

Bishop Michael Pham Leads San Diego Diocese with Focus on Immigration and Refugees

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— Categories: Human Rights



Bishop Michael Pham, the first Vietnamese-American to head the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego, is stepping into his new role with a clear emphasis on immigration and support for vulnerable communities. Appointed earlier this year by Pope Leo XIV, Pham's leadership comes at a time when U.S. immigration policy faces renewed debate and stricter

enforcement measures, particularly affecting border regions such as Southern California.

Born in Vietnam, Pham came to the United States as a child refugee after the war. His personal history gives depth to his ministry and informs his outreach to those facing deportation or legal uncertainty. Pham has been seen attending immigration hearings, praying with families in detention, and encouraging parishioners to provide material and moral support to migrants. His actions echo the Catholic Church's long-standing call to uphold the dignity of every person, regardless of status, while navigating the challenges of law and policy.

The San Diego Diocese, which serves more than 1.5 million Catholics, is facing its own pressures, including financial difficulties tied to bankruptcy proceedings related to historic abuse cases and reductions in federal aid for social programmes. Despite these challenges, Pham has prioritised ministries that serve immigrant and refugee communities, emphasising language accessibility and cultural understanding. Masses and outreach are now offered in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, broadening the diocese's connection to its diverse population.

Pham's appointment aligns with Pope Leo XIV's direction for the global Church: a firm but compassionate witness to faith in the public sphere, without ignoring the realities of governance and law. While Pham has not directly criticised U.S. policies, his visible presence at immigration-related events signals a quiet but deliberate message of solidarity. For many migrants, seeing a bishop stand beside them in court or community centres offers both spiritual comfort and public validation of their struggles.

Local leaders and faith advocates say Pham's efforts reflect a broader trend within American Catholicism, where bishops are increasingly active in public debates over immigration and social justice. In border dioceses especially, these issues are not abstract but deeply personal, affecting families within parishes. Pham's own journey, from refugee to bishop, adds weight to his advocacy, showing how lived experience can shape a ministry rooted in both faith and action.

Opinions among American Catholics on immigration remain divided, with some supporting tighter controls and others calling for more open policies. Yet in San Diego, where the realities of migration are visible daily, Pham's approach appears to bridge pastoral care with public witness. His emphasis on compassion and service, even in the face of political complexity, underscores the enduring role of the Church in addressing pressing humanitarian challenges.

Through his work, Bishop Pham demonstrates that leadership grounded in experience can speak powerfully to communities in transition. His story is not just one of personal achievement but also of commitment to those whose journeys echo his own.