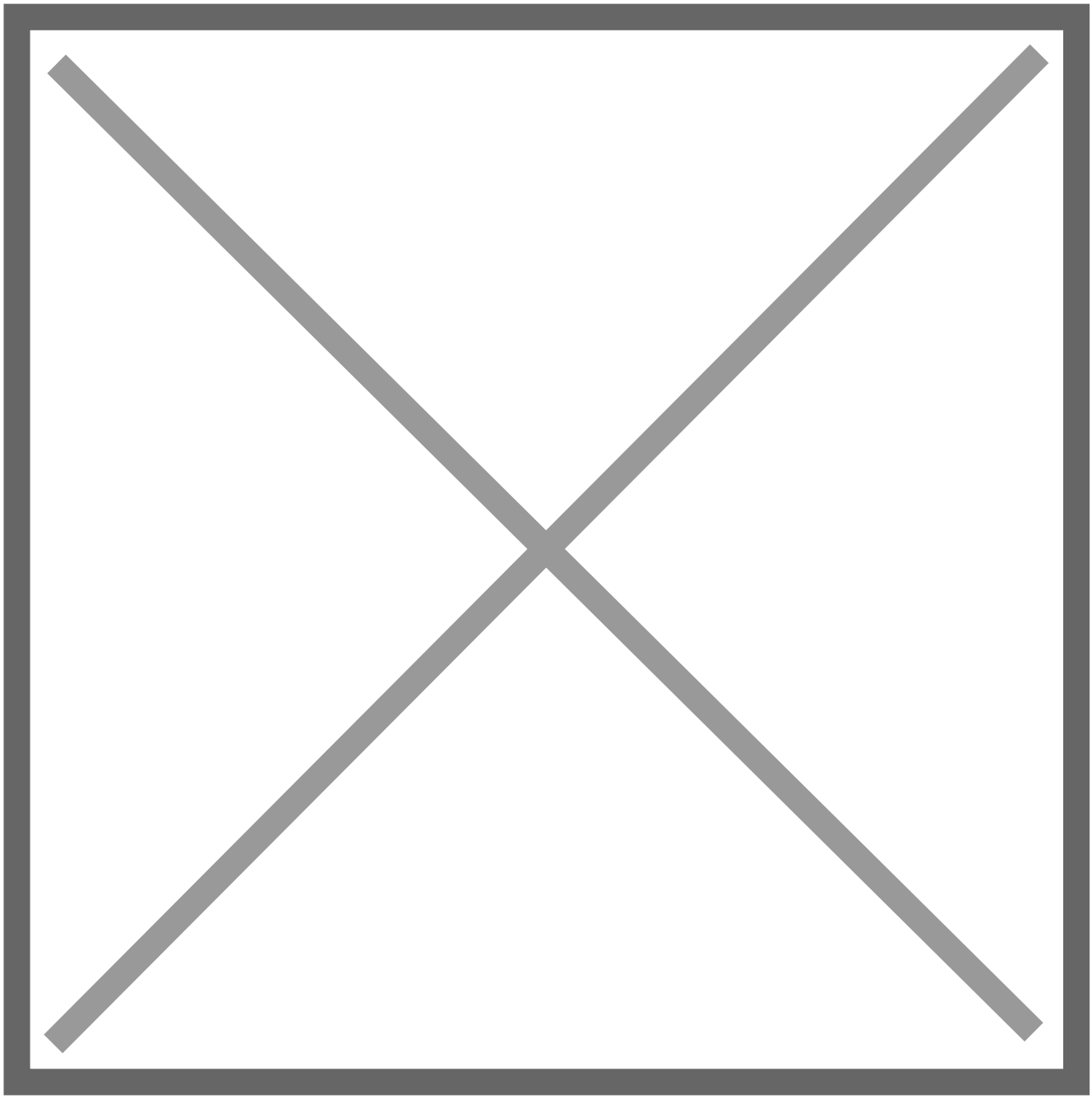
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Pope Leo XIV prays Jan. 8, 2026, during a consistory he held with cardinals from around the world at the Vatican. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

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Pope Leo XIV strongly condemned the Church's failure to welcome survivors of sexual abuse, calling it a "scandal" that deepens their suffering, even though the issue was not a main topic at the Jan. 7-8 extraordinary consistory in Rome.

The door of the Church "was closed" and the victims "were not welcomed," the pope told the cardinals.

Final remarks of the pope to cardinals were published Jan. 10 by the Vatican. Victims of abuse welcomed the brief text.

"Even if it wasn't a specific topic of discussion during our meeting — I want to mention the problem, which still today is truly a wound in the life of the Church in many places, which is precisely the crisis caused by sexual abuse," Leo told the cardinals Jan. 8 as they were wrapping up discussions of their day-and-a half consistory.

"We cannot close our eyes nor our hearts" to victims seeking a conversation, he said.

Encouraging the cardinals to share his message with the bishops in their countries, the pope warned that "many times the pain of the victims has been greater because they were not welcomed and listened to."

The abuse itself "causes a deep wound that perhaps lasts a lifetime," the pope said, "but many times the scandal in the Church is because the door was closed and the

victims were not welcomed, accompanied by the closeness of authentic pastors."

The pope remembered how a victim recently told him "that truly the most painful thing for her was precisely that no bishop wanted to listen to her. And so there too: Listening is profoundly important."

Antonia Sobocki, leader of the LOUDFence initiative helping survivors in the U.K. and beyond, told OSV News the pope "is correct to discuss the critical nature of listening."

"Listening is not only a means of obtaining vitally important information in order to more ably safeguard others" but is "the first gift we give a survivor in order to affirm their human dignity."

"Many survivors will talk about how abuse has two parts to it. The first is the abuse itself, and the second is the way they are so often treated by others when the abuse is discovered," Sobocki told OSV News.

"Listening, especially when you have emotionally invested in the person against whom the allegations have been made, requires the renunciation of selfishness and the conscious decision to put the wounded first," she said of bishops.

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Robert Fidura, a survivor of clerical sexual abuse in Poland, was eager to know whether abuse would be addressed during the consistory and said he was relieved it was.

"After the legal aspects his predecessors addressed, Leo seems to be drawing attention to what's equally important: the human, pastoral aspect," he said of the papal words to cardinals.

"The Church isn't a curial office, it's not a bunch of bureaucrats, but we're sisters and brothers in faith. I've often heard from survivors that worse than abuse was being ignored, rejected by the hierarchy, being bounced off the doors of their palaces, defending the perpetrators," Fidura told OSV News.

"The protracted procedures and lack of information are also a nightmare. We are merely petitioners, swabbed away by the hierarchy like annoying flies," he

lamented, urging empathy.

Leo, Fidura said, "seems to have noticed this aspect," but "this is also something that cannot be decreed. It's a matter of human conscience and upbringing," he added, urging formation of clergy in the spirit of empathy and understanding for those who have been hurt inside the Church.

For Teresa Pitt Green, founder of Spirit Fire ministry, survivor and longtime advocate for victims, "when survivors reach out, they can receive no answer, simply silence, and the Church that should endeavor to offer sanctuary for all instead remains unmoved and closed to very tender hearts."

It's "not just the bishops, sadly," she told OSV News in a written comment.

"Clergy and lay ministries reject and often judge survivors. In some places there remains a startling resentment toward the conversations and boundaries which addressing the abuse scandal has forced our Church to have."

"The Church simply cannot heal without the first step of radical selfless deep listening," Sobocki added, stressing that if every cardinal and bishop accompanied a survivor of abuse and "witnessed the suffering first hand," the accompaniment "would give back to the survivor and change the bishops and cardinals as they transformed into accompaniers."

"It would help them to see the invisible but painful wounds of a terrible epidemic," she said, "and enable them to be part of the process of acceptance" that "survivors must undergo in order to live and thrive despite the pain."

Pope Francis often described the church as a field hospital, Sobocki said. "I would add that listening is the first medicine we use to treat the wounded."

Pitt Green sees a "bright spot of hope."

"Some bishops and clergy, some ministers, hasten to care for survivors. Their efforts can be stymied, however, by their brethren's cold welcome. We have much work to do, and we have ample grace to do as the Holy Father has asked."