

NEW POPE IS WELL-KNOWN ABROAD

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The voting members of the College of Cardinals elected an Augustinian priest, Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, to be the new pontiff. He chose the name Pope Leo XIV.

While he is the first American pope—he was born in Chicago—he is not well known to most American Catholics. That is partly because the 69-year old spent many years as a missionary in Peru. What helped him enormously with his fellow cardinals was his previous assignment as prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops.

In that role he advised Pope Francis on the appointment of bishops around the world; he also dealt with the resignation of bishops. Thus was he able to know many high-ranking clerics in faraway parts of the world, places that most westerners have never been to. That gave him a strategic advantage over the other cardinals in the election of a new pope. He clearly was more of an international cleric than an American one.

On issues that are of interest to many Catholics, he is not in favor of ordaining female deacons, never mind being an enthusiast for women priests. But when it comes to many other issues, not much is known about where he stands. For example, when it comes to making priestly celibacy optional, restricting the Latin Mass, and the Vatican-China accords, he has not been forthcoming.

However, it is reported that he has shown some support for *Fiducia Supplicans*, the Vatican document that allows for select blessings of gay couples. That got Pope Francis into a lot of trouble, especially with the African bishops. He will have to be more specific about his position.

He will also have to answer a barrage of questions about two

cases of clergy sexual abuse that he has been accused of mishandling.

The first occurred in 2000 when he allowed a homosexual priest in Chicago who was convicted of sexually abusing boys to stay in a residence near a Catholic elementary school; he never told the school administration about him. Also, the convicted molester, Father James Ray, was allowed to function as a priest, until he was later removed.

To this day, Prevost has declined to discuss this issue.

While the case of Father Ray occurred a few years before the Dallas reforms were issued, a more recent case, involving three sisters, raises new questions.

In 2022, when Prevost was the bishop of the Peruvian Diocese of Chiclayo, the girls say that when they reported being sexually abused by a priest, he failed to investigate it. They also say that they were never called by an investigator to hear their side. Prevost disputes these charges.

Did Pope Francis know about any of these accusations of mishandling sexual abuse cases? There is no evidence that he did. However, he did know about very serious cases of sexual abuse—some sacrilegious in nature—that his fellow Jesuits were involved in and he did not act with dispatch to seek justice.

Two strong supporters of Prevost are Father James Martin, the most famous advocate for homosexuals and transgender persons, and Austen Ivereigh, a vocal fan of Pope Francis.

If there was one cardinal who rallied for Prevost more than any other it was Cardinal Oscar Maradiaga from Honduras; he was known as Francis' "vice pope." When news broke in 2018 that former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick was involved in serial sexual abuse cases—he is the most disgraced American prelate in American history—Maradiaga blasted those who made a big deal about it. He called it a "private mater." He has also

been accused of covering up a homosexual “epidemic” in his diocesan seminary.

Catholics pray that Pope Leo XIV will be able to demonstrate just how wrong his critics are. Meanwhile, he has much to celebrate. Congratulations to our new pope!