

Cuba mourns the death of Pope Francis



Francis died on Easter Monday at the age of 88 (source: [US Papal Visit/Flickr/CC-BY-NC 2.0](#))

The Cuban leadership reacted with dismay to the death of Pope Francis on Monday. President Miguel Díaz-Canel praised the “warm closeness” that the pontiff had always shown to the Cuban people. “We will remember with great affection his visits to Cuba and the loving words he dedicated to our country in his messages,” Díaz-Canel [wrote](#) on the short message service X.

Foreign Minister Bruno Rodríguez also commemorated the pope and [recalled](#) his trips to the socialist country. He expressed hope that the legacy and work of the head of the Catholic Church would serve as an example for future generations in solving the pressing challenges facing humanity.

Historic papal visits to Cuba

Pope Francis, whose real name is Jorge Mario Bergoglio, was the first Latin American pope and representative of liberation theology to visit the island, where he left a deep impression. He [visited Cuba](#) twice during his pontificate. In September 2015, he held masses in Havana, Holguín, and Santiago de Cuba and met with then-head of state Raúl Castro and revolutionary leader Fidel Castro.



Pope Francis and Fidel Castro in 2015 (source: [Cubadebate](#))

A [personal friendship](#) even developed between Francis and Raúl Castro. “Francis is a Jesuit, and in a way, so am I,” [said](#) Castro at the time, who, like his brother, attended a Jesuit boarding school. “I have read all the Pope's speeches, his comments, and if the Pope continues like this, I will start praying again and going to church – I'm not joking,” the Marxist continued.

In February 2016, the Pope made another stop in Cuba. At José Martí Airport in Havana, a [historic meeting](#) took place between the head of the Catholic Church and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill I – a rapprochement between the church leaders after the churches had separated from each other almost 1,000 years earlier.

Francis as mediator between Cuba and the US

Pope Francis played a key role in the diplomatic rapprochement between Cuba and the US under US President Barack Obama. Together with Canada, the Vatican was instrumental in the secret negotiations that led to the [resumption of diplomatic relations](#) in December 2014 after more than 50 years of frosty relations.

In the final years of Francis's papacy, mediation between Havana and Washington took place once again, this time under US President Joe Biden. In January 2025, Biden announced that Cuba would be removed from the list of state sponsors of terrorism, shortly before Donald Trump returned to the White House and reversed the measure. In return, the Cuban government promised to release 553 prisoners – [a gesture](#) to mark the Holy Year 2025 proclaimed by Francis.

Francis was the third pope to make a pastoral visit to Cuba, after John Paul II (1998) and Benedict XVI (2012). During his visits, thousands of Cubans, both believers and non-believers, poured into the streets. Today, many people in Cuba joined the worldwide expressions of mourning.

Update (April 22): A three-day period of national mourning has been [declared](#) in Cuba. Raúl Castro has also [issued](#) a personal message: “Rest in peace, dear friend,” he wrote. “You were a man of integrity and consistency who reciprocated the human relationship that developed between us with affection and goodwill,” Castro said. He continued: “Your life and your pontificate were an example of your tireless commitment to peace and brotherhood among peoples. Your constant concern for the pressing challenges facing humanity and your commitment and dedication to finding a viable and sustainable solution to these problems will be an example to us all.” ([Cubaheute](#))