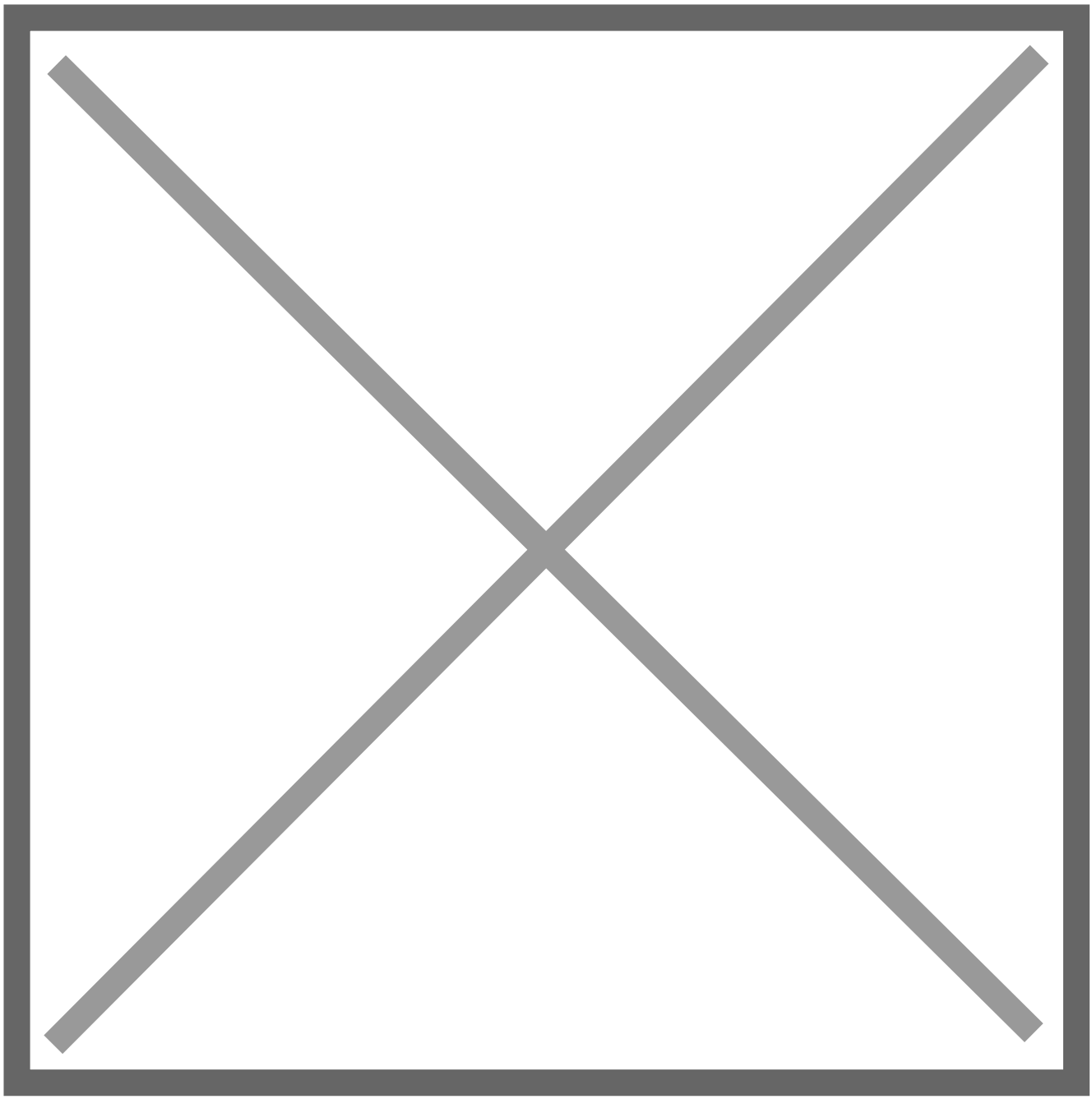
News



Bishop Brendan Cahill Joliet, Ill., speaks during a Nov. 18, 2026, session of the fall general assembly of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

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A year after the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a special pastoral message on immigration, "much of what we addressed at that time continues to be relevant today," Bishop Brendan Cahill of Joliet, Illinois, chair of the USCCB's Committee on Migration, said Nov. 18 at their fall plenary assembly in Baltimore.

The November 2025 statement expressed the bishops' opposition to the "indiscriminate mass deportation of people."

While it did not name President Donald Trump, it objected to some of the policies implemented by his administration, which also included a reduction in protection from immigration enforcement actions at houses of worship and other sensitive locations, and expressed concern about access to sacraments for those detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

In remarks at the assembly, Bishop Cahill expressed particular concern about the impact on children and family separation.

"The reduced protections and support for noncitizen children, especially the decreased availability of legal services within this population, is a scandal," he said.

Cahill also stressed the conference's position that clergy should be able to provide pastoral care to those in detention centers. The Archdiocese of St. Louis recently filed a lawsuit against the federal government over a policy it said prohibits priests from distributing Communion to and hearing confessions of ICE detainees.

"Please note that our staff at the conference are eager to assist with addressing any issues that arise for dioceses attempting to provide pastoral care to those in immigrant detention," he said.

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The assembly came just weeks after midterm elections in which Democrats won a landslide victory, projected to win a more than 80-seat majority in the U.S. House. In the U.S. Senate, Democrats will hold 56 seats, after Democrat Mary Peltola defeated Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska.

After the election and subsequent mixed signals from Trump on his willingness to work with the new Congress on the issue, debate emerged over the viability of immigration reform after the new Congress begins in January. Leaders of the USCCB indicated they would continue to advocate for what they called humane and just immigration reform.

In Vice President JD Vance's book "Communion: Finding My Way Back to Faith," released in June, he acknowledged the USCCB's November 2025 statement was "widely viewed as a critique of our administration's immigration policies," but argued that the bishops' message was "admirably measured. Or almost too measured," casting it as vague.

In response to a question at a Nov. 17 press conference about whether the message was effectively ignored by the Trump administration, Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City, president of the USCCB, said, "We did have one bit of success working with the Trump administration, subsequent to my visit with him at the end of January regarding R1 visas. So that was something that we counted as a partial win."

"There's a lot more work to be done," he added.

Many immigrant religious workers — such as Catholic priests and nuns — legally enter the country on R-1 non-immigrant religious worker visas. During his address to the assembly, Bishop Cahill also pointed to a policy slightly reducing wait times for religious worker visas.

Asked about the new political landscape during an interview with OSV News, Cahill said, "I do think there is a sense that the people of America would want better

treatment of human beings," adding that it is a good "starting point."

This story appears in the **USCCB Fall Assembly 2026** and **Immigration and the Church** feature series.