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Bishops listen to a speaker Nov. 14, 2018, at the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. (CNS/Bob Roller)

by Catholic News Service

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An update to the Program on Priestly Formation, a progress report on the establishment of a nationwide, third-party reporting system for abuse or misconduct by bishops, and a vote on new leadership for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops are on the agenda for the bishops' fall general assembly.

Gathering in Baltimore Nov. 11-13, the bishops also will review and vote to approve a short letter and five short video scripts to supplement "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," the bishops' quadrennial teaching document for the faithful on the political responsibility of Catholics.

The changes in the sixth edition of the Program on Priestly Formation have been in the works for more than a year. The document has governed seminary formation in the United States since the bishops issued the first edition for dioceses in 1971.

At their June assembly, the bishops overwhelmingly voted to authorize the implementation of a third-party system that would allow people to make confidential reports of abuse complaints against bishops through a toll-free telephone number and online.

This new national reporting system would not replace systems already in place in every diocese for the reporting of abuse by priests. It is to be operated by an outside vendor contracted by the U.S. bishops' conference and should be in place no later than May 31, 2020.

The "Faithful Citizenship" document traditionally has been updated and released about a year before the presidential election every four years. It was last updated in 2015. The new materials will "apply the teaching of Pope Francis to our day," the bishops said in agreeing to supplement the document in order to generate more interest in it.

The bishops also will elect a new president, a vice president, a chairman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Religious Liberty and chairman-elect for five conference committees: canonical affairs and church governance; ecumenical and interreligious affairs; evangelization and catechesis; international justice and peace; and the protection of children and young people.

They also will elect the new board of directors of Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' overseas relief and development agency.

The assembly will begin with an address by Archbishop Christophe Pierre, papal nuncio to the United States. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston will give his final address as conference president; his three-year term ends at the close of the assembly.

The U.S. bishops also will hear a report from the National Advisory Council, a group made up of religious and laypeople that is a consultative body for the U.S. bishops' conference Administrative Committee.

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In other action items include:

- The members of Latin-rite dioceses will vote to approve two translations by the International Commission on English in the Liturgy: a translation of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults as the base text for a future edition of the rite in U.S. dioceses; and a translation of the Hymns of the Liturgy of the Hours for use in the dioceses.
- The Subcommittee on Hispanic Affairs of the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church will request authorization from the full body of bishops to lead the process of developing a new formal statement and comprehensive vision for Hispanic/Latino ministry in response to the V Encuentro, or National Fifth Encuentro. The statement and vision document would be developed and approved by the bishops during the next strategic planning cycle, which is 2021-2024.
- The bishops also will vote on the budget for 2020 and give final approval to a new set of strategic priorities to guide the work of the conference from 2021 through 2024: evangelization, life and dignity of the human person; "protect and heal God's children" and vocations, equipping "all Christ's disciples for mission."

Public sessions of general assembly discussions and votes as well as portions of the day of spiritual discernment will be available via livestream at http://www.usccb.org/live. News updates, vote totals, texts of addresses and presentations and other materials for the bishops' November assembly will be posted to this page: www.usccb.org/meetings as soon as possible.