News
three men at Mass

People pray during a special Mass for federal workers and civil servants celebrated March 20 at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington. The Mass was offered as a sign of solidarity with government workers facing job uncertainties. (OSV News/Catholic Standard/Mihoko Owada)



by Mark Pattison

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Washington — March 26, 2025
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Faith leaders are raising their voices in both protest and prayer over the thousands of federal government employees who have been fired or put on leave since President Donald Trump took office.

Every Wednesday at noon during the month of March, the Christian advocacy group Sojourners, has been hosting a series of vigils on the Capitol Hill grounds, urging Congress to stand up to the current administration's sweeping cuts of federal jobs and grants, many of which supported programs for those in need in the U.S and around the world.

Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, the new interim general secretary and president of the ecumenical National Council of Churches, said on the Capitol grounds March 19 that the group stands with those who have lost their jobs or benefits.

"When one of us is under attack, all of us are under attack," said McKenzie, a retired bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. She urged faith groups represented at the vigil to continue to speak up against cuts to programs and jobs, and to volunteer to help those in need.



Speakers at the Faithful Witness Wednesday vigil at the U.S. Capitol on March 19 join in prayer. They are, from left Sandy Ovalle of Sojourners, Rabbi Jonah Pesner of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Jeanné Lewis of Faith in Public Life, Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie of the National Council of Churches, Maggie Siddiqi of Interfaith Alliance, the Rev. Marvin Silver of Children's Defense Fund and the Rev. Leslie Copeland-Tune of the National Council of Churches. (Courtesy of Faith in Public Life)

The first vigil, on a chilly, rainy Ash Wednesday (March 5), drew 100 people. The March 19 event, on a sunny, springlike day, drew twice that many. Jeanné Lewis, a

Catholic who is CEO of Faith in Public Life, spoke at the March 19 vigil. She said a traditional Masai warrior greeting in Kenya is: "And how are the children?" Referring to cuts to basic food programs, Lewis then posed the same question to Congress. "This greeting," she said, "is a reminder that our children are our collective responsibility."

The group held its final vigil on March 26.

A March 20 Mass for federal workers at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington drew more than 100 people — three to four times the typical turnout for a weekday Mass, according to regulars.

"We know that more are hurting," said Msgr. W. Ronald Jameson, the cathedral rector and principal celebrant. He said that during this Jubilee Year of hope he wanted federal workers to know that hope exists.

He pointed out that St. Matthew, the cathedral's namesake, is the patron saint of government workers. "Matthew was a good federal employee," he said. "He was a tax collector."

After Mass, Jameson said he had been approached the Sunday after Trump's inauguration by a cathedral parishioner who had already been fired. Every Sunday since then, other parishioners have approached him with their hardships, he said, so he thought it would be good to schedule a Mass for federal workers.

"They're scared. They're worried," said Gregory Guthrie, president of a National Federation of Federal Employees local and a federal employee, said of the union's members.

Justin del Rosario, a 22-year Defense of Department employee, said that office conversation is strained. "It's not like suspicious," he added. "More like, 'Do you know something I don't know?' "

Aimee Shelide Mayer, interim executive director of the Catholic Labor Network, said that even from her home base in Nashville, there's "a lot of fear and trepidation, a lot of uncertainty. And now with the layoffs, a fear of the unknown."

She added, "Here on the ground in middle Tennessee, a lot of charities that depended on federal funding and federal staff, are slowing down their efforts greatly." Cuts affect Catholic social services in her community, she said.

Advertisement

"It's hard to see this happening," said Fr. Dan Carson, pastor of St. Peter's Church on Capitol Hill. "You can really feel the tension in the air and a lot of people are anxious about it."

Carson, whose parents were both government workers, said: "Everybody agrees that efficiency's good, but you don't like to see the way it's being done. It discounts the dignity of the person."

According to government data, there are currently about 2.4 million federal workers in the United States, excluding those employed by the military and the postal service. Some 17% of federal workers live in the Washington metropolitan area. By mid-March, the Trump administration had fired more than 100,000 federal employees. Some of these actions are facing court challenges.

Officials in New York, Maryland and Virginia, home to tens of thousands of federal workers, have invited fired federal workers to apply for jobs in their states.

Jesuit-run Georgetown University is also assisting fired federal employees. Its Graduate School for Arts and Sciences has offered a number of federal workforce transition resources, including a 10% tuition scholarship on master's degree classes, a 30% discount on professional certification education and seminars on how to transition to the private sector. It is also currently waiving the application fee.

Read this next: 'I am going through hell': Job loss, mental health and the fate of federal workers