News



Speaking to the U.S. bishops' conference Nov. 14, Cardinal Christophe Pierre, the Vatican's ambassador to the U.S., linked synodality with the U.S. bishops' eucharistic revival project. (NCR screenshot/YouTube/USCCB)



by Brian Fraga

Staff Reporter

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Baltimore — November 14, 2023

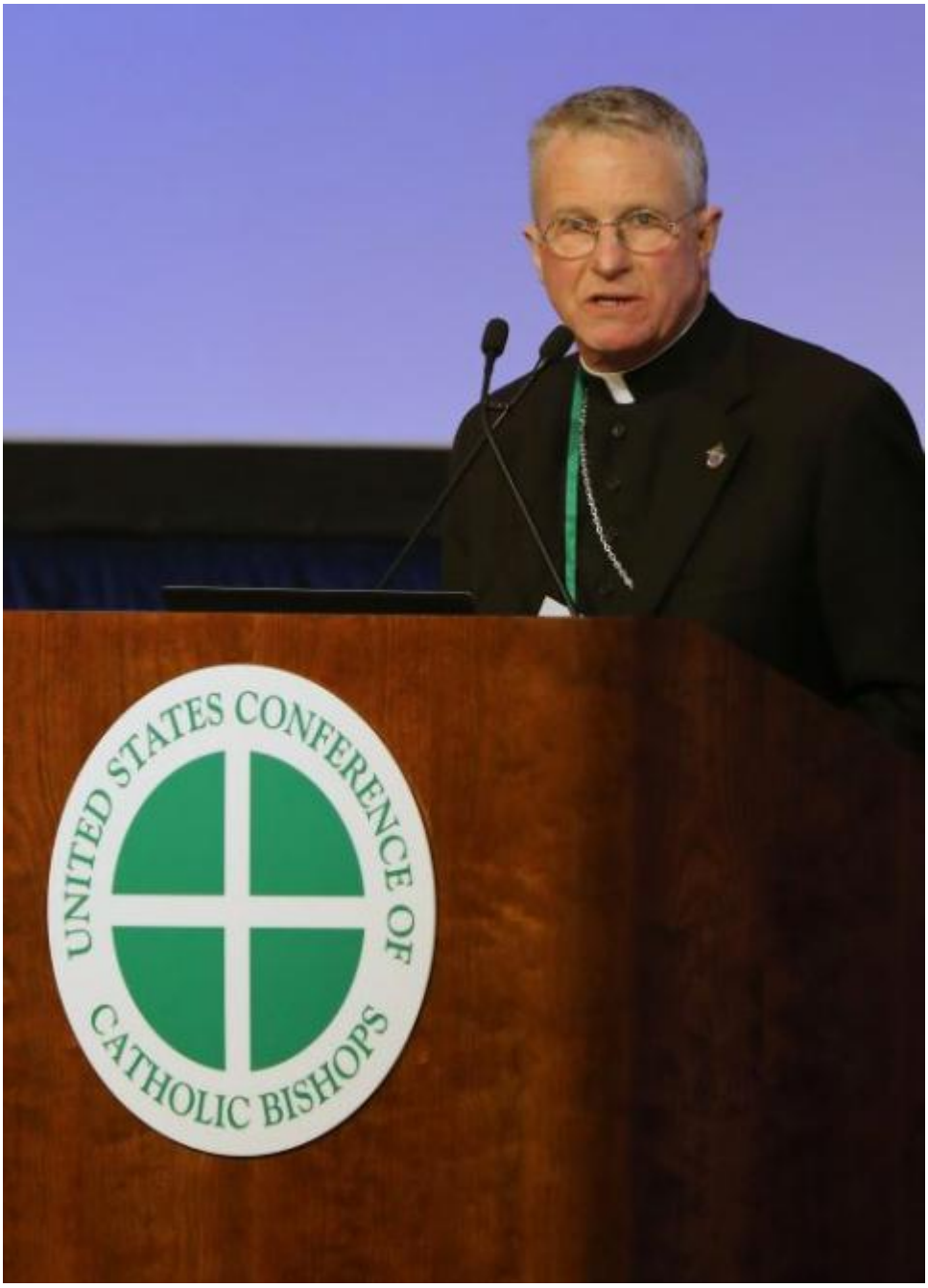
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The Vatican's ambassador to the U.S. urged the nation's Catholic bishops on Nov. 14 to step out of their "comfort zones" and embrace the open-ended discussions at Pope Francis' Synod of Bishops as the way forward for the global church.

In a 20-minute opening address to the bishops' annual fall assembly here, Cardinal Christophe Pierre told the prelates that Francis' vision of a synodal church where all members listen to one another is "essential to evangelization."

"We may have had fears and anxieties about the synod, especially if we are focusing on a particular agenda or idea, whether positive or negative, but this is not what synodality is all about," Pierre said, in an apparent reference to resistance among conservative U.S. Catholics and bishops to the synodal process.

The U.S. bishops are meeting in Baltimore Nov. 13-16, about two weeks after the Oct. 4-29 Synod of Bishops on Synodality concluded its assembly. The synod delegates issued a report that discussed many pressing issues impacting the church's mission in the modern world, including questions of better inclusion of LGBTQ Catholics and women's leadership.



Military Services Archbishop Timothy Broglio, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, speaks during a Nov. 14 session of the bishops' fall general assembly in Baltimore. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

Pierre, who was made a cardinal by Francis in September, also linked synodality — which Pope Francis has said is what "God expects of the Catholic Church in the third millennium" — with the U.S. bishops' ambitious eucharistic revival project.

A multiyear initiative aimed at restoring lay Catholics' devotion to the Eucharist, the bishops' revival project is set to culminate in 2024 with a large-scale, $14 million National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis.

"Synodality and the eucharistic revival belong together by their very nature, and they shed light on one another," Pierre said.

"Eucharistic revival and synodality go together," the cardinal said later in his address. "Or to put it another way: I believe that we will have true eucharistic revival when we experience the Eucharist as the sacrament of Christ's incarnation: as the Lord walking with us together on the way."

Military Services Archbishop Timothy Broglio, the president of the bishops' conference, thanked Pierre for linking the synodality and the Eucharistic revival.

"These are both forms of evangelization," said the archbishop, delivering his presidential address after Pierre spoke. Broglio, who attended the synodal assembly in Rome, said the event was "certainly an opportunity to interact and speak on many different themes from representatives from around the world."

Advertisement

"Different cultures, different perceptions always enrich," said Broglio, who added that it was "important to listen to each other."

Throughout his 12-minute address, Broglio primarily highlighted situations of crisis around the world. He spoke about the Catholic Church's efforts to address political conflicts in Nicaragua and Haiti, and offered prayers for peace in Ukraine, Israel/Gaza and the wider Middle East. He said the church recognizes "the right of Israel to exist," the Palestinians' "right to a land that is their own" and mentioned Ukraine's "struggle against unjust aggression."

After the two speeches the morning of Nov. 14, the U.S. bishops elected Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley as their conference secretary. Coakley had already been serving in the position since the bishops elected him in November 2022 to complete the term left vacant when Broglio was chosen as the conference president.

The bishops elected Coakley over Portland, Oregon, Archbishop Alexander Sample, 187-55.

Also elected were chairmen-elect of six of the conference's standing committees:

- Trenton, New Jersey, Bishop David M. O'Connell, Committee on Catholic Education;
- Springfield, Massachusetts, Bishop William Byrne, Committee on Communications;
- Brooklyn, New York, Bishop Robert Brennan, Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church;
- Brooklyn Auxiliary Bishop James Massa, Committee on Doctrine;
- Reno, Nevada, Bishop Daniel Mueggenborg, Committee on National Collections;
- Toledo, Ohio, Bishop Daniel Thomas, Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Later in the assembly session on Nov. 14, bishops and other delegates who attended the October synodal assembly in Rome shared their reflections and experiences.

"This level of consultation of the people of God is unprecedented in church history," said Fort Wayne-South Bend, Indiana, Bishop Kevin Rhoades, who described the synod as a "positive and enriching experience."

"It was an experience of the beautiful universality of the church and of our communion," Rhoades said, adding that prayer had a "prominence" throughout the gathering that he said "made it clear" that the synod was "centered in Christ."

"Our task was spiritual discernment, not political or theological debate," Rhoades said. "The method and the atmosphere were conducive to deepening our communion, even if and when we may have had some theological disagreements."

Brownsville, Texas, Bishop Daniel Flores, who coordinated the national consultation for the synod for the bishops' conference, urged the prelates in attendance to read the synodal assembly's 40-page report.

Flores said the report, which sidestepped questions about LGBTQ ministry and the possibility of ordaining women as deacons, "raises thoughtful questions." Flores said "many difficult issues" were raised during the synod, but added that they were not discussed in a contentious way.

"This is in itself quite remarkable," said Flores, who added that he expects the Vatican's synod office and the bishops' conference to distribute resource materials for bishops to consult before the next synodal assembly meets in Rome in October 2024.

Flores encouraged the bishops to be "actively involved" in synodal consultations with the laity in their local churches. He said lay Catholics have "an indispensable role in the mission of the church."

Flores said the synodal style of honest conversation, sincere listening and discernment offers the church "a Catholic way" to grapple with contentious issues "faithfully, realistically, prayerfully, thoughtfully and charitably."

The assembly also heard from Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, who spoke about the conference's plans to issue Catholic voting guidance ahead of the 2024 presidential elections. The guidance, which will include bulletin inserts and a new introductory letter, is planned to supplement the bishops' quadrennial "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" teaching document.

The bishops were to be given the opportunity to propose amendments to the materials before discussing and voting on them during their Nov. 15 public session.

According to drafts of the "Faithful Citizenship" materials obtained previously by NCR, abortion is presented as "a preeminent concern" for Catholic voters. Issues like racism, health care, wars and famine, climate change, gun violence and the death penalty are mentioned as "other grave threats to life."

At their November 2022 plenary, the bishops opted to publish new supplemental materials instead of rewriting "Faithful Citizenship."

***Editor's note**: This story has been updated to include reporting of afternoon events.*

This story appears in the **USCCB Fall Assembly 2023** feature series. View the full series.
A version of this story appeared in the **Nov 24-Dec 7, 2023** print issue under the headline: Bishops told to leave ‘comfort zones’.