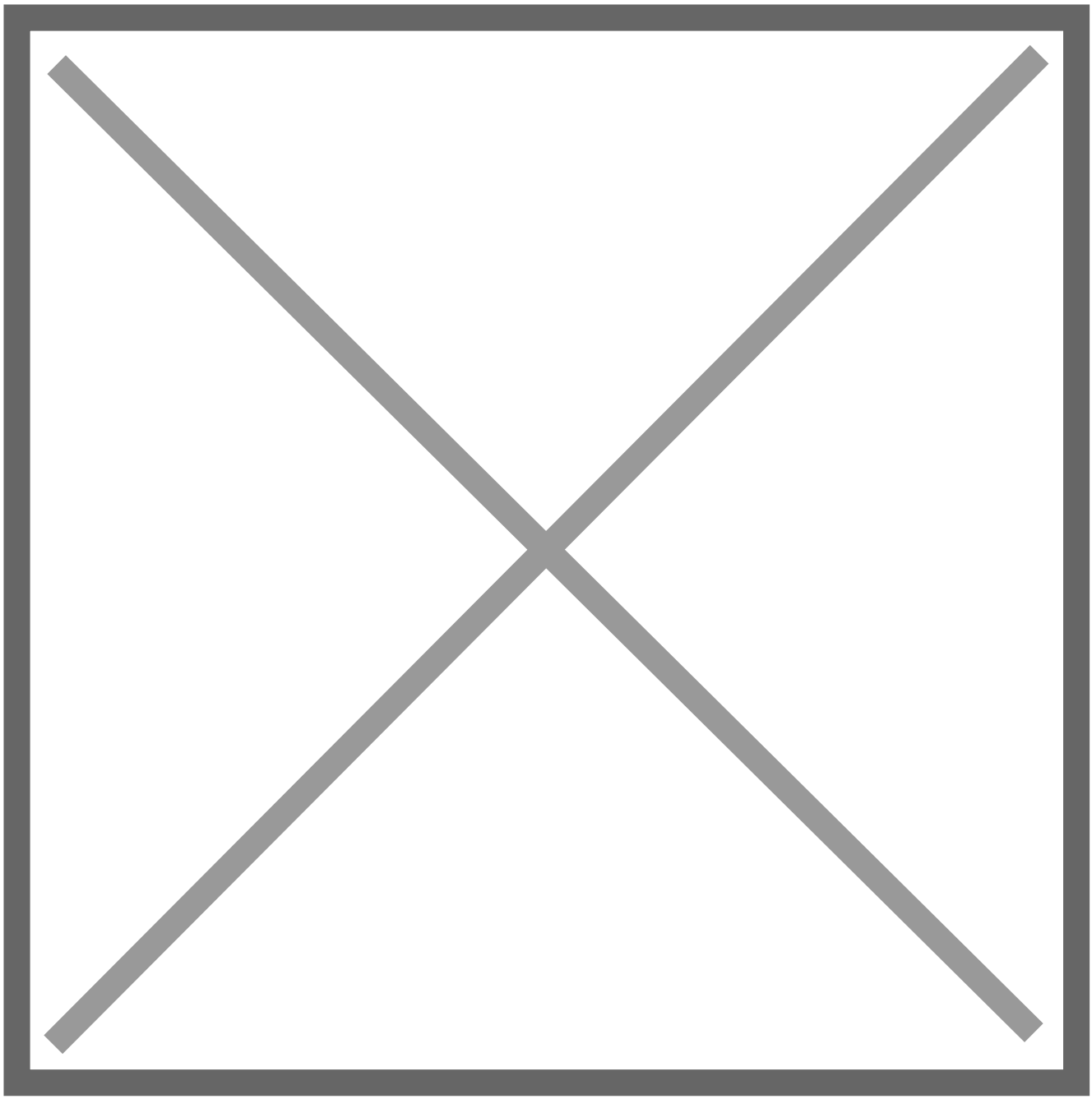
News



Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, and Thea Bowman, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration from Canton, Miss., are pictured in a combination photo. The Dorothea Project draws its name from the women, whose causes are open for sainthood. (OSV News/Courtesy of Milwaukee Journal/ Catholic Standard/Michael Hoyt)



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Katie Holler, a Catholic mother of two, had for months been following news of the Trump administration's increasingly hardline immigration policies, but she still remembers when she felt compelled to do something more.

It was May 2025, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection Acting Commissioner Pete Flores had just signed a memo immediately rescinding four Biden-era policies, including those designed to protect vulnerable CBP detainees such as pregnant women, infants and nursing mothers.

"At the time, I was newly postpartum with my second baby," Holler told OSV News. "It was just like a breaking point for me, where I said, 'I don't want my church to be involved in this in any way. I don't want us to be supportive of this. This is cruel; not honoring people's dignity. This is not pro-life.'"

So Holler, a social worker from Steubenville, Ohio, launched the Dorothea Project, a women's action and advocacy group dedicated to educating the public

about Catholic social teaching, with the mission of empowering communities "to speak truth and act in defense of vulnerable people whenever human rights and human dignity are violated."

Its moniker joins the names of the group's two spiritually feisty patrons, both of whom have causes for canonization underway: Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, and Sr. Thea Bowman, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration who fought against racial injustice. Mary the Mother of Sorrows completes the troika of benefactresses.

The bipartisan movement has grown to over 1,000 members who feel they are "called to live our faith out loud," according to the Dorothea Project website, which also highlights conscience formation, ongoing formation and spiritual solidarity.

In less than a year, they have written more than 200 letters to Church leaders in more than 75 dioceses, and 16,000-plus Hail Marys have been prayed for the vulnerable and imprisoned.

Holler said it started rather informally.

"I had been seeing other Catholic women talking about their concerns on a couple of different Facebook groups I was part of," she said. "So I decided to make posts on those two groups, addressing the things that we were seeing that a lot of women were concerned about — the attacks on immigrants, rolling back environmental protections, attacks on free speech."

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"I said, 'If you're seeing this and feeling like this doesn't fit with our faith — and you're concerned about it, and you want to do something — let's get together for a meeting.' I didn't have a clear plan," she said.

Holler said while the backgrounds of Dorothea Project members vary, she has become accustomed to "hearing stories from women who were previously supportive of this administration and reached a point where they felt, 'This is not what I was sold, and I didn't want to be supportive of it — the detention of infants, the detention of children, the separation of mothers and fathers from their children.'"

"People change their mind all the time, and we especially want to be a space where people can come in and say, 'I've changed my mind. I want to do something right,'" she said. As OSV News recently reported, a trio of polls released in February have indicated declining support for Trump's immigration policies.

The Dorothea Project has petitioned 75 of the nation's bishops to "help lead our local Church in defending the vulnerable and promoting policies that reflect the Gospel as well as Catholic Social Teaching."

"In light of the Church's teachings on human dignity, the preferential option for the poor, and the call to welcome the stranger … now is the time for bold and courageous leadership in defense of the marginalized," they wrote.

"You need both the lay faithful and the clergy to be strong, and to be effective in defending people," Holler told OSV News.

Asked if simply raising awareness of Catholic social teaching is enough, Holler pauses.

"I don't know if it is," she admitted. "Because we're living in a day and age where people can easily disregard things as, 'Oh, that's fake news,' or 'Oh, that's AI' — it's easy to find justification if you hold on to certain values more than our faith."

The group's new campaign seeks to launch parish and community Dorothea Project chapters, and to produce a voter's guide based on Catholic social teaching themes.

"We want to build relationships with people, our communities, to bring Catholic social teaching without an agenda; without a political angle — just, 'This is what the Church teaches. This is what our faith says,'" Holler said. "And if we believe this to be true, then we need to do something."

Lauren Garcia, the group's project leader who lives in Central Florida, told OSV News she watched headlines with a rising sense of anxiety, while feeling "helpless." When she discovered the Dorothea Project, she appreciated its collective power.

"As one person — and a busy mom — me just doing one thing or calling one senator doesn't feel like much," Garcia said. "But when you bring it together with a group of other women who are very action-oriented — not just talking about, 'Did you see that this happened?' and then it kind of stops there, but actually doing stuff — it feels like even if I can only give that one phone call or that one letter, it's part of a

bigger effort."

Lindsay Mayernik, a Dorothea Project member in St. Paul, Minnesota, organized other women to pray the rosary outside Minneapolis' Whipple Federal Building in August. The epicenter of the Immigration and Custom Enforcement's Minnesota operations, federal agents have been accused of barring faith leaders from entering to offer prayer and pastoral guidance to detainees.

"They said, 'Why are you here?'" recalled Mayernik. "I said, 'We're going to pray the rosary.' And they let us — we just stood near the door and said a rosary, and it was fine. But now that's not what Whipple looks like anymore," she noted, referring to recent protests that have resulted in chaos and arrests.

Holler is clear that the Dorothea Project respects the fact that countries naturally have a right to regulate their borders, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church articulates.

But, she stresses, that right "needs to be informed by mercy and justice."

"When we hear stories of infants being detained and getting sick to the point where they have to go to the hospital, that doesn't seem like mercy or justice," she said. "When we hear stories of these detention centers not having clean water — especially water clean enough for infant formula — that's not mercy or justice. When there's bug- or mold-ridden food, that's not mercy or justice."

Holler hopes Dorothea Project efforts will equip unsure Catholics to discern what that looks like.

"So," she said, "even if from a broad spectrum, Catholics can say, 'Yes, we need immigration enforcement and that needs to happen in some way,' I hope and I pray we can also say, 'But this isn't it. This is missing the mark.'"

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.