Vatican



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The group of cardinals advising Pope Francis on reforming the Vatican bureaucracy has considered how the Catholic Church can speed up its investigations of clergy sexual abuse cases, discussing as one possibility creation of regional tribunals to deal with a backlog of pending inquiries.

Vatican spokesman Greg Burke said at a Feb. 28 briefing such tribunals were “one of the options” considered by the Council of Cardinals at its latest Feb. 26-28 meeting, but that the matter had not yet been decided.

Burke emphasized that final authority for abuse cases would still rest with the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which is known to have a backlog of some 1,800 cases to investigate.

"It is not the simplest thing in the world,” the spokesman said about how to handle the backlog. "There are various options being studied."

Beyond abuse cases, Burke said the Council of Cardinals also continued discussions on how there could be a “healthy decentralization” of authority across the wider Catholic Church. The spokesman said the prelates focused for some time in their latest meeting on the “theological nature” of the world’s episcopal conferences.

Burke said the prelates discussed in particular the 32nd paragraph of Francis' 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, which said that "excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church's life and her missionary outreach."

That paragraph also noted that the Second Vatican Council had called for episcopal conferences "to contribute in many and fruitful ways" to the church but said that desire "has not been fully realized."

Burke said the cardinal advisors were "re-reading" Pope John Paul II's 1998 *motu proprio* letter *Apostolos Suos*, on the nature of episcopal conferences, in light of *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Other themes the Council of Cardinals discussed in its latest meeting included: containment of costs at the Vatican; reduction of the city-state's deficits; the work of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, and the Congregation for the Oriental Churches.

The next meeting of the Council of Cardinals is set for April 23-25.

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