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Vatican



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Editor's note: This story has been updated with more background on the upcoming meeting between Pope Francis and the U.S. bishops' conference president and vice-president.

Pope Francis will meet Sept. 13 with the president and vice-president of the U.S. bishops' conference, who last month requested an in-person encounter to discuss the continuing clergy sexual abuse scandal and revelation of shocking allegations against now ex-cardinal Theodore McCarrick.

In a statement late Sept. 11, the Vatican press office said Galveston-Houston Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, president, and Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, vice-president, would be joined in the meeting by Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, who heads Francis' advisory commission on clergy abuse.

Also taking part will be Msgr. Brian Bransfield, the U.S. bishops' conference's secretary general.

While the Vatican's statement did not give a reason for the meeting, DiNardo announced Aug. 16 that he planned to come to Rome to detail the U.S. bishops'

plans to confront the abuse crisis.

The announcement sets the stage for a kind of high-profile encounter not seen since April 2002, when eight U.S. cardinals were summoned to Rome to discuss revelations of abuse with Pope John Paul II.

DiNardo first requested the encounter with Francis after the Aug. 14 release of a grand jury report in Pennsylvania that revealed that more than 300 priests had been accused of committing sexual assault in six dioceses in the state over seven decades.

Release of that report came shortly after McCarrick, the former archbishop of Washington, renounced his place in the College of Cardinals in the wake of revelations that he sexually harassed or abused several young men during his rise to become one of the U.S. church's most senior prelates.

In his Aug. 16 statement, DiNardo said he would be inviting the Vatican to conduct an apostolic visitation, or investigation, of how McCarrick's abuse had not been reported earlier.

DiNardo also said the bishops were seeking to develop an unspecified process for future reporting of allegations against bishops, saying they wanted something that included "substantial involvement" of laypeople and is "free from bias or undue influence by a bishop."

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In the time since DiNardo's original request for a meeting with Francis, the pontiff has come under intense global scrutiny over his handling of abuse cases.

On Aug. 26, former Vatican ambassador Archbishop Carlo Viganò released a document alleging a systemic cover-up of allegations against McCarrick, saying he had told Francis personally about the matter in 2013.

In his only remarks on the matter to date, Francis said Viganò's document, which contains a host of unsubstantiated and ideological claims and has now been revealed to have been drafted with the help of several ultra-right-wing Catholic figures, "speaks for itself."

The 2002 meeting between U.S. bishops and John Paul II came after the Boston Globe's now famous series of reports on clergy abuse, which led to charges being brought against five priests and to the eventual resignation of then-archbishop Cardinal Bernard Law.

O'Malley, who leads the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, replaced Law as Boston archbishop in 2003.

Among those taking part in the 2002 summit was McCarrick, who at the time was seen as the most amiable of the eight U.S. prelates involved. The Washington Post called him "the man of the hour."

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