News



IHM Sr. Nancy Sylvester asks Vice President JD Vance a question about immigration enforcement at a town hall in Detroit aired on CBS Oct. 17. (GSR screen capture)



by Dan Stockman

View Author Profile
dstockman@ncronline.org

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Vice President JD Vance is used to being confronted by questions from the press. Over the weekend, he faced questions from a Catholic sister.

Sr. Nancy Sylvester, of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary of Monroe, Michigan, was among attendees at a town hall event Oct. 15* in suburban Detroit featuring the vice president and was able to ask him a question about immigration. The event was aired on CBS Oct. 17.

"We are sisters who minister at the southern border in the United States, as well as here around Detroit, and they are constantly seeing families who are affected by our immigration policies," Sylvester told Vance in the video from CBS News. "They see the trauma of children who are separated from their parents, sometimes on a moment's notice — they go to school and they come back and [the parents are] not there."

She went on, citing the "fear and violence" of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers.

"How would you justify to people of faith, especially those of us who try to follow the Gospel, how the behavior of the ICE men and women can constantly be justified in terms of the kind of values we want to live by?" asked Sylvester, who is a senior contributor for Global Sisters Report. "And also, what policies would you advocate to try to promote more compassionate and respective behavior toward our immigrant sisters and brothers?"

Sr. Nancy Sylvester confronts Vice President JD Vance in this video. (YouTube/CBS News)

Vance, who is Catholic, began his answer by saying he appreciates her "and hopefully I'll be in your prayers as you'll certainly be in mine." He said the federal government is "trying to strike a balance" between the need for law enforcement and acting humanely.

Despite the host's efforts, Vance did not address specific instances of alleged violent incidents by ICE officers, such as shooting American citizens, but allowed that mistakes have been made.

"Most of them are amazing people who are patriots and they want to do a good job protecting their country. Sometimes you have some people who make mistakes,

sometimes you have some people who really screw up, and obviously we have a responsibility to prosecute, investigate when people do screw up," Vance said.

Incidents where ICE officers have been ordered to receive more training or discipline may not be advertised, Vance said, but that doesn't mean it's not happening.

"We believe people have to be judged in a court of law and through a normal investigatory process," he said. "We don't jump in and try to accuse people just again because of what we've seen in a news media article."

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Vance seemed to imply that the government has had to be aggressive because of the Biden administration's policies, saying, "What we saw over the last five years, before we came in, I mean is, we have to talk about the fact that drug cartels were sex trafficking thousands and thousands of children, thousands of thousands of girls who were sold into sex slavery. Of course, the fentanyl trade which killed a lot of people in Michigan."

"Despite what some people say in the press, I promise you that we wake up every day and we try to balance law enforcement with humane law enforcement," he said. "And of course, when you're dealing with hundreds of thousands of law enforcement officials, you're never going to get everything perfect, but I think the men and women of ICE, by and large, have done a good job and where there are people who've screwed up, of course they should suffer consequences."

Sylvester is founder and director of the Institute for Communal Contemplation and Dialogue, has served in leadership of her own religious community and in the presidency of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and is a columnist for GSR. Previously, she was national coordinator of Network, the Catholic social justice lobby.

*This story has been updated to correct the date and location of the town hall.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.