

Faith facts noted about VP nominee Vance

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—Former President Donald Trump announced Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance—a Roman Catholic—will be his running mate as he seeks reelection.

Before his election to the Senate in 2022, Vance was a tech venture capitalist and the author of the bestselling memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* about his family history, upbringing in Middletown, Ohio, and the broader struggles facing white working-class Americans.

Vance, an adult convert to Catholicism and married to a Hindu woman, has a complicated relationship with religion and, after his recent support for keeping mifepristone, an abortion pill, legal, with the GOP's religious base.

Here are five faith facts about Vance:

- **Vance is an adult convert to Catholicism.**

Vance converted to Catholicism in August of 2019, when he was baptized and confirmed at St. Gertrude Priory in Cincinnati, Ohio, by Henry Stephan, a Dominican friar. According to an interview with American expatriate and writer Rod Dreher, who was present at the baptism, Vance chose St. Augustine as his patron saint.

Vance told Dreher that he'd converted because he "became persuaded over time that Catholicism was true" and had observed that the people who meant the most to him were Catholic.

Vance said his conversion would have happened sooner if not for the clergy sexual abuse crisis, which “forced me to process the church as a divine and a human institution, and what it would mean for my 2-year-old son.”

Before becoming Catholic, Vance, now a father of three, was raised by Christian relatives, including many who didn’t go to church. Around when he started law school, he “went through an angry atheist phase,” as he told Dreher.

If elected, he would be the second Catholic vice president in U.S. history—after Joe Biden.

• Vance is tied to ‘Catholic integralism,’ an ideology that seeks Christian influence over society.

“Catholic integralism” is an intellectual movement that—experts say—prefers a “soft power” approach to exerting Christian influence over society.

Thinkers in the movement herald the importance of a Christian “strategic adviser” to people in power.

As Kevin Vallier, a professor at Bowling Green State University and expert in Catholic integralism, told RNS earlier this year: “There’s the sense that the liberal order is so corrupt that elite Catholics have to find positions of influence and use them in a kind of noble and appropriate way,” he said.

Harvard University’s Adrian Vermeule, a leader in the movement, stated integralists once viewed Trump as a figure similar to Constantine the Great, the Roman emperor who converted to Christianity.

Vermeule has also praised Trump by likening him to Hungarian Prime

Minister Viktor Orbán, a leader widely decried as being authoritarian.

Vance, for his part, spoke at a 2022 gathering at the Franciscan University of Steubenville that was widely associated with integralism and “new right” politics. Vance has yet to answer questions about his own thoughts regarding Catholic integralism.

• Vance’s wife, Usha, is not Christian and was raised in a Hindu household.

According to a recent interview with Fox and Friends, Usha Chilukuri Vance, J.D. Vance’s wife, is “not Christian.”

The two met in Yale Law School and married shortly after graduation. Usha, a native Californian, was raised by Indian immigrants in a Hindu household but has said she was very supportive of Vance’s conversion to Catholicism.

“I did grow up in a religious household,” said Usha, who clerked for Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts as well as Brett Kavanaugh before he became a Supreme Court justice. Roberts and Kavanaugh are both Catholic.

“My parents are Hindu,” Usha said. “That is one of the reasons why they made such good parents. That made them very good people. And I think I have seen the power of that in my own life. And I knew that J.D. was searching for something. This just felt right for him.”

When the couple married in 2014, they held two ceremonies, including one where they were blessed by a Hindu pundit, per Politico.

Vance thinks Christianity is an “answer” to existential questions about American identity.

During a 2023 talk hosted by American Moment, Vance brought up Christian nationalism, which he dismissed as a term “meant to be very scary.” But he went on to explain how he envisions Christianity informing American life—and, particularly, American identity.

“We’re a country that is majority Christian, nominally, but not nearly majority Christian in terms of practice,” he said. “We’re a multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious democracy that’s heavily exposed to the economic forces of globalization, and I think that we have not yet figured out how to harmonize that with some basic sense of what it means to be an American in the 21st century.

“I happen to think that the Christian faith is a good way of helping provide an answer to that question.”

When he converted, Vance said his views on public policy were aligned with Catholic social teaching.

“Part of social conservatism’s challenge for viability in the 21st century is that it can’t just be about issues like abortion, but it has to have a broader vision of political economy and the common good,” he told Rod Dreher.

• His statements about abortion and immigration may trigger blowback from some Catholics.

On July 7, Vance told NBC’s “Meet the Press” that he supported mifepristone “being accessible.” Mifepristone is used alongside misoprostol in abortions before 10 weeks of pregnancy. It also can be used to treat high blood pressure in adults who have Cushing’s syndrome and type 2 diabetes and cannot have or have failed surgery.

“This tawdry episode informs us that Vance has no principles, at least none that aren’t for sale, and the asking price is cheap,” C.J. Doyle, executive director of the Catholic Action League of Massachusetts, told the *National Catholic Register*.

J.D. Flynn, the editor-in-chief of *The Pillar*, a Catholic opinion and news site, wrote in an analysis on July 12 that if Vance was selected, it could lead to a new conversation about Eucharistic coherence, or the idea that a Catholic’s belief in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist should be accompanied by actions that align with the Catholic Church’s teaching.

This argument was used most recently to suggest Catholic politicians Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi, who support abortion rights, should not receive Communion.

In a campaign fundraising message on July 8, Vance called for mass deportations of immigrants without legal status, a promise also present in the Republican Party platform. “We need to deport every single person who invaded our country illegally.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has called for a pathway to legal status and citizenship for the approximately 11 million immigrants who live in the U.S. without legal authorization, emphasizing the obligation in the Catholic Catechism to “welcome the foreigner.”