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As the U.S. bishops met in Baltimore for their spring general assembly, social media users had the opportunity to pose questions to bishops the evenings of June 11 and June 12 via the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Facebook Live sessions.

On June 12, the panelists were Bishop Timothy Doherty of Lafayette, Indiana, who is the chairman of the Committee for the Protection of Children and Young People, Auxiliary Bishop John McIntyre of Philadelphia, and Deacon Bernard Nojadera, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection.

They resumed the conversation begun the evening before regarding the sexual abuse crisis within the church and emphasized how the laypeople have been affected.

McIntyre commented, "They have every right to be angry, frustrated and hurt." He believes, however, that one should move past these emotions. "At the same time, I think it's important for any one of us not to be stuck there, to stay there, to remain there, to know that in the midst of all of this first of all that Christ is with us," said McIntyre.

Nojadera noted that the anger and mistrust expressed by the laity and at other levels within the church are natural and necessary.

"Those are good. It's causing folks to act and to do something about it," said Nojadera. He stated that he has noticed an increase of parish groups wanting to get involved and find a solution. "Folks are reaching out because they love the church," he said.

Doherty later addressed a question on social media regarding if there are clear guidelines to handle incidents of abuse within the church. He expressed that clerical training on preventing abuse is mandatory and that "abuse" is not limited to sexual abuse. When dealing with minors, training about psychological abuse, physical abuse and neglect is included.

"Most of us are mandated reporters, and if someone reveals these things to us, then we have to call the proper authorities," said Doherty.

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The U.S. bishops' 2002 the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People" mandates safe environment programs be set up in dioceses and parishes. Clergy, lay church workers and volunteers at in a parish or school must follow diocesan guidelines on background checks, safe environment training, policies and procedures, and codes of conduct.

McIntyre added that if an investigation surfaces, bishops have limitations as far as their involvement in that. If law enforcement agencies become involved during an investigation, they may request that the bishops step back for some time so that a thorough independent investigation can be completed.

Doherty noted that the bishops want to be held accountable in a diligent manner.

McIntyre said that an unfortunate reality of the church is that it has "always been marked by individuals' sins, but we also know that the risen Christ did not give up (on the church community)."

Nojadera expressed that it is important to not lose hope and to not be discouraged by one's own sins and the sins of others: '"It's a journey of healing and holiness. I pray when we leave, we're motivated even more so to make mission that of 'siempre adelante,' 'always forward.' "

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Note: Those wishing to review the meeting on social media can use the hashtag #USCCB19 and look at Twitter (twitter.com/usccb) as well as Facebook (facebook.com/usccb) and Instagram (instagram.com/usccb).

This story appears in the **USCCB Spring Assembly 2019** feature series. View the full series.