



***Comments Following the Fall Plenary Meeting of
Bishops of the United States***

Held in Baltimore, MD on November 12-15, 2018

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the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

“When the summer’s news first broke, we committed to three goals: to do what we could to get to the bottom of the Archbishop McCarrick situation; to make reporting of abuse and misconduct by bishops easier; and, to develop a means of holding ourselves accountable that was genuinely independent, duly authorized, and had substantial lay involvement. Now, we are on course to accomplish these goals. That is the direction that you and the survivors of abuse across our country have given me for the February meeting in Rome.

“More than that, in the days prior to the meeting of episcopal conference presidents, the Task Force I established this week will convert that direction into specific action steps. Some of those actions steps include:

- A process for investigating complaints against bishops reported through a third-party compliance hotline. We will complete a proposal for a single national lay commission and a proposal for a national network relying upon the established diocesan review boards, with their lay expertise, to be overseen by the metropolitan or senior suffragan.
- Finalizing the Standards of Accountability for Bishops.
- Finalizing the Protocol for Removed Bishops.
- Studying national guidelines for the publication of lists of names of those clerics facing substantiated claims of abuse.
- Supporting the fair and timely completion of the various investigations into the situation surrounding Archbishop McCarrick and publication of their results. . .

“We leave this place committed to taking the strongest possible actions at the earliest possible moment. We will do so in communion with the Universal Church. Moving forward in concert with the Church around the world will make the Church in the United States stronger, and will make the global Church stronger. But our hope for true and deep reform ultimately lies in more than excellent systems, as essential as these are. It requires holiness: the deeply held conviction of the truths of the Gospel, and the eager readiness to be transformed by those truths in all aspects of life.”

-Closing Statement of Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, President of the USCCB
Fall Plenary Meeting, November 12, 2018, Baltimore

I was among those who were shocked, baffled, dismayed and frustrated by the intervention of the Holy See to prevent voting by the bishops on known proposals for addressing the issues Cardinal DiNardo noted in his statement. Any actions approved would have been subject to Vatican review.

Despite this surprise directive which changed the tenor of the meeting, it did not deter the discussion. Dialogue among the bishops was spirited, in many ways more direct and heartfelt than those we have had over the years. The resolve of the body of bishops to straightforwardly address the crisis before us was clear, knowing the faithful question our credibility and expect and deserve specific action to prevent the failings of the past to come again.

You can review my previous statements at <http://www.sfcatholic.org/bishop-swain/category/statements/>.

We spent the first day of our meeting in prayer for victims and in repentance for the many ways in which we bishops have failed them and all those who have placed their trust in us. During this time in addition to adoration and Holy Mass, at which our Metropolitan Archbishop Bernard Hebda was the homilist, we heard from two victims of clergy child sexual abuse who remain in the Church despite the ongoing heaviness they continue to endure. They inspired and challenged us. We also heard from a woman religious leader who with love called us to account. And we heard from the leader of a Catholic youth ministry who with candor brought the perspective from this important part of our Church family.

At our public general session, the President of National Association of Seminary Rectors informed and reassured us of the policies in place to protect seminarians from predators which sadly is a concern of parents and of me.

Best practices in dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse with sensitive attention to the individual victims were candidly offered by the Victims Assistance Coordinator for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

All of these presentations are available on the USCCB website as archived video recordings.

The discussion among bishops centered on what is the appropriate response to this crisis, especially what better accountability of bishops there might be. As I have previously stated I was surprised to learn that bishops are not subject to the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. This must change.

In both the public comments and private interchanges there were many contrasting thoughts offered on this sensitive and serious matter.

These were noted in the address of the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Christophe Pierre who made this important contribution:

“There may be a temptation on the part of some to relinquish responsibility for reform to others than ourselves as if we were no longer capable of reforming or trusting ourselves as if the deposit of trust should be transferred to other institutions entirely. To regain trust it is not enough to simply preach words about responsibility, without living the difficulties of that responsibility, even in the face of criticism. When it comes to the responsibilities, with which we are charged – with children and the vulnerable at the forefront - we must show that we can solve problems rather than simply delegating them to others.

“At the same time, there can be no question that the insights of experts, the contributions of time and professional skill of all the faithful, laity together with the clergy and so many consecrated women and men, are critical to carrying out our mission as Shepherds. Assistance is both welcomed and necessary, and surely collaboration with the laity is essential. However, the responsibility, as bishops of this Catholic Church, is ours – to live with, to suffer with, and to exercise properly. The People of God have rightly challenged us to be trustworthy. Pope Francis never ceases to tell us that if we are to begin again, then we should begin again from Jesus Christ, who enlightens our lives and helps us to prove that we can be trustworthy!”

As to the Archbishop McCarrick matter, deference was given to the completion of the investigation Pope Francis has authorized. It is clear that transparency on its results is needed and expected.

As you know Pope Francis has called the Presidents of all the bishops’ conferences in the world to meet with him in February on this topic. We soberly await the results of this consultation. Until then, as Bishop of Sioux Falls, I ask you and those who you shepherd to pray for all victims of child sexual abuse in any of its horrific forms and environments and for their families; for fallen clergy and their contrition and repentance; for clergy unfairly accused whose good name we must seek to restore; and for each of us that we recommit to the pursuit of holiness which requires us to humbly own up to our own failings in what manner they might be.

We take comfort and hope from the Truth that Jesus instituted the Church and is her leader still.

Our Lord told Peter that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church He instituted¹. Our Lord is with us in these tough times. May we listen to him in fidelity.

May Our Lady walk with us as well.

¹ – Mt 16:18