

## More details emerge about delayed U.S. bishops' vote on abuse provisions

A letter from Cardinal Marc Ouellet indicates that the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops had blocked the U.S. bishops from voting on proposals to address the sex abuse crisis in November because the congregation believed more time was needed to discuss the measures.

The Associated Press reported Jan. 1 that it had obtained a letter from Cardinal Ouellet, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops, addressed to U.S. bishops' conference president Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston.

The letter, dated Nov. 11, says that proposals which had been scheduled for a vote by the bishops' conference needed more time and discussion to "properly mature." Ouellet indicated that the Vatican congregation had numerous canonical objections to the proposals.

On Nov. 12, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston announced that the Vatican had directed the U.S. bishops' conference to delay a vote on two key proposals which had been expected to form the basis for the Church's response to the sexual abuse crisis.

The proposals to establish a new code of conduct for bishops and create of a lay-led body to investigate bishops accused of misconduct had been scheduled to receive a vote at the fall gathering of the bishops' conference, which was held Nov. 12-14 in Baltimore.

DiNardo said he received a directive from the Congregation for Bishops, insisting that consideration of the new measures be delayed until the conclusion of a special meeting called by Pope Francis for February. That meeting, which will include the presidents of the world's bishops' conferences, will address the global sexual abuse crisis.

DiNardo said he had only been told of the Vatican's decision one day before the start of the U.S. bishops' fall meeting in Baltimore.

However, according to the Associated Press, Ouellet first told DiNardo on Nov. 6 that the bishops should not vote on the proposals, and repeated the instruction in his Nov. 11 letter, saying, "Considering the nature and scope of the documents being proposed by the (conference), I believe it would have been beneficial to have allowed for more time to consult with this and other congregations with competence over the ministry and discipline of bishops."

DiNardo on Jan. 1 told the Associated Press that he had shared the "content and direction" of the proposals with the Vatican in October. He said he moved

forward with drafting the final text when he did not meet with any opposition.

"We had not planned, nor had the Holy See made a request, to share the texts prior to the body of bishops having had an opportunity to amend them," he said, adding that he assumed the Vatican would be able to "review and offer adjustments" to the measures after the U.S. bishops voted to approve them.

"It is now clear there were different expectations on the bishops conference's part and Rome's part that may have affected the understanding of these proposals," DiNardo said in a statement. "From our perspective, they were designed to stop short of where the authority of the Holy See began."

In his letter, Ouellet acknowledged that the bishops' conference has autonomy to discuss and approve measures, but added "the conference's work must always be integrated within the hierarchical structure and universal law of the church." He mentioned a need to "incorporate the input and fruits" of the February meeting in Rome.

DiNardo told the AP that he had cautioned Ouellet that a failure to vote on the proposals "would prove a great disappointment to the faithful, who were expecting their bishops to take just action."