

# Pope Francis Declares Priests Can Forgive Abortions

Pope Francis will give all priests discretion to formally forgive women who have had abortions and seek absolution during the Roman Catholic Church's upcoming Holy Year, in the Argentine pontiff's latest move towards a more open and inclusive church.

In a letter published by the Vatican on Tuesday, Francis described the "existential and moral ordeal" faced by women who have terminated pregnancies and said he had "met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision".

In church teaching, abortion is such a grave sin that those who procure or perform it incur an automatic excommunication.

It can usually only be formally forgiven by the chief confessor of a diocese—known by the Italian term "penitenziere"—or a Christian missionary, Vatican spokesman Father Ciro Benedettini said.

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