



A participant holds a sign during a Jan. 25, 2025, interfaith rally in support of immigrants at Love Park in downtown Philadelphia. The event, organized by nonprofit New Sanctuary Movement, challenged city officials to push back on Trump administration policies that restrict immigration and include plans for mass deportations of unauthorized immigrants. (OSV News/Gina Christian)



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January 29, 2025

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The U.S. bishops' conference always reminds us that they are not partisan, but it is becoming harder and harder to believe the assertion.

Four years ago, the U.S. bishops' took great umbrage at the prospect of a Catholic president who did not support the church's opposition to legal abortion. They formed a [working group](#) to study whether or not President Joe Biden should be denied Communion. The president of the conference at the time, Archbishop José Gomez, issued a churlish [statement](#) on the day of Biden's inauguration.

"I must point out that our new President has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity, most seriously in the areas of abortion, contraception, marriage, and gender," Gomez said. "Of deep concern is the liberty of the church and the freedom of believers to live according to their consciences."

The statement was issued without the usual consultation of other bishops, and was so poorly done, Cardinal Blase Cupich of Chicago took the rare step of [publicly distancing](#) himself from it, and labeling it "ill-considered."

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Now, the president of the U.S. bishops' conference, Archbishop Timothy Broglio, issued a tepid [statement](#) questioning President Donald Trump's executive orders as they pertain to a host of issues. He said some of the executive orders "are deeply troubling and will have negative consequences, many of which will harm the most vulnerable among us." Nothing there as churlish as what Gomez had said about Biden.

One of Trump's policy directives gave federal agents authorization to enter churches to arrest undocumented migrants. How does that not threaten the "liberty of the church" they were worried about four years ago? Is not the prospect of deporting millions of people a "moral evil?"

The nation's Catholic vice president, JD Vance, has now given the bishops another reason to challenge the administration. [Appearing](#) on CBS News' "Face the Nation," Vance not only failed to address the concerns raised in Broglio's statement, he cast aspersions on the bishops' motives.

"Because as a practicing Catholic, I was actually heartbroken by [the bishops'] statement," Vance said. "I think that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops needs to actually look in the mirror a little bit and recognize that when they receive over \$100 million to help resettle illegal immigrants, are they worried about humanitarian concerns? Or are they actually worried about their bottom line?"

Ah, yes, those money-grubbing bishops. Helping immigrants not because we Catholics feel bound by the explicit dictates of Scripture — "You shall not oppress or afflict a resident alien, for you were once aliens residing in the land of Egypt" (Ex 22:20) and "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). No, according to the veep, the bishops are trying to pad their coffers. The suggestion is as obscene as it is ridiculous.



U.S. Vice President JD Vance walks from Air Force Two as he arrives at Tri-Cities Airport Jan. 27, 2025, in Blountville, Tennessee. (Pool via Reuters/Ben Curtis)

The bishops' response to this insult? An unsigned [statement](#) pointing out that the bishops do not even break even on their programs of assistance to migrants. Yeesh.

To be fair, statements from Bishop Mark Seitz, who chairs the migration committee, have been well crafted and powerful, highlighting the human tragedy that is unfolding and the distortions that make that tragedy possible.

Vance not only misunderstands Catholic teaching. He misunderstands American history and society. Alexis de Tocqueville noted the essential role played by churches and other voluntary associations in American society. They provided social services and built a sense of community then, as they do today, holding a society built on individual freedom from coming apart at the seams. To be sure, in de Tocqueville's day, there was no federal funding: There was yet no income tax and the complexities of urban poverty were in the nation's future. But Americans have always looked to churches to provide aid to the unfortunate.

There is one other commonality between today and de Tocqueville's time, one our new Catholic vice president should consider. In the antebellum era, anti-Catholicism was fierce and it was wedded to nativist, anti-immigrant tropes. The anti-immigrant venom Vance displayed is directed mostly at his co-religionists. Trump and Vance have reignited the hatreds of the Know-Nothings first set.

In any event, what matters in this moment is not what the bishops say or don't say, even Episcopalian bishops. What matters is that the Catholic Church protects its people, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who may be awaiting an asylum hearing or who overstayed their visa because returning to their home country would have put their lives at risk. We do not need statements, we need lawyers.

[Read this next: Editorial: JD Vance aims vulgar, undeserved cynicism at bishops over immigration](#)

[CLINIC](#), the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, which provides immigration lawyers for those making their way through our nation's broken immigration system, has been doing heroic work for decades. Now, they could be stretched to the limit. Dioceses should consider taking up a second collection to help CLINIC train

additional lawyers to assist those detained in these raids at their first hearing. Once the person detained is in front of a judge, there is a co-equal branch of the government involved, and the person has a much better shot at getting justice.

In November, Dara Lind of the National Immigration Council, discussed what to do and not do regarding Trump's draconian immigration policies in an op-ed in The New York Times. Lind [pointed out](#) that "deportation isn't a quick process." And she warned those who care about justice for migrants that "resigning oneself in advance to a maximalist vision of mass deportation helps accomplish the same goal: making immigrants feel they have no choice but to leave the United States." Resistance in the form of a cadre of lawyers is more important than rhetoric.

The fact that bishops' statements don't matter doesn't let Vance off the hook. His suggestion that the bishops were motivated by lucre is ironic in an administration where lucre usually counts a great deal. Saying the bishops only care about migrants because of the federal funding they receive is no different from saying the bishops' commitment to the defense of unborn life is a product of misogyny. It is unfair, and it diverts from the justice of the cause.

Should there be a committee set up to consider denying Vance Communion? Of course not. He is wrong and, just so, in need of the healing grace Communion provides. But someone who cares about the man's soul should pull him aside and acquaint him with the teaching of the magisterium about the respect and dignity we are called to show to all people, including migrants. And remind him that American society has always relied on churches to come to the aid of those in need.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)