News



Republican vice presidential candidate Sen. JD Vance, R-Ohio, center, is introduced during the first day of the Republican National Convention on July 15 in Milwaukee. (AP/J. Scott Applewhite)



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The news that Donald Trump had selected J.D. Vance as his running mate was greeted with enthusiasm at the Republican National Convention, although many delegates were not familiar with his faith background as an adult convert to Catholicism.

"It's just hard not to like the guy," said Rick Rathfon of Shippenville, Pennsylvania. "He's a nice young man, and looking ahead, he would be a great nominee in 2028. He's a young, vibrant guy that I think could do a great job of leading our party forward."

Rathfon, chair of the Clarion County Republican Committee, did not know that Vance is Catholic but he said Christian values are important to him. "We need to get back to that in this country," he said. "We need the Bible back in schools. We need God back in schools."

Vance, the junior senator from Ohio and author of the best-selling *Hillbilly Elegy*, was introduced at the convention July 15, where he walked in to Merle Haggard's "America First."

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A former staunch critic of Trump, Vance has only a year and half of political experience. If elected, he would be the second Catholic vice president in U.S. history. The first is President Joe Biden, who served two terms as VP before being elected as the second Catholic to serve as president.

Although he has opposed abortion, Vance recently told "Meet the Press" that he supports the abortion pill mifepristone "being accessible" after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against pro-life advocates who sued to end its Food and Drug Administration approval.

Vance has also called for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants, which the U.S. bishops' conference opposes.

In Milwaukee's Fiserv Forum, Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted called Vance "a living embodiment of the American dream" who will "faithfully stand by President Donald Trump's side as they win this election."

Speaking to NCR from the convention floor, Kathy Broghammer of Mequon, Wisconsin said she didn't know the details of Vance's Catholicism, but she liked that he has faith and that he is humble. "They say he's a person who has never changed who he is. Maybe that's one of the reasons I like him," said the substitute teacher at a Catholic school.

Brian Yanoviak of Chester County, Pennsylvania, also did not know about Vance's religious background but said "faith is a very important part of people that I vote for."

Yanoviak also believes that Trump's survival of the assassination attempt last weekend was "an act of God." He added, "There was some providence there."

Tony Schroeder, who lives in Ohio's heavily Catholic Putnam County, called Vance "a man of the people" and "a man of faith."

"He understands what people of faith want to see in a political leader," he told NCR. "I admire him greatly. I think he's going to be a fantastic vice president and I think he's going to win."

Although the issue of abortion is important to Schroder, he said he was "comfortable" with Vance's recent comments in support of the abortion pill.

"I know his heart and what side of the argument he is on with that, and the same way with President Trump," Schroeder said. "What we wind up with in national elections is a binary choice. [Trump and Vance] are by far the best choice for faithful Catholics."

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Anti-abortion activist Frank Pavone, the director of Priests for Life who was dismissed from the priesthood in 2022 for engaging in partisan political advocacy inconsistent with his role as a member of the Catholic clergy, told NCR he was attending the convention with the Florida delegation.

He said he was "not disturbed" by Vance's comments about the abortion pill. "The Supreme Court is not finished with that case, so I think this is the normal response we should expect from politicians at this point, especially on the national level," he said.

Pavone, said he was "happy with the choice" of Vance — not just because he's a Catholic, but because he will be able to continue, after Trump, policy issues that the church supports. Those include "a strong and safe country, first of all respect for freedom and life and religion and the rights of the church."

Pavone spoke with NCR at a prayer chapel in the Baird Center, next to the Fiserv Forum, which was hosting Catholic prayer services twice a day. On the first day, the late afternoon service had not attracted any attendees.

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