Opinion
Editorial



A protester stands outside the migrant detention facility dubbed "Alligator Alcatraz" at the Dade-Collier Training and Transition Facility, July 12, 2025, in Ochopee, Flordia. (AP photo/Alexandra Rodriguez)

by NCR Editorial Staff

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"Alligator Alcatraz" has the alliterative zip of a good marketing campaign. Almost whimsical enough to distract from its essence: a name rooted in an island hellhole representative of human isolation, despair and hopelessness.

The tropical "Alcatraz" is much worse. Many of its inhabitants haven't been allowed the legal niceties of due process. Some of them were simply removed from society while attempting to obey U.S. laws or show up for routine check-ins. A Miami Herald-Tampa Bay Times review of a snapshot of government records concluded that the information "suggests that scores of migrants without criminal records have been targeted in the state and federal dragnet to catch and deport immigrants living illegally in Florida."

A third of the detainees have criminal convictions — with charges ranging from attempted murder to illegal re-entry to traffic violations — and hundreds of others only have pending charges. Most are guilty of little more than traffic violations or entering the country illegally; the Tampa Bay Times and the Miami Herald reported that more than 250 people are listed as having only immigration violations but no criminal convictions or pending charges in the United States

Some have been here for years, and have jobs or families, and likely are faithful participants in their religion — one lawsuit alleges that "officers have confiscated religious materials from detainees, including Bibles." Many have done nothing worse than attempt to escape this kind of cruelty in their own homelands.



Work progresses on the migrant detention facility dubbed "Alligator Alcatraz," at Dade-Collier Training and Transition facility in the Florida Everglades, July 4, 2025, in Ochopee, Florida. (AP photo/Rebecca Blackwell)

"Alligator Alcatraz" is a catchy name for an American concentration camp deep in the Florida Everglades.

The name will likely carry on in history as shorthand for President Donald Trump's unmitigated and escalating cruelty. We live in an era in search of an alternative narrative, one of compassion and love. It is reasonable to expect that alternative from our religious leaders. But the chorus of opposition so far is timid and thin, limited in the Catholic world to a few weak voices that barely make it through the din of hate-filled rhetoric and bands of masked government-sponsored thugs.

"Alligator Alcatraz" is a tent village of cages into which humans are stuffed — and out of which humans are expelled, hustled onto planes and flown to other countries or other detention centers. "Alligator Alcatraz" is not an anomaly, it's just the one with the catchiest name. The federal government intends to spend vast sums — $45

billion in the big, shameful bill — to build more Alcatrazes. We send people to cages within our borders or ship them off to far-away torture centers and war-torn countries like South Sudan, where they will be newly alien and vulnerable. We have become an ugly repudiation of our highest ideals. The shining city on a hill is tarnished.



Protesters flank an entrance road at a temporary migrant detention center nicknamed "Alligator Alcatraz" in Ochopee, Florida, July 1, 2025, the day U.S. President Donald Trump visited the facility. (OSV News/Reuters/Octavio Jones)

We're not told who those humans are who are yanked out of homes and workplaces, chased down onto Catholic church grounds, snatched from day-labor gathering spots, farm fields, slaughterhouses and factories. We don't know if they've been afforded the rights to which humans are entitled. We don't know if they were here legally, under special provisions, or going through established processes upended by masked and unidentified ICE agents. Accountability is absent in this unforgiving system.

Civil rights advocates say that lawyers have not been able to visit detainees, and we know that religious leaders have been unable to minister to the incarcerated, a particular irony as bishops and ministers cozy up to Trump on things such as his phony domestic religious liberty commission.

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Conditions inside the mosquito-infested cages are inhumane, according to detainee accounts. Those overseeing the concentration camp in Florida refused to allow a congressional delegation to view the space where the incarcerated are being held.

Flights recently began to leave the Florida facility, headed either for other federal installations or for other countries. According to The New York Times, at a recent news conference GOP Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis did not specify where nearly 100 deported detainees had been taken.

In addition to being cruel, this indiscriminate mass deportation is also monumentally illogical and self-defeating. For example, an Omaha meatpacking company's production plummeted by about 70% after federal agents conducted a raid and removed most of the workforce, The New York Times reported. Owner Gary Rohwer, a registered Republican, voted for a Democrat for the first time in 2024 in part because Trump's depictions of immigrants didn't reflect "the employees he'd known for decades as 'salt-of-the-earth, incredible people who helped build this company.' "

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Like his predecessors, Pope Leo XIV recently described immigrants as signs of hope.

"In a world darkened by war and injustice, even when all seems lost, migrants and refugees stand as messengers of hope," Leo said in a letter. "Their courage and tenacity bear heroic testimony to a faith that sees beyond what our eyes can see and gives them the strength to defy death on the various contemporary migration routes."

Immigrants among us are being turned instead into figures of despair in a pageant of cruelty. What is occurring in our midst is far beyond the bounds of anything that might be considered immigration reform or protection of our borders. It is the consequence of state-sponsored vengeance motivated by falsehoods and fear

mongering.



Motorcycles ridden by Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski and Knights on Bikes are parked in front of the entrance to Alligator Alcatraz, a controversial immigration detention facility some 55 miles from Miami in the Florida Everglades. The archbishop and his fellow bikers stopped to pray a rosary for detainees July 20, 2025. (OSV News/Thomas G. Wenski)

We are grateful for those few bishops and cardinals who have made statements opposing mass deportations. We're grateful for the few who have walked with protesters to Immigration and Customs Enforcement facilities or protested being unable to minister to those in our newly erected concentration camps.

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But where is the bishops' conference that raised funds for a lavish $14 million Eucharistic Congress, complete with a convention hall of vendors selling tchotchkes to profit from the body of Christ? Is the Eucharist simply a private matter excusing us from engaging the world's cruelty? Or does our participation in the Eucharist confer on us the responsibility to act on behalf of the vulnerable being swept up in raids and families being ripped apart?

Where is the episcopal outrage and the concomitant resources that we see poured into combating abortion? Does our concern for life end at the birth canal? Does the Catholic hierarchy only care about immigrants who are in utero?

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Imagine the sobering effect on our politicians if the same thousands transported in for right-to-life marches showed up demanding that they protect the dignity and lives of immigrants. Where is the letter from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to be read at every Mass decrying the treatment of our migrant brothers and sisters? Where are the church-funded lobbyists cajoling legislators and bankrolling campaigns at the state and federal levels to protect those being unjustly and often illegally hauled off to vermin-infested torture camps and a future of fear and uncertainty?

Where are the harsh words for politicians — especially the prominent Holy Eucharist-receiving Catholics among them — spreading falsehoods that spawn hatred and fear?

Indiscriminate mass deportation that upends the rule of law and reduces people to trauma victims in a politically motivated drama is anti-Christian. It is contrary to Catholic social teaching that is rooted in the heart of our Gospels. It is evidence of Satan in our midst.

As citizens we risk being judged complicit in the cruel and inhumane conduct of agents of the state acting in our name.

As the people of God, we risk history's judgment that will ask what the church did during this era of indiscriminate cruelty.

Related: Catholic moms plead with their bishops to speak out on migrant detention
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