

Catholic Trends: Winter (#3)

Pope Francis assures Donald Trump of prayers, but says mass deportations would be a “disgrace.” On the day of Trump’s inauguration as the 47th President of the United States, the Holy Father assured the president of his prayer that “Almighty God will grant you wisdom, strength and protection in the exercise of your high duties.” He went on to say that “Inspired by your nation’s ideals of being a land of opportunity and welcome for all,” the pope said, “it is my hope that under your leadership the American people will prosper and always strive to build a more just society, where there is no room for hatred, discrimination or exclusion.”

His words appear to allude to several issues, including the question of migration. In February 2016, on a flight from Mexico to Rome, Pope Francis said in response to a question about Trump’s plan to build a wall at the U.S-Mexico border and deport 11 million undocumented migrants that “a person who thinks only of building walls, whatever it may be, and not of building bridges, is not Christian. That is not the Gospel.”

More recently, during an inflight press conference returning from Singapore, on September 13, 2024, Pope Francis when asked what advice he would give to Catholics in the U.S. on voting in the presidential election when one of the candidates supports abortion and the other candidate promises the mass deportation of undocumented people, the pope replied:

Both are against life: the one who throws out migrants and the one who kills children. Both are against life. I cannot decide. I am not an American and I will not go to vote there. But let it be clear: sending migrants away, denying them the ability to work and refusing them hospitality is a sin, and it is grave. The Old Testament speaks repeatedly of the orphan, the widow, and stranger—migrants. Israel must care for these three groups. Whoever fails to care for migrants is at fault; it is a sin, an sin against the lives of those people.

On Sunday evening, January 19, on the eve of Trump’s inauguration, Pope Francis said on Italian TV when asked about Trump’s plan to carry out mass deportations of undocumented migrants immediately after his installation: “if this is true, it would be a disgrace, because it would make the poor wretches, who have

nothing, pay the bill of the inequalities (in the world)”, he said. “It doesn’t work. Problems are not resolved that this way. That’s not the way to resolve them.”

When it comes to presidential office, does character matter? Apparently not in the United States as the slim majority of the American electorate overlooked his two impeachments and conviction of 34 felony counts of fraud, seemingly voting for his policies rather than the person himself.

When ***Tomas Halik, a noted Czech priest and theologian*** was asked in a recent Commonweal article (January 2025) what words he would impart to American Catholics following the reelection of Donald Trump, he said the following:

“The victory of the amoral populist Donald Trump, a chaotic and immature personality, is a tragedy not only for America but for the whole world. Those who cannot accept defeat and are incapable of critical self-reflection, who don’t respect democratic rules and the culture of law, do not deserve to win and rule. When the people of Europe watch the narcissistic scenes of Donald Trump—whose gestures and facial expressions are strikingly reminiscent of Benito Mussolini—his vulgarities, his notorious lies, and his empty phrases, they laugh out loud. I don’t know if Trump voters realize that the world will not take America seriously with such a president. The spiritual blindness that makes this figure—who is the pure embodiment of values in complete opposition to the Gospel—into the object of a religious cult needs to be seriously studied. The attempts to turn the Christian faith into an ideological weapon for culture wars dangerously discredit Christianity. Nationalism and national egoism are contrary to catholicity.”

The Catholic Presidential Vote in 2024: 59% votes for Trump. Media exit polls indicate that 59% of Catholic voters cast a ballot for Donald Trump and 39% for Harris. Historically, this would place the 2024 election alongside 1976, 1984, 1996, and 2008 when the Catholic vote was decidedly less evenly divided than in previous elections.

The 2024 election once again shows that the Catholic vote does not “look like America.” Most Americans vote consistently for one party or the other given their religion. Catholics, on the other hand, are the one group that sways back and forth between the two parties’ candidates. It is arguable that Catholics are the most important swing vote—despite the media and pollster fascination with Evangelicals.

On another note, it may not be a good idea to skip an invite to the Al Smith dinner in the Archdiocese of New York in the future as did Kamala Harris. The last candidate to skip the dinner was Walter Mondale who also lost the election. Is there a curse? Probably not, but it can't hurt to accept the invite.

Cardinal Dolan, who presides at the All Smith, gave the Inauguration prayer at Trump's swearing in.

Christians make up largest share of the world's migrant population. A report from the Pew Research Center begins, "Migration has grown steadily in recent decades. Today more than 280 million people, or 3.5% of the world's population, are international immigrants—meaning they live outside their country of birth.

Christians make up a much larger share of migrants (47%) than they do of the world's population (930%). Mexico is the most common origin country for Christian immigrants, and the United States is their most common destination.

Catholic marriage today. Using data from CARA's Church Statistic Database, a number of important Catholic marriage trends emerge.

- Most Catholics will end up being married during their lives. 73% of Catholics will eventually marry (compared to 79% in the 1970s).
- The share of adult Catholics who are currently married has declined. In the '70s, 67% of Catholics were married, compared to 53% today.
- The share of adult Catholics who have divorced jumped from 10% in the '70s to 22% in the 2022s.
- Total marriages in the Church are down. Until the mid-1990s, about half of marriages involving Catholics were celebrated in the Church and the other half elsewhere. From 2000 to 2022, three-quarters of marriages of Catholics occurred outside the Church.

The effect of Educational Debt on religious vocations. According to the College Board, 55% of U.S. bachelor's degrees graduated in 2022 with an average of \$29,100 in educational debt, a situation which could impede many potential vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The average applicant debt for 21% of applicants to the religious institutes was \$23,600. The average debt for 23% of Diocesan applicants was \$28,800.