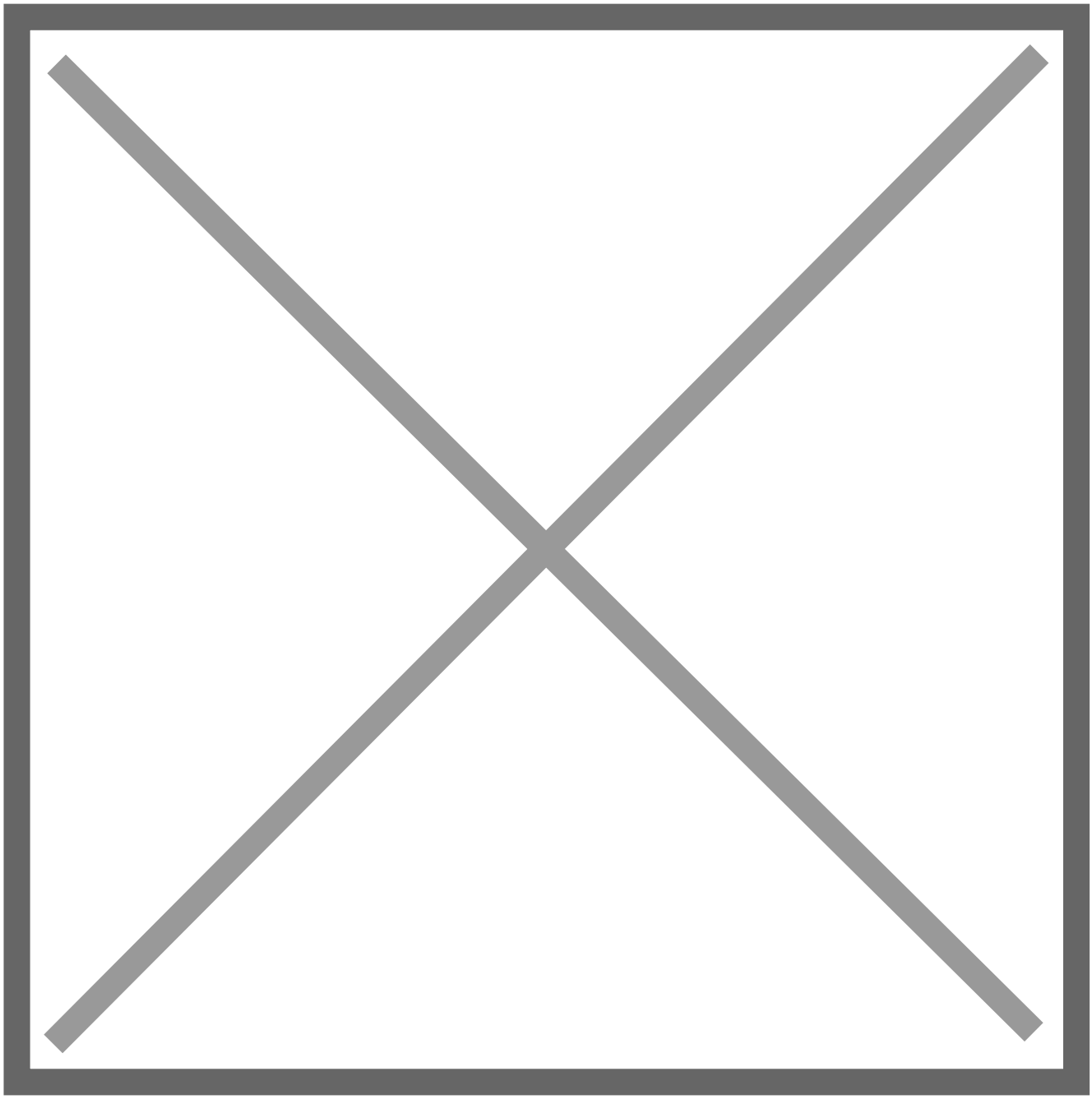
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Pope Leo XIV prays at Mass during a parish visit to the Church of St. Mary of the Presentation in Rome March 8, 2026. The pope sent a message to students gathered at Loyola University Chicago for a peacebuilding conference March 7, calling on them to "be co-workers for peace with Christ." (CNS/Vatican Media)

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Pope Leo XIV sent a message to students gathered at Loyola University Chicago for a peacebuilding conference March 7, calling on them to "be co-workers for peace with Christ."

"True peace is not simply the absence of conflict, but rather is God's gift," Leo said. "This peace is not like the kind that the world offers us (cf. Jn 14:27), which unfortunately is often imposed with violence and deception."

The message, signed by the pope March 2 and released by the Vatican the day of the event, was addressed to participants in the Building Bridges Initiative: International Encounter for Peace and Reconciliation, a daylong conference that brought together university students, scholars and practitioners from across the Americas.

Leo also warned against what he called "the globalization of powerlessness," a temptation, he said, to "believe that an era free of conflict is unattainable."

"Christians are called today to be co-workers for peace with Christ, who even in our day wishes to share that gift with humanity," Leo wrote, adding that the Lord walks with those who work to promote harmony in their families, communities and countries across the globe.

The pope said that fostering global concord requires the engagement of the international community on behalf of the common good, which, he said, "transcends borders, faith traditions and cultures."

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"True harmony is rooted in the reconciliation that God has brought to us through his only Son, Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection," he said, describing peace as a constant journey of reconciliation with God, with oneself, with others and with creation.

The pope underscored that prayer is a powerful force for reconciliation, saying that when people of different religious traditions pray together, it has "the power to change the course of history."

The event on Loyola's campus featured discussions on topics including peace and the Church, migration and law, the role of culture and art, and the challenges of truth and justice in an era shaped by artificial intelligence. Featured speakers included Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago, and several Catholic scholars and diplomats.

The conference was co-hosted by Loyola's Institute for Pastoral Studies, the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage, the Division of Mission Integration and the Department of Theology with support from several pontifical bodies including the Pontifical Commission for Latin America.

"I am pleased that you are continuing the work of the Building Bridges Initiative begun in 2022 with Pope Francis by bringing together university students, scholars and leaders who are promoting peace around the world," Leo said. "In a time increasingly marked by the wounds of war and violence, your efforts are sorely needed."