



**OSTARA**  
**INITIATIVE**  
Reimagining Health & Justice

### **Ostara Initiative**

2020-2021 grants list indicates that Ostara Initiative received a [\\$65,000 grant](#). This is the second grant in 2 years, totaling \$125,000, and there is reason to believe that Ostara has received a third grant, but we do not yet know for how much.

We first reported on the [Ostara Initiative in 2020](#), proving that they were advocating for abortion. In this report are recorded statements by the leaders of the Ostara Initiative indicating that they've helped women in prisons obtain access to abortion information and services. This report also showed that the Ostara Initiative produced its own pregnancy resource guide promoting all manner of contraceptives, including abortifacients. What follows is the information we provided in 2020:

The stated goal of Ostara is “to end prison birth in America.” Initially called “Isis Rising,” the Ostara Initiative was [founded in 2004](#) in order to address the “needs of pregnant and parenting women in prison.”

Unfortunately, the Ostara Initiative considers access to abortion and contraception among the “needs” of pregnant women, and its leaders fully admit that access to abortion is included in their work.

The [two main projects of the Ostara Initiative](#) are the Alabama Prison Birth Project and the Minnesota Prison Doula Project (MnPDP). [MnPDP's website confirms](#) that it is a project of the Ostara Initiative and that it is a recipient of funding from the CCHD, which indicates that the CCHD's funds went specifically to this project.

The screenshot shows the website for the Minnesota Prison Doula Project. At the top, there is a navigation bar with buttons for HOME, ABOUT, CONNECT, MAKE A REFERRAL, and DONATE. Below this is a section titled 'KEY PARTNERS' which includes logos for the Minnesota Department of Corrections, Pine County Minnesota, Ramsey, and another organization. A red arrow points from 'KEY PARTNERS' to the 'SUPPORTERS' section. The 'SUPPORTERS' section lists several organizations, with 'Catholic Campaign for Human Development' underlined. A second red arrow points from this list down to the footer. The footer contains the copyright notice: © 2020 Minnesota Prison Doula Project of Ostara Initiative EIN 82-4855661.

Both the executive director of the Ostara Initiative and the director of MnPDP [are on the record](#) that in the capacity of their work for Ostara, they “served as resources for women considering abortion” in prison.

According to the [leadership page of the Ostara Initiative](#), Erica Gerrity is a co-founder of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project and the executive director of Ostara Initiative. Raelene Baker is the director of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project.

## Leadership



Erica Gerrity

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Erica Gerrity is a co-founder of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project and the Executive Director of Ostara Initiative. She is a licensed clinical social worker and doula who has worked with incarcerated pregnant people and their children for the past twenty years. In 2014, she and her team worked to write and pass Minnesota's Anti-Shackling legislation. In 2018, Erica was awarded an Ashoka Fellowship for her efforts to create social change at the intersection of reproductive health and incarceration.



Raelene Baker

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Raelene Baker is the Director of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project and has been involved with the program since its beginning in 2008. Rae has been a certified doula for 15 years and has attended over 350 births during that time. In partnership with incarcerated mothers, she developed an evidence-based, trauma-informed prenatal curriculum for those experiencing pregnancy and birth during incarceration. Rae specializes in providing loss-specific doula services.

On 17 May 2018, Carleton College published an article about a presentation given by Erica Gerrity and Raelene Baker. The talk, titled "[Reproductive Justice and the Justice System](#)," was sponsored by "Advocates for Reproductive Choice," and spotlighted MnPDP's work regarding abortion:

**"Although the Minnesota Prison Doula Project focuses on pregnancy care, birth, and child care, Erica and Raelene described how, due to the lack of support for abortions within the prison, the doulas have sometimes served as resources for women considering abortion."**


The article also noted how both Erica and Raelene expressed concern that prisons were reluctant to permit women prisoners to commit abortions:

**"Erica and Raelene described how, despite the fact that abortion is legal, and prisons are legally required to allow incarcerated women to have them, many jails and prisons attempt to keep women from getting abortions by ignoring their requests or putting off their appointments until it is too late to have an abortion."**

One month earlier, on 11 April, an article published on “Feminist Campus,” which describes itself as the “World's Largest Feminist Student Network,” explained that the work of MnPDP includes abortion. Titled, “[We Have No Idea What’s Happening to Pregnant People in America’s Prisons](#),” the article says the following about MnPDP:

**"One group that has worked to support incarcerated women seeking access to reproductive healthcare, including abortion, is the Minnesota Prison Doula Project.** The Doula Project works in compassionate solidarity with incarcerated women to create community, opportunity, and change through the provision of pregnancy and parenting support for incarcerated pregnant people and mothers. The Doula Project provides birth support from trained doulas, as well as both group-based and individual education. All of these services support the goal of nurturing healthy relationships as well as increasing parenting confidence and skills. **Though the work of the doulas was initially focused on prenatal care, birth, and mothering, they have recently aided a few of their clients in accessing abortion care, which demonstrates the group’s responsiveness to the needs of the community of women that they serve."**

Another co-founder of MnPDP, and found on the [Ostara Initiative leadership page](#), is Dr. Rebecca Shlafer.

	<p><b>Rebecca Shlafer PhD, MPH</b> <a href="mailto:shlafo02@umn.edu">shlafo02@umn.edu</a> / <a href="http://www.rebeccashlafer.com">www.rebeccashlafer.com</a></p> <p>Rebecca Shlafer is a University of Minnesota Assistant Professor in the Department of Pediatrics and <a href="#">Ostara Initiative’s Director of Research</a>. Dr. Shlafer received her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and her Ph.D. in child psychology from the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota. During her graduate studies, Dr. Shlafer has focused her research efforts on studying children’s developmental outcomes in the context of risk and adversity. For the past eight years, <a href="#">she has partnered with the Minnesota Prison Doula Project to evaluate outcomes</a> and systematically collect the experiences of incarcerated birthing people.</p>
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On 27 April 2018, Dr. Shlafer represented MnPDP in a panel discussion she participated in at St. Olaf’s College titled "Reproductive Health Behind Bars: A Discussion with the Experts". At the beginning of the presentation, she is identified as a co-founder of “the Minnesota Prison Doula Project.” The last question of the discussion was about abortion, wherein Shlafer was asked if abortion is accessible to women in prison. In response, Shlafer was incredulous that healthcare providers were ignoring requests for information or access to abortion during their incarceration. She said that it “boggles her mind” that the state would provide maternal and child health services, but not abortion, and said that “We’re treating people like crap and we’re not giving them access to terminating their pregnancies when they want to.” What follows is a short video clip showing the introduction of Dr. Shlafer as co-founder of MnPDP and her statements regarding abortion. The [full video can be found here](#).

[embedyt] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pBc9ZBiS8CA>[/embedyt]

Chauntel Norris is identified on the [Ostara Initiative leadership page](#) as the co-manager for the Ostara Initiative’s Alabama Prison Birth Project. On [her facebook page](#), Norris “likes” Planned Parenthood.

Chauntel Norris

**Abortion is safe and still legal.**

**Planned Parenthood Southeast Advocates**  
Nonprofit Organization

**Dashill Smith Music.**  
Musician/Band

**The King's Canvas**  
Art

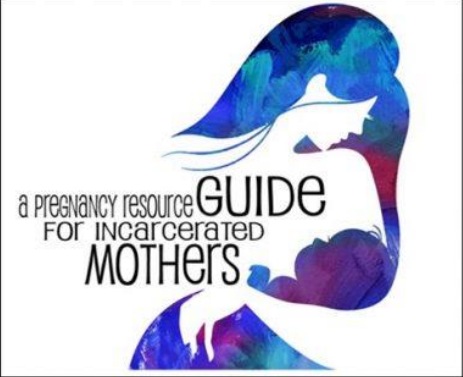
In 2016, MnPDP published a [Pregnancy Resource Guide for Incarcerated Mothers](#). In direct violation of CCHD grant guidelines, this resource guide advocates the use of contraception, including abortifacients.

Beginning on page 3, under the heading, “Top 10 Tips for Making a Healthy Baby,” the guide says:

**“10. Use birth control until you’re ready to start trying**

There are many birth control options available, including, condoms, birth control pills, Depo-Provera shot, and the intrauterine device (IUD). Ask your healthcare provider for more information.”

Page 37 identifies OB/GYNs as individuals who can assist with obtaining contraception, and page 38 identifies Midwives as individuals who can do the same.



**Top 10 Tips for Making a Healthy Baby**

7. **Learn your family medical history**  
Knowing your history can help your healthcare provider better advise you on reducing your risk of various diseases.
8. **Be in a safe environment**  
Violence affects people of all ages. Abuse can often escalate during a pregnancy, and once the baby arrives the baby may also be at risk.
9. **Get mentally healthy**  
To be fully prepared for a pregnancy, you need to be healthy mentally as well as physically. It is normal to feel sad, overwhelmed, anxious, or stressed sometimes. Get help if these feelings do not go away or if they interfere with daily life. Talk to your healthcare provider and see what your treatment options are.
10. **Use birth control until you're ready to start trying**  
There are many birth control options available, including, condoms, birth control pills, Depo-Provera shot, and the intrauterine device (IUD). Ask your healthcare provider for more information.

This guide was developed by Erica Gerrity, LICSW, Raelene Baker, CD(DONA), and Samantha Lo, JD, Minnesota Prison Doula Project<sup>1</sup>.

In [May 2022, the Lepanto Institute produced a second report](#) proving that the abortion-promotion from Ostara has continued. Video footage from an Ostara Initiative conference held in November of 2021 asserts that women have a “constitutional right” to abortion and complains that women lack access to abortions while in prison. A journal article written by Ostara co-founders Erica Gerrity and Rebecca Shlafer, published just last month, complains that “Pregnant people experiencing incarceration have been denied access to their constitutional right to abortion.”

On the morning of May 2<sup>nd</sup>, we released a [17-minute video report](#) about one of the most egregious cases of Catholic funding for abortion advocates we have seen to date. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD) is currently providing a third grant to a group called the Ostara Initiative, an organization we reported on in November of 2020. Our report that year revealed several independent articles that explained how the Ostara Initiative, through its primary operation called the Minnesota Prison Doula Project, was assisting women in prison obtain access to abortion. We even provided video of the co-founder of the Ostara Initiative, Rebecca Shlafer, complaining that women in prison are “being denied” access to abortion. That year, Ostara’s grant from the CCHD was \$60,000. That video report is available for viewing, [here](#):

[embedyt] [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALDTzv\\_M8Vc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALDTzv_M8Vc)[/embedyt]

According to the latest CCHD grants list, Ostara received another grant for the year 2020-2021, this time of \$65,000. And an article from November of last year reveals that Ostara is already receiving a third grant for the year 2021-2022 for an undisclosed amount.

In the video report, we provided more recent information, including an analysis of a state bill, written by the entire leadership of the Ostara Initiative, complaining that “Pregnant people experiencing incarceration have been denied access to their constitutional right to abortion.”

16 hours after the release of our video report, [Politico published a leaked draft](#) of Justice Samuel Alito’s majority opinion for the Dobbs v. Jackson case indicating that Roe v. Wade would be completely overturned. In light of this, abortion advocates have been active on social media, screeching their dismay over this watershed moment ... including the co-founder of the Ostara Initiative.

Immediately after the news about the SCOTUS leak broke, [Shalfer retweeted](#) a call for people to contribute to abortion funds:



The next day, [she retweeted](#) a call for people to donate to the “[Yellow Fund](#),” which boldly states “We fund abortion and promote reproductive justice in Alabama and the Deep South.”



Bear in mind that this is the co-founder of an organization being funded by the Catholic bishops of the United States tweeting these things!

But the name and logo of the Ostara Initiative appears to have been inspired by the occult. The [Ostara Initiative says](#) on its own website, "Inspired by **the word Ostara**, with origins in the **celebration of spring and regrowth**, Ostara Initiative is the mother organization for both prison doula projects ..."

According to the [Boston Public Library](#):

**"Ostara is a wiccan holiday** and one of their eight Sabbats. Ostara celebrates the spring equinox. The word Ostara comes from the Anglo-Saxon goddess name, Eostre. Eostre **represented spring and new beginnings.**"

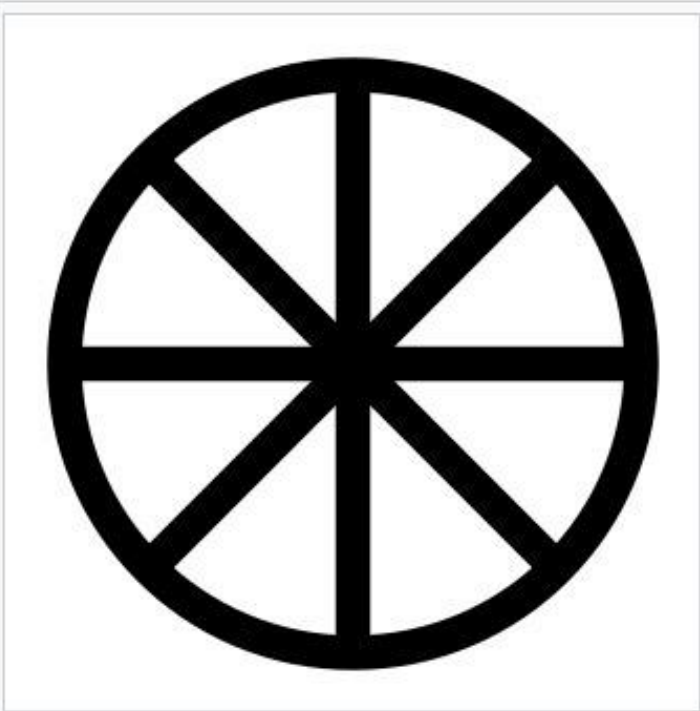
This is especially interesting, considering the fact that Ostara's logo appears to also be connected to the Wiccan "Wheel of the Year."

Notice the pattern of moon phases in the Ostara logo in the image on the right:



According to [Wikipedia](#), "a holiday named for the goddess is part of the neopagan Wiccan Wheel of the Year (Ostara, 21 March)." Wikipedia then linked to an article on the "[Wiccan Wheel of the Year](#)," leading to these two images:





The eight-armed sun cross is often used to represent the Neopagan Wheel of the Year.



*Kotomir* – the Slavic example of Wheel of the Year indicating seasons of the year. Four-point and eight-point swastika-shaped wheels were more common.

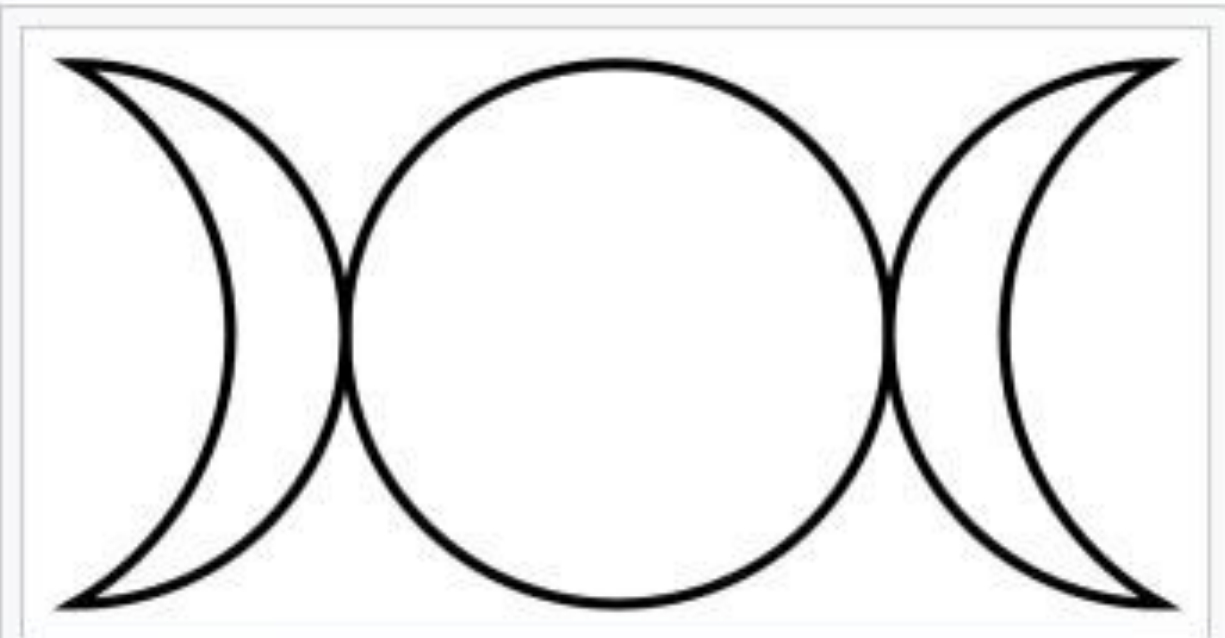
What you should see pretty quickly is how the inner circle of the Ostara Initiative's logo is a combination of these two symbols – the eight armed sun cross, but with the arms in the stylized shape of the wheel on the right. Combined with the obvious moon symbology at each of the eight points, one could conclude that the logo was based upon the Wiccan Wheel of the Year.

But there's more.

The Ostara Initiative's primary work is called the Minnesota Prison Doula Project, and this is what its logo looks like:



The strange symbol of the circle standing between two crescents is the same as the symbol for what is called in occult circles the "[Triple Goddess](#)," as you can see here:



The "Triple Goddess" symbol of the waxing, full and waning moon, representing the aspects of Maiden, Mother, and Crone<sup>[60]</sup>

In addition to all of this, the original name of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project was "Isis Rising." In [this 2016 press release from the MN Prison Doula Project](#) announcing its name-change, they say:

*"As we sadly say goodbye to our beloved goddess Isis and the warm beginnings we found at Everyday Miracles, change our name to reflect the statewide effort that is about to begin."*

A [separate article from 2013](#) quotes Erica Gerrity (Co-founder of the Ostara Initiative) and directly links the name of "Isis Rising" to the Greek goddess, Isis, saying:

*"The point is, it's benefiting us all," says Gerrity about the privately funded doula program she named 'Isis Rising' after the Greek goddess of motherhood and fertility."*

So, what have we seen? The name of the Ostara Initiative is derived from a Wiccan word celebrating "spring and regrowth" or "rebirth," which has a holiday of the same name. We've also seen that the logo of the Ostara Initiative incorporates the wiccan symbolism for the Wheel of the Year, relating to the name Ostara. We also saw that the logo of the Minnesota Prison

Doula project is the symbol of the “Triple Goddess.” And we’ve seen that the original name of the Minnesota Prison Doula Project was “Isis Rising,” named after the Greek goddess “Isis.”

Taken individually, any one of these things could be viewed as a mere nod to ancient pagan significance without specifically indicating that the organization itself was involved in neopaganism. However, when one considers all the information together, it paints a rather clear picture and gives a strong indication that this organization, receiving funding from the Catholic Church, which is involved in the promotion of abortion, is also likely involved in Wiccan beliefs.

The mission and purpose of the Catholic Church is to draw souls to Christ for His glory and their salvation. But the CCHD has given three grants to an organization that is most certainly at odds with that mission, and if the third grant is commensurate with the previous two, then Ostara has received nearly \$200,000 from pew-sitting Catholics.

### **Conclusion**

The Ostara Initiative is definitively and directly involved in the promotion of abortion. Its leaders are pro-abortion. And the organization itself is very likely involved in the occult.