



Pope Leo XIV and Israeli President Isaac Herzog exchange gifts at the end of their meeting in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Sept. 4, 2025.
(CNS/Vatican Media)

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As Israeli military operations in Gaza continued, Pope Leo XIV met with Israeli President Isaac Herzog at the Vatican.

The meeting Sept. 4 came just a week after Leo appealed again for Israel and Hamas to stop the violence and for Hamas to release the hostages it has held since attacking Israel in October 2023.

With the pope and with Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, Herzog discussed "the political and social situation in the Middle East ... where numerous conflicts persist, with particular attention to the tragic situation in Gaza," the Vatican said.

"A prompt resumption of negotiations was hoped for so that, with openness and courageous decisions, as well as with the support of the international community, it would be possible to secure the release of all hostages, urgently achieve a permanent ceasefire, facilitate the safe entry of humanitarian aid into the most affected areas, and ensure full respect for humanitarian law, as well as for the legitimate aspirations of both peoples," the Vatican said.

The statement echoed what Leo had said Aug. 27 when he called on Israel to ensure the safe entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza and full respect for humanitarian law, including full observance of "the duty to protect civilians and the prohibitions against collective punishment, the indiscriminate use of force and the forced displacement of populations."

The meeting between the pope and president was preceded by unusual public statements about who initiated the meeting.

Herzog's office announced Sept. 2 that the president "will depart on Thursday morning, for a one-day visit to the Vatican at the invitation of the Pope."

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But, while was responding to reporters' questions, Matteo Bruni, director of the Vatican press office, said, "It is the Holy See's practice to grant requests for an audience with the pope made by heads of state and government; it is not its practice to extend invitations to them."

An unnamed source in Herzog's office then told the news agency Reuters that the president's meeting originally had been scheduled with Pope Francis but was rescheduled after the pope died in April. The source said the meeting with Leo was

arranged in full coordination with the Vatican through diplomatic channels, Reuters reported.

When it announced Herzog's trip, his office had said that during his meetings with the pope and Parolin, the president planned to discuss "efforts to secure the release of the hostages, the fight against global antisemitism and the safeguarding of Christian communities in the Middle East, alongside discussions on other political matters."

Posting on X after the meeting, Herzog focused on the hostages.

"All leaders of faith and goodwill must stand united in calling for the immediate release of the hostages as the first and essential step toward a better future for the entire region," he wrote.

Herzog said that Leo's "inspiration and leadership in the struggle against hatred and violence and in promoting peace around the world is valued and vital."