



PONTIFICIA
UNIVERSITÀ
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Ufficio Stampa e Comunicazione

26 November 2025, h 3:30 – 7:00 pm

Dorothy Day: A Pilgrim of Hope:

An Academic Symposium on the Legacy of Dorothy Day with personal family and friend recollections

*Pontifical Gregorian University
Aula magna, Piazza della Pilotta 6, Rome*

“A small, great American woman”
(Pope Leo XIV)

In Autumn 1965, Dorothy Day arrived in Rome to participate in the final session of the Second Vatican Council, leading, along with 19 other women, ten days of fasting and prayer for peace and calling on the Council to condemn the use of nuclear weapons. Sixty years after that “pilgrimage of hope” and 45 years after Dorothy Day’s death (November 29, 1980), the Pontifical Gregorian University, together with the University of Notre Dame - Rome and Manhattan College, intends to commemorate the American activist with **an academic symposium featuring personal family and friend recollections, including those of her granddaughters Martha and Kate Hennessey, as well as Robert Ellsberg, her biographer and personal friend.** “*A Pilgrim of Hope*” is therefore the title of the afternoon study session promoted by the Department of Moral Theology and Spiritual Theology at the Gregorian University, which will be held on November 26, from 3:30 to 7:00 pm.

“Dorothy’s commitment to the poor and social justice is still profoundly needed in today’s world,” explains **Professor Donna Orsuto**, director of the Department of Moral Theology and Spiritual Theology. “Her figure has been dear to numerous popes, from Paul VI, from whom she received communion during the Third World Congress for the Apostolate of the Laity, to Pope Francis, who included her among the four great models of interpreters of reality he proposed in his address to the United States Congress. Pope Benedict XVI also cited her, in one of his last audiences, among the examples of ‘great converts’ in an age of eclipse of the sacred. Dorothy Day is therefore an example of the convergence of profound spirituality and authentic civic engagement.”

The afternoon of study will open with greetings from Rector **Fr. Mark Lewis, S.J.**, and Professor Orsuto. The first roundtable discussion will explore the meaning, originality, and limits of Dorothy Day's spirituality (**Robert Ellsberg**, Orbis Books - **Margaret R. Pfeil**, University of Notre Dame; moderator Filipe Domingues, The Lay Centre), while the second will offer a critical assessment of her social commitment (**Kevin Ahern**, Manhattan University - **Fr. Diego Alonso-Lasheras S.J.**, Pontifical Gregorian University; moderator Giulia Galeotti, L'Osservatore Romano). The closing remarks will feature the direct testimony of **Martha and Kate Hennessy**, Dorothy Day's granddaughters, in dialogue with **Fr. René Micallef S.J.** (Pontifical Gregorian University).

The event will be held in English, with simultaneous translation. In-person participation requires online registration (<https://www.unigre.it/it/eventi-e-comunicazione/eventi/calendario-eventi/un-pellegrino-di-speranza/>). A live stream will also be available on the @UniGregoriana YouTube channel, in both Italian and English; registration is also required for participation in the live stream (<https://www.unigre.it/it/eventi-e-comunicazione/eventi/calendario-eventi/un-pellegrino-di-speranza/>).

Quotes

«The ability to oppose the ideological enticements of her time in order to choose the search for truth and to open herself to the discovery of faith was witnessed by another woman of our time, the American Dorothy Day. [...] The journey towards faith in such a secularized environment was particularly difficult, but Grace acts nevertheless, as she pointed out: "It is certain that I felt the need to go to church more often, to kneel, to bow my head in prayer. A blind instinct, one might say, because I was not conscious of praying. But I went, I slipped into the atmosphere of prayer...". God guided her to a conscious adherence to the Church, in a life dedicated to the underprivileged».

(Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 13 February 2013)

«In these times when social concerns are so important, I cannot fail to mention the Servant of God Dorothy Day, who founded the *Catholic Worker Movement*. Her social activism, her passion for justice and for the cause of the oppressed, were inspired by the Gospel, her faith, and the example of the saints. [...] A nation can be considered great [...] as Dorothy Day did by her tireless work, the fruit of a faith which becomes dialogue and sows peace».

(Pope Francis, Address to the United States Congress, 24 September 2015)

«I would like to remember a small, great American woman, Dorothy Day, who lived in the last century. She had fire inside her. Dorothy Day took a stand. She saw that her country's development model didn't create the same opportunities for everyone. She understood that the dream for too many was a nightmare, and that as a Christian, she had to engage with workers, migrants, and those rejected by a killing economy. She wrote and served: it's important to unite mind, heart, and hands. This is taking a stand. She wrote as a journalist; that is, she thought and made others think. Writing is important. And so is reading, today more than ever. And then Dorothy served meals, gave clothes, dressed and ate like those she served: she united mind, heart, and hands. In this way, hoping is taking a stand. Dorothy Day touched thousands of people. They have opened homes in many cities, in many neighborhoods: not large service centers, but centers of charity and justice where they can call one another by name, get to know one another, and transform indignation into communion and action. This is what peacemakers are like: they take a stand and bear the consequences, but they move forward. To hope is to take a stand, like Jesus, with Jesus. His fire is our fire. May the Jubilee rekindle it in us and in the entire Church!»

(Pope Leo XIV, *Jubilee Audience*, 22 November 2025 - unofficial translation)

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- University of Notre Dame - Rome
- Manhattan College

Partners

- The Dorothy Day Guild
- The Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas

Accreditation Procedure

Journalists and media operators who wish to participate must apply, no less than 24 hours before the event, through the Holy See Press Office online accreditation System available at press.vatican.va/accreditamenti.

For interviews and technical information on the event, please contact: press@unigre.it