

# Charleston Mercury

March 2026

The newspaper with a cosmopolitan attitude

## 2025: the Jubilee of Hope

By Martine P. Dulles & Frederick H. Dulles

This past year was very important for the Vatican as it was celebrating a Golden Jubilee Year. The tradition of the Jubilee celebration is mentioned in the Old Testament in Leviticus 25. Every 50th year, every Israelite was instructed to celebrate. The word “Jubilee” comes from the Hebrew word *yobel*, which is a ram’s horn blown to proclaim a yearlong period, when among other traditions, farmers had to leave their fields unattended so that the land would rest and recover. It was a year of joy.

But what does the Jubilee mean today and how is it celebrated?

“Pope Boniface VIII (1230–1303, Pope 1294–1303) proclaimed the first Christian Jubilee in the year 1300. The Christian Jubilee is a spiritual reinterpretation of the ancient Hebrew tradition. While the [Old Testament] Jubilee focused on freeing slaves, the Christian version offers liberation from sins, and from the punishment due to sin that must be faced in Purgatory,” according to the Vatican News website.

Ever since, pilgrims from all over the world come to Rome, some by foot (even to this day) to pass the “Holy Door,” which is considered the most powerful symbol of the Jubilee. Initially, the Holy Door of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome, which is the cathedral of the bishop of Rome, was the only one to be opened, but later due to the increasing number of pilgrims three other Holy Doors were opened and remained open until the end of the Jubilee year.

On Christmas Eve 2024, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at San Pietro’s Basilica (Saint Peter’s Basilica), thus inaugurating the



Tourists and the faithful visit St. Peter’s Square.

year of the Jubilee of Hope. That day, all the cathedrals in the world had to celebrate a mass to mark the event.

On December 29, 2024, Cardinal Baldassare Rema opened the Holy Door of San Giovanni in Laterano (Saint John Lateran). On January 1, 2025, Cardinal Rolandas Mackrickas opened the Holy Door of Santa Maria Maggiore (Saint Mary Major), and four days later Cardinal James Michael Harvey officiated the opening of the Holy Door of San Paolo Fuori le Mura (Saint Paul Outside the Walls). Those are considered the Papal Basilicas.

Pope Francis died on April 21, 2025, and he wanted to be buried at Santa Maria Maggiore, which was his favorite Basilica. On April 28, the Conclave started, where 133 Cardinals gathered in the Sistine Chapel to elect the 267th Pope. For the first time ever, an American-born pope was elected: Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost. In 2023, Pope Francis had made him the prefect of the Dicastery for Bishops (Congregation for Bishops) in Rome, so he was very well known in the Curia (the governing establishment of the Catholic Church). Prior to that, he lived many years in Peru, and so he has a strong international

background and speaks many languages. At his election on May 8, 2025, he decided to be named Pope Leo XIV.

Pope Francis had organized the Jubilee, and Pope Leo XIV had to pick up the reins very fast.

During the 12 months, more than 33 million pilgrims came to Rome (31 million was the target). After the Italians, the greatest number of pilgrims came from the United States.

Thirty-three different Jubilees were organized. Just to name a few, there were Jubilees for the World of Education, for the Prisoners, for the Choirs, for the Elderly, for the Tour Guides, for the Unwell, for Governments, for the Missionaries, for Actors and for Artists.

The most successful one was the Jubilee of the Youth. One million young people from all over the world came to Rome to attend their Jubilee, which lasted from July 28 to August 3. They gathered, like all the other jubilees, at Saint Peter’s Basilica where the Pope celebrated a mass outside on Saint Peter’s Square. They also had two important gatherings on major fields outside the Vatican (but in Rome) where the pope came to meet them. Fortunately, the weather was very



PHOTOS BY MARTINE DULLES

The Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican, known to most simply as St. Peter’s.

nice as most of them had to sleep outside.

During the seven days, they attended many meetings and seminars and visited the important sites of Rome. They prepared questions for the pope, who answered in front of everyone. Both times, the pope went very early in the morning to meet them and tour the grounds in the popemobile, and at the end of the meetings the pope departed by helicopter and waved at them from on high.

The last Jubilee was the Jubilee for the Volunteers. There were more than 7,000 volunteers who came from all over the world. Among them were 2,000 from the Order of Malta, who attended to medical issues. You could not miss the volunteers as they all wore bright green jackets with the Jubilee logo. They were everywhere helping pilgrims and visitors.

On December 25, 2025, the Holy Door of Saint Mary Major was closed. On the 27th, it was the turn of Saint John Lateran, followed by the Holy Door of Saint Paul Outside the Walls. The Pope concluded the Jubilee of Hope on Epiphany Day, January 6, 2026, with the closing of Saint Peter’s Holy Door. Later, during



Jubilee of Hope’s logo.

private ceremonies, the Holy Doors of the four Papal Basilicas were sealed.

It is obvious 2025 was very rich and exceptional. There were so many people everywhere in Rome.

Pope Leo XIV announced that the next Jubilee, dedicated to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, will take place in 2033. There is a medieval Roman proverb, first recorded in French by Alain de Lille in 1175 and in English by Geoffrey Chaucer in 1391, that says: *Omnes viae Romam ducunt — Tutte le strade portano a Roma* — “All roads lead to Rome.”

*Martine and Frederick Dulles live in France. Martine’s email address is mpd@dullesdeleu.com. Frederick’s email address is fhd@dullesdeleu.com.*