News



Participants walk toward the U.S. Capitol during the Women's March on Washington Jan. 21. (CNS/Bob Roller)



by Dawn Araujo-Hawkins

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For many women in the United States, Election Day 2016 was a crisis. Almost immediately, women began talking, planning and organizing on Facebook and other social media platforms. It became a movement so widespread that on Jan. 21, the day after Donald Trump was inaugurated as the 45th president of the United States, millions of women took to the streets for what would become the largest single-day protest in the nation's history: the Women's March.

A Nation Under Trump

As the anniversary of Donald Trump's election as president of the United States approached, the NCR staff wondered if the calls to action that persisted immediately following the election remained as urgent. We identified several policy issues to explore and asked NCR reporters to interview key players about what has transpired since Nov. 8, 2016. The entire series can be found here.

For example, an estimated 8,000 to 9,000 people marched in Lansing, Michigan — among them, Sr. Audra Turnbull, now a 29-year-old second-year novice with the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Monroe, Michigan. Turnbull describes the march as "electric" and says it gave her a focus for her post-election shock.

"I worked on the fact that, as a white woman, I can use my privilege to speak up," she told NCR. "I felt so compelled to be on the frontlines. I wanted to do the right thing."

In the months following the Women's March, Turnbull took part in additional demonstrations against some of the Trump administration's policies, namely the Muslim travel ban. She says whenever there was news out of Washington, she would search Facebook to see if there was going to be a rally near Monroe. "There usually was," she said.

It turns out Turnbull's experience isn't unique. In the last year, women in the U.S. have, en masse, become more politically active.

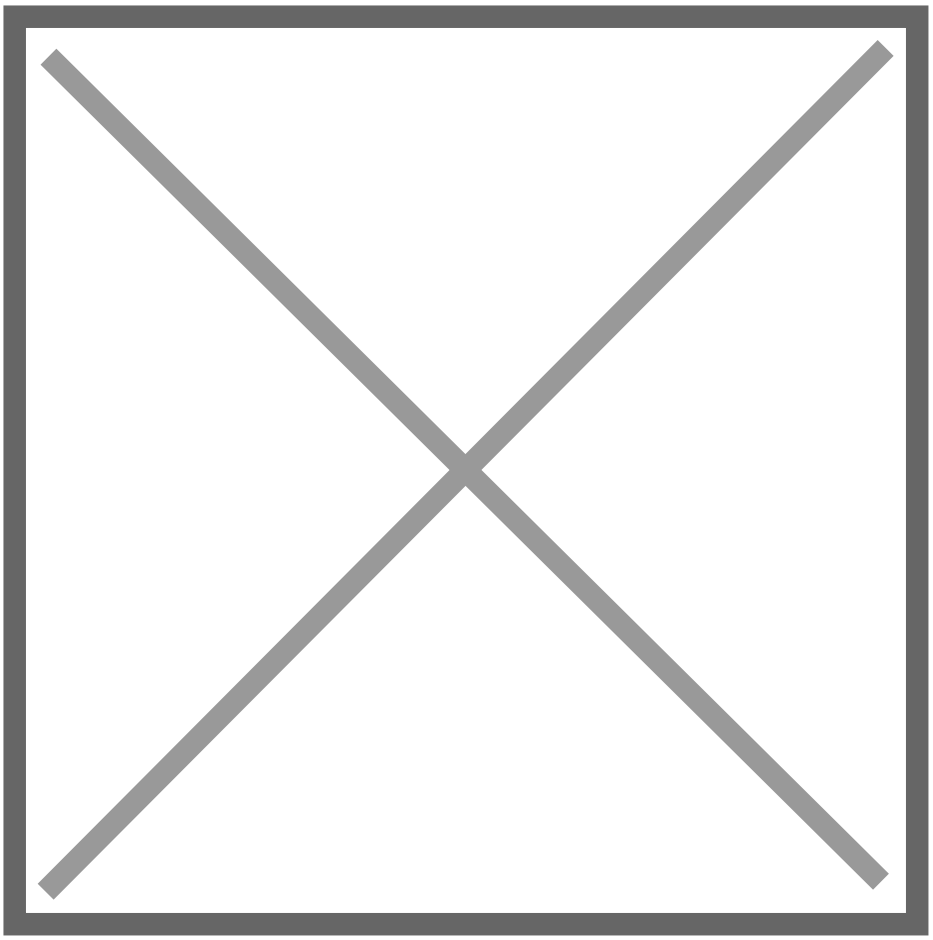
According to a Pew Research Center study released this summer, 58 percent of women say they have started paying more attention to politics since the election. While not all of these women oppose Trump or his policies (42 percent of women voted for Trump), other polls suggest that it's left-leaning women who have been the most galvanized to action.

For example, when The Washington Post polled people in the days following the Women's March, 40 percent of Democratic women said they planned to increase their political activity in 2017. In comparison, only 27 percent of Democratic men and 17 percent of Republican women said the same. Similarly, when Daily Action — an anti-Trump tool that sends daily text messages reminding people to call Congress — surveyed its users this spring, it found that 86 percent of them were women.

In Monroe, Turnbull says a group of marchers have started meeting monthly at the Immaculate Heart of Mary motherhouse. "They're women who were never politically active before," she said, "but they were shocked by what they were seeing and needed that sense of community."

Before the election, many women opposed a Trump presidency because of his history of misogyny and sexual assault. In the year since he was elected, much of the focus has shifted to his actual agenda. Polls show that on issues like Syrian refugees and the Affordable Care Act, the majority of women are at odds with the president.

"This administration is not pro-life. It is pro-death," said Anthea Butler, an associate professor of religious studies and Africana studies at the University of Pennsylvania, "I'm not praying for this administration, because it's against the people of God; I'm praying for the people affected by their policies."



People join the Women's March Jan. 21 in Chicago. (Nicole Sotelo)

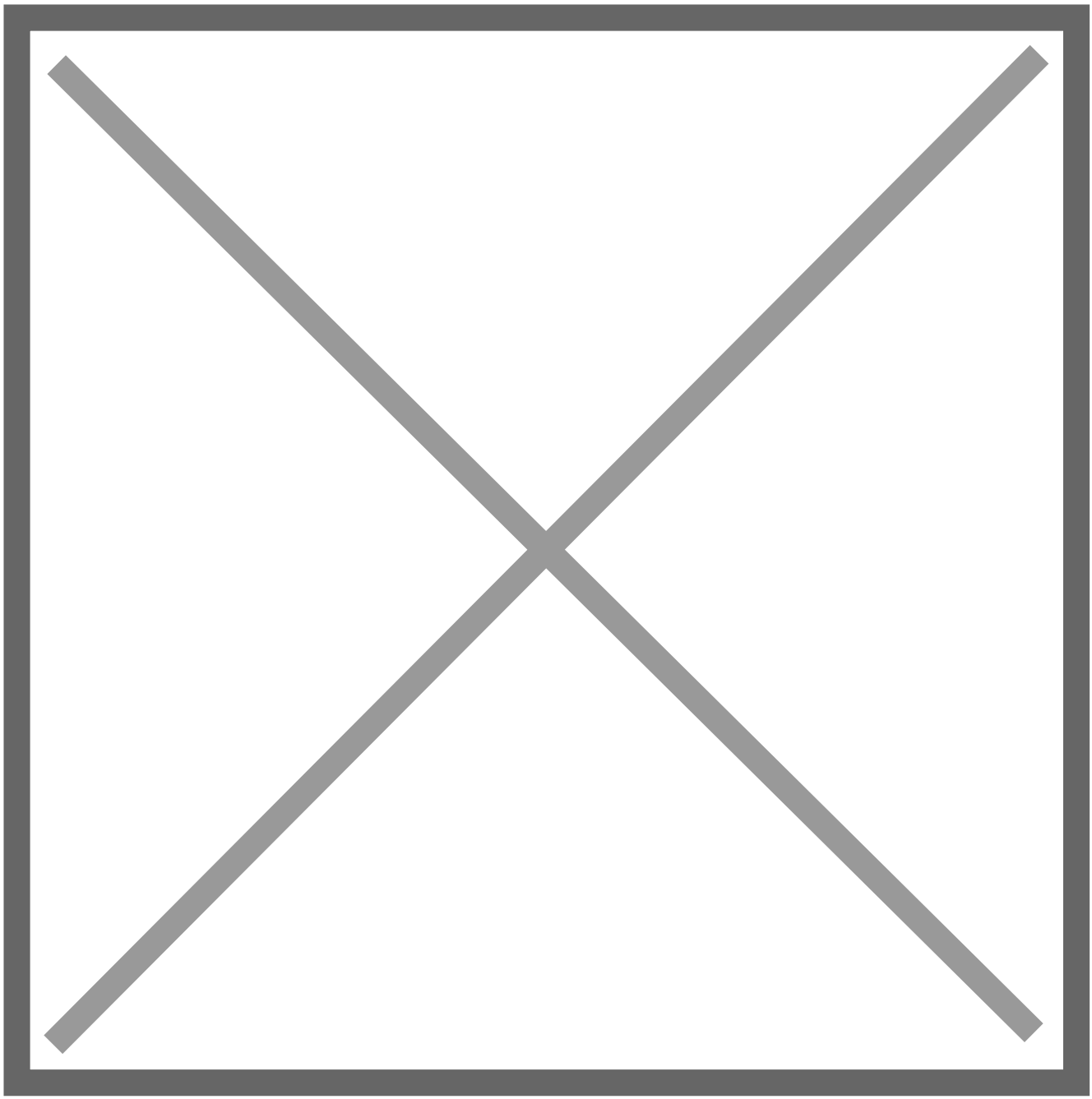
In addition to praying and protesting, liberal women are also joining the anti-Trump resistance by running for political office in droves. Applications to Emerge America, a training program for Democratic women, have increased 87 percent since the election, and women in 24 states have asked about starting local chapters.

EMILY's List, a political action committee that helps pro-choice Democratic women run for office, also saw an uptick in interest. The day after the election, a record 920 women contacted the organization. By October 2017, that number had risen to more than 19,000 first-time, would-be candidates — among them two Catholics: Elizabeth Guzman, who is running for the Virginia House of Delegates, and Juanita Perez Williams, who is running for mayor in Syracuse, New York.

"That's definitely not a coincidence," said Julie McClain Downey, a spokesperson for EMILY's List. "Women had either a visceral reaction to Trump or were frustrated by the way Hillary [Clinton] was treated."

But for all the ways liberal women have either found or amplified their political voices in the post-election Zeitgeist, the movement has also highlighted the lack of intersectionality in U.S. feminism.

Turnbull said she was dismayed to learn that pro-life groups were ostracized from the Women's March last year. And although a number of the national march organizers were women of color, Turnbull said, from her perspective, the event itself was conspicuously white.



People join the Women's March Jan. 21 in Philadelphia. (Elizabeth Eisenstadt Evans)

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"The Women's March had an opportunity to bring people together, but I don't think it did as good of a job as it could have," she said. "There were a lot of missed opportunities."

Butler was in Spain during the Women's March because she didn't want to be anywhere near the inauguration, which she called a day of shame. But she said that even if she had been in the U.S., she would not have participated because the march wasn't for her, a black woman.

"I'm happy for them that they marched, but that was not my march," she said. To sum up her feelings about the Women's March, Butler mentions a now viral photo from the march in Washington, D.C.

In the photo, a black woman stands in front of three white women wearing the march's ubiquitous pink pussy hats. The three women are on their phones, possibly posting proof of their activism to social media. Angela Peoples, co-director of GetEqual, is holding a handmade sign that reads, "Don't forget: White women voted for Trump," — a reference to the fact that while 94 percent of black women voted for Clinton, 53 percent of white women voted Trump.

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"They know they are complicit," Butler said. "They never spoke up before to make sure this wouldn't happen. I don't have time for people who feel guilty because they're the ones who got us here."

Butler says she's now putting her energy toward the upcoming midterm election. "I want to see some of these people out of office."

Turnbull is also looking toward the future. "We're in such a new moment," she said. "But it's that solidarity with other women that lets me know we're going to get through it."

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.
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