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Fr. Davide Pagliarani, center, superior general of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X is pictu

Fr. Davide Pagliarani, center, superior general of the traditionalist Society of St. Pius X is pictured during the society's general chapter in Econe, Switzerland July 12, 2018. With him are Bishop Alfonso de la Galarreta, left, and Fr. Christian Bouchacourt. (CNS/Courtesy fsspx.news)



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Vatican City — February 19, 2026
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The traditionalist Catholic society long a thorn in the side of the Vatican will move forward with plans to create its own bishops without approval from the pope. The plan escalates its standoff with Rome and sets the group on a path toward an outright break from the Catholic Church.

The Feb. 19 announcement marks the latest turn in a back-and-forth between the Society of St. Pius X and the Vatican that sought to avoid a full-blown rupture between the two. Now, the situation poses a major test for Pope Leo XIV, who has made church unity a priority of his pontificate.

Fr. Davide Pagliarani, superior general of the Society of St. Pius X, said in a letter that the society would not postpone its announced bishop consecrations. The letter was sent to Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, which oversees the Vatican's relationship with the group.

The two met one-on-one on Feb. 12 to discuss a resolution to the society's threat of consecrating new bishops in defiance of Rome.

In their meeting, the cardinal offered to engage in a theological "path of dialogue" with the society to establish "the minimum requirements necessary for full communion with the Catholic Church" on the condition the society suspend their planned episcopal consecrations.

Notably, Fernández met with the pope on Feb. 19, the day the letter was made public.

The Society of St. Pius X has long operated in a canonical gray zone. While its priests have been granted faculties in certain cases, including permission for the valid administration of confession and marriage, the society continues to function without full canonical recognition and in open defiance of church authorities.

Pagliarini wrote that the society is not seeking canonical regularity in the church,which he said "in the current state of affairs, is impracticable due to doctrinal divergences."

The Society of St. Pius X, which counts 733 priests worldwide according to its latest figures, rejects key teachings of the Second Vatican Council. That includes the church's teaching on interreligious dialogue and the postconciliar liturgical reform promulgated in 1970 and now celebrated by nearly all Latin-rite Catholics.

Among the topics Fernández proposed for discussion with the Society of St. Pius X were "the different degrees of assent required by the various texts of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and their interpretation."

In response, Pagliarani wrote that the society and the Vatican "cannot agree doctrinally" in light of the insistence that "the texts of the Council cannot be corrected, nor can the legitimacy of the liturgical reform be challenged."

The society's decision sets up a direct confrontation with the Vatican ahead of its planned July 1 bishop consecrations, a move widely interpreted as an attempt to

pressure Rome into addressing the Society of St. Pius X's shrinking number of bishops.

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, pictured in a 1967 photo, was excommunicated in 1988 for orda

Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, pictured in a 1967 photo, was excommunicated in 1988 for ordaining bishops for his rebel order, the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X. He died in 1991 at age 85. (OSV News file photo)

Currently, the society has only two active bishops who can ordain new priests and grow its ranks: Bishops Alfonso de Galarreta and Bernard Fellay, respectively 69 and 67.

Those two bishops were among the four bishops illicitly consecrated in 1988 by the society's founder, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, in what Pope John Paul II called a "schismatic act" and which resulted in Lefebvre's excommunication.

The four newly ordained bishops also incurred automatic excommunication, but Pope Benedict XVI lifted the penalties in 2009 in an effort at reconciliation.

In the letter, the Society of St. Pius X denies that it is engaging in schism with the new consecrations. Arguing that they are necessary for the salvation of souls, the group "maintains that an episcopal consecration not authorised by the Holy See does not constitute a rupture of communion."

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In a separate post also published Feb. 19, the society said that since the new bishops would not claim any governing authority apart from the pope, they would not incur a schism.

That reasoning, however, depends on a rejection of *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on the church. That document stated that episcopal consecration confers the office of teaching and governing which "can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the college."

And canon law is clear: "No bishop is permitted to consecrate anyone a bishop unless it is first evident that there is a pontifical mandate."

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