News



Cardinal Blase Cupich of the Archdiocese of Chicago. (AP File/Gregorio Borgia)

Jack Jenkins

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Aleja Hertzler-McCain

View Author Profile

Religion News Service

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Cardinal Blase Cupich, head of the Archdiocese of Chicago, has twice told interviewers in recent weeks that priests in the archdiocese have been stopped by federal agents and asked to prove their immigration status — demands he said were "because of their color."

Cupich made the allegation in a Jan. 17 interview with WTTW, a Chicago PBS affiliate, and in an interview published Friday (Feb. 6) in the U.S. edition of El País, a Spanish newspaper.

"I've had some priests who are of a different color being targeted and arrested — stopped — because of their color and asking them to prove that they're citizens. That's not America," Cupich told the PBS affiliate. "We should not have to live in a country where people have to carry around their documents all the time."

In the El País interview, Cupich said: "It brings terror into a city where not just immigrants, but the population, feel as though they're being terrorized by the ways that these roundups are going." He continued, "This is really unheard of. That kind of tactic is really fueling the outrage of people, not only because of the murders that we had in Minneapolis, but also because of our experience here."

It was not immediately clear how many priests in his archdiocese Cupich was referring to, or the exact nature of their alleged encounters with U.S. Department of Homeland Security agents. A spokesperson for the archdiocese declined to elaborate

in an email to Religion News Service, saying, "We have nothing to add beyond what Cardinal Cupich shared in that interview."

In a statement sent to RNS Tuesday evening, DHS Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said that "allegations that ICE engages in 'racial profiling' are categorically FALSE," and claimed similar accusations have contributed to an increase in assaults against DHS agents.

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RNS also reached out to several other dioceses and archdioceses to ask whether their priests have had similar encounters with DHS. Most did not immediately respond. Representatives from the Los Angeles and Miami archdioceses said they were not aware of their priests experiencing similar encounters with DHS.

Even so, reports of DHS agents stopping people and demanding proof of citizenship are widespread, especially in cities where President Donald Trump's administration has launched targeted mass deportation campaigns.

Last September, the Supreme Court lifted restrictions on immigration stops based on race or ethnicity. Less than a month later, the investigative journalism nonprofit ProPublica found that more than 170 U.S. citizens had been detained by immigration agents. Since then, more reports of immigration agents demanding the papers of U.S. citizens have emerged, though legal scholars say that citizens do not have to carry identification while walking or standing in public, and two U.S. citizens have been killed by immigration agents.

Catholic leaders have grown increasingly critical of DHS and its actions, and agents have had several contentious and even violent interactions with clergy of various faiths.

In January, Newark, New Jersey, Cardinal Joseph Tobin, a close ally of Cupich, called DHS a "lawless organization" in calling for Congress to withhold its funding. Days later, Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley, who is president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said in a statement, "The recent killing of two people by immigration enforcement officers in Minneapolis and that of a detained man in Texas, are just a few of the tragic examples of the violence that represent failures in our society to respect the dignity of every human life."

Last fall, several clergy who staged protests against DHS reported being exposed to tear gas or shot with pepper balls fired by federal agents. Around the same time, footage emerged of the Rev. David Black, a Presbyterian minister, being shot in the head with pepper balls while praying outside a DHS facility in Illinois, and a separate video circulated of the Rev. Jorge Bautista, a United Church of Christ minister, being shot in the face with a pepper round while protesting against DHS in California.

Other faith leaders have also been arrested by DHS agents. Last fall, a Muslim chaplain in Cincinnati was detained for roughly two months after a check-in with immigration officials but was eventually released. A few weeks later, an imam in New York City was arrested by federal agents, as was a priest in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas. In all three cases, the detentions sparked outrage among religious leaders and supporters.

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