

President of U.S. Bishops' Conference Announces Effort That Will Involve Laity, Experts, and the Vatican as U.S. Bishops Resolve to Address "Moral Catastrophe"

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WASHINGTON— Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has issued the following statement after a series of meetings with members of the USCCB's Executive Committee and other bishops. The following statement includes three goals and three principles, along with initial steps of a plan that will involve laity, experts, and the Vatican. A more developed plan will be presented to the full body of bishops at their general assembly meeting in Baltimore in November.

Cardinal DiNardo's full statement follows:

"Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Two weeks ago, I shared with you my sadness, anger, and shame over the recent revelations concerning Archbishop Theodore McCarrick. Those sentiments continue and are deepened in light of the Pennsylvania Grand Jury report. We are faced with a spiritual crisis that requires not only spiritual conversion, but practical changes to avoid repeating the sins and failures of the past that are so evident in the recent report. Earlier this week, the USCCB Executive Committee met again and established an outline of these necessary changes.

The Executive Committee has established three goals: (1) an **investigation** into the questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick; (2) an opening of new and confidential channels for **reporting** complaints against bishops; and (3) advocacy for more effective **resolution** of future complaints. These goals will be pursued according to three criteria: proper **independence**, sufficient **authority**, and substantial leadership by **laity**.

We have already begun to develop a concrete plan for accomplishing these goals, relying upon consultation with experts, laity, and clergy, as well as the Vatican. We will present this plan to the full body of bishops in our November meeting. In addition, I will travel to Rome to present these goals and criteria to the Holy See, and to urge further concrete steps based on them.

The overarching goal in all of this is stronger protections against predators in the Church and anyone who would conceal them, protections that will hold bishops to the highest standards of transparency and accountability.

Allow me to briefly elaborate on the goals and criteria that we have identified.

The first goal is a full **investigation** of questions surrounding Archbishop McCarrick. These answers are necessary to prevent a recurrence, and so help to protect minors, seminarians, and others who are vulnerable in the future. We will therefore invite the Vatican to conduct an Apostolic Visitation to address these questions, in concert with a group of predominantly lay people identified for their expertise by members of the National Review Board and empowered to act.

The second goal is to make **reporting** of abuse and misconduct by bishops easier. Our 2002 "Statement of Episcopal Commitment" does not make clear what avenue victims themselves should follow in reporting abuse or other sexual misconduct by bishops. We need to update this document. We also need to develop and widely promote reliable third-party reporting mechanisms. Such tools already exist in many dioceses and in the public sector and we are already examining specific options.

The third goal is to advocate for better procedures to **resolve** complaints against bishops. For example, the canonical procedures that follow a complaint will be studied with an eye toward concrete proposals to make them more prompt, fair, and transparent and to specify what constraints may be imposed on bishops at each stage of that process.

We will pursue these goals according to three criteria.

The first criterion is genuine **independence**. Any mechanism for addressing any complaint against a bishop must be free from bias or undue influence by a bishop. Our structures must preclude bishops from deterring complaints against them, from hampering their investigation, or from skewing their resolution.

The second criterion relates to **authority** in the Church. Because only the Pope has authority to discipline or remove bishops, we will assure that our measures will both respect that authority and protect the vulnerable from the abuse of ecclesial power.

Our third criterion is substantial involvement of the **laity**. Lay people bring expertise in areas of investigation, law enforcement, psychology, and other relevant disciplines, and their presence reinforces our commitment to the first criterion of independence.

Finally, I apologize and humbly ask your forgiveness for what my brother bishops and I have done and failed to do. Whatever the details may turn out to be regarding Archbishop McCarrick or the many abuses in Pennsylvania (or anywhere else), we already know that one root cause is the failure of episcopal leadership. The result was that scores of beloved children of God were abandoned to face an abuse of power alone. This is a moral catastrophe. It is also part of this catastrophe that so many faithful priests who are pursuing holiness and serving with integrity are tainted by this failure.

We firmly resolve, with the help of God's grace, never to repeat it. I have no illusions about the degree to which trust in the bishops has been damaged by these past sins and failures. It will take work to rebuild that trust. What I have outlined here is only the beginning; other steps will follow. I will keep you informed of our progress toward these goals.

Let me ask you to hold us to all of these resolutions. Let me also ask you to pray for us, that we will take this time to reflect, repent, and recommit ourselves to holiness of life and to conform our lives even more to Christ, the Good Shepherd."