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Pope Leo XIV prays at the altar inside St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, or Santa Teresita, in Juanicó, Uruguay, Nov. 8, 2026. Leo met for more than an hour with five survivors of clergy sexual abuse while in Argentina Nov. 9, conveying to them and all victims "his closeness and his commitment to strengthening measures for protection, well-being, welcome and accompaniment within the Church." (OSV News/Vatican Media/Simone Risoluti)

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Pope Leo XIV met privately Nov. 9 with five people abused by clergy or Church institutions in Argentina, listening individually to their experiences during an encounter that lasted more than an hour, the Holy See Press Office said.

The meeting took place before the pope traveled to the Catholic University of Argentina for an encounter with representatives of the world of work. Earlier in the day, he celebrated Mass at Buenos Aires' Monumento de los Españoles before approximately 2.5 million people, according to local authorities.

The five survivors were presented by the local Church, the Vatican statement said.

"The pope spoke with each of them individually, listening to their accounts, the painful experiences they had endured, and their suggestions for strengthening paths toward healing within the Church," the statement said.

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At the conclusion, Leo greeted the survivors all together, blessed them and thanked them for the meeting and their "testimony of faith."

"To them — and through them, to the other victims whom it was not possible to meet — the pope conveyed his closeness and his commitment to strengthening measures for protection, well-being, welcome, and accompaniment within the Church," the statement said.

The encounter came during Leo's second day in Argentina, a country where the dimensions of the abuse crisis remain unknown. Argentina has not conducted the kind of nationwide investigation or accounting undertaken in other countries including the United States, Australia, France and Germany.

BishopAccountability.org, a U.S.-based watchdog organization, lists nearly 100 priests, religious brothers and women religious publicly accused of abusing minors or vulnerable adults in Argentina. Other allegations remain under criminal or canonical investigation.

The Argentine bishops have established a national safeguarding council and issued guidelines for handling allegations. Survivors and advocates, however, continue to criticize the absence of a comprehensive national accounting and the limited information released about canonical proceedings.

Among Argentina's best-known cases is that of Fr. Julio César Grassi, a once-prominent priest who operated homes for disadvantaged children. Grassi was convicted in 2009 of sexually abusing and corrupting a minor and sentenced to 15 years in prison.

While archbishop of Buenos Aires and president of the Argentine bishops' conference, the future Pope Francis commissioned a four-volume study challenging the criminal case against Grassi. Grassi remains imprisoned, with his sentence scheduled to end in May 2028. He remains a priest but is prohibited from publicly exercising ministry while awaiting a definitive Vatican decision.

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At the Antonio Próvolo Institute in Mendoza, deaf and hearing-impaired children were sexually abused between 2005 and 2016. Frs. Horacio Corbacho and Nicola Corradi were sentenced in 2019 to 45 and 42 years in prison, respectively. Corradi later died while under house arrest. In September, former nun Kumiko Kosaka was sentenced to 20 years for her role in the abuse and mistreatment of students.

The case most directly connected to Francis involved Bishop Gustavo Oscar Zanchetta, one of his first episcopal appointments. Bishop Zanchetta resigned as bishop of Orán in 2017 and was subsequently given a position in the Vatican's financial administration.

Francis later acknowledged that he initially accepted Zanchetta's defense against allegations involving sexual images found on his phone. An Argentine court convicted Zanchetta in 2022 of sexually abusing two seminarians and sentenced him to four years and six months in prison. His conviction became final in February

2025, and he was conditionally released that September. Zanchetta remains publicly identified as bishop emeritus of Orán, and the Vatican has not announced the outcome of its canonical proceeding.

Argentina's crisis is part of a broader reckoning across Latin America. The pope is expected to encounter that reality again in Peru, where he previously served as bishop of Chiclayo and helped survivors of the now-suppressed Sodalitium Christianae Vitae obtain a Vatican investigation and reparations.

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