

# The First American Pope!

*Robert Prevost of the United States becomes Pope Leo XIV.*



Pope Leo spoke from a balcony at the Vatican.

The Catholic Church has more than 1 billion followers. The leader of that religion is called the pope, and there have been more than 260 popes throughout history. Most of those leaders came from Italy, some came from other nations in Europe, and three came from Africa. The last pope — Pope Francis — was the first from South America. Now, the church has its first pope from North America!

On May 8, 2025, religious leaders called cardinals chose Robert Prevost of the United States to be pope. It's tradition for popes to pick new names, which is why Prevost is now *Pope Leo XIV (14)*.

Prevost was chosen through a process that goes back hundreds of years. After Pope Francis died on April 21, cardinals from around the world traveled to Vatican City, the home of the pope and the seat of the Catholic Church. On May 7, the cardinals started a process called a conclave, in which they cast votes while being cut off from the rest of the world. After votes, the cardinals release smoke to share the results. Black smoke from the Vatican means a decision hasn't been made yet, and white smoke means a pope was picked.

The 2025 conclave started with several plumes of black smoke, but on May 8, the crowd gathered outside in Saint Peter's Square saw white smoke rising. There was a new pope, but who was it?

Watchers had to wait a bit longer to find out. Finally, up on a balcony, curtains were pulled aside and doors opened. A man stepped out and shared the name of the new Catholic leader.

Robert Prevost was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. He studied at Catholic schools in Chicago and later in Rome, Italy. Prevost was ordained as a priest in 1982, and his work with the Catholic Church brought him to Peru in South America, where he lived for many years. Prevost worked his way up from a missionary to a bishop and later got a top job at the Vatican, managing and selecting bishops around the world.

Now at 69 years old, Prevost's life is taking a huge turn. Back on the Vatican balcony, he stepped out to greet the waiting crowd — and the world — for his first time as pope. Pope Leo waved and began speaking with simple yet powerful words: "Peace be with you all."

Pope Leo was close to Pope Francis, and experts believe that some of his messages will be similar to Francis's work, such as a focus on helping migrants and the poor. In his first speech, Pope Leo talked about bringing people together, saying he wants "a church that builds bridges and dialogue." He said, "Without fear, united, hand in hand — let us go forward."

*By Ashley Morgan*

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