

# *News Of The East*

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*Compiled from internet sources around the world.*

# Catholic-Orthodox Dialogue

## Common Date for Easter

### Will Catholics and Orthodox Settle on a Common Easter Date?

The Hope for Ecumenical Unity Includes the Desire for a Reconciliation of the Gregorian and Julian Calendar



In an ongoing dialogue with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, the successor of St. Andrew the Apostle and “first among equals” among the bishops of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Pope Francis has expressed his belief that Catholics and Orthodox will one day attain full communion. Eastern Orthodox — as opposed to Eastern-rite Catholics who differ from Latin-rite Catholics in custom and liturgical practices but accept the primacy of jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome — gradually separated from Rome in the Middle Ages and are today composed of a variety of Orthodox churches, the largest of which is the Russian Orthodox Church with nearly 100 million members. Orthodox and Catholics both accept the first seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church as well as the seven sacraments and apostolic succession, but differ in key areas as well, most notably the primacy of the pope.

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## **The 1,700-Year Quest for a Common Easter**

COMMENTARY: The Council of Nicaea gave Christianity more than a creed — it gave the Church a way to calculate Easter. But unity around the great feast of the Resurrection remains incomplete.



This year's 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea is suitably marked by both the Catholic and Orthodox Easter falling on the same date, which is not the norm. It was at Nicaea that the date of Easter was set; it was one of the most important items on the conciliar agenda.

The anniversary and the joint celebration this year have fostered hopes that a permanent joint celebration of Easter might be possible. That remains unlikely, however, given that relations within the Orthodox world do not permit such a momentous decision to be made.

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## **A Path Towards Unity: Pope Francis Proposes Joint Catholic-Orthodox Celebration of Nicaea Anniversary**

The Pope also highlighted the recent participation of Orthodox representatives in October's Synod on Synodality.



Pope Francis has proposed celebrating the 1,700th anniversary of the First Council of Nicaea together with Orthodox leaders, in a personal letter to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople.

The letter, published by the Vatican on Saturday [Nov. 30, 2024], was delivered by Cardinal Kurt Koch — who heads the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity — during a visit to Istanbul for the patronal feast of the Orthodox Church.

“The now imminent 1700th anniversary of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea will be another opportunity to bear witness to the growing communion that already exists among all who are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” Francis wrote in his message dated Nov. 30.

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## **Bishops of the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches Meet with the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States**

On Friday, April 25, 2025, the Bishops of the Standing Conference of Oriental Orthodox Churches (SCOOC) convened with their counterparts in the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the United States for a private meeting at the St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine.

At the meeting, the assembled hierarchs discussed practical steps towards unity and collaboration in the fields of theological education, youth ministry, pastoral care, and other areas.

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# Ecumenism in the Holy Land

## Easter celebrations in the Holy Land amid hardship and hope



*Christians in the Holy Land are preparing for the Easter celebrations with a mixture of anguish, frustration and hope for peace with talks of a new possible ceasefire to release ten Israeli hostages.*

For the second running year Christians in the Holy Land will celebrate Easter amid ongoing violence and conflict along with increasing restrictions on their freedom of movement.

### *Permits granted to Christians in the West Bank*

During the Easter period, Israeli authorities normally grant special permits to allow Palestinian Christians in the West Bank to visit Jerusalem.

According to a statement published by the Israeli Embassy to the Holy See, citing official data from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the competent authorities, this year 9,770 \* Christians have obtained permission to enter Jerusalem during the Holy Week, on a total of over 50,000 living in the West Bank who would like to celebrate their faith in the Holy Sites in this crucial religious period. It should be noted, that Christians have never been involved in incidents of violence.

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## **Easter and Holy Week in Jerusalem 2025**

*An article titled “Easter and Holy Week in Jerusalem 2025” by Dr. Bernard Sabella, the former Director of the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees (DSPR) at the Middle East Council of Churches.*

### ***Ancient Roots: The Council of Nicaea, 325 AD***

The First Ecumenical Council was held in Nicaea in 325 AD. Among its most important decisions was the establishment of the Nicene Creed and the condemnation of the Arian heresy—Arius being a priest from Alexandria who questioned the divinity of Christ. Another significant decision of the Council was to unify the date of Easter. The Council determined that Easter would fall on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox, which occurs after March 21. This means that Easter can be celebrated as early as March 22 or as late as April 25.

This year, 2025, marks the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, and a “Unified Easter” will be celebrated in Jerusalem on April 20. The convergence of the Julian and Gregorian calendars this year is a “mathematical” coincidence. In fact, the rule is the same for all churches, as mentioned: Easter falls on the first Sunday after the spring full moon following March 21. What causes the current disagreement among churches is their adherence to different civil calendars. Western churches follow the Gregorian calendar (named after Pope Gregory XIII, who reformed the calendar in 1582), while Eastern churches continue to follow the Julian calendar (named after the pagan Emperor Julius Caesar, who implemented it in 46 BC). There is a 13-day difference between the two calendars. So when March 21 arrives in the Gregorian calendar, the Julian calendar must wait 13 more days for its own March 21. This discrepancy can result in a difference of a week or more, and up to a maximum of five weeks. Thus, the disagreement stems from the use of two different civil calendars, not from differing ecclesiastical calculations. Occasionally, March 21 and the spring full moon fall on the same day in both calendars, making Easter coincide in all churches—as is the case this year.

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## **Pope Francis' desire to foster unity among Christian Churches**

*Throughout his twelve years as head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis' push for a greater sense of unity between all Christian Churches was evident through his words and deeds.*



Rifts between the different Christian Churches date back centuries. But rather than give in to unhealthy precedent, Pope Francis used his time in the papacy to build upon the ecumenical foundation of his predecessors to bridge the gap.



From introducing himself as Bishop of Rome rather than Pope upon his election to becoming the first Pope to make a visit with Anglican and Reformed leaders, Pope Francis repeatedly expressed his solidarity with different Churches through his words and actions over the last twelve years.

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## **The best of Francis: Five unforgettable moments**



As the world absorbs the news of the death of Pope Francis — and before the ever-busy oddsmakers and deep insiders begin the game of papabile speculation that accompanies every papal death and conclave — let us rest for a moment and appreciate what were (arguably) the five most memorable moments of the Franciscan papacy:

### ***A call to reality***

5: The Joy of the Gospel. The encyclical “*Laudato Si*” (and its successor, “*Laudato Deum*”) has gotten wide attention being concerned, as it is, with matters of environment and Christian stewardship....

4: “Who am I to judge?” This one gets a little dicey because of a human inclination to cherry-pick a quote to better fit it for battle...

3: Early in his papacy, Francis had a habit — doubtlessly one that left his security team a bit frazzled — of wading out into the crowds..

2: In his 2016 apostolic letter “*Misericordia et Misera*,” Pope Francis established the first World Day of the Poor, later kicking it off in the Paul VI Hall by sharing a beautifully catered luncheon with the destitute of Rome...

1: With a world in chaos, deeply divided ideologically, secularly and spiritually, Pope Francis’ finest moment came when he quietly and hauntingly brought all sides together, from all corners of the planet, to make prayers of supplication — for healing, for consolation, for mercy and for wholeness — before Christ Jesus...

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# Eastern Orthodox Churches

## The Ecumenical Patriarchate

### *Message of the Ecumenical Patriarch on the Repose of Pope Francis*

“In an atmosphere of great Paschal joy, this morning, Monday of Renewal Week, came the sorrowful news of the repose of Pope Francis, a precious brother in Christ, with whom from the very moment of his ascent to the papal throne, we had a fraternal friendship and collaboration for the good of our Churches, for their further rapprochement, and for the good of humanity.

Throughout these twelve years of his Papacy, he stood as a faithful friend, a fellow pilgrim and supporter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, a genuine friend of Orthodoxy, a true friend of the least of the Lord’s brethren, on whose behalf he often spoke, acted, and even washed their feet in an example of true humility and brotherly love.

We will always remember him.

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## The Patriarchate of Antioch

### *Patriarch John X Expresses Grief over Pope Francis Passing*

“Pope Francis’ departure is a loss to all humanity.” And he is the one who called for peace and for the extinguishing of wars in all the ends of the earth”

“In the holy season of Easter, the divine care wanted Pope Francis to return to the heavenly Father’s house”

“In the name of the Antioch Patriarchate and the East Walk of the Orthodox Rome, Eclairos and the people, I offer my sincere condolences and sympathy to the Apostolic See, to the Catholic Church and to all those who loved him and were influenced by his sublime Christian message”

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## **The Patriarchate of Jerusalem**

### ***Statement of His Beatitude Theophilos III on the Passing of Pope Francis***

Jerusalem, April 21, 2025

“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.” (John 11:25)

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ,

With a heart heavy in sorrow yet anchored in the promise of the Risen Lord, I join the faithful around the world in mourning the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome, who today has returned to the house of the Heavenly Father.

Pope Francis’ life was a luminous testament to the Gospel, a tireless witness to Christ’s boundless mercy, a steadfast champion for the poor, and a beacon of peace and reconciliation among all peoples. According to the Lord’s call: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

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## **The Orthodox Church of Russia**

### ***Condolences of His Holiness Patriarch Kirill on the passing of Pope Francis***

To His Eminence, the Most Reverend Cardinal Kevin Farrell, Camerlengo of the Roman Catholic Church

Your Eminence,

Please accept my sincere condolences on the passing of Pope Francis.

The late Pontiff led the Roman Catholic Church during a time of epochal change (Joint Statement of Pope Francis and Patriarch Kirill, 7).

His name is associated with an important stage in relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The historic first meeting of their Primates in 2016 marked the desire of our Churches to heal “the wounds inflicted by conflicts of the distant and recent past” and to “unite efforts in witnessing to the Gospel of Christ and the shared heritage of the Church of the first millennium” (Joint Statement 5, 7).

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## **The Orthodox Church of Serbia**

### ***Statement of condolences from Serbian Patriarch Porfirio on the occasion of the passing of Pope Francis***

Christ is risen! We received with sadness the news that on the second day of the feast of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Pope Francis passed away.

I had the opportunity to meet the late Pope personally several times during his pontificate, so I feel obliged to testify today that he was a man who built peace and understanding between people and nations, with a special desire to develop cooperation with the Orthodox Churches. The Serbian Orthodox Church is grateful to him for his deep understanding of the tragic historical heritage of the area where the Serbian Orthodox people live.

On behalf of the fullness of the Serbian Orthodox Church, I express my condolences to the Diocese of Rome and the entire Roman Catholic Church with a prayer that the Lord may grant eternal life and eternal memory to the late Pope Francis.

## **The Orthodox Church of Greece**

### ***Archbishop of Athens on Pope Francis: He had love and respect for Church of Greece***

His Eminence

Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re

Dean of the College of the Cardinals

Rome

Your Eminence,

It is with great sorrow that we would like to express our most heartfelt condolences on the passing of His Holiness the late Pope Francis to You and to all the faithful members of the Roman Catholic Church. May we assure you of our partaking of the grief and mourning of the Christians around the Earth.

He was a powerful personality, who spent himself for the prevalence of all that is good and of the values of the human being as God's creature. Throughout his ministry as Bishop of Rome, every lowliest brother, the poor, the migrant, the refugees, in particular, occupied a central place in it.

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# **Oriental Orthodox Churches**

## **Armenian Church**

Catholicos of All Armenians Sends Condolence Letter on the Passing of Pope Francis

His Holiness Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians, conveyed a letter of condolence on the occasion of the passing of His Holiness Pope Francis, the Supreme Pontiff of Rome.

“The late Pope Francis of blessed memory was a humble, courageous, and kind shepherd who faithfully walked in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. He undertook the lofty and responsible papal mission during difficult times. He bore witness to the Gospel—consistently standing for justice and peace, offering special attention and care to those in need, and contributing significantly to strengthening interchurch relations.”

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## **Coptic Church**

H.H. Pope Tawadros II said: “We offer our condolences to the whole world on the passing of this man who served all of humanity. Although Pope Francis sat on the Throne of Rome for only 12 years, it was a time filled with work, vitality, and service wherever he went. He left us an example of an open heart toward every human being.”

He added in a phone interview with Extra News Channel: “There is no doubt that Pope Francis was a voice for peace in all crises and conflicts around the world. He was always a voice for peace and a voice for truth—standing by the oppressed, the weary, the marginalized, and the forgotten.”

Regarding the distinguished relations between the Coptic and Catholic Churches, His Holiness said: “Our relationship was always good—full of respect and trust, framed in meekness and humility. He visited us in Egypt in 2017 and met with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. It was an extremely blessed visit. I also visited him twice, in 2013 and 2023. The most recent visit marked the 50th anniversary of the beginning of relations between the Coptic Church and the Catholic Church.”

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# Eastern Catholic Churches

## Pope Francis seen as strong promoter of Eastern Catholic traditions, liturgy, mission



Eastern Catholic leaders are remembering Pope Francis for bringing significant attention to their churches and traditions throughout his papacy, in a legacy marked by fraternity and many firsts, while marked with some tensions at times.

The pope, who died April 21 at age 88 after a 12-year pontificate, was “a fan of the East,” said Ines A. Murzaku, professor of ecclesiastical history and founding chair of the Department of Catholic Studies at Seton Hall University.

That affection traced its roots to the pope’s native Argentina, where, as Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, he was the ordinary for Eastern-rite faithful, who at the time had no bishop of their own in that nation.

Murzaku told OSV News that Pope Francis called for Catholics in the Latin Church “to turn East and learn,” particularly by starting with Eastern Catholic churches “in their own backyard.”

“Not many Westerners know of the Catholic East — and that these churches are as Catholic as the Western Churches,” said Murzaku.

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## Churches of the Middle East

### *‘Brother in humanity’: Church leaders in Middle East pay tribute to Pope Francis*

On Monday morning, April 21, the Christian world was shaken by the passing of Pope Francis at the age of 88. His death marked the end of a life of faith and service that spanned decades, culminating in 12 years of humble service as the Roman pontiff.

In the midst of the Easter season — a time Francis long proclaimed as a message of hope — churches across the Middle East are bidding the pope farewell with liturgies and prayer, while Arab leaders are paying tribute to him with messages of respect and appreciation.

Patriarch Ignatius Joseph III Younan of the Syriac Catholic Church offered prayers on behalf of the synod, clergy, and faithful for the repose of Pope Francis’ soul, asking the Lord to reward him with the inheritance of the kingdom for his pastoral service and profound acts of charity. The patriarch presided over a special Easter Monday Mass for his repose and invited bishops and priests to commemorate the pope in the Eucharistic celebrations.

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## Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

“Today I am travelling from Kyiv to Rome to lead a delegation of our Church’s bishops at the funeral of St. Francis on Saturday.” “And then, with God’s help, I will take part in the enthronement of the new, newly-elected Pope” - Head of the Ecumenical Catholic Church,” noted.

On April 23, 2025 Father and Head of the UGCC Blessed Svyatoslav led the Divine Liturgy on the occasion of the consecration of the renovated Church of St. George in the city of Drohobych. At the end of the Liturgy, he addressed the faithful to pray for the late Pope Francis and for the Cardinals who will soon gather at the conclave to elect a new Pope.

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## **Syro-Malankara Catholic Church**

The first Pope of the Americas Jorge Mario Bergoglio hails from Argentina. The 76-year-old Jesuit Archbishop of Buenos Aires is a prominent figure throughout the continent, yet remains a simple pastor who is deeply loved by his diocese, throughout which he has travelled extensively on the underground and by bus during the 15 years of his episcopal ministry.

“My people are poor and I am one of them”, he has said more than once, explaining his decision to live in an apartment and cook his own supper. He has always advised his priests to show mercy and apostolic courage and to keep their doors open to everyone. The worst thing that could happen to the Church, he has said on various occasions, “is what de Lubac called spiritual worldliness”, which means, “being self-centred”. And when he speaks of social justice, he calls people first of all to pick up the Catechism, to rediscover the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes. His project is simple: if you follow Christ, you understand that “trampling upon a person’s dignity is a serious sin”.

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