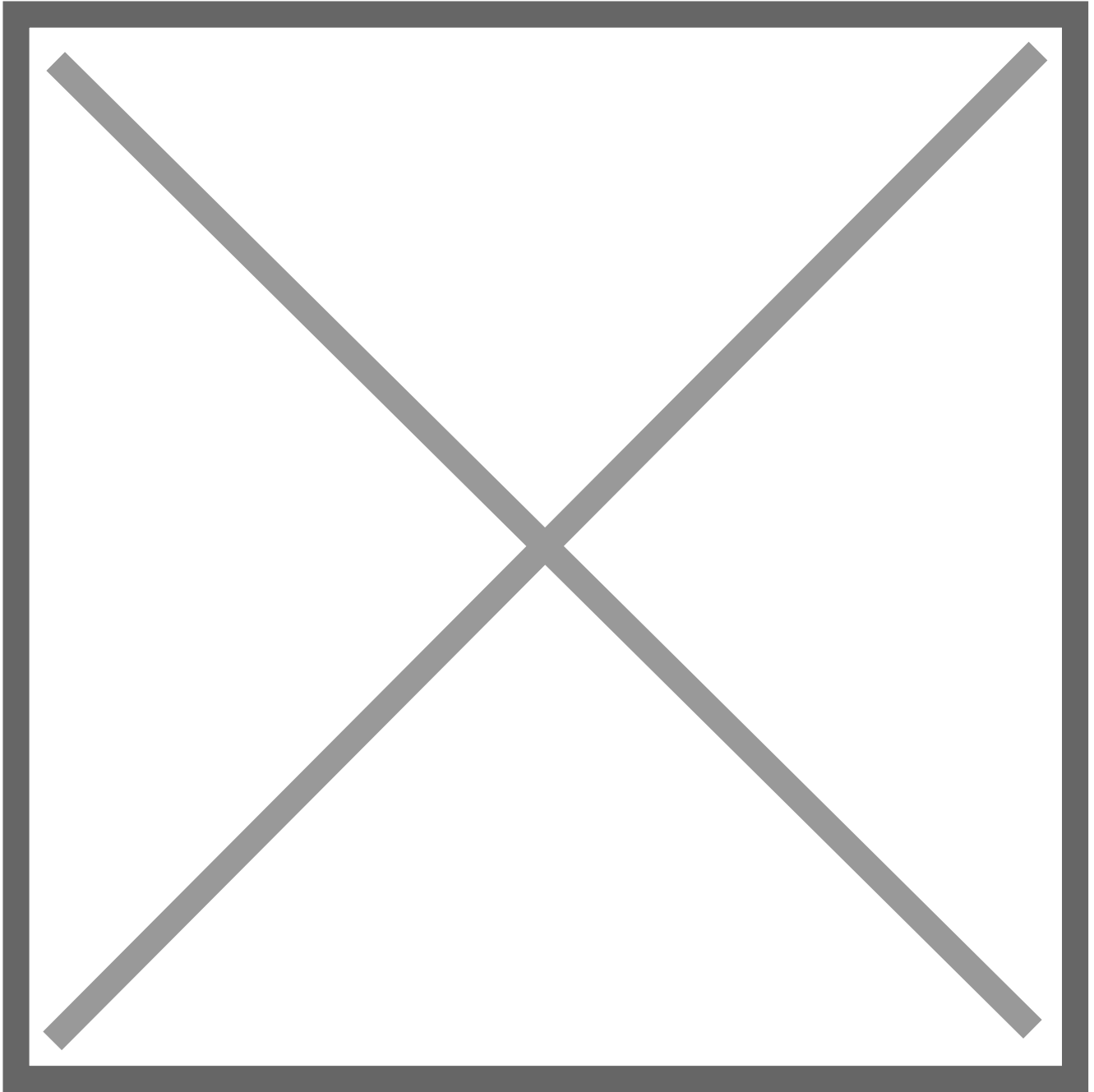


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A person prays at a makeshift memorial for the victims outside Le Constellation bar in the upscale ski resort of Crans-Montana in southwestern Switzerland Jan. 2, 2026, after a fire and explosion during a New Year's Eve party. Around 40 people were killed and 115 others injured, most of them seriously, after a fire ripped through the bar at the Swiss Alpine resort less than two hours after midnight, police said. (OSV News/Reuters/Stephanie Lecocq)



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CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland — January 2, 2026

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Around 40 people are presumed dead and 115 were injured, most of them seriously, after a fire broke out in a bar packed with people celebrating the New Year in a Swiss ski resort bar.

The fire broke out at around 1:30 a.m. Jan. 1 in a bar called Le Constellation in Crans-Montana, a ski resort in southern Switzerland, around 115 miles from Geneva.

Pope Leo mourned those killed and consoled their families in a Jan. 2 telegram signed by Cardinal Piero Parolin, the Vatican's secretary of state.

"Pope Leo XIV joins in the mourning of the families and of the entire Swiss Confederation," it said. "He wishes to express to the relatives of the victims his compassion and his concern."

The telegram said the pope "prays that the Lord may welcome the deceased into His dwelling of peace and light, and may sustain the courage of those who are suffering in their hearts or in their bodies," asking that "the Mother of God, in her tenderness, bring the comfort of faith to all those affected by this tragedy and keep them in hope."

The Swiss Bishops' Conference and the Diocese of Sion expressed their "concern, closeness, and compassion for all the victims, their loved ones, and their families.

"This night, which should have been a time of celebration, turned into a terrible catastrophe for hundreds of people. Our thoughts and prayers are with them," the bishops said in a Jan. 1 message signed by Bishop Jean-Marie Lovey of Sion.

"We are devastated," Police Commander Frédéric Gisler of Valais Canton said during a morning press conference of local authorities and responders Jan. 1.

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Beatrice Pilloud, prosecutor-general of Valais Canton, said an investigation is under way "to identify the circumstances which caused this dramatic situation to occur," adding that "currently we are favoring a fire and at no time is there question of any attack."

Victims are of different nationalities and significant diplomatic effort will be needed to identify the victims, said officials at the press conference. Representatives from France and Italy said their nationals are among the missing, The Associated Press reported.

According to The Associated Press, officials called the blaze an "embrasement généralisé," or generalized conflagration. The firefighting term describes how a blaze can trigger the release of combustible gases that can then ignite violently and cause what English-speaking firefighters would call a "flashover," when all surfaces in a room ignite at once due to extreme heat, or a "backdraft," a smoke explosion when a door is opened and air feeds the fire.

The Diocese of Sion also expressed its "support and gratitude to all those involved in various ways in assisting the victims, both on the ground and in the various hospitals mobilized: medical personnel, police, and civil and judicial authorities."

Local authorities urged the local community to be cautious in seeking any emergency assistance for their own needs because hospitals were already overwhelmed with care for the victims of the fire and would not have any capacity to treat other patients.

"On this New Year's Day, traditionally dedicated in the Catholic Church to the feast of Mary, Mother of God, and to worldwide prayer for peace, we pray that the grieving families may be accompanied and supported. That the light of solidarity may dispel the thick black smoke of this tragedy, we especially entrust all the victims and their loved ones to the tenderness of the Virgin Mary," the Swiss bishops said.

Hundreds gathered in a Catholic church in Montana Station Jan. 1, and daily Masses will be said to pray for those killed. Lovey will celebrate Epiphany Mass Jan. 4 for the

intention of the victims.