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Dolores Huerta, the renowned American labor leader and civil rights activist who co-founded the United Farm Workers union, speaks to students at La Academia Dolores Huerta in Las Cruces, N.M., Oct. 16, 2023. Huerta died Oct. 28, 2026, at 96. (OSV News/USA TODAY NETWORK via Reuters/Sun-News/Meg Potter)

Dolores Huerta, the renowned American labor leader and civil rights activist who co-founded the United Farm Workers union, speaks to students at La Academia Dolores Huerta in Las Cruces, N.M., Oct. 16, 2023. Huerta died Oct. 28, 2026, at 96. (OSV News/USA TODAY NETWORK via Reuters/Sun-News/Meg Potter)

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Catholics are remembering civil rights leader Dolores Huerta as a woman whose faith inspired her lifelong mission of service.

"In her life, she was a courageous and heroic defender of human dignity, and a woman of faith who inspired generations of young Hispanic leaders, especially women," said Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles in an Oct. 29 statement published by that archdiocese's news outlet, Angelus. "We entrust her to the tender mercies of Our Lady of Guadalupe and pray that God console her family and grant her peace."

Huerta died Oct. 28 at age 96, following a decades-long career of advocacy for farmworkers, migrants, the economically marginalized and women.

Her death was announced by the Dolores Huerta Foundation, of which she was founder and president.

In its statement, the foundation said Huerta "always reminded us of a fundamental truth that shapes everything we do: history is not written by the wealthy and seemingly powerful, but rather by everyday people who recognize their own power and take collective action to make changes in their lives, their communities, and the world."

She had an "ability to make every single person feel seen, valued, and essential," said the foundation.

Born in 1930 in northern New Mexico and largely raised in California, Huerta demonstrated a passion for social justice early in life, following the example of her mother's community activism.

After creating the Agricultural Workers Association, she teamed up with fellow activist César Chávez in 1962 to launch what is now the United Farm Workers of America. The organization mobilized agricultural workers, along with faith and civic leaders, to peacefully demand fair wages, safe conditions and other essential rights for farm laborers.

Cardinal Roger Mahony, archbishop emeritus of Los Angeles, remembered working with Huerta while he was a bishop in the dioceses of Fresno and Stockton, and during his time leading the Los Angeles Archdiocese.

"I join countless people throughout California and our nation in mourning the passing of Dolores Huerta, a woman of extraordinary courage, determination, and faith in the dignity of every human person," Mahony said in a statement published by the Angelus.

The cardinal added that Huerta's legacy "extends far beyond the labor movement."

He said Huerta "gave hope to generations of working families and reminded our society that true justice requires listening to those whose voices are often overlooked."

Mahony described Huerta's mission as "a testament to the conviction that every worker is entitled to dignity, respect, and a fair opportunity to provide for family and future."

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Later in her career, Huerta — who was the recipient of multiple awards and honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom — focused on the rights of women and immigrants.

After an investigation published by The New York Times in March revealed Chávez's alleged sexual abuse of several women and girls, Huerta released a statement saying she had been sexually assaulted twice by Chávez as a young mother in the 1960s, with both encounters resulting in pregnancies. She had kept the pregnancies — and the attacks — secret, placing the children she bore with stable families, she said.

"I have kept this secret long enough. My silence ends here," said the 95-year-old Huerta, who gave The New York Times permission to republish her statement, issued in English and Spanish.

Huerta remained active up until the time of her death, traveling to the Vatican's Borgo Laudato Si' for a Sept. 1 Mass for the Care of Creation, said Fr. Manuel Dorantes, executive director of the Laudato Si' Center for Higher Education at the Vatican, in an Oct. 28 X post.

At the liturgy, she met Pope Leo XIV, said Dorantes, who lauded Huerta's "extraordinary commitment to human dignity, justice, and the rights of farmworkers."

Dorantes said Huerta's life "reminds us that caring for our common home means standing alongside one another, defending the vulnerable, and recognizing the dignity of every person."

"May her legacy continue to inspire us to build a more just, compassionate, and hopeful world reminding us that the cry of the earth is the cry of the poor," he said.

Invoking the rallying cry for which Huerta became known, he added, "¡Sí, se puede!" ("Yes, we can!")

"Together, we can make a difference," Dorantes said.

[Gina Christian is a multimedia reporter for OSV News. Follow her on X @GinaJesseReina. The Angelus, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, contributed to this report.]