



Pope Leo XIV leaves after his weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square at The Vatican, Wednesday, June 4, 2025. (AP/Gregorio Borgia)

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Pope Leo XIV met with members of the Vatican's child protection advisory commission on Thursday for the first time amid questions about his [past handling](#) of clergy sex abuse cases and demands from survivors that he enact a true policy of [zero tolerance](#) for abuse across the Catholic Church.

The Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, which is made up of religious and lay experts in fighting abuse as well as survivors, called the hourlong audience a "significant moment of reflection, dialogue, and renewal of the church's unwavering commitment to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable people." The group said it updated history's first American pope on its activities, including an initiative to help church communities in poorer parts of the world prevent abuse and care for victims.

The Vatican did not provide the text of Leo's remarks or make the audio of the audience available to reporters.

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Pope Francis created the commission early on in his pontificate to advise the church on best practices and placed a trusted official, Boston's then-archbishop, Cardinal Sean O'Malley, in charge.

But as the abuse scandal spread globally during Francis' 12-year pontificate, the commission lost its influence and its crowning recommendation — the creation of a tribunal to judge bishops who covered up for predator priests — went nowhere. After many years of reform and new members, it has become a place where victims can go to be heard and bishops can get advice on crafting guidelines to fight abuse.

O'Malley turned 80 last year and retired as archbishop of Boston, but he remains president of the commission and headed the delegation meeting with Leo in the Apostolic Palace.

It has often fallen to O'Malley to speak out on egregious cases that have arrived at the Vatican, including one that remains on Leo's desk: The fate of the ex-Jesuit artist, the Rev. [Marko Rupnik](#), who has been accused by two dozen women of sexual, psychological and spiritual abuse over decades.

After coming under criticism that a fellow Jesuit had apparently received preferential treatment, Francis in 2023 ordered the Vatican to waive the statute of limitations on the case and prosecute him canonically. But as recently as March, the Vatican still hadn't found judges to open the trial. Meanwhile, the victims are still waiting for justice and Rupnik continues to minister, with his supporters defending him and denouncing a "media lynching" campaign against him.

Leo, the Chicago-born former Cardinal Robert Prevost, has been credited by victims of helping to [dismantle](#) an abusive Catholic movement in Peru, where he served as bishop for many years. But other survivors have asked him to account for other cases while he was a superior in the Augustinian religious order, bishop in Peru and head of the Vatican's bishops' office.

The main U.S. survivor group, SNAP, has also called for Leo to adopt the U.S. policy calling for any priest who has been credibly accused of abuse to be permanently removed from ministry.