Opinion
Guest Voices
Guatemalan migrants arrive at La Aurora Air Base on a deportation flight from the United Stat

Guatemalan migrants arrive at La Aurora Air Base on a deportation flight from the United States, in Guatemala City, Feb. 18. (OSV News/Reuters/Cristina Chiquin)



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The U.S. Catholic bishops recently delivered a special message against "the indiscriminate mass deportation of people." Pope Leo XIV has expressed his support of the message for all Catholics and people of goodwill during these terrifying holidays for millions living, working and providing for their families.

This is an exceptional unified moral message with tremendous political implications. However, it is only a step. And I fear a very minor one in our current political culture. A robust pastoral plan across the country against mass deportation that recognizes Christ in the migrant is needed urgently for the even darker days ahead.

Since January, the White House has been leading a mass deportation campaign "protecting the American people against invasion" under a general and indiscriminate policy targeting all unauthorized noncitizens. The current administration, along with the Department of Homeland Security and its increasingly well-funded chief federal guard, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, has

been invading metropolitan centers against local political authorities' wishes in places that include Chicago, Los Angeles and Charlotte. Their aim is to rid this nation of over 12 million "illegals," many of whom have mixed-status families with spouses and/or children who are U.S. citizens.

Mass deportation is immoral and unjust. It is a grave evil for several reasons. First and foremost, it is a direct attack on the family — the principal organic unit of any society, regardless of citizenship status. Children are ripped apart from their parents and spouses from each other. This reality is not the exception but the norm of mass deportation, which deploys indiscriminate force against the livelihood of undocumented people for the purposes of instilling fear and punishing "criminals." Even the humiliating detainment of U.S. citizens and veterans are not beyond the pale of ICE, as the Chicago South Shore raid demonstrated in late September.

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Additionally, the terms "illegal" and "criminal" for mass deportation are a ruse. Consider the moral travesty of the current administration with the mass revocations of hundreds of thousands of people who fled dangerous political situations in Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela under a temporary protected status from deportation. These de-legalized individuals and families are now lured by an ICE app to "voluntarily" self-deport. It is unconscionable to think a protected legal status for anyone leaving a dangerous situation in their home country that still exists could be revoked by the government that granted it, whether 20 years ago or just last year.

The deportation-industry complex may fly under the banner of enforcing the law of the land, preserving order and maintaining national security. However, in the words of St. John Paul II, mass deportation must be considered an "intrinsically evil" action rejected by Catholics and all people of goodwill. Mass deportation is an indiscriminate action or blanket enforcement policy that can never be justified, regardless of circumstances. Its idolatrous endgame of trying to create a pure society of citizens against invaders directly offends God and the humans whose dignity and freedom comes from the Creator's image. According to the popes, mass deportation is an injustice in the same moral category as human trafficking and arbitrary imprisonment.

immigration vigil

Participants gathered Oct. 22 in front of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement offices in Philadelphia as part of the nationwide "One Church, One Family" prayer vigils organized by the Jesuits West province and several Catholic organizations, including the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services. (OSV News/Gina Christian)

After passage of the bipartisan One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) in July, mass deportation is a $75 billion dollar industry that relies on expanded powers of ICE under expedited removal without due process in immigration court. Its primary mechanism of enforcement are the detention centers following the unchecked seizure and capture raids of its masked ICE crusaders. Since the Biden administration, 9 out of 10 detainees are held in centers run by private companies, which now have the OBBBA promise of $45 billion more funds in the future. Evidently, Trump 2.0's draining of the swamp has meant government outsourcing of taxpayer dollars to private companies. The detention centers are an appalling example of the transference of public authority to a private sector that profits from the division of families.

Catholics who support mass deportation and the arbitrary, mass detainment required for its widespread enforcement not only deny the moral teachings of U.S. bishops and recent popes, but also the sacred authority of the Second Vatican Council. The "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" made it clear that mass deportation, along with abortion and euthanasia, "do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury." Moreover, Catholics who enforce, aid, abet and support mass deportation formally cooperate with a grave evil action, thereby placing their salvation in peril.

Those Catholics wrestling with the current administration's policy on this issue must make a moral choice about which loyalty is of greater importance: baptismal identity or MAGA identity. Tom Homan, a baptized Catholic, made his choice clear in response to the bishops' statement. The "border czar" and former ICE director told fellow Catholics that the U.S. bishops have no moral authority on the issue of mass deportation. It does not matter to Homan that a significant number of those he wants detained and deported are themselves Hispanic Catholics who eat from the same Body of Christ as him, though they are increasingly scared to do so. For this reason and more, the U.S. bishops, together and individually, are rightly speaking

out against the administration's denial of religious liberty to immigrants and access to the sacraments among the detained.

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Nevertheless, there is a subtle but significant flaw in the special message of the U.S. bishops needing correction for clarity's sake. Although the U.S. bishops oppose mass deportation and the attack on religious liberty by the current administration, their special message unwittingly undermines their moral authority on the issue. In an effort to strike a balance, the U.S. bishops' message is too sanguine and misleading when it asserts "human dignity and national security are not in conflict." Unfortunately, they opted for national security as the seeming counterpart to human dignity instead of the common good. What the bishops give with one hand in the biblical defense of dignity for the stranger, they take away with the other in the political defense of national security. As Leo made clear in Nov. 19 remarks, the moral issue under condemnation is not the protection of borders but mass deportation. National security ideology conflates these distinct issues.

The ideology of national security justifies the elimination of foreign elements deemed dangerous or "garbage" within an ideal society. Any attempt to strike a balance with it is a deceit. The violent terror of national security in 20th century Latin America during the Cold War should inform our church's memory and prophetic witness right now. The defense of national security led to the murders of bishops of the poor like Blessed Enrique Angelelli in Argentina and St. Óscar Romero in El Salvador. They were branded as communists by their Catholic enemies.

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These martyrs of the Americas did not seek illusory compromise with the ideology of national security. Instead, they followed the straight and narrow path that inevitably brought rejection and even persecution from the world's Caesars. Faithful Catholics must not let MAGA anti-immigration steal our national identity like the Cold War's anticommunism.

Politics has undoubtedly touched the altar under the administration's mass deportation policy. The U.S. bishops must protect the Body of Christ despite any criticism and retaliation from the false faithful who love the MAGA nation more than

the Holy Family present among immigrant families. But that is a decision the bishops will need to proclaim even more firmly, boldly and comprehensively in the new liturgical year beginning now in Advent. An authentic community of faith that extends beyond Catholics is already standing with the U.S. bishops on this issue, alongside Leo in Rome.

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