



# Driving toward Immigration Justice

dear members

I am realizing that in just one year NETWORK has grown in stature and opportunity. We have built on the great work of the past and are experiencing increased opportunity to influence legislative policy. To this end we have created a new strategic plan that continues to put mission at the center of our work while trying to build the necessary organizational capability to grow.

This means that we have added Paul Marchione as our managing director so that someone is paying close attention to the internal functioning of our work. Shantha Ready Alonso has joined us as our field staff bringing with her a lot of ecumenical experience at the National Council of Churches. Shannon Hughes and the education team are ready to launch our faith and taxes work called "We the Taxpayer." Sr. Marge Clark has continued to work on economic justice, bringing creative energy to the lobbying on the Hill. In short, all our staff members are working together to try to create federal policy that responds to the needs around us.

Which brings us to you, our members! Know how grateful we are for your perseverance and commitment. On the bus we had a chance to meet some of you and it lifted our spirits. NETWORK has clout on the Hill because we have all of you around the country. It truly is an experience of being the one body that St. Paul speaks of in Corinthians. Know that we here in the office daily give thanks for your commitment. Only together can we be faithful to this opportunity to achieve even a small portion of our mission.

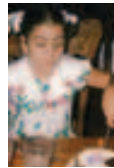
Simone Campbell, SSS



Sisters Simone Campbell and Mary Ellen Lacy and other "Nuns on the Bus" march with Dolores Huerta, renowned activist for farmworker justice and human rights.

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# NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus— Meeting Fear and Hope in our Nation

By SIMONE CAMPBELL, SSS

There are two stories from the bus that shout in my memory to be told. They are entwined in motivation but so different in results.

The first occurred on a hot, hot afternoon in San Antonio, Texas. There we had an outdoor press event and rally to speak out yet again for comprehensive immigration reform. Congressman Pete Gallego, who had just come in from the airport after a political trip, stood at the podium with his prepared text. His eight-year-old son Nicholas saw him and (oblivious to the big crowd) ran up and threw his arms around his father's waist to greet him.

Congressman Gallego, obviously

touched, put his papers down and said that he was not going to use his prepared text. Rather, he spoke from the heart and told us that his attitude toward immigration reform was forever changed the first time he held Nicholas right after he was born. He told us that he knew in that moment that he would do whatever he could to protect his son. He would even give his life for his treasure. Many of us had tears in our eyes as we listened and knew the deep truth that he was sharing as a parent.

The second story came a few days later on the Pascua-Yaqui reservation outside of Tucson, Arizona. There, after our "friendraiser," Chairman Peter Yucupicio of the Pascua-Yaqui nation told me

of the horror of living on the reservation and having criminal activity channeled through their territory, as well as having desperate people trying to cross the desert. He told me that he had found the body of a woman curled up under a large desert bush. When they turned her huddled body over, they found that she was cradling the body of her infant child. What immediately struck me was that this nameless woman had the same commitment to her child as Congressman Gallego and most parents everywhere. The only difference is that her quest to protect her child ended in both of their deaths. It is this stark story that is at its heart of what comprehensive immigration reform is about and why we went back on the road to lift up the urgent need to reform our laws.

We started on May 28 at St. Rose of Lima Parish in New Haven, Connecticut with an evening of sharing and a blessing for those of us on the bus and for the bus itself. I was so touched by the number of Sisters who drove long distances to be a part of the sendoff. Some even drove down from New Hampshire to join us!

We learned of the struggles and successes of the immigrant communities in Connecticut. The mayor and Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro wished us well on our quest. With the rain letting up, we boarded the bus and headed to the Dominican Sisters Convent in Jersey City for the night. We were quite late getting there because of nighttime road construction, but they were waiting up for us and had wine, soft drinks and snacks laid out for us. Wonderful hospitality! It was the first night of an incredible three-week journey.

The next morning at Liberty State Park we arrived to find the park (and Ellis Island) swathed in fog. Of all of the things I had worried about, none included fog at the beginning. But amazingly, before the end of our opening event the sun came out and continued to shine



*Walking along the border fence with the mayor of Nogales, Arizona*

on every one of the approximately 6800 miles we drove! Fifteen states later and after 50+ events of “Raise your hands! Raise your voice! For Comprehensive Immigration Reform NOW!!” we have indeed made a dent in politics. But more than that, we have broken (yet again) many of our hearts and stirred our commitment to “form a more perfect union.”

What you will read in the following pages is the story of this journey from some of the multitude who put it together. But I wanted to share some perspective from the whole trip. Among the themes that stood out for me was the theme of fear. I had always known that people without documents fear deportation, but I discovered this was a big bundle of fear that has many more nuances that I had ever imagined.

- In Savannah, we met Ida, a 17-year-old DREAMer who had received her TPS (Temporary Protected Status) papers and now had her learner’s permit to drive a car. She was terrified that her parents would get picked up by the police so she is doing all of the family driving. She tells her parents to not go off with anyone and to wait for her at their work so she can drive them home. She also feels a bit guilty that she has papers and her parents do not.
- In Dallas, we met DREAMers who were applying for their TPS with Catholic Charities. Many had come long distances on Saturday to fill out the application. They had waited to fill it out with Catholic Charities because they were terrified of “notaries” who can take advantage of unsuspecting people.
- On the Pascua-Yaqui reservation we found many fearful because their families are being torn apart and criminal activity is being funneled through the reservation because the U.S. Border fence is built right up to their territory.
- In Phoenix, a 19-year-old DREAMer with TPS papers is raising her 11-year-old twin siblings because both of her



Sister Simone Campbell greets the crowd in Dallas



During the stop in Washington, President Obama invited Sister Simone Campbell to the Oval Office to discuss immigration reform and NETWORK’s Nuns on the Bus trip.

parents have been deported. Her fear is that she is not doing a good-enough job raising them because she is so young.

We also met themes of hope and the promise of new growth at every turn.

- The mayor of Scranton, Pennsylvania told us that his city had experienced a boom because a neighboring town (Hazleton) had passed very repressive laws against immigrants, and many moved to Scranton. This increased property values, and many opened businesses. Now in the public high school, 30 languages are the first language of the students.

- In Charlotte, North Carolina, a realtor told us that the National Association of Hispanic Realtors did a study that indicated that of the estimated 11 million households with an undocumented person, 3 million are poised to buy homes once there is security in their legal position.
- In Laredo, Texas, we heard from the mayor, judges, police officers and border patrol agents that we must have comprehensive reform so that their communities can work together the way they did before the latest divisiveness.
- In El Paso, we heard that El Paso is the safest city in the United States three years in a row. We were urged to share this information because people in Washington want to think it is a dangerous place to be. They told us this was definitely NOT the case.
- In Silicon Valley, an immigrant CEO of a startup told us that she requires as many national backgrounds as possible at the table when solving a problem. She says that only by having different cultural backgrounds do you really have the breadth of creativity that you need to solve the complex problems in a global world.

Everywhere we went we met citizens and aspiring citizens who are working so hard to make our nation better. We met fear, but it was not a fear that crippled. Rather, we met bravery of hardworking people caring for their families in the best way they can. Like Congressman Gallego and the unnamed woman in the desert, all families are committed to caring for their children. “We the People” know this, and that is why faith and patriotism demand that we stand up for comprehensive immigration reform. We have a narrow window to get it done, but now is the time:

**Raise your hands! Raise your voice!  
For Comprehensive Immigration  
Reform NOW!!**

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



At the Houston office of Texas Senator Cruz



Crowd gathers at the office of Senator Chambliss in Atlanta

## Raise Your Hands, Raise Your Voice for Comprehensive Immigration Reform

BY STEPHANIE NIEDRINGHAUS

On the road again! Almost exactly one year after NETWORK's famous "Nuns on the Bus" began their first bus trip for economic justice, we launched a new justice journey—this time for comprehensive immigration reform.

Reasons for the immigration focus were obvious—immigration reform has languished in Congress far too long, and there is a critical need for immediate action.

Unlike last year, when we planned the first bus trip in only a few weeks, we had months to organize this new one. That resulted in fewer frantic moments even though we had the normal number of complications (e.g., two flat tires and times when communication systems broke down on the road).

This year's journey lasted three weeks, with 53 stops in 15 states—from Connecticut to Florida, and across the southern route to California. Along the way, the Sisters met thousands of supporters, lobbied in congressional offices, and witnessed the remarkable work of

many people serving within immigrant communities.

They also heard countless stories from immigrants caught up in our nation's shattered immigration system. Some were heartbreaking, others hope-infused. But all showed the exceptional strength and resilience of immigrants who live with daily uncertainty and even abuse because of our broken policies.

Their stories also made it clear that policies and laws that split families apart, keep people in the shadows, and result in worker abuse are neither moral

nor in keeping with our nation's values.

Below are reflections from women who helped plan parts of bus trip. We are grateful for their involvement and for that of all the justice-seekers who connected with our "Nuns on the Bus" along the way.

### Early Stops in Pennsylvania and New Jersey

**Sister Mary Beth Hamm SSJ, NETWORK Board Co-chair:** I had the wonderful opportunity to participate in a trifecta experience of Nuns on the Bus when they visited Scranton, PA, Lawrenceville and Camden, NJ. So many fond memories surface as I reflect on these experiences, but the common denominator is the moving stories I heard.

In Scranton, I listened to Mayor Doherty speak of his pride serving such an ethnically diverse city and offer gratitude to the immigrants for the richness their presence brings. I heard a young man from Marywood University, a Honduran who had been granted



At Hope CommUnity Center in Apopka, Florida

asylum, share his dream of getting a law degree so he can advocate for other immigrants. At St. Ann's Church, Lawrenceville, I listened to a young undocumented woman share her daily cross of fear and anxiety, and gratitude for the way the parish community welcomed her. Finally, at St. Joseph Pro Cathedral in Camden, I listened to young Latinas/Latinos share with pride the good works they are doing together to support their immigrant community. Through my mini-tour, my life is now integrally entwined with these dear neighbors whose story has become part of mine.

**Sister Donna Korba IHM, NETWORK Board Coordinating Council:** When I first learned that the Nuns on the Bus would pass through Scranton, excitement leapt in my heart mainly because we IHM Sisters of Scranton would have the opportunity to stand behind our 2008 corporate stance for comprehensive immigration reform. I admit that as time drew closer, there was also some fear as letters-to-the-editor began to include conflicting messages, people threatened to protest, and small-town politics posed its own unique challenges.

Planning included input from the IHM Social Justice Committee, social service organizations, church/community leaders, local universities, the local Pax Christi group and others. Special thanks to our local pastor who had the generous spirit not only to offer space that I requested for the event, but also the courage to persevere despite criticism from various sectors whose opinions differed on immigration reform.

The event placed an emphasis on the history of South Scranton immigrants and IHM Sisters within that area. Various congregations of women religious joined IHM Sisters to stand together in support of our Sisters on the bus. We heard from Congressman Matt Cartwright and Mayor Doherty. Five local immigrants gave personal testimonies about the



*Sister Simone Campbell with Sisters Mary Beth Hamm, Diane Guerin and Donna Korba in Scranton, Pennsylvania*



*Sisters show their support in New Haven, Connecticut*



*Supporters raise their hands for immigration reform at St. Joseph's Pro Cathedral in Camden, New Jersey*

value of diversity and their own dreams and challenges.

People brought food to share: Bhutanese fare, a variety of Latino foods and North American specialties. And there was music to celebrate our diversity and connect our spirits.

The event began with a brief welcome in the parking lot followed by a procession into the gym to the tune of "All Are Welcome." At the close, everyone raised hands and blessed the nuns with the bilingual Guatemalan Peace Song.

I was proud to stand with my IHM Sisters and all of the women religious who were present—those with whom

we collaborate locally and those on the bus with whom we collaborate nationally. I felt pride and a sense of communion standing with our neighbors of South Scranton, both the old and the new, rejoicing in our history and celebrating our future together.

I was grateful to our immigrant neighbors for coming out and those who had the courage to speak their truth. I was honored to have our local rabbi offer the opening blessing with a heartfelt welcome to the faithful from all traditions. Our celebration was a positive experience of community, the Scranton community at its best.

Three hundred of us gathered that afternoon in the gym of the old Marian Catholic School. We sang, we prayed, we shared stories and culture, food and music, and experienced an excitement in South Scranton that I have not felt in quite some time.

For those not able to join us, I believe you missed CHURCH at its very best. The People of God celebrated and witnessed to the possibility of what can be when we put aside color and creed and learned prejudices and recognize ourselves as precisely that: the People of God!

### **Spirit Filled: Not Even the Heat Could Keep Texans Away from the Bus**

**Patricia Mejia, NETWORK Board Member:** It was a blistering afternoon with temperatures above 100. Event organizers, including myself, asked who would gather on the Southside of San Antonio for a rally in these conditions. The answer: well over 200 community leaders of all types braved less-than-perfect weather to welcome the Nuns on the Bus with loving, hopeful arms.

The arrival of the bus moved the air just enough to provide the crowd with gusto to rise with a welcome cheer, "Go

Nuns Go.” As mariachis played, it quickly became evident that the Holy Spirit moved the minds and hearts of those gathered “to love thy neighbor as thyself.”

The bus door opened to the cheers of children as young as four while union leaders, elected officials, religious and lay church leaders waved signs and their paletas (Spanish: popsicles). Signs varied; some quoted scripture and others were more personal—“I learned the meaning of Catholic Social Teaching from my middle school teacher Sister Guadalupe” or “Nuns Rock.”

The Spirit filled even these warmest temperatures, allowing fellow Board Member Lorena Gonzalez and myself to stand alongside former NETWORK Board members to proudly welcome the entire team. We were knocked off our feet by fourth-grader Isabel Marie Sanchez, who sang the National Anthem powerfully. The crowd was reminded of our reason for gathering by Methodist Pastor Lorenza Andrade Smith’s opening prayer. It was not only about our responsibility to care for the vulnerable, but also about women’s roles throughout biblical history in standing on the side of justice.

The air stood still yet again when DREAMer Alicia Torres spoke of her family’s struggle. She told us of her dreams of becoming a nurse, inspired by her ill mother’s search for healthcare. In a strong yet steady voice, she demanded citizenship for her and her family. She laughed as she remembered that when all this began, DREAMers weren’t even asked to attend these events, and now “we are being asked to speak.”

Texas AFL-CIO leader Tom Cummins spoke in both English and Spanish, detailing why unions stand behind comprehensive immigration reform. Then, Congressman Pete Gallego, with his son, shared his story of why immigration reform is important for our future. And just as people began to feel overwhelmed by the high temperatures and blistering sun, Congressman Joaquin Castro gently reminded us to be mindful of the real reason we gather—for

farmworkers laboring in these conditions each day who do not have the luxury of citizenship.

One Sister was overcome by extreme temperatures and fell to the ground. But true to their faithfulness to the Gospel, all quickly rendered aid. I panicked, thinking we should have had more water or fans, but then it hit me. Sister Maria de Los Angeles and all those gathered braved extreme weather conditions for a reason—a deep commitment to justice. Maybe we could have passed out more water or even provided fans, but the truth is we all must do our part to make sure Congress acts NOW! We must brave extreme political conditions to stand on the side of justice.

It was my honor to do my small part in the big state of Texas to “Raise Our Hands and Raise our Voices” and to share more of NETWORK with my San Antonio community! Que Viva NETWORK! Que Viva!

**Ouisa Davis, NETWORK Board Member:** We on the U.S./Mexico border hold special claim to “la lucha” of

immigration reform. It’s a matter of human dignity to us. Unjust immigration laws color every facet of our lives. That is why I, an attorney for 22 years, practice human interest law; it’s critical that a lawyer hold a level of expertise in immigration law no matter the area of a specific practice.

Here, it doesn’t seem as though our stories matter. Nobody in Washington hears or cares about families torn apart in mid-night raids, undocumented parents deported during a workplace raid, and U.S.-citizen children placed in foster care. It doesn’t seem to matter that families languish for years during the visa allocation process while dreading the knock on the door that will separate them forever. Nobody in power seems interested in the plight of the domestic-violence victim whose abuser can adjust their status and refuses to do so—thus continuing the terrorization.

Nobody seems to count the plight of border-crossers coming to work in our homes, gardens and construction sites for less than a living wage, dreading the eventual reality of confiscation of their visas. And undocumented children don’t get the spotlight when their dreams of full, active lives are dashed because of their status. Nobody cares about the permanent resident who makes a stupid mistake, facing deportation because of a petty offense.

These are not “sexy” stories that gain media attention. These are the stuff of daily lives here in the Chihuahuan desert. The Nuns on the Bus cared enough to hear our stories and carry them into their advocacy for immigration reform. They shared a meal with us, prayed with us, listened and heard us.

From the moment of their arrival, the Nuns on the Bus energized our Sisters and community. Carrying stories from the road, they commiserated and commissioned us to continue our work of education, advocacy and service to the immigrant community. They gathered our stories from elected officials, people in movement, Sisters in ministry, and



ABOVE: Raising hands for immigration reform in Washington DC

BELOW: Sister Marge Clark and other Nuns on the Bus visit immigrant community in Mecca, California





Sisters of Charity gather by the bus in Liberty State Park across from the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island

carried them forward as an offering of hope.

Yes, we are newly energized. We have been given the blessing of support of our Sisters in Action in “la lucha” of justice. We are grateful.

### Journey’s End in California

**Mary Ann Gaido, former NETWORK Board Chair:** The colorful bus became visible in the distance. A shout of delight was heard as enthusiastic sign-waving supporters spread out under the sun-drenched palm trees lining the parkway. The Nuns on the Bus stop in Orange County drew 150 locals to Congressman Campbell’s office voicing support for a citizenship path for immigrants.

The afternoon sun greeting the bus was the same sun under which hundreds of immigrant farmworkers harvested peas, strawberries and asparagus nearby. The same sun provided warmth for immigrant shopkeepers and restaurant workers. At that moment, all were united in justice-seeking.

Sister Simone Campbell emerged with encouragement for the welcoming crowd. There were hugs, expressions of gratitude, and admiration for all the nuns. Locally picked oranges were donated as a refreshing symbol from the county.

The crowd included Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange and folks from parishes, hospitals and shelters. There were young organized workers, retired folks, office workers on lunch-breaks. There were pastors—Protestant and Catholic—standing in solidarity with their congregations’ immigrants. All supported NETWORK’s advocacy efforts and the many nuns willing to tirelessly publicize the desperate need for just national immigration legislation.

Stephanie Niedringhaus is NETWORK’s Communications Director and Connection Editor.

# New Challenges on the Hill

By NETWORK’s ISSUE STAFF

Recent months have shown yet more evidence of a Congress focused on politics rather than justice and governance. As this issue of *Connection* was going to press, the Republican-led House of Representatives was planning a piecemeal approach to address our broken immigration system instead of critically needed comprehensive reform. Their goals included further militarization of our southern border.

They had also successfully split off food stamps from the farm bill so they could vote on it separately, presumably to severely cut funding, and they have steadfastly refused to pass legislation to curb gun violence. Why? Many believe that Republican politicians are worried about primary challenges next year from Tea Party candidates if they vote for anything that does not agree with far-right dogma.

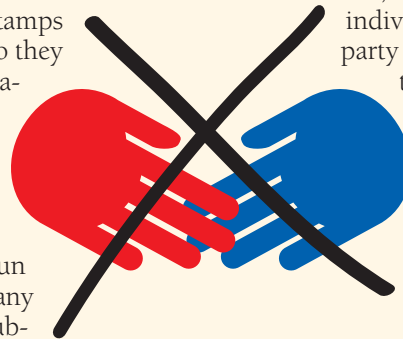
It is noteworthy that this is also a Congress already predicted to beat the record set by the last Congress for passing the least number of bills in many decades. Is it any wonder that June Gallup polling revealed that Americans gave Congress record-low approval ratings? It is clear that our lobbying and justice advocacy have never been more needed!

### Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Immigration reform continues to be the major focus for most of us on the Hill. NETWORK has a long history of pressing for comprehensive immigration reform, and we thanked the U.S. Senate for passing its bipartisan bill (S.744) on June 27. We are awaiting the House of Representatives’ response. While the Senate’s bill has unnecessary border security provisions and other

provisions we would not have included, it does provide a realistic path to citizenship, a means to reunify separated families, and needed protections for immigrant workers. Because of that, we promote the compromise as a solid basis for positive immigration reform.

Speaker Boehner has repeatedly stated that he will not bring the Senate bill to the floor. Instead, while the Senate debated their comprehensive bill, the House passed five individual bills, pursuant to party lines. Not surprisingly,



this piecemeal approach imposes more border security, enhanced e-verify participation, and cherry-picking of highly educated immigrants. The House Gang of Eight, reportedly working on a House comprehensive bill, has lost a member and produced nothing. Speaker Boehner and the Republican caucus held a raucous debate regarding their anticipated response to the Senate bill, but they could not find unity in position or approach within the party.

NETWORK continues to dispute the need for enhanced border security measures and calls on the House of Representatives to pass comprehensive immigration reform that provides for a path to citizenship and reunification of families. This will help the 100%.

### Budget, Appropriations, Sequestration

Sequestration went into effect on March 1, 2013. Discretionary spending limits were cut below the already slashed appropriations levels for FY 2013. With half the year completed, many programs needed to



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cut a year's worth of spending in just the remaining six months.

Some pundits are saying sequestration is not so bad, that we've hardly noticed it. It is true that many of us haven't. Highly visible damaging effects have not happened: air traffic has continued, police and fire departments are operating, and we notice little change at national museums.

However, those who live at the margins and struggle to meet basic needs experience a different reality:

- Head Start programs eliminated summer programs, reduced the number of children served, cut hours or cut days. This seriously impacts low-wage families who count on their children being cared for so they can work.
- Meals on Wheels has been drastically reduced or eliminated in many areas, denying seniors their only hot meals.
- A million and a half applicants for emergency unemployment compensation have been negatively impacted by sequestration cuts, many by reductions in their checks, some by lack of staff to process requests.

For hundreds more examples of cuts that are really hurting people, see [www.chn.org/background/save-state-factsheets/](http://www.chn.org/background/save-state-factsheets/).

NETWORK and other advocacy organizations are working to have sequestration overturned. The Senate Budget FY2014 is built on an assumption that this will happen, and is adhering to the Budget Control Act (BCA) of 2011 (current law) as a basis for spending and revenue. The House, however, has built a budget incorporating the further cuts of a 2014 sequestration with no new revenue, reducing personal and corporate tax rates, and eliminating the



alternative minimum tax. It claims to provide savings by repealing the Affordable Care Act (President Obama's health-care reform). The House budget violates the BCA by removing the 50/50 mandate for spending across defense and non-defense appropriations.

The House overall spending level is \$957 billion, with military spending set at \$47 billion more than half of the total and non-military spending \$47 billion below the halfway mark. The Senate's \$1.058 trillion adheres to the 50/50 requirement of the BCA.

The House decision pushes non-defense spending to 18% below the 2010 level. This difference is one that must be addressed by Congress, either through conferring on a budget resolution or by individual appropriations bills and a Continuing Resolution for spending in FY2014.

Looming over Congress is the likelihood of reaching the limit set for borrowing (debt limit). This date continues to move further into the future as the economy improves. Most recent estimates project that it may be reached in late October or November.

NETWORK continues to hold that there must be reasonable revenue responsible to the 100%. A document called "The Priorities for a Faithful Budget: Acting with Mercy and Justice as One Nation under God" lays out guidelines for development of such a budget ([www.faithfulbudget.org](http://www.faithfulbudget.org)).

### SNAP (Food Stamps)

The House of Representatives voted down the farm bill on June 20, which initially saved the food stamp program from being cut by \$20.1 billion over ten years. However, in their desire to pass other elements of the farm bill, they split it into two parts, one being nutrition programs. On July 11, they passed

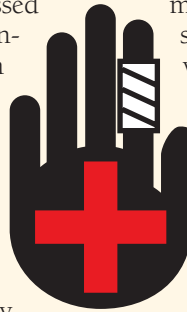
the other section of the bill, which included about \$12.9 billion in farm program cuts over 10 years.

Republican leadership announced they wanted to bring the nutrition program section to the floor as soon as possible. They were expected to seek cuts even deeper than those proposed in the original bill. NETWORK will work, of course, to defeat those drastic cuts in such a critical safety-net program.

### Healthcare

Demonstrating flexibility and a responsiveness to a genuine business concern, the White House announced a one-year delay in implementation of the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) employer mandate. The insurance provision mandate for companies with more than 50 employees will now not go into effect until January of 2015. Uninsured people who cannot get affordable coverage through employment in 2014 may go to the health exchanges with subsidies if they meet eligibility based on their income. In an effort to thwart the success of the ACA and confuse the issues, opponents decry the decision to delay the individual mandate. Meanwhile, other opponents have introduced bills to defund parts of the law that was passed in Congress and constitutionally upheld by the United States Supreme Court.

The mandatory contraception provisions in the ACA are scheduled for implementation this summer. The Catholic Health Association (CHA) and NETWORK have found that the final rule accommodation for the mandatory contraception provisions has effectively barred any religiously operated, not-for-profit organization from procuring, providing or referring for contraception. More information about the CHA announcement can be found at [www.chausa.org/newsroom/women%27s-preventive-health-services-final-rule](http://www.chausa.org/newsroom/women%27s-preventive-health-services-final-rule).



**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.**

# Gifts from Boxes Filled with Darkness

By WIDIAN NICOLA

Mary Oliver writes, “Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift.” I see my undocumented status as a gift, but this was not always the case. Since my family’s arrival in the United States in the early morning of July 4, 1990, I have often wondered why struggle, challenge, sacrifice and even confusion could be seen as gift. As an eight-year-old newly arrived to the United States, the only thing I desired was to be a kid and to have friends. At that

During my childhood, my father worked as a mechanic and my mother as a teacher. While our home was filled with love, my parents recognized that their children would have better opportunities for education, advancement and success in the U.S. There would be a stronger guarantee that their children would not experience the same types of poverty and struggle that they had experienced throughout their lives and in the lives of the generations before them.

The only words in English I knew

reminder of how far I have come is where I witness the magic (gift). But this gift came at a great cost. Coming to the United States with only one hundred dollars in their pockets, my parents worked tirelessly to provide all they could for our family. My father worked as a mechanic and my mother as a stay-at-home mom attempting to navigate us through our new world, pinching every dollar she could to make ends meet.

Our family arrived to the United States on a temporary visitors’ visa,



time, the only thing my parents wanted for my two younger brothers and me was for us to be happy, not just as children, but also for our entire lives. For this to happen, my parents had to make a radical decision that was both courageous and frightening.

Raised in a tiny village in Galilee, my father, the eldest of five children, was raised by loving parents who made a meager living as poor farmers. My mother, who was raised in an orphanage from a young age by a community of Sisters in Jerusalem, married my father at seventeen.

when my family and I immigrated to the States were “yes,” “no,” and the numbers one through ten. I have a fond memory of being served cereal at breakfast and a hamburger for lunch on our flight to the United States. I did not like either one and could not imagine ever getting used to these foreign foods. I was the little girl who ate yogurt and tomato sandwiches and falafel and hummus for dinner. My strong reaction to the food was the first of many indicators of the small challenges that came with assimilation into the American culture.

Looking back, I suppose that the

which we overstayed after six months. My parents made great attempts to become “legal,” spending money on attorneys who stole from us and gave us false hope, only to leave our family wondering if we were ever going to have the chance to stop living under the shadows and fear of deportation. Beginning at the age of eight (and beyond), I did not quite understand what our immigration status meant or even where it stood. The only thing I knew was that our status was a secret and we were never to mention that fact to anyone, ever.

While we were met with many chal-

ABOVE, R-L: Author with her father and brothers soon after their arrival in the U.S.; with her father and brothers; author’s ninth birthday, her first birthday celebration in the U.S.; giving the graduation speech at graduate school. All photos courtesy the author.

lenges, mainly financial and legal, assimilation was the most difficult. Maintaining cultural Arab norms in our home made it hard for my brothers and me to live the typical American lifestyle as teenagers. Understandably, my parents feared the unknown. America was a big country and everything was new. Even though I made many friends in my teenage years, I was frustrated much of time by the fact that my parents were stricter than my friends' parents. I remember well the challenges of assimilation through the prolonged period of transition, mainly understanding and

strangers—have offered guidance and reassurance that in the midst of uncertainty, God Is.

Not much has changed since my childhood and teenage years, even since my twenties. I asked a million questions and was determined not to give anyone else the responsibility for my life. My undocumented status closed many doors but opened wide the opportunity to find creative ways to navigate through life. I entered college without the ability to receive federal financial aid because of my status. My parents helped support me until I began working and support-

worker, I have had the honor to meet God in inner-city at-risk youth, homeless men and women, pregnant and parenting women struggling to maintain sobriety, the elderly, faithful friends and colleagues, my faith community, family and strangers.

Again, as Mary Oliver writes, "I tell you this to break your heart, by which I mean only that it break open and never close again to the rest of the world." My undocumented status has opened up my soul to the rest of the world. My father's deportation when I was twelve, while incredibly painful, is a box full of darkness that is gift. I have yet to see my youngest brother who was deported almost five years ago and continue to wait for the revelation of the gift in that box.

Recently, three months shy of my thirty-first birthday, with no criminal record, having lived in the U.S. at least five consecutive years and arrived before the age of 16, and holding an advanced degree, I completed my application for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. After a seven-hour wait in line to complete my application, I was certain that God had awaited my arrival in that Catholic Charities immigration office since the Fourth of July twenty-two years earlier. But my new status is bittersweet as I, along with millions of others, pray in hopeful expectations that undocumented immigrants all over the country will have the opportunity to live freely in our home.

So much has transpired since that Independence Day in 1990. I am invited each day to stay hopeful, committed and courageous, even in a broken system. Now, it is only seems appropriate to share my story since God comes to us disguised as our lives. Today, I am a licensed social worker in central New

Jersey, excited each day to hang out with "old people" who make me laugh, smile and cry, and who teach me lessons on patience and a life worth living at every moment in spite of all odds.

*Widian Nicola met NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus when they arrived in New Jersey.*



attempting to reconcile my Palestinian identity with that of my new American identity. Eventually, through asking tough questions and accepting myself as I was, I found peace in just being me.

"You must not ever stop being whimsical. And you must not, ever, give anyone else the responsibility for your life," Mary Oliver writes. Without ever naming it, resilience is what I have seen in so many young children who have experienced strong shifts in their lives, and what I have noticed in my siblings and myself. I attribute that resilience to the contributions that so many adults made in my life. These loving individuals—teachers, mentors, spiritual guides, even

ing myself. After completing graduate school, I moved across the country to complete a year of service with the Center for FaithJustice, which helped me see the intersection between faith, service and social justice.

Profoundly touched by my experience as an undocumented immigrant and especially in recognition of how blessed my family has been relative to millions of others, my experience has informed my commitment to supporting those most in need. Throughout my many years as a social



# To Live and Walk with God

By STEPHANIE NIEDRINGHAUS



Rev. Lorenza Andrade Smith with Jody, and below, with Lester, both homeless men in El Paso.

standing over her with a knife. Rising quickly to her feet, she introduced herself and reached out her hand to him. He took her hand and, after some discussion, put away the knife. One of the points of her story is to say that kindness is not to be a “doormat,” but to be in relationship.

She grounds her ministry in her understanding of Micah 6:8 (“...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God”). She believes that there is power in the Body of Christ that empowers each of us for transformation of ourselves and of others.

When she lives on the streets, she carries a sleeping mat, a chalice and a paten. One night, she was refused space in a homeless shelter because she was told that the chalice and paten could be used as weapons. She refused to give them up and left, but she said afterwards that the homeless shelter was actually right. The holy objects were indeed weapons—but weapons for transformation, not violence.

She believes that we are indeed called to walk with God. Romans 8 tells us that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Once, after struggling with the harsh living conditions she had chosen, she remarked, “When I felt the lowest, it was the hospitality of the people living on the streets that opened my eyes. I clearly saw Jesus in each of my friends. God was indeed with me.” Hers is a ministry that surely embodies what it is to walk with God.

*Quotes from United Methodist News Service. Used by permission.*

During the Texas leg of their bus trip, NETWORK’s “Nuns on the Bus” were honored to be greeted by the Rev. Lorenza Andrade Smith, a Methodist pastor. She offered a moving welcoming prayer when they arrived in San Antonio, speaking to the need to stand with and care for those forced to the margins.

Her prayer did not simply come from a theoretical understanding of the Gospel call for compassion and justice. Nor was it rooted only in her reading of stories of women in the Bible who reached out to those around them. Instead, her words came from deep within her own heart and lived experience.

Her story is remarkable. In 2011, she sought and was granted permission from her bishop to minister directly to people living on the streets for a three-year period. She decided to take a leave of absence from her church duties, and she rid herself of her house, salary, insurance, car and other possessions so she could authentically live with people experiencing homelessness.

When asked why, she responded “I have to live it to understand it. I think I could not work or advocate on their behalf if I did not know what it is to live it.”

Living on the streets was not enough,

however. She also sought out opportunities to engage in public demonstrations focused on justice for immigrants and other marginalized groups. This led to arrests, including one in August 2011 when she was held in a county adult detention center after refusing to leave the San Antonio office of Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. She had gone there with students who supported the DREAM Act.

She likes to tell the story of another time she was arrested—this time for sleeping outside on a bench. She refused the judge’s offer of community service, choosing instead to go to jail to protest the criminalization of poverty. When released and told to instead pay a fine, she refused that as well. This went on as more warrants were issued for her arrest and she steadfastly refused to pay the fines.

Another powerful story she shares is that of the time she was sleeping outside in San Antonio. She awoke one night to find a man



UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

# CONGRESS NEEDS TO HEAR FROM YOU!

**The message is simple, but urgent:  
We need commonsense immigration reform NOW!**

**Comprehensive immigration reform** will have a profound impact on millions of aspiring Americans – and our entire nation. The time is NOW to tell your lawmakers that people of faith support compassionate immigration reform that reflects our American and faith values.

Please write your Members of Congress TODAY with a personalized message saying that as a constituent you expect them to continue America's longstanding tradition of welcoming newcomers into the American family.

Tear out the postcards inserted into this issue of the *Connection*. There are four in all, found in two sections of the issue – one for you and three for people you know.

Make sure you fill out all the information and send it to our office.

We will make sure the postcards are delivered to Capitol Hill as soon as possible.

## **NETWORK supports commonsense reform that:**

- \* ensures family unity
- \* enhances the present diversity visa program
- \* protects the rights of immigrant workers
- \* speeds up the processing of already-approved immigrants
- \* acknowledges our borders are already secure, with only minor changes needed
- \* provides a clear, direct path to citizenship.

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



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# Immigration Reform Fact Sheet

*Needed: commonsense 21st century immigration policies that reflect our true American values. Laws should reflect our values, not our fears.*

## **Americans value our nation's heritage.**

- \* We celebrate our shared history as a nation of immigrants — people from around the globe who have come together to create a strong, diverse nation filled with energy and promise.

## **Americans value fairness and community-building.**

- \* Many immigrants come at Americans' invitation to work in agriculture and meet other needs of U.S. employers. They help employers remain in business and help keep many Americans employed.
- \* Most undocumented immigrants are here for more than 10 years — working, paying taxes, and contributing to our communities.
- \* Many came as children, and they grew up with us. They are our neighbors and our children's friends.
- \* Eleven million contributing members of our communities will not and should not be forced to leave.

## **Americans value family.**

- \* When families are together, individuals are happier, healthier and more productive. Present and future immigrant families must be allowed to be together.
- \* Establishing legal status will help keep immigrant families together.
- \* More than 5,100 children whose parents are undocumented immigrants are in the U.S. foster care system because their parents have either been detained or deported.
- \* If undocumented immigrants without a path to citizenship continue to be deported, up to 15,000 children could be in the foster care system by 2016. Our nation's child welfare departments do not have the resources to handle this increase.

## **Americans value diversity because it benefits all of us — the 100%.**

- \* We welcome people with diverse skills, backgrounds and talents because they strengthen our entire nation.
- \* Without a visa diversity program, we deprive our society of a rich, multihued tapestry of gifts.

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## “I did not come for a better life; I came to save my life.”

BY MOLLY CORBETT

Current discussions about immigration reform center on undocumented or economic migrants who come here to work and find a better life for themselves and family. Minimal attention is focused on asylum seekers who need refuge and safety from persecution and torture.

In December 2010, I was working as a consultant for the Benedictine Sisters and other small nonprofits in the Baltimore area. One was a torture treatment center that provides mental health services to victims of torture in Maryland and Washington DC.

Over the Christmas holiday I received a phone call at home from a woman who worked at United Way. They had received a call from a nonprofit trying to find a homeless shelter for a young, pregnant Afghan woman who had just arrived in the U.S. and who seemed traumatized. They hoped that I would be able to help find a safe place where she could stay temporarily. We feared that a shelter would further traumatize her.

I called the Benedictine Sisters, a small monastic community, and requested housing for her for just a few days until a permanent home could be found. “Yes” was the answer! The Sisters had been educating themselves on immigration issues because their own founding was as an immigrant community. This chance encounter/call in 2010 resulted in a tangible response and commitment.

The young woman gave birth a mere six days after her arrival at the monastery. We were not prepared to help a new mother raise her son, adjust to a new country, and navigate a complex asylum process, but with the help of the Sisters’ network of associates, families, friends and other communities of women religious, we did just that.

Two short months after this “new venture,” there was a clear sense of mission and energy in the monastery. We knew other women’s communities would also

provide support as we came together to respond to other asylum seekers. Fortunately, Baltimore has a wealth of religious communities that are experienced in building community and willing to share living space and networks.

As a result, A.W.E. (Asylee Women Enterprise) was launched in March 2011, bringing together nine women’s communities.

Across the country, housing for asy-



Working with asylee

lum-seekers is scarce. Although asylees are here legally awaiting their asylum, they do not receive any government benefits and often have to wait until their asylum decision to even receive work permits. Without money or home, they live in a transient mode and often find themselves in dangerous shelters and situations.

A.W.E.’s launching has enabled us to provide housing, community and companionship to women seeking asylum. Most of the women are torture survivors who come alone with little more than the clothes on their back. In the two years since this journey began, we have housed 10 asylum seekers, assisted an additional 15 through our Sisters’ Co-op (job skills, ESL and crafts), and dozens more with clothing, school supplies, legal/medical/mental health referrals, and help with immigration forms.

Each woman’s story is unique and

dramatic. A woman from a central African country witnessed her entire family being killed. Police had come into their home at night and started killing her parents. She managed to flee, but her life will never be the same. Returning to her country would be her end.

Another woman was a human rights attorney in her country. She took on a high-profile case to prosecute perpetrators of unspeakable crimes such as rape of young girls. As a result, she was subjected to torture, and family members were killed as a warning to her.

These women come here because they were persecuted or tortured due to their religion, ethnicity, political beliefs, or simply because of being a woman. One woman said, “I did not want to leave my country—my family, a home, a career—but I wanted to fight for the rights of women. **I did not come for a better life; I came to save my life.**”

Remember the young Afghan woman? She has a beautiful 2½ year old son, a high school diploma, a driver’s license and car, and is working and enrolled in a community college!

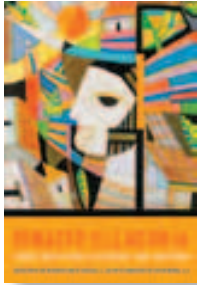
We pray that Congress does not forget these “strangers among us” who seek asylum and that they will offer them hope, safety, refuge and welcome.

Molly Corbett is the Executive Director of Asylee Women Enterprise ([www.asyleewomen.org/](http://www.asyleewomen.org/)).





**Band of Sisters**, a film by Mary Fishman  
<http://bandofsistersmovie.com/>



**Ignacio Ellacuría: Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation**, ed. with an introduction by Michael E. Lee, Orbis  
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While the bus completed its journey at Angel Island in California, our work is far from over! NETWORK's ministry of justice continues, and we need your support to keep our lobbyists on the Hill, our education materials and workshops relevant, and our field organizing team equipped with the tools to inform and engage you, our activists!

Please continue your support by using the envelope in the middle of this magazine to send a contribution, or donate online at [www.networklobby.org/donate](http://www.networklobby.org/donate).

*Together, we can continue to make strides that ensure justice and dignity for everyone in our global community!*



# NETWORK NUNS on the bus

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