

Pope Francis faces a big week in his effort to reform the Vatican

by [David Gibson](#)

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VATICAN CITY (RNS) Pope Francis on Monday began what could be a key week for his reformist papacy, starting with meetings with his hand-picked kitchen cabinet of nine senior cardinals, who are developing plans to overhaul the Roman Curia, the papal civil service that has been plagued with crisis and dysfunction.

The three-day gathering was preceded by intense talks among his economic advisers, who are trying to revamp the scandal-plagued Vatican bank as well as instituting other reforms aimed at cleaning up the Vatican's tangled finances.

At the same time, the commission Francis set up to tackle the clergy sex abuse crisis held its first full meeting over the weekend, with its 17 members vowing to find ways to finally hold bishops accountable if they look the other way on abuse.

The week will conclude with two days of closed-door meetings with the entire College of Cardinals—more than 150 scarlet-clad princes of the church—before Francis formally adds 20 members to their ranks at a service in St. Peter's Basilica on Saturday.

"The week that begins today and ends with the creation of 20 new cardinals may represent the turning point of Pope Francis' pontificate," Vatican watcher Andrea Gagliarducci wrote on Monday.

Gagliarducci noted that Francis is approaching the second anniversary of his election, and Catholics are starting to look for concrete results from the great expectations he has raised.

"Will Pope Francis' pontificate be merely transitional or will it give the Church a new shape?" he asked.

The structural reforms represent a huge challenge, given the culture of secrecy that has marked the papal bureaucracy for centuries, producing scandals on a regular basis.

The meeting of the Council for the Economy, for example, “was rather tense, reflecting that we’ve reached a decisive stage in setting up checks & balances for better management of Vatican finances,” Cardinal Wilfrid Napier of South Africa tweeted Saturday.

“Clearly (the) Council is grasping the nettle & taking charge of the reform issues entrusted to it!” said Napier, one of the eight cardinals, along with seven lay experts, charged with implementing sweeping financial reforms.

Church sources say the pope’s nine-member Council of Cardinals—the “C-9,” as it is often called—that began meeting with Francis on Monday is also set to get down to brass tacks and will present an initial outline for reforming the Curia when Francis gathers the entire College of Cardinals together on Thursday and Friday.

Even more important, and perhaps more difficult, than changing the Vatican’s structure is changing the culture of the place.

In his annual Christmas address to the Curia in December, Francis stunned observers—and more than a few career bureaucrats—when he delivered a blistering critique of the “catalog of illnesses” that plague the church’s central administration, including “spiritual Alzheimer’s” and gossipy cliques.

Yet many of his top advisers agree those tough words are needed.

Francis is pursuing a “spiritual cleansing of the temple, at the same time both painful and liberating, so the glory of God can shine in the Church, the light of all mankind,” Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, the Vatican’s doctrinal chief, wrote on Sunday in *L’Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican’s semiofficial daily.

The Curia, said Mueller, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, is a “spiritual institution rooted in the specific mission of the Church of Rome.”

Mueller’s fellow German, Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and another top adviser to Francis, agreed, telling *America* magazine in its current issue that the key to change in Rome is “Mentality! Mentality! Mentality!”

“The bishops and the Holy Father have to begin the change,” Marx said. “I was very often in seminars or courses for heads of companies, and that was always clear: the stairs are cleaned from above, not from below — from the top down, not the bottom up.

“So the leaders must begin; the chiefs must begin. The mentality must change. The church is not a business, but the methods are not so different. We have to work more in teams, in projects.”

The pope and the Curia will have more time for developing their teamwork—and focusing on spiritual reform—when he leads them on a weeklong retreat for Lent later this month at a religious house 18 miles outside of Rome. No distractions, just themselves and their “spiritual exercises.”