News



U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops Facebook wall, Sept. 7, 2017



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Updated Sept. 8, 11:05 a.m. CT, with comments from New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan

Calling it "preposterous," "outrageous" and "insulting," the U.S. bishops responded quickly to former White House chief strategist Steve Bannon's allegation that the Catholic Church supports immigration because it "needs illegal aliens to fill the churches."

Bannon made the comments as part of an interview with CBS's news show "60 Minutes," which will air Sunday, Sept. 10. Bannon said the church's support of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) comes from economic interests and is "not doctrine."

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops responded with a statement on "Care for Migrants and Refugees" shared on Facebook and Twitter today by James Rogers, chief communications officer.

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"This isn't Catholic partisanship," the statement said. "The Bible is clear: welcoming immigrants is indispensable to our faith."

Quoting Genesis, Leviticus and Matthew 25, the bishops' statement argued that their support of immigration is rooted in the Gospel. "Our pro-immigration stance is based on fidelity to God's word and honors the American dream," it says. "For anyone to suggest that it is out of sordid motives of statistics or financial gain is outrageous and insulting."

"Caring about and for the 'Dreamers' is nothing more than trying to carry out that seemingly simple, but ultimately incredibly demanding, commandment," the statement said.

"We are called not to partisanship or politics, but to love our neighbor."

Comments on the conference's Facebook post included some in support of the bishops' response, while others insisted that the church's catechism supported adherence to the law.

New York Cardinal Timothy Dolan also responded to Bannon's accusations during an interview Sept. 7 on SiriusXM's The Catholic Channel, saying he was initially "befuddled" by the news and calling it "insulting" and "so ridiculous that it doesn't

merit a comment."

Yet Dolan noted that, in addition to being a political issue, treatment of immigrants is also a moral one that bishops have a responsibility to address. Bannon "may be right that this is not an issue of Catholic doctrine," Dolan told the Catholic Channel, "because it comes from the Bible itself, and we Catholics are people of the book."

Scripture clearly gives "a moral imperative to treat the immigrant with dignity and respect that we have a sacred duty to preach," he said. "I'm glad we bishops have risen to the occasion with such unanimity and enthusiasm. You would expect nothing less."

However, the government has the right to address "legitimate questions of national security and safe borders," Dolan said. "The way we do that is extraordinarily important. If we do that in a disrespectful, racial or insensitive way, we've got a problem in that we're risking disobeying the clear teaching of the Bible."

Dolan also praised the church for reflecting the "magnificent ethnic diversity of God's children," adding that, "The Catholic Church means everybody."

"It beats in the heart of every Catholic to know that his or her parents, grandparents [or] great-grandparents once came here as immigrants," he said. "That memory is vibrant in the Catholic psyche and that gives us an added solicitude, a more enhanced sense of justice and advocacy on the part of the immigrant."

[Heidi Schlumpf is NCR national correspondent. Follow her on Twitter @HeidiSchlumpf.]