

NETWORK Connection

PEOPLE LOBBYING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE • NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2009



**Advent: Preparing for
a Future of Justice**

dear members

What an intense time this has been. We have been working feverishly on many policy opportunities, including healthcare, the funding of the housing trust fund, immigration reform, and peacebuilding in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the midst of all of the heat around these topics, I have once again come to know how we ONLY can do the work on Capitol Hill if you are doing your part in your states.

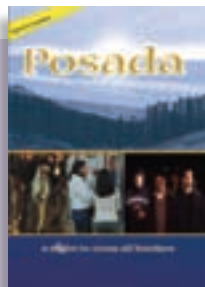
I am often asked if writing your representative or senator makes a difference. I can only say ABSOLUTELY YES! It is so important to have your voice registered. One great example of this occurred in the office of Senator Lugar (R-IN). His staff informed us that they were concerned because they were only hearing negative immigration messages. Our coalition then organized a faith call-in day and we were told that his office was deluged with calls and emails. They appreciated hearing a different message, which gave them an incentive to stay engaged in the process!

Simone Campbell, SSS

Planning for 2010? Save these dates!

January 28–30, 2010
Health Action 2010 Conference
www.familiesusa.org/conference/

March 19–22, 2010
Ecumenical Advocacy Days
<http://advocacydays.org>



This Advent, help lay the foundation for immigration reform.

Order a **free DVD**—*Posada: A Night To Cross All Borders*—for your church/community. Using the Hispanic Christmas tradition of Las Posadas, it depicts the journeys of three teenagers to the U.S.

Contact mtighe@networklobby.org or 202-347-9797, ext. 204, for more information.

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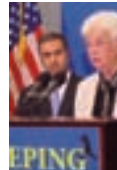
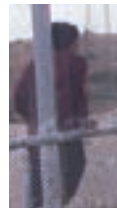
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NETWORK

A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

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Clearing the Clouds of Anger and Confusion

By SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

I had expected there to be controversy as we work to change the direction of our country from fear-based individualism to policies grounded in the common good. But I had not expected such anger, lies and exaggeration. I had known that we were captive to a 24-hour news cycle, but I had not realized that news has become a synonym for venting. Listening to some of the reactions to healthcare reform, I was saddened and horrified to hear the promulgation of confusion as a way to stir up fear and thus create a negative attitude toward change. This preference for confusion and fear is very worrisome for us as a nation and makes me realize that we have a lot of work to do.

Advent 2009 needs to be about embracing this work of clearing the clouds of confusion and fear. The fact that God has pitched a tent among us should be the anchor of our hope. This hope gives us the certainty that we are not alone and that the struggle to embrace the Gospel message, in all of its complexity, is the path of real life. But how do we do that in our first world?

I think we are called to live intensely Jesus's mandate to "fear not" because fear is one of two attitudes that will shut down the contemplative life. "Fear not" because we are not alone and have been

sent to bring glad tidings. "Fear not" because we live in the Pentecost Spirit and can be healing for others. "Fear not" because we will be given sight when we are blind, food when we are hungry, and the capacity to let the oppressed go free.

Living this Gospel message means that we might be called to walk where we would rather not go. I experienced this with an invitation to be on the O'Reilly Factor on Fox News to "discuss" healthcare reform from a faith perspective. I found myself very nervous and was tempted to say no to the opportunity. But I thought that if I did not speak a different message in that setting, who would? So I went on the show and experienced the challenge of being in a small room with a camera on me and a little earphone in my ear relaying various voices. While waiting, I tried to do centering prayer in order to be open to the Spirit and the moment. I didn't know when the camera was on me (which is a strange sensation), and I could not see Mr. O'Reilly in the studio in New York. But when the time came, I took a deep breath of "Come Holy Spirit" and launched into it. It went all right and the segment was over in a blur five minutes later, but the experience was not.

For the next few days, there followed a cascade of phone calls and emails

from angry, frightened and/or confused people. How could we take a position in favor of healthcare reform when there are all sorts of scary aspects? Most of the issues raised were not even included in any of the legislation, but people feared them anyway. One man called several times and engaged one of our staff in long, concerned conversations. Another woman talked to me and just kept being afraid, no matter what I said. Several emailed repeatedly with hostility that I have rarely seen in print. While the show was one thing, I realized that the "fear not" applies also to the aftermath. It heightened for me the work that we have to do.

So this Advent, I am picking up the practice of speaking to others of the good news of struggle and hope. I am trying to help clarify policies and promote the common good. I am working to encourage civil discourse that is the anchor of democracy. It is in this substantive engagement for clarity that we can find the tidings of great joy for our time. Maybe by all of us engaging this Advent practice of civil discourse in the darkness of our time, we will eventually see a great light.

Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director.

NETWORK Touches the Future of Justice

Since our founding in 1971, NETWORK has been able to bring hundreds of young people to Washington to serve as Associates and interns in our office. While they are with us, we teach them about the legislative process and the intersection of public policy and Catholic Social Teaching. In return, they energize and inspire us with their passion, intellect and youth. We are proud of the journeys they have taken since they left us. Many are lawyers and public policy advo-

cate, while others directly serve suffering people. Two recent Associates now work at the White House and on Capitol Hill.

These are the stories of two young women who worked with us and who now continue their justice-making in two new jobs—one as a campus minister and one as an immigration policy advocate. Like NETWORK, each touches the future of our nation and our world, and we are grateful for all that they do.

Advent Journey

By JESSICA GUENTZEL

As we journey together throughout this Advent season, the Scriptures remind us of John the Baptist and how he testified through his gift of teaching. As he preached, those he spoke to were able to experience and understand the light of Jesus's message.

When we look at the world today, it can

be easy to become disheartened as social, economic and political events seem to overshadow our optimism—that is, until we realize that, like John, we too have the privilege and responsibility to be light in that darkness, living our lives in a way that shows true testimony to Christ's teachings. Especially during this Advent season, this gift allows us

to be present to those sometime dark moments of waiting while trusting in the beauty and hope of a time yet to come. Like John, we too can bear witness, testifying together prophetically in an unwavering commitment to bringing Christ's message to our world. We carry within us the transformational power of God's love.

Students visit the U.S./Mexico Border in Juarez to understand the U.S. immigration system, trade agreements, femicides in Juarez and border security.





ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Students, faculty and staff visit Representative Larry Hosch (in doorway) as part of the Joint Religious Legislative Council's "Day on the Hill," an annual advocacy event in St. Paul, Minnesota. RIGHT: Author outside her campus office.



A New Spirit

This year, we have been given new hope through the birth of a new administration, along with some heartache as we have seen friends lose jobs, homes and hope in a tumultuous economy. In the midst of national and global events, I imagine many like myself stepping back and wondering how our life choices and vocations contribute to carrying God's light. It is easy to see our personal inadequacies or view our lives as being inconsequential.

What can one person really do? Often, this question can be paralyzing.

Because of my work on a college campus, I am aware of a common critique about students that they can be rather apathetic about the social issues of our time. I question whether they are truly apathetic, or if it is actually a case where they have not been able to recognize the Advent light they carry within themselves.

Young people can become paralyzed by feelings of inadequacy—fears of not knowing enough about an issue or of being overwhelmed by the immensity of suffering caused by poverty or hunger. Some are unaware that they have an important voice and perspective because of their youth. Simultaneously, they face cultural pressures pushing them to believe that church and state should

remain separate, that the halls of Congress should not echo with the clamor of advocacy from faith-filled constituents.

Despite their fears, I am actually filled with an overwhelming sense of optimism when I become involved in their lives, goals and aspirations.

It hasn't actually been that long since I myself graduated, but I have noticed a significant change in rhetoric since the time I was in college. I was a student when George W. Bush was elected to office a second time. During that campaign season, rhetoric on the Catholic campus was overwhelmingly centered on one significant life issue, dividing Catholics on campus as fingers pointed out who was "more Catholic" than the other.

But the language was different during last year's campaign. Students talked about a consistent life ethic and spent

time discerning how to develop their Catholic conscience and how it was or was not reflected in either party. They flew to Philadelphia to participate in the work of NETWORK and others in the "Convention for the Common Good," where they contributed to the development of a Catholic faith-centered election platform. They continued this work by returning to campus and becoming involved in political meetings and caucuses, as well as in groups like Amnesty International, Catholic Relief Services, Pax Christi and others.

They brought hope as they realized that they had important contributions to make and that they had a strong collective voice that could change the tide of the election in a way that no other election was changed before. Their gifts and contributions were recognized and they were empowered.

Hope and Unity

It is in this hope, energy and optimism that I center my work. Each day, I work with students as I commit myself to empowering them.

I see future leaders within our church and it gives me great comfort and hope. It is when their inner light is allowed to be exposed that they shine so brightly. They become Advent hope for generations to come, and they allow us to see the sun-kissed horizon as the night's darkness lifts to reveal the dawn of a new day.

These students know the power of unity. On the anniversary of September 11th, both political groups and a number of clubs on campus rallied together to honor those who had died, and they offered prayers for continued peace.

The same students who travel to the School of the Americas protest in November rally again to advocate for the unborn in January. Each spring, hundreds trade spring-break beachside vacations in Cancun for trips to volunteer in various locations both in the United States and international communities, contributing their efforts toward community building. Their energy, dedication and hope are evident during those times.

To Make a Difference

In the midst of world issues that can make our efforts seem insignificant, I am inspired as I accept my vocation as mentor. I can't do everything, but I can support, challenge and encourage these students to grow in their passion for social justice and change. I can help them deepen their commitment to issues that resonate with them currently while gently opening new doors as they learn about other issues toward which they can channel their passions.

I also encourage leaders in the faith community who are already active in their commitment to living the Gospel through their struggle for justice, making myself available as an informed resource in their efforts. As they become more engaged, they in turn recruit and educate others. They advocate passionately on campus for AIDS awareness, sustainability, fair trade, immigration reform, hunger and homelessness abatement, and eco-justice among other issues.

My work at NETWORK contributed greatly to my ability to serve as a mentor of students. As a NETWORK Associate, I became aware of issues at a very systematic level, and while I still have much to learn, I was given the skills and tools to learn about resources available to my students. These include youth scholarships for conferences, advocacy groups students can join, and networks of committed individuals across the globe who have turned their compassion into action.

I have learned that no matter where we live, work or study, each of us plays a role in seeking God's light, searching for that which will bring the most good to society. Like John the Baptist, each of us holds the potential to testify and witness God's goodness, bringing the dawn's grace-filled hope to the world around us.

Jessica Guentzel, a former NETWORK Associate, is the Director of Campus Ministry at the College of St. Benedict in St. Joseph, Minnesota.



Immigration Justice

By A. ELENA LACAYO

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend and volunteer at the “Reform Immigration FOR America” vigil at the Church of the Reformation just a few blocks from the U.S. Capitol building. As the Immigration Field Coordinator at the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the largest national Latino advocacy and civil rights organization in the U.S., I often have the opportunity to talk to people in the field about the impact of immigration policy in their town, city or state. Through my work, I am deeply involved with the intricacies of immigration policy and politics that deeply impact the community I serve.

But as I listened to the dozens of immigrant families in the church who told their painful personal stories and as I looked out at the hundreds of tired yet optimistic faces of those who had driven across the country to ask the government for immigration reform, I felt a deep sense of spiritual renewal for the cause into which I had put so much energy. Sitting in the church, I felt the sense of community come alive—the sense that it is through community, through the sharing of our lives and stories with one another that we are able to fully recognize the dignity of each human person in our midst and struggle for justice in solidarity with one another.

Justice-Seeking Inspired by NETWORK

Not a day goes by that I am not reminded of the values and principles that were instilled in me during my time as a NETWORK Associate. I know that

the foundation for the work I do with the immigrant population and for just immigration policy in the U.S. is deeply connected, informed and inspired by my formation in social justice and Catholic Social Teaching while at NETWORK. I am deeply humbled to be asked to contribute to this issue of *Connection* and to share the ways in which my experience at NETWORK firmly brought me to a committed life vocation for social justice in the world.

I spent eleven months as a NETWORK Associate after I finished my undergraduate degree at the University of Notre Dame. Looking back on it now, it is undeniable that my time at NETWORK allowed me to grow in many ways. On a basic level, I was exposed to a professional work environment where I learned to navigate the DC advocacy world (and its wardrobe) and to work in coalition with NETWORK staff and other faith-based organizations. Also, on a more practical level, I was exposed to the inner workings of the federal government, the ways in which political realities influence policy decisions, and the importance of input from the ordinary people in the political process.

Thanks to the practical and professional skills I acquired through the Associate program, I was able to fulfill my potential as an advocate and to begin my current job at one of the most prestigious immigrant advocacy organizations in Washington on one issue at the center of the civil rights debate today—comprehensive immigration reform.

Finding My Path

However important the technical and professional skills I developed at NETWORK were to my ability to get a policy-oriented job in our nation's capital, the deepest mark the experience left on my life came in the form of discernment of my life's mission.

For me, the community-oriented environment of growth and reflection I found at NETWORK served to ground me in the right life principles. NETWORK staff members provided professional guidance, but they also served as spiritual and moral examples. They taught me to float above the petty political battles and approach policy issues through prayerful reflection that revolved around the needs of people who are poor and marginalized.

This reflection was enabled by a strong office community in which staff meetings were not only about outcomes and strategies, but also about prayer and right action. The weekly meetings served as a constant reminder that in order to do justice, it is necessary to reflect the values we wish to see in the halls of Congress and around the world in our own everyday actions.

Due to this intentional and reflective work environment, my time at NETWORK was most importantly one of spiritual growth that allowed me to discern my life vocation. While at NETWORK I had the opportunity to work on various domestic issues of vital importance to people in poverty and those who are marginalized. Specific issues included the federal budget, the estate tax, the increase in the federal minimum

Immigration rally at the U.S. Capitol (above left) and church (below).



Author A. Elena Lacayo.

wage and most importantly, passage of comprehensive immigration reform.

While many of the issues I worked on were intellectually stimulating and interesting, it was not until I began to work on immigration during the Senate debate of 2007 that I made a personal connection to this vitally important justice issue, one that some have dubbed "the civil rights struggle of our day." And this is what ultimately led me to my current position at the National Council of La Raza.

My Personal Connection

I was born in the 1980s into a family of undocumented asylum-seekers from Nicaragua. While it would seem obvious that I would naturally be drawn to work on immigration reform, my own life experiences had not reflected the plight of the typical marginalized immigrant.

The tough times my parents and older siblings experienced during the revolution and exile had passed by the time I became a toddler, so most of my memories were ones of a time of comfort and relative wealth.

It was not until I began to discern justice through the lens of the NETWORK community that I realized how Jesus calls us to be in solidarity with all communities, not just the ones we were naturally drawn to. Thus, my work on immigration was simply a part of the justice I thought we should strive to foster in all communities. However, through my time of discernment I began to realize that the issue of immigration was more than just an intellectual exercise; it

was something I had always understood deeply in my own life experience.

My current work at NCLR is exciting and inspiring, allowing me to fulfill my mission while advancing the cause for reform. I have been tasked with engaging the field in advocacy on a national level for immigration reform. Through my experience at NETWORK, I came into my position with an understanding about the field and the broad impact constituents could make at a local level. Now, the advocacy model I learned from NETWORK has informed the campaigns and actions I design to engage the field in immigration reform. My greatest accomplishment in this capacity has been coordinating hundreds of successful campaign events across the country.

Amid the hustle and bustle of the over-politicized and self-aggrandizing environment of Washington DC, the stories of families who filled the church last week brought me back to the core reason I do what I can in the fight for immigration justice. This is the realization that the measure of a society is how it treats those who are suffering.

My work with the Latino community in the U.S. is now so natural that I cannot imagine serving in another field. It is work to which I feel a deep calling, one in which my talents and skills are put to good use.

I believe that to whom much is given, much is expected. I intend to take the talents that NETWORK fostered in me to do my part to build the reign of God on earth. I will always be grateful to NETWORK for allowing me to discern my path. I will always be grateful that my experience in that community opened my mind to building more than just a job or a career, while opening my heart to a true vocation of action in solidarity with those who are most deeply in need.

Before coming to the National Council of La Raza as the Immigration Field Coordinator, A. Elena Lacayo worked as a NETWORK Associate and as the Immigration Legislative Assistant in the Office of Government Liaison at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. For more information on NCLR's local immigration advocacy campaigns visit www.nclr.org/immigrationfield.

Moving through Healthcare Reform to Trade, Immigration and Other Justice Issues

BY MARGE CLARK, BVM, CATHERINE PINKERTON, CSJ, AND SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

As is obvious to any observer of the news, legislative action in Washington has been dominated by healthcare reform. In recent months, all other issues have taken a back seat. Approaching the end of President Obama's first year, much legislative work is left undone. Yet there are still accomplishments to celebrate and pending issues on which advocacy is greatly needed.

Healthcare Reform

On October 29, Speaker Nancy Pelosi presented the House health plan (H.R. 3962) to a crowd assembled at the Capitol. This \$894 billion package, the combined work of three House committees, covers some 36 million people by expanding Medicaid and giving subsidies to moderate-income citizens to purchase insurance or join a new public plan. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) stated that it would reduce future budget deficits by about \$30 million over 10 years.

Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid awaited a CBO cost estimate for the Senate legislation. As announced, it would include a national government insurance plan with an "opt-out" provision for states, but details about how that would work were still unknown.

Both the House and Senate versions would create insurance "exchanges" and subsidize the purchase of insurance by low-income people. Both would also expand Medicaid, but the House version would reach more people.

A crucial difference lies in funding. The House bill imposes a new income surtax on wealthy individuals while the Senate version taxes high-cost insurance policies.

NETWORK urges Congress to include a robust public option as a common good measure that will help control rising costs. We also seek access to health

coverage for all legal immigrants, without any waiting period for eligibility, and the opportunity for undocumented immigrants to purchase health insurance through the "exchange" mechanism.

Budget & Appropriations

Congress is working to complete each of the appropriations bills through the standard process rather than through an omnibus bill. A few appropriations bills are ready for the president to sign into law.

Among these is the Agriculture appropriations bill, which includes some additional help for people who are struggling. New funding was allocated for the summer nutrition, child care food, and school meal programs, as well as for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program. WIC, which provides grants to states for supplemental foods, healthcare referrals and nutrition education for low-income women and young children, was authorized to provide

increased fruit and vegetable vouchers. Also, Connecticut, Nevada, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia were added to the list of states participating in the Afterschool Meal Program.

Given the increase in homelessness due to the economic downturn, NETWORK regrets that Energy and Water Appropriations did not raise the Emergency Food and Shelter Program funding above the 2009 level.

Housing Trust Fund

NETWORK continues to advocate for funding of the National Housing Trust Fund and for additional housing vouchers to be made available so new housing units can be used. There is hope as the House and the Senate have each presented legislation including \$1 billion in funding.

H.R. 3766, the "Main Street TARP Act," will transfer untapped TARP (Troubled Assets Relief Program) funding to the trust fund and will limit tenants' rents



"A brain and a heart? Sorry guys. That's not covered by your medical plan."

Need up-to-date information about legislation in Congress? Check out NETWORK's Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/bills/> ★ To learn what happened to legislation you followed in the past, go to <http://capwiz.com/networklobby/issues/votes/> and enter your zip code in the "Key Votes" field.

to 30% of their adjusted income. It also will provide help for homeowners who fall behind on mortgage payments due to job loss or healthcare emergencies.

S.1731 uses funds from the sale of stock options acquired from banks repaying their loans from TARP. It will provide grants to states to assist homeowners who are struggling to meet mortgage payments due to unexpected financial hardship.

Paid Sick Leave

There is optimism about the passage of H.R. 2460, the Healthy Families Act, as well as its companion bill in the Senate, S. 1309, the Responsible Fatherhood and Healthy Families Act of 2009. These bills would compel most employers to allow workers to earn up to 56 hours of paid sick leave per year.

With the H1N1 virus adding to the urgency of passage, NETWORK encourages members to check with legislative offices to be sure they have signed on as co-sponsors and are supporting this bill.

Financial Justice

Congress and the administration continue work to curtail unjust banking and credit practices. The Truth in Lending Act, which requires simplicity and transparency in credit card accounts, was signed into law this summer and is scheduled to take effect at the end of the year. Hearings and draft legislation aimed at additional consumer protections abound on the Hill. The administration has proposed an overarching agency, the Consumer Financial Protection Agency, which could be created through passage of H.R. 3126, the Consumer Financial Protection Agency Act, or similar legislation. This idea has been applauded by investor groups and opposed by banks and other lenders. A balance is needed between regulation and the ability to create new helpful financial products.



NETWORK and our faith-based partners applaud consumer protections, and await clear and specific legislation.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

NETWORK has begun preliminary visits to House and Senate offices, letting them know that we are engaging seriously with next year's TANF reauthorization, and challenging them to do the same. Stay tuned for more work in this area.

Trade

NETWORK, with the Interfaith Working Group on Trade (IWG), has lobbied Congress to reject the Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Colombia, Panama and South Korea that were negotiated by the Bush administration. Thus far, action has not concluded on these agreements, which would grant extensive rights and privileges to multinational corporations without ensuring adequate protection for local governments and populations. Also, to approve the Colombia FTA would be to neglect the history of human rights violations in that country.

Key among congressional actions this session was the introduction of H.R. 3012, the Trade Reform, Accountability, Development, and Employment (TRADE) Act, by Rep. Michael Michaud (D-ME). This act calls for a review and renegotiation of all existing FTAs, with the hope of creating new rules for globalization that ensure economic security for all, promote sustainable development in poor countries, and respect our shared environment.

The administration has yet to clearly indicate its leanings on trade policy, but it is hoped that the passage of the TRADE



Act would encourage the president to take a stance.

Immigration

It is expected that bills pertaining to immigration reform will be introduced soon, but the timing of hearings or any other movement is uncertain.

A current debate concerns whether advocates should push for immigration reform in pieces rather than as a comprehensive package. A worry is that if the "easy" issues are passed (e.g., DREAM and AgJOBS), then it will be harder to pass the more difficult pieces (e.g., a path to citizenship for undocumented people or the creation of new permanent and temporary immigration system policies).

This is a difficult question because so many people suffer in the status quo, and yet the political will for change is weak. NETWORK will continue to advocate for the needs of all families in the midst of this political question.

Peacebuilding

As our military operations wind down in Iraq, more attention is being paid to diplomacy and economic development. 2010 funding includes more civil society capacity-building and economic development funding than ever before. NETWORK continues to urge responsible civilian development and Iraqi accountability to ensure that money is reaching its designed programs.

In some provinces there is evidence that the local governments are improving public services. There is still a disconnect between the local governments and Baghdad. The State Department and USAID are working with the Iraqi central government on this problem. NETWORK applauds this step forward and will continue to support such efforts.

Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, and Marge Clark, BVM, are NETWORK lobbyists. Simone Campbell, SSS, is NETWORK's Executive Director.

Want timely information about key issues in Congress? NETWORK members can sign up for our weekly email legislative hotline. Send your name, zip code and email address to jsammon@networklobby.org

As Our Muslim Brothers and Sisters Arrive from Other Nations

By DR. SAYYID M. SYEED

Unlike today, there wasn't a large Muslim community in the United States 50 years ago. That changed when many Muslim countries were able to gain their independence from European colonial powers. After that happened, a half-million Muslim students came to this country to study science, medicine and other subjects. Their reception in the U.S. was different from what Muslims had experienced in Europe. Here they found the freedom of a democratic western country where many religious institutions opened their buildings to the students for prayer. This was in contrast to Europe, where there wasn't the same spirit and many did not understand our shared religious roots.

After they graduated, a significant percentage of the Muslim students stayed in the United States, where they began their professional lives, married and had families. They were joined by Muslim refugees from countries such as

Iraq and Somalia who came because of political reasons and natural disasters. A large number of Arab Muslims had settled here and, because of all these factors, the Muslim community in the U.S. grew quickly in a relatively short time. According to some estimates, there are now seven million Muslims in America. This is the number that President Obama quoted in his Cairo speech.

Like so many others, I came to the United States to further my education. I knew that universities in the United States were far ahead in the study of sociolinguistics, my area of interest, so I enrolled at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, where I received a Ph.D. in the subject. I also chose to come to this country because I saw it as a country committed to democracy, which looked at religion in a progressive way and which had a sense of adventure and looking forward. Like others, I was also fascinated by the civil rights movement here.

Unlike many other Muslim students, however, I came to the United States already knowing that I wanted to make my home in this country. My wife and our three young children (ages five, three and one) came with me from our home in Kashmir, and we had three more children after we arrived here.

Building Community

While in Indiana, I served as the president of the Muslim Students Association of the US and Canada (MSA), which had been formed in the 1960s. When I became president, we saw the need for a larger role. I oversaw the transformation of the MSA into the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), which is an umbrella organization that includes organizations such as the MSA, North American Islamic Trust, Islamic Medical Association of North America, and the Association of Muslim Scientists & Engineers.

ISNA's mission is to support Mus-



DELIMA IBRAHIM

Many Muslim students came to the U.S. to study science and medicine.



JACK E. BOUCHER, HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY (HABS), LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1974 photograph of the mosque on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, DC, which was originally sponsored by diplomatic mission heads from Moslem countries to promote international understanding. In keeping with this concept, President Eisenhower dedicated the building upon its completion. The wings now house the library, museum and offices of the Islamic Center.



COURTESY OF ISNA

Author Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed speaks at an ISNA conference.

lim communities, develop educational outreach, and foster good relationships with other faiths and organizations. One of our biggest challenges has been the extremely rapid growth of the Muslim community in the U.S. About 95% of this country's mosques have been built in the last 50 years. There are now about 2,000 mosques and more than 300 are affiliated with us.

Our biggest activity is the ISNA Annual Convention, which attracts 30-40,000 Muslims each year. We held our 46th convention this year in Washington DC and it was a large, complex undertaking with several hundred workshops and 300 speakers. The goal of our convention is to bring together people and ideas and to form a supportive community. We also seek to build bridges to those around us. Every two months, we publish *Islamic Horizons* (<http://www.isna.net/Islamic-Horizons/pages/Islamic-Horizons.aspx>), which goes out to libraries, Islamic Centers, families, and individual subscribers, and is read by a quarter million people.

Respecting Diversity

At the ISNA, we see interfaith cooperation and communication as critically important. After 9/11, it was evident just how necessary this cooperation is. As Muslims, we were under a lot of pressure to explain how and why the attacks had occurred. It became a duty of every Muslim to stand up and speak out.

We have worked with the U.S. Con-

ference of Catholic Bishops, with whom we produced books and organized conferences to show the religious necessity of working together. I met with Pope John Paul II, who was very clear about the importance of interfaith cooperation, and I also had a very positive experience with Pope Benedict when he came last year to DC. I talked with him about the importance of interfaith dialogue and how it is a way of life in the United States. I said that we believe we are good Christians, Muslims and Jews only when we are able to reach out to each other.

As Muslims, we understand our links to the struggles that other faith communities have faced. Many Catholics experienced bigotry and hardship when they first arrived, for example, and have had to work hard to become fully recognized as mainstream communities in this nation. Jewish communities experienced similar struggles.

We believe it is important to show how the Abrahamic faiths (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) are rooted together. As part of our outreach, we have promoted the idea of "mosques without walls" to foster the idea of transparency and understanding. We invite our neighbors to come in to be with us and to see what is going on inside the Islamic centers and mosques.

One of America's proudest achievements is being able to build a society that respects diversity. The terrorists don't understand this. They don't see that real strength is the ability to establish a soci-

ety that is the sum total of many colors and faiths.

After 9/11 there were some unfortunate examples of bigotry, but these were an exception, not the rule. In Toledo, Ohio, for example, on 9/11, the news went out that someone had vandalized the local Islamic Center. Christians and Jews made a circle around the Islamic Center to express their solidarity with the Muslim community and make sure it wouldn't be desecrated. We heard similar stories of hope in other areas.

These amazing stories need to be told internationally. Doing so will take the steam out of those who want to promote hate and bigotry.

The Next Generation

Like many others, my wife and I wanted to raise our children in the U.S. and to show them that they could practice our religion and thrive here. Muslim families under the domination of European colonial powers had not had that opportunity because Muslims were seen as subjects to Christian "masters." Our children were raised as active American Muslims with a full understanding of their heritage and with a full understanding of their rights and duties in a pluralist democracy. Today, they are doing well in many professions.

Our new generation is taking leadership roles in many fields. Our first-generation immigrant Muslims were medical doctors. But now, a large number of the second-generation Muslims are going in law, social services and non-profit sectors. We are glad that there is a positive and constructive involvement and integration of the Muslim community and that this has happened much faster than in the case of many other faith and ethnic communities.

Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed serves as the National Director of ISNA's Office of Interfaith and Community Alliances in Washington DC (<http://www.isna.net/Home.aspx>). He has also been General Secretary of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) and is one of the founders of the quarterly American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences.

Anticipating the Coming of Healthcare Reform

By CATHERINE PINKERTON, CSJ

Advent, the season in which the Christian community prepares to again celebrate the “coming” of Christ in history, is rich in longing and anticipation and is therefore an appropriate time to contemplate this current historical moment. For this is the time when our nation again anticipates a critical new cycle in human history, one in which a comprehensive rethinking and revamping of our healthcare system will touch all our lives.

Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. He was not speaking about life after death alone. Certainly, the Gospels record instances of his returning the dead to life, but much more prevalent are the times he healed the sick, restoring them to fullness of life.

Our nation’s founding documents are rooted in the concept that all are created equal and “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Those three rights are inextricably linked, but in the history of our nation’s healthcare systems, they have been curtailed and even denied for reasons antithetical to our foundational principle: the equality of all persons.

The healthcare community can be proud of its contributions to the welfare and sustenance of millions of our people, legitimately boasting of countless medical advances—often termed “medical miracles”—in the treatment of critical and unfamiliar diseases. But it must also in justice acknowledge that millions of people have been denied access to even the most basic care because of financial and other reasons.

Sadly, the thirst for economic wealth on the part of all too many financial and service entities has run rough-shod over those principles directed to safeguarding life. They have made decisions that harmed the quality of life of millions of our people and sadly, in some cases, the very right to life itself.

Our nation’s recent leadership has also been partially responsible for our health-



Author speaks in the U.S. Capitol about the urgent need for healthcare for all children. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and Sen. Robert Menendez (left side of the photograph) were present and Sen. Edward Kennedy was also in the audience. (2007 photo)

care delivery crisis, although there have been many efforts on the part of administrations and Congresses to create effective healthcare delivery systems. Some successful efforts have included creation of the Medicare and Medicaid programs. These were the initiatives of presidents and through the decades they have preserved the promise of healthcare to many of the nation’s retired or impoverished people.

Unfortunately, however, both the government and the electorate were seemingly incapable of fully diagnosing and addressing the intricate forces at work and countless breakages in the whole health arena even while they were being held hostage to them. Efforts toward comprehensively reforming the nation’s system were also affected by the recent death of Senator Kennedy, which was a deep sadness for his colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and for all who saw reform through his vision. Fortunately, his vision still lives. Whatever happens this year, there is still much more to be done if we are to achieve a fair, quality healthcare system for all.

But indeed, comprehensive healthcare reform is not solely the duty of Congress and the administration. It is fundamentally the moral duty of us all, including employers who must see their employees not as instruments of production or financial gain, but as humans with families and futures and rights. It is also the moral obligation of insurers who all too often compete in a system that can value profit over integrity. And finally, each of us has a moral responsibility to care for ourselves and our neighbors.

In essence, this “coming” of comprehensive healthcare reform is a monumental test of the moral integrity, humaneness and justice of our nation and society as a whole. There is no more appropriate a time to reflect on this historic moment than Advent, this time of Christian anticipation.

Catherine Pinkerton, CSJ, is the NETWORK lobbyist who has worked on healthcare reform for more than 20 years, including her time as a member of the healthcare reform taskforce during the administration of President Clinton.

Advent Reflection: Hail Mary, Full of Grace

This year, we have witnessed a whirlwind of change: an economic recession, a new administration, and more. How do we envision our future in the midst of this?

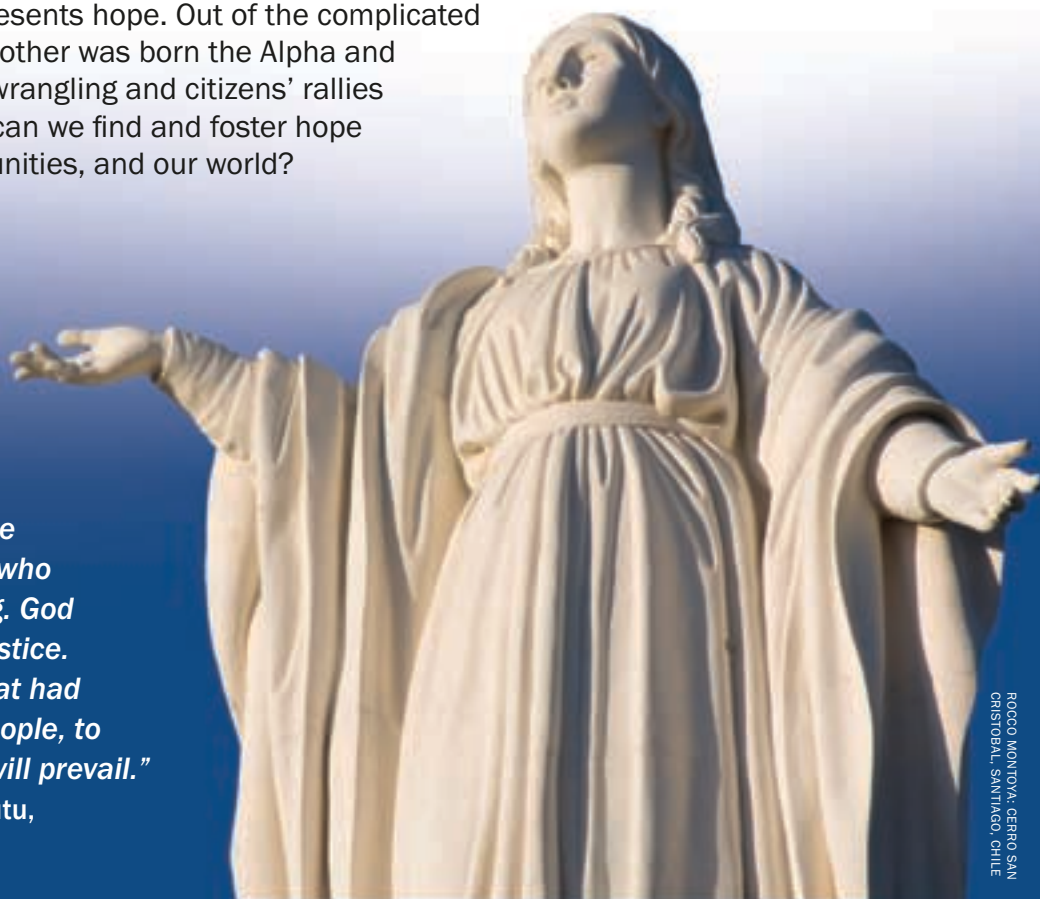
During Advent, we can look to a woman who also experienced change. Mary, the mother of Jesus, completely surrendered herself to God's will. She had to convince herself, her community, and the man to whom she was promised that she was carrying out that will. In the midst of chaos, she had to envision that there was a future—that she would be mother to the Son of God.

What can she teach us?

- **Openness:** Mary was open to the Spirit. To God working through her, she said “may it be done” (Luke 1:38). By changing the ways we stand in solidarity with people around the globe, can we be more open to doing God's will?
- **Strength:** Mary was strong and committed. She possessed the courage to tell Joseph that she was carrying a child, knowing that she could face scorn or punishment. How can we show the strength to respond to God's call?
- **Hope:** Jesus's birth represents hope. Out of the complicated situation of an unwed mother was born the Alpha and Omega. Out of political wrangling and citizens' rallies can come good. Where can we find and foster hope in ourselves, our communities, and our world?

“This is a moral universe, which means that, despite all the evidence that seems to be to the contrary, there is no way that evil and injustice and oppression and lies can have the last word. God is a God who cares about right and wrong. God cares about justice and injustice. God is in charge. That is what had upheld the morale of our people, to know that in the end good will prevail.”

— Archbishop Desmond Tutu,
God Has a Dream



ROCCO MONTOYA, CERRO SAN CRISTOBAL, SANTIAGO, CHILE

We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.

2009 ADVENT CALENDAR

Reflecting on a Year of Change, Looking Forward with Hope

Week 1:

- Listen to a favorite Christmas carol. Are the lyrics not only a song, but also a prayer?
- Live simply so others can simply live. How will you have a simpler Christmas this year? Consider coordinating with a friend or family member to exchange charitable donations in lieu of gifts.
- Millions of Americans remain separated from their families due to our broken immigration system. What can you do so that more families can celebrate the holidays together?

Week 2:

- In celebration of St. Nicholas Day (12/6), how can you show “secret generosity” to loved ones and strangers?
- On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (12/8), how can you mirror Mary’s willingness and courage?
- Celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe (12/12). Almost 500 years ago, Mary appeared in an unexpected way. How does Mary appear to you in persons you might not expect?
- The celebration of Hanukkah begins (12/12): *“As Christians and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing to the world. This is the common task awaiting us.”* –Pope John Paul II

Week 3:

- The third week of Advent is one of Joy. *“Joy is the true gift of Christmas...We can communicate this joy simply: with a smile, a kind gesture, a little help, forgiveness.”* –Pope Benedict XVI
- Write special notes to distant relatives and forgotten friends.
- World leaders are working in Copenhagen to negotiate a global climate treaty. Take an action to shrink your “carbon footprint.”

Week 4:

- As our homes and neighborhoods are illuminated with Christmas lights—who is the light in your life?
- In this time of treats, fast. Let God fill your emptiness.
- The shortest and darkest days of the year occur this week. Reach out to someone who could use some light.
- Prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ through Eucharist and time with family and friends!

Written by NETWORK Associates Sarah Carey and Meghan Tighe.

We encourage the reproduction and distribution of this back-to-back fact sheet.



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“It’s a God Thing”

By JEAN SAMMON

This is a story—a true story—about a tennis-playing Mom who turned into a neighborhood activist and is now helping to put shattered lives back together.

The story takes place in New Orleans, where all the homes in Connie Uddo’s neighborhood were flooded during Hurricane Katrina. Connie’s family moved five times in the next six months. When they finally moved back to their Lakeview home, they were the first family to return to the neighborhood.

Connie felt both blessed and cursed to be back: blessed because they had a home and most of their belongings, but cursed because they were the only ones living in the neighborhood. It felt like a war zone, with no life—not even birds or ants. If you can imagine living like this, you can probably imagine how depressed Connie was.

Beacon of Hope

Connie was rescued from depression by a neighborhood meeting at her home, where she saw that she really wasn’t alone after all. She became involved in helping her neighbors recover their homes, and then she met a woman who was “ten steps ahead of her.” This woman used her home as a command center—a “Beacon of Hope”—to bring people together

to accomplish the many tasks involved in rebuilding a neighborhood.

Connie began to see miracles. Churches, schools and homes that had seemed impossible to restore because of damage and lack of funds were rebuilt and reopened by people in the community who wouldn’t take “no” for an answer. Connie felt called by God when a minister gave her the keys to a small building and said, “I’ve got to rebuild a church and a school. You can run a new center for the Episcopal diocese and I’ll help you when you need it.” She became the director of the St. Paul’s Homecoming Center, in partnership with Beacon of Hope, and conducted a “scavenger hunt” to find the resources that people needed: tree cutters, plumbers, electricians, roofers, painters, notary publics, mental health counselors, laundry facilities, and so on.

When government seemed unable to help, St. Paul’s Homecoming Center became a one-stop, one-form-to-fill-out place to connect residents with the

resources they needed to bring their neighborhood back.

Making Them Whole

The work of the homeowner assistance program has evolved from helping people with basic reconstruction to enabling them to complete their journeys home. Bringing volunteers together with residents who are too exhausted and out of money to put the finishing touches on their home—restoring lawns and gardens, painting over the flood lines—brings new energy to residents and helps them feel whole.

Connie refers to their model for recovery as the Trinity Model, with three key components: faith groups that provide volunteers and funding; grassroots residents who know the needs; and neighborhood associations that provide leadership. She also says that “it’s a God thing” since she very clearly sees God’s involvement, referring to the people as the “hands and feet” of Christ. They have learned what can be accomplished when people of different faith denominations work together.

This “trinity” has also learned how to build mutually beneficial relationships with government agencies, and how to push for changes in laws that get in their way. NETWORK staff saw this recently when a delegation of Gulf Coast residents, including Connie, came to Washington to meet with congressional and administration officials to tell them how the federal government can help.

The Work Continues

This is not the end of the story. There is much work yet to be done. St. Paul’s Homecoming Center is still looking for volunteers of any age or skill level. Anyone interested can contact Connie at 504-644-4125 or uddo2911@hotmail.com.

If you can’t volunteer in New Orleans, I hope you will still be as inspired as I am by the story of how God made a difference in Connie’s life, and how she is now making a difference in the lives of others.

Jean Sammon is NETWORK’s Field Coordinator.



Connie Uddo.



Beacon of Hope volunteers at work.

NETWORK recommends



The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth
by Thomas Berry (ed.)

by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim),
Maryknoll/Orbis <http://bit.ly/XianFuture>

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NETWORK Capitol Campaign 2009

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news (of justice)...” Isaiah 52:7

This fragment from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah is a dramatic image of the high expectation that marks the Christian community’s approach to the season of Advent. This season tells us that the coming celebration of our Lord’s birth is about bringing good news to those who are poor, and binding up and releasing all those on the socio-economic margins whose lives are defaced by the impact of social marginalization and economic poverty.

We who are members of NETWORK share a common commitment to change. As such, we are deeply committed to serving on the frontlines of faith-based advocacy, where we pour out our lives so that all peoples can live in the shelter of God’s peace with justice.

Place your “feet” on the frontlines of justice-building by giving generously to NETWORK’s solidarity with those on the margins of our society. Working together, we can become a powerful sign of empowerment and messengers of peace.

—John Price (The Rev.), Major Gifts Coordinator

Dear Friends,

With your help, we can meet our “Capitol Campaign 2009” goal of the funding necessary to permit us to undertake NETWORK’s critical education and advocacy work on Capitol Hill during the remaining term of the 111th Congress, 2009-2010. But we are not there yet.

We members of the NETWORK Board have pledged our 100% participation in the Capitol Campaign. And we are asking the same of you, our members. To those who have already invested in our campaign, THANK YOU. For those who have not yet responded to our plea: we ask that you join us by participating at a level that satisfies your heart.

Member support is the foundation of NETWORK’s funding. We need your investment if we are to continue to serve, as we have since 1971, as a voice on fundamental issues of social and economic justice.

Let’s make this happen together.

—Mary Yelenick, Capitol Campaign Chair

To contribute, use the envelope in the middle of this issue, or go to www.networklobby.org.