



Colombians deported from the United States arrive at El Dorado International Airport in Bogota, Colombia, Jan. 28, 2025. (Reuters/Luisa Gonzalez)



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What can and should Catholics be doing to resist President Donald Trump's "mass deportation" efforts? The answer is twofold: We should take practical steps to protect migrants and we should creatively preach what the church teaches.

Bishops need to make sure that leaders and staff at every Catholic parish, every Catholic school, every Catholic hospital and every Catholic charitable agency have been briefed on what to do if there is a raid by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. Those leaders need to make sure every staff member knows what to do and, just as importantly, what not to do.

Catholic buildings are private property and the government is not allowed on them without a warrant. A judicial warrant, not an administrative one, should be demanded before granting access. If the government agents have a warrant to arrest someone, that someone should be asked to turn themselves in, which could prevent a raid of the entire building and round-up of people who are not listed on the warrant. If ICE agents or other law enforcement officials commence a search, everyone should hand them a "[red card](#)" or *tarjetas rojas* which can help a migrant assert his or her rights to law enforcement officials without offering any compromising information.

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Bishops also need to work the phones. Republican members of Congress and local and state officials need to hear from key constituencies that these mass deportations are harming them. Most bishops have wealthy people on their finance boards and some of those rich folk are Republican donors. Ask them to call office holders whose campaigns they donated money to, and speak up on behalf of migrants.

If you are in a blue state, and the members of Congress are Democrats, ask the Republican-leaning business people to contact the Chamber of Commerce, or the National Restaurant Association, or other business associations that donate to the Republican Party and voice our Catholic concerns to them.

Priests can help organize their parishes along the lines outlined above, but they can also use their pulpits to preach about the church's teaching. There is no reason to make it personal. The pulpit is never a place to attack anyone in a partisan way. Preachers addressing this topic should always state that church teaching acknowledges the right of a nation to regulate migration, and that both parties are to blame for the fact that our immigration system is broken. The question is how to fix it in ways that are true to our Catholic Church's bedrock commitments to human dignity, solidarity, the common good and subsidiarity.

Depending on the parish, a lot of priests can also use the pulpit for a little local history lesson. If I go to the vigil Mass, it is at [St. Joseph's Church](#), built by Irish migrant workers after the Civil War. If I go on Sunday morning, I usually attend St. Mary's Church, located about 300 yards from St. Joseph's. It was built by French migrant workers in the first decade of the 20th century.

A third church completes the parish, Sagrado Corazón\*, consecrated in the 1970s. Interestingly, only Sagrado Corazón was not built by people who were not yet citizens. The Latino community in our area was mostly Puerto Rican in the 1970s and Puerto Ricans are already U.S. citizens. I am sure other churches in other cities tell similar tales.



Members of the Mexican Navy guard the area where a temporary shelter is being built to receive Mexicans due to possible massive deportations from the U.S., in Matamoros, Mexico, Jan. 25, 2025. (Reuters/Daniel Becerril)

"How many of you have gotten a parking ticket because you forgot to feed the meter?" That is how I would begin a sermon this coming Sunday. Being in the U.S. without proper documentation is a civil, not a criminal, violation, just like a parking ticket. If we get caught, we pay a fine, but we don't get deported! Or thrown into a detention center.

The most important thing preaching must accomplish in the next few weeks is to make clear who is being punished in these raids. When "border czar" Tom Homan or Vice President JD Vance give an interview, they always dwell on the threat posed by "violent criminals." But, when they are pressed on the fact that these raids also extend to people who have not committed any violent crime, they fall back on the fact that being in the country without proper documentation is itself against the law. That's true. But the punishment of deportation is incommensurate to the violation.

Trump, Vance and Homan want all Americans to think of the Venezuelan immigrant who murdered Laken Riley when we think of migrants. The symbolism of Trump [signing](#) the Laken Riley Act as the first piece of legislation passed during his second term was powerful. People in the pews need to be reminded that every group of people, including migrants, has its share of bad apples, but that most undocumented migrants are busy doing the jobs no one else wants to do: picking strawberries, working a meat packing plant, washing dishes in a restaurant, landscaping. Migrants do the backbreaking jobs. They are our neighbors. They are parents with children in our schools. They are in the pews next to us.



U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and Tom Homan, appointed as "border czar," speak with the media in Washington, Jan. 29, 2025. (Reuters/Ken Cedeno)

As for laity? As I noted the other day, the [Catholic Legal Immigration Network](#) is overstretched and the Laken Riley Act only makes their job harder. Catholics can send CLINIC some money or ask their priest to conduct a second collection. Catholics

can also support Catholic Charities in its work with migrants. And, if you are a parent with a kid in a Catholic school, ask the principal if there is a student whose parents may not have their papers and, so, shouldn't be walking or driving their kid to school. ICE can pick people up off the street, and bringing a child to and from school might be an enormous help.

"Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves," Jesus told his disciples (Mt 10:16). A lot of friends want to be "prophetic" and denounce the Trump administration. There is a time and a place for that, but now is a time to be effective not performative. The Catholic Church at every level should do what it can to protect migrants and to reframe the public conversation by humanizing the innocent victims of these indiscriminate raids.

*\*This story has been updated to fix the name of Sagrado Corazón church.*

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. [View the full series.](#)