News

Participants gather at makeshift shrine for Alex Pretti Jan. 24, 2026, at a vigil in Minneapolis. Pretti, 37, was fatally shot earlier that day by a U.S. Border Patrol agent. (Tim Montgomery)

by Tim Montgomery

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At an outdoor vigil service honoring Alex Pretti and Sunday Masses in Catholic parishes in the Twin Cities, Catholics spoke urgently of the need to stand up against injustice in the current immigration crackdown and vowed to continue to offer practical help to the local immigrant community.

"Every sermon from the pulpit should be denouncing very clearly this injustice, this cruelty, this barbarity," said a participant at the vigil on the street honoring the 37-year-old nurse who had been shot and killed earlier that day by a U.S. Border Patrol agent.

The participant at the Jan. 24 vigil was an Iraq War veteran from Kansas City who taught in a Catholic school there. He did not want his name used for fear of retribution but he encouraged other Catholics to become actively involved, saying: "There is a power in our presence."

Before Sunday Mass the next day at St. Joan of Arc Catholic Church, not far from the site of Pretti's shooting, parishioner Mike Menzel said: "I'm devastated. It's tragic what we're seeing happening." But he said that working with organizations and participating in activities that help immigrants has given him hope. He was also inspired by the turnout at the Jan. 23 rally and march in downtown Minneapolis against the federal government's crackdown on immigrants. Protesters have been continually gathering in the Twin Cities to speak out against the Jan. 7 fatal shooting of Renee Good by a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer.

A woman cries next to a makeshift memorial in Minneapolis Jan. 24, 2026, at the site where 37-year-old Alex Pretti was fatally shot earlier that day by a U.S. Border Patrol agent. (OSV News/Reuters/Evelyn Hockstein)

"My faith tells me we cannot back down," Menzel said. "We have to work together and talk to people who are on the sidelines or not certain what to do."

In his Jan. 25 homily, Fr. Jim DeBruycker, pastor of St. Joan of Arc, told parishioners: "As you take your stand out there in the cold each day, as you're out there [blowing] your whistles ... you have become a great symbol of what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a follower of Jesus. ... Thank you for the gift of your presence and your witness!"

The parish helps support Risen Christ Catholic School in Minneapolis, the state's only dual immersion Catholic school. Michael Rogers, the president of the school, which has a 90% Latino student body, spoke to the congregation before Sunday Mass and stressed that every day requires "an unsustainable level of vigilance to keep kids

safe."

He said students haven't been outside for recess since December since ICE agents have been observed frequently driving by the school. He also said 13 school parents had been detained or deported. Families have reported seeing drones circling near their homes and one person was taken from their home by federal agents at 3 a.m.

This is an ever-present fear among school families, he said.

People take part in a demonstration in Minneapolis Jan. 25, 2026, a day after Alex Pretti was fatally shot by a U.S. Border Patrol agent while federal agents were trying to detain him. (OSV News/Reuters/Shannon Stapleton)

Rogers said as a member of a Catholic community, he affirms the inherent dignity of every person, regardless of citizenship, immigration status, skin color or language. He thanked St. Joan of Arc parishioners for their active partnership in driving children to and from school, delivering groceries, monitoring street corners and providing emergency housing and utility assistance for those living in fear and unable to go to

work saying: "you are the body of Christ in action."

Barb Johnson, a St. Joan of Arc parishioner who works with Welcome the Stranger, a parish ministry organized to support immigrants and their families, said she remembers being confined to her home during the COVID-19 pandemic and just about going out of her mind. "These families [are seeing] no end to being in their homes — it's just cruel."

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Johnson was dismayed by the actions of federal agents in the immigration crackdown efforts. She said she worked for many years in the local office of a California congressman as an immigration caseworker and her husband was in law enforcement. "Having been in a law-enforcement family for 52 years, I don't understand how they can put these people on the street that really seem to lack training in the rules of simple crowd control."

At Annunciation Catholic Church in Minneapolis, parishioner Tim Gagliardi said the parish is continually praying for guidance in this crisis. "That's where our strength is," he told the National Catholic Reporter.

A family prays as Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis celebrates an evening Mass for peace Jan. 25, 2026, at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul. Hebda celebrated the Mass following the Jan. 24 shooting death of Alex Pretti, a 37-year-old intensive care nurse who was shot during an incident with federal agents in south Minneapolis. (OSV News/The Catholic Spirit/Dave Hrbacek)

Joe Laue, who attended Mass in the gym at Annunciation with his wife Rebecca and their two young children Jan. 25, said the approach taken by ICE has been detrimental to the community and there needs to be a change in tactics.

He called the actions of the ICE agents "completely conflicting with our Catholic values" emphasizing that everyone deserves to be treated with dignity as a human being.

He said he and his wife wanted to help immigrant families who are afraid to leave their homes and had reached out to Blessed Trinity Catholic School in Richfield, where Rebecca went to school. He said the parish may eventually become a partner in the effort.

Participants take blessed candles at the end of Mass at the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis, Jan. 25, 2026. (Tim Montgomery)

"People are afraid to go out of their homes for groceries and the other needs that they have," said Dolly Prochaska, a parishioner from Holy Name of Jesus in Wayzata who traveled 20 miles to attend a special Jan. 25 evening prayer service offered for Pretti and his family at the Basilica of St. Mary in downtown Minneapolis.

"People shouldn't have to live in fear," she said, adding that she had reached out to a local volunteer program and received a grocery list and a delivery site so she could buy and deliver groceries to a homebound family.

Following Mass at the Basilica, a blessing of candles was held in Pretti's memory and those in attendance were invited to bring the candles home as a reminder to illuminate darkness with the light of Christ.

"It starts in our own neighborhoods, in our families and in our communities," said Juanita Webster as she held one of the candles blessed at the end of the service.

Related: Cardinal Tobin: Pray, mourn and say 'no' to ICE funding

This story appears in the **Immigration Protests in Minneapolis** feature series. View the full series.