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A group of more than a dozen faith-based activists — sisters of different congregations, lay associates, supporters — who participated in the April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstration in Washington D.C. were among those attending the nationwide rally. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)



by Chris Herlinger

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Citing commitments to the Gospel and the need to affirm justice-oriented values, Catholic sisters joined thousands in April 5 demonstrations against the administration policies of President Donald Trump. They and others say these policies are unjust and inflict pain on the marginalized and the vulnerable.

In joining the vanguard "Hands Off!" demonstration on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for example, sisters such as Sr. Maria Orlandini and Sr. Marie Lucey, both Franciscans, said they were not taking a partisan political stance but were expressing frustration with actions they say are harming the most vulnerable.

"Why am I here?" Orlandini said as she and others began a 20-minute trek to the landmark mall, anchored by the Washington Monument and Lincoln Memorial. "Franciscans stand with the marginalized."

The "Hands Off!" protests were held in all 50 states, organizers said, with more than 1,400 events; though independent verification of the number of those attending is difficult to make, organizers said millions attended the rallies throughout the U.S., CNN reported.

Among the demands by the protesters, CNN reported, were "an end to the billionaire takeover and rampant corruption of the Trump administration; an end to slashing federal funds for Medicaid, Social Security, and other programs working people rely on; and an end to the attacks on immigrants, trans people, and other communities."



Sr. Maria Orlandini, right, and Sr. Marie Lucey, both Franciscans, represented the justice advocacy group Franciscan Action Network during April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstrations in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

Orlandini and Lucey, who represented the justice advocacy group Franciscan Action Network, told Global Sisters Report it was important to take a public stance for justice, democracy and values that Orlandini said "as Americans and as religious" are worth preserving and defending.

"As followers of Jesus, our faith calls us to do this," Lucey said.

Among the specific concerns the sisters have are cuts to international aid programs that have provided medical and prevention treatment for those living with HIV and AIDS. The sisters said that in speaking out against such cuts, they are being political and prophetic but in the spirit of St. Oscar Romero of El Salvador.

Related: Sisters alarmed by Trump's gutting of US foreign aid

"We are doing this out of our faith," Lucey said, holding a sign proclaiming, "Franciscans Stand with the Marginalized."

Being "political," Orlandini said, "is part of being a citizen, of being concerned with your country. 'Political' is not a dirty word — and it is different [from] being partisan."

Walking towards the mall as the morning drizzle ended, she said, "This is not the time to be quiet."

That was a sentiment shared by others in an informal group of more than a dozen faith-based activists — sisters of different congregations, lay associates, supporters — who marched to the Washington rally together.



Demonstrators stand at the foot of the Washington Monument on the National Mall during the April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstration in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

"We're here to say no to unjust policies," said Megeen White, the associate director of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd. "We believe in justice and mercy."

"We feel it is important to have a public witness and oppose the erosion of democracy," said Sr. Terri Bednarz, a member of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas' Institute Leadership Team.

Among her and her congregation's concerns are the deportation of international students; crackdowns on immigrants; the elimination of diversity, equity and inclusion programs within government agencies and educational institutions; and policies harming the environment. Also a concern: the potential for the rise of violence against women.

"We're Gospel-based," Bednarz said of what impelled sisters to have a public presence at the Washington event. "It's expressing Gospel values. It's a prophetic voice, as Jesus would have wanted us to do — protect the vulnerable and do it in a peaceful and nonviolent way."

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Sr. Maria Orlandini, left, Sr. Marie Lucey, center, and Michele Dunne, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, right, all represented the network during the April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstration in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

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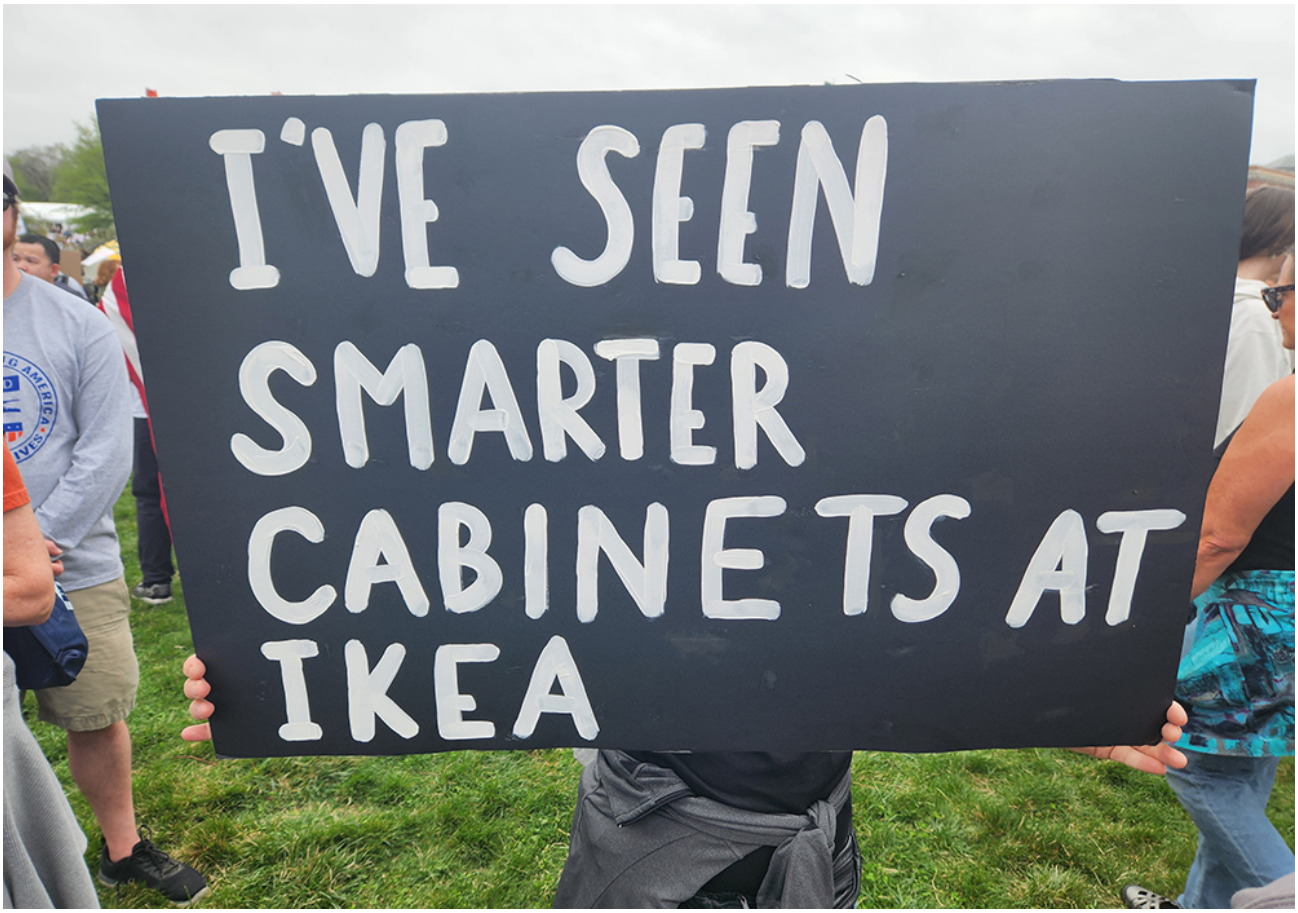
Tens of thousands attended the April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstration in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

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A sign satirizing Elon Musk during the April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstration in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

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American flags — held aloft or draped around shoulders — were ubiquitous during the "Hands Off!" demonstration April 5 on the National Mall in Washington D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

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A sign criticizing President Donald Trump's Cabinet during the April 5 "Hands Off! demonstration in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

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A sign critical of President Donald Trump's policies during the April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstration in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

For the Franciscans, the example of St. Francis is also important, said Michele Dunne, the executive director of the Franciscan Action Network.

Dunne, a professed Secular Franciscan, said Francis' expansive view of humanity and of creation undergird Franciscan concerns about threats to the social safety net which she believes "are going to impose suffering on our brothers and sisters — the impoverished, the ill, the sick, the elderly, the young, migrants and the most vulnerable."

"As Christians, we recognize that Jesus always spoke up for the marginalized and vulnerable. St. Francis did the same — and we're here to deliver the message of St. Francis [to those in power]."

Dunne said a recent letter to all members of the U.S. Senate organized by the Franciscan Action Network was signed by 64 organizations and 1,063 individuals

described as "followers of Jesus Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi."



Michele Dunne, the executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, held a sign aloft during the April 5 "Hands Off!" demonstration in Washington, D.C. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

"We view U.S. government appropriations as a moral decision that should serve the common good, with a preferential option for the most vulnerable among us," the letter said. "We urge you to hear the cry of the poor and of the earth as you make budget and appropriation decisions."

The letter called for "full and sustained funding" for a wide variety of social safety net programs that care for vulnerable populations, as well as environmental protections.

Those marching on the mall expressed similar sentiments, though condensed on signs and placards and through pithy, often boisterous chants.

Signs warned of threats to democracy by fascism and authoritarianism, and criticized Trump and Elon Musk, who is heading the Trump administration's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE.

Among the popular sayings on the signs was a quote from the late Georgia congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis about the need for "good trouble" in seeking justice.



Sheri Minix, a resident of San Diego, who came to Washington expressly for the demonstration had a Ukrainian flag draped around her shoulders. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

"This is what democracy looks like" was a popular chant, as was "Hey, hey, ho, ho, Elon Musk has got to go."

American flags, held aloft or draped around shoulders, were ubiquitous. But another common sight were the blue and yellow colors of Ukraine. Those displaying the Ukrainian flag said they were worried about the Trump administration's policies on Ukraine tilting too heavily toward the Russian government and its president, Vladimir Putin.

"We have to fight," said Sheri Minix, a resident of San Diego, who came to Washington expressly for the demonstration and had a Ukrainian flag draped around her shoulders. "I don't like Russia attacking Ukraine. And I don't like Trump cozying up to Putin."

Similarly, Jim Berlow, a resident of Vienna, Virginia, said he worries about Trump "destroying the Constitution" and using an "authoritarian playbook to make it happen."

He held a sign criticizing the Republican Party — the GOP — as representing "Greed Over People."

"It's good energy," he said of the event.



Jim Berlow, a resident of Vienna, Virginia, said he worries about President Trump "destroying the Constitution" and using an "authoritarian playbook to make it happen." He held a sign criticizing the Republican Party, also known as the GOP. (GSR photo/Chris Herlinger)

That sentiment was felt elsewhere in the country. Like in Washington, the "Hands Off!" march in New York City attracted tens of thousands; a rally also took place north of the city in Hastings on Hudson, a community of about 8,600 along the Hudson River.

Sr. Donna Dodge and four other members of the Sisters of Charity of New York joined hundreds of other demonstrators there.

"The experience was uplifting given all that has happened in our country during the past months," Dodge told Global Sisters Report. "It was hopeful to see so many people across the country who seem to share in the values of dignity, inclusion and concern for those living on the margins and for our earth."

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Several Adrian Dominican sisters attended the Chicago event, which by some estimates drew about 30,000.

"It was wonderful to see the turnout in Chicago, a sign to me that people are tuned in to what is happening in our capital and clearly do not approve of what they see and hear from the Trump administration, DOGE and the legislators," Adrian Dominican Sr. Judy Rimbey told GSR.

"It was good to be there," Sr. Mary Priniski said, "among thousands of people who want to uphold democracy." And, she added, "the rally was peaceful."

"The day was a moment of great hope for me in the voices of thousands of people who care about democracy," Sr. Anne Lythgoe, a member of the leadership team of the Dominican Sisters of Peace, said about an event in Columbus, Ohio.

"I was thrilled to be a part of such a large and energized group of people who seek to protect so many aspects of American life: welcoming the stranger, protecting Social Security, freedom of speech, and so many things we hold sacred from our Constitution."

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.