

Mexican immigrant José Gómez elected head of US Catholic bishops group

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José Gómez (RNS/Jack Jenkins)

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has elected as its new president Archbishop José Gómez of Los Angeles, a naturalized US citizen who emigrated from Mexico and is outspoken on immigration issues.

Gómez, 67, was elected on November 12 by a landslide on the first ballot during the bishops' fall conference in Baltimore. The first Latino selected to hold the position, he received 176 votes, with some American bishops voting remotely from Rome. His closest competitor in the field of ten candidates received 18 votes.

When the results were announced, the room erupted in a standing ovation.

Gómez has been vice president of the USCCB under outgoing president Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Texas for the past three years.

Speaking at his first press conference as USCCB president-elect later in the day, Gómez said that immigration has been a frequent point of discussion by bishops in the past.

“We are constantly talking about immigration, and especially encouraging our elected officials to do something,” he said, “to come up with immigration reform that is reasonable and possible.”

“We have so many people that are our brothers and sisters in the United States that have an immigration situation,” he said. “Then we have the situation at the border, that is a tragedy.”

Asked about the Supreme Court’s review of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy, Gómez urged justices to protect immigrants who came to the country as children, or “Dreamers.”

“Obviously the Catholic bishops of the United States have been insisting to the elected officials that DACA, the approval of the presence of the Dreamers here in the United States, is very important—I think everybody agrees that it is a logical decision,” he said. “So we’re praying for the good result of the Supreme Court decision in favor of the possibility of the Dreamers to be in the United States, obviously, in a legal way.”

“I hope the symbolism is not missed by anybody that Bishop Gómez is an immigrant who has served this country well and might change, I hope, a few caricatures,” said Cardinal Joseph Tobin, archbishop of Newark, New Jersey, noting that Gómez’s archdiocese is the largest in the country. —Religion News Service