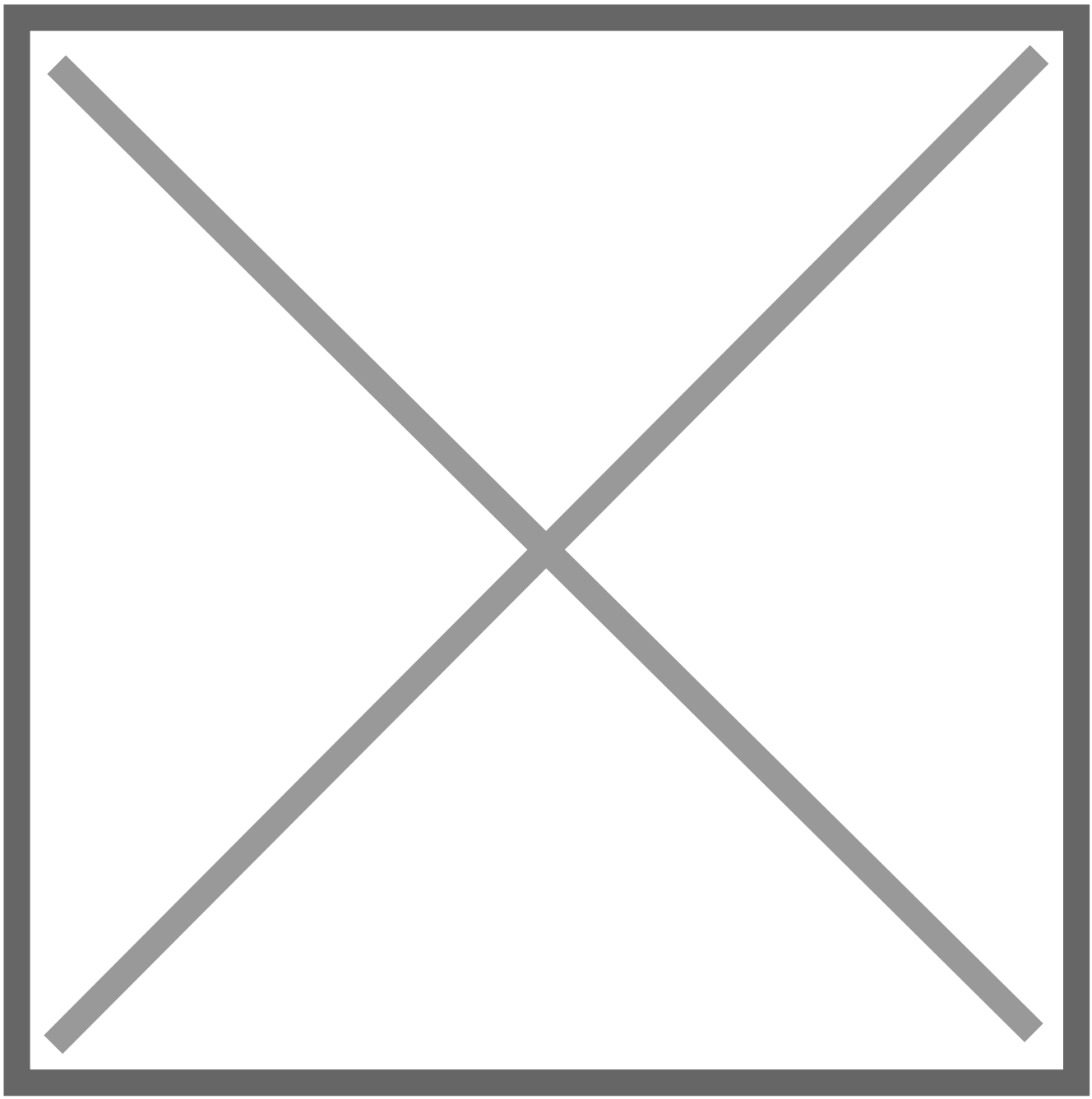
News



Bishop Kevin Sweeney of Paterson, N.J., is seen participating in the Via Crucis, or the Way of the Cross, near the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Paterson on Good Friday, April 7, 2023. The Paterson Diocese and five of its diocesan priests announced Oct. 31, 2025, they were ending their lawsuit filed against federal agencies in the U.S. District Court in Newark, N.J., after reaching a deal over religious worker visas for foreign-born priests. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)

Gina Christian

View Author Profile



OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Newark, N.J. — November 3, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Attorneys for the Diocese of Paterson, New Jersey, have moved to voluntarily dismiss a lawsuit they had filed against the federal government regarding visas for religious workers — a case that highlights the perfect storm created by the nation's shifting immigration policies and the increased reliance on international clergy by the Catholic Church in the United States amid a downturn in domestic vocations to the priesthood.

In an Oct. 31 email, Raymond Lahoud, the lawyer representing the diocese, provided OSV News with a copy of the notice, which was filed the same day in U.S. District Court for the District of New Jersey.

The notice said that the plaintiffs — the diocese along with five of its foreign-born priests — sought to "voluntarily dismiss this matter to allow for Agency action and/or rulemaking that will render moot the relief Plaintiffs sought from the Court."

In his email to OSV News, Lahoud said, "We reached a deal that impacts the entire country," advising he would provide more information "as soon as I am permitted."

The Diocese of Paterson filed its suit Aug. 8, 2024, against the U.S. State Department, the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, along with their respective heads at the time under the Biden

Administration.

Advertisement

The suit alleged that the agencies and their leaders have placed the priests in the position of having to "count the days until they have no lawful choice but to abandon their congregations" in the U.S.

At issue was what the diocese's legal counsel described in an Aug. 16, 2024, statement as an unlawful and unconstitutional alteration of how visa availability is calculated for certain noncitizens, which creates "profound immigration delays for noncitizen religious workers."

In a subsequent update to OSV News, Lahoud had said the diocese was hoping proposed legislation regarding religious worker visas would resolve their lawsuit. The Senate's and House's respective and identical "Religious Workforce Protection Act" bills, introduced in early April, would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to authorize "the continuation of lawful nonimmigrant status for certain religious workers affected by the backlog for religious worker immigrant visas," Lahoud wrote at the time.

Neither piece of proposed legislation has moved forward since.

Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso, Texas, who chairs the USCCB's Committee on Migration, said during the U.S. bishops' spring 2024 plenary assembly in Louisville, Kentucky that the religious worker visa issue "is only expected to worsen with time, if not addressed" — especially since close to 90% of the nation's Catholic dioceses rely on foreign-born clergy and religious.

"This is simply not sustainable for our ministries — and it is especially devastating for parishes that will be left without a pastor when he is forced to depart the country at the end of his R-1 visa," Seitz told the assembly.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.