News
Migration



Religious of the Sacred Heart Sr. Diane Roche, left, helps hold a banner with the image and words of St. Oscar Romero, as she prays March 24, 2026 in front of the headquarters of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. She celebrated Romero's feast day by demanding that the agency put a stop to the violent tactics of some of its agents. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)



by Rhina Guidos

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Washington — March 26, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Sisters joined Catholics and others outside the headquarters of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement March 24 to mark the feast of St. Oscar Romero by demanding the agency put a stop to the violent tactics of some of its agents.

"Echoing St. Romero's words, we call out to our ICE sisters and brothers and say 'we love you and we ask God to pour forth repentance into your hearts,' " Religious of the Sacred Heart Sr. Diane Roche said, facing the federal building.

Romero was assassinated March 24, 1980, as he celebrated Mass in his native El Salvador a day after urging soldiers in one of his homilies to "stop the repression."

He was among more than 75,000 civilians killed during the country's 12-year civil conflict, and his words ordering others to obey the laws of God above the orders of repressive governments have echoed into Christian history during times of persecution.

Advertisement

"No ICE agent is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time for those carrying out the current unjust immigration policy to obey their consciences rather than a sinful order," said Art Laffin, of Dorothy Day Catholic Worker, outside the ICE building making parallels with Romero's last homily.

Among those displaying posters of Romero, Franciscan Srs. Marie Lucey and Maria Orlandini, of the Franciscan Action Network, took turns reading the names of people deported, those who have died in ICE detention centers, and three U.S. citizens killed by federal agents in the past 12 months: Ruben Martinez, of South Padre Island, Texas, and Minnesotans Alex Pretti and Renee Good.

Lay leaders representing the Sisters of Mercy and the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Pax Christi USA, as well as Network, a Catholic social justice lobby of women religious, joined the chorus shouting "stop the

repression."



Franciscan Srs. Maria Orlandini and Marie Lucey, of the Franciscan Action Network, on the left, took turns reading the names of people deported, those who have died in ICE detention centers, and three U.S. citizens killed by federal agents outside the headquarters of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement March 24, 2026. They participated in an ecumenical event to mark the feast of St. Oscar Romero by calling attention to violent acts committed by ICE agents. (GSR photo/Rhina Guidos)

Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Jo Ann Flora, who regularly accompanies nervous migrants as they go to immigration court appointments in Maryland, said the event called to her because of what Romero represents.

"I love Oscar Romero. He's an inspiration to all of us. He was very brave. And he spoke up for the small people, the people that did not have a voice," she told Global Sisters Report. "And we just love him. And so, we're also very disturbed by what is happening with ICE and the way ICE is treating people. … I feel very strongly that these people need to be treated with respect. They have dignity. It doesn't matter

how they got here."

Scenes of agents violently yanking people out of cars, shoving them to the ground and shooting have become commonplace. A February 2026 Marist poll showed 65% of those polled in the U.S. "think the actions of ICE have gone too far in enforcing immigration laws," the survey said.

Sisters have equally criticized Democrats when it comes to immigration. During the Biden administration in December 2021, about 80 Catholic sisters from 24 congregations marched in circles in front of the White House against a health rule used to keep migrants out.

"My community, we have always been for the poor, and for the people that live on the margins, and for people who don't have a voice themselves," said Flora, adding that just like Romero, sisters "do what we can to speak for them."

Susan Gunn, director of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, also invoked Maryknoll Srs. Ita Ford and Maura Clarke, Ursuline Sr. Dorothy Kazel and Maryknoll lay missionary Jean Donovan, who lived among the poor in El Salvador and were killed a few months after Romero.

"When they looked upon the suffering of the marginalized, they saw not aliens but friends," Gunn said.

> "No ICE agent is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time for those carrying out the current unjust immigration policy to obey their consciences rather than a sinful order."
>
> —Art Laffin
>
> Tweet this

Jesuit Fr. Tim Manatt, of the Midwest Province of the Jesuits, also prayed for accountability for ICE agents who've resorted to violent tactics and said callous ignorance has no place in a just society.

"Acting with impunity has no place in a just society. And yet, it took the deaths of two non-immigrants to force the administration to back down in Minneapolis," he

said, referring to the deaths of Good and Pretti. "So, today, let us pray to God for the enactment of the many needed reforms to the training, outfitting, and rules of engagement of ICE agents.

"Let us pray to God for the just prosecution of those responsible for the deaths of all the litany of persons we have shared today, as well as the documentation and prosecution of those agents responsible for the unwarranted, lacerations and broken bones, and psychological trauma, foisted on countless immigrants who have been forcibly detained, thrown to the ground, pressed against the hoods of vehicles, slammed into holding cells."

Invoking other Salvadoran martyrs, including Jesuit Fr. Rutilio Grande, also killed by his government in 1977, Manatt told those present that they should pray for themselves, too, so that their hearts do not become embittered and lose sight of a common humanity.

Their prayers, he added, should be for everyone: "Even the people coming and going from ICE headquarters … help us, Lord, to set aside the anger we feel at times associated with this struggle."

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