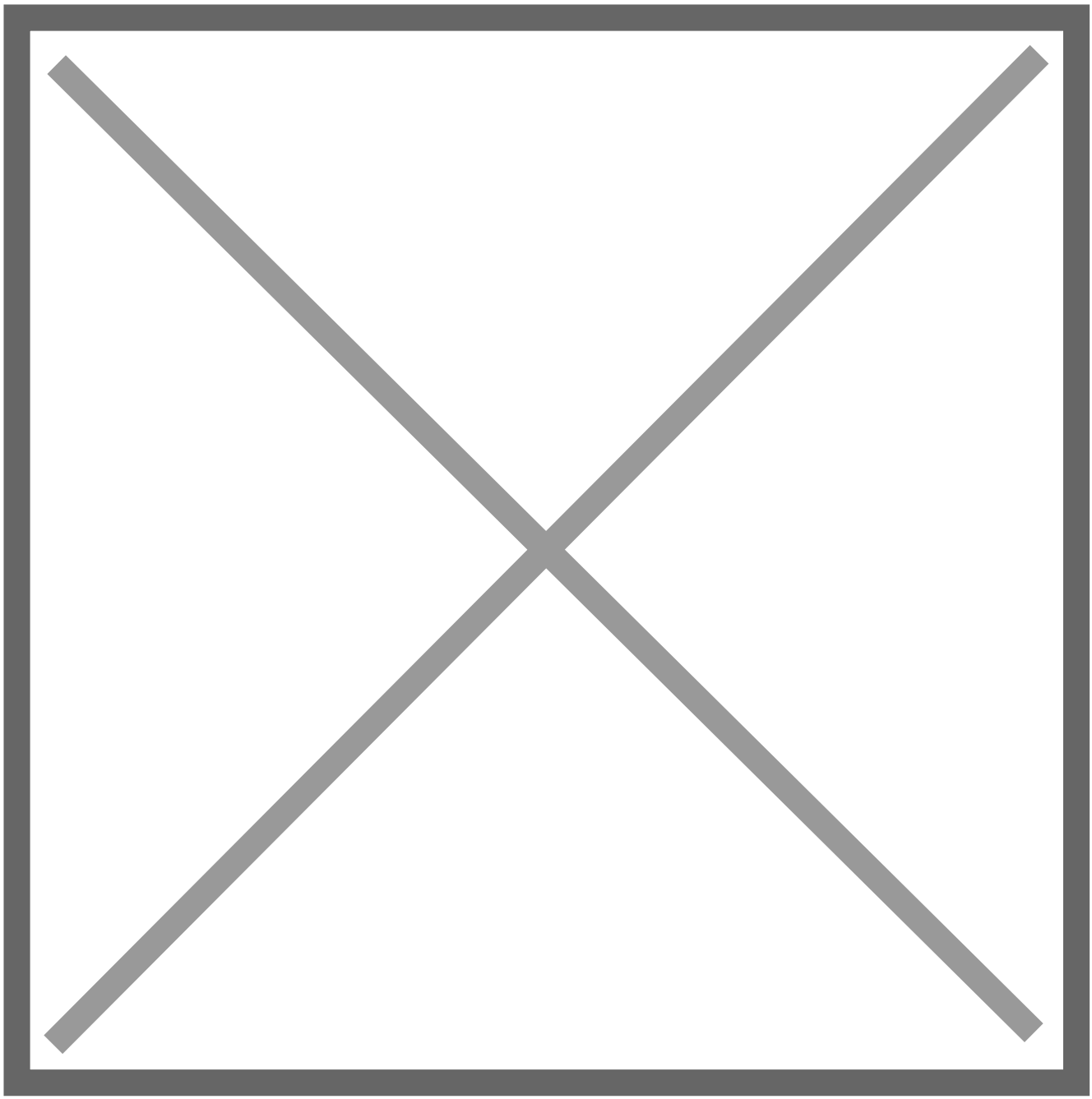
News



The U.S. Supreme Court is seen in Washington May 11, 2026. In a May 26 order list, the high court declined to intervene in a lawsuit over allegations that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops misled donors about the purposes of the annual Peter's Pence collection. (OSV News/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



by OSV News

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Washington — May 28, 2026

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The U.S. Supreme Court declined to intervene in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' efforts to dismiss a lawsuit alleging it misled donors about the purposes of the annual Peter's Pence collection.

In a May 26 order list, the high court declined a petition for a writ of certiorari in United States Conference of Catholic Bishops v. David O'Connell, in effect sidestepping the case.

Daniel Blomberg, senior counsel at Becket and lead attorney for the USCCB in the case, said in a statement provided to OSV News, "While this is disappointing news, the USCCB is evaluating all of its options moving forward. USCCB remains committed to protecting the Church from unconstitutional government entanglement."

The high court's denial of the petition will leave in place a lower court ruling against the USCCB's effort to dismiss the class action lawsuit, allowing the case to proceed.

In 2020, a Dallas law firm and a Rhode Island parishioner alleged in a federal lawsuit that the USCCB misled donors regarding how Peter's Pence collection funds would be spent. Plaintiff David O'Connell alleged in court documents that the USCCB promoted the collection as assisting in the charitable works of the pope, but Italian media reports suggested Peter's Pence funds were invested in part in real estate and Hollywood films.

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U.S. courts have held in other rulings that the First Amendment's church autonomy doctrine prevents courts from interfering in internal church affairs. In United States Conference of Catholic Bishops v. David O'Connell, the USCCB's lawyers have argued "that courts have no business second-guessing the Church's religious communications and decisions about the use of offerings."

Peter's Pence is a worldwide collection used to support Vatican administrative costs, such as its staff and its embassies around the world, as well as the charitable efforts of the pope.

The USCCB website states, "The purpose of the Peter's Pence Collection is to provide the Holy Father with the financial means to respond with emergency assistance to those who are suffering as a result of war, oppression, natural disaster, and disease. This collection was started centuries ago to provide financial support for the Pope and has evolved to fund the Holy See's charitable actions for those in need."