News



Pictured in the top row, from left to right, are Cardinal Blase Cupich; Cardinal Joseph Tobin; and Bishop John Dolan. Pictured, bottom row, from left, are Bishop Daniel Flores; Archbishop Nelson Pérez; Archbishop-designate Joe Vásquez; and Archbishop John Wester (OSV News/CNS files; Bob Roller; CNS/Robert Duncan; Courtesy of Philadelphia Archdiocese; CNS/Bob Roller; Courtesy of Santa Fe Archdiocese/Leslie Radigan)



by Heidi Schlumpf

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A group of U.S. bishops, including two cardinals, will lead a nine-day Lenten prayer service for migrants and refugees in an online series sponsored by the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

The "National Novena for Migrants and Immigrants" will be held over nine days, March 14-22, overlapping with the feasts of St. Patrick and St. Joseph, which are traditionally marked by Irish, Italian and Polish immigrants in the United States. Scripture tells how Joseph led the refugee Holy Family to Egypt. Patrick, according to tradition, was trafficked as a slave to Ireland.

"Both Patrick and Joseph not only call attention to the American immigrants, they are stories that help us think about the situation of migrants and immigrants today," said Stephen Millies, executive director of Catholic Theological Union's Bernardin Center, which is organizing the novena.

Seven bishops have confirmed their participation: Cardinals Blase Cupich of Chicago and Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey; Archbishops Nelson Pérez of Philadelphia and John Wester of Santa Fe, New Mexico; Archbishop-designate Joe Vásquez of Galveston-Houston; Auxiliary Bishop Robert Lombardo of Chicago* and Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas.

The 15-minute prayer services will begin at noon Central time, over Zoom. Worship aids will be available in Spanish and English. Also included will be information about Catholic ministries serving migrants and immigrants.



People pray together as a group of mostly Venezuelan migrants camp on the tennis courts of a community center after losing access to another shelter, April 3, 2024, in Seattle. A group of U.S. bishops, including two cardinals, will lead a nine-day Lenten prayer service for migrants and refugees. (OSV News/Reuters/David Ryder)

While the event is in response to threats to migrants since the beginning of Donald Trump's presidency, the services will not be partisan, Millies said. "The point is effective solidarity through prayer."

"There are always vulnerable people who have suffered something so terrible that they would take their children and few possessions and walk from one country to another," he said. "In this climate, we want to remind people about the dignity of migrants and immigrants and the Christian duty to welcome the stranger."

Several of the participating bishops have spoken out about the administration's plans for mass deportation of undocumented immigrants. Even before Trump's inauguration, Cupich released a statement in which he acknowledged the country's right to defend its borders but noted Chicago's legacy of immigration. He also

responded to Vice President JD Vance's assertion that church leaders' concerns about Trump's immigration policy are motivated by financial concerns, citing audits that show the money is spent on services.

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"The truth matters, and that is why I feel it is important to set the record straight," Cupich said in a second statement. "No one who serves those in need has any interest in getting into a back and forth with public figures who make demonstrably false statements about why the church serves. They are too busy feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving shelter to the homeless."

Tobin expressed his concerns about Trump's immigration policies at a January interfaith gathering, while Wester said mass deportation was not the answer, and called open and sealed borders "overly simplistic" solutions. Dolan, as part of an op-ed with other Arizona faith leaders, protested the elimination of so-called "sensitive" spaces, including churches, as safe from raids.

"We find it unacceptable that undocumented persons might be intimidated from going to a church and thereby exercising their right to the practice of religion," the Arizona faith leaders said.

Those interested in attending the online novena can register here.

**This story has been updated as one of bishops originally scheduled to lead the novena had a scheduling conflict.*

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** and **Lent 2025** feature series.