News



Federal law enforcement officers confront protesters outside Oregon's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Portland, Oregon, Oct. 3, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/John Rudoff)

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Human dignity comes "not from government, but from our loving God," Archbishop Alexander Sample of Portland, Oregon, declared in a Nov. 8 statement regarding recent immigration enforcement activity in that state.

"It does not matter whether some of our brothers and sisters have proper documentation or not," said Sample. "They are our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ."

The archbishop's statement — posted in both English and Spanish on the archdiocesan website and the archbishop's social media platforms, along with a video version of the message — follows months of immigration raids and arrests under President Donald Trump's crackdown on immigrants lacking permanent legal status in the U.S., a group known to be majority Catholic Christians.

"My heart is heavy because of the continued fear and anxiety that runs through the community of our Hispanic brothers and sisters in this archdiocese," said Sample. "This is due to the increased ICE activity within our communities, even now in the vicinity of some of our parishes."

Oregon has become one of several flashpoints for tensions over the Trump administration's hardline immigration policies, with regular protests taking place outside the Immigrations and Customs Enforcement field office in Portland.

"I want to assure our Hispanic brothers and sisters that the shepherds of the church in the United States are working diligently to advocate for their humane and respectful treatment. We are doing all that we can to alleviate this suffering," said Sample, who noted he is currently attending the annual U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' fall plenary meeting in Baltimore.

Both Portland, Oregon's largest city, and the state government have codified their sanctuary status, prohibiting their respective law enforcement personnel from assisting any federal agency with immigration enforcement.

In September, Trump federalized 200 members of the Oregon National Guard to protect federal property. The city of Portland and the state of Oregon sued, with U.S. District Judge Karin Immergut — a Trump appointee — temporarily blocking the deployment of the troops in an October order made permanent Nov. 7.

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More than 200 individuals residing in Oregon have been detained by ICE officers since Trump took office, said Reyna Lopez, executive director of the farmworker advocacy organization PCUN (Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste), during an Oct. 31 press conference in Portland.

Several North Portland public schools have implemented "secure the perimeter" protocols — locking all exterior doors while continuing learning activities — in response to reported ICE activity. On Nov. 6, some 100 community members surrounded César Chávez School an hour ahead of dismissal to watch out for ICE officers during student pickup.

Catholic social teaching on immigration balances three interrelated principles — the right of persons to migrate in order to sustain their lives and those of their families, the right of a country to regulate its borders and control immigration, and a nation's duty to regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

The Catholic Church's teaching also makes clear human laws regulating migration are also subject to divine justice, but it has not yet issued teaching exploring the morality of deportation beyond the magisterium of St. John Paul II.

The late pontiff's 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* ("Splendor of Truth") and 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* ("The Gospel of Life") both quote the Second Vatican Council's teaching in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, naming "deportation" among various specific acts "offensive to human dignity" that "are a disgrace, and so long as they infect human civilization they contaminate those who inflict them more than those who suffer injustice, and they are a negation of the honor due to the Creator."

John Paul II underscored their moral severity in *Veritatis Splendor* by calling them examples of "intrinsic evil," explaining that, no matter the motives, these acts are "not capable of being ordered to God and to the good of the person."

Across the U.S., Christians account for approximately 80% of all of those at risk of Trump's mass deportation effort, with the single largest group of affected Christians being Catholics, according to a joint Catholic-Evangelical report published by World Relief.

The report found one in six Catholics (18%) are either vulnerable to deportation or live with someone who is.



Archbishop Alexander Sample of Portland, Ore. (OSV News/Courtesy of Portland Archdiocese/Mack Alano)

According to a Pew Research Center data analysis from March 2025, more than four out of 10 Catholics in the U.S. are immigrants (29%) or the children of immigrants (14%). But eight out of 10 Hispanic Catholics are either born outside the U.S. (58%) or are the children of an immigrant (22%), while 92% of Asian Catholics are either immigrants (78%) or are the children of an immigrant (14%). Far fewer white Catholics — just 15% — share this immigrant experience: Only 6% were born outside the U.S., with another 9% born in the U.S. to at least one immigrant parent.

"As your archbishop and spiritual father, I wish I could remove this cross from you," Sample told the Hispanic Catholic faithful in his message.

The archbishop assured them he was "deeply concerned over what you are experiencing right now, along with all of your local parish priests. I know this is a great burden for them as well, because they feel helpless to take this cross from you. ... Please know that I and your pastors stand with you in solidarity during this difficult time."

Sample also addressed priests "who are caring for people during these difficult times," promising his "support and prayers.

"We are in this together to uphold the dignity of every human person, every child of God," said Sample, urging all to "lean on the love that Jesus has for each one of us.

"He alone is our hope, and in him alone do we trust. He is with you always and will never abandon you," said the archbishop. "Place yourselves in his hands."

Sample concluded his message with "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" ("Long live Jesus Christ!") — the battle cry of the Cristeros, who defied the anti-Catholic, secular government of Mexico during the Cristero War of 1926-29. The Cristeros' defiant cry was made famous in particular by Blessed Miguel Pro. The Mexican martyr and Jesuit priest extended his arms in the form of a cross and shouted those words before he was executed by firing squad in 1927.

In 2000, St. John Paul II canonized 25 martyrs from the Cristero War. In 2016, Pope Francis canonized the most recent Cristero martyr, St. José Sánchez del Río, a teenager remembered for repeating "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" many times before his own

public martyrdom in 1928.

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