

Biography and Vocation of Pope Leo XIV

Pope Leo XIV (United States, 1955) was born in Chicago. On 30 January 2023, Pope Francis appointed him Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America. He was created and proclaimed Cardinal by Pope Francis on 30 September 2023. On 8 May 2025, with the name Leo XIV, he was elected the 267th Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church.

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Pope Leo XIV, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, O.S.A., Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and Bishop Emeritus of Chiclayo, was born on September 14, 1955, in Chicago (Illinois, United States).

He grew up in the United States with his parents and two brothers. His parents were very involved in parish activities. All four of his grandparents were immigrants, both French and Spanish.

Robert Francis Prevost speaks about his vocation

In a recent interview with RAI, he recalled: “I came to know the Church through the experience of parish life at the local level. I also studied at a parish school. In this sense, and also

thanks to the closeness of some diocesan priests, the idea of possibly becoming a priest began to take shape.

“Later, I met my religious family, the Augustinians. After a short period of discernment, as well as by meeting other young people who had joined the Augustinians,” he entered the Augustinian Fathers’ Minor Seminary at the age of 14.

“Before the novitiate, the story is that of a young man living with other young men, getting to know himself and, as a son of Saint Augustine, getting to know others, the importance of friendship, and community life. During those years, a certain restlessness and a desire to become a missionary arose in me: not to remain in my own country, but to take part in some kind of activity as a priest or religious.”

Pope Leo XIV talks about the importance of friendship with his father in his vocation

“There are some things I remember very well. I trusted my parents deeply. Our family was, and still is, very close, even though my parents have already gone to be with the Lord.

“I remember some conversations with my father, who wasn’t exactly a spiritual director, but we talked about practical things, like the doubts that can trouble a young person: ‘Maybe it’s better to leave this life, get married, have children... have a so-called normal life, like the one I saw in my own family.’ Those are moments of important decisions and discernment for a young man.

“He would speak from his experience about things like the importance of intimacy between himself and my mother, and about how essential

closeness to Christ is in a vocation to the priesthood, to truly know Jesus, to know the love of God in life, for all Christians. Even though I'd heard the same ideas a hundred times from priests and the people who formed me, when my father said it, in a very human but deeply meaningful way, I thought: I have to listen to this.

"I reflected a lot on what he told me. Before I entered the novitiate... I still remember where we were. We weren't at home, we weren't sitting like we are now. We spoke several times; he was an educator, a teacher, he worked in schools, and he had the ability to talk to me. All those things were very important."

Civil studies, solemn vows, and first missionary experience

In 1977, he earned a degree in Mathematics and studied Philosophy at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. On 1 September of

that same year, at the age of 22, he entered the novitiate of the Order of Saint Augustine (O.S.A.) in the Province of Our Lady of Good Counsel, in Saint Louis.

He made his solemn vows on 29 August 1981. He studied at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, where he received a degree in theology.

At 26, he was sent by the Order to Rome to study Canon Law at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum). He was ordained a priest on 19 June 1982. He earned his licentiate in 1984 and was then sent to work in the mission of Chulucanas, in Piura, Peru (1985–1986).

Doctorate, episcopal ordination, and appointments

He earned a doctorate in canon law from the Pontifical University of St.

Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum). He completed his thesis, titled “The Office and Authority of the Local Prior in the Order of Saint Augustine,” in 1987. The same year, he joined the mission in Trujillo, also in Peru, as director of the joint formation project for Augustinian candidates from the vicariates of Chulucanas, Iquitos, and Apurímac.

Over the course of eleven years, he served as prior of the community (1988–1992), formation director (1988–1998), and instructor for professed members (1992–1998), and in the Archdiocese of Trujillo as judicial vicar (1989–1998) and professor of Canon Law, Patristics, and Moral Theology at the Major Seminary “San Carlos y San Marcelo.” At the same time, he was also entrusted with the pastoral care of Our Lady Mother of the Church, later established as the parish of Saint Rita (1988–1999), in a poor

suburb of the city, and was parish administrator of Our Lady of Monserrat from 1992 to 1999.

In 1999, he was elected Provincial Prior of the Augustinian Province of “Mother of Good Counsel” in Chicago, and two and a half years later, the ordinary General Chapter of the Order of Saint Augustine, elected him as Prior General, confirming him in 2007 for a second term.

In October 2013, he returned to his Augustinian Province in Chicago, serving as director of formation at the Saint Augustine Convent, first councilor, and provincial vicar, roles he held until Pope Francis appointed him on 3 November 2014, as Apostolic Administrator of the Peruvian Diocese of Chiclayo, elevating him to the episcopal dignity as Titular Bishop of Sufar.

He entered the diocese on 7 November, in the presence of

Apostolic Nuncio James Patrick Green, who ordained him Bishop just over a month later, on 12 December, the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the Cathedral of Saint Mary.

His episcopal motto is *In Illo uno unum*, words pronounced by Saint Augustine in a sermon on Psalm 127 to explain that “although we Christians are many, in the one Christ we are one.”

He served as Bishop of Chiclayo from 26 November 2015. In March 2018, he was elected Second Vice President of the Peruvian Episcopal Conference.

The Church as a communion of the faithful, not a mere institution

He concluded the interview with these words: “I believe that the voice of the Church today – the witness of the Church not merely as an institution, but as a communion of

the faithful, with the martyrs and the presence and testimony of men and women who give their lives even in situations of violence, war, and conflict – is a voice that offers great hope to the world.

“Not everyone is ready or open to hearing the message. The Church faces a great challenge. Too often we have allowed the Church to become merely an institution, whether in part or as a whole: the Vatican, the Holy See. There are institutional dimensions, yes. But that is not the heart of what the Church is or ought to be.”

Serving the Church from Rome

In 2019, Pope Francis appointed him a member of the Congregation for the Clergy (13 July), and in 2020, a member of the Congregation for Bishops (21 November). Meanwhile, on 15 April 2020, he was also

appointed Apostolic Administrator of the Peruvian Diocese of Callao.

On 30 January 2023, the Pope called him to Rome as Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, promoting him to the rank of Archbishop.

Pope Francis created him Cardinal in the Consistory of 30 September that year and assigned him the Diaconate of Saint Monica.

He has been a member of the Dicasteries for Evangelization (Section for First Evangelization and New Particular Churches), the Doctrine of the Faith, the Eastern Churches, the Clergy, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, Culture and Education, Legislative Texts; and the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State.

On Thursday, 8 May 2025, at 6:07 p.m., white smoke announced to the world the election of a new successor of Peter. In the fourth ballot of the conclave, Robert Francis Prevost was elected the 267th Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church and took the name Leo XIV.

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