

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 5, 2017

Pastor's Column

Rev. Michael Ratajczak
760-758-4100 x100
michaelr@stmoside.org

My Journey with *Roe v. Wade*: A Personal Reflection

January 22 marked the 44th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court Decision which legalized abortion in the United States.

In this week's Pastor's Column, I share with you my own personal journey with *Roe v. Wade*.

The Column was first written in 2001. I have updated it several times since then.

It is my hope that my reflection will help you in whatever way you may need as you come to terms with what it means to be "pro-life."



Also included in this week's Bulletin is a letter from Bishop McElroy, a statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), and statements from Cardinal Blase Cupich and Cardinal Joseph Tobin regarding the recent actions by the Trump Administration in regard to the U.S. refugee admissions program and migration to the United States.

Directions are also given if you wish to write our elected officials.



F. A. Mike



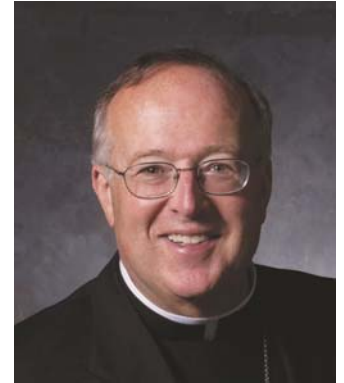
The Roman Catholic DIOCESE OF SAN DIEGO



San Diego Bishop Calls Trump Executive Orders “A Shameful Moment of Abandonment that Repudiates Our National Heritage”

January 29, 2017

SAN DIEGO – Bishop Robert McElroy, head of the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego, issued a statement this afternoon critical of a controversial executive order signed by President Trump restricting the flow of travelers and refugees into the United States, as well as creating a new religious test for entry.



For the Catholic community, the Gospel mandate to “welcome the stranger” is a searing responsibility, not only in our personal lives, but also in guiding our efforts to create a just society in a world filled with suffering and turmoil.

“For this reason, the historic identity of the United States as a safe haven for refugees fleeing war and persecution is for American Catholics both a source of justifiable pride and an unswerving religious commitment, even as we recognize that at shameful moments in our national history prejudice, fear and ignorance have led our country to abandon that identity.

“This week is just such a shameful moment of abandonment for the United States.

“The executive order signed by President Trump on Friday professes to be a necessary step in securing the safety of Americans. But the design of the order—and its chaotic implementation—unmask the reality that this Presidential order arose not from a careful effort to balance the needs of security with our commitment to welcome refugees amidst the greatest refugee crisis since World War II. Rather, this executive order is the introduction into law of campaign sloganeering rooted in xenophobia and religious prejudice. Its devastating consequences are already apparent for those suffering most in our world, for our standing among nations, and for the imperative of rebuilding unity within our country rather than tearing us further apart.

“This week the Statue of Liberty lowered its torch in a presidential action which repudiates our national heritage and ignores the reality that Our Lord and the Holy Family were themselves Middle Eastern refugees fleeing government oppression. We cannot and will not stand silent.”

The Diocese of San Diego runs the length of California’s border with Mexico and serves more than 1.3 million Catholics in San Diego and Imperial Counties. It includes 98 parishes, 48 elementary and secondary schools, and various social service and family support organizations throughout the region. It also includes five historic sites, the most well known of which is the Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá, the first mission established in California by St. Junipero Serra in 1769.

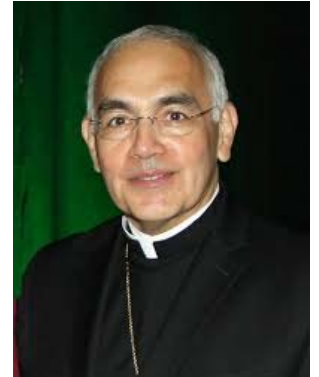


UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

USCCB Committee on Migration Chair Strongly Opposes Executive Order Because It Harms Vulnerable Refugee and Immigrant Families

January 27, 2017

WASHINGTON—President Donald J. Trump issued today an Executive Order addressing the U.S. refugee admissions program and migration to the United States, generally. The executive order virtually shuts down the refugee admissions program for 120 days, reduces the number of refugees to be admitted to the United States this year from 110,000 to 50,000 individuals, and indefinitely suspends the resettlement of Syrian refugees. In addition, it prioritizes religious minorities suffering from religious persecution, thereby deprioritizing all other persons fleeing persecution; calls for a temporary bar on admission to the United States from a number of countries of particular concern (all Muslim majority); and imposes a yet-to-be determined new vetting process for all persons seeking entry to the United States.



Regarding the Executive Order's halt and reduction of admissions, Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, Texas, chairman of the Committee on Migration, stated:

"We strongly disagree with the Executive Order's halting refugee admissions. We believe that now more than ever, welcoming newcomers and refugees is an act of love and hope. We will continue to engage the new administration, as we have all administrations for the duration of the current refugee program, now almost forty years. We will work vigorously to ensure that refugees are humanely welcomed in collaboration with Catholic Charities without sacrificing our security or our core values as Americans, and to ensure that families may be reunified with their loved ones."

Regarding the Executive Order's ban on Syrian refugees, the prioritization of religious minorities suffering from religious persecution, Bishop Vásquez added:

"The United States has long provided leadership in resettling refugees. We believe in assisting all those who are vulnerable and fleeing persecution, regardless of their religion. This includes Christians, as well as Yazidis and Shia Muslims from Syria, Rohingyas from Burma, and other religious minorities. However, we need to protect all our brothers and sisters of all faiths, including Muslims, who have lost family, home, and country. They are children of God and are entitled to be treated with human dignity. We believe that by helping to resettle the most vulnerable, we are living out our Christian faith as Jesus has challenged us to do."

Moving forward after the announcement, Bishop Vásquez concluded:

"Today, more than 65 million people around the world are forcibly displaced from their homes. Given this extraordinary level of suffering, the U.S. Catholic Bishops will redouble their support for, and efforts to protect, all who flee persecution and violence, as just one part of the perennial and global work of the Church in this area of concern."



If you wish to take action, visit the USCCB Justice for Immigrants site below, where you will find links to send a message to President Trump and your representatives to express your concern:

<http://tinyurl.com/jcja5mx>

Statement of Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Archbishop of Chicago, on the Executive Order on Refugees and Migrants

January 29, 2017

This weekend proved to be a dark moment in U.S. history. The executive order to turn away refugees and to close our nation to those, particularly Muslims, fleeing violence, oppression, and persecution is contrary to both Catholic and American values. Have we not repeated the disastrous decisions of those in the past who turned away other people fleeing violence, leaving certain ethnicities and religions marginalized and excluded? We Catholics know that history well, for, like others, we have been on the other side of such decisions.

These actions impose a sweeping and immediate halt on migrants and refugees from several countries, people who are suffering, fleeing for their lives. Their design and implementation have been rushed, chaotic, cruel, and oblivious to the realities that will produce enduring security for the United States. They have left people holding valid visas and other proper documents detained in our airports, sent back to the places some were fleeing or not allowed to board planes headed here. Only at the eleventh hour did a federal judge intervene to suspend this unjust action.

We are told this is not the “Muslim ban” that had been proposed during the presidential campaign, but these actions focus on Muslim-majority countries. They make an exception for Christians and non-Muslim minorities, but not for Muslims refugees fleeing for their lives. Ironically, this ban does not include the home country of 15 of the 19 September 11 hijackers. Yet, people from Iraq, even those who assisted our military in a destructive war, are excluded.

The United States has a long history of welcoming refugees who are fleeing for their lives and Catholic organizations have helped to resettle many families, men, women, and children, from around the globe. Many of our priests, religious, and laypeople have accompanied newcomers precisely to assist them in this process. Because of our history of aiding in refugee and migrant settlement for decades, we know the very lengthy and thorough vetting process they must face before they are admitted to our country. We have seen initial fear turn into a generous willingness of local communities to accept and integrate refugees. Here in Chicago generations of migrants have found a new home. We are better for it...

The world is watching as we abandon our commitments to American values. These actions give aid and comfort to those who would destroy our way of life. They lower our estimation in the eyes of the many peoples who want to know America as a defender of human rights and religious liberty, not a nation that targets religious populations and then shuts its doors on them.

It is time to put aside fear and join together to recover who we are and what we represent to a world badly in need of hope and solidarity. “If we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities.” Pope Francis issued these challenging words to Congress in 2015, and followed with a warning that should haunt us as we come to terms with the events of the weekend: “The yardstick we use for others will be the yardstick which time will use for us.”



Statement of Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., On Wednesday's Executive Actions on Immigration

January 27, 2017

I understand the desire for every American to be assured of safe borders and freedom from terrorism. The federal government should continue a prudent policy aimed at protecting citizens.

I also understand and heed the call of God, who through Moses told the people of Israel: “You shall not oppress an alien; you well know how it feels to be an alien, since you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt” (Ex 23:9). Jesus asks His disciples to go further, calling on us to recognize Him in the stranger: “Whatsoever you did to the least of my brothers, you did to me” (Mt. 25:40).

Wednesday's Executive Actions do not show the United States to be an open and welcoming nation. They are the opposite of what it means to be an American.

Closing borders and building walls are not rational acts. Mass detentions and wholesale deportation benefit no one; such inhuman policies destroy families and communities.

In fact, threatening the so-called “sanctuary cities” with the withdrawal of federal funding for vital services such as healthcare, education, and transportation will not reduce immigration. It only will harm all good people in those communities.

I am the grandson of immigrants and was raised in a multicultural neighborhood in southwest Detroit. Throughout my life as a priest and bishop in the United States, I have lived and worked in communities that were enriched by people of many nationalities, languages, and faiths. Those communities were strong, hard-working, law-abiding, and filled with affection for this nation and its people.

Here in Newark, we are in the final steps of preparing to welcome 51 refugees from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is only the latest group of people whom Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese has helped to resettle during the past 40 years. This current group of refugees has waited years for this moment and already has been cleared by the federal government...

They have complied with all of the stringent requirements of a vetting process that is coordinated by the Department of Homeland Security. Catholic Charities, assisted by parishes and parishioners of the Archdiocese, will help them establish homes, jobs and new lives so that they can contribute positively to life in northern New Jersey. When this group is settled, we hope to welcome others.

This nation has a long and rich history of welcoming those who have sought refuge because of oppression or fear of death. The Acadians, French, Irish, Germans, Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Jews and Vietnamese are just a few of the many groups over the past 260 years whom we have welcomed and helped to find a better, safer life for themselves and their children in America.

Even when such groups were met by irrational fear, prejudice and persecution, the signature benevolence of the United States of America eventually triumphed.

That confident kindness is what has made, and will continue to make, America great.



My Journey with Roe v. Wade— Personal Reflections

—Rev. Michael Ratajczak

This reflection was first given on Sunday, January 21, 2001, at Santa Sophia Parish in Spring Valley, California, to mark the 28th anniversary of “Roe v. Wade”—the Supreme Court Decision which legalized abortion in the United States.

It was updated and included in the St. Thomas More Parish Bulletin on January 22, 2006, to mark the 33rd anniversary of “Roe v. Wade and on January 23, 2011, marking the 38th anniversary.

It has once again been updated this year to mark “Roe v. Wade’s” 44th anniversary.



Today, I want to take time to share with you my own journey in regard to the Supreme Court Decision, “Roe v. Wade,” which legalized abortion in this country on January 22, 1973.

This Supreme Court Decision has been and continues to be one of the most divisive and political issues we have faced as a nation.

When I just say the word “abortion,” you can feel the room split. There are those who sit on the edge of their seats to listen, and those who immediately tune out once the word “abortion” is mentioned.

All of us have been in conversations with others when the word “abortion” surfaces. You can immediately feel the participants’ temperatures rise, their voices become louder and more passionate, and the air is soon filled with acrimony.

I invite you today to walk with me through this very personal sharing of my journey with “Roe v. Wade.” I do this today as one way of inviting you to revisit the abortion question and to ask yourself—“Where am I on this issue? After 44 years, have I taken a position on one side or the other? Have I ever challenged myself to deal with this issue; not only on a personal level, but in terms of what this issue means to us as a society and as a Church? How does the abortion issue fit in with my thinking in terms of other life



issues?” and “Are my views consistent with Church Teaching? If not, why not?”

“Roe v. Wade” became the law of the land 44 years ago in January of 1973. I began my ministry on behalf of the Church in November 1973, when I was ordained a deacon. I was a transitional deacon until my ordination as a priest in January 1975.

“Roe v. Wade” and my ministry both had its beginning in the same year. My entire ministry has been in the context of abortion being legal by government standards and immoral and sinful by Church standards.

How did I view abortion when it was first legalized? How did I begin to deal with it in the context of my ministry?

I have always considered abortion as sin, as immoral, as the wrong choice for people to make. But I was not very passionate in terms of reversing the law. In the early years, my response was, “If you don’t believe in abortion, don’t have one; don’t participate in the decision making that leads to one; if it is a part of your work environment, say ‘no’ to it.”

My thinking and response was on a personal “one-to-one” level, without seeing the necessity to reverse the law of the land. Abortion would be personal, occasional, and would not have any great effect on the mores of our society.

As I reflect on my thinking, I believe that I thought this way for two main reasons:

1. concern for the individual woman, and
2. an uncertainty about when life actually began, along with the question of when does the fetus become a separate entity from the woman, the mother.

In those days, in regard to the law, I would try to imagine myself being a woman and, for whatever reasons, finding myself with an unwanted pregnancy. Would I want anyone else but myself, ultimately, to make a decision about what to do with my body?

If I found myself pregnant, would I want others making decisions for me about my pregnancy, deciding for me how my future would be?

And who are those “others” that are making those decisions that are affecting my life? In the 1970s, what was the gender of the majority of people who created legislation, who strongly influenced the mores, the customs, and the traditions of society? That gender majority was, and still is to a lesser degree today, male. It was so easy then, and still is, again hopefully to a lesser degree today, for men to tell women what to do, how to do it, and to know their place. Men are in charge. Men will make the decisions.

So, I found myself being concerned more about the individual woman than about the life in her womb. And I believe that I did so because of the lack of gender equality that I experienced in society and in the Church. “Roe v. Wade” was one way of giving greater leverage to women in their struggle for equality in our society and in our Church.

The second influential factor in making me less passionate about reversing the law was an uncertainty about when life began in the womb. At what point did the embryo, the fetus, become an unborn child and become a separate entity from the mother?

At what point, did the argument, “It is my body and I have the right of control over my body,” lose its validity?

In the 1970s, those issues were not firmly decided. There was vagueness. Arguments about whether the

embryo, the fetus, was considered a fully human person were presented from a variety of perspectives, and there was not a clear understanding about when life began.

Over the years though, I saw myself becoming more concerned about the legality and the morality of “Roe v. Wade.”



Week 6

What brought this about? First and foremost was the scientific and medical technology and knowledge that we have acquired about life in the womb. Today there is no question that what is in the womb of the mother is life, a separate and entirely different human being from the mother. And it can not be pinpointed as to when that “differentness” begins to happen. It is now easy and logical to conclude that a new and entirely different human being is created and God’s breath, the soul, is infused at the moment of conception.

In recent years, as medical advances continue, as we experience more sophisticated sonogram equipment and see pictures of children in the womb at very early stages of development; as we do fetal surgery, surgery in the womb; as courts convict people for intent to kill an unborn child; have you noticed how our language has changed?

We talk less and less of embryos and fetuses. We use the language of pre-born and unborn children.

It has become fact, not belief, that life in the womb is an entirely different human being from the mother and that the only logical point for the beginning of life is at the moment of conception, the moment when man and woman, with God’s help, create new life.

In regard to the right of a woman to choose, the abortion argument over the years has shifted from “I have a right to control my body” to “Are my rights, as the woman and mother, greater than the rights of this unborn child? Do I as the mother have the right over the life of this child, or does this child have certain inalienable rights equal to my rights that are determined by society’s legal standards? Who ultimately makes the decision as to whether this unborn child comes to life outside the womb or not?”

Today it has become a very different argument. As the discussion swirls about, this debate has the voice of many more women who are anti-abortion. There are many more women in various positions of power who

influence society and the Church, who help to create legislation, who are a part of the on-going dialogue of what is necessary to create and maintain a healthy society. (As a side note, I admit that there is still not complete gender equality in society or in the Church. We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go.)

Because of this greater participation in the ongoing dialogue of society and Church, and because there is a greater degree of gender equality, women, I believe, feel somewhat safer and freer to examine the question of life in the womb and to share decision making about the unborn child's future with society through legislative decisions.

I hope you see the first link that I am trying to make regarding what it means to be pro-life. Pro-life is not just anti-abortion. Pro-life is also about gender equality at all levels, in all places in society, and in the Church. When there is a commitment to gender equality, and when there is gender equality, I believe there will be fewer abortions as women feel a greater ability to participate in creating a healthier society and a healthier Church.

Once I came to the realization and conclusion that life in the womb is a unique and completely separate human being from the mother, and that life begins at the moment of conception, I began to struggle with the question of, "Does the unborn child have rights; if so, what kind of rights, and do these rights need to be protected, and how do these rights weigh in when compared to the rights of the mother?"

My initial response to those questions was, again, not to reverse the law, but to be more passionate and vocal about the abortion issue and to work for change on a "one-to-one" level.

One of the most thought-provoking comments that came out of the presidential campaign of 2000 came from the then-Governor George W. Bush who said, "It is not so much about making abortion illegal as it is about making it unthinkable."

I resonated with that phrase because it summed up my personal belief that was operative for a number of years: "Leave the 'Roe v. Wade' decision alone and work to create a climate of life in regard to all social

issues and to make sure that the abortion issue is viewed in the context of other life issues."

I have worked very hard and continue to do what I can in my ministry to create a "Culture of Life" in which abortion becomes unthinkable. I have faithfully attempted to do this in my "one-to-one" ministry and in my efforts on a Parish-wide basis in all the Parishes in which I have served.

This attitude worked for a while, but I continued to be nagged by the question of the unborn child and his/her rights. What happens to all these human beings who cannot speak for themselves while we, as a society, are busy getting our "Culture of Life" act together?

Are they society's sacrifice? Or do we, if we believe that they are pre-born human beings, protect them with the rights that we grant born children and adults.

And, indeed, we grant even greater rights to infants and children than to adults because infants and children are more vulnerable. Do we not logically conclude that pre-born children should have those same rights?

It is one thing to try to persuade people to live within a "Culture of Life" and it is another to ensure that "Culture of Life" rights are guaranteed for everyone, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the defenseless.

What finally moved me to decide that we not only must create a "Culture of Life" through persuasion, but at the same time, we must create, enact and enforce laws that protect all human beings whether born or pre-born was my remembrance of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and especially the witness of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Could you imagine if that movement was only about persuasion? Could you imagine Rev. King saying, "Let us try to convince white people that they shouldn't be prejudiced toward black people; let us try to convince them that separate is not equal; let us point out all the institutionalized inequalities and simply pray for change?"

Where would we be today? Not very far from the late 1950s and 1960s, I believe!

It was the legislation that was created, enacted, and enforced that made people change behavior and hopefully, in time, change attitudes and feelings.



Week 20

We see a great change today in 2017, and it is because of legislation and moral persuasion!

Moral persuasion alone, unfortunately, would not have begun to bring discrimination to an end. If we believe in a “Culture of Life,” we must be willing to not only change attitudes, but we must be willing to create legislation that reflects our beliefs.

We still see many forms of subtle and not so subtle discrimination that continue some 50 years later even though legislation is in place. The reason for that, in my opinion, is because we, as society and as a Church, need to do more in the way of moral persuasion! Discrimination based on religion, skin color, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, mental and physical disabilities, economic and academic abilities must be loudly denounced. Where legislation is still needed, it must be enacted and enforced. These issues are, indeed, pro-life issues. If we want to protect life in the womb, we must be sincere and tireless in our efforts to protect life out of the womb.

We must make those connections. Otherwise our efforts to be anti-abortion are meaningless!

In 2016, we concluded a long and very difficult presidential campaign. As Catholics, we must keep in mind that neither Hillary Clinton nor Donald Trump and neither party, the Democrats nor the Republicans, are fully pro-life in the Catholic understanding.

In creating a “Culture of Life,” and in being Catholic, when we are pro-abortion and anti-death penalty; when we are anti-abortion and pro-death penalty; when we turn a deaf ear to a variety of discriminations; when we care not about the poor and the recently arrived in our society; when we see ourselves in isolation from other peoples and countries; when we are spending scarce resources on building walls instead of bridges, we are not consistent in our Catholic beliefs. We must be willing to make the connections!

This consistency is called the “Seamless Garment Ethic.” The phrase was coined by the late Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago. The phrase alludes to the event during Jesus’ crucifixion, his act of solidarity with the sufferings of Creation:

“When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garment and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, ‘Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be’” (John 19: 23-24).

The seamless garment ethic makes the same point as the Gospel story: the fabric of God’s Creation is desecrated when we tear it, gamble over it, or in any sense lay claims of ownership upon any part of it. This ethic involves an opposition to abortion, sexism, discrimination, warfare, the use of nuclear arms, the death penalty, economic deprivation, and the active killing of the sick and disabled. Just as much, the ethic calls us to create positive alternatives to these violent practices.

If I am to be pro-life, I must be consistent. I must be willing to wear the seamless garment. I must be pro-life in all places and at all times—from womb to tomb. I must work to create the “Culture of Life” not only through moral persuasion, but I must also work to create legislation that institutionalizes the “Culture of Life” beliefs. It is not “either/or.” It is “both/and”!

Thank you for allowing me to share my personal story with you. I pray that my sharing will help you in your struggles with the variety of life issues.

It is time that we stop pointing fingers at one another, and arguing with each other about whom is more pro-life. The challenge for each of us is to look into our hearts and ask ourselves: “How well am I wearing the seamless garment of Christ”?

Fr. Mike

