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Spurning tradition, Bishops elect Dolan as new president

Jerry Filteau | Nov. 16, 2010

Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York addresses the sixth annual Los Angeles Catholic Prayer Breakfast outside the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels Sept. 21. (CNS photo/Victor Aleman, Vida Nueva)

BALTIMORE ? The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Nov. 16 elected Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York as president of the conference for the next 3 years.

It was the first time in the modern history of the conference, since it was reorganized in the 1960s after the Second Vatican Council, that a sitting vice president who was on the presidential ballot did not get elected president.

Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz., vice president for the last three years, led Dolan 104-84 on the first ballot but did not get the necessary majority of all voters to win the election. On the second ballot ? still among 10 nominees ? Kicanas gained a few votes, but Dolan led him 118-111, still not an absolute majority of all voters for either candidate.

In the run-off third ballot, where only the top two vote-getters were candidates, Dolan won, 123-111.

The vote signaled a clear ascendancy of the conservative bloc in the U.S. episcopate. One prominent retired bishop, long on the center-right of the conference, told *NCR* afterward that he considered the rejection of Kicanas "most unfortunate" and "disgraceful."

In the balloting for a new vice president that immediately followed the presidential election, two conservatives immediately became front-runners ? Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., and Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver, with 53 and 45 votes respectively.

On the second ballot, Kurtz, who has headed the bishops' efforts to support marriage as a union of one man and one woman, got 85 to 67 for Chaput, who has been a leading advocate of denying Communion to pro-choice Catholic politicians. In both ballots Archbishop Gregory Aymond remained a close third, with 44 votes on the first ballot and 50 on the second.

In the run-off third ballot, where only the top two remained in contention, Kurtz won overwhelmingly, 147-91.

Since the modern bishops' conference was formed in the late 1960s following Vatican II, only twice has a conference vice president not been elected president. In 1971 Archbishop Leo Byrne of St. Paul-Minneapolis died in October, less than a month before the bishops' November meeting, and he was not on the presidential ballot. Three years later Cardinal John Carberry of St. Louis, vice president since 1971, was 73 years old and was due to retire before his possible term as president would have ended, so he was not on the ballot.

By conference rules USCCB officers and committee chairs cannot hold the same office for more than one term, so after losing the presidency Kicanas was not eligible to be re-elected to a second term as vice president. After the bishops elected Dolan as president, only the other eight presidential candidates were on the slate of nominees for vice president.

[Jerry Filteau is NCR Washington correspondent.]

NCR's Michael Sean Winters and Jerry Filteau were at the annual meeting.

Winters is also blogging from conference in real-time. Check *NCR*'s **Distinctly Catholic blog** [1] for updates.

For more coverage of Archbishop Timothy Dolan's election as head of the U.S. Bishops, see:

- Jerry Filteau's news story: **Spurning tradition, Bishops elect Dolan as new president** [2]
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- Ken Briggs' commentary: **Amidst Dolan hubbub, easy to forget bishops are virtually powerless** [5]

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