News



White House border czar Tom Homan walks to do a television interview at the White House April 28 in Washington. The signs show photos of people the Trump administration says are undocumented immigrants who have been arrested. (AP/Alex Brandon)

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The White House "border czar" Tom Homan called the U.S. Catholic bishops "wrong" Nov. 14, two days after the body of bishops in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops voted overwhelmingly to issue a rare group statement voicing "our concern here for immigrants" at their annual fall plenary assembly in Baltimore.

The statement, which the conference approved Nov. 12, did not name President Donald Trump, but it came as a growing number of bishops have acknowledged that some of the Trump administration's immigration policies risk presenting the church with both practical challenges in administering pastoral support and charitable endeavors, as well as religious liberty challenges.

"We oppose the indiscriminate mass deportation of people. We pray for an end to dehumanizing rhetoric and violence, whether directed at immigrants or at law enforcement," the bishops' statement said, adding, "Catholic teaching exhorts nations to recognize the fundamental dignity of all persons, including immigrants. We bishops advocate for a meaningful reform of our nation's immigration laws and procedures. Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together."

But in comments to reporters at the White House, Nov. 14, Homan said, "The Catholic Church is wrong."

Homan argued that, "A secure border saves lives. We're going to enforce the law and by doing that we save a lot of lives," and that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement "is sending a message to the whole world."

"I'm a lifelong Catholic, but I'm saying it not only as a border czar, but I'm also saying this as a Catholic, I think they need to spend time fixing the Catholic Church," he said.

> 'Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together.'
> —U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
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Homan has made similar comments in the past. In January, when Pope Francis called Trump's planned mass deportation campaign a "disgrace," Homan said, "The Pope ought to stick to the Catholic church and fix that. That's a mess."

Chieko Noguchi, a spokesperson for the USCCB, said in written comments shared with OSV News, "The bishops of the United States have spoken together and in unity with Pope Leo XIV."

"The position of the Catholic Church is clear: 'Human dignity and national security are not in conflict. Both are possible if people of good will work together.' We invite all Catholics and people of good will to reflect on the Special Pastoral Message," she said.

Many Catholics at risk

The U.S. mass deportation campaign is expected to have an outsized impact on the Catholic Church.

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

The report found 1 in 6 Catholics (18%) are either vulnerable to deportation or live with someone who is.

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%).

At the bishops' plenary assembly, the message was approved by all but a handful of voting bishops and was met with a standing ovation.

Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, newly elected president of the USCCB, spoke in favor of the statement from the floor, saying, "I'm strongly in support of it for the good of our immigrant brothers and sisters."

He added that the statement sought "balance" in "protecting the rights of immigrants, but also securing and calling upon our lawmakers and our administration to offer us a meaningful path of reform for our immigration system."

Catholic social teaching on immigration seeks to balance three interrelated principles: the right of persons to migrate in order to sustain themselves and their families; the right of a country to regulate its borders and immigration; and a nation's duty to conduct that regulation with justice and mercy.

The church's teaching, the bishops' special message noted, "rests on the foundational concern for the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27)."

A woman bows her head in prayer during a Nov. 13 prayer vigil and eucharistic procession fo

A woman bows her head in prayer during a Nov. 13 prayer vigil and eucharistic procession for immigrants outside of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office in Philadelphia. (OSV News/Gina Christian)

The bishops' condemnation of "indiscriminate mass deportation" also has a reference point in existing magisterial teaching. St. John Paul II'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*, that names "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."

The papal teaching in *Veritatis Splendor* states that these acts are examples of "intrinsic evil" incapable of being ordered to God or the good of the human person.

According to a USCCB news release issued with the text of the statement, the bishops' special message "marked the first time" in 12 years the bishops' conference "invoked this particularly urgent way of speaking as a body of bishops." The last time was in 2013, when the U.S. bishops issued their response to the federal government's contraceptive mandate in the Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, stating, "we bishops stand united in our resolve to resist this heavy burden and protect our religious freedom."

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