

Apostolic Nuncio says bishops need to regain trust of their faithful

(CNA/) - Bishops in the United States need to work hard to regain the trust of their flocks and combat a culture of clericalism, Archbishop Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States, told those present at the USCCB's Fall General Assembly in Baltimore, Md.

After acknowledging that the past year has been "challenging and sobering," Pierre spoke sternly to his brother bishops and told them that they need to accept their responsibility as "spiritual fathers" of their dioceses.

While the Church is "always" in need of renewal, Pierre said that that this task will be impossible without rebuilding the trust of their community. It is a task that demands time, effort sacrifice, and reform on the part of the bishop.

"The only way of reforming the Church is to suffer for her," he said, and this reform needs to come from the mission of the Church. In creating reform, bishops must show that they are capable of solving problems that are placed before them, "rather than simply delegating them to others."

Bishops, he said, have a "special responsibility" to strengthen the faith of others, especially when presented with these challenges.

"The people of God have rightly challenged us to be trustworthy," he said.

"Pope Francis never ceases to tell us that if we are to begin again, then we should begin again from Jesus Christ, who lightens our lives and helps us to prove that we can be trustworthy."

Despite admonishing the bishops for betraying the trust of the faithful, he also offered praise for certain aspects of their work.

Pierre voiced approval for the bishops' efforts in creating sanctions and rules for the protection of children and vulnerable adults. There is, however, always more that can be done, and bishops should not be afraid to "get their hands dirty" and remain vigilant in this work.

"Those of you who have done good work have to be congratulated for your commitment as leaders, and for setting a good example for us all," he said, noting that one case of clerical sex abuse is one too many.

He also praised the media for their work in reporting the abuse crisis, reminding the bishops not to shoot the messenger, so to speak, when it comes to these stories, regardless of how "painful and humiliating" they may be.

As a way to regain the trust of the faith, bishops need to work on fighting back against a culture that promotes clericalism and one that tolerates the abuse of authority, he said. These sins are not those of the media, nor are they "products of conspiracies," he said. Rather, they are for the Church to confront head-on.

"These are things we must recognize and fix," he said, starting from the beginning of the priesthood formation process in the seminaries. Those who are selected for the seminary must

be properly screened, and he encouraged the bishops to spend time talking to young people and hearing their concerns.

Bishops “cannot run from the challenges that present and confront us,” he said, but instead need to have “open hearts” and hear the concerns of the faithful.

“Even if things seem dark, do not be discouraged. Have hope. [Christ] is with us, and He accompanies the Church,” he said.