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Reflections on the USCCB meetings in Baltimore

Bishop Bill Wack, CSC – Nov. 18, 2018

As the bishops, USCCB support staff, observers and a small army of media arrived in Baltimore for the Fall Meeting, many in the Catholic Church hoped that decisions would be taken concerning bishops' accountability in light of the clergy abuse scandal. When the meetings were adjourned four days later, even though no votes were taken on specific action items, the bishops left with hope and a renewed sense of unity.

Personally, I was very surprised and disappointed to hear, within a few minutes of being convened, that the Holy See had intervened and asked the bishops not to vote on anything specific regarding a third-party reporting system for bishops. Many of us objected. After all, that's what we came to Baltimore to do. But as the week went on, it became clear to most of us that this was an inspired decision. Because we were prevented from voting on hastily-made proposals, we spent the next couple of days *listening*. We listened first of all to the Holy Spirit, as we came together in Adoration and silent prayer. Then we listened to the stories of a couple of victims/survivors. They encouraged us to listen first of all, and then to act decisively so that we may continue to protect children and vulnerable adults in our Church. Finally, we listened to each other in our on-air conferences, during breaks between meetings, and over simple meals shared throughout the day.

It became clear that we are of one heart and mind in our efforts to hold ourselves accountable and to provide people with a way to report allegations pertaining to a certain action – or inaction – of any bishop. As well we agreed to encourage the Holy See to perform a thorough investigation into the allegations against Archbishop McCarrick, and the events leading up to his rise in the hierarchy. Finally, we were able to communicate to Cardinal DiNardo, President of the USCCB, our hopes for his meeting with Pope Francis and the presidents of all of the conferences of bishops throughout the world.

Even though we were disappointed with the directive that came from the Holy See at the beginning of our meetings, it is clear to us that we must work with the Universal Church to change the way that bishops are evaluated and held accountable. For sadly, this is not just a problem in the United States. As with the Charter, every other conference can benefit from our deliberations and actions.

Other highlights from the meetings include: approving the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism, approving the cause for canonization to continue for Sr. Thea Bowman, approving the annual budget for the USCCB, and electing various chairmen for the various committees of the USCCB.

I especially enjoyed spending a lot of time with my brothers – many of whom I am getting to know personally now. After the formal meetings concluded, I joined 11 other bishops for some faith-sharing and prayer. This was especially edifying and helpful to me.

At the conclusion of our meetings, Cardinal DiNardo presented a statement to the bishops who were gathered. After hearing its contents, the body of bishops gave their approval. I invite all of the faithful to read the document and to join in prayer for its fulfillment:

<http://www.usccb.org/news/2018/18-187.cfm>