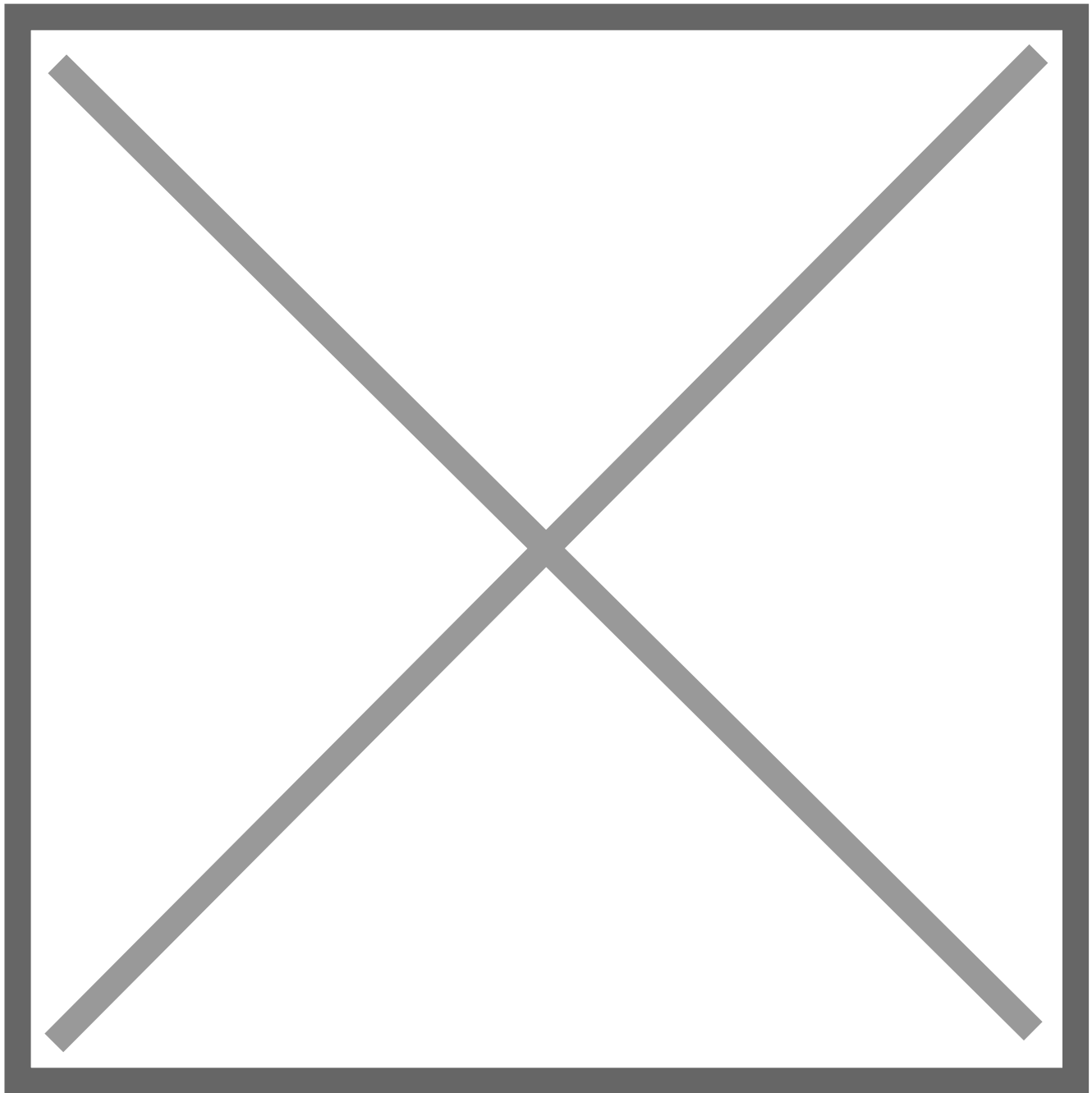




Young adults present Pope Leo XIV with a plate decorated with the logo of the Youth Council of the Mediterranean after an audience at the Vatican Sept. 5, 2025. The council, coordinated by the Italian bishops, includes young adult representatives from more than a dozen Mediterranean countries. (CNS/Vatican Media)

by Cindy Wooden, Catholic News Service

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Vatican City — September 5, 2025

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The future Christians hope for and must build "is not one of walls and barbed wire, but one of mutual acceptance," Pope Leo XIV told young adult Catholics from more than a dozen Mediterranean countries.

Coming from different cultures, speaking different languages and representing both Latin-rite and Eastern Catholic churches, the young people "are proof that dialogue is possible, that differences are a source of wealth and not a motive for opposition and that the 'other' is always a brother or sister and never a stranger, or worse, an enemy," the pope said.

Leo held a private audience Sept. 5 with members of the Youth Council of the Mediterranean, a group coordinated by the Italian bishops' conference but made up of young people appointed by bishops' conferences from around the Mediterranean basin, including Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

The bishops, he said, recognize that the Mediterranean "can and must be a place of encounter, a crossroads of fraternity, a cradle of life and not a tomb for the dead" and that young people around the basin already are working to ensure that is true.

Leo asked the young people to "continue to be signs of hope, the hope that does not disappoint, the hope that is rooted in the love of Christ."

"To be signs of Christ means to be his witnesses, heralds of the Gospel, precisely around that sea from whose shores the first disciples set out," he said.

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With dialogue, acceptance and tolerance, he said, "the spiritual heritage of the great religious traditions born in the Mediterranean can continue to be a living ferment in this area and beyond, a source of peace, of openness to others, fraternity and of the care for creation."

"Those very religions have been, and at times continue to be exploited in order to justify violence and armed conflict," he said. "We need to reject these forms of blasphemy that dishonor God's holy name, and to do so by the way we live our lives. We are called to cultivate prayer and spirituality, together with action, as sources of peace and points of encounter between traditions and cultures."

Too often, Leo said, peace is just a slogan.

"To be a peacemaker is no easy matter: it forces us out of our comfort zones of distraction and indifference and may well be resisted by those who have an interest in perpetuating conflicts," he said.

But the pope encouraged the young people: "Do not be afraid. Be sprouts of peace where the seed of hatred and resentment is growing; be weavers of unity where polarization and enmity prevail; be the voice of those who have no voice to ask for justice and dignity; be light and salt where the flame of faith and the taste for life are fading."

"Do not give up if someone does not understand you," the pope said. As St. Charles de Foucauld, a French hermit murdered in Algeria in 1916, used to say, "God also uses contrary winds to bring us to port."