

Section 5:

Statements by and Reporting on Robert Prevost, Before Election as Pope Leo XIV

Vatican News: Pope names missionary bishop to head Dicastery for Bishops

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-01/pope-names-missionary-bishop-to-head-dicastery-for-bishops.html>

30 January 2023

Pope Francis has named Robert Francis Prevost, an Augustinian missionary who has been serving as Bishop of Chiclayo in Peru, as the new prefect for the Dicastery of Bishops. Bishop Prevost succeeds Cardinal Marc Ouellet, both as prefect and as president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.

By Vatican News

The Holy Father has accepted the resignation from the offices of prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops and president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, presented, upon reaching the age limit, by His Eminence Cardinal Marc Ouellet, P.S.S., and has called Bishop Robert Francis Prevost, O.S.A., until now bishop of Chiclayo, Peru, to succeed him in the same offices, at the same time conferring the title of Archbishop-Bishop emeritus of Chiclayo. He will assume office on 12 April 2023.

Biography of Robert Francis Prevost

Robert Francis Prevost, 67, was born in Chicago, Illinois, U.S., on 14 September 1955. He entered the novitiate of the Order of Saint Augustine (OSA) in 1977, in the province of Our Lady of Good Counsel in St. Louis, and made his solemn vows on 29 August 1981. He studied at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, graduating with a degree in Theology.

At age 27, he was sent by the Order to Rome to study Canon Law at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum). He received priestly ordination on 19 June 1982. He received his Licentiate in 1984, then was sent to work in the mission in Chulucanas, Piura, Peru (1985-1986).

In 1987 he received his doctorate with the thesis, "The Role of the Local Prior of the Order of St. Augustine." In the same year he was elected vocations director and missions director of the Augustinian Province of "Mother of Good Counsel." In 1988 he was sent to the mission of Trujillo as director of the common formation project for Augustinian aspirants from the Vicariates of Chulucanas, Iquitos, and

Apurímac. There he served as community prior (1988-1992), formation director (1988-1998), and teacher of the professed (1992-1998). In the Archdiocese of Trujillo, he was judicial vicar (1989-1998), and professor of Canon Law, Patristics, and Morals in the San Carlos e San Marcelo Major Seminary.

In 1999 he was elected prior provincial of the "Mother of Good Counsel" Province. After two and a half years, the Ordinary General Chapter elected him prior general, a ministry the Order entrusted to him again at the 2007 Ordinary General Chapter. In October 2013 he returned to his province to be teacher of the professed and vicar provincial; positions he held until Pope Francis appointed him apostolic administrator of the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru, on 3 November 2014, elevating him to the episcopal dignity of titular bishop of the Diocese of Sufar. He took canonical possession of the diocese on 7 November in the presence of Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop James Patrick Green; he was ordained bishop on 12 December, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in the Cathedral of his diocese. He has been bishop of Chiclayo since 26 September 2015. He has served as second vice president of the Peruvian Bishops' Conference since March 2018. Pope Francis appointed him a member of the Congregation for the Clergy in 2019 and a member of the Congregation for Bishops in 2020.

Vatican News: Archbishop Prevost: ‘The bishop is a pastor, not a manager’

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-05/archbishop-prevost-the-bishop-is-a-pastor-not-a-manager.html>

In an interview with Vatican Media, the new prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, Archbishop Robert Prevost, says, “We are often worried about teaching doctrine, but we risk forgetting that our first duty is to communicate the beauty and joy of knowing Jesus.”

04 May 2023

By Andrea Tornielli

At the age of 67, Archbishop Robert Prevost is beginning his “novitiate” as prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops.

An Augustinian friar, Robert Francis Prevost was born in the US city of Chicago, and served first as a missionary and later as bishop in Chiclayo, Peru, before being chosen by Pope Francis to succeed Cardinal Marc Ouellet.

In the following interview with Vatican Media, he sketches a portrait of the type of bishop needed today.

Q: What has it mean for you to go from being a missionary bishop in Latin America to leading the dicastery that helps the Pope choose bishops?

Archbishop Prevost: I still consider myself a missionary. My vocation, like that of every Christian, is to be a missionary, to proclaim the Gospel wherever one is.

Certainly, my life has changed a lot: I have the opportunity to serve the Holy Father, to serve the Church today, here, from the Roman Curia. [It is] a very different mission from before, but also a new opportunity to live a dimension of my life, which simply was always answering ‘Yes’ when asked to do a service. With this spirit, I ended my mission in Peru, after eight and a half years as a bishop and almost twenty years as a missionary, to begin a new one in Rome.

Q: Could you offer an “identikit” of a bishop for the Church of our time?

First and foremost, he must be ‘*Catholic*’: sometimes the bishop risks focusing only on the local dimension. But a bishop should have a much broader vision of the Church and reality, and experience the universality of the Church.

He also needs the ability to listen to his neighbour and seek advice, as well as psychological and spiritual maturity.

A fundamental element of the portrait of a bishop is being a pastor, capable of being close to the members of the community, starting with the priests for whom the bishop is father and brother. To live this closeness to all, without excluding anyone.

Pope Francis has spoken of four types of closeness: closeness to God, to brother bishops, to priests, and to all God's people. One must not give in to the temptation to live isolated, separated in a palace, satisfied with a certain social level or a certain level within the Church.

And we must not hide behind an idea of authority that no longer makes sense today. The authority we have is to serve, to accompany priests, to be pastors and teachers.

We are often preoccupied with teaching doctrine, the way of living our faith, but we risk forgetting that our first task is to teach what it means to know Jesus Christ and to bear witness to our closeness to the Lord. This comes first: to communicate the beauty of the faith, the beauty and joy of knowing Jesus. It means that we ourselves are living it and sharing this experience.

Q: How important is the bishop's service of unity around the Successor of Peter in a time when polarisation is also growing in the ecclesial community?

The three words we are using in the work of the Synod—participation, communion, and mission—provide the answer.

The bishop is called to this charism, to live the spirit of communion, to promote unity in the Church, unity with the Pope. This also means being Catholic, because without Peter, where is the Church? Jesus prayed for this at the Last Supper, 'That all may be one,' and it is this unity that we wish to see in the Church.

Today, society and culture take us away from that vision of Jesus, and this does so much harm. The lack of unity is a wound that the Church suffers, a very painful one.

Divisions and polemics in the Church do not help anything. We bishops especially must accelerate this movement towards unity, towards communion in the Church.

Q: Can the process for the appointment of new bishops be improved? Praedicate Evangelium states that 'members of the people of God' must be involved. Is this happening?

We had an interesting reflection among the members of the Dicastery on this issue. For some time now, not only some bishops or some priests, but also other members of the people of God are being heard. This is very important, because the bishop is called to serve a particular Church. Therefore, listening to the people of God is also important.

If a candidate is not known by anyone among his people, it is difficult—not impossible, but difficult—for him to truly become pastor of a community, of a local Church. So, it is important that the process is a little more open to listening to different members of the community.

This does not mean that it is the local Church that has to choose its pastor, as if being called to be a bishop was the result of a democratic vote, of an almost ‘political’ process. A much broader view is needed, and the apostolic nunciatures help a lot in this. I believe that, little by little, we need to open up more, to listen a little more to the religious, the laity.

Q: One of the novelties the Pope has introduced was to appoint three women among the members of the Dicastery for Bishops. What can you say about their contribution?

On several occasions we have seen that their point of view is an enrichment. Two are religious and one is a laywoman, and often their perspective coincides perfectly with what the other members of the dicastery say; while at other times, their opinion introduces another perspective and becomes an important contribution to the process.

I think their appointment is more than just a gesture on the part of the Pope to say that there are now women here, too. There is a real, genuine, and meaningful participation that they offer at our meetings when we discuss the dossiers of candidates.

Q: The new norms for combating abuse have increased the responsibility of bishops, who are called upon to act promptly and to answer for any delays and omissions. How is this task experienced by the bishop?

We are on a journey with regard to this as well.

There are places where good work has already been done for years and the rules are being put into practice. At the same time, I believe that there is still much to learn.

I am talking about the urgency and responsibility of accompanying victims. One of the difficulties that many times arise is that the bishop must be close to his priests, as I have already said, and he must be close to the victims. Some recommend that it not be the bishop directly who receives the victims; but we cannot close our hearts, the door of the Church, to people who have suffered from abuse.

The responsibility of the bishop is great, and I think we still have to make great efforts to respond to this situation that is causing so much pain in the Church. It will take time. We are trying to work together with the other dicasteries.

I believe it is part of the mission of our dicastery to accompany bishops who have not received the necessary preparation to deal with this issue. It is urgent and necessary that we be more responsible and more sensitive to this.

Q: The laws are there now. It is more difficult to change a mentality...

Certainly, there are many differences between one culture and another on how one reacts in these situations. In some countries, the taboo of talking about the subject has already been broken somewhat, while there

are other places where victims, or victims' families, would never want to talk about the abuse they have suffered.

In any case, silence is not an answer. Silence is not the solution. We must be transparent and honest, we must accompany and assist the victims, because otherwise their wounds will never heal. There is a great responsibility in this, for all of us.

Q: The Church is engaged in the path that will lead to the Synod on Synodality. What is the role of the bishop?

There is a great opportunity in this continuous renewal of the Church that Pope Francis is inviting us to promote. On the one hand, there are bishops who openly express their fear, because they do not understand where the Church is going. Perhaps they prefer the security of answers already experienced in the past.

I truly believe that the Holy Spirit is very present in the Church at this time and is pushing us towards a renewal and therefore we are called to the great responsibility of living what I call a new attitude. It is not just a process, it is not just changing some ways of doing things, maybe holding more meetings before making a decision. It is much more.

But it is also what perhaps causes certain difficulties, because at the end of the day we must be able to listen first of all to the Holy Spirit, to what He is asking of the Church.

Q: How do we achieve this?

We must be able to listen to one another, to recognise that it is not a question of discussing a political agenda or simply trying to promote the issues that interest me or others.

Sometimes it seems that we want to reduce everything to wanting to vote and then doing what was voted for. Instead, it is something much deeper and very different: we need to learn to really listen to the Holy Spirit and the spirit of truth-seeking that lives in the Church. Move from an experience where authority speaks and it's all over, to a Church experience that values the charisms, gifts, and ministries that there are in the Church.

The episcopal ministry performs an important service, but then we must put all this at the service of the Church in this synodal spirit that simply means walking together, all of us, and seeking together what the Lord is asking of us, in this our time.

Q: How much do economic problems affect the lives of bishops?

The bishop is also asked to be a good administrator, or at least [to have] the ability to find a good administrator to help him.

The Pope has told us that he wants a Church that is poor and for the poor. There are cases where the structures and infrastructure of the past are no longer needed and it is difficult to maintain them. At the same time, even in the places where I have worked, the Church is responsible for educational and health institutions that provide basic services to the people, because many times the State fails to provide them. Personally, I am not of the opinion that the Church should sell everything and ‘only’ preach the Gospel in the streets. However, this is a very big responsibility, there are no one-size-fits-all answers. There is a need to promote more fraternal help between the local Churches.

Faced with the need to maintain service structures with incomes that are no longer what they used to be; the bishop must be very practical. Cloistered nuns always say: ‘You have confidence and entrust everything to Divine Providence, because a way will be found to respond.’ The important thing also is never to forget the spiritual dimension of our vocation. Otherwise, we run the risk of becoming managers and reasoning like managers. Sometimes this happens.

Q: How do you see the relationship between the bishop and social media?

Social media can be an important tool to communicate the Gospel message reaching millions of people. We must prepare ourselves to use social media well.

I am afraid that sometimes this preparation has been lacking.

At the same time, the world today, which is constantly changing, presents situations where we really have to think several times before speaking or before writing a message on Twitter, in order to answer or even just to ask questions in a public form, in full view of everyone. Sometimes there is a risk of fuelling divisions and controversy.

There is a great responsibility to use social networks, communication, correctly, because it is an opportunity, but it is also a risk. And it can do damage to the communion of the Church. That is why one must be very prudent in the use of these means.

Vatican News: Brief biographies of 21 future Cardinals

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2023-07/get-to-know-the-future-cardinals.html>

July 9, 2023

Archbishop Robert Francis Prevost, 67, was born in Chicago, Illinois, U.S., on 14 September 1955. He entered the novitiate of the Order of Saint Augustine (OSA) in 1977, in the province of Our Lady of Good Counsel in St. Louis, and made his solemn vows on 29 August 1981. He studied at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, graduating with a degree in Theology. In 1988 he was sent to the mission of Trujillo as director of the common formation project for Augustinian aspirants from the Vicariates of Chulucanas, Iquitos, and Apurímac. There he served as community prior (1988-1992), formation director (1988-1998), and teacher of the professed (1992-1998). In the Archdiocese of Trujillo, he was judicial vicar (1989-1998), and professor of Canon Law, Patristics, and Morals in the San Carlos e San Marcelo Major Seminary. In 1999 he was elected prior provincial of the "Mother of Good Counsel" Province. After two and a half years, the Ordinary General Chapter elected him prior general, a ministry the Order entrusted to him again at the 2007 Ordinary General Chapter. On 3 November 2014, Pope Francis appointed him Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Chiclayo and on 7 November he was installed in the diocese. He was ordained Bishop of Chiclayo on 12 December 2014. On 15 April 2020, Pope Francis appointed him Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Callao. And in 2023. Pope Francis appointed him a Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops.

Vatican News: Cardinal-designate Prevost sees new role as a way to "walk together"

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-07/cardinal-designate-prevost-sees-new-role-as-way-walk-together.html>

July 10, 2023

Cardinal-designate Robert Prevost, prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, believes his future responsibility as a Cardinal will allow him to offer new ways to carry out his mission of service to the Lord and the Church.

By Linda Bordoni and Thaddeus Jones

Among the 21 new cardinals announced by Pope Francis at the Sunday Angelus of 9 July is Archbishop Robert Francis Prevost, O.S.A., Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops. He will be created a cardinal on 30 September 2023 during the Vatican consistory, just on the eve of the Synod on Synodality that will open with Church leaders and experts from around the world.

Archbishop Prevost is from Chicago, Illinois in the United States and a member of the Order of Saint Augustine (O.S.A.). He served for a decade and a half in the O.S.A. missions in Peru, followed by teaching in the US, leadership roles as Prior General of the entire Order for two terms, and later as Bishop of the Diocese of Chiclayo, Peru. Pope Francis appointed him Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops in 2023.

Reacting to Pope Francis' naming him a Cardinal, Archbishop Prevost expressed his "incredible surprise" in an interview with Vatican News the day after the announcement, while entrusting to the Lord this new responsibility and all it entails.

Recalling the words of Saint Pope Paul VI, he said that "being a cardinal is a mission of love with Christ, our Savior," and that "a cardinal is called to give his whole life in service to the Church." The colour red of a cardinal's vestments is associated with the blood of the martyrs, he notes, and this means great responsibility. He expressed his "great trust in the Lord" which has been strengthened in his many experiences living among the people of Peru, serving in different missions, and carrying out various leadership roles in his order and as a diocesan bishop.

"I just pray to the Lord that I will be faithful in trying to fulfill what Pope Francis and the Church is now asking me."

Cardinal-designated Prevost says it is not a coincidence that Pope Francis will hold the consistory for the creation of new cardinals right at the beginning of the first session of the Synod on Synodality, noting his firm conviction that "all of us are called to walk together."

This requires us "to truly search for the will of God and the presence of the spirit listening to one another and carry on this mission of service and love that is so central to the very meaning of what Church is about."

"I hope to be able to be a faithful servant for what the Lord is asking of myself and of the Church."

He adds in conclusion that he believes his role as a cardinal will allow him to promote a Church marked by "participation, communion and mission" as the Synod will discuss in October.

Vatican News: Synod forum: Local Churches offer ‘richness in dialogue through diversity’

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-10/synod-forum-local-churches-cardinal-prevost-wijlens.html>

October 17, 2024

Full video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR3ySz7heCY&t=11s>

As part of the Synod on synodality, several Synod delegates hold a theological-pastoral forum at the Pontifical Augustinianum Institute to explore the mutual relationship between particular Churches and the universal Church.

By Edoardo Giribaldi

On the evening of October 16, the second theological-pastoral forum, organized as part of the Synod on Synodality, took place at the Pontifical Patristic Institute Augustinianum in Rome.

"The mutual relationship between the local Church and the universal Church" was the guiding theme for the interventions moderated by Professor Anna Rowlands, a member of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development.

The speakers were fathers and mothers of the Synod assembly, including Professor Antonio Autiero, a priest from the Diocese of Naples; Professor Myriam Wijlens, a Dutch canon lawyer and theologian, consultant to the General Secretariat of the Synod; Professor Miguel de Salis Amaral, a Portuguese priest and theological consultant at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints; and, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops.

Richness in diversity

Cardinal Prevost focused his intervention on two personal experiences related to his episcopal formation. During a pastoral formation course in Rome in 2011, organized by the then "Sacred Congregation for Bishops," he recalled an "emphasis on the role of the bishop in helping local people look beyond the limits of the individual diocese, broadening horizons to promote an understanding of what it means to be part of the Church."

He also recalled that new bishops from Asia and Africa used to attend a separate course in Rome after their election. However, said the Cardinal, "this year the course was organized in close collaboration between the involved Dicasteries, so that everyone could meet."

Cardinal Prevost shared an assessment of the new teaching method, which was received with great enthusiasm for offering "an experience of the universal nature of the Church that could not be found in any other format."

The opportunity to sit with bishops from all over the world, "just being able to dialogue," made the learning "noteworthy."

Local Churches, he said, are not "mere parts" of the universal Church, which represents "the sum of all." Rather, each particular Church brings a uniqueness and richness to the universal Church as part of their "mysterious being" of the different communities.

The Church that lives in all parts

Speaking afterward to Vatican News, Cardinal Provost emphasized the unity of the body of Christ in the Church.

"Throughout the history of the Church, the formation of local communities has been a reality in different places, but always with reference to the one Church of Christ," the Cardinal Prefect said. "We must not try to understand this as a matter of mathematics or geography, but to see it on a deeper level of communion. The Church lives in all parts."

Entire people of God

Fr. Miguel de Salis Amaral affirmed that all relationships, including the one examined in the Forum, are built on the dynamic promoted by the current Synod, highlighting the importance of the relationship that binds various ecclesial realities.

The Portuguese priest noted that the Second Vatican Council marked the first opening in this direction, referring to local Churches as "part of the whole," in reference to the universal ecclesial community, and at the same time, they are "present and active in the whole."

Quoting *Lumen Gentium*, the priest highlighted that "in every local Church" resides "the power, the richness of all sacramental and spiritual gifts."

He illustrated this relationship with a metaphor of a slice of cake. "In every portion, there is all the flavor, all the people of God," he noted.

In conclusion, the professor noted the current global context, marked by "polarization, individualism, wars, and a globalization that only informs us about part of reality, but does not always unite us." Faced with this scenario, he said, "pastors" are called to insist "on the Church" and its various fields "where truly human relationships, openness to others, are lived."

Primacy of local communities

Fr. Autiero then pointed out that "the local Church, in its articulations" represents "the place where we can" experience the "synodal and missionary life of the whole Church."

The Neapolitan priest said the issue of the relationship between local and universal communities is linked to the classification of the concept of place.

"The place is much greater," he said, adding that "place" represents the horizon "within which different subjects converge, united by shared intentions, common aspirations" of the Church.

The "character of place" cannot, he added, be reduced to a secondary element but, on the contrary, "enters into the substance" of the ecclesial whole.

Though an individual's experience of the Church is primarily local, each person can draw on the "principle of unity" through the figure of their local Bishop and his collegiality with the universal Church. Ecclesiological frameworks are often "questioned and challenged" by this assertion, which "does not merely call for procedural adjustments or marginal improvements to our established practices," but rather instills in consciences "the need for a conversion, both relational and contextual."

Australia's example of diocesan and plenary councils

Professor Wijlens' intervention focused on the various forms of diocesan and parish pastoral councils, as well as plenary councils.

She noted that "the people of God" expect "much more; they desire canonical norms to transform them into real vehicles of a synodal Church, allowing them to participate in Christ's royal office."

Alongside the diocesan councils are plenary councils, characterized by "structured cooperation" and capable of "expressing notions of catholicity, even for the universal Church."

Professor Wijlens positioned them halfway between local and universal communities. All active bishops in a particular territory participate, but several other categories of people "can and should be invited," including vicars general and episcopal, seminary rectors, deans of theology faculties.

The Dutch theologian offered an alternative model in the experience of the Australian Church, "which recently celebrated a plenary council" in a context of "deep crisis due to sexual abuse scandals." The bishops "felt they could not restore trust in the Church on their own," and thus called all the faithful to "take action, so that they could emerge together."

The broader participation of the "invited" members was granted through an "indult from the Holy See," leading to a composition of 44 bishops and 275 faithful.

Professor Wijlens noted that "decisions were fully made even by non-episcopal members," and expressed her hope that such institutions could be adapted to needs in other particular Churches.

Vatican News: Synod briefing–Day 17: Delegates propose amendments to final document

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-10/synod-briefing-day-17-synod-participants-propose-amendments.html>

October 23, 2024

Video of Prevost: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AVRu6DWxF-A&t=52s>

At the penultimate Synod press conference, panelists discuss the role and authority of bishops, the need for canon law to reflect synodality, the doctrinal authority of episcopal conferences, and the Eastern Catholic Churches.

By Christopher Wells

Synod participants have proposed more than one thousand “modi”, or amendments, to the so-called “Final Document” which will mark the end of the General Assembly’s work.

More than 900 of the amendments were proposed by the Synod’s small working groups, where each suggestion had to be approved by a simple majority. The writing group charged with preparing the final document also received about 100 proposed amendments from individuals at the synod.

The writing group is now preparing a final draft of the document, which will be read to at the Synod on Saturday morning and voted on in the afternoon.

At Wednesday’s press briefing at the Holy See Press Office, Dr. Paolo Ruffini, the president of the Synod’s Commission for Information, informed journalists that Synod members will now vote on the renewal of the Ordinary Council of the Synod, which is charged with preparing for the next General Assembly. Newly elected members will take office at the close of the current gathering.

Statement of Cardinal-elect Timothy Radcliffe

Dr. Ruffini also advised journalists of a statement by Cardinal-elect Timothy Radcliffe concerning Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo’s response to a question during Tuesday’s press conference.

Referring to an address by Cardinal-elect Radcliffe that was republished in *L’Osservatore Romano*, a journalist asked Cardinal Ambongo to respond to the suggestion that financial considerations were behind the African response to *Fiducia supplicans*. Cardinal Ambongo strongly defended the Cardinal-elect, saying that he had spoken to Cardinal-elect Radcliffe, who assured him that he had never suggested anything of the kind.

In the statement released on Wednesday, Cardinal-elect Radcliffe explained that his conversation with Cardinal Ambongo referred not to the original speech published by *L’Osservatore Romano*, but to an article by Phil Lawler that appeared on the website of Catholic Culture.

“Lawler’s reading of the Osservatore article misinterpreted what I had written,” Cardinal-elect Radcliffe affirmed. “I never wrote or suggested that positions taken by the Catholic Church in Africa were influenced by financial considerations. I was acknowledging only that the Catholic Church in Africa is under tremendous pressure from other religions and church which are well funded by outside sources.” Cardinal-elect Radcliffe concluded his statement by saying he is “most grateful to Cardinal Ambongo for his clear defence of my position.”

The authority and role of bishops in the Church

Following Dr. Ruffini’s presentation, Wednesday’s guest speakers took the floor, beginning with Cardinal Robert Prevost, OSA.

The Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops spoke on the role and authority of bishops and bishops’ conferences, beginning with a discussion on the process of selecting bishops. He went on to emphasize that bishops are not “business administrators,” but should be pastors first and foremost, walking with the people of God entrusted to their care.

Cardinal Prevost noted the tension felt by bishops in regard to their role of fathers and pastors while also having, at times, to be judges and disciplinarians.

The Cardinal repeatedly emphasized that a bishop’s authority is based on “service,” saying it is very important to change the dynamic of power structures within the Church by emphasizing the need to serve all members of a diocese. In this context, he highlighted the need for bishops to consult and work with priests, religious, and laity, as well as the various synodal structures already recognized in canon law. He went on to encourage bishops to get to know their people and to listen to them.

Finally, Cardinal Prevost said it is “very important” for bishops to reach out to those on the margins of society and those who feel excluded, and to invite them to be part of the Church.

He highlighted the refrain of Pope Francis, “everyone, everyone, everyone,” meaning all must be welcomed, and noted that bishops are especially called to be the expression of that welcoming and openness.

The role of canon law in the synodal process

The next speaker, Professor Myriam Wijlens, an expert at the Synod, addressed the role of canon law with regard to synodality.

She used the metaphor of “hitting the reset button,” referring to an earlier lecture she had given, and said this involves changing the system in which we work to optimise working conditions for a particular task.

The current Synod, she said, is an invitation by the Pope for the Church to be “reconfigured” with regard to the acting subjects in order to optimise the Church’s missionary task.

Rooted in the Second Vatican Council, this involves the members of the Church discerning together, in light of the variety of vocations, charisms, etc., and in the various contexts in which they find themselves, how they can help make the Church's mission more credible and effective.

Professor Wijlens also remarked on the “great consistency” of the people of God who have insisted that the transformative process initiated by the Synod must be accompanied by canonical structures. She noted calls for episcopal and ecclesial gatherings involving the whole people of God at every level of the Church, including the continental level, as well as calls for mandatory pastoral councils, which she said should be strengthened.

Finally, Professor Wijlens emphasized the importance of accountability, transparency and evaluation, noting that abuses within the Church have had an impact on the Church's credibility.

She noted an increased awareness that all the faithful are bound together and that this implies a mutual responsibility to hold one another. She added that this realization flows not from a societal but from a deeply theological perspective.

The doctrinal authority of episcopal conferences

Father Gilles Routhier, a theologian and an expert in ecclesiology and the history of the Church, spoke next, discussing the question of the doctrinal authority of episcopal conferences.

He noted that the question is not new, having been addressed in several magisterial documents since Vatican II.

He insisted on a rigorous description of what is meant by the term, emphasizing that bishops' conferences do not have the authority to propose new dogmas but must act in communion with the whole Church and with the Pope.

Concretely, he spoke about the competence of bishops' conferences to teach the common faith of the Church in a way that responds to the needs of a particular people—that is, not to leave the teaching as an abstract idea but to apply Church teaching to the needs and challenges facing their people.

Eastern Catholic Churches and the Synod

Finally, Father Khalil Alwan, ML, a witness of the synodal process from the Maronite Church, spoke about the various Eastern Catholic Churches.

He began by noting a novelty of the current Synod, which, on the initiative of Pope Francis, has invited non-bishops—priests, deacons, men and women religious, and laymen and women—to take part as members with full voting rights. He said this is very much appreciated by the laity and allows this Assembly “to be the best expression of the *sensus fidei* of the universal Church.”

Father Alwan went on to discuss the Eastern Catholic Churches, which are not simply local Churches, but Apostolic and Patriarchal Churches with their own jurisdiction, traditions, and heritage.

Eastern Catholics, he said, have travelled beyond their homelands as migrants throughout the world, bringing the consensus of their Churches which often suffer from various afflictions, including war.

Eastern Catholics dispersed throughout the world carry “the pain of the people” while remaining attached to their lands of origin. Often marked by “martyrdom,” they maintain the hope of the Resurrection.

Father Alwan said that during this Synod, Eastern Catholics have experienced the richness of the unity of the Church that is yet diverse. “Through discernment in the Spirit,” he said, “we have found, on the part of others, compassion, understanding, and hope.”

He highlighted the importance of “weaving relationships and building bridges of dialogue” aimed at mutual understanding and working together for the common good.

He also noted concrete signs of solidarity, including Pope Francis’ letter to the Catholics of the Near East and the call for a day of prayer and fasting for an end to the “atrocities” of the war in the Holy Land, as well as the canonization of eleven martyrs from Damascus during Mass on Sunday, October 20.

Finally, after adding his voice to the call for the international community and the UN Security Council to put an end to the war in the Holy Land, Fr. Alwan explained that Christian hope is not mere superficial optimism.

The Cross, he said, is not the last word. God has prepared a path of life even in suffering, “giving us hope to go on, hope for a peaceful future in the Middle East, even if it seems far away.”

Vatican News: Pope: Climate change impacts poorest and requires global cooperation

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2024-11/climate-change-conference-latin-america-cardinals-rome.html>

November 29, 2024

Pope Francis sends a message to a conference in Rome that brought together Cardinals and experts to discuss climate change and its negative effects on the most vulnerable.

By Kielce Gussie

About 30% of the world's population has been exposed to deadly heat waves more than 20 days each year, according to the UN Environment Programme.

In a seminar on November 28 in Rome hosted by the embassies of Cuba, Bolivia, and Venezuela to the Holy See, several Cardinals and representatives from these countries came together to discuss the global impacts of the ongoing environmental crisis.

Pope Francis sent a letter to participants, issuing them a warning: climate change impacts the “poorest nations” and its signs “cannot be hidden or disguised.”

Man must not be a tyrant

Speaking on the deteriorating environmental crisis facing the world, **Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost**, president of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America and Prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops, stressed it is time to move “from words to action.” He said the answer to this challenge must be based on the Social Doctrine of the Church.

“Dominion over nature”—the task which God gave humanity—should not become “tyrannical.” It must be a “relationship of reciprocity” with the environment, he said.

The Cardinal cautioned against the “harmful” consequences of technological development and reiterated the Holy See's commitment to protecting the environment, enumerating examples, like the Vatican installing solar panels and shifting to electric vehicles.

Climate change is ‘undeniable’

Cardinal Peter Appiah Turkson, chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, emphasized humanity's vocation to care for the environment. “The world is not an accident but an intentional act of God” and everyone is called to be a “co-creator.”

The Cardinal emphasized that those most affected by climate change are the most vulnerable. The way the environment has been treated, Cardinal Turkson said, is “a tragic and glaring example of structural sin.”

The embassies of Bolivia, Cuba, and Venezuela to the Holy See, entitled, “Addressing the Problems of the Environmental Crisis in Light of *Laudato si'* and *Laudate Deum*, Experiences in Latin America.”

Referring to movements that deny climate change, he stressed the importance of taking action now, as the climate emergency is not a “hypothetical future” but something humanity is “experiencing firsthand.”

Agreeing with Cardinal Turkson, Dr. Paolo Ruffini, Prefect of the Dicastery for Communication (our parent organization), reiterated Pope Francis’ words, stating the need to call the climate crisis what it is: “undeniable.”

Impoverished but ‘we all have the right’

Emilce Cuda, Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, pointed out how floods in Brazil, which have “swept away entire communities,” often do not make headlines like those in Spain. She called on all of Latin America to focus on agendas similar to Pope Francis.

“We are an impoverished continent,” the Secretary stated, “but when we sit at the same table, we all have the right to the same space and freedom.”

She emphasized that being “poorer does not mean we are less professional or less qualified.”

How to face the future

Numerous organizations are working to implement the principles of *Laudato si'* to support the most vulnerable amid the climate crisis.

In Venezuela, Josué Alejandro Lorca Vega, Minister of People’s Power for Ecosocialism, described how young people are being educated on environmental sustainability to give the tools needed to do their part.

With the COP29 meeting just having ended, Pedro Luis Pedroso Cuesta, Deputy Director General for Multilateral Affairs and International Law at Cuba’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called its response to the climate crisis “fragmented” and inadequate, as no “financial milestone” was outlined to offer aid to developing countries.

The Deputy Director applied a phrase from Cuban revolutionaries to climate change, stressing the need for immediate action: “Tomorrow will already be too late to address what we should have done a long time ago.”

National Catholic Reporter: Prevost's Peru was a Vatican II laboratory of church renewal

BY JUSTIN MCLELLAN

Chulucanas, Peru — October 23, 2025

<https://www.ncronline.org/news/prevosts-peru-was-vatican-ii-laboratory-church-renewal>

Long before he was the successor of St. Peter, Pope Leo XIV had a different name to the faithful of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Chulucanas.

"We called him Father Robertito, because we were very close to him," Elena Lozada Seminario told the National Catholic Reporter inside the church where a then-30-year-old Fr. Robert Prevost once served in northern Peru in 1985. "He was always visiting the communities, going to the countryside. People loved him because he was so simple, so humble."

As a young missionary and priest of only three years, Prevost was sent to Chulucanas where he spent just one year before moving on to minister for over a decade in the coastal city of Trujillo, but his time there left an indelible mark on the future pope's vision of the church.

The pastoral model he encountered — rooted in synodal governance, lay leadership and social mission — shaped his later ministry in Trujillo and, decades later, guided his approach as bishop of Chiclayo, a city just four hours south of where he first arrived in the country.

Vision of church steeped in Vatican II

The pastoral framework Prevost immersed himself in Chulucanas was up and running by the time he got there as a young Augustinian in 1985, but its roots can be clearly traced back to the 1962-65 Second Vatican Council and the Latin American bishops' assemblies that followed it.

In 1962, Pope John XXIII called on the church in the United States to send 10% of its clergy on mission to Latin America.

Though that figure was never realized, several religious congregations took that message in stride. The Midwest Province of the Augustinians was one of them; in 1963 the first U.S. Augustinians arrived in Peru and the prelature of Chulucanas was formed the following year.

John McNabb, an Augustinian from Beloit, Wisconsin, became prelate of Chulucanas in 1964, the head of the church's jurisdiction, which was not yet a diocese. When McNabb arrived in Peru, the other U.S. Augustinians already working in the country told him that leading Chulucanas was "impossible," he recalled in his memoir. "There's no way we can begin to evangelize that large a territory. We don't think we should take the prelature as it is planned," they told him.

McNabb, however, pressed ahead, and as the head of the church in Chuclucanas he attended as a voting member the Second Vatican Council's third and fourth sessions, which dealt with church's structure, the role of bishops and the laity, missions and priestly formation.

That started McNabb's decadeslong reflection on how to best organize the mission in Peru that would materialize in the model encountered and embraced by Prevost.

In 1968, Latin American bishops met in Medellín, Colombia, to discuss implementing Vatican II, which had concluded three years prior. A key outcome of this meeting was the recommendation to promote the formation of ecclesial base communities — small, locally led Christian communities — as the "first and fundamental nucleus" of the church. The meeting said the formation of leaders for these communities, which could be clerics, religious or laypeople, should be a "priority concern for parish priests and bishops."

Following that assembly, the Augustinians implemented a formation program for lay leaders in the prelate. At the time, it was estimated that some 300,000 people lived in the church's jurisdiction, 15% of whom lived in urban provincial capitals and 85% in rural areas.

In a history of the Augustinian Order in the region, Augustinian Fr. Avencio Villarejo recalled how in the mid-'60s, the rugged terrain, "almost entirely devoid of roads, clearly indicated the difficulties that the Augustinians would encounter in the spiritual administration of so many souls, who can only be reached through arduous and lengthy journeys on the backs of animals and on dizzying trails."

Nine years after the Medellín meeting, McNabb attended another assembly of Latin American bishops in Puebla, Mexico, which was opened by Pope John Paul II. McNabb recounts in his memoir how the pope referred to the ecclesial base communities that were being developed throughout the continent as "a special source of hope for the church in Latin America."

At that point, McNabb was discerning the implementation of a parish renewal project to be adopted by the prelate, titled the "New Image of Parish."

The Movement for a Better World, a Catholic initiative dedicated to church renewal that began in 1952, developed the project following Vatican II. The parish renewal project would become integral to McNabb's legacy in the diocese and an essential part of Prevost's vision of the church.

Bishop John McNabb in an undated photo (CNS/Courtesy of the Augustinians of the Midwest)
The project sought to include all baptized persons in the life of the parish. Practically, that meant dividing each parish into zones, in which laypeople were elected to fulfill ministries within their zones, such as secretary, messenger, or coordinator for liturgy, catechesis, social services or young adult activities. McNabb wrote that the pope's praise of the ecclesial base communities during the meeting in Puebla in 1977 "gave the plan a very positive recommendation and helped to assure us that the direction of our pastoral program was not only approved and necessary, but also that it was probably the most concrete way to accomplish the many suggestions we had heard about in Puebla."

With a 10-year implementation timeline, Prevost would arrive in Chulucanas right as the "New Image of Parish" plan was reaching its full potential. The model, implemented by the Augustinians who preceded him, became integral to the future pope's pastoral DNA, informing his view of church, the laity, the role of the priests and bishops, and how they all interact with one another to live as church.

'Father Robertito' and the spirit of Chulucanas

The faithful at St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Chulucanas recall a young Augustinian Fr. Robert Prevost pushing McNabb around Chulucanas in a wheelchair, helping balance him while walking and assisting him in keeping track of taking his medication.

"Pastorally, [Prevost] was forged here in Chulucanas," Lozada, the parishioner, told NCR. "We had a bishop, Msgr. Juan [McNabb], who was a missionary 100%, he worked a lot. He made our little parish into a huge diocese with the help of the Augustinians, who did a lot of work and were formed here." A young canon lawyer who had only been a priest for three years, Prevost was sent to Peru after spending four years in Rome and earning his licentiate in canon law. In Chulucanas, he acted as chancellor to assist McNabb, then 60 years old, and to prepare the documentation to convert the prelature into a diocese.

St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Chulucanas, Peru, was one of the churches where a young Augustinian Fr. Robert Prevost served as a missionary upon arriving in Peru in 1985. (NCR photo/Justin McLellan) Beginning in late 1983, just over a year before Prevost's arrival, the region of Chulucanas was hit by serious floods that worsened the area's already poor economy. McNabb recalled rescue missions led by religious sisters, priests and seminarians riding out on pickup trucks belonging to parishes to pull people out of waist-deep water and housing them in Augustinian convents and rectories.

Pope Leo recalled that extreme poverty in an interview for his biography published in Peru. "There was a part of me that looked around and said, 'Lord, where have you brought me?' " he said. Although his objective there was largely administrative, the parishioners who saw him at work remember him as a pastor.

Lozada recalled Prevost spending time forming young people and training them to be altar servers. Those who lived close by would come to the parish for their formation, but Prevost "would go and visit the villages where priests wouldn't reach because it was difficult, but he would go once or twice a week." Luis Chiroque Farán was just 13 when the future pope taught him how to be an altar server. He said he and the other young people Prevost worked with were happy to have a young priest around.

"To see a priest in jeans, in a polo shirt, with a cap on, that he would walk with and meet with the young people, it was very striking," he said. "He had a spirit of great openness toward young people."

The Chulucanas in which Prevost found himself was "a very small town, very poor, the houses were made of sticks and straws," said Lola Chávez Hernández, another parishioner of St. Joseph the Worker. Yet Prevost "stood alongside the poor, the most simple, the most humble. That's where he was, and he also learned from his predecessors, from those whose authority he was under, like Msgr. Juan [McNabb] and other priests who had been here. So he came here with that conviction to serve the poor."

Victor Chiroque, another parishioner, said that Prevost, like the other Augustinians in the prelature, was committed to the pastoral plan implemented by McNabb.

"All of the priests were very involved in the pastoral plan, and he was one of them," Chiroque said. "He was young, so he would go out — not just here in Chulucanas, but to all of the villages to visit, which at that time was not easy."

As pope, Leo said in his biography that McNabb "was in many ways a very prophetic bishop" for instituting a pastoral plan that envisioned a parish as "the experience of the church at the local level and the building of an authentic community where people get to know each other, help each other, and support each other."

"All the things we are hearing today with the talk about synodality, we were already doing in Chulucanas in the 1980s, moving forward, so it was all very natural for me," he said, referring to the term for creating a more [listening and participatory church](#) coined by Pope Francis.

The future pope would only spend one year in Chulucanas before returning to the United States, yet his time there would instill in him a participatory image of the church that he worked to implement time and again throughout his ecclesial career.

Turning parishioners into partners

Víctor Saldaña Ortiz had a problem. In the early 1980s, he began living in the Monserrate neighborhood of Trujillo, the Peruvian coastal city some 220 miles south of Chulucanas.

The neighborhood didn't have any parish of its own and the community was divided as people visited different parishes for Mass each Sunday.

In 1989, Saldaña and other neighbors successfully lobbied the Redemptorist religious order to celebrate a Sunday Mass for the neighborhood. Despite the 6:30 am Mass time, the people showed up, and more and more began flocking to it.

Yet in 1992 the Redemptorists could no longer provide the community with a regular Mass. The faithful in Monserrate met with the archbishop of Trujillo, who recommended that they contact another religious order, the Augustinians, who were still relatively new to the area and could have the bandwidth to support the parish.

Saldaña and other neighbors recall going to the Augustinian formation house in Trujillo to request their support. There, a young seminarian opened the door for them and another group of young Augustinians soon followed them into the house to eat lunch.

Socorro Cassaro, a member of the neighborhood group, told one of the Augustinians that they were told to speak with Fr. Robert Prevost, the prior of the community. Dressed in a polo shirt, jeans and sneakers just like the seminarians, the Augustinian responded with a smile, "I'm him."

After his yearlong stint in Chulucanas, Prevost had returned to the Chicago area to act as mission and vocations director for the Midwest Augustinians. In 1988, he then returned to Peru, this time to Trujillo, which had a population of just under 700,000 at the time.

For 11 years in Trujillo, Prevost was the formation master at the Augustinian formation house. He was in charge of pastoral care at another poor parish, and, from 1992 onward, he was parish administrator at Our Lady of Montserrat Parish.

After thinking on the community's request, Prevost agreed to entrust the pastoral care for the community of the Monserrate neighborhood to the Augustinians, on one condition: to push back the 6:30 am Mass time.

"How am I going to get there at 6 am?" Saldaña recalled Prevost telling them. "I'm just opening my eyes then."

While the parish community was vibrant, there was still no church building. Masses in that first year that Prevost was involved were celebrated in the streets or in different parks. Families would bring their own chairs, and at the end of Mass each week they would communicate where Mass would be held the following week.

Once the Augustinians took over the parish, Prevost and the other organizations began implementing the model of parish he had learned in Chulucanas, and the new Parish of Our Lady of Montserrat was divided into 16 zones.

"In each area we knocked on doors, set an appointment for a certain time. The families would come out to a park and meet, Father Robert would also come, and young people would play songs so that everyone would come out," explained Alicia Chang Sánchez, a parishioner. "There, a leadership group was appointed, a representative body so that they could work more directly with the parish, and really that's how everyone in Montserrat knows each other, because of that work."

Elsa Ocampo recalled how it was initially a challenge for the community to adjust to the New Image of Parish plan.

"We were accustomed to another, more traditional way of leading where the priest led everything and gave orders and that's what was done," she said. "But with [the Augustinians] we began to work as a team."

Each zone of Montserrat Parish hosted its own *fiesta de fraternidad*, or "fraternity party" each month consisting first of a liturgy, followed by an assembly and then sharing conversation over coffee, tea and

snacks. Those gatherings, Ocampo said, "helped to create bonds of friendship between the people who make up a parish community."

When someone fell sick, and couldn't afford medicine or the fare for a taxi to take them to work, "we would all collaborate, we'd put something together and give it to them," she added. When someone died, the liturgical coordinator would organize people to gather at the home of the deceased for a prayer.

"From those acts, people feel involved and committed to the work of each zone," Ocampo said. Each zone has a patron saint, typically marked by a statue of the saint within that neighborhood, and on their feast day the entirety of the parish community would come over to their zone to celebrate it with them.

The parish's monthly gatherings, its grassroots decision-making and its network of mutual aid gave ordinary Catholics a sense that they were the church and not merely its audience.

Even decades later, the parishioners who built Monserrate remember Prevost not only for the structures he helped shape but for his presence among them. "He was very gentle in how he said things," Cassaro recalled. "I never saw him upset. He always did things with much calm, with much peace. He was always open to making friends."

They remember him in their homes, sitting at kitchen tables, sipping lemongrass tea, listening to concerns about parish life. "He wasn't the kind of priest who stayed in the church," she said. "He was like a member of the family."

For them, his leadership wasn't about authority but about accompaniment, drawing people in and letting them take ownership of their faith.

In time, the system he implemented became a defining part of Our Lady of Montserrat's identity. Those who founded the parish now talk about how their children are involved in many of the roles they previously held.

"Many young people who came to the church back when he was the parish priest, they have come back since our Pope Leo XIV was elected," said Ocampo. "Everyone is happy that someone who was so close to us is now leading the universal church."