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The U.S. bishops will start 2019 with a spiritual retreat to pray and reflect on the important matters facing the Catholic Church.

Set for Jan. 2-8 at Mundelein Seminary near Chicago, the retreat was planned in response to Pope Francis' request to a delegation of U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops leaders during a meeting at the Vatican Sept. 13.

The meeting with the pope focused on the U.S. bishops' response to the widening clergy sex abuse crisis.

Capuchin Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the papal household, will direct the Ignatian style retreat, the USCCB announced Oct. 23.

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, USCCB president, thanked Pope Francis for offering Cantalamessa as retreat director in a statement announcing the retreat.

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In September, the bishops' Administrative Committee outlined actions to address the abuse crisis, including approving the establishment of a third-party confidential

reporting system for claims of any abuse by bishops. They also initiated the process of developing a code of conduct for bishops and looking at policies addressing restrictions on bishops who were removed or resigned because of allegations of abuse of minors or adults.

The church’s response to the sexual abuse crisis also will top the agenda for the bishops’ fall general assembly in Baltimore Nov. 12-14.

The bishops face a busy January, with the annual March for Life in the nation's capital Jan. 18 and World Youth Day in Panama Jan. 22-27.