The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Pope Receives High-Ranking Russian Orthodox Cleric

By AFP

July 26, 2025



Pope Leo XIV (L) meeting with Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk (Anton Yuryevich Sevryuk), at the Vatican. **AFP PHOTO / VATICAN MEDIA**

Pope Leo XIV held a first meeting on Saturday with a senior Russian Orthodox cleric at the Vatican since becoming the head of the Catholic church earlier this year, the Holy See said without giving further details.

Leo — who has called on the Kremlin to make a "gesture" towards peace in Ukraine -— received Metropolitan Anthony of Volokolamsk, the head of external relations at the Russian Orthodox Church.

Relations between the Vatican and Moscow has been frosty for centuries.

The head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill, has sanctified Moscow's invasion

of Ukraine, which he has described as a "holy war."

But Moscow held a dialogue with the late Pope Francis, widely criticised in Ukraine, with Metropolitan Anthony hold around a dozen meetings with the Argentinian pontiff.

The Russian cleric told Italian newspaper La Repubblica days before the meeting that Francis had a "balanced approach" on Ukraine, while he did not know Leo's stance yet.

Related article: Putin Wishes Pope Leo Success, Hopes for 'Constructive' Ties

Leo is the first American pope. He took over the church at a time when the United States is pushing for peace in Ukraine, in efforts that have so far yielded few results.

Leo had received Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky earlier this month and has also spoken to Russia's Vladimir Putin by phone.

The Vatican had earlier this year been floated as a possible platform for peace talks, but that idea was refuted by the Kremlin and negotiations have stayed in Istanbul.

Anthony reiterated that, for Moscow, the Vatican would not be a "neutral" ground for any peace talks.

Metropolitan Anthony was appointed as head of the Moscow church's external relations in 2022 — the year Russia invaded Ukraine — and had earlier been a church envoy in Italy.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/07/26/pope-receives-high-ranking-russian-orthodox-cleric-a89975