

The Carmelite System Connects Faith, History, and Healing in Alabama

Joining the Catholic Health Association and Catholic Mobilizing Network on a pilgrimage to Montgomery and Selma, the System reaffirms its commitment to human dignity, healing, and Catholic Social Teaching.

For The Carmelite System, compassionate care begins with recognizing the inherent dignity of every person. From September 30 through October 2, 2026, that commitment took its representatives to Montgomery and Selma, Alabama, for a pilgrimage organized by Catholic Mobilizing Network (CMN) and the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA).

The gathering invited Catholic health ministry colleagues to examine the legacy of racial injustice and consider the Church's responsibility to advance truth-telling, reconciliation, and healing. It offered The Carmelite System an opportunity to deepen the connection between Catholic Social Teaching and the way it leads, serves, and cares.



Kathy Curran and Dennis Gonzales

Coordinated by Lucie Martinot-Lagarde of Catholic Mobilizing Network and her team, the pilgrimage began with two questions: What do you bring to this pilgrimage? What do you need?

Those questions established a spirit of openness and reflection, inviting participants to acknowledge what they could offer and what they still needed to understand.

Walking in Faith, Bearing Witness to Justice

Prayer and reflection in Montgomery preceded a visit to the Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey—Mothers of Gynecology Monument. Honoring enslaved women subjected to medical exploitation, the monument raised questions for healthcare ministries about listening to vulnerable people and protecting their dignity.

At the Legacy Museum, those questions widened into an examination of enslavement, segregation, and mass



Representatives from a cross section of Catholic healthcare ministries gathered at the pilgrimage.

incarceration. The exhibits invited reflection on how historical oppression continues to shape modern systems, particularly the criminal legal system. For Catholic ministries, recognizing these connections carries a responsibility to examine assumptions, acknowledge harm, and support efforts that promote fairness.

"Hope and faith require action," Cathy Curran and Dennis Gonzales of the Catholic Health Association reminded participants, linking spiritual conviction to the practical work of reconciliation. Curran also serves on the Board of Directors of The Carmelite System, Inc.

That call accompanied the pilgrims to the historic City of St. Jude, where Father Manuel Williams, C.R., celebrated Mass. Visits to the Dexter Parsonage and Freedom Monument Sculpture Park further connected faith with histories of leadership, suffering, perseverance, and liberation.

In Selma, Dianne Harris, a 1965 foot soldier and civil rights activist, brought living testimony to the journey. Her account gave personal meaning to the places that followed: Brown Chapel AME Church, the Edmund Pettus Bridge, and Civil Rights Memorial Park.

Crossing the bridge on foot, pilgrims retraced the route of those who marched for freedom, seeking to walk in

their shoes and reflect on the courage their steps represented. Dialogue at Edmundite Missions then brought the day's lessons into the present, asking what solidarity requires today.



Lucie Martinot-Lagarde and Trish Gathers

"This pilgrimage reminds us that protecting human dignity begins with listening. As Catholic ministries, we must allow what we learn to shape how we lead, how we care, and how we stand beside those whose voices are too often unheard," said Trish Gathers, president and CEO of The Carmelite System and founder of Carith Ministries.

Sammie Orih, a participant representing The Carmelite System, offered a framework for reflection: *Learn, Unlearn, and Relearn*. Learn histories too often left untold. Unlearn assumptions that obscure another person's experience.



L-R: Sammie Orih, Shantel Perkins and Shani Jones

Relearn how to listen, serve, and see each person with greater understanding.

Do Justice and Love Mercy

The final morning brought pilgrims to the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Remembering victims of racial terror lynchings gave the journey a solemn closing and an enduring responsibility to bear witness.

Micah 6:8 offers a compass for that responsibility: **"To do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."**

For The Carmelite System, this calling finds expression in welcoming residents, listening to families, respecting employees, and honoring every person's story. It also encourages honest education, community partnerships, and thoughtful attention to policies affecting vulnerable people.

A pilgrimage begins with a willingness to be changed. Its meaning unfolds afterward, when what has been witnessed shapes how people live and serve.

The journey ended, but its invitation continues: to tell the truth with compassion, seek reconciliation with humility, and make hope visible through action.

Rooted in the mission of the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm, these commitments bring love into daily practice through a voice heard, a choice respected, and a person treated with dignity.

The Carmelite System is grateful to the Catholic Health Association and Catholic Mobilizing Network for this meaningful opportunity for reflection and growth, deepening its commitment to reconciliation, healing and compassionate care. The pilgrimage reaffirmed how faith becomes care through everyday acts of compassion
The Difference Is Love.

Learn more:

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