News
Vatican



Pope Francis and Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid attend a welcoming ceremony at the presidential palace in Tallinn, Estonia, Sept. 25, 2018. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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Tallinn, Estonia — September 25, 2018

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Pope Francis has acknowledged that some young people are angry with the leaders of the global Catholic Church, saying that a perceived lack of "clear condemnation" of clergy sexual abuse has resulted in youth becoming "outraged."

In a Sept. 25 address to an ecumenical meeting on the last of his four-day visit to the three Baltic countries, the pontiff also noted that many youth no longer even think of the church as being able to offer them counsel or life advice.

"We know -- as you have told us -- that many young people do not ask us for anything because they don't consider us significant to their existence," the pope said to young faith leaders at Tallinn's Kaarli Lutheran church.

"Some, in fact, expressly ask to be left in peace, because they feel the presence of the church is annoying or even irritating," said Francis, adding: "They become outraged when they do not see a clear condemnation of sexual and economic scandals."

The pope's acknowledgement of young people's anger comes as the Catholic Church is under intense scrutiny over its handling of sexual abuse after the July resignation of now ex-cardinal Theodore McCarrick and the August release of a devastating Pennsylvania grand jury report.

Just hours after the pontiff spoke in Tallinn, Germany's Catholic leaders were due to release a report expected to document the abuse of more than 3,600 people by 1,670 clergy over a period of 68 years.

Francis had not mentioned the scandals earlier during his Sept. 22-25 visit to the Baltic countries, which began with trips to Lithuania and Latvia before ending in Estonia, a nation of 1.3 million perched on the Gulf of Finland just west of Russia.

A former member of the Soviet Union that now has one of the fastest-growing economies in Europe, Estonia is also one of the least religious nations in the world with a majority of the population identifying as non-religious.

Francis spoke Sept. 25 after hearing testimonies from several young Estonians. He told them that young people have an ability to tell adults when they are ignoring "a

reality that already exists."

"Some of you ... have the courage to say: 'Don’t you see that nobody is listening to you any more, or believes what you have to say?'" said the pontiff.

"We ... need to be converted, to realize that in order to be at your side we need to overturn many situations that, in the end, keep you at a distance," he said.

The pope also mentioned the upcoming Oct. 3-28 global meeting of Catholic bishops, known as a Synod, which will focus on young people. Citing from the gathering's working document, he said youth want a church that is more "transparent, welcoming, honest, [and] inviting."

Francis landed in Tallinn, Estonia's capital and largest city, early Sept. 25, and went first to meet with President Kersti Kaljulaid.

In an address to about 200 of the country's political leaders in brisk, fall weather outside the presidential palace, the pontiff called on the politicians to build "a sense of belonging and commitment to others" among their people.

"One of the most important obligations incumbent on all of us who have social, political, educational and religious responsibilities has to do precisely with how we can keep building bonds," said the pope.

Francis is to continue his visit later in the day with a visit to a local convent and by meeting with volunteers at an agency run by the Missionary Sisters of Charity. The pontiff is to end his trip to Estonia, and the Baltics, with a Mass in Tallinn's Freedom Square, which during Soviet rule was the site of military parades.

The pope returns to Rome in the evening of Sept. 25.

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This story appears in the **Francis in the Baltics** feature series. View the full series. A version of this story appeared in the **Oct 5-18, 2018** print issue under the headline: Francis says church has 'spared no effort' in response to abuse.