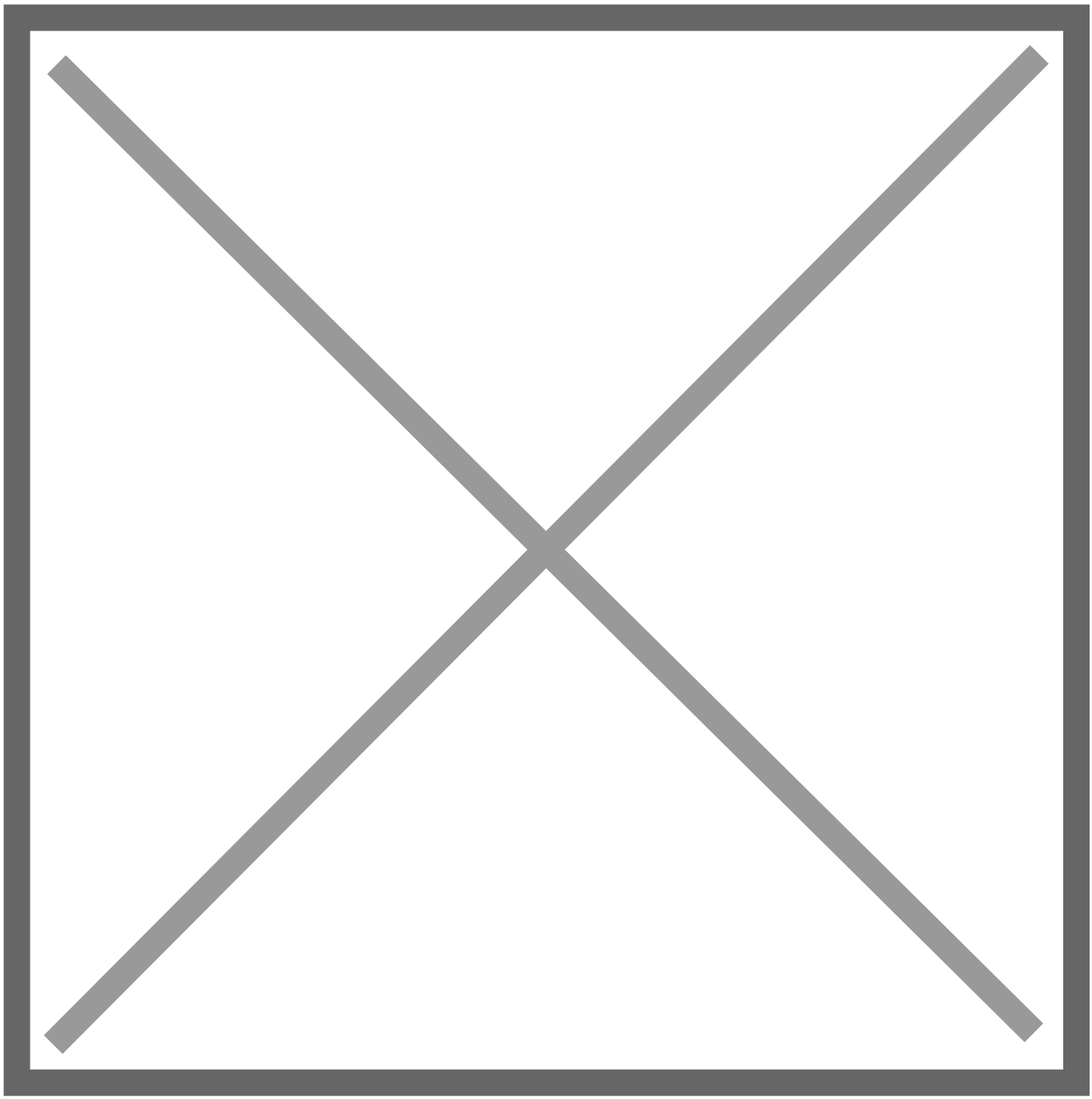
News



Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, president of the Italian bishops' conference, speaks during a news conference in Rome May 27, 2022, after members of the conference approved an audit of their child protection policies and a study of clerical sexual abuse in the country. (CNS photo/Yara Nardi, Reuters)

Cindy Wooden

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As a "first choice," members of the Italian bishops' conference decided to focus their study of clerical sexual abuse in the country on cases reported to the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith from 2000 to 2021.

Cardinal Matteo Zuppi of Bologna, the new president of the conference, told reporters May 27 that the bishops decided to focus on only on the past two decades "because it involves us," survivors and alleged abusers who are mostly still alive and bishops who are still in office.

A statement from the conference said the archives of the doctrinal congregation will allow the bishops "to know and analyze, quantitatively and qualitatively, the data kept at the congregation while ensuring the appropriate confidentiality."

"The analysis will be conducted in collaboration with independent research institutes," the statement said, which should enable the bishops to have "a deeper and more objective knowledge of the phenomenon" so they can improve prevention programs and procedures for handling allegations.

The independent research institutes, he said, would be university faculties of criminal sciences and victim services. "They will direct the study, not us," he said. "We are not looking for someone to tell us what we want to hear; that is not even in our own interests."

Zuppi said that to prepare a full and accurate assessment of the situation, it makes sense to work with the congregation, since all Italian dioceses, like every diocese in the world, are required by church law to report allegations to the congregation.

"There is no desire to hide anything -- just the opposite," he told reporters when asked why the study would not include access to individual diocesan archives.

The bishops also announced that they would begin preparing and publishing an annual report and audit of the diocesan child protection offices -- offices present in all 226 Italian dioceses -- and the "listening centers" established so far in about 70% of the dioceses, where people enduring any kind of abuse, whether by priests or family members or strangers, can seek assistance.

Zuppi said he was confident the audit, which initially will cover 2020 and 2021, will be published by Nov. 18, the day the bishops' conference marks as a day of prayer for the survivors of abuse.

The audit will be done annually thereafter, he said. The two studies are the "first choice" the bishops made in responding to calls for a public, transparent study of the clerical sexual abuse in the country, "but they will not be the last."

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