

[News](#)



U.S. Vice President JD Vance speaks during the swearing in ceremony of CIA Director John Ratcliffe Jan. 23, 2025. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Howard)



by John Grosso

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

January 27, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Vice President JD Vance once again made unsubstantiated claims about immigration — this time on CBS' "Face the Nation with Margaret Brennan."

After his [initial criticism](#) of U.S. bishops' condemnation of President Donald Trump's new immigration policies, Vance took it a step further, casting aspersions on the conference's work with migrants by referencing a claim about child sex trafficking that is unsubstantiated and lacking even an iota of credibility.

"I believe the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, if they're worried about the humanitarian costs of immigration enforcement, let them talk about the children who have been sex trafficked because of the wide open border of Joe Biden," [Vance said](#).

The vice president appears to be referring to a far-right conspiracy that has been percolating on social media since March 2024, which initially prompted [savage vitriol and threats](#) directed at Catholic Charities staffers.

Religion News Service's Jack Jenkins was the first to identify this reference on X.

"False," Jenkins declared.

While it is hard to identify the exact origin of the specific claims about child sex trafficking, the anti-immigration rhetoric that dominated the 2024 presidential election appears to have created a volatile environment for the proliferation of the rumor on social media.

Enter, disgraced former founder of Project Veritas, James O'Keefe.

As reported by Religion News Service last [March](#), O'Keefe and his film crew attempted to gain access to a hotel used by Catholic Charities in San Diego to house migrants. On March 6, 2024, O'Keefe posted the videos to social media and made wild accusations, including that some had been trafficked. Though the videos have since been removed from X, the accompanying image, a whiteboard with the names and personal information of many San Diego Catholic Charities staff members, remains.

Though Vance did not directly accuse the bishops' conference or Catholic Charities of engaging or supporting sex trafficking, it appears his dog whistle was enough to

re-engage the conspiracy theorists.

Advertisement

Many of the church hierarchy's most vocal opponents were quick to pounce on the VP's incredible reference. Disgraced and excommunicated Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò [amplified a post](#) that called the U.S. bishops "complicit." Catholic convert and far-right agitator Taylor Marshall [celebrated](#) the Vance interview as affirmation for his "Catholic infiltration" theory, itself a dangerous fringe conspiracy.

In light of Vance's comments, anti-immigrant advocates on social media are also taking aim at a recent video shared by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee that explains what to do in the event of a visit from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The bishops' conference issued a follow-up statement, which, despite not acknowledging Vance's comments, did nonetheless defend their involvement with the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program and affirmed their work as [remaining faithful to the teaching of Jesus Christ](#).

It is unusual enough for a recent Catholic convert to publicly shame the institutional church over a core church teaching. A sitting U.S. government official, much less the vice president of the United States, referencing debunked social media conspiracies is totally uncharted territory.

Vance is no stranger to making unsubstantiated and inflammatory claims about migrant communities. During the 2024 presidential campaign, Vance [famously amplified](#) the debunked rumor that Haitian immigrants in Ohio were eating cats and dogs. Vance's post led, in part, to the viral moment during the 2024 presidential debate where Trump incorrectly proclaimed "In Ohio, they're eating the cats. They're eating the dogs."

Though Vance [doubled](#) — and then [tripled](#) — down on his accusations of pet eating, he was disproven repeatedly, including several days later [when confronted](#) by CNN's Dana Bash.

"If I have to 'create stories' about migrants eating cats and dogs so that the American media actually pays attention to the suffering of the American people, then that's what I am going to do."

It appears that Vance has made good on that promise.

This story appears in the **Reporter's Inbox** feature series. [View the full series](#).