



A protester holds a poster depicting the Seven Sorrows through the lens of modern immigrants' experiences during an event Sept. 15 in Washington. (Emma Cieslik)



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About 200 Catholics took to the streets of Washington, D.C., this week to protest the rising crackdown and deportation of undocumented immigrants by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The day started at St. Peter's Church on Capitol Hill Sept. 15 with a bilingual Mass celebrated by Bishop Gary Studniewski, the newly named auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington. In his homily the bishop said: "These days, in our own country, we are aware of so many who suffer the pains of injustice from a hostile power, just like Jesus on the cross. Particularly as we gather today [we are] mindful of the many men, women and children, real families, who suffer the injustice of being mistreated as immigrants, migrants, strangers."

He told the congregation that they should be present to those who are suffering to show them they are not alone.

After Mass, members of the [Dorothea Project](#), a group of Catholic women advocating for Catholic social teaching that organized the event taking place on the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, processed to a park outside the Capitol, many carrying signs depicting Mary with immigrants.

At the Upper Senate Park the group prayed for immigrants, reciting the chaplet of the Seven Sorrows, each section referencing the violence and grief lived and experienced by immigrants in the United States.

"The sorrows of a mother are present here in the United States," said Katie Holler, cofounder of the Dorothea Project. "She weeps with families who are being separated. She weeps with parents who don't know if their kids will come back from school or don't know if they'll make it to pickup, and we need to bring those sorrows to Congress because they have the power to change something."

The group heard from speakers including Sr. Eilis McCulloh, a Sister of the Humility of Mary who works with Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice; and Flaka Martinez from La Colectiva North Texas, an initiative that cares for families in Dallas separated by ICE.

Martinez described her own experience coming to the United States and being separated from her father, and said it mirrored the devastation immigrants are facing today. She recounted the recent story of a young boy who asked the same question she did 25 years earlier: "Where is my father?"

Martinez stressed that the fight continues. "We have a lot of work to do," she said.

After the rally, some participants went to speak with their congressional representatives in scheduled or drop-in visits.

Tyler Hunt, who came to the event from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, said an event like this is the pathway forward — reminding Catholics that they have a moral and spiritual obligation to stand alongside the marginalized, alongside immigrants whose families are being torn apart.

She told the National Catholic Reporter that the Dorothea Project members are "standing 10 toes on the teachings of our church and not being exploited, being very bold in that we are lay women who are not afraid and we will go to our bishop and continue to knock at your door. We will be the persistent widow."

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The group began last year with a dozen Catholic women meeting over Zoom because they were alarmed by the Trump administration's immigration enforcement tactics. Holler said she was deeply disturbed seeing ICE detain and deport pregnant and postpartum women and their babies. At the time, she was breastfeeding her second baby, so she gathered other Catholic moms around the question: "How did we get to this place where this is happening in our country and so many Catholics are OK with it?"

"This is part of our faith," Holler said. "This is what it means to live the Gospel, what it means to love your neighbor, and we need to do something so that it's not the best kept secret anymore, so that Catholics are responsive when they see evil happening, when they see injustice happening."

With this mission, the Dorothea Project members organized feast day actions across the country, including events in Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Texas and Florida. They decided to mobilize in Washington to particularly speak to Catholic legislators

committed to stand alongside immigrants whose families are torn apart.

"Going to a protest for the first time can be very scary," Holler said, "but going with some people to pray a rosary is much more manageable for a Catholic stepping into solidarity for the first time. We want to be a place where all Catholic women, and Catholic men, can step into solidarity and feel like my faith affirms this. This is something that's in line with what I believe, and so I know I can be fully present here."

This is why they planned their action around the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. "One of our leaders pointed out that it was the sorrow of a mother that brought us together," Holler said. "We just thought she would be the perfect intercessor for that, so we felt it would be a good day to unite our efforts and to say, Our Lady's sorrows are happening again today."

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. [View the full series](#).