



From left, Auxiliary Bishop Andrew Cozzens of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Bishop Peter Christensen of Superior, Wis., Bishop Paul Sirba of Duluth and Auxiliary Bishop Lee Piché of St. Paul and Minneapolis read from an iPad June 11 during the annual spring meeting of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in New Orleans. *CNS photo/Bob Roller*

## Bishops focus on religious liberty, election document, upcoming synod

Catholic News Service

During their June 11-13 spring general assembly in New Orleans, the nation's Catholic bishops voted to extend their Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty and to approve work on a limited revision of their quadrennial document aimed at guiding Catholics in election decisions.

They also were urged to promote and support Catholic families by paying close attention to the upcoming synod on the family at the Vatican and to promote the World Meeting of Families next year in Philadelphia.

The bishops heard about the progress made and the work that still needs to be done on efforts to protect children from sexual abuse. They received a report about their aid to typhoon victims in the Philippines and were advised about the work being done to make sure religious educational materials conform to the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The public sessions of the meetings took place June 11 and the morning of June 12 before the bishops went into executive session.

Prior to the vote on a three-year extension of the Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty, Baltimore Archbishop William Lori, its chairman, compared the body's work to the "humble beginnings of the pro-life movement."

The ad hoc committee was formed in 2011 and the "need for its sustained work is at least as great as when it started," he told the bishops.

Several bishops said they appreciated the materials the committee provided them and their dioceses and felt the work was important.

Another item the bishops unanimously approved was a limited revision of the 2007 statement "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship" and the draft of a new introductory note for it. The revision and draft will be presented for a vote by the U.S. bishops at their annual fall assembly in November.

The document has been issued before every presi-

dential election for almost four decades.

A note in the current introduction, revised in 2011, clarifies that the document "does not offer a voters' guide, scorecard of issues or direction on how to vote," but instead "applies Catholic moral principles to a range of important issues and warns against misguided appeals to 'conscience' to ignore fundamental moral claims, to reduce Catholic moral concerns to one or two matters, or to justify choices simply to advance partisan, ideological or personal interests."

### Focus on families

The bishops, by applause, showed their support of a letter to be signed by Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, to Pope Francis, inviting him to attend the World Meeting of Families in September 2015 in Philadelphia.

Read at the meeting by Archbishop Kurtz, the letter said the pope's presence would "add significance" to the gathering and "deepen the bonds of affection" many Catholics feel for the Holy Father.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, said the Philadelphia gathering was a key factor in promoting family life, which he said is currently in crisis.

Archbishop Kurtz spoke about the upcoming extraordinary synod on the family at the Vatican, noting that it will take its cue from responses given in surveys of Catholic families worldwide. He said while the responses remain confidential, one trend they indicate is Catholics' eagerness to respond to questions about family life; many have expressed a desire to hear more clear explanation of Church teaching about marriage and families.

He also said many parents indicated that they are "at a loss" for how to transmit the faith to their children and they also face challenges from today's economy, busy schedules and from living in a culture that they've described as being "hostile" to their faith.

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