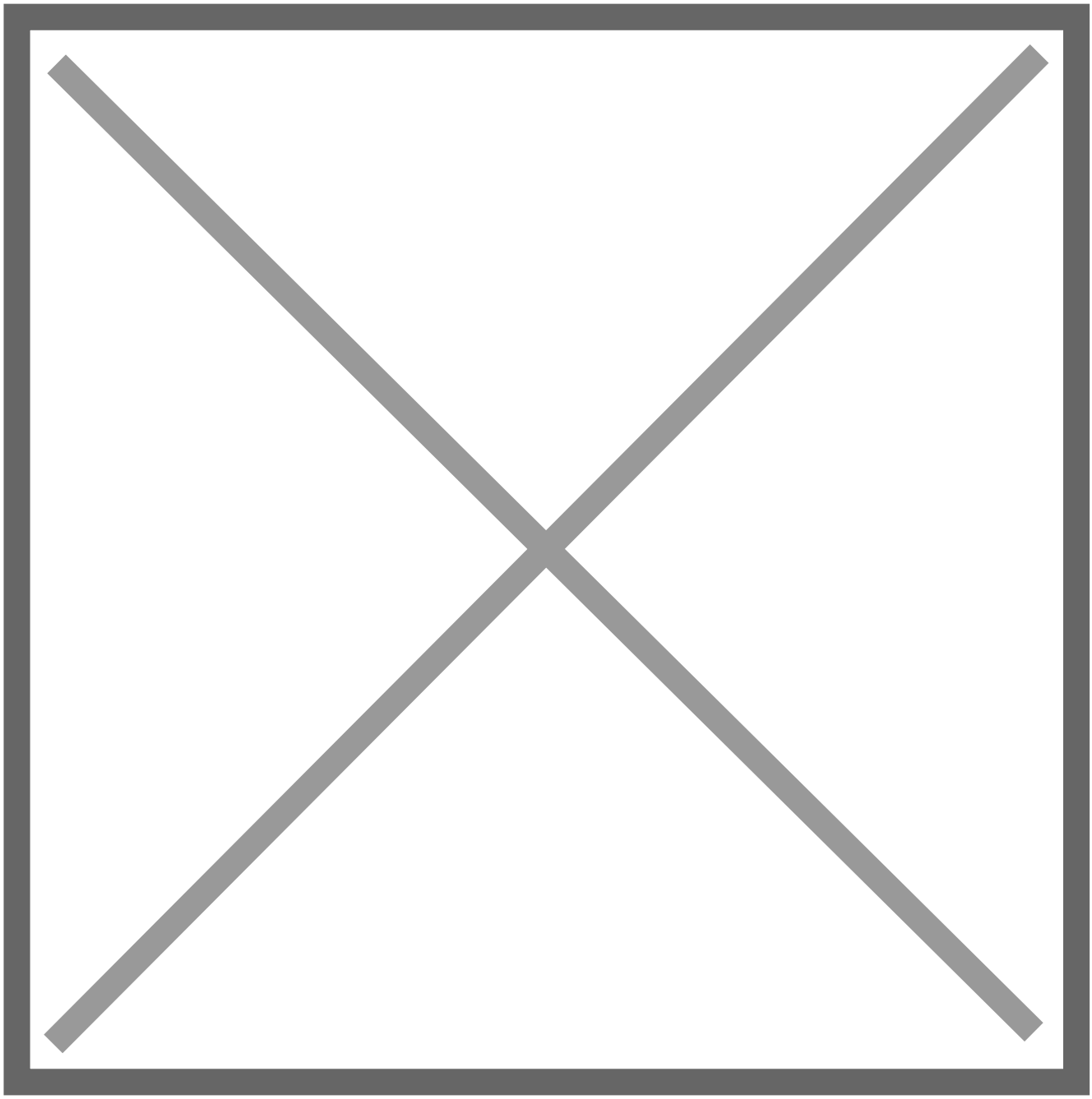
Vatican
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Pope Leo XIV embraces a young man as he meets the youth of the Rome Diocese in the Paul VI Hall at the Vatican Jan. 10, 2026. A massive crowd of thousands of young people — from parish groups to school and scout groups, as well as individuals from all over pope's own diocese gathered in the Vatican hall. As many young people who didn't fit inside followed the encounter with the pope on screens in St. Peter's Square. (OSV/Reuters/Ciro De Luca)

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Pope Leo XIV embraced the youth of Rome — both literally and with his words — during a Jan. 10 meeting with the young people of the Diocese of Rome, telling them to choose real relationships over digital isolation.

It's "always better to see each other in person and not just on screens," Leo told the crowd, adding, "It's very important that we try to build human relationships, good friendships, and above all, friendship with Jesus."

A massive crowd of thousands of young people — from parish groups to school and scout groups, as well as individuals from all over the pope's own diocese gathered in the Paul VI Hall on Saturday evening, with the pope calling the crowd "courageous" — as many young people didn't fit inside and followed the encounter on the screens in St. Peter's Square.

The pope started the meeting clearly in a relaxed and joyful mood, telling the excited crowd that his young American niece asked him before the meeting: "Uncle, how do you cope with so many problems in the world, with so many worries? ... Don't you feel alone? How do you manage everything?"

"And the answer, largely," the pope said, "is you! Because we are not alone!" and later added that "we can truly know in our hearts that we are never alone, because

Jesus is with us!"

Speaking candidly, Leo reflected on loneliness, especially in an age of constant online noise, warning that "links without connection" and "likes without affection" leave young hearts empty.

"We can be isolated even in the midst of so many people," he said.

In these moments of despair, however, the pope called all to "sharpen our sensitivity."

"If we listen carefully and open our eyes, creation reminds us that we are not alone: The world is made of connections between all things, between the elements and living beings."

The pope offered a remedy to the youth of Rome: "When you feel alone, remember that God never abandons you."

"His company becomes the strength to take the first step toward those who are alone, yet he is right beside you," he said, adding that sharing lives and talents with others is the best solution to not feel alone: "Everyone remains alone if they look only at themselves."

"Instead, drawing closer to others makes you become an image of what God is for you. Just as he brings hope into your life, so you can share it with others. You will then find yourselves together, seeking communion and fraternity," the pope said.

Virginie, a 25-year-old scout leader who came with the group of teenagers for the Jan. 10 meeting, told OSV News she was very happy to meet the pope and echoed the pope's words on youths sharing their lives and gifts with others.

"I live my faith and I'm trying to live my faith with the scouts," Virginie said. "Not everyone in our scout group is Catholic but (we) try to help them to discover their faith because this is something that can give you peace and happiness in our lives — more than a simple person can normally have."

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Her colleague Riccardo told OSV News that thanks to his scouting experience, "I'm living my Catholic journey in a unique way and I'm developing my faith in a personal way, not in an imposed way, almost. And I'm happy, because I'm managing to develop my own personal version, almost my own idea, and at times it's a great help and allows me to move forward."

The pope told the young people to resist the pressures of modern culture, saying: "Don't expect the world to welcome you with open arms."

Instead he encouraged young people to be joyful and to pray.

"To set the world ablaze requires a burning heart! And God lights the fire when we pray," the pope told them.

The "true good in life cannot be bought with money or conquered with weapons, but can be given, simply, because God gives it to everyone with love," the pope emphasized.

Virginie hoped Leo would continue to "give space to young people" in the Church.

"The Church is losing a lot of people in the last years," and Leo "is answering to that, so it's good that he is giving space to us," with the January meeting, Viginie said.

Riccardo was hopeful that the pope is a man of action as our faith is "about what we do," he told OSV News.

After many Italian youth died in a fire at a bar on New Year's night in a Swiss resort in Crans-Montana, the pope encouraged the youth to pray for their deceased colleagues and their loved ones. The blaze took the lives of 40 people of different nationalities and seriously injured another 115.

"We too must remember that life is so precious, that we can never forget those who suffer," the pope reminded the youth. "Unfortunately, those families, still grieving, must now seek how to overcome that pain. This is also why our prayers, our unity, are important: Let us always remain united, as friends, as brothers!"

After greeting Leo at the beginning of the meeting, the youth asked: "Can we embrace you?" with the pope eagerly welcoming them in his arms.