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Pope Francis meets with members of the International Association of Journalists Accredited to

Pope Francis meets with members of the International Association of Journalists Accredited to the Vatican in the Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican Jan. 22, 2024. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Vatican City — January 22, 2024
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Pope Francis thanked the Rome-based journalists who regularly report on his papacy for their work to uncover scandals in the global Catholic Church in a manner that he said showed "great sensitivity," as part of a first of its kind meeting at the Vatican on Jan. 22.

In an hour-long encounter in the Vatican's ornate Clementine Hall with about 150 of the journalists who have covered Francis' 10-year papacy most closely, the pope acknowledged scandals in the church and said he witnessed the reporters work with "respect" in uncovering them.

"In a certain sense, being a journalist is choosing to touch with your hands the wounds of society and of the world," said the pope. "This is an occasion for me to thank you."

Francis was meeting Jan. 22 with journalists who are members of the International Association of Journalists Accredited by the Vatican, of which National Catholic Reporter is a part. The association, which is led by volunteers, helps organize coverage of many Vatican and papal events, including the pope's press conferences during his trips abroad.

Although the organization has existed in various forms since 1978, it had never been granted a formal audience with a pope. Francis spoke for about 12 minutes during the encounter, before greeting each of the journalists one-by-one.

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Noting that many in the room had traveled with him during his 44 trips abroad since his election as pontiff in 2013, Francis called the reporters his "companions on the voyage."

"Journalists, producers, photographers: you are a community united by a mission," said Francis. "I know your passion, your love for what you do, all the effort you put in."

The pope asked that, in their reporting, journalists try to mix "information with reflection, speaking with listening, discernment with love."

"The beauty of your work … is that of grounding itself on the solid rock of responsibility to the truth, not on the fragile sand of gossip and of ideological interpretations," said Francis.