

A SUMMARY OF THE 2018 FALL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS (USCCB)

It is a great privilege to be invited as an official Observer at the USCCB General Assemblies and so it was that we found ourselves in Baltimore at the Marriott Inner Harbor duly registered and seated in the Observer section of the beautiful Harborside Ballroom for the 2018 Fall Assembly from November 12-14. The Observers are seated at tables in two long rows top the side of the bishops whose tables and chairs face toward the front. A projection behind the USCCB officers and Secretary, who are seated on the stage, portrayed a lovely rendition of the Assumption of Mary on the left, Mary ministering to Jesus on the cross in the center and Our Lady of Guadalupe on the right with the logo of the USCCB centered below. This, with blue up-lights on the dark blue curtains around, created a perfect setting to remind those present that all being done is done for God.

Though it is not permitted to approach the bishops in the meeting room, there are plenty of opportunities to speak with them at meeting breaks, luncheons, and dinners. It was also quite nice that several stop by prior to or after the meetings to speak with us and so this provides an additional opportunity to discuss the meeting, our organizations and our projects. It is most gratifying to hear so many thank us for the work our women accomplish on behalf of the Church and for those in need.

Concelebrated Masses were held every day in the mornings in the Grand Ballroom which provided a quiet sacred space. Confessions was offered at specified times near this Liturgy Space and another adjacent room contained the sacred relic of the heart of Saint John Vianney. On the first day, the Opening Mass was held in the evening but let's return to the beginning of the day and journey through this little review together in a sequential manner.

Monday, November 12, found everyone filing into the meeting room. Right outside the meeting room, there were muffins and pastries, coffee, tea, water, and sodas every morning for a break as well as in the afternoons. These breaks provide a wonderful opportunity to speak with the bishops. As the bishops went to their seats and settled in there was a feeling of anticipation in the room. Called to quiet by the sound of a little bell, a hush came over the room. Cardinal DiNardo, current President of the USCCB, referred everyone to the special edition *Magnificat* found in their registration folders. This contained all the Morning, Afternoon, and Evening Prayers that would be said each day of the Assembly. We proceeded to recite and sing the Morning Prayer for that day.

After everyone sat and awaited the formal opening of the meeting, Cardinal DiNardo announced that there was a change in the agenda in that, at the request of the Vatican, no voting would take place on three of the action items concerning the sex abuse scandal scheduled for a vote at this Assembly. The Vatican instructed the bishops to wait until after a meeting in Rome in February where bishops from around the world will be meeting to discuss these issues. The action items had to do with newly developed Standards of Accountability for Bishops, a proposal to establish a special commission for review of complaints against bishops who might be accused of violating the Standards of Accountability for Bishops, and protocols regarding restrictions on bishops who were removed from or resigned their office due to sexual abuse of minors, sexual harassment or misconduct with adults, or grave negligence in office. Cardinal DiNardo said that he was disappointed that the Conference would not be voting and shared the concerns felt by all about this late development. He asked everyone to pray that the Holy Spirit would guide them. The sense of shock and disappointment was palpable in the room.

A cardinal said that even though they could not vote on the three action items, there was no reason that they should not be discussed and a consensus formed that could be conveyed to the Vatican to be included in the discussion at the February meeting. He, and several others, indicated that it was unfortunate that they had to wait because the public was waiting for them to take concrete definitive steps regarding this matter. He suggested that perhaps a March meeting could be held to take action after getting the ideas that will come forth from the February meeting.

Cardinal DiNardo acknowledged that everyone was disappointed but said that he was now calling the meeting to order to proceed with business. He indicated that a revised agenda would be released the next day. He welcomed back Bishop Murray who had been in treatment for acute leukemia and is now cancer free.

Cardinal DiNardo then introduced Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the USA. Archbishop Pierre said that there had been highlights this year, the 100th anniversary of the USCCB, the V Encuentro, and the Synod on Youth but that there had also been challenges that are sobering and must be faced with humility and apostolic courage as they face responsibilities. He noted that the Church is always in need of renewal and that time, effort and sacrifice bring about true reform. Accountability and transparency need to be the goals. Reform of the Church cannot come about as reform in Society. Reform in the Church can only spring from the mission of knowing Christ. Responsibility cannot be transferred to an outside entity; they must show that they can solve their own problems and not delegate to others. Though assistance is welcome and necessary, the responsibility is that of the bishops. The Pope challenges them to begin again in Christ. They are called to a special responsibility to confront challenges. They have put structures in place to protect children and that Charter has been extremely effective but they must do more. One case is too many. Diocesan programs must become models for civil institutions. Must have the entire people of the Church be vigilant. Trust must be earned. When they demonstrate care for all, bishops can be looked up to. Don't be afraid to speak of the work that has been done. Speak of it with pride and continue the good work that has started. The media has said that not much has been done and this should be corrected. The bishops must not be discouraged if they feel the Church is treated unfairly. This leads to paralysis; they must go into the world, not withdraw. Respond by going to the people, not the media, and show transparency. Continue the work started in 2002 with the Charter that has been strengthened twice since then and has proven effective. In *Lumen Gentium*, we learn that the bishops are the successors of the apostles and that joined together, they must create a sign of unity, of peace. The Holy Father says that the following traits are needed for good bishops: Men of prayer, men of proclamation, and men of communion. Bishops must be engaged and act humbly. They must listen to the laity, hear their needs. Bishops are here to teach but also to listen. Priests need support and must be listened to, as well. Priests today are hurting, demoralized, worn down. They are looking to the bishops to listen as a father listens and encourages. The current problems are compounded by clericalism. This erodes communion and is an illness that must be treated. It is good that seminarian selection and training has been updated. Formation will help. Bishops must work in hope for God is with them. God accompanies His Church. Each one must be a living witness of hope. This speech was met with a standing ovation.

We next heard the Presidential Address from Cardinal DiNardo. He said the USCCB is committed to a program of greater action. He intends that they address the survivors of abuse directly. St. Augustine warned against two things: Despair which has no hope for healing of sins and presumption which leads to inactivity (such as presuming that crises will blow over). Survivors cannot heal on a timeline. Bishops

must be like Jesus was when searching for lost sheep. Healing can come, and with healing, forgiveness. The bishops must listen and then carry out rightly demanded changes. Progress has been made. Tens of thousands of Church workers have submitted to background checks. There is a coordinator in each diocese. Since 2002, there has been a zero tolerance policy. The bishops must be held to the highest standards. They must take every precaution to keep all with Christ. Whether they are seen as abuser protectors or guardians of the abused is critical over time. From whatever place one has fallen, they must rise from that place today. Begin now by praying. Must become a strong example of how a sinner humbles himself before the Lord. Only in that way, can healing begin.

We then adjourned to the ballroom reserved for Mass where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed. Throughout Adoration, which lasted the rest of the day, three speakers addressed us. Two were survivors of abuse; one has clearly come to a position of hope and forgiveness and the second seemed more confused and still unsettled, probably because after living what appeared to be a very successful life, the stress of his being abused recently overtook him. The first speaker said that she knows that survivors she counsels carry grief and know resilience, courage, and beauty but carry large crosses. Many are alienated from the faith while others sit in the back of the church because no one can hurt them there. Faith is where she herself has found healing. Many were rejected and lonely, could not make it in college or in jobs. They stay apart and their families have to endure heartbreak. But, survivors are bringers of light. She thanked the bishops because she knows that even though children are being abused every day, she knows that if a child is in a Catholic institution today, they are safe, so thank you for that peace. It is important to bring Jesus to where evil strikes. She knows that therapy is essential and that each survivor has their own timeline to healing and forgiveness. She said that God saved her and she will use her life to praise God using the terrible experience she went through to help others. She closed by saying, "May God be praised." The second speaker said that he had a great childhood with heavy involvement in the Church as an altar boy and lector and was a missionary volunteer. He excelled at college and became a lawyer in corporate law and worked at the Mayor's office in New York City. He stated that he does not fully understand himself, so he gets why the bishops may not fully understand survivors. At some point in his "idyllic" childhood, he was abused by a priest, someone he and his family, totally trusted. He said that evil takes its time and is persistent. It was not until he was an adult that symptoms of the abuse began to manifest. He even had sat on the diocesan review board and listened to other stories and saw the face of Christ on those on the review board. But the burden grew heavier on him over the years and he perceived a church that seemed to be ignoring the abused and seemed more interested in protecting its assets. Five years ago, he fell apart completely. He was filled with darkness, anger, and despair. His family had a father who just ceased to exist. He is now working toward healing. He has found how to battle the darkness and to reconnect with his family. He commended the Diocese of Brooklyn which he said has been great in helping him -he called the diocese the heart of the Church. He advised the bishops not to put attorney's advice ahead of concern and care for the victims. Victims are your children, your brothers and sisters, not adversaries. The laity expects better. He asked that the bishops inspire faith in him again, community, and action. He asked them to act now, not in 6 months. He said that faith is a naïve thing and they need to approach it as a child does. They must have that courage. The third speaker, after lunch, said that she worked a lot with youth. The laity goes through Virtus training but what about the bishops? She realizes that most priests and bishops did not sign up for this abuse crisis and that it is time for all of them to regain their role as spiritual pastors. These things are needed: Transparency and accountability; Shared oversight with lay persons; Listening to the laity; and Showing genuine care for the laity in the

Church. Have a deep love for the Church that is evident. Saint Charles Borromeo listened deeply to the people. Why do we stay in this Church? Because of Jesus Christ. Good to come to this meeting which took courage. Good to listen and be in communion. The bishops must become one in communion as the apostles were. They must create relationships and listen. They are called to notice their family, the US Church, gathered around the Eucharist. Our Church is the most diverse and gifted church in the world. Turn to your lay leaders. Turn to Catholic universities to find the questions. The Church must be a hospital to treat the victims, the wounded, to return their dignity. You need the women of the Church. St. Charles Borromeo said that bishops are healers, physicians. Pray for the gift to listen as pastors. The best doctors listen. One way to face a crisis is together in communion. Articulate that which needs to go and that which is most precious and needs to be cared for. Cultivate listening and contemplation. The bishops are men anointed to be of one mind and heart with the Holy See but don't expect the Vatican to solve this issue. The US bishops can be models for the rest of the world. They have the experience and the tools. Many are already doing the best -listening to survivors, working with them. The entire Church is praying for the bishops and hopes that they act with urgency and integrity that give everyone hope. She closed by referring them to the words of Our Lady of Guadeloupe: Let not your heart be troubled. Do not fear sickness or anxiety. I am your Mother.

Following this presentation, we prayed the Evening Prayer and had the Opening Mass.

The next morning, following Mass at 7:30am and breakfast, we had Morning Prayer together in the meeting room.

Cardinal DiNardo then invited those who had been made bishops since the last meeting to the dais and welcomed them. He then asked the retired bishops in the room to stand and they were acknowledged. We then said the prayer for deceased bishops together using the pamphlet in our meeting folders that had the photos and brief bios of those bishops who had died since the last meeting. A message from the Holy Father was then read that included mention of holiness, the success of V Encuentro, the World Day of the Poor, an awakening of the heart to the needs of the world, renewed affection for the Jews especially in light of the recent anti-Semitic violence, realization that this meeting will focus mainly on the scandalous failures of their brother bishops, looking forward to the February conference, gratitude for their letter and he joins in solidarity and prayer. He asked that they pray for him and gave his blessing on the assembly. This was affirmed with applause. Cardinal DiNardo then drew our attention to a new updated agenda. The three items concerning the crisis that they were going to vote on will now be discussion items. They will be introduced this day and will be discussed tomorrow in order to focus the discussion and documents. There will be time for some discussion this day. Cardinal DiNardo said that he had established a task force to consider all the ideas and consolidate them for discussion tomorrow. He said he was grateful for the prayerful unity displayed the previous day. He will: 1. Continue dialogue with the Holy See and 2. Consider the items on the agenda and dialogue to form the next steps. He wants to speak with His Holiness on this prior to February.

Bishops Boyea and Cousins said that they wanted discussion on documents from the Holy See on Archbishop McCarrick voted today. A 50% voice vote was needed for this and it received a resounding voice vote so was added to the agenda.

Bishop Strickland said he wanted to thank the Assembly for the beautiful day of Adoration and reflection held the previous day that enabled them to begin crisis intervention in our Church. It was important to

hear the survivors. Under Canon 1752, they make two promises as bishops, one being the salvation of souls. He would like the bishops to revisit the promises at each meeting.

Archbishop Lori said that the change in the agenda at the behest of Rome has sparked a groundswell from the people who expect action to be taken at this meeting. Even if they can't vote, can there be some way to provide a consensus opinion to the public?

Bishop Paprocki said that he is concerned that they are not voting. It is not a question of being defiant but perhaps misunderstanding by the Holy See of what is proposed. They are proposing resolutions concerning what the bishops pledge to do, not making law. It is a proposal for the country that could be helpful to the Holy See. Under *Lumen Gentium* 27 they find that bishops are not branch managers of the Vatican but are vicars of Christ. People are crying out for action and it will be a great loss if they leave this meeting without giving any action. Cardinal DiNardo said that he will bring the sense of the house to the meeting in February. The bishops applauded.

Bishop Tyson said they could adopt policy in their own local dioceses relative to the consensus of the house. Many dioceses already have these proposed actions in place. After February, they could do a harmonization of these in light of what comes from the Holy See. Cardinal DiNardo affirmed that the local ordinary can certainly run his own diocese.

Bishop McElroy said it is important how they conceive their actions this day. 16 years ago, they produced an act of profound synodality. They were in union with the Holy See though the US actions preceded those of the Holy See. US actions included lay persons, zero tolerance, and removed clericalism and now they wish to adopt application of the same measures to bishops. They can discuss today and reach a consensus, anticipating again the action of the Holy See but reflecting the voice of the US bishops.

One bishop said his diocese is greatly damaged due to behavior of the previous bishop. The wounds persist today. The bishops need to give a clear response today.

Bishop Murray said they must anchor their discussion in care for the victims. The priests and people are rightly angry but are hopeful. This hope is rooted in the ability of the bishops to take action that the perpetrators are held accountable. Must reach a consensus that Cardinal DiNardo can take to Rome in February.

A voice vote was taken to approve the agenda and the ayes had it. The tellers for counted votes were then introduced and approved. The minutes from the June Assembly were approved. Cardinal DiNardo then referred everyone to the Green Book they had received that contains reports from various committees, some of whom will report at this meeting.

National Advisory Council (NAC): This Council, made up of 35 voting members, lay persons expert in diverse fields and diverse in ethnicity, age, and occupation to reflect the diversity in our nation, advises the bishops conference on topics which are called action items for discussion at their meetings among other things. The September meeting of the NAC focused on this but principally on the crisis. In anger, pain, and disapproval, the NAC struggled. They concluded that the focus must be to recommit to healing that requires true repentance. Need to focus on episcopal accountability and transparency. Take concrete actions. They then reported that they rejected a proposal to revise a statement of episcopal conduct but they approved a proposal for a signed statement of a code of conduct. Every lay

employee, priest, bishop must sign a code of conduct. A board is to review alleged allegations against bishops. Audits of seminaries require reporting mechanisms and sound training. They recommend a special committee for complaints against bishops and call for a thorough independent investigation of Archbishop McCarrick. They want to know with regard to him: What care was given to victims, where did the money come from for settlements, and what sanctions were placed on him and when. They are honored to serve the bishops and are so pleased that the bishops realize that it is essential to have the laity assist the bishops. Received a standing ovation by the bishops. Questions or comments included statements that the Conference must rely on the Holy Spirit and congratulations to the NAC on the pastoral, spiritual efforts they recommended. The Conference must be faithful to the truth. Must root out this deep spiritual crisis in the Church and get in constant contact with the Holy Spirit to receive the power to address this crisis properly. The Church, as a whole, is not giving enough attention to the action of Satan and his influence on Society and the Church. Cardinal DiNardo then thanked the NAC and introduced the next committee.

The National Review Board (NRB) normally reports in June but given the present circumstances, they are speaking now. Dr. Cesareo said that the efforts made over the years since 2002 have been extremely effective but the response is incomplete. A few bishops still need to respond. Not doing so gives the impression of a lack of transparency about past cases and lack of accountability as items are exposed by the secular world. They need action that signals a cultural change. Must come to terms and fully acknowledge the truth. He then referred us to a handout that listed all the recommended changes to be made, many of which have been implemented in many dioceses. Many suffered due to inattention by bishops. There is little trust in the bishops now. Must put the victims first. With regard to Archbishop McCarrick: Case not fully known except through Archbishop Vigano's allegations and this must be addressed. The NRB supports a lay-run investigation. The audit they support of all dioceses must be changed to include a review of all parishes and schools to ensure the accuracy of the information. Bishops who facilitated the crisis need to resign. Questions and comments from the Assembly included: Create an analogous review for adult abuse or incorporate it into the existing audit that covers children and the vulnerable. Strengthen the audits to include the names the *Boston Globe* and other secular media say they have. Many lists of names are popping up all over different websites. Many are alleged and go back too far to have any alive or credible witnesses. Need an outside contractor or lay board to standardize the lists. Many dioceses are already producing credible lists on their own. A question arose concerning the cost of the audits as the hourly rate is the same for large and small dioceses and poses a huge burden on small dioceses. It is viewed as a disproportionate burden for some small dioceses. There is an existing study to recommend reviews of bishops which should be revisited. There was some debate about the need (or not) for separate diocesan review boards for adults and children since some adult cases revolve around consensual activity and porn. This requires different skill sets from what is needed to review cases involving children. A question arose around whether the NRB was checking that the information from Grand Jury reports is verified to ensure they have the correct information. Currently, the NRB is doing a deep dive into the PA report. One bishop said that he has been repeatedly told by victims that every time a list is released, it re-traumatizes them. Need a national standard with coordinated action across the nation and coordinated release dates. Create a national database for priests in good standing, too, as well as clergy removed. One of the NRB recommendations was to create a database of persons not accepted as seminarians and it was felt that as there are so many reasons for this that have nothing to do with criminal bent or behavior that it would be too damaging to reputations. This should only be a list of those rejected for abuse or sexual misconduct with a minor.

One bishop reported that he is dealing with mostly reports of misconduct with adults, again most stemmed from consensual activity. He suggests listening session as these have worked very well in many dioceses. Some bishops reported that they had created an oversight board completely independent from their authority and this has worked well. The Charter for Youth is working so well so don't water it down by simply adding adults to it as adult crimes are completely different in most cases from those against unwitting youth. Don't have the Charter lose focus. It was noted that there was certainly negligence on the part of bishops but it needs to be noted that they acted on what was the best practices and the norm for that time. When a medical professional reported that someone was cured and it was OK to place them back to work, the bishops accepted this and acted accordingly. Now we see this is wrong but who could have known then? This is more complex than what the press paints. Back to the lists: Any lists created should have much information, not just names. Maybe police should create the lists. The collaboration of bishops and religious superiors of orders must be strengthened. There should be two types of review boards: one for clergy and adults to include financial misconduct and the existing one for children and vulnerable. One bishop stated that the primary role of a bishop is to preserve the apostolic communion of the Church and he is heartbroken that the Holy See does not trust the US bishops to take the proposed votes. He wants to know one thing they can do to preserve the communion of saints in the US. Dr. Cesareo said they need to act decisively on this issue and continue to actively move it forward. A bishop said that one goes to Mass based on belief in Jesus Christ, not on who is saying Mass. Courage is needed to go forward. He sees three reasons that led to the collapse: 1. Requirement for celibacy, 2. 1960's saw the collapse of sexual morality around the world, and 3. Post-Vatican II, many priests and lay people gave up on confession. Abuse is a mortal sin. Period. Most offenses happened decades ago, true, but now there is zero tolerance and the bishops want to help the victims. Need to keep strong in moral teaching in the Church. What is the risk if a young priest admits to a sexual encounter with an adult? Prayer and penance or if the transgression continues, laicization? Dr. Cesareo said that monitoring needs to happen for all on a regular basis as this ensures that abuse will not happen again. A cardinal said that in 2002 there was the horrendous meeting when the horrendous news broke. Pope John Paul II said it was a time of profound institutional purification. Transparency and accountability personally and institutionally in the context of synodality, of walking together, is needed. Must be a communion in the Church rooted in our faith. Sex abuse is part of original sin and cannot be ignored. Many great helpful steps were taken in 2002 and incidence has plummeted. But one case is too many. Must persevere. It has been reported that 1/10 males in Washington, D.C. perpetrate abuse on minors. This is a societal problem and must be rooted out in the Church. Another cardinal said that they need to come out of this meeting with concrete actions. What is the definition of vulnerable? Should be extended to adults who are victims of the abuse of power. Another comment was the victims find it difficult to find a path to healing. Need conversation with PTSD counselors. Must help the victims with the whole Church to accompany them. Also, the families of victims. Need to be present to heal and be of service. Dr. Cesareo said it is true that each victim has a unique story and path to healing. This ended the report from this committee.

Cardinal DiNardo then said that while the focus of this meeting is on the crisis and the role of bishops that they also had some other important matters to accomplish. He then introduced Action Item #3. Pastoral Letter Against Racism and asked Archbishop Fabre to describe the work of the committee and this important letter. Titled, "Open Wide Our Hearts," the letter addresses the scourge of racism. It is a Conference-wide statement. Archbishop Gregory had shepherded the document from the beginning. The text covers the concern about the rise in racism in US society. It condemns racism and seeks to

assist in confronting it. It is written in the style of St. Paul and is a call to conversion and action. It seeks to engage everyone as the bishops are determined to combat racism. It will provide the foundation for an *ad hoc* committee on racism for the Conference for future years. One question asked how it will be rolled out. Multi-media: educational pieces for all grades, translations, videos, condensed pieces, a shorter summary. One question asked if it addressed our Jewish brothers and sisters. Yes, the document includes anti-Semitism. One bishop said he likes the document but should it go into social sin? Social sin is a collective blindness within a group. It is an illness in a society or culture. Whole document addresses this.

Cardinal DiNardo then returned us to discussion on the items that were to be voted on relative to bishops and the sexual abuse crisis. There are four items but one is just informational and the others are for discussion. They are to address a gap in the Charter that can be construed not to include bishops.

ITEM #1: Archbishop Gomez spoke on the informational item: A Third Party Reporting System which was already approved. It provides a clear avenue for complaints against bishops. A phone or internet hotline. Allows tracking of the issue. Gathers information only, does not investigate and is only for complaints against bishops for minor abuse, sexual harassment, misconduct with an adult, or mishandling abuse complaints. It is essentially technical support for diocesan review boards. The cost would be \$8500 per year. Comments included: Why not use the Nuncio's office number or a metropolitan rather than establish this hotline? Are complaints anonymous? It would be unjust to burden the Nuncio with unproven allegations that are not investigated and are unproven. Complaints are not anonymous.

Break for Lunch after the Angelus. Afternoon resumed with prayer.

ITEM #2: Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations. There was no discussion on the Standards of Accountability for Bishops proposed document

ITEM #3 Executive Committee: Archbishop Vigneron introduced the proposal for a Special Commission to Review Complaints Against Bishops. With no vote, implementation by June will be impossible now. The document is presently a sketch and will go to a Task Force for final development after the meeting in Rome. That meeting may cause them to change course and go in an entirely different direction to pursue complaints. Presently it states: 1. Receive the complaint. 2. Report to civil authorities. 3. Notify the Nuncio and begin investigation. The proposed commission will have 9 members: 6 lay and 3 clergy with the Chair being a lay person. The board will have experts in civil law, law enforcement, canon law, social work and psychology, a victim/survivor, and a woman religious. It will be a non-profit corporation separate from the USCCB with a Board of Directors made up of laity and clergy who will hold 4 year terms and provide an Annual Report. The slate for the board will be from names provided by the National Review Board and not from the USCCB. Funding will come from the participating dioceses. The cost is estimated to be \$500,000 per year with incremental costs/case. The authority will be based on the consent of the bishops. It is designed to respect the authority of a local bishop, the Apostolic Nuncio, and the Holy See. The Commission will give reports to the Nuncio who then acts on the report. Comments and questions included: What if an allegation is made that is not true. Is there an expectation that the allegation will be made public and won't that force the bishop to then step aside? The response was that it is then the role of the Nuncio to decide what to do. This is where there may be a breakdown. The US bishops cannot force the Nuncio or the Holy See to do anything and the concern is

that something could be swept under the rug at that point. This would be a deep concern for all the people and the US bishops. Would the bishops get a report at the same time as the Nuncio? They need clarity from the Holy See on emeritus bishops. Who would have the competency to investigate? It would seem obvious that one response would be to strengthen the power of the metropolitan to investigate but they wonder if the opportunity to do that has passed as the public wants independent review. Another bishop said that this seems to add another layer as there is already a process to bring such an allegation to the metropolitan or the Nuncio. There were concerns that not having a bishop on the commission could be an issue as only a bishop has that experience. There was a concern about the cost and a suggestion to consider an *ad hoc* approach as needed since there could not be that many cases to maintain a permanent body. There was a question as to whether anyone had asked the nunciature about this. There was a concern if this is really independent of the dioceses since a diocese could pull their funding of the committee away. By outsourcing, does it not seem that they are shirking their responsibility? Suggest that Canon Law be changed to explicitly cover this as being an issue for the metropolitan or Nuncio. That is a route that is less expensive and exists now in theory. It is very hard to re-establish a good name if you are innocent. There was then a comment that you need to use the laity to get out of this mess, so support the task force idea. Can 2-3 lay people help Cardinal DiNardo to study the root causes of abuse of power by the hierarchy? Lay persons could do this study well as an objective study of the abuse of power is needed. A last comment said that in the future, people will study how these bishops responded to this crisis. The supreme law of the Church is the salvation of souls. Bishops are seen as invisible CEO's and reform is needed to the sacred mission of Christ being seen as their charge.

We then heard from two speakers. Heather Banis, a victims assistance coordinator spoke on the Best Principles in Victim Assistance Ministry: Hope and Healing. She spoke on seeking assistance from victims, families, and counselors. Healing is a journey and cannot be measured by time or money. Must listen deeply. Listening brings those harmed into the light. Must listen to everyone. Meet directly with survivors. Diversify the voices with whom they dialogue. Change from betrayed to believed. Begin by believing. Apologize. Advise them of their rights. Offer counseling and support. Remove the accused from ministry. Develop good relationships with law enforcement and child protection services. Announce allegations to build trust and transparency. Change silenced to heard. Put what you hear into action. Post names. Be accessible to survivors. Pray for them at each Mass. Talk about what you heard/learned in homilies. Change isolated to accompanied. Be victim-centric. Pray for them first. Offer liturgies for healing, for lament. Offer sacred spaces. Foster a culture of outreach and support. Change complacency to vigilance. The bishops' work over the last 16 years shows what they have put in place is working. Working due to vigilance. Maintain these high standards. Continue to hold clergy accountable. Set the tone and change the conversation. Extend and engage as each person has different needs. Be flexible as you will get those with PTSD. Too many out there who have waited for this. Need to tell their story and then there is hope and healing with the engagement of the bishop.

We next heard from Monsignor Todd Lajiness, rector/president of a major seminary, who spoke on Seminary Culture: Strengths and Challenges of abuse in the seminary and formation. The Apostolic Visitation was comprehensive and accurate 10 years ago. It cited difficulties in the areas of morality that some seminaries suffered. Discernment of vocations of homosexuals. Need vigilance for candidates to be holy and healthy. Ensure that they can live celibate chastity. In the last decade, seminaries have been in flux. A false sense of freedom led to dismissal of good priestly formation. Today, schools need

appropriate policies for grievances or harassment. Even where there are policies, many are not enforced or lived. Seminaries need to be attentive to boundaries. Faculty and seminarian boundaries need to be clearly articulated. Opportunities to move forward include bishops helping seminaries with norms to form candidates and seminarians. Integrate sexuality with regard to celibate chastity. Annual formation reports have developed means to determine whether candidates are mature sexually. Root seminarians in virtue and adhere to protocols to dismiss seminarians.

After a break, discussion returned concerning bishops and the sexual abuse crisis.

Item #4: Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance to review the proposed document, Protocols Regarding Restrictions on Bishops who were Removed from or Resigned their office due to Sexual Abuse of Minors, Sexual Harassment of or Misconduct with Adults, or Grave Negligence in Office. Bishop Deeley led this discussion. There is a fraternal bond among the bishops with the emeritus bishops. Only the Holy Father can impose sanctions or remove a bishop from office. This protocol would be in addition to action by the Holy See. Discussion included the following comments: Must make clear that the bishop emeritus no longer speaks for the diocese. They must not allow outside groups to break bonds of collegial union. The January retreat should strengthen their relationship with Jesus. It is important to listen to outside as the Church can be divided now. Media and some outside groups are not credible and are out there blaming all the crisis on homosexual priests. Others blame it on having an all male clergy. No direct causal connection between being homosexual and the abuse of minors through one study often cited said that there is a 100% correlation between homosexuality in the clergy and the abuse of minors. Need a credible study to debunk such statements. With regard to Archbishop McCarrick: Need to have an investigation to see how he got to have such an influence on the hierarchy even after his retirement. Can the Conference bring pressure to speed an investigation? It was pointed out that the goal of this document is to ensure that there are meaningful constraints placed on accused bishops. It is grating on people that there are none, so far. Need to be careful that they don't overemphasize sins concerning sex as bishops can be capable of malfeasance in other areas, too, like in finances. Maybe it is a blessing they are not to vote on this yet so the document can be strengthened and comprehensive.

Cardinal DiNardo then called for Open Business and continued discussion on the crisis: Comments included: Need to start speaking up concerning the good that has been done so far. Some of the press, even some of the Catholic press, ignores this. Most of the news from the Youth Synod focused on the difficulties and challenges and not on how the Good News of Jesus Christ was observed. Another point then made was that the bishops would like to have resolution on the action items the following day; to do something sooner rather than later. They would like to discuss the use of a metropolitan review board rather than create a whole new costly review board for what would likely be very few cases. Cardinal DiNardo mentioned that one thing they all agree on is that they want a more rapid investigation of Archbishop McCarrick. They returned to the idea of the lists but wanted to know the criteria for these lists. They have heard plausible, credible used. Perhaps substantiated would be a better determinant for the list. The list can't be just someone accused. It is nearly impossible for someone innocent to recover their reputation and trust after an accusation. Part of the crisis is about the accountability of the bishops and the Holy See. Victims have to come first and they do. But there is a myth out there that nothing has happened since 2002 and that simply is not true. Another comment was that how bishops are held accountable in a timely manner has not been made clear. The US Conference can be more clear on what they want and need as bishops from the Holy See. They benefit

from the help of lay persons. Evidence leads to judgement which leads to the truth. Cardinal DiNardo was asked to bring to the meeting in February that the bishops are requesting that the role of the metropolitan be strengthened to handle these issues, to get change made to canon law and involve the laity. People care about their priests and bishops and want to help. Invite the laity to collaborate so each can learn from the other. We cannot let the news of the day distract us from the need to address this issue but must also not forget that people are still coming to church and kids still are coming to catechism and they need the attention of the bishops, too. Keep perspective and do what they need to do as bishops. Today, outrage is an addiction, an industry that bloggers and TV use to drive people to their sites and raise ad revenue. The bishops will regain the trust of the people if they do what needs to be done as bishops. Much has been done since 2002 and they need to tell their story to the public better. Another comment was that they are not emerging from this meeting with a definitive response and that leads to outright anger in today's climate. The directive from the Holy See to wait has placed the bishops on an episcopal tightrope. They and the laity want accountability and transparency. Justice delayed is justice denied. The bishops want to support the Holy See but they need to take a strong advisory vote to reflect the gravity of the matter as there is an urgency. They need an advisory vote to remove this cancer and heal the living body of Christ. Another cardinal noted that with regard to Archbishop McCarrick, there are 4 investigations going on, one of which is being complicated by the criminal task force from the Attorney General in New Jersey. The Seton Hall investigation is moving along quickly. An independent law firm was engaged and should be done by the end of the year. The Holy See has their own investigation and the diocesan investigation will share their information with the Holy See. Another bishop said that they have heard much about a loss of credibility. If the awful events of the summer can so damage their credibility, what was there before? What was it based upon?

They were then given information on their spiritual retreat and then were adjourned for the day. The bishops had until 6:00pm to make any proposed amendments to documents under discussion the next day and most had evening committee meetings.

The last day of the meeting, Wednesday November 14th, the bishops met in their regional meetings in the early morning so the Assembly did not reconvene until 10:30am. Archbishop Gomez led us in an opening prayer as we had already attended Mass and most had said their Morning Prayers by then.

Cardinal DiNardo announced that due to an impending ice and snow storm that was to begin late that day, they would proceed to any items on which they needed to vote at this meeting first. Monsignor Bransfield, Secretary of the Conference, explained the electronic voting system and they did a practice vote to ensure everything was working.

They began with the election of a treasurer and chairmen for committees. Bishop Parkes was elected Treasurer. The following committee chairs were elected for a three year term: Committee on Catholic Education -Bishop Barber; Committee on National Collections -Archbishop Etienne; Committee on Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations -Bishop Checchio; Committee of Divine Worship – Archbishop Blair; Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development -Archbishop Coakley; Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth -Archbishop Cordileone; and the Committee on Migration -Bishop Dorsonville-Rodriguez. Cardinal DiNardo thanked all who placed their names in nomination and all the chairs who were going off their committees.

They next elected Directors for Catholic Relief Services. Currently, the board has 13 bishops and 12 non-episcopal directors. They needed to elect three bishop directors at this meeting. The Assembly was

asked to look for diversity ethnically and geographically for these positions. The three bishops elected were Archbishop Broglio, Bishop Johnston, and Bishop Solis.

Next, they voted on Action Item #3 presented by the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church. They were asked to approve the statement (Pastoral Letter) *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love -A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*. After votes that approved Group 1 Amendments and rejected Group 2 Amendments, the statement was passed. It was noted that the document deals with current and systemic issues and will contribute to the healing of Society. It is a very important statement and they must be sure it does not get overshadowed by other work at this Assembly. This should be seen as a strategic priority moving forward. It was called a magnificent document and there are so many aids to roll it out: Educational catechetical resources from K-12, fact sheets, stories on iconic civil rights leaders in different cultural families, study guides, and a summary document (The NCCW has placed it on our homepage -www.nccw.org). Working in an African-American parish made one bishop a better priest, was stated. It is important for our youth to know how Native Americans and African Americans suffered and still contribute to our nation.

They next voted on Action Item #4 presented by the Committee on Budget and Finance. The vote was on whether the members accept the recommendation of the Committee to approve the 2019 proposed budget. The twin issues of the abuse crisis and government immigration policies have financial impacts. A general fund reserved due to the crisis is being tracked in a distinct cost center. New Federal policies on immigration are expected to cost the USCCB a minimum of \$66 million in 2019. Departments have been adjusted to reflect these shifts. The vote was then taken and the budget passed.

Action Item #4 was presented by the Committee on Canonical Affairs and Church Governance. It asked the members if they considered it advisable to continue to advance on the local level the cause for canonization of Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA, in accord with the provisions of universal law. A bishop said that one is grateful for the efforts of missionaries like her in their life. She gave African-American Catholics respect and challenged the Church to make room at the table for all God's children. She had a great gift of expressing joy throughout her life despite any circumstances. Joy that was a charism that nourished her great soul. Cardinal O'Malley said that when he was bishop in the Virgin Islands, the people there revered Sister Thea. A voice vote to advance the cause was held and was unanimously in favor to advance this cause.

Cardinal DiNardo then opened the floor for further discussion on the abuse crisis. Bishops said they were disappointed that the votes could not be taken and they had received several messages from their priests expressing disappointment about this. They are grateful for the Day of Prayer and the reports and recommendations from the NAC and the NRB. For all the grace offered. Need to define a credible allegation with a national term: frivolous, plausible, substantiated, credible? They learned much at listening sessions held in their dioceses. The lay faithful love their priests and pray for the seminarians. They want to know what they can do to help the Church. Many are unaware of the Charter. They do not know how seminarians are now screened, how support is given to victims and families, how lay people are included on review boards and in so many other support ways. Need to get this information out there. Must engage experts to let the faithful know what has been done, what is being done. Educating the faithful is not a defensive move but is educational and what they deserve to know. One bishop said that the denial of these votes at this meeting seemed to undermine subsidiarity. Decisions should be made at appropriate levels. It seems that the USCCB is either blocked or left to do work by

themselves. Need subsidiarity in communions with the Holy See. Waiting for the February meeting means months precluding the USCCB from acting. Need to come as close as possible to a binding protocol today as possible. This area is such a matter of public concern that the document on racism can become eclipsed and that would be terrible. Protestors did not materialize as they had said but in speaking with the few there, they said that they felt that the USCCB was releasing information now because they were being forced to do so by the media. They were not aware or did not wish to hear of the statistics concerning the age of the allegations or of the success of the Charter since 2002. Other bishops again brought up the McCarrick issue. Some persons entering RCIA said they were contacted and asked why they were entering a "sick institution." The Vigano letters are also being used as ammunition to lure them away from the Church, with catechists left to explain the difference between the immense privilege of the Eucharist and the fallibility of men. There is much rightful outrage due to the treatment of the seminarians by McCarrick. Trust was violated and their issues were silenced. The USCCB needs to address McCarrick and say he is not welcome to this Conference out of respect for those he harmed. Why has the USCCB not repudiated Vigano's call for the resignation of the Pope? They must do something about that. There needs to be a complete report done on bishops like the John Jay report on priests. McCarrick offended priests, faithful, and bishops. Attacked unity and apostolic integrity. The faithful expect the USCCB to restore integrity. The USCCB must distance themselves from McCarrick. They have not ruled out his participation but no open mike has been given to his victims. This statement was met with applause. Another bishop said that he was grateful for this time to be together to learn from each other, to pray, and to reflect. There was another call to extend the authority of the metropolitan to permit him to review the behavior of bishops. Perhaps recommend that three more bishops be added to the metropolitan review. Have this either prior to or after a review by lay persons prior to going to the Nuncio. Another bishop reported that at listening sessions held in his diocese, there was great support for the priests. He recalled that 50 years ago, 40 priests were suspended after a call to fidelity was ignored. Today's crisis is similar. Another bishop stated that this is such a painful time. First, they must bear witness to Jesus Christ in a deeply wounded world all the time. They must bear witness now and trust the Holy See is with them and will assist them. People are angry, embarrassed, confused and disgusted. The faithful either become more faithful or allow themselves to drift away. We lose cannot lose confidence in any teaching of the Church. Those most upset in his diocese are 51-70 years old. Millennials respond that they love our Catholic faith. Another bishop said that the sole competent authority to remove a bishop is the Holy Father. Their discussions should be aimed at helping with this. Need to make a clear statement to the Holy See from this Conference and make it available to the public, too. Each will return to his diocese and act. Conformity to Jesus is their calling. Challenge is to fix this serious problem now and they can, with the Holy See. Another bishop said they are 1. Disappointed they could not vote on the documents; 2. Are grateful for the interventions they heard and the Day of Prayer which led them to greater discernment; 3. Affirm their fidelity to the Holy Father; 4. Support the mandate of the Holy Father with regard to Archbishop McCarrick; 5. Request prior to the February meeting a decision between the 2 possible ways to deal with complaints against bishops (Make use of the metropolitan review board to receive and take action against complaints or make use of the review board suggested at this meeting).

After lunch we prayed and then they worked on a statement that encouraged the Holy See to release all documentation that can be released consistent with canon and civil law regarding the misconduct of Archbishop McCarrick. After being informed that on October 6th, the Holy See had already stated that they would do this and after much debate as to whether this was simply asking for information that has

already been promised, the question of how much could be released prior to the canonical trial, the fact that much of what had been spoken of is at this point alleged and has not been properly vetted, that this seems like a statement of distrust in the Holy See, that the motion was too vague, that they want to acknowledge that they and the laity and their priests feel a sense of outrage and betrayal but need to show their trust in the Holy See, it was posited that there was no purpose to this proposed motion because the Holy See already said they would release the information, and it was voted down.

Other observations were then taken to include:

Proposed Standards of Accountability for Bishops: There is a history/perception that the law, parishioners, and the bishops have not been favorable to victims. The bishops need to guard their flock. Need to address this and there is a need for conversion.

Special Commission for Review of Complaints Against Bishops: There was support for the metropolitan and local review boards rather than establish this separate commission. They will establish a task force to work on this. Another take was that bishops should be excluded from the proposed commission as their presence could create a perception against accountability and transparency. Another thought was to set up a separate metropolitan review board with representation from all the dioceses. Another bishop felt that a separate commission rather than the metropolitan review should be established. He asked if seminarians would feel confident to come forward to a metropolitan. He said a separate commission separate from the diocese and the USCCB to make a recommendation to the Holy See via the Nuncio directly would be better. Need to take to the Holy See the sense of how much the bishops value lay expertise on review boards.

Protocol Regarding Restrictions on Bishops who were Removed from or Resigned from their Office due to Sexual Abuse, Misconduct or Grave Negligence in Office. This document is a summary of existing canonical measures.

A bishop said that there is a need to recognize how all three of these documents tie together.

We then heard reports on the 15th Ordinary General Assembly on the Synod of Bishops of Young People. Bishop Caggiano said that a renewed commitment remains paramount for all. Some highlights were that 350 attended to include bishops, lay experts, representatives from religious communities, lay leaders and youth. The See, Judge, Act method was used. There were 7 themes raised: Protection of the vulnerable and experience of encounter; deep appreciation of the global nature of the Church with different challenges for the young in different places with an exploration of synodality at every level of Church life; many face violence, poverty and live on the periphery and are disaffiliating from the faith in growing numbers; need to bring forth new leaders. They wish to be protagonists in ministries and don't want token involvement; Need to form mentors for the young -they seek accompaniment; expand the understanding of vocation -Baptism leads to discipleship whether in marriage, religious life, or single; need to renew ministry to the youth on every level of ecclesial life. The Apostolic Exhortation from the Pope following this Synod will give possible steps for this. Have assemblies or synods in the dioceses. Begin to find mentors and leaders for every level of Church life. Build bridges to the youth. This Synod came at a time when it was most needed. It was a moment of great grace. It demands continued time and commitment to implement. The average age of young adults at the synod was 22-25. Discussion included the fact that living as Church in diverse parts of the world requires different approaches. Mention of the young martyrs in present day India. Other areas of the world present different survival

challenges. There is a desire for mentors and for an intense prayer life. There was no appetite to discuss the abuse crisis at the Synod. North America, Europe and Australia tried to bring it up but got no traction. The Holy Father was present the whole time every day and listened intently. He came 20 minutes early every day so he could stand at the front door and chat with the young people!

We then heard a report on the V Encuentro. It was culturally diverse. The bishops were thanked for their participation and for sending delegations to this meeting in Texas. It was a moment of grace and a manifestation of God's love for His people. In Social Media there were high marks for the Keynotes and the Liturgies. The model of the Church is to be more welcoming. Need to identify the best practices in each parish and develop leaders. Renew advocacy for immigrants. There is a need for family catechesis. Follow-up will include: Publication of the Proceedings; Inservices on the proceedings across dioceses; and parish inservices. There will be a resource in early 2019. It was made clear that most young people at the meeting said they prefer English. Findings from this meeting will be incorporated into a strategic plan for the USCCB. They spoke a lot about the family but did not acknowledge the problem of the young not getting married. Immigration issues affect legal status and marriage. Contributions from the dreamers/DACA were poignant. Must accompany the youth so they don't lose their patrimony. It was evident that the immigrant poor were not present. Must keep them in mind and remember the mothers and children still coming to the US. Our Lady of Guadeloupe had Juan Diego as her messenger, now the bishops are her Juan Diegos.

Action Item #6: Proposal to Transfer the Diocese of Fairbanks from the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to the Congregation for Bishops was then discussed for a vote. In reality, this has already happened. Support for the diocese comes from the USA via mission appeals. The diocese has need of priests. Some dioceses send priests for 2-6 months, mostly from outside the US. Most parishioners are below the poverty level. There are 11,000 Catholics in a population of 167,000. Need priests and money. Will not be any formal demand of the USCCB to take on any support for the diocese. Voice vote taken and the transfer was approved.

The final item presented was a brief report on the 40th anniversary of the Pastoral Statement on Persons with Disabilities from the National Catholic Partnership on Disabilities.

Linda Hunt from the Executive Office of the USCCB is retiring and was called to the stage to be acknowledged by the Assembly.

Cardinal DiNardo then thanked all for their attendance and participation. He said that the meeting was opened with disappointment but closes with hope. He offered a prayer and then affirmed the loyalty of the USCCB to the Holy See, indicated that he was sure that the meeting in February would help eradicate the evil and that global effort there could inform US action. He thanked the experts present and promised to take the consensus to the February meeting to include: Getting to the bottom of the McCarrick issue; making the path to report concerns with bishops easy; making investigations that are accountable and transparent. The task force will: Determine the best process to report complaints against bishops; finalize the protocols and standards and a list of substantiated claims; publicize the substantiated information against Archbishop McCarrick when the Holy See releases it. He is committed to take the strongest action possible as soon as possible to make the US and global Church stronger. It will require holiness and an eagerness to embrace truth in their lives with Jesus as the center. Need to reconnect holiness and the mission of the Church. He is confident they will move forward decisively.

The meeting was adjourned and we left filled with information and an appreciation for the sincerity and dedication of our bishops to provide clear and faith-filled guidance for our Church in the United States. May God bless their work.