

Pope summons bishops to address abuse

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by Associated Press and [Christian Century staff](#) in the [October 10, 2018](#) issue

Pope Francis is summoning the presidents of every bishops' conference around the world for a February summit to discuss preventing clergy sexual abuse and protecting children.

Francis's key cardinal advisers announced the decision September 12, a day before Francis met with U.S. church leaders in the wake of the latest accusations in the Catholic Church's decades-long sexual abuse and cover-up scandal.

The call for the February 21-24 meeting at the Vatican is believed to be the first of its kind and signals a realization at the highest levels of the church that clergy sexual abuse is a global problem and not restricted to the Anglo-Saxon world, as many church leaders have long tried to insist.

The same day that the meeting was announced, the key findings of a study about clergy sexual abuse in Germany over the past seven decades were released, the *New York Times* reported. The German bishops' conference commissioned researchers from three universities, who gathered data showing that more than 3,600 children were abused by 1,670 clergy, or 4.4 percent.

Media in the Netherlands reported days later that more than half of the nation's cardinals, bishops, and auxiliaries participated in covering up sexual abuse of children since 1945. Media had analyzed anonymous information provided by abuse victims, and a church spokeswoman confirmed a part of the report that corresponded to a study the church commissioned, according to Agence France-Presse.

Francis's papacy has been jolted by accusations from Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, a retired Vatican ambassador, that Francis ignored sanctions Pope Benedict XVI imposed on American cardinal Theodore McCarrick for having sexually harassed

adult seminarians. The Vatican hasn't responded to the accusations by Viganò but has promised "clarifications."

Daniel DiNardo, head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has said he wants Francis to authorize a full-fledged Vatican investigation into McCarrick, who was removed as cardinal in July after a credible accusation that he groped a teenager.

The Vatican has known since at least 2000 that McCarrick would invite seminarians to his New Jersey beach house and into his bed. John Paul II made him archbishop of Washington and a cardinal in 2001.

Two people in DiNardo's own archdiocese of Galveston-Houston have gone to the media with accounts of being sexually abused by a priest when they were teenagers. One was promised the priest would no longer have contact with children but later learned he remained in active ministry at another parish 70 miles away. The priest was arrested in mid-September.

After a private audience with Pope Francis September 13, DiNardo released a statement saying it was "a lengthy, fruitful, and good exchange" but did not give details. DiNardo had requested the meeting following the release of the Pennsylvania grand jury report documenting cover-ups of child sexual abuse by Catholic clergy, Catholic News Service reported.

The same day, the pope accepted the resignation of Bishop Michael Bransfield of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and appointed William E. Lori, archbishop of Baltimore, to take on Bransfield's former duties. "The Holy Father further instructed Archbishop Lori to conduct an investigation into allegations of sexual harassment of adults against Bishop Bransfield," the diocese said in a statement.

Massimo Faggioli, author of *Catholicism and Citizenship*, wrote in the Catholic journal *Commonweal* that Viganò's charges against Francis represent "an unprecedented moment in modern church history—and not just because of his demand that Pope Francis resign. . . . this was a retired papal diplomat trying to bring down the pope."

A *Commonweal* editorial in early September cited "ample evidence" of McCarrick performing the public functions that Viganò alleged Pope Benedict had restricted but exhorted the pope to respond to Viganò nonetheless. —Associated Press; *Christian Century* staff

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