



NEWS

Office of Public Affairs
3211 Fourth Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017
202-541-3200
Fax 202-541-3173
www.usccb.org

Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, Presidential Address President of U.S. Bishops Conference 2017 General Assembly- Baltimore

November 13, 2017

BALTIMORE—The following is the Presidential Address given by Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) at the start of the annual 2017 General Assembly taking place November 13-14 in Baltimore.

The text of Cardinal DiNardo's full address follows:

Presidential Address

My brother bishops, fellow priests, deacons, religious, and dear laity, Happy Centenary! What a joy to celebrate one hundred years as an episcopal conference. I am grateful to the Cardinal Secretary of State for serving as principal celebrant at the opening Mass. Cardinal Parolin's presence reminds us that we are never alone when living the Gospel. We find our strength in the one body of Christ and, united with our Holy Father, we are indeed a family, always there for one another.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops was born in 1917, as the National Catholic War Council, during a time of great national and international need. Citizens at home were anxious about their future. At the same time, a massive refugee crisis was unfolding overseas. The Bishops back then knew that such challenges could only be met through a unified marshaling of all the Church's resources.

Not surprisingly, we are living in a time of similar challenge. Just as before, how we organize Church life must reflect this reality. The word parish comes from the Greek word *paroikos*: a sojourner, someone on the move. We bishops are shepherds accompanying a migrant flock on their journey; a journey that is robustly spiritual, but not one that is divorced from the needs of this world.

Ours is a diverse flock. People look, talk, and even think differently from each other. This is a fact that the forces of division will use all the more. They tempt us to see only a threat in the stranger, and to ignore the hope and joy, as well as the obligation, in welcoming the stranger. The forces of division prey upon our fear of the unfamiliar, the different. But fear is not of God. God does not divide; God unites. And God, who is love, created us to love.

Love is not naïve, but neither is it irritable, resentful, or rude. As Pope Francis teaches in *Amoris Laetitia*, “when a loving person can do good for others or sees that others are happy, they themselves live happily, and in this way, give glory to God -- for ‘God loves a cheerful giver.’”

We were reminded of that just recently, at the first beatification of a U.S. born priest. Blessed Stanley Rother was a true witness to the Good Shepherd *who does not abandon his sheep nor runs away*. No, like the Good Shepherd, Father Rother offered his life for the people he had come to serve. In this way, he is a witness to the Love of God for all peoples, a truth that the Church must continually teach.

Over the next two days, our agenda reflects fundamental questions of our national life. Questions continue over how best to care for the sick, the unborn, the poor, the immigrant and refugee, the unemployed and the underemployed in cities and towns across America. But the question before us is straightforward: as a people of faith, what will our contribution be?

I would like to answer straightforwardly: our contribution is always to witness to the Gospel. For the last 100 years, this conference has responded to the needs of our country and has addressed some of our greatest challenges. It has done so in the context of grace; the grace we have received from Christ. And this conference will continue to do so, for our next century. As shepherds, and as citizens, the Gospel compels us to enter the public debate with civility. The light of the Gospel must continually direct how we face the challenges ahead.

Let Blessed Stanley Rother be our inspiration. As Father Stanley stayed despite the imminent threat of persecution and death in order that he may continue to preach the Gospel of Love, so too should we, as a church, be united in proclaiming Christ's love for humanity. How much more so then in this time when Christians around the world are persecuted in unheard of numbers. On the Solemnity of Christ the King, I ask that the entire Church in the United States come together in a special way for a Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians, to express our solidarity with those who are suffering.

We are facing a time that seems more divided than ever. Divisions over health care, conscience protections, immigration and refugees, taxes, abortion, physician assisted suicide, gender ideologies, the meaning of marriage, and all the other headlines continue to be hotly debated. But our role continues to be witnessing to the Gospel.

The history of our American Church provides many examples of holy men and women rising to meet the challenge of their day. Next week offers another moment for prayer and inspiration. Fr. Solanus Casey will be beatified in Detroit. The history of Christianity is also the story of reconciliation. In 2017, we mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Begun as a

moment of painful division, it stands as a journey toward healing — from conflict to communion.

There are many challenges in the contemporary Church and society. Our response must be civility and love. My friends, civility begins in the womb. If we cannot come to love and protect innocent life from the moment God creates it, how can we properly care for each other as we come of age? Or when we come to old age?

We must continue to proclaim that the poor have a right to good and affordable healthcare, which still has not been met.

There is the opioid epidemic that is a plague on our society that needs to be addressed vigorously. This is in addition to the plague of drug abuse our country has been wrestling with for years.

Hospitals and health care workers deserve conscience protections so that they never have to participate in the taking of a human life. And, even though there are alternatives to abortion, children yet to be born still lose their lives before they even have a chance.

On immigration, we can all agree that the system is broken; comprehensive reform is needed, but fear tempts us with false choices. Providing for the common defense and the general welfare is a basic responsibility of government. However, we have a moral responsibility to improve border security in a humane way.

We join our Holy Father in declaring that a pro-life immigration policy is one that does not tear families apart; it protects families. Such a policy includes an equitable path to legal protection.

In our towns and in our cities, as civility ebbs, we have seen bolder expressions of racism, with some taking pride in this grave sin. Sometimes it is shocking and violent, such as in Charlottesville; more often it is subtle and systematic. But racism always destroys lives and it has no place in the Christian heart.

Conversion is needed. A bold national dialogue on racism is needed. A frank and honest commitment to address the root causes of racism is needed. Americans don't like to talk about it. None-the-less, it is time to act; our common humanity demands it of us; Jesus demands it of us.

To help us in this, the Conference has created an Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. Under the chairmanship of Bishop George Murry, they are planning to meet with people across the country and to learn from them how the Church can best work with others in ending this evil. Pray this conversation will lead to genuine conversion of hearts, including our own.

The challenges seem great – maybe even insurmountable at times. Natural disasters alone have been relentless. Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Maria, devastating fires in California and earthquakes in Mexico. But as I have witnessed first-hand, suffering has brought the Church in America together and has reminded me of how wonderful the gifts of faith, hope and love truly are. We need to constantly put forward these virtues, especially in light of the violence from what is a long and growing list of mass shootings in our schools, offices, churches, and places of recreation. The time is long past due to end the madness of outrageous weapons – be they stockpiled on a continent or in a hotel room.

As I said at the beginning of this talk, one hundred years ago the Bishops of the United States came together, realizing this country was facing numerous issues. Today is not that different. But like our predecessors, we know that the love of Christ is stronger than all the challenges ahead.

I recently saw this eternal truth first hand, in two distinct moments. The first was following Hurricane Harvey, as I visited parish after parish and experienced the awful damage. Time and time again the parishioners would say to me, “please pray for the victims of Irma or Marie or the earthquakes.” It is a beautiful expression of the Gospel when you think of your neighbor, even amid your own suffering. Allow me to say a special word of thanks to Sr. Donna Markham and Catholic Charities USA for being present to so many in the wake of the flooding.

The second moment was this past July when over three thousand gathered in Orlando. The Convocation of Catholic Leaders: The Joy of the Gospel in America was a high point in the reception of *Evangelii Gaudium* in the United States, a high point that will continue as we move towards the Fifth *Encuentro*. *Evangelii Gaudium*, a gift to the whole Church from the Holy Father, brings into splendid focus the work of evangelization, of witnessing to the Gospel. This work began with Blessed Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and continues through to *Aparecida*. This work taps into the deepest life of the Church and shows that in the middle of all our challenges, the Church is fully alive.

This is what the Church has offered this past century, and what we will continue to offer in the next hundred years – the life transforming joy of the Gospel. In the words of Pope Francis, “Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary vigor!”

Some of you know I like the fathers of the Church. St. Augustine speaks to us today in his exposition on Psalm 149. Let them sing a psalm to Him with timbrel and psaltery. That not the voice alone may praise, but the works too. When timbrel and psaltery are taken, the hands

harmonize with the voice. So too you, when you sing praise and hallelujah, take bread to the hungry, clothe the naked, take in the stranger. Then does not only your voice sound, but your hand sounds in harmony with it. Your finger agrees with your tongue.

My brothers, let us follow our Holy Father ever more closely, going forth to be with our people in every circumstance of pastoral life. Drawing strength and wisdom from these past hundred years, let us sound our hands and voices joyfully. And let us always remind our people, and ourselves, that with God, all things are possible.

Come Holy Spirit and guide our prayer and deliberations these days. May God bless us all.

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Media Contact:

Judy Keane

202-541-3200