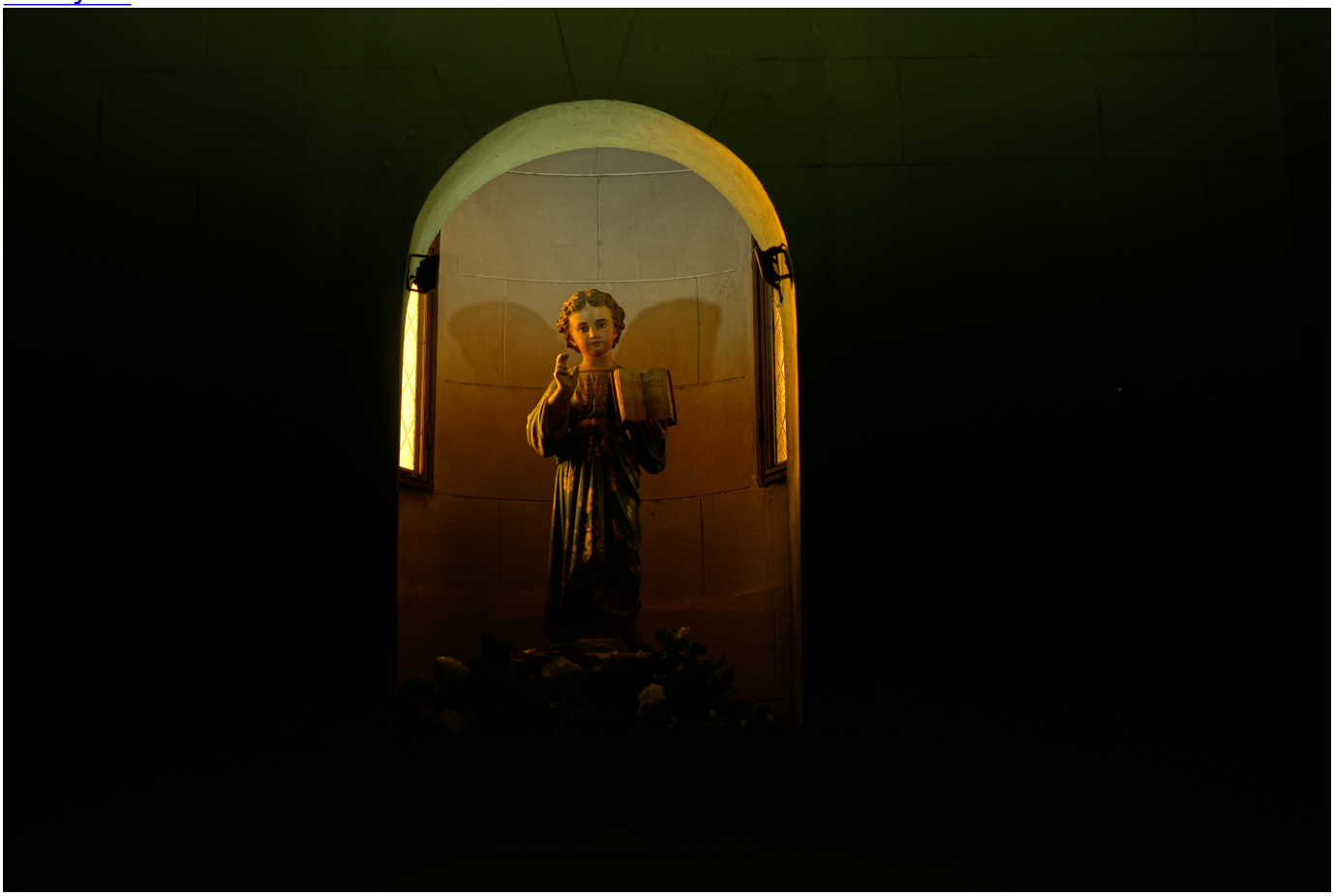
Vatican
Vatican News
Analysis



A statue of the Christ Child stands inside the Parroquia del Niño Dios or Parish of the Child Jesus, where priest Alejandro Nicola was removed from his parish duties amid criminal allegations of sexual abuse involving young children at an affiliated kindergarten, in Villa Carlos Paz, Argentina, Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2026. (AP/Natacha Pisarenko)

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Pope Leo XIV's visit to Argentina comes amid allegations of sexual abuse and other crimes involving Catholic clergy and lay members, with survivors demanding stronger action from the Vatican against those accused or convicted.

Victims have expressed frustration over the Vatican's silence on church proceedings involving priests convicted in criminal courts. They are demanding that the clergy be defrocked, the Catholic Church's most severe disciplinary punishment.

The papal visit, initially scheduled for Nov. 8-11, has stirred mixed feelings. Some survivors hope to meet Leo to share their experiences and demand action, while others, including members of a network of clergy abuse survivors, oppose his visit, saying the church has failed to deliver on its promises of "zero tolerance" for abuse.

Here are some of the major scandals involving the Catholic Church in Argentina:

Abuse allegations in Cordoba

Leo is scheduled to visit Córdoba province, where priest Alejandro Nicola faces allegations of sexually abusing children at a Catholic school's kindergarten, mostly in 2025.

More than a dozen families have filed complaints. Prosecutors are investigating, while the local church has opened a preliminary inquiry.

Nicola was seen celebrating Mass at Córdoba's cathedral in July despite the allegations, angering families of the alleged victims. The pope is expected to visit the cathedral during his trip.

Florencia Navarro and Fernanda Agüero, who accuse Nicola of abusing their daughters, criticized church and school authorities for their handling of the allegations.

"I would like him to provide explanations, since they talk so much about protecting the vulnerable," Navarro said of the pope.

Agüero said she hoped the pope's message would be backed by "concrete actions" rather than words alone.

Cordoba Archbishop Ángel Rossi invoked the priest's presumption of innocence when questioned about the case.

Nicola has not addressed the allegations, telling journalists only that "the lawyers will take care of that." His defense team has not commented publicly on the case.

Opus Dei faces trafficking allegations

A group of 43 women who allege they were subjected to human trafficking and forced labor at Opus Dei centers in Argentina hope to meet the pope in Buenos Aires.

The allegations implicate senior members of the conservative Catholic organization, including its global leader, Fernando Ocáriz. Three former Opus Dei vicars in South America and a former regional secretary of its women's section have been formally accused in the investigation, along with Mariano Fazio, the organization's second-highest-ranking official.

Prosecutors have requested that the defendants be summoned for questioning, but the judge has not ordered it. They are also investigating claims that the women were recruited as teenagers under false promises and forced to work 12 to 16 hours a day as domestic servants without pay, under conditions of isolation and strict control, between the 1970s and 2015.

Their lawyer, Sebastián Sal, is seeking a meeting with the pope and has requested that Ocáriz also face charges.

The women want Leo to intervene in Opus Dei and demand a public apology from its leaders. They say the Vatican has not responded to a formal complaint filed in 2021.

"We were just little girls when we entered. They will never give us back the dignity they stole from us," said Andrea Martínez, 52, who joined an Opus Dei center in Buenos Aires as a teenager.

Another complainant, Rosana Vaccon, said she was isolated from her family and never received letters from her mother informing her of her father's serious illness.

Opus Dei authorities in Argentina have categorically denied the allegations, which carry potential prison sentences.

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Abuse of deaf children

One of Argentina's most notorious clergy abuse scandals involved dozens of deaf children at the Antonio Próvolo Institute in Mendoza between 2005 and 2016.

In September, a court sentenced former nun Kumiko Kosaka to 20 years in prison for sexually abusing five students.

Two priests received lengthy prison sentences in 2019: Horacio Corbacho was sentenced to 45 years and Italian priest Nicola Corradi to 42 years. Corradi later died while under house arrest.

Survivors have criticized the Vatican for failing to publicly announce the outcome of canonical proceedings against Corbacho, which began in 2017. A Vatican-appointed judicial vicar had recommended that both priests be dismissed from the clergy.

Other convicted priests retain clerical status

Survivors' groups are also demanding the removal of clerical status from several high-profile priests convicted of serious crimes, including Christian Von Wernich, Julio Grassi and former Bishop Gustavo Zanchetta.

Von Wernich, a former police chaplain, was sentenced to life in prison in 2007 for his role in seven murders and dozens of kidnappings and torture cases during Argentina's 1976-1983 military dictatorship.

Argentina's bishops announced a church investigation that year, but no canonical sanction has been made public.

Grassi, once a prominent figure who ran homes for orphaned children, is serving a 15-year sentence for sexually abusing a minor. Survivors say the Vatican has not

announced a decision on his clerical status despite receiving a formal report from the Diocese of Morón. Francis, who at the time was still Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio and the archbishop of Buenos Aires, in 2010 commissioned a four-volume, 2,000-plus-page forensic study of Grassi's case that concluded he was innocent, that his victims were lying and that the case never should have gone to trial.

Zanchetta, a former bishop close to Pope Francis, was sentenced in 2022 to 4 1/2 years in prison for sexually abusing two seminarians. He was granted parole in 2025, prompting renewed demands that he be defrocked. Francis had initially rejected the accusations against Zanchetta and created a job for him at the Vatican that got him out of Argentina. The late pope eventually authorized a canonical criminal proceeding against Zanchetta in 2019, but the Vatican has not publicly announced a ruling.

The Vatican did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment on the canonical status of the convicted clergy. The Argentine dioceses responsible for overseeing their cases also did not respond.

The Vatican tends to not initiate canonical trials until all criminal appeals are exhausted, to not prejudge the outcomes, though it does recommend that bishops take precautionary measures during investigations such as removing priests from active ministry.

This story appears in the **Pope Leo in Uruguay, Argentina and Peru** feature series. View the full series.