



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: April 21, 2025
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Statement from Bishop Erik Pohlmeier on the Death of the Holy Father

Jacksonville, Fla. – With sorrow and gratitude, I join the faithful of the Church and the world in mourning the death of our Holy Father Pope Francis. His life was a gift to the Church and a reflection of Christ’s love lived with humility and devotion.

Learning of the Holy Father’s passing gives me pause to reflect on his life and the impact he has had on the Church and the world, and in my own ministry. My years of study at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome shaped my priesthood in the heart of the Church. It was there, in St. Peter’s Basilica, that I was ordained a transitional deacon, standing at the very place where so many have carried on the mission of Christ. Years later under the leadership of Pope Francis I was called to serve as a bishop. His faithful leadership and love for the Gospel have been a source of encouragement in my own ministry, and I am deeply grateful for the example he set.

I am especially grateful for the gift of his 2013 apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*. This teaching of Pope Francis expresses the joy that marked his life and provides beautiful guidance for all who seek to share the faith with others. I have often reflected on his teaching that our salvation should free us from “sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.” These interior struggles speak directly to the needs of our time. His call and witness challenge us to identify with Christ as Savior and live as lights for the world.

Pope Francis was a shepherd for all, including those beyond the Catholic Church. His words and witness resonated with people from every background, drawing many to reflect on the presence of God in their own lives. He had a heart for those on the margins, speaking out for the poor, the immigrant seeking safety, the unborn child and the prisoner facing execution. He carried the concerns of those who struggled, including Catholics who felt unseen or alone after divorce. His message was clear: every person is loved by God and worthy of dignity.

As the Church mourns his death, we pray in gratitude for the gift of his life and leadership. May his example continue to inspire us to live with faith, serve with love and seek first the kingdom of God.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him. May he rest in peace.

+Most Rev. Erik Pohlmeier
Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine