News

Sr. Norma Pimentel, executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, discusses her work on the South Texas border with journalist Niala Boodhoo at the Texas Tribune Festival, Friday, Sept. 25, 2026, in Austin, Texas. (RNS photo/Ellie Ashby)

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The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has lifted a financial freeze on Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, restoring federal funding to the South Texas nonprofit run by prominent Catholic leader Sister Norma Pimentel, she said on Friday (Sept. 25).

Last November, the Trump administration suspended federal funding to the organization, one of the nation's most prominent Catholic Charities affiliates.

DHS sought to bar funds to the charity for six years, after an investigation allegedly found a series of grant violations, including the submission of inconsistent migrant data and use of government funding for migrant support that went beyond the 45-day federal limit. The original DHS letter sent to Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley also accused Pimentel of breaking government trust and failing to put the safety of U.S. citizens first.

Pimentel announced the investigation had been dropped during a conversation with Religion News Service events host Niala Boodhoo at the Texas Tribune Festival in Austin. Their discussion was presented by RNS and titled "Faith at the Border: One on One with Sister Norma Pimentel."

"The ban was lifted," Pimentel said, smiling.

Pimentel, a member of the Missionaries of Jesus, said Washington, D.C., attorneys reached out to her after the funding suspension and asked to help formulate a response to DHS. Pimentel and her attorneys then demonstrated that they were in line with the federal requirements for receiving funding, she said.

"We went to D.C. and met with (DHS), and as a result of that meeting, they sent us to create an administrative agreement of how we will proceed," she said. "They accepted it, and we're back … able to receive funding from the federal government."

Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley is part of the Diocese of Brownsville and provides a wide range of charitable services, from emergency assistance and homelessness prevention to counseling and poverty alleviation.

The nonprofit also has operated the Humanitarian Respite Center, a large migrant shelter in McAllen, Texas, that, according to the Border Report, has assisted over 500,000 migrants in more than a decade of operation.

Pimentel, who has been the executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley since 2004, founded the Respite Center in 2014.

Catholic charitable work for migrant communities has been under scrutiny throughout the second Trump administration. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops named "the targeting of faith-based immigration services" as an area of critical concern in its annual religious liberty report, published in January 2025.

DHS did not immediately respond to a request for comment regarding the restoration of federal funding.

"They (migrants) are blessed when we are given the opportunity to care for them — to care for anybody who finds themselves struggling and having difficulties feeling the dignity that God has rightfully given them," Pimentel said during the discussion, which also served as a recording for the new podcast "Oh God Now What," hosted by Boodhoo.

"The 'why I do what I do' has nothing to do with who's in office," she added.

"God is the force within me that calls me forward to do what I'm doing to help the other person."

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