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Vice President J.D. Vance speaks with "Face the Nation" host Margaret Brennan on CBS. (Video screen grab)



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Vice President JD Vance has done what the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops have been incapable of doing: He has made their position on migrants and refugees national news.

I have not seen such a fortuitous political blunder since General Alexander Haig, the Catholic chief of staff to President Nixon, attacked the bishops for their pastoral letter on peace, which brought it to national attention.

Thank you, Mr. Vice President!

[Related: Bishops condemn Trump's immigration orders for stoking fear, anxiety](#)

In an interview on "[Face the Nation](#)," Vance expressed disappointment as a Catholic that the U.S. Catholic bishops are not supporting the new administration's actions against migrants and refugees. He said the bishops' support for refugees was motivated by their desire to get money from federal programs aimed at helping refugees.

"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? We're going to enforce immigration law. We're going to protect the American people," Vance told host Margaret Brennan, before going on to imply that the bishops did not care about children being trafficked for sex.

"I believe the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, if they're worried about the humanitarian costs of immigration enforcement, let them talk about the children who have been sex trafficked because of the wide open border of Joe Biden," he said.

Within the day, the [bishops released a statement saying](#) that federal funds do not cover the full costs of their programs helping refugees, let alone show a profit.

Thanks to the vice president, the national press may finally realize the Catholic bishops care about something other than abortion.

In the past, when Democrats were in the White House, a favorite religion story was the conflict over abortion between the U.S. Catholic bishops and the Democratic administration.

Ignored were all the areas where the bishops agree with or are more liberal than Democratic politicians, such as on expanding health care, education, housing and social services to help the poor and marginalized.

For example, the bishops support universal health care, even for migrants in the U.S. without legal status. No Democratic politician would say this.

The fights over abortion led many Americans, including reporters, to see the Catholic bishops as partisan advocates for Republicans like so many evangelical ministers. But the Catholic bishops advocate on a wide range of public policies and do not endorse political candidates or parties.

True, some bishops say abortion is the only issue that should guide Catholic voters, but that has never been the position of the Vatican or of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Most bishops avoid the appearance of endorsing parties or candidates.

The next four years are going to be a rocky time between the Catholic bishops and the Trump administration. Now that Trump has made the Republican Party supportive of abortion rights, there is no reason for the bishops not to take off the gloves in advocating for the poor and marginalized.

There is not much new in what the bishops are saying. They said it during the last Trump administration, but perhaps now, thanks to the vice president, more people will pay attention.

In truth, the bishops were very critical of Trump on refugees and migrants during his first term in office.

[As I have reported in the past](#), in press releases on immigrants and refugees, the bishops forcefully attacked the administration's policies as "misguided and untenable," "unacceptable," "appalling," "devastating," "very concerning," "heartbreaking," "unlawful and inhumane," "terrible," "callous," "disturbing" and "contrary to American and Christian values."

They consistently argued that migrants and refugees should be welcomed and treated with compassion and that the administration's actions had "created a climate of fear in our parishes and communities across the country."

But these press releases got little coverage in the national media because they went against the narrative that the bishops are Republicans. Thanks to the vice president, that narrative might change.

The bishops held their fire immediately after the 2024 election, waiting to see what Trump would do. While they cheered the executive orders on gender and [defunding abortion abroad](#), they criticized Trump's actions on migrants and refugees.

Even before the executive orders were issued, the [conference's spokesperson](#) said, "The Catholic Church's foundational teaching calls us to uphold the sacredness of human life and the God-given dignity of the human person. This means that the care for immigrants, refugees, and the poor is part of the same teaching of the Church that requires us to protect the most vulnerable among us, especially unborn children, the elderly and the infirm."

After the orders were issued, the bishops sent out their big gun, their president, [Archbishop Timothy Broglio](#), who stated, "Some provisions contained in the Executive Orders, such as those focused on the treatment of immigrants and refugees, foreign aid, expansion of the death penalty, and the environment, are deeply troubling and will have negative consequences, many of which will harm the most vulnerable among us."

He prayed that our nation "demonstrate a genuine care for our most vulnerable sisters and brothers, including the unborn, the poor, the elderly and infirm, and migrants and refugees."

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Broglia was quickly followed by [Bishop Mark Seitz](#) of El Paso, chairman of the conference's Committee on Migration, who on Jan. 22 condemned "the use of sweeping generalizations to denigrate any group, such as describing all undocumented immigrants as 'criminals' or 'invaders,' to deprive them of protection under the law, is an affront to God, who has created each of us in his own image."

He supported anti-trafficking but noted that "several of the executive orders signed by President Trump this week are specifically intended to eviscerate humanitarian protections enshrined in federal law and undermine due process, subjecting vulnerable families and children to grave danger."

He also expressed concern about "the open-ended deployment of military assets to support civil immigration enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border."

Rather than weakening gangs, "preventing any access to asylum and other protections will only endanger those who are most vulnerable and deserving of relief, while empowering gangs and other predators to exploit them," said the bishop.

He affirmed that "halting refugee resettlement is unmerited, as it is already proven to be one of the most secure legal pathways to the United States."

The following day, Seitz was joined by the heads of the Catholic Health Association and Catholic Charities USA in [objecting to Trump's executive order](#) lifting restrictions on immigration enforcement in "protected areas" such as churches, schools and hospitals.

"Non-emergency immigration enforcement in schools, places of worship, social service agencies, healthcare facilities, or other sensitive settings where people receive essential services would be contrary to the common good," said these Catholic leaders. "With the mere rescission of the protected areas guidance, we are already witnessing reticence among immigrants to engage in daily life, including sending children to school and attending religious services."

"All people have a right to fulfill their duty to God without fear," they said. "Turning places of care, healing, and solace into places of fear and uncertainty for those in need, while endangering the trust between pastors, providers, educators and the people they serve, will not make our communities safer."

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