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Reaction to refugee ban by religious ranges from concern to opposition

Mark Pattison March 7, 2017
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE



President Donald Trump salutes as he stands on the tarmac after disembarking Air Force One as he arrives Sunday, March 5, 2017, at Andrews Air Force Base, Md. Trump is returning from Mar-a-Largo, Fla. (Credit: AP Photo/Alex Brandon.)

President Donald Trump's new executive order that imposes a 90-day ban on issuing visas to people from six predominantly Muslim nations had mixed reactions among Catholic and other religious groups. While some questioned the wisdom of such a move others vowed to oppose it outright.

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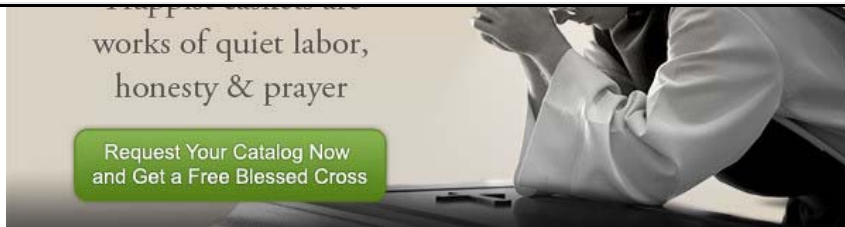
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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Within hours of President Donald Trump’s new executive order March 6 temporarily banning refugees, Catholic and other religious groups joined secular leaders in questioning the wisdom of such a move, with others vowing to oppose it outright.

Bill O’Keefe, vice president for advocacy and government relations at Catholic Relief Services, said in a statement, “As the world’s most blessed nation, we should be doing more to provide assistance overseas and resettle the most vulnerable, not less. It is wrong, during this time of great need, to cut humanitarian assistance and reduce resettlement.”

O’Keefe added, “Refugees are fleeing the same terrorism that we seek to protect ourselves from. By welcoming them, we show the world that we are an open, tolerant nation which seeks to protect the vulnerable. That has always been America’s greatest strength.”

“At the heart of the work of Catholic Charities is the Gospel mandate to welcome the stranger and care for the most vulnerable among us,” said Dominican Sister Donna Markham, president and CEO of Catholic Charities USA, in a statement.

“Today’s executive order not only hinders that work, but also effectively abandons, for four months, the thousands of endangered refugees fleeing violence, starvation and persecution,” she added. “It is deeply disturbing to know that the thousands of women, children and other persecuted individuals around the world will face a closed door rather than a helping hand from the United States.”

The revised order replaces Trump’s January 27 order, which has been blocked in the courts. **The new order** imposes a 90-day ban on issuing visas to people from six predominantly Muslim nations; Iraq is no longer on the list. The countries are Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan and Yemen.

It suspends the U.S. refugee program for all countries for 120 days. It also excludes lawful permanent residents - green card holders - from any travel ban. The new order will not take effect until March 16.

“A ban regarding human beings, because they are from a certain country or practice a particular religion is clearly xenophobic, nationalistic and racist,” said a statement by Sister Patricia Chappell, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur, who is executive director of Pax Christi USA.

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Scott Wright, director of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach, said that Columbans “have always welcomed migrants and refugees, we do so every day at the U.S.-Mexico border.

“We must always remember that we are a nation of immigrants and refugees, and we are called to stand in solidarity with them,” he said.

People of faith “are called to both address the root causes of migration and seek policies of welcome toward our migrant sisters and brothers,” Wright continued. “We stand against any policies that seek to build a wall, inhumanely detain and deport women and families, or limit migration based solely on a person’s country of origin or religion.”

Eli McCarthy, director of justice and peace for the Congregation of Major Superiors of Men, called it “completely unjust to punish an entire country due to the suspicion of a potential crime by an individual.

“We should be asking about the root causes of violent acts, such as U.S. militarization of conflicts, and giving our attention to addressing those concrete situations,” he said in a statement.

“Women religious have been blessed to be able to accompany and serve immigrant and refugee communities across this country for a very long time,” said a statement by Holy Cross Sister Joan Marie Steadman, executive director of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

“Catholic sisters remain committed to welcoming those who come to this country after passing through the U.S. government’s already rigorous screening processes.”

Larry Couch, director of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, aimed his statement directly at Trump.

“Mr. President, why close our borders to those fleeing real atrocities, fleeing the ravages of war and the search for food, clean water and safety?” Couch asked.

“This is not what America stands for and not who we are called to be. America is not a country that retreats and Americans choose to not live in fear of the ‘what if.’ Mr. President, welcome the refugee and welcome the face of God.”

“The ban goes against everything that we stand for as Franciscan Catholic Christians, and against what Jesus and Francis of Assisi taught and lived,” said a statement from Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network.

“St. Bonaventure tells us that how we choose and what we choose makes a difference - first in what we become by our choices and second what the world becomes by our choices.”

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“For Christians, Lent is a season of repentance for personal and social sin. The Franciscan Action Network will stand in prayer and solidarity with Muslim sisters and brothers, as well as all refugees and immigrants, during the forty days of Lent,” she said.

“While opposing bans and harmful executive orders, we also pray for a change of hearts and minds of this administration and legislators who support anti-refugee and anti-immigrant measures,” Lucey added. “We will also continue to speak out against this injustice which is as cruel and unusual as it is astounding and irreconcilable.”

Sara Benitez, Latino program director for the interfaith group Faith in Public Life, said that once again Trump “is compromising our integrity as a nation.

“The refugee ban introduced today is rooted in the same immoral and divisive policy we saw a few weeks ago, and we will not stand for it,” she said in a statement.

“We must continue the work on the ground to stand up for our immigrant and refugee neighbors who are under threat,” added Benitez, whose organization amassed dozens of pastors for a midafternoon protest March 6 in front of the White House.

Faith in Public Life also has mounted a “Build Bridges, Not Walls” campaign to list ways people can support refugees and other immigrants.

“The new order doubles down on demonizing refugees - implying that America should fear those who have been persecuted, tortured, threatened and victimized by terrorists. America is diminished when we abandon our values and close our doors,” said a statement by Linda Hartke, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, or LIRS.

“Had the new executive order been in place last month, it would have likely prevented LIRS from reuniting Mushkaad Abdi, a 4-year-old Somali refugee who was alone in Kampala, Uganda, with her mother and sisters in Minneapolis,” Hartke added. “To close our nation’s doors on those who are simply seeking safety and protection is shameful and misguided.”

“While the White House may have made changes to the ban, the intent to discriminate against Muslims remains clear. This doesn’t just harm the families caught in the chaos of President Trump’s draconian policies - it’s diametrically opposed to our values, and makes us less safe,” said a statement from Eric Schneiderman, New York state’s attorney general.

Schneiderman took the White House to court after Trump’s first executive order; other court challenges around the country followed.

“My office is closely reviewing the new executive order, and I stand ready to litigate - again - in order to protect New York’s families, institutions, and economy,” Schneiderman said.

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aimed to help ISIS (Islamic State) genocide survivors in Iraq and Syria. ... Even if ISIS is routed from Mosul (Iraq), the Christian community is now so shattered and vulnerable, without President Trump's prompt leadership, the entire Iraqi Christian presence could soon be wiped out."

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