

Update from Baltimore and USCCB Meeting

Since Monday [November 12, 2018] the bishops of the United States have been meeting in Baltimore. The primary topic of discussion was on the issue of clergy sexual abuse notably in adopting policies for addressing failure in episcopal leadership on the issue. As you likely know Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, opened the conference with news that the Vatican had requested the bishops to delay a final vote on abuse related matters until after the global sexual abuse summit that will take place in Rome in February.

Below is the transcript of the Pilot interview followed by a statement we issued to media inquiring about the Vatican decision.

PILOT TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH THE CARDINAL

BALTIMORE -- On the final day of the 2018 Fall General Assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Nov. 14, Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley spoke to The Pilot about developments at the meeting, including the unexpected request by the Vatican for bishops delay voting on proposed responses to clergy abuse.

Following is an edited version of the interview:

Q. After the Vatican requested that no new policies be voted on at this meeting, what do you think can still be accomplished?

A. Accountability of bishops is under the authority of the Vatican and so, even if we had had a vote, it would still have to have been eventually ratified by the Vatican, and so I think they probably did not have enough time to review these proposals in the Vatican. Our bishops conference has been working on them up to the last minute but we still have the opportunity to fine-tune the documents and to vote on them in a consultative way that will allow our president, Cardinal DiNardo, when he gathers with the other presidents of bishops conferences in February, to present what the American bishops' desire, as a path forward, to assure accountability for bishops.

In the long run, hopefully, the outcome will be the same. It's just that the process will be more consultative and will also allow this discussion to be front and center in the meeting in February and therefore, hopefully, to have a global impact because in this whole area of safeguarding the United States has really led the way with the charter.

Accountability is an area that needs attention, not just in the United States, but throughout the world. So, the work that is being done here in Baltimore will make a very important contribution to the meeting of all the presidents of bishops conferences in Rome in February.

Q. Watching the proceedings, it was apparent that not every bishop has followed through with the stipulations of the 2002 charter. Are you discouraged by that?

A. I think we need to have a lot more information as to what the actual situation is, and I also think we need a much better auditing process. To me, one of the most disturbing things was the charter-mandated annual audits, but if you are not asking the right questions, you can lull yourself into a false sense of security. So, we had dioceses getting very good marks in the audits and then we discovered afterward that they had all these other defective things that had not been addressed by the audits.

I am happy that the bishops' conference is now looking at the audits and we need to use those as instruments to help bishops understand where they need to improve their safeguarding practices.

In our Commission in Rome for child protection, where our mandate is education and prevention, one of the things that the Holy Father has given us permission to do is to try to develop auditing instruments for bishops' conferences throughout the world to measure implementation of their national policies. In the States, we thought we were doing it right, but I think we need a better instrument to be able to really measure how the charter is being implemented in all its phases.

Q. Yesterday at the meeting you said that the fact that some bishops have not followed through with their own commitments affects every diocese...

A. It does, and that's why I think it is so important to have a good audit so that we are pressuring every diocese to make sure that the charter is being observed faithfully in their jurisdiction.

Q. And what should happen to those bishops that do not comply with the charter?

A. I think if a bishop is not faithful to safeguarding, he should not be a bishop.

Q. The McCarrick case has also highlighted the fact that this is not only a crisis about minors but about adults who are susceptible to abuse because of their relationship to Church leadership.

A. Even our own Commission (for the Protection of Minors) in Rome, our mandate is minors, which we define as children and vulnerable adults. Vulnerable adults in canon law are people who do not have "habitual use of reason," in other words special needs people. That area of vulnerable adults needs to be expanded to adults who, having use of reason, are still in a vulnerable situation because they are seminarians or employees in a situation where the influence of a cleric could pressure them to do something against their will. So, to begin with, we need to change that definition of vulnerable adults for our National Review Board so that they will have that as part of their responsibilities. This is something that we will be discussing in Rome for our own commission there.

Q. What would you say to those who, after hearing the news of the Vatican's intervention, are losing patience with the Church and question her ability to police herself?

I am very encouraged by the commitment that the bishops are demonstrating here to child protection, to strengthening the charter and to demanding accountability. I think that the work that has been done in preparation for this meeting and the meeting itself are very significant and are going to have a very positive impact going forward.

In addition, the following statement was used with media who inquired about this unexpected guidance from the Vatican.

ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON STATEMENT

The US Bishops gathered at their annual assembly in Baltimore with the intention of approving new policies and procedures for their accountability regarding sexual abuse by clergy, including any of their membership, and an independent third party system for reporting any allegations of sexual abuse or negligence involving bishops.

The Holy See's call to delay a final vote on these matters until after the global sexual abuse summit that will take place in Rome in February was unexpected. But it does not change Cardinal O'Malley's commitment to zero tolerance of sexual abuse by clergy and mandated reporting to law enforcement, civil authorities and appropriate Church leadership. In the meantime it provides the Church an opportunity to prepare recommendations that can be considered for implementation by the universal Church when the meeting in Rome convenes in February.

The Archdiocese holds among its highest priorities providing the best possible assurance of safe environments for children and vulnerable adults, credentialed training and prevention programs, working with civil authorities including law enforcement and life-long care for survivors.

Cardinal O'Malley will continue to vigorously advocate for revising the Dallas Charter to hold bishops accountable, greater transparency including the release of names of clergy accused of abuse and increased lay involvement and leadership.

In the days and weeks ahead we will continue to provide additional information for your use in your parish, school and ministry.

Thank you.