News
Vatican



A statue of Mary is seen as Chilean bishops attend a meeting July 30 in Punta de Tralca on the sexual abuse scandal in the Chilean church. The July 30 – Aug. 3 meeting was organized to examine the causes of the ongoing abuse crisis and to establish national guidelines for dioceses on how to handle abuse cases. (CNS/Alberto Valdes, EPA)

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After the bishops of Chile issued a formal apology for failing to listen to clerical abuse victims and drew up national guidelines for responding to abuse allegations, Pope Francis sent them a handwritten letter of thanks.

"I am struck by the work of reflection, discernment and the decisions you have made," the pope wrote in the letter dated Aug. 5 and posted on the website of the Chilean bishops' conference.

Addressed to Bishop Santiago Silva Retamales, the military ordinary and conference president, Pope Francis' letter praised the decisions as "realistic and concrete."

The bishops, who have been accused of interfering with the pursuit of justice by alleged victims, promised to draw up a formal agreement with the national prosecutor's office to share information; vowed to release information on investigations carried out within their dioceses and urged the superiors of religious orders to do the same; expanded the competencies of their national review board and appointed a laywoman lawyer to lead it; and appointed another laywoman to direct the new Department for the Prevention of Abuse within the bishops' conference.

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Pope Francis told the bishops that what "struck me most" about the decisions made in early August was "the example of an episcopal community united in guiding the holy, faithful people of God. Thank you for this edifying example."

The pope's letter, in tone and in its informality, was markedly different than one he sent them in April when he apologized to abuse survivors for making "serious mistakes in the assessment and perception of the situation, especially due to a lack of truthful and balanced information," presumably from the bishops.

He summoned the country's bishops to Rome for a three-day meeting in May. At the end of the meeting, most of the bishops offered the pope their resignations. By late June, he had accepted five of the resignations.