Pope Leone XIV weighs bistro atop St Peter's

Posted on July 22, 2026 by Sabina Castelfranco

A new bistro could open on the terrace of St Peter's Basilica as early as September 2026, unless Pope Leone XIV steps in to stop it. The project, championed by Cardinal Mauro Gambetti, the archpriest responsible for overseeing the basilica, has divided the Curia, the Vatican's central administrative body, and a significant part of the Catholic world since it first emerged in January 2026.

"It's separate from the worship place of the Basilica… really no different to the hospitality areas attached to most churches. As long as it's not actually *in* the Basilica, it ought to pose no issue with regard to sacrilege", said Catholic commentator Jo Hayes, member of the Order of St. Benedict.

Basilica officials have consistently described the plan as an expansion of the visitor reception area and snack bar on the terrace, rather than a full restaurant. Yet the scale of what has been proposed keeps drawing scrutiny, and recent activity at the site suggests the opening date is approaching fast, more than seven months after the idea first became public.

Source: https://italynow.co.uk/pope-leone-xiv-weighs-bistro-atop-st-peters/

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Views of Bernini colonnade and Saint Peter’s Basilica *(Credits: Italy Now)*

What is planned

The original concept reportedly called for a restaurant seating more than 100 guests. That proposal has since been scaled back to a smaller bistro, positioned opposite the bar already operating on the terrace. According to the Italian newspaper Il Messaggero, contractors have completed final inspections and fit out work, and a private tasting was held inside the future bistro space.

Cardinal Gambetti has argued there is no reason to deny visitors a proper food service, noting that toilets and a bar have operated on the summit of the basilica for years without controversy, and that a paid ticket already governs entry to the dome.

A dispute over sacred space

Critics disagree. After the January announcement, opponents launched a petition addressed to Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican secretary of state, the Holy See’s most senior official after the Pope, asking him to suspend the project. They point to canon 1210 of the Code of Canon Law, the

Catholic Church’s body of internal law, which bars anything from sacred places that does not serve or promote worship.

Supporters counter that this principle has already been tested by the existing dome entry fee and by the terrace bar, both long established.

The bistro would extend a partial museum style transformation of the basilica that began under Pope Francis. Leone XIV has so far avoided public comment on a plan that continues to split opinion inside the Vatican, and his decision now appears to be the one that will settle the matter.

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