

Bishops in Baltimore, Our Review Board

Bishop Timothy L. Doherty

December 1, 2019

The US bishops' conference (USCCB) meets every November in Baltimore. I arrived for weekend sessions with my Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People, and the National Review Board. My committee chairmanship lasts through the end of the November 2020 meeting, at which time chair-elect Bishop James V. Johnston will take over.

Papal Nuncio Archbishop Christophe Pierre helped to open the plenary meeting on Monday, Nov. 11 with greetings from Pope Francis. He appropriately framed the relationship between the pope and our conference, and between a bishop and his priests, as one of collegiality and communion. He has been returning to these themes in public, in my opinion, because too many people only want to perceive – or to instigate – frictions. And to see these as failures. We might do well to read from St. John Henry Newman's Apologia:

"Catholic Christendom is . . . brought together as if into some moral factory, for the melting, refining, and moulding by an incessant, noisy process, of the raw material of human nature, so excellent, so dangerous, so capable of divine purposes."

On another subject, I need to comment on the Nov. 20, 2019, AP report on Catholic review boards. Our diocese has such a board. The Vicar General convenes this with one other priest member, and lay people who are specialists in trauma counseling, abuse counseling, law enforcement and the judicial process. Even with no new allegations here, these people have met to examine the adequacy of our protocols and approaches to victim survivors. AP omitted my statement that these people will consider the credibility or substance of an allegation of sexual abuse only after police or child protective services are notified. This is true for me and our diocesan review board if an alleged abuse happened forty days or forty years ago. One of AP's general assertions is not true of our diocese: "review boards appointed by bishops and operating in secrecy have routinely undermined sex abuse claims from victims, shielded accused priests and helped the church avoid payouts."

The review board for the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana is worthy of our trust. I sent them copies of the AP report and I am confident they will advise me of updating that needs to happen because of it, if any.

To some, this kind of a column may not seem to fit with the First Sunday of Advent. Let me suggest that it lets us know that I will not leave victim survivors to the past, but that I prayerfully carry them with me into this new liturgical year. I am also aware, as were all the people at our Baltimore meeting, that the promised McCarrick report will be issued in the foreseeable future. Hurts will be reopened by it, and I will be ready to accompany our parishes as needs indicate. We will not be derailed from our vocations to live upright and holy lives, with all helps from the hearts of Jesus and Mary.