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Pope Leo XIV greets visitors and pilgrims from the popemobile before his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Oct. 1, 2025. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

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Pope Leo XIV spent close to three hours listening to and praying with 15 Belgians who had survived clerical sexual abuse as children.

"The meeting, held in an atmosphere of closeness with the victims, deep and painful listening and dialogue, lasted nearly three hours and concluded with an intense moment of prayer," the Vatican press office said in a statement after the meeting late Nov. 8.

CathoBel.be, the news site of French-speaking Belgian Catholics, said the 15 survivors are part of the group of 17 survivors who had met in September 2024 with Pope Francis during his trip to Belgium.

Members of the group, CathoBel said, waited for more than a year for "a new meeting to evaluate the promises that had been made" during their encounter with Pope Francis. "The emotion in the room was palpable. Would the new pope be as attentive as his predecessor? Had he familiarized himself with the case? Or would they have to tell their story all over again from the beginning?"

The survivors had three main points, the website said: "The impact of abuse on the victims' faith and the spiritual rebuilding required; the financial hardship many suffer as a result of the trauma; and the ways in which the church can ensure that such abuses never happen again."

Lieve Brouwers, one of the participants, told CathoBel that the 15 were accompanied by representatives of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

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One of the participants, who is seriously ill, had asked Colombian Bishop Luis Manuel Ali Herrera, commission secretary, if he could arrange for Leo to administer the anointing of the sick, which the pope did, the website reported.

Jan Puype, also a member of the group, told the Belgian television network VRT that the discussion about financial support for survivors did not go as he had hoped.

"It quickly became clear that he doesn't consider finances to be the most important thing. 'We need to focus on other matters,' he said. To which I asked, 'But you are the world leader of the Catholic Church. Surely you can make the Belgian bishops

see reason and ask them to revise our financial support as soon as possible?'"

"Once again, we left with a bit of a ping pong game," Puype said, although the pope did say he would write to the bishops.