo XIV's promise to foster a welcoming and synodal Church—one that champions peace and unity—is a sentiment that echoes throughout his inaugural message. As he embarks on his papacy, Prevost’s ability to connect with both American and Latin American Catholics will be critical. The challenges ahead are significant, yet his election has the potential to signify a transformative era for the Catholic Church as it seeks to uphold its doctrines while remaining relevant in a rapidly changing global environment.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0l9481b), [[2]](https://time.com/7283867/pope-leo-challenges-diversity-globalization/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[3]](https://www.axios.com/local/chicago/2025/05/08/pope-leo-xiv-american-elected), [[4]](https://apnews.com/article/d7991a37a679f09792ed220cc1f6bbed)
* Paragraph 3 – [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/whats-us-uk-economic-deal-2025-05-08/), [[6]](https://www.huffingtonpost.es/sociedad/habemus-papam-fumata-blanca-anuncia-iglesia-catolica-nuevo-papa.html)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/05/pope-leo-robert-prevost-american/682749/?utm_source=apple_news)

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## References

* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0l9481b> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
* <https://time.com/7283867/pope-leo-challenges-diversity-globalization/> - Pope Leo XIV, born Robert Prevost, was elected as the first American Pope on May 8, 2025, following the death of Pope Francis. His papacy inherits challenges such as handling LGBTQ+ issues, sexual abuse scandals, the role of women, and maintaining geographic diversity within Church leadership. Prevost's conservative views on LGBTQ+ matters and past allegations related to covering up abuse in the Diocese of Chiclayo are expected to be focal points of his tenure. His diverse background positions him as a potential bridge within the global Catholic community.
* <https://www.axios.com/local/chicago/2025/05/08/pope-leo-xiv-american-elected> - Pope Leo XIV, formerly Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, has made history as the first American pope and hails from Chicago, having grown up in the suburb of Dolton. His appointment holds significant weight beyond the religious sphere, offering him a major diplomatic and social platform through leadership of the 1.4 billion-member Catholic Church. He began his religious journey in 1977 with the Order of Saint Augustine and studied at the Catholic Theological Union in Hyde Park. Pope Leo XIV is expected to continue the progressive legacy of Pope Francis, emphasizing inclusion and advocacy for marginalized voices.
* <https://apnews.com/article/d7991a37a679f09792ed220cc1f6bbed> - Robert Prevost has been elected as the 267th pope, becoming the first U.S.-born pontiff in the history of the Catholic Church. Originally from Chicago and a dual citizen of the U.S. and Peru, Prevost chose the name Leo XIV, referencing the 13th-century companion of St. Francis and signaling continuity with Pope Francis' reformist legacy. A member of the Augustinian order and former bishop in Chiclayo, Peru, Prevost previously led the Vatican office responsible for bishop appointments and played a role in significant church reforms. His election follows the resignation of Pope Francis and was announced after white smoke emerged from the Sistine Chapel on the second day of conclave. The crowd in St. Peter’s Square cheered as the new pope emerged, delivering a message advocating missionary work, dialogue, peace, and openness. Vatican observers note that Prevost’s leadership may bridge divides in the U.S. Catholic Church and maintain Francis’ focus on social justice. Leo XIV, the first Augustinian pope, is expected to lead Mass, address the media, and potentially travel to Turkey for a key ecumenical anniversary. His election has resonated strongly both in the U.S. and Peru, where he previously served as bishop.
* <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/whats-us-uk-economic-deal-2025-05-08/> - The United States and the United Kingdom have reached a new economic agreement aimed at reducing tariffs and improving bilateral trade. Key components include a reduction in U.S. tariffs on British-made cars from 27.5% to 10%, with a 100,000 vehicle quota, and the elimination of 25% tariffs on British steel exports. British firms will now be able to export airplane parts to the U.S. without tariffs, and in return, a British airline is set to purchase $10 billion worth of Boeing aircraft. In agriculture, both countries have agreed to reciprocal market access for beef, allowing 13,000 metric tonnes of tariff-free British beef exports, while the UK will eliminate tariffs on U.S. ethanol. Discussions on U.S. film tariffs will occur separately, and the UK retains its Digital Services Tax. Further negotiations will address pharmaceuticals and the remaining reciprocal tariffs. Additionally, the UK is promised preferential treatment in future U.S. Section 232 national security tariff investigations.
* <https://www.huffingtonpost.es/sociedad/habemus-papam-fumata-blanca-anuncia-iglesia-catolica-nuevo-papa.html> - Robert Francis Prevost, 69, of U.S. origin with Spanish ancestry, has been elected as the new pope of the Catholic Church, adopting the name Leo XIV. This election marks a historic milestone, as Prevost becomes the first American pope and the first Augustinian to hold the position. A former missionary in Peru and bishop of Chiclayo, he is considered close to the previous pontiff, Francis. In his first speech from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, Prevost advocated for a missionary, welcoming, and synodal Church, with a strong message of peace and unity. He honored his connection with Peru and reinforced his intention to continue the reformist spirit of Francis. He was elected in the fourth ballot of the conclave, after two days of deliberations in the Vatican. His appearance in traditional papal attire marks a nuance compared to his predecessor. His election was celebrated with enthusiasm by faithful gathered in Rome and officially recognized by U.S. President Donald Trump, who highlighted the historic nature of his appointment.
* <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/05/pope-leo-robert-prevost-american/682749/?utm_source=apple_news> - In an unprecedented move, the Vatican conclave has elected Robert Francis Prevost, an American, as the new pope, choosing him on just the second day of voting. Now Pope Leo XIV, he becomes the first-ever American pontiff, defying long-held assumptions that a superpower citizen could not be selected due to geopolitical and cultural concerns. Born in Chicago and educated at Villanova University, Leo XIV has spent much of his career abroad, including missions in Peru and leadership of the Augustinian order in Rome. Fluent in Italian and Spanish, he breaks the mold of traditionally parochial American clergy. His election occurs during a contentious period in U.S. politics under President Donald Trump's administration and signals a continuation of Pope Francis’s social agenda, particularly on issues like immigration and environmental stewardship. Though he previously criticized Western media's promotion of values contrary to Church teachings, including on abortion and LGBTQ+ issues, his full stance remains to be seen. His strong connections to both American and Latin American Catholicism may offer a unique bridge between regions. With his historical election, Pope Leo XIV is expected to significantly influence the Church's relationship with American Catholicism and global Catholic social teaching.