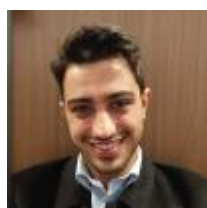




Archbishop Jeffrey Grob concelebrates Mass with the presbyterate during his installation as the 12th archbishop of the Milwaukee Archdiocese Jan. 14, 2025. (OSV News/Catholic Herald/Andy Gilicinski)



by Jeromiah Taylor

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Archbishop Jeffrey Grob of Milwaukee said [a recent meeting of 12 bishops](#) with President Donald Trump was "manipulated" by the White House into a "political photo opportunity" and apologized for any harm the meeting caused.

Grob issued [a statement](#) today on the archdiocesan website, offering rationale for his involvement in the controversial Oct. 22 White House meeting, expressing "sincere regret" and stating, "I apologize for any damage my actions have caused." Grob's statement comes a day after another participant in the meeting, Denver Archbishop James Golka, [said](#) in an interview with the Denver Catholic that the meeting was not meant to be a political endorsement.

According to Grob, the meeting at the White House, organized by the Trump-aligned Heritage Foundation, was supposed to be private. He said he attended because he felt it would be a valuable opportunity to meet with Catholic members of the administration to "discuss matters of importance to the Church and our people, including immigration enforcement, religious worker visas, and human dignity."

Following that meeting, Grob said, the bishops were moved into the Oval Office, where they were greeted by Trump and then "directed to stand behind him and pray."

Although the bishops were aware that photos were taken during their prayer with Trump, they were not asked for their permission to share the photos nor were they aware that a video was taken, Grob said.

"Unbeknownst to the group of bishops a video was also taken," he added. "But permission for the public distribution or posting of either the video or photos was not given by the bishops"

"I feel a heavy sadness, not only over the pain I caused, but also for the fact that something so sacred to a group of religious leaders, prayer to our Heavenly Father, would be manipulated in that way," Grob said.

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Grob, who earlier this year [co-signed a statement](#) along with other Wisconsin bishops critical of the Trump administration's mistreatment of immigrants, said he wished he had given more consideration to the "reservations" he felt about the meeting.

"We came in good faith to try to work for the betterment of our fellow human beings, to ease their suffering, to build up the common good, and to pray with a president, not to pose for a political photo opportunity to benefit the few," Grob said. "We should never have been put in that position by the White House. I did not go without reservations. I wish I had heeded them."

Another participant in the meeting, Bishop William Joensen of Des Moines, also issued a [statement](#) on Oct. 25, saying that he had hoped the meeting would give bishops a chance to offer their perspective on the "many things tied to this present Administration that are blatantly at odds with our Catholic faith."

While bishops were aware the meeting with Trump came on the "cusp of a national election," he nonetheless felt the White House had "exploited" the gathering for "partisan political purposes."

Following the meeting, the White House [told NCR](#), "There has never been a greater president for Catholic Americans than President Trump, and his strong record proves it."

According to both Golka and Grob, the prayer represented a brief portion of a 3 hour meeting with the White House Faith Office — a sequel to an earlier meeting last June. The bishops were informed that there would be an opportunity to pray with the president, and both Golka and Grob expressed their stance that private prayer with a political leader was well within their pastoral purview as priests.

This story has been updated with the statement issued by Bishop Joensen.

This story appears in the **2026 Midterm Elections** feature series. [View the full series.](#)