News



U.S. Catholic bishops are seated at the Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Queen of the Universe in Orlando, Fla., for a service, June 11, 2026, consecrating the United States to the Sacred Heart upon the nation's 250th anniversary. (AP/Peter Smith)

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U.S. Catholic bishops are holding their annual fall meeting in Baltimore this week. The gathering comes just after Democrats' sweeping midterm victories reset the political dynamics around some of the bishops' priorities, including immigration, abortion and artificial intelligence.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is now facing a divided government as it seeks to influence both the faithful and public policy.

"Midterm elections are the opportunity for people to assess where we are as a country and where we hope to go," said Bishop Michael Burbidge of Arlington, Virginia. "I think what the citizens are asking — and we're certainly praying for — is that those who are elected will be devoted to doing all that is right and just and true and somehow find a way to begin working together and addressing the issues that impact individuals and families."

Catholics overall are politically mixed. Catholic voters split roughly evenly between Republican and Democratic candidates for the U.S. House, according to The AP Voter Poll, a survey of more than 100,000 midterm voters.

There was a split between white Catholics and Latino Catholics: Just over half of white Catholics supported the Republican House candidate in their area, while about two-thirds of Latino Catholics supported the Democratic House candidate in their area.

Nationally, just over half of Catholics said the Trump administration's actions on immigration enforcement had "gone too far," according to The AP Voter Poll. A similar share disapproved of how Immigration and Customs Enforcement was doing its job.

During the first half of Republican President Donald Trump's second term, Catholic leaders emerged as strong critics of the administration's immigration crackdown. Last fall, U.S. bishops issued a rare "special message" on immigration, decrying "the

vilification of immigrants" and "indiscriminate mass deportation."

Bishops are expected to hear updates Wednesday from their committees that deal with migration and abortion. They will also hear from a new task force on "preserving human dignity in the age of artificial intelligence."

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Catholic theology does not fit neatly into American political categories. While Catholic leaders have criticized current Republican immigration policies, they have also taken Democratic leaders to task over support for abortion rights. Targets of criticism included former Democratic President Joe Biden, who is Catholic.

"I think we're still trying to wrap our minds around what actually just happened," said Bishop Robert Boxie III, an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, while speaking about the midterms at a Georgetown University forum. He added the elections showed the power of "collective action" over money, including in "communities that had been sort of written off."

Ahead of the midterms, U.S. bishops led a campaign urging Catholics to exercise their right to vote while putting faith before politics.

"The Church's contribution to the public life of a nation is not a political or partisan program; rather, it reflects our commitment to the dignity of every person, who is created in the image and likeness of God," Archbishop Paul Coakley, the conference's president, said in a statement.

That message became muddled in late October, when the White House released images and a video of a group of Catholic bishops praying over Trump in the Oval Office. At least two bishops expressed regret during the ensuing backlash.

"I wish I had been more shrewd and less simple, like those who exploited our meeting for partisan political purpose," Bishop William Joensen of Des Moines, Iowa, wrote in a statement. "I pray I am more prudent and wise going forward, even as I remain resolute in my openness to engaging and praying for political leaders at all levels."

This story appears in the **USCCB Fall Assembly 2026** feature series. View the full series.