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Catholic sisters in the United States working on global issues say they are dismayed by the prospect of a second Trump presidency and what it portends for U.S. policy on issues like climate change and international development.

Their reaction mirrors that of other sisters whose domestic ministries serve the most vulnerable and who say they are worried about policies that could affect immigrants and those experiencing economic poverty.

Wherever their ministries, many sisters expressed shock at the election result.

"I'm stunned," said Adrian Dominican Sr. Durstyne "Dusty" Farnan, who represents the Dominican Leadership Conference at the United Nations.

In what was expected to be a tight race, former President Donald Trump of the Republican Party won the Nov. 5 election handily — he not only won the electoral college, but is also on track to win the popular vote for his first time — and was declared the victor in the early hours the following day, besting Vice President Kamala Harris, a Democrat.

Farnan said she was on a Zoom call Nov. 6 with environmental advocates and participants in the upcoming United Nations summit on climate change known as COP29.

Supporters of Democratic presidential nominee U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris react to ear

Supporters of Democratic presidential nominee U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris react to early election results during an Election Night rally at Howard University in Washington on Nov. 5. Harris' Republican rival, former President Donald Trump, was elected the 47th president of the United States. (OSV News/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)

She said people outside the United States are still looking for U.S. leadership on the climate issue but are now deeply worried that a new Trump administration will downplay or ignore concerns about the climate crisis.



Adrian Dominican Sr. Durstyne "Dusty" Farnan (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

"People on the call were dismayed [at Trump's election]," Farnan said, adding that many expressed fear and worry, because when it comes to climate change, "we [the U.S.] must be engaged."

"I'm just in shock," said Sr. Irene O'Neill, who coordinates Sisters Rising Worldwide, a sister-run nonprofit based in St. Paul, Minnesota, that links sisters and potential funders who can support sister ministries globally. "I wasn't expecting this outcome."

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"The first feeling I had was like I had been thrown from a boat and tossed onshore. It's that disorienting," she told Global Sisters Report. "Going forward I need to harness the peace and joy within me."



Sr. Irene O'Neill of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph (Courtesy of Sisters Rising Worldwide)

O'Neill, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, said what worries her and others committed to global solidarity and justice work is that they believe the Trump ethos is antithetical to what grounds the work of Catholic sisters: commitment to community.

"It's not money that keeps us alive," she said of American society, "but community." Sisters, she said, "have community, and we model it."

O'Neill said that she is disappointed that a majority of American voters, in voting for President-elect Trump, seemed to eschew a commitment to community and solidarity, the kind she said is exemplified by the work of her group's ministry.

Farnan also expressed frustration with fellow American voters, saying she is sorry "that the U.S is not ready for a woman and a woman of color [as president]. Just when you think it's going to happen, it doesn't happen."

Beth Blissman, the Loretto Community's representative at the U.N., agreed, saying, "I really thought we were ready for a female head of state in this country. It's a huge disappointment."



Democratic presidential nominee U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris reacts after delivering her concession speech Nov. 6 at Howard University in Washington. Harris' Republican rival, Donald Trump, was elected the 47th president of the United States. (OSV News/Reuters/Hannah McKay)

Farnan added she and others committed to gender equality need to continue their work "to think bigger and think inclusively," noting that Harris "tried to engage people of different views and political parties throughout the U.S."

Blissman said that, moving forward, it will be important for her and other advocates to stress the need to "look beyond our borders and explain to others how unjust systems are built on the backs of others."

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She said wealth has been built on systems of empire and it is important to reflect that "Jesus was standing up to 'empire' until his death."

It is also imperative for advocates — like sisters and lay representatives at the U.N. — to stress the importance to fellow American Catholics of Catholic social teaching's focus on compassion to others, Blissman said, as well the focus on environmental stewardship in the landmark 2015 encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home."

"Catholic social teaching is the best- kept secret [among American Catholics]," she said, while there is "a huge *Laudato Si*' movement globally but few Catholics in the pews in the U.S. know about it."

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious noted that its members have been reflecting on the Gospel and the Beatitudes as they relate to current events for the last year.

"In November 2023, we took up the work we entitled, 'Transforming Grace,' a set of practices designed to help us participate in the healing of polarization that exists in our country and world. This present moment reminds us of the necessity of these practices," they said in a post-election statement.



A supporter of Republican President-elect Donald Trump celebrates at his victory rally at the Palm Beach County Convention Center Nov. 6 in West Palm Beach, Florida, after Trump was elected the 47th president of the United States. (OSV News/Reuters/Carlos Barria)

"Without regard to who one voted for, there is work to be done to embody the values of the American promise," they wrote. "If we are to create common ground as a society, there is work to be done by all of us so that we can be hospitable to the ideas and dreams of all people. We invite you to join us in this work of radical inclusion and healing."

About 15 miles north of U.N. headquarters in New York, members of the Sisters of Charity of New York said they are deeply worried about the people they serve in the city.

"We're worried about the immigrants, we're worried about the poor," Sr. Donna Dodge, president of the Sisters of Charity of New York, said in an interview.

"We're worried about people all over the world who are going to be affected by the decision that was made by the majority of the United States' people."

That concern, rooted in Dodge's many years of experience working with marginalized communities, is now colored by uncertainty. Waking up after election night, she said, felt like "living in a foreign land."



The six sisters of the leadership team of the Sisters of Charity gathered on Nov. 6 in their headquarters in the Bronx, New York, speaking to NCR. (Courtesy of Sisters of Charity of New York/James Rowe)

"I prayed a lot that God would let us know, what is our role in this? What is our role in the next four years?" she added, emphasizing a desire to live her next years as "a peacemaker."

The Sisters of Charity congregation's legacy has included supporting stigmatized groups, such as patients with AIDS in the 1980s when St. Vincent's Hospital, a Catholic institution in Manhattan, became a sanctuary for those turned away by

others.

"We don't know what the next crisis is going to be," said Sr. Mary Ann Daly, who is a member of the leadership team at the Sisters of Charity of New York. "I'm concerned about the future vision of the common good. I'm not sure how that's going to be expressed."

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Already before the election, on Oct. 30, the leadership team of the Sisters of Charity had released a statement in which they expressed their dismay in the face of a political situation that, they said, is unprecedented.

"Never in our experience has a presidential race been laced with such disrespect, mockery, vulgarity, misogyny, and complete disregard for the dignity and worth of individuals because of their race, ethnicity, beliefs, gender and gender expression," they wrote.

"Equally disturbing because it hits closer to home is the stance of many of our church leaders. Not only do they stand by silently as the people they serve are mocked and denigrated, some seem to endorse this vulgar and non-civil behavior with a smile."

In Immokalee, Florida, Sr. Judy Dohner spent the middle of the week trying to assess what the election results will mean for the immigrants and migrant farmworkers she's worked with for decades in one of Florida's key agricultural centers.

Related: Q&A with Sr. Judy Dohner, on the need for democracy in Haiti

"I know the Haitians, they would wait and see," said the Sister of the Humility of Mary. "They truly believe God is in charge and believe they have a legal status. They're not going to worry until they have something real to worry about," which could happen if President-elect Trump changes the rules on Temporary Protected Status.

But for now, she said, "the people who want to come into the country are worried but those who are here and have legal status; that's a different case."

The false accusations against Haitians in Springfield, Ohio, has Haitians and immigrants there very worried, she said, citing cases of people she knows personally.

Some are considering leaving jobs and apartments to go elsewhere — even those with legal status — because Trump has said Springfield would be first on the list of places where immigrants would be deported.



Sr. Judy Dohner, a Sister of the Humility of Mary, served as a nurse and hospital administrator in Haiti for 16 years. In 2018, she returned to the U.S. and volunteers at Guadalupe Social Services and Catholic Charities in Immokalee, Florida, considered the center of Florida’s migrant workers. (Gail DeGeorge)

In her volunteer position with Catholic Charities, Dohner knows of cases in which mothers have been left to care for their children when their husbands have been deported after being stopped for traffic violations.

"It's a huge problem and it may get worse," she said, referring to children born in the U.S. but whose parents may be deported because they're here without legal status.

Dohner is hopeful that President-elect Trump's heated rhetoric may get a reality check once he takes office again in January. "We need the farmworkers, we need the labor," she said. "Saying it during a campaign and making it happen are two different things."

As for her reaction to the overall election results, Dohner said she was still recovering after volunteering as a poll worker on Election Day and absorbing the news.

"This might be OK; having a Republican president and Republican Congress — maybe the fighting will stop. The Spirit says maybe we'll stop fighting. We can't spend all this time blaming someone else," she said.

She is worried about Ukraine and the world, but in her morning prayer and meditation, she came around to a more hopeful perspective.

"In God's eyes, four years is a drop of sand. They're going to make awful mistakes and they won't be able to blame it on the Democrats. He may close the border — but immigration has been happening since God took the people out of the Sinai Desert."

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