



Baltimore Archdiocese moves ahead with reforms to address sexual abuse that were tabled at national conference

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The Archdiocese of Baltimore is forging ahead with measures tabled at a national meeting of Catholic bishops in an effort to address the church's long-running sex abuse crisis.

Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori at a news briefing Tuesday morning outlined steps the Baltimore Archdiocese is taking to create more accountability among local church leadership, addressing sexual abuse and other missteps by church leaders and clergy members. The archdiocese plans to incorporate more lay people in church affairs, update its child protection policies, require bishops to sign a code of conduct and implement an independent reporting system for allegations of abuse by bishops.

"The church is undergoing a genuine crisis," Lori said. "It's a crisis that threatens to undermine the faith of a lot of Catholics, caused a lot of Catholics to question their faith and maybe even to lose trust in the institution."

As the Baltimore Archdiocese works to reestablish trust among congregants, the organization is working to improve accountability among its leaders.

"We've tried really hard," Lori said. "We have a rigorous and thorough approach for dealing with allegations of those credibly accused."

The plans come several months after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore did not vote as originally planned on steps to address the sex abuse crisis. Creating a national code of conduct and an independent system for reporting abuses by bishops were among the items tabled at the meeting at the urging of the Vatican.

“Well, we’re not quite there yet nationally, but boy we can do it locally, and that’s the decision that we made,” Lori said.

The reporting system, EthicsPoint.com, allows people to report bishops for criminal or ethical violations, including sexual abuse, financial impropriety or code of conduct violations. The system will be overseen by its independent review board.

“The bishops who serve in this area, in this archdiocese, are expressly being held accountable to the same rigorous standard of conduct that any other member of the clergy, any volunteer, any employee are held to,” Lori said. “And the report of any allegations against bishops will not be received or handled by my office but by individuals totally independent of the archdiocese.”

The archdiocese in December also released its inaugural annual report by the independent review board detailing the board’s oversight of child protection efforts.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore encompasses 153 parishes across Baltimore City and nine counties, including 545 priests and hundreds of deacons, brothers, nuns and lay ministers.