



Office of the Bishop

November 16, 2018

My dear brother priest:

I arrived back in San Diego early this morning after the USCCB meeting in Baltimore, and I want to provide you some background on the meeting in order to help you prepare for any questions you may receive over the weekend. I profoundly regret that the substantive steps which should have been taken to achieve the process of reform were not realized in Baltimore, and this failure calls for a deeper reexamination of our culture as bishops, which hopefully will begin during our extraordinary national retreat in January.

As you know, the Holy See asked the conference not to take a formal vote on structural reforms. It is my understanding that the Congregation for Bishops took this step both because the Congregation had not received the proposed structural reforms in sufficient time to analyze and productively comment on them and because the Congregation did not want to isolate the action of the bishops in the United States from the process of reform that will unfold at the meeting of all of the national episcopal conferences of the world in Rome this February to discuss the topic of clergy sexual abuse.

When this was announced, many of us felt that the possibilities for meaningful progress in Baltimore had evaporated. But, while we emerged from the meeting without having formally adopted the cultural and structural reforms that are needed in the present moment, the three days of discussion actually propelled us forward in two specific ways.

The first of these was the refinement of a standard of accountability for bishops. This standard of accountability not only incorporates for bishops the same behavioral norms contained in the Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, but also addresses sexual misconduct by bishops with adults and the pastoral failure of bishops to address effectively violations of the Charter by clerics in their dioceses.

The second area of progress was in identifying the key issues for erecting a coherent structure of accountability for bishops in these three areas. Some bishops favored a national review board proposal for bishops of the type that the Conference leadership had formulated in the leadup to the meeting. Other bishops favored a province-based approach where a regional review board would examine allegations against bishops. All of the bishops were in agreement that any new structure of accountability had to contain a determinative lay voice in assessing the validity of allegations that a bishop had violated the Charter in his personal life, or engaged in sexual activity with adults, or violated his duty to vigorously enforce the Charter in his diocese.

I emerged from meeting greatly saddened that we did not adopt nor clearly choose a single pathway forward to effectively bind us as bishops to the standards of behavior to which we all agreed that we should be held as leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ.

But the genuine progress that was made gives me renewed hope that this will be achieved in union with the call to spiritual renewal and moral reform that Pope Francis has been pointing to in these recent days.

As we approach the great feast of Thanksgiving, may God's call to spiritual renewal touch us all, and touch especially our families and those whom we love.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. W. McElroy". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly stylized font.

Most Reverend Robert W. McElroy
Bishop of San Diego