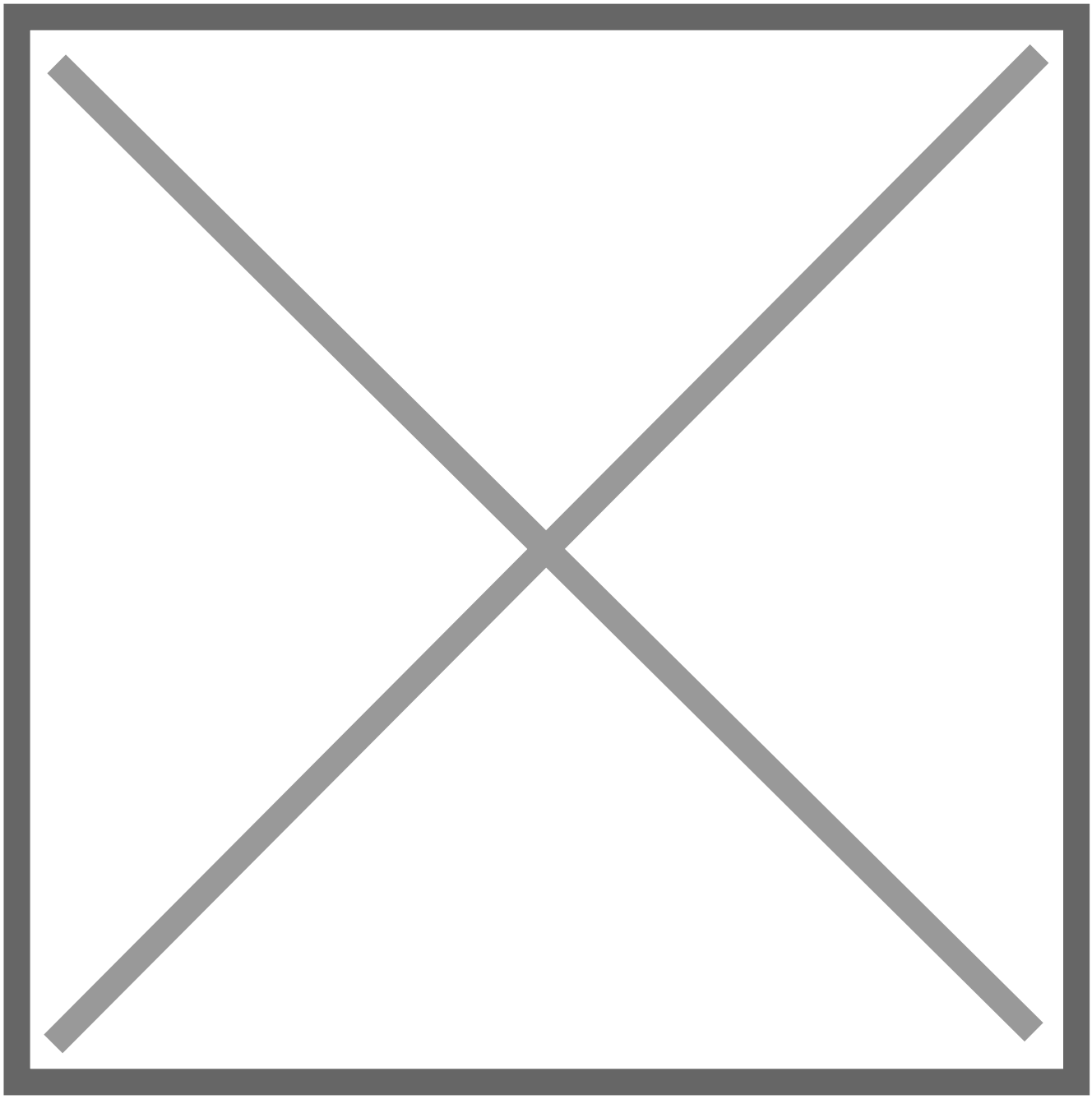
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Pope Leo XIV speaks during a meeting with the the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Consistory Hall of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican March 16, 2026. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Elisabetta Trevisan)

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Addressing the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors March 16, Pope Leo XIV underlined the importance of preventing abuse in the Church, insisting that such responsibility must be concretely confronted and not delegated.

"Your mission is to help ensure that abuse is prevented. Yet prevention is never just a set of protocols or procedures," he said. "It is about helping to form, throughout the church, a culture of care, in which the protection of minors and persons in vulnerable situations is not seen as an obligation imposed from outside, but as a natural expression of faith."

In a speech at the Vatican March 16, Leo expressed his gratitude to the pontifical commission for its efforts to protect children, adolescents and persons in vulnerable situations.

"It is a demanding service, sometimes silent, often burdensome, but one which is essential for the life of the church and for the building of an authentic culture of care," Leo said.

Pope Francis placed the commission permanently within the Roman Curia "to remind the whole Church that the prevention of abuse is not an optional task, but a constitutive dimension of the mission of the Church," the pope recalled.

With this in mind, the Holy Father suggested that a path of conversion, in which the suffering of others is heard, must continue to propel them to take action, with the experiences of victims and survivors as essential reference points.

"While they are certainly painful and difficult to hear, these experiences powerfully bring the truth to light and teach us humility as we strive to assist victims and survivors," Leo said. He added that it is through the recognition of the pain that has occurred that a credible path for hope and renewal is opened.

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The pope also encouraged the commission to engage in dialogue with other dicasteries and institutions of the Roman Curia.

Leo called the commission's annual report a tool of "great importance," since "it represents an exercise in truth and responsibility, as well as in hope and prudence, which must go hand in hand for the good of the Church."

The pope also underlined that ordinaries and major superiors have a responsibility that cannot be delegated.

The Holy Father urged members of the commission to continue to serve as a resource to assist every community and institution in the Church in listening to victims and accompanying them, "so that no community within the Church feels alone in this task," especially where resources or expertise are lacking.

Leo stated that he looks forward to receiving additional information in their third annual report on the encouraging progress already made, as well as on the areas in which further development is still required.

The Holy Father recalled that the commission's engagement with the church at every level, with victims, survivors and their families, as well as with civil society partners, has prompted them to deepen their study in two rapidly developing areas of safeguarding, namely the concept of vulnerability in relation to abuse and the prevention of technology-facilitated abuse of minors in the digital space.

"Let me reiterate," Leo concluded, "that the protection of minors and persons in vulnerable situations is not an isolated area of ecclesial life, but a dimension that

permeates pastoral care, formation, governance and discipline."

"Every step forward on this journey is a step towards Christ and towards a more evangelical and authentic church," he said.