



U.S. Vice President JD Vance speaks during the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington Feb. 28, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy National Catholic Prayer Breakfast/Gary Gellman)



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Vice President JD Vance on Friday tried to calm tensions over remarks he recently made about the Trump administration's immigration policies — criticized by some Catholic bishops and Pope Francis — saying he doesn't think it's good for Christians to fight with each other.

"While yes, I was certainly surprised when [Francis] criticized our immigration policy and in the way that he has," Vance said Feb. 28 during his keynote speech at the 20th annual National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. "I also know that the pope, I believe that the pope, is fundamentally a person who cares about the flock of Christians under his leadership."

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Vance, who addressed the immigration debacle within the Catholic community at the end of his roughly 30-minute remarks, then quoted a portion of the homily that Francis gave at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and led breakfast attendees in a prayer for the pope, who has been [battling pneumonia in both lungs](#).

The vice president's remarks come amid a weeklong conflict between himself, Catholic leaders and others over the Trump administration's immigration policies, which have included sending illegal immigrants to Guantanamo Bay and [trying to arrest them in places of worship](#). The new administration has also tried [to target birthright citizenship](#) and President Donald Trump declared a national emergency at the southern border, which [some Catholic leaders have criticized](#).

Just days after Trump's inauguration, Catholic Church leaders [issued a statement](#) condemning the administration's approach to immigration policy, saying that "non-emergency immigration enforcement in schools, places of worship, social service agencies, healthcare facilities, or other sensitive settings where people receive essential services would be contrary to the common good."

Vance then [criticized](#) the U.S. bishops for their lack of support in an interview on CBS' "Face the Nation," saying he thinks the bishops' conference "has, frankly, not been a good partner in common sense immigration enforcement that the American people voted for."

"I hope, again, as a devout Catholic, that they'll do better," Vance said.



Attendees pray during the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast in Washington Feb. 28, 2025. (OSV News/Courtesy National Catholic Prayer Breakfast/Gary Gellman)

In his Friday remarks, Vance addressed the bishops specifically, saying "sometimes the bishops don't like what I say," eliciting applause from the audience. "And I'm sure, by the way, sometimes they're right and sometimes they're wrong."

"My goal is not to litigate when I'm right and when they're wrong or vice versa," Vance said. "My goal is to maybe articulate the way that I think about being a Christian in public life when you also have religious leaders in public life who have a spiritual duty to speak on the issues of the day."

The ongoing verbal battle between the bishops' conference and Vance was enough to prompt Francis himself to weigh in in recent weeks. In a Feb. 11 letter [addressing U.S. bishops](#), the pope also criticized the Trump administration's immigration policies and pushed back — without naming Vance — against the vice president's interpretation of *ordo amoris*, a concept in Catholicism that Vance had referenced in a social media post.

"The true *ordo amoris* that must be promoted is that which we discover by meditating constantly on the parable of the 'Good Samaritan,' that is, by meditating on the love that builds a fraternity open to all, without exception," Francis' letter stated.

"I have followed closely the major crisis that is taking place in the United States with the initiation of a program of mass deportations," the letter stated. "The rightly formed conscience cannot fail to make a critical judgment and express its disagreement with any measure that tacitly or explicitly identifies the illegal status of some migrants with criminality."



Protesters opposing the Trump administration's immigration policies hold signs Feb. 28 in front of the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in downtown Washington, D.C., where Vice President JD Vance addressed the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast. (NCR photo/Allison Prang)

The dispute between Vance and Catholic leaders has spread beyond official statements and media coverage as well. Outside the Walter E. Washington

Convention Center in downtown D.C., where this year's breakfast was held, just over a dozen protestors gathered in opposition to the Trump administration's immigration policies and recent remarks from Vance.

One of them was 82-year-old Marie Dennis, who said she is "deeply troubled" by Vance's messages about Catholics' views.

"We believe that every human being is a person of dignity, and that it is our responsibility as Catholic Christians to care for and create a more just society for the whole world," said Dennis, who serves as the director of Pax Christi International's Catholic Nonviolence Initiative. "It feels sad for him to be celebrated as the main speaker at this breakfast."

Dennis, along with another protestor, held one side of a large purple banner that said: "Catholics Stand With Pope Francis. All Human Beings Have Dignity ... Including Immigrants."