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Crowds cheer in St. Peter's Square as white smoke emerges from the chimney atop the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican May 8, 2025, indicating Pope Leo XIV, the former Cardinal Robert Prevost, was elected pope. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)



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Catholic sisters responded with joy to the news of the election of Pope Leo XIV on May 8, praising his past work and looking to the future with a pontiff committed to following the path set by the late Pope Francis.

Cardinal Robert Prevost was elevated to pope about 6 p.m. Rome time, and it wasn't long before women religious responded.

"With joy, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious welcomes Pope Leo XIV as the new head of the Catholic Church," the group said in a statement. LCWR represents about two-thirds of the nearly 35,000 sisters in the United States. "We are deeply grateful for his humble acceptance of his election and his willingness to serve the church and the wider world at this critical moment for the global community."

LCWR officials pointed to his history of ministering to those on the margins.

"We believe Pope Leo XIV's experience as the prior general of his Augustinian order, his years as a missionary in Peru, and his ministry as the prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and as president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America combine to give him both the skills and the heart to serve the Catholic Church well throughout the world," they wrote. "He also has the breadth of knowledge and a deep concern for marginalized peoples that will make him a credible moral voice for the larger world."

His message of inclusion and synodality particularly resonated.

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"We were especially heartened to hear in his greetings to the people after his election these words: 'We have to look together how to be a missionary church, building bridges, dialogue, always open to receiving with open arms for everyone, like this square, open to all, to all who need our charity, our presence, dialogue, love. ... To all you brothers and sisters of Rome, Italy, of all the world, we want to be a synodal church, walking and always seeking peace, charity, closeness, especially to those who are suffering.' "

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas — some of whom know Leo from years ministering in Peru — also cited his work with the poor.

"It is my hope that in his pastoral approach, our new Pope speaks truth to the powerful and, in his style of living, models the lifestyle and concerns of the powerless," wrote Mercy Sr. Susan Sanders, president of the congregation's leadership team. "I also hope he commits to thinking broadly about new and significant wants to incorporate the perspectives and skills of many more women in Vatican and local diocesan leadership positions. Such an approach would be encouraging to all of us who hold the hope for greater synodality in our Church."

The Ursuline Sisters of Louisville, Kentucky, have also ministered in Peru for decades.

"Although this is a historic moment of an election of a pope from the United States, even more importantly are Pope Leo XIV's words that affirm Pope Francis's Gospel message of peace and outreach to others," Sr. Jean Anne Zappa, president of the Ursuline Sisters of Louisville, said in a statement. "He called us to be bridge builders, to have a welcoming spirit and live out our Catholic Social teachings in this time of geo-political, social and religious challenges. All of us are called to be missionary disciples."



The crowd reacts as Cardinal Robert Prevost, who has chosen the papal name Leo XIV, appears on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican May 8, 2025, following his election during the conclave. (OSV News/Reuters/Eloisa Lopez)

The statement went on to say the congregation believes Leo will keep hold to the principles Francis modeled.

"We believe that this pope will continue to address the climate crisis, reach across divisions, extend mercy to refugees and migrants, and support human dignity and rights for all people, especially those on the margins," it said.

The Confederation of Latin American Religious (CLAR), a conference of women and men religious from South America, Central America and the Caribbean, said in a statement that they join the world in celebrating the new pope.

"His election is a sign of hope for a world that longs for peace, justice and fraternity," CLAR said. "We ask the Holy Spirit to guide him in this new ministry and to inspire us all to walk together, with humility and boldness, as a synodal, prophetic and

outgoing church."

The Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon offered a list of expectations for the new pope. The conference's vice president, Franciscan Catechist Sr. Laura Vicuña, wrote:

> May the human be the line that guides your feet, hands, head and heart, to meet the God who is incarnated among the poor and the last.
>
> May the universality of your actions promote the common good, peace, fraternity and justice, calling us to walk together in our diversities, weaknesses and capacities, in building bridges that help us overcome the difficult times that lie ahead.
>
> May your disciple's ear awaken your heart every morning to hear the cries of the earth, the poor and wounded humanity.
>
> May your mouth carry a word of comfort to those who are fallen and marginalized on the roads, but be a voice of denunciation against the powers of death, which diminish lives in the name of a failed power.

The conference also asked that Leo remember the things most important to them.

"We ask you to be our ally, in the defense of what is most sacred to us: life, land and rights," Vicuña wrote.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo XIV** feature series. View the full series.