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Pope and US Jewish leaders

Pope Leo XIV and leaders of the American Jewish Committee smile during their audience at the Vatican Oct. 22, 2026. During the encounter, Pope Leo emphasized the Church's commitment to fostering friendship between the two faiths and to rejecting all forms of ethnic and religious discrimination. (OSV News/Vatican Media/Mario Tomassetti)

Junno Arocho Esteves

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Welcoming U.S. Jewish leaders at the Vatican, Pope Leo XIV emphasized the church's commitment to fostering friendship between the two faiths and to rejecting all forms of ethnic and religious discrimination.

In an Oct. 22 meeting with a delegation from the American Jewish Committee, or AJC, the pope recalled the "shared spiritual heritage" of Jews and Catholics that compels people of both faiths "to defend human dignity, serve the poor, protect religious freedom and promote justice and peace."

"Differences of opinion, however profound, must never give rise to prejudice and hostility, which undermine the moral foundations of society," he said.

The pope's warning comes at a time when Christians in the Holy Land have faced continued attacks from Jewish extremists. Most recently, Christian leaders condemned an attack by Israeli settlers against Palestinians and several European diplomats present in Taybeh, one of the last remaining Christian villages in the West Bank.

A complaint against the settlers was launched by Rabbis for Human Rights, an Israeli-based organization composed of rabbis, as well as rabbinical students and leaders who advocate for civil and human rights in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

In an Oct. 20 statement condemning the attacks, the patriarchs and heads of the churches in Jerusalem thanked the "rabbis and Jewish voices" who "have publicly rejected it."

However, a study published in April by Tel Aviv University found an exponential increase in anti-Jewish sentiment and attacks around the world in the wake of Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza.

According to the study, 20 Jews were murdered in four separate attacks in 2025, making it "the highest number of victims of antisemitic attacks in more than three decades." Hundreds of incidents and physical assaults were reported across several countries, including Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

In his address, Leo noted that the AJC's visit coincided with the feast day of St. John Paul II, "whose efforts contributed so greatly to fostering friendship between Jews and Catholics."

Recalling St. John Paul's 1995 address to the Jewish organization, in which the Polish pontiff encouraged dialogue between Christians and Jews, the pope said his predecessor's words "remain relevant today" and expressed his gratitude to "all who continue to build relationships, grounded in sincerity and mutual respect, between our respective communities."

"Essential to this commitment," he continued, "is the rejection of all forms of religious and ethnic hatred and discrimination."

Recalling last year's 60th anniversary of Nostra Aetate, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Leo reaffirmed that "the Church does not tolerate antisemitism and fights against it, on the basis of the Gospel itself."

"In a world wounded by violence and mistrust, this commitment to fraternity is especially urgent," the pope said. "Indeed, the witness of our fraternity, which I hope we will be able to show with effective gestures, will certainly contribute to building a more peaceful world, something that all men and women of good will desire in their hearts."

In a statement released after the meeting, Rabbi Noam Marans, AJC's director of interreligious affairs, said the delegation was "deeply moved" that the Jewish leaders were welcomed to a papal audience "while His Holiness continues to recover" from his Oct. 13 surgery for lung cancer.

The pontiff was discharged from the hospital Oct. 17, and his doctors confirmed Oct. 21, he needs no further treatment.

Marans said the AJC group was among the first to meet Leo since he has resumed his schedule of public meetings, which the rabbi called "a clear demonstration of the value he places on maintaining and fostering the enduring relationship between the Church and the Jewish people."

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