

Vatican opens landmark sex abuse summit

Under the banners of accountability and transparency, Pope Francis has opened an unprecedented summit on sex abuse in the Catholic Church. He said that serial critics of the church were in league with the devil.

Pope Francis kicked off a four-day summit on child protection on Thursday by warning bishops the faithful want concrete action, not just condemnation.

Church leaders from around the globe have gathered for the meeting, which will focus on the child sex abuse crisis within the Catholic Church, although abuse survivors have voiced concerns that Francis' efforts to raise awareness don't go far enough.

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What's been said so far:

- The pope said the flock "looks to us, and expects from us not simple and predictable condemnations, but concrete and effective measures to be undertaken."
- The 82-year-old said it was time to "turn this evil into an opportunity for awareness and purification" and "heal the grave wounds that the scandal of pedophilia has caused, both in the little ones and in believers."
- The pope also claimed that those who did nothing but criticize the Catholic Church were "friends, cousins and relatives of the devil," referencing a biblical description of the devil as "the great accuser."
- Cardinal Blase Cupich, a summit organizer and one of the pope's allies in the US, said he hoped people would "see this as a turning point."
- One unnamed abuse survivor who addressed the gathering said: "You are the physicians of the soul and yet ... you have been transformed — in some cases — into murderers of the soul."
- Another recounted how a priest had begun sexually abusing her in her teens, and then forced her to have three abortions after she fell pregnant.
- "Wounds have been inflicted by us, the bishops, on the victims," a tearful Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of the Philippines told the assembly.

- He acknowledged that “our lack of response,” even to the point of rejecting abuse victims and “covering up the scandal to protect perpetrators,” had caused immense damage.



The four-day landmark meeting aims to educate senior members of the clergy about how to tackle abuse

Unprecedented event:

- Some 190 church leaders were invited to take part, including 114 head bishops and 10 representatives from women’s religious orders.
- The summit is organized around three themes: “responsibility, accountability and transparency.” The first three days will center around one of the themes, with Francis due to hold a Mass on the fourth day.
- Participants will take part in workshops and debates, as well as listen to testimonies from victims and speeches on topics like how to communicate with the public.
- One of the main goals is to raise awareness of the crisis and to teach church leaders how to spot abuse and address it — particularly in Africa and Asia, where some churches say the problem doesn’t exist.

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How have victims reacted?

Survivors of clergy abuse and advocacy groups for victims gathered in Rome to hold protests alongside the summit. They'd requested a meeting with Francis himself on the eve of the event but were only met by summit organizers.

During the meeting, Phil Saviano, a victim who helped uncover the "Spotlight" abuse cover-up in Boston, urged the church to release the names of abusive priests.

"Do it to break the code of silence. Do it out of respect for the victims of these men, and do it to help prevent these creeps from abusing any more children," he said.

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Are there any changes expected?

Many of the survivor groups have called on the Catholic Church to expel predator priests and bishops guilty of covering up abuse and to open Vatican archives on abusers. They also want the church to make it a requirement that bishops report suspected abusive priests to the police — they are currently only encouraged to do so.

Their demands for fundamental reforms are not likely to be met during the summit. However, certain changes — such as minor changes to canon law — are expected.

Decades of abuse scandals: The summit is being viewed as a major test of Francis' leadership, with his record on combating child abuse under close scrutiny.

Francis organized the landmark summit following the latest spate of sex abuse revelations and scandals to arise in the United States, Chile, Ireland and other countries. Last week, Francis defrocked a former US cardinal, Theodore McCarrick, over accusations that he sexually abused a teen.

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