

Archbishop Lori addresses Baltimore media at bishops' meeting

Midway through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' fall meeting in Baltimore, Archbishop William E. Lori reacted to the Vatican's request that the bishops not vote formally on proposals regarding the accountability of bishops in relation to the sexual abuse scandals within the church.

He told Baltimore media outlets Nov. 13 he was not waiting for the U.S. bishops to enact protocols.

"Here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore - and I'm going to make this really clear - we have a zero-tolerance policy and that applies to bishops, myself and my auxiliary bishops, just the same way applies to priests, deacons, lay employees and volunteers," Archbishop Lori said.

He said any complaints against the bishops that might come forward would go to the archdiocese's Independent Review Board, just as cases against any other minister or employee in the archdiocese would be handled.

Bishops are expected "as much or more than anyone else" to adhere to the archdiocese's existing code of conduct.

He said survivors of clergy sexual abuse must be "foremost in our thoughts and our prayers and in everything we try to do to address this terrible scourge and to put into place protections for the future accountability transparency," he said.

"All those things have to be done with the survivors first and foremost in mind," he said. "They are the ones who have suffered from this. They are the ones whose families are suffering. They are the ones who have been wounded."

On the first day of the meeting, the bishops heard during a day of prayer and penitence reflections from two survivors of clergy sexual abuse, Teresa Pitt Green

and Luis A. Torres Jr. Archbishop Lori said, “You could hear a pin drop as these survivors spoke of their experiences. They are extraordinary people, people who have maintained hope against hope and they are people who have been severely wounded but who have experienced a remarkable degree of healing.

“As we listen to them, I think they lead us deeper into the experience of what it means to be victimized as a young, innocent person and I think they challenged us and we have to continually be challenged.”

Pitt Green’s and Torres’ testimonies “resonated deeply with the bishops and with myself,” Archbishop Lori said.

He said he has conducted more than a dozen listening sessions around the archdiocese with more attended by the auxiliary bishops. The archdiocese also has ongoing virtual forums to solicit input, with more than 7,000 comments received so far.

“I think we bishops are keenly aware of the need to do something here. ... Overwhelmingly people are saying, ‘We want action. We want action now.’ I’m happy to say those actions are already in place in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. But these also need to be put into place nationally, and I hope someday internationally, too,” the archbishop said.

He acknowledged that the bishops will not take a formal vote on the proposals for bishop accountability. “I certainly feel and I think most of my brother bishops feel that we have to have a clear sense of the house and we want to give clear direction to the leadership of the Bishops Conference to get the job done,” he said, repeating some of what he had said on the floor of the meeting earlier in the day.

“I think the thing to keep your eye on is not the formality of whether it’s a resolution or a formal vote. The thing to keep our eye on is getting the job done and America, the United States, has been the world leader in this,” Archbishop Lori said.

The adoption in 2002 of the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People and the accompanying Essential Norms that became particular law for the United States are bolstered by the proposals presented at the 2018 meeting.

“I think these are things that will get done. And I think that these things are already being done in Baltimore,” he said. “I think we will exercise a lot of leadership when the pope gets the bishops together for this worldwide meeting in February. I think the American bishops, led by Cardinal (Daniel N.) DiNardo (USCCB president) will bring a lot to the table.”