

Vance spars with US bishops over their pushback on Trump's immigration policy

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January 27, 2025



U.S. Vice President JD Vance speaks during the swearing in ceremony of CIA Director John Ratcliffe Jan. 23, 2025. In an interview on Face the Nation Jan. 26, Vance criticized USCCB's response to Trump's executive orders on immigration. (OSV News photo/Nathan Howard, Reuters)



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By [Maria Wiering](#)
OSV News

Vice President JD Vance questioned the motives of the U.S. bishops' criticism of President Donald Trump's new immigration policies in a Jan. 26 interview — including raids on churches and schools — asking if they are actually concerned about receiving federal resettlement funding and “their bottom line.”

“I think the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has, frankly, not been a good partner in commonsense immigration enforcement that the American people voted for, and I hope, again, as a devout Catholic, that they’ll do better,” Vance said on CBS’s “Face the Nation.”

In Vance’s first interview since becoming vice president, host Margaret Brennan noted that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops “condemned” Trump’s immigration-related executive orders, and asked Vance, “Do you personally support the idea of conducting a raid or enforcement action in a church service, at a school?”

“Of course, if you have a person who is convicted of a violent crime, whether they’re an illegal immigrant or a non-illegal immigrant, you have to go and get that person to protect the public safety. That’s not unique to immigration,” he said.



U.S. Vice President JD Vance speaks during the 52nd annual March for Life rally in Washington Jan. 24, 2025. In an interview on Face the Nation Jan. 26, Vance criticized USCCB's response to Trump's executive orders on immigration. (OSV News photo/Bob Roller).

“But let me just address this particular issue,” he continued. “Because as a practicing Catholic, I was actually heartbroken by that statement. And 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."

The USCCB is one of 10 national resettlement agencies that receive federal funding and partner with local organizations to assist refugee populations that qualify for federal assistance. Those populations include people resettled via the U.S. refugee admissions program, certain groups of vulnerable noncitizen children, and certain other groups such as victims of human trafficking and torture.

Vance said that if the USCCB is "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 ... who are brutally murdered. I support us doing law enforcement against violent criminals, whether they're illegal immigrants or anybody else, in a way that keeps us safe."

Vance said that Trump's change to federal regulation allowing law enforcement to go into schools and churches "empowered law enforcement to enforce the law everywhere, to protect Americans."

The Trump administration announced Jan. 21 it would rescind a long-standing policy preventing Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents from making arrests at what are seen as sensitive locations, including houses of worship, schools and hospitals under most conditions. However, the previous policy had exceptions that allowed ICE arrests for national security or terror issues, the arrest of dangerous felons, and other special criminal considerations.

When Brennan suggested that such a change has "a chilling effect ... to people to not send their kids to school," Vance replied, "I desperately hope it has a chilling effect ... on illegal immigrants coming into our country."

Brennan asked Vance whether he thought the USCCB is "actively hiding criminals from law enforcement?" Vance did not answer the question directly, but said the USCCB has "not been a good partner in commonsense immigration enforcement that the American people voted for."

In a statement Jan. 26 regarding its work with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program, which did not name Vance, the USCCB said, "Faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Catholic Church has a long history of serving refugees."

"In 1980, the bishops of the United States began partnering with the federal government to carry out this service when Congress created the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP)," the statement said. "Every person resettled through USRAP is vetted and approved for the program by the federal government while outside of the United States. In

our agreements with the government, the USCCB receives funds to do this work; however, these funds are not sufficient to cover the entire cost of these programs. Nonetheless, this remains a work of mercy and ministry of the Church.”

While the funds the USCCB receives are limited to assistance for qualifying refugee populations, and therefore immigrants in the U.S. lawfully, Vance’s accusation that the funds are used to “resettle illegal immigrants” appears to mirror previous rhetoric he used. While campaigning, Vance indicated that he does not recognize the legal status of certain immigrant groups the Biden administration deemed eligible to receive temporary protected status, or TPS.

However, TPS recipients are not eligible for the federal funding received by the USCCB for refugee resettlement. Other immigrant populations not eligible for federal assistance received by the USCCB include migrants seeking asylum, humanitarian parolees, employment-based immigrants, family-based immigrants, DACA recipients, and people who are stateless.

Immigration was one of an array of issues Brennan covered with Vance six days after he and Trump took the oath of office. Trump’s first week included a flurry of executive orders, several of which fulfilled campaign promises to deter illegal immigration and deport undocumented immigrants living in the United States.

Ahead of Inauguration Day, Catholic bishops and other leaders expressed concerns about Trump’s plans to allow immigration enforcement access to sensitive locations. On Jan. 22, USCCB president Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services said in a statement that some of Trump’s executive orders, including those related to immigration, “are deeply troubling and will have negative consequences, many of which will harm the most vulnerable among us.”

In a separate Jan. 22 statement, Bishop Mark J. Seitz of El Paso, Texas, chairman of the USCCB’s Committee on Migration, specifically addressed Trump’s orders on immigration.

“The Catholic Church is committed to defending the sanctity of every human life and the God-given dignity of each person, regardless of nationality or immigration status. Church teaching recognizes a country’s right and responsibility to promote public order, safety, and security through well-regulated borders and just limits on immigration,” he said.

“However, as shepherds, we cannot abide injustice, and we stress that national self-interest does not justify policies with consequences that are contrary to the moral law,” he continued. “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.”

Bishop Seitz said that he welcomed Trump's "emphasis on anti-trafficking," but that the president's executive orders "are specifically intended to eviscerate humanitarian protections enshrined in federal law and undermine due process, subjecting vulnerable families and children to grave danger."

"We urge President Trump to pivot from these enforcement-only policies to just and merciful solutions, working in good faith with members of Congress to achieve meaningful, bipartisan immigration reform that furthers the common good with an effective, orderly immigration system," Bishop Seitz said. "My brother bishops and I will support this in any way we can, while continuing to accompany our immigrant brothers and sisters in accordance with the Gospel of Life."

Bishop Seitz also co-signed a Jan. 23 statement with Sister Mary Haddad, a member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and president and CEO of Catholic Health Association of the United States, and Kerry Alys Robinson, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA, decrying Trump's orders allowing immigration arrests in "sensitive locations."

"We recognize the need for just immigration enforcement and affirm the government's obligation to carry it out in a targeted, proportional, and humane way," they said. "However, 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."

According to the USCCB, its Migration and Refugee Services "is the largest refugee resettlement agency in the world." Audited financial statements show that the USCCB received about \$122.6 million in 2022 and about \$129.6 million in 2023 in funding from government agencies for refugee-related services. The group's website states that, in partnership with its affiliates, "the United States Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services department resettles approximately 18% of the refugees that arrive in the U.S. each year."

The financial statements explain that since 1975, the USCCB has entered into agreements with the U.S. government to assist refugee resettlement and "and to provide specialized services to particularly vulnerable migrants, such as unaccompanied minors and victims of human trafficking." The funds are particularly provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. State Department under the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Contributing to this story was Kate Scanlon, OSV News national reporter covering Washington.

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