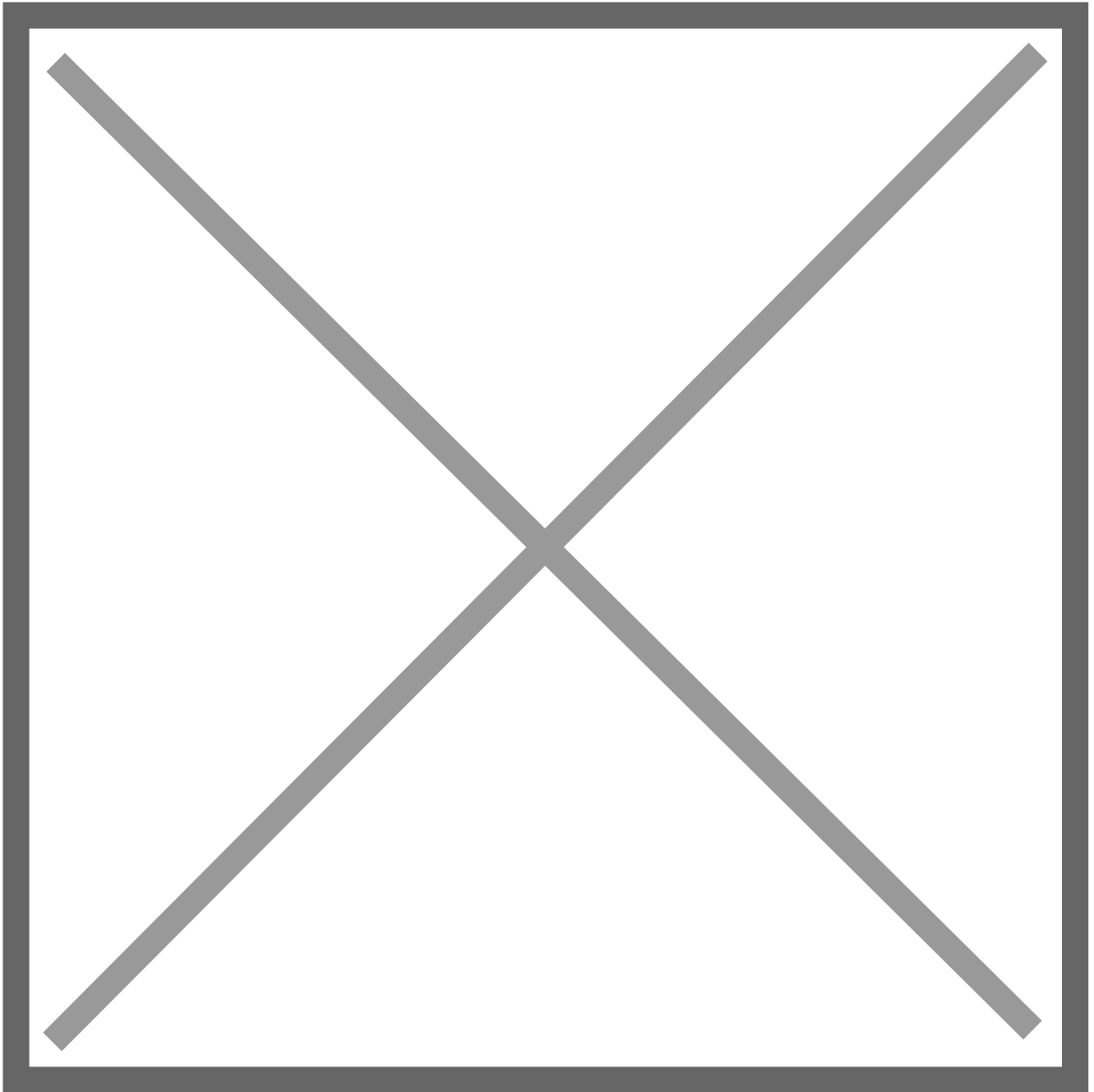




Pope Leo XIV talks at a table with prelates and laypeople Oct. 7, 2026, after he opened the weeklong Vatican meeting of presidents of bishops' conferences marking the 10th anniversary of *Amoris Laetitia* ("The Joy of Love"). In his opening address, the pope spoke about the pastoral responsibility of the Church to find renewed ways of proclaiming the Gospel, offering sacramental graces and accompanying families today. Following surgery the afternoon of Oct. 13 to remove a lung nodule, the

Vatican confirmed that evening that Leo has lung cancer. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

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Vatican City — October 15, 2026

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The Vatican meeting of the world's bishops' conference presidents and the heads of Eastern Catholic churches marking the 10th anniversary of *Amoris Laetitia* concluded on the evening of Oct. 14 with prayers for Pope Leo XIV's recovery from lung cancer surgery.

Jesuit Fr. Giacomo Costa, a consultant to the General Secretariat of the Synod who helped to organize the meeting, said Oct. 14 that "accompaniment" was one of the key words in the week's discussions of marriage and family.

Reflecting on the significance of the experience at the event's final press conference, Archbishop Charles Scicluna, the archbishop of Malta, said that he is bringing with him from this meeting "a renewed commitment to put the family at the center of the church's pastoral mission."

"*Amoris Laetitia* 10 years ago stimulated, provoked, an invitation for pastoral conversion, an attitude of listening to families, before judging, and also discerning situations with ... open hearts, seeking the will of God, but also facilitating the meeting with God's mercy," Scicluna said.

In the closing session of the Vatican family summit, participants listened to a presentation of the meeting's synthesis report. Due to the personal request of Leo prior to his surgery, the meeting's final synthesis report will not be made public until the pope has had time to personally review it. Costa said that the pope requested to postpone the meeting's final report, noting that Leo "wanted to listen to it and be able to offer his own word on it himself."

"I will read the fruits of your work and discussions, and offer my reflections in due course," Leo wrote in a brief message to the participants signed on the day of his surgery.

"I encourage you to begin to share with your Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses what you have lived and received, and to continue proclaiming the Gospel with families, drawing on the richness of *Amoris Laetitia*," the pope said.

The bishops, patriarchs, families and experts taking part in the meeting on marriage and family in Paul VI Hall met for more than 42 hours of discussions over the course of Oct. 7 to 14 on topics ranging from cohabitation of young couples to influencers on social media portraying "traditional" families, often referred to as "trad wife" culture.

The topic of annulments, as well as Communion for the divorced and remarried, also came up on Oct. 12, the day that participants devoted to discussing how best to accompany and support families in the difficulties of life, which was overshadowed by Leo's shocking announcement the day prior that he would be undergoing surgery.

Addressing participants that morning, U.S. theologian Julie Hanlon Rubio said, "In preparing for this intervention, I heard heartbreaking stories. One person told me of his elderly mother suffering from dementia who, when offered Eucharist at Mass, shouted, 'No!,' and covered her mouth, because one thing she remembered was that, because her husband of 50 years had been previously married, she was not worthy to receive the Body of Christ," according to remarks posted on the meeting's website.

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"The church can offer a challenging vision of marriage as intimate partnership oriented to love and justice that does not require perfection," she added. "Whether they are single or married, with or without children; whether they are divorced, widowed, or remarried, we can meet them at the door with open arms, tell them that theirs is a challenging and necessary vocation, and assure them they are not alone."

Earlier in the weeklong meeting, delegates reflected on the delicate first years of married life, a point Francis emphasized in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

In his address on Oct. 10, Cardinal José Cobo Cano of Madrid warned that the church should "consider whether we prepared couples more for a wedding ceremony than for married life."

"The issue is not merely a matter of reviewing contents. It is a question of whether our pastoral care is organized primarily around the planned wedding ceremony or around the human, faith-based and vocation journeys we are called to accompany," he said.

He also emphasized the need for pastors to be present at significant moments in the first years of marriage "without necessarily turning this accompaniment into a continuous program of meetings."

"The sacrament has been celebrated, but now the spouses must learn to build and put roots in their married life. They must build a 'we' without erasing the 'I' and the 'you,'" Cobo said.

Following the intense work during the first days of the meeting, Oct. 11 was scheduled as a recess. However, Leo's surgery announcement during his Sunday Angelus address shifted the pre-programmed schedule and shocked the participants.

Reconvening on Oct. 12, while under the weight of Leo's impending surgery, the bishops and patriarchs reflected on the challenges faced by families in difficult situations.

"*Amoris Laetitia* invited us to give priority to listening, to avoid judging too quickly, and to allow ourselves to be surprised by the action of God's grace in people's lives," Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life, said in the day's opening address.

Filipino Cardinal Pablo Virgilio David of Kalookan described ministering to families affected by extreme hardships, noting that the "fragility of many families is not produced only by personal choices."

"Family life can also be wounded by poverty, migration, violence, addiction, imprisonment, injustice and precarious work. These realities can severely limit people's freedom and their capacity even to approximate the Christian ideal of family life," David said in a video presentation.

Reflecting on the declining numbers of baptisms and marriages, Hanlon highlighted Francis' call for a pastoral accompaniment that "is ever ready to understand, forgive, accompany, hope, and, above all, integrate."

"In an era when influencers on social media show off their seemingly perfect 'traditional' families complete with homemade bread and chickens, Francis' integration of weakness is crucial," Hanlon said.

In the afternoon, before continuing with reports on group discussions, Farrell and Cardinal Mario Grech, the secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, released a statement confirming that, because of Leo's surgery, the synthesis report would not be made public; instead, they would present the report and relevant texts to him after his convalescence.

"We will then proceed according to his instructions," the cardinals said.

On the meeting's final day of plenary sessions and group work, Oct. 13, the assembly sent a message to Leo ahead of his surgery in the afternoon, expressing their closeness, affection and prayers for his health.

"We are grateful to you for having wanted this Meeting and for encouraging us to listen to families and to the journeys of our Churches. As we continue our work, we feel your closeness and carry with us your concern for families throughout the world," the message read.

The day's discussions focused on Christian families and their significance in the Church's mission. In his address, Tanzanian Cardinal Protase Rugambwa of Tabora highlighted the need for couples and families to take "on a more active role in the formation of seminarians, deacons, and other pastoral workers."

"The involvement of families as active subjects of pastoral action is supported very much by the concrete experiences they have gained as faithful and committed Christians, which can be utilized not only in their struggle to support the growth of the church's mission but also in shaping the formation of those who are called to accompany them," Rugambwa said.

Leo had been an active participant in the Vatican meeting up until he was admitted to the hospital. During the meeting's closing Mass the morning following the pope's surgery, Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle read aloud a homily that had been prepared by the pope prior to the operation.

Cameroonian Archbishop Andrew Nkea of Bamenda, one of the bishops participating in the meeting, told OSV News that despite the pope's absence on the meeting's final days, those present in the assembly "were not discouraged, but we were very, very strongly united with him in prayer."

"Every morning before we started the meeting, we prayed for his health and for his quick recovery," he said. "It really didn't affect the meeting in the sense that it didn't kill our spirits, because we have hope in God and trust in his healing power. But at the same time, we missed him in the meeting."

"We thank God that it was an early discovery," Nkea said. "So, we are hoping that he will recover very fast, and he will get back to his duties because the whole world is waiting for him to get well."