News



A prelate prepares to vote June 14, 2018, during the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' annual spring assembly in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. When they meet Nov. 11-13 in Baltimore, the bishops are expected to vote on a revised set of strategic priorities to take them into the next decade. (CNS/Bob Roller)



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When they meet Nov. 11-13 in Baltimore, the U.S. bishops are expected to vote on a revised set of strategic priorities to take them into the next decade.

The bishops, when they met in June, gave their provisional OK to development of a new set of strategic priorities for 2021-24. The June vote allowed committees, secretariats and departments of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to continue work on how to carry out the priorities.

The expectation is the proposed 2021-24 priorities would receive a final vote for implementation at the bishops' conference November 2020 meeting.

For this year's vote, a simple majority of bishops present and voting is needed for passage.

A working group of bishops under the aegis of the bishops' conference Committee on Priorities and Plans – following two rounds of consultations with the bishops, one round with the conference's National Advisory Council, with recent input from five conference standing committees – identified four priorities:

- "Evangelization: Form a joyful band of missionary disciples of Jesus Christ." The phrase "of Jesus Christ" is new since June.
- "Life and dignity of the human person: Serve the common good as the leaven in a free society."
- "Protect and heal God's children: Restore integrity, foster virtue."
- "Vocations: Equip all Christ's disciples for mission."

Within each priority there are four to six emphasis points, with slight changes in wording for a few since June.

Under evangelization:

- "Evangelize a culture in need of hope, especially the religiously unaffiliated."
- "Invite and empower youth/young adults to become missionary disciples."
- "Foster an evangelizing focus in catechesis and Catholic schools."
- "Communicate more effectively how the faith transforms lives."
- "Offer our society an account for the hope that is within us."
- "Acknowledge and welcome the gifts and talents that the Encuentro process brings to Christ's church." "Encuentro process" replaces "Hispanic community" in an earlier version.

Under human life and dignity:

- "Work to heal the scourge of racism and religious intolerance." It originally read: "Work to heal the scourge of hatred based on race and/or religion."
- "Protect and defend the dignity of migrants and refugees, of the poor and those on the peripheries."
- "Defend the right to life for all people especially the unborn, elderly, sick, dying and persons with disabilities; and fight the advance of abortion, infanticide, assisted suicide, euthanasia, violence and the death penalty." "Violence" has been added to this list.
- "Defend and secure religious liberty and freedom of association."
- "Foster reverence for God's creation, in protection of our common home." The phrase "in protection of" was added.
- "Articulate a convincing anthropology of the human person, male and female, as proclaimed by faith and affirmed by science and right reason."
- Under protect and heal God's children:
- "Maintain and strengthen safe environments through sound policies and procedures." Originally, it began with "Create and maintain."
- "Extend and ensure effective collaboration with the laity."
- "Cultivate an ever-deepening spirituality of chastity and other virtues."
- "Nurture courageous and transparent leadership."
- "Accompany survivors and embrace their witness."

Under vocations:

- "Foster lifelong discernment and formation to fulfill one's God-given vocation."
- "Prepare for and sustain the living-out of marriage and family life."
- "Create a culture that nurtures consecrated life and holy orders."

- "Encourage the laity in their mission to evangelize society and transform it through the grace of word and sacrament." The "transform" phrase is an addition.

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According to bishops' conference statutes, the bishops' strategic plan is to be reviewed and revised as needed every four years.

The process got underway during the bishops' conference fall general meeting last November, where bishops in their regional meetings were asked to give input on strategic priorities for 2021-24, and an electronic survey was distributed to bishops last January.

Archbishop Allen Vigneron of Detroit, chairman of the bishops' conference Committee on Priorities and Plans, in a message to his fellow bishops with the draft document, used all caps to emphasize that one priority is not more important than the other.

"The listed order of strategic priorities and emphasis areas serves only to provide a framework for referencing them in committee, subcommittee and department operational plans and in future evaluations," he explained.

Should the priorities and plans be approved, conference committees, secretariats and departments will continue developing draft operational plans; that work started in July. Starting in February and going through June 2020, the Committee on Priorities and Plans and the conference general secretariat will conduct a review of the draft strategic plan. The conference Executive Committee's review and approval will take place between July and September 2020.

In November 2020, the full body of bishops will vote on whether to approve the 2021-24 priorities.

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