



By: TA | AP Insight

# What it really means to be pro-life - Pope intervenes in US abortion debate



Pope Leo XIV has intervened for the first time in an abortion **dispute** roiling the U.S. Catholic Church by raising the seeming contradiction over what it really means to be “pro-life.”

Leo, a Chicago native, was asked late Tuesday about plans by Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich to give a lifetime achievement award to Illinois Senator Dick Durbin for his work helping immigrants.

The plans drew objection from some conservative U.S. bishops given the powerful Democratic senator’s support for abortion rights.

Leo called first of all for respect for both sides, but he also pointed out the seeming contradiction in such debates.

“Someone who says ‘I’m against abortion but says I am in favor of the death penalty’ is not really pro-life,” Leo said. “Someone who says that ‘I’m against abortion, but I’m in agreement with the inhuman treatment of immigrants in the United States,’ I don’t know if that’s pro-life.”

Leo spoke hours before Cupich announced that Durbin had declined the award.

Church teaching forbids abortion but it also opposes capital punishment as “inadmissible” under all circumstances.

U.S. bishops and the Vatican have strongly called for humane treatment of migrants, citing the Biblical command to “welcome the stranger.”

## Pope Leo says mutual respect is needed

Leo said he wasn’t familiar with the details of the dispute over the Durbin award, but said it was nevertheless important to look at the senator’s overall record and noted Durbin’s four-decade tenure.

Responding to a question in English from the

U.S. Catholic broadcaster EWTN News, he said there were many ethical issues that constitute the teaching of the Catholic Church.

“I don’t know if anyone has all the truth on them but I would ask first and foremost that there be greater respect for one another and that we search together both as human beings, in that case as American citizens or citizens of the state of Illinois, as well as Catholics to say we need to you know really look closely at all of these ethical issues and to find the way forward in this church. Church teaching on each one of those issues is very clear,” he said.

Cupich was a close adviser to Pope Francis, who strongly upheld church teaching opposing abortion but also **criticized** the politicizing of the abortion debate by U.S. bishops.

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Biden met on several occasions with Francis and told reporters in 2021 that Francis had told him to continue receiving Communion.

During a visit to Rome that year he **received** the sacrament during Mass at a church in Francis’ diocese.

Durbin was barred from receiving Communion in his home diocese of Springfield in 2004.

Springfield Bishop Thomas Paprocki has continued the **prohibition** and was one of the U.S. bishops who strongly objected to Cupich’s decision to honor the senator.

Cupich claims Durbin as a member of the Chicago Archdiocese, where Durbin also has a home.

## Senator Durbin declines his award

In his statement announcing that Durbin would decline the award, Cupich lamented that the polarization in the U.S. has created a situation where U.S. Catholics “find themselves politically homeless” since neither the Republican nor the Democratic party fully encapsulates the breadth of Catholic teaching.



*The polarization in the U.S. has created a situation where U.S. Catholics find themselves politically homeless - Cardinal Blase Cupich*

He defended honoring Durbin for his pro-immigration stance, and said the planned Nov. 3 award ceremony could have been an occasion to engage him and other political leaders with the hope of pressing the church's view on other issues, including abortion.

“It could be an invitation to Catholics who tirelessly promote the dignity of the unborn, the elderly, and the sick to extend the circle of protection to immigrants facing in this present moment an existential threat to their lives and the lives of their families,” Cupich wrote.

Paprocki, for his part, thanked Durbin for declining the award. “I ask that all Catholics continue to pray for our church, our country, and for the human dignity of all people to be respected in all stages of life including the unborn and immigrants,” Paprocki said in a Facebook post.

The dispute came as President Donald Trump's administration maintains a **surge** of immigration enforcement in the Chicago area.