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Welcoming Remarks

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WILFRED R. CARON, ESQUIRE

GENERAL COUNSEL, UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Thank you very much George. I will be appropriately brief, but there are some thoughts I would like to share with you at this time. Apart from the delight and sense of privilege I felt when I was told that I could have the job, I soon found myself thinking most about my greatly increased capacity for scandal. The fact is that from this point forward, I, as you have been, will be far more identified as Catholic, not only in my parish and with my own friends, but in my work every day as I deal with Catholics and non-Catholics. So if I had any concern at all it was that I would not offer any disappointment to people as a Christian. With advocates and lawyers, it is easy to do because we are, as a necessary part of our work, advocates. We must contend, we must argue, we must fight, and the real question is can we do that and leave people still convinced that we believe what we say about being Christian. I would like, with your permission, to read the comments of two different men, one of whom is in the room. About a year-and-a-half ago, Father Charles Whelan, who is on the faculty of Fordham Law School and is a consultant to our office, and who, as you know, enjoys an excellent reputation as a lawyer and a priest, concluded his remarks to the bishops with two very significant sentences. The context was the general topic of church-state relations, and he closed his talk by saying, "[w]e must be sure, as witnesses to Christ, to let the warmth and love of the gospel, as well as its light shine through. The salvation of men, not the exemption of churches is the pearl of great price." I think that is an observation that we should always carry with us as we go about our work.

The other relatively short quote that I would like to leave with you for your reflection, and for my own, is the statement made by the Holy Father when he was in the United States last year. He said, "[l]ove is the power that gives rise to dialogue in which we listen to each other and learn from each other. Love gives rise above all to the dialogue of prayer in which we listen to God's word which is alive in the Holy Bible and alive in the life of the Holy Church. Let love then, build the bridges across our differences and at times our contrasting positions. Let love for each other and love for truth be the answer to polarization, when factions are formed because of differing views in matters that relate to faith or to the priorities for action." I read this because I know and you know that even in the Church, we often find that we are less than considerate and less than Christian in our behavior. And so, to return to my first thought, I hope that I can remember that while I want to do my best as a lawyer, I also want to do my best as a Catholic.

With respect to any commitments that I might make to you today, I feel I might mention three. One is to continue the very good service that

the office has rendered in the past. In that connection, you might wish to know the Law Briefs, which I believe you find helpful, will be increased, so that the information you get will be more timely. And further, we will attempt to find other ways to improve the availability of legal information and legal discussion. Secondly, I certainly expect that we will maintain the same level of excellence that has been attained in the past. And finally, I hope that we will continue to celebrate a Mass as a part of our annual meeting so that we can keep that dimension in mind as we discuss the law. And so with that, I do hope that you have a good 2 days, that you find the programs that were developed interesting and, for my own part, I say welcome to Washington. I hope that I will have the opportunity to meet each one of you.