

# Vladimir Putin Praises Late Pope Francis as 'Defender of Humanism'

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Pope Francis. **Tiziana Fabi / AFP**

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Monday praised the late Pope Francis as a “defender” of humanism and justice and lauded his efforts to foster dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox churches.

“Pope Francis enjoyed great international respect as a devoted servant of Christian teachings, a wise religious and state leader, as well as a steadfast defender of the highest ideals of humanism and justice,” read Putin’s [statement](#), which the Kremlin published shortly after the Vatican announced the Pope’s passing.

“Throughout his papacy, he actively promoted dialogue between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, as well as constructive engagement between Russia and the Holy See,” the statement added.

“I had the honor of meeting this remarkable man on multiple occasions, and I will always cherish the warmest memories of him,” Putin wrote in the statement.

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The Kremlin leader met with Pope Francis in person three times — in 2013, 2015 and 2019 — and last spoke with him by phone in December 2021, just weeks before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, according to Russian state media.

Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, said Pope Francis oversaw an "important stage" in relations between the Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches.

"An important stage in the relations between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches is associated with his name," said Kirill, who met the pope in 2016 for the first-ever meeting between heads of the two churches.

Pope Francis had repeatedly called for peace in Ukraine, although he stirred controversy last year after urging Kyiv to "raise the white flag and negotiate." Ukrainian officials reacted to those remarks with fury, even while the Vatican insisted the words "white flag" were intended to mean a cessation of hostilities, not a surrender.

Russia's Catholic Church [announced](#) Monday afternoon that its churches across the country would hold prayer services for the late Pope.

"Starting today, in all our churches in Russia, there will, of course, be prayers for Pope Francis. We will remember and pray here, locally," Auxiliary Bishop of Mother of God at Moscow Nikolai Dubinin told state media.

In 2016, Francis met Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill in Cuba, marking the first-ever meeting between the heads of the two churches. The historic encounter concluded with a joint 10-page declaration, hailed at the time as a milestone in relations between the Catholic and Russian Orthodox branches of Christianity.

*AFP contributed reporting.*

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