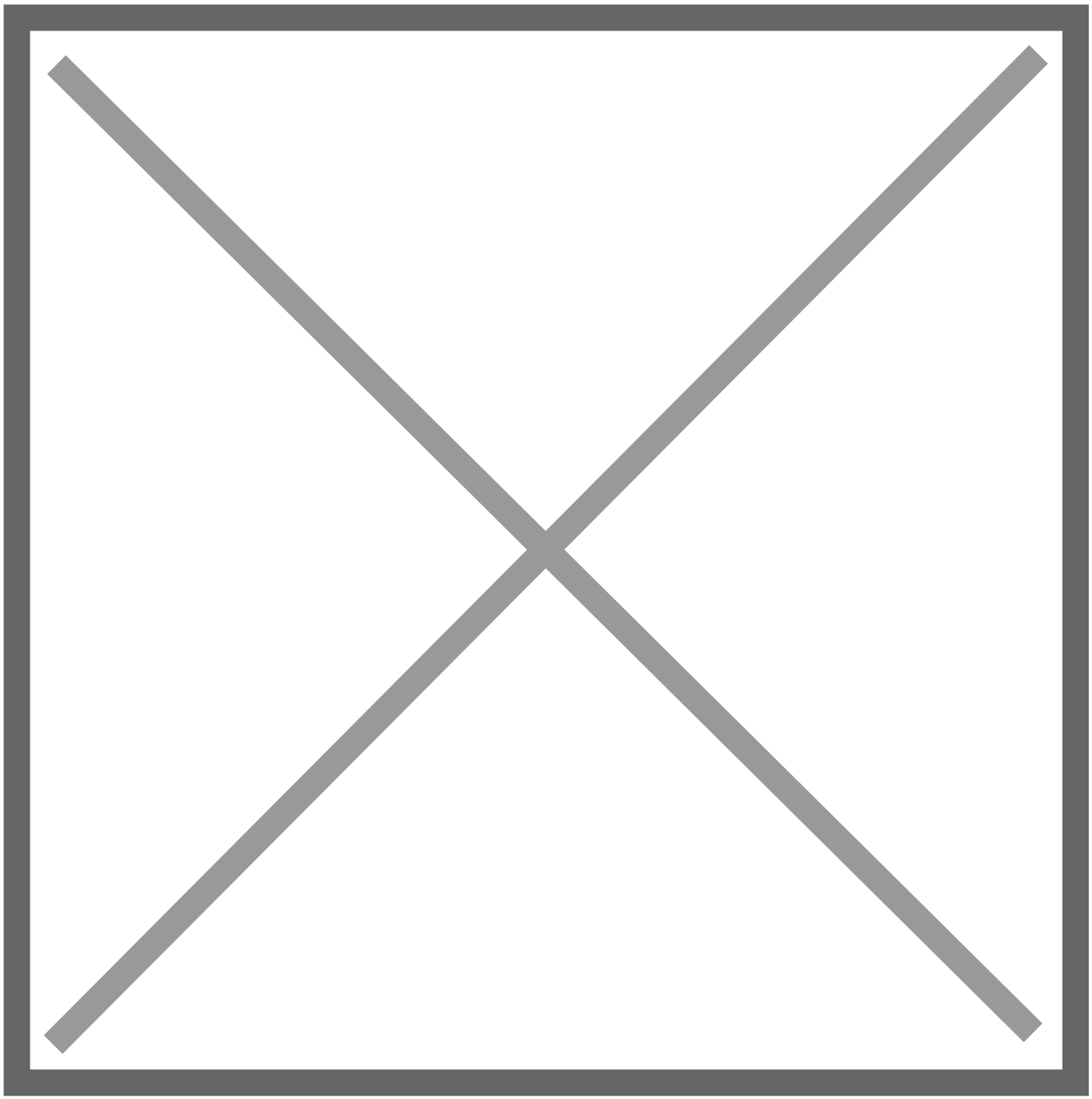
News



Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles gives a blessing after celebrating a Mass in Recognition of All Immigrants at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels Sept. 21, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles/Evan Lirette)

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More U.S. Catholic bishops are sounding the alarm over an increasingly frayed social order both at home and abroad — while calling for a renewal of heart and a recommitment to Gospel values safeguarding God-given human dignity.

Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles, Bishop Anthony Taylor of Little Rock, Arkansas, and Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle are among the latest prelates to weigh in on widespread unrest and division, with Etienne issuing a Jan. 26 pastoral letter on "A Well-Ordered Society Rooted in Truth, Justice, and Peace."

Three key sources — the Second Vatican Council, Catholic social teaching and a Jan. 9 address by Pope Leo XIV to Holy See-accredited diplomats — "illuminate our path with clarity and a renewed urgency," said Etienne in his letter.

The latest statements and reflections — which follow comments already made by Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; Archbishop Bernard Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey — came within days of the fatal shooting of 37-year-old nurse Alex Pretti, a U.S. citizen, by federal agents during a protest amid an immigration enforcement operation in Minneapolis.

Another U.S. citizen and Minneapolis resident, 37-year-old Renee Nicole Good, was shot to death by a federal agent at a separate immigration-related protest Jan. 7.

Hours after Pretti's death, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said at a Jan. 24 news conference the nation was at "an inflection point" amid the Trump administration's

crackdown on immigrants lacking legal authorization to live and work in the U.S., which has seen Minneapolis and several other cities become flashpoints.

In their respective reflections, the various bishops agreed that current societal tensions have reached an untenable crisis point.

"The country cannot go on like this," said Gomez in a Jan. 27 column published by Angelus, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

"Polarization and partisanship are poisoning the social fabric of our country," warned Taylor in a Jan. 24 column published by Arkansas Catholic, his diocese's news outlet. "We have reason to worry about the direction our society has taken in recent years. And we have reason to work to shore up our democracy before it is too late."

In his pastoral letter, Etienne pointed broadly to "turbulent times" that have been "marked by conflict abroad, fragmentation at home, and profound questions about our shared moral life."

In an accompanying Jan. 26 blog post, the archbishop said he had been moved to issue the teaching having "read my own mail, seen fissures in the unity of our Church, witnessed the fracturing of our American society and watched in dismay at the escalation of war around the world."

Taylor cited his own family's experience during the Second World War, when his grandfather "lost 20 first cousins in the Holocaust," also known as the Shoah, the systematic murder of 6 million Jews by Germany's Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators.

"I want to be clear that the current times are not identical, and Trump is no Hitler," Taylor stated. "But the moral decline of our country is real. And we are doomed to repeat failures of the past if we are not willing to remember them and learn from them."

He noted "many obvious parallels with the 1930s" that "should give us pause" — specifically, German society's move at the time "away from respect for human dignity, peace and moral restraint."

"I fear that the same dynamics are now happening in our country with the decline of civil discourse," said Taylor.

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He noted that Adolf Hitler's policies as Germany's leader leveraged post-World War I fears and crises to gain popular support for what ultimately became his "dictatorial powers," which in turn emboldened him to invade other nations. Refugees fleeing the Nazi regime were often refused entry to other nations, and many — like his own relations — were ultimately slain, he said.

"Obviously, these tragic examples are not what is happening here today. But these are the kinds of atrocities to which the dehumanization of mass, indiscriminate deportation can naturally lead," said Taylor, noting "sad chapters in the history of our own country" such as mass deportations of Native Americans and enslaved Africans, as well as the "indiscriminate imprisonment of Japanese-Americans in internment camps" during WWII.

Gomez lamented that as the U.S. marks its 250th anniversary this year, "what's happening now seems to be moving us away from the values of our nation's founding."

He stressed that "America was the first nation to be established on the belief that human rights come from God and that the government's purpose is to protect these rights," and that "we do not lose our rights based on the color of our skin, or the language we speak, or for not having the proper documents.

"Right now our government seems to be treating undocumented immigrants — men, women, and children — as if they have no rights. That should not be happening," said Archbishop Gomez.

"This is a pro-life issue," said Taylor. "And it will remain a pro-life issue so long as millions of people continue to live lives trapped in desperate circumstances, where countries with means refuse to help."

Gomez named "the root cause of the current crisis" as "the country's broken immigration system," and advocated support for the bipartisan Dignity Act.

Despite its "flaws," said Gomez, the legislation would reform visa and asylum processes, enhance border security and provide greater verification for employers while offering "a path to a legal status" for millions of people who have been living and working in the U.S. without authorization.

Gomez also said that in the present moment, "the first task is to restore order and peace to our streets, and insist on calm and restraint in our public discourse."

"There is no question that the federal government has the duty to enforce immigration laws. But there must be a better way than this," he said.

The archbishop said he hoped "all sides in this conflict — federal authorities, city and state officials, and those protesting the enforcement actions — will take a step back in the interests of the common good."

The principle of the common good — founded on human dignity, social well-being and a just, peaceful order — was one stressed by Etienne in his pastoral letter, which highlighted charity, or love of neighbor, and respect for the rule of law as "two essential pillars of any Christian society."

"These do not stand apart from the principles of our social teaching, but they flow directly from them," he explained, adding that "our Catholic Social Teaching makes clear that rights also come with corresponding duties."

Etienne clarified in his blog announcement that in writing the letter, he focused not on "speaking to specific, outrageous behaviors of individuals, nations or leaders," but "to simply speak to what a well-ordered society looks like."

In his letter, Etienne noted that Leo's Jan. 9 address — which he said had inspired his pastoral — "framed the challenges of our age through the lens of St. Augustine's 'The City of God.'" The treatise, written by the saint in the early fifth century, contrasted the ongoing struggle between good and evil in human history — and the archbishop noted how the pope used it to offer "a deeply Christian vision of peace, justice, and right order."

"I implore every Catholic to read Pope Leo XIV's Jan. 9 address," Taylor also said, emphasizing that St. Augustine's "seminal work" offers a roadmap for "a more just and peaceful coexistence among peoples," while cautioning against "grave dangers to political life arising from false representations of history, excessive nationalism and the distortion of the ideal of the political leader."

Writing in his pastoral letter, Etienne said that "in these turbulent times, the Church once again lifts high the Gospel as the light by which we must walk."

He explained that "Catholic Social Teaching begins with the unshakeable truth that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God," and that "this fundamental dignity forms the bedrock of all moral life and a just society."

"God created us in his image and we need to treat other people like we believe that," noted Gomez.

The rule of law is "a moral achievement" that "embodies the conviction that justice, not force, must govern human relationships," wrote Etienne in his pastoral letter. "Laws grounded in moral truth safeguard the weak, hold the strong accountable, and restrain the impulses of domination that St. Augustine identifies with the 'city of man.'"

Quoting Leo, the archbishop said that "when nations and leaders abandon dialogue in favor of coercion, they erode 'the foundation of all peaceful civil coexistence.'"

The Catholic principle of solidarity — "the social expression of charity" — extends to "all levels of society," from the family to the international community, and remains crucial in "a world that has so many levels of interdependence," said Etienne.

Subsidiarity, another core principle of Catholic social teaching, "affirms that decisions should be made at the most local level possible, respecting the integrity of families, parishes, and communities," Etienne said.

"Brothers and sisters, the world around us is undergoing profound change and we are experiencing no small amount of fragmentation, but Christ remains our sure foundation," wrote Etienne. "Pope Leo XIV's Augustinian vision reminds us that the destiny of society depends on the love that shapes it."

He added, "May we choose, again and again, the path of truth, justice, charity, and peace."

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