

NETWORK Connection

PEOPLE LOBBYING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE • FOURTH QUARTER 2015



Weeks of Faith and Joy
Pope Francis and Nuns on the Bus

dear members

It is with joy that we follow up Pope Francis's visit and our Nuns on the Bus trip with joyous news from here in Washington. For a few days this city was different. There was a sense of our better selves, and hope was in the air.

We all now have the challenging project of keeping this hope alive!

I learned from Pope Francis to believe Congress can and will act for the common good. I also learned from him that we should lift up the heroes of our nation and remember their leadership. By focusing on Abraham Lincoln, Dr. Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton he called out the best of who we are in bridge-building for justice.

It won't be easy in the days ahead, but I plan to have his speech to Congress by my side so that I remember his call to hope. Let us be living messengers of that message because that is the way forward for the common good. I know we can do it together.

Thank you for being a part of this mission to make the common good a reality!

Simone Campbell, SSS



ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS April 15-18, 2016

Lift Every Voice!—Racism, Class & Power

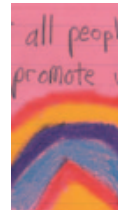
An Election Year National Gathering and Lobby Day in our nation's capital to address solutions to issues of injustice for communities of color and immigrants, voter suppression, and economic exploitation.

Registration is now open!

<http://advocacydays.org/2016-lift-every-voice/>

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Weeks of Faith and Joy

Nuns on the Bus Encounter New Communities as Pope Francis Inspires Our Nation

BY SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL

Sitting in the first row of the gallery in the House of Representatives, I was awed by the picture before me. To my left were the Democrats, with many women in brightly colored blazers and dresses. Directly below me and to my right were Republicans dressed primarily in dark suits that men wear regularly, but some sporting splashy ties. Seated to my left were Ambassador Elizabeth Bagley and Mrs. Cindy McCain, and to my right was John, a Jesuit Volunteer working in DC for his year of service. All of us were excited about the opportunity to hear the pope.

Pope Francis was announced and entered the chamber by himself. He had declined the escort committee and chose to just walk in by himself. The escort committee of the House and Senate followed after Pope Francis had reached the front of the chamber. It was this simplicity that became the hallmark of his speech to Congress and his time in the United States.

It was a little difficult to hear the pope because of acoustics and his gentle voice, but I took copious notes so as not to miss a single word. Sometimes I repeated what he said to my neighbors as they too strained to hear. But tears sprang to my eyes when he said, "It is my duty to build bridges and to help all men and women, in any way possible, to do the same." I felt that in some way he had "seen" the work of NETWORK as we had been on the road in our bus to "Bridge the Divides; Transform Politics" for the two weeks prior to his visit.

As we developed our plans for our bus trip, we pondered the teaching of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis's new encyclical. NETWORK staff members pulled together all of the paragraphs that mentioned politics and the political

process. We ended up with 11 pages of paragraphs. After reflection, the common theme seemed to be to end the polarization and to take action for the sake of the planet and for those living in poverty. We saw the call to us was to work to bridge divides in our nation.

For that reason we chose a route for our bus that was to more conservative locations or places challenged with division. It was clear to me that we should start in St. Louis, which has become an icon of racial division. Following the August 2014 killing of Michael Brown

Above: Edible flowers nasturtiums from Grow Ohio Valley in Wheeling, WV.
Right: Mother 2 Mother discussion group, St. Louis, MO.





decided that they would go in groups to talk with groups of white mothers to share what black mothers have to worry about that white mothers do not. We heard of Marlowe's fear that her beloved grandson Chico, who had experienced a sudden growth spurt, could be intimidating to some white people just because of his size, even though he still felt like the little boy who had his hair ruffled in affection.

in Ferguson by a white police officer and the subsequent anger, we wanted to honor the struggle for racial justice and see if we might help bridge the divides.

Our opening rally was held in Kiener Plaza in front of the old courthouse where the Dred Scott decision was handed down that cemented slavery in our nation for decades. It is also in the shadow of the big arch that is called the "Gateway to the West." We used these iconic places to lift up the divide of race in our society as the anguish of our past and the gateway to hope for our future.

Later on the trip I heard the story of building the arch and found out that the foundation of one leg was one-sixteenth of an inch different from the other, and by the time they got to the top it was very difficult to bridge the gap. Engineers worked feverishly to warm one side and cool the other until they could finally fit the last piece into place. This is so like our nation that is so polarized with seemingly different foundations. There are days when I wonder what engineering miracle will bring us together. But if they could do it with the iconic arch, I believe that We the People can do the same.

After the rally, we went to visit with participants in the "Mother 2 Mother" program at a local YWCA. After Ferguson, these women were called together by Rev. Traci Blackmon to try to determine what they could do to respond to the racism so alive in segregated St. Louis. After reflection, they



Amy told us about her two sons, whom she quizzes regularly about what to do when they are stopped by the police (not if). She tells them to keep their hands out of their pockets and arms away from their bodies; say "yes, sir" and "no, sir"; and not to get any teenage attitude. One son recently asked her, "Mommy, how long will this go on?" She said that she had to look him in the eye and tell him that it would be for the rest of his life.

These stories broke my heart. I had always known that I walked around with white privilege, but these five moms made the privilege real and vibrantly present. They were anguished by the reality of racism, but were building bridges over prejudice to communicate their reality. They were doing what Pope Francis was challenging all of us to do.

In every city we visited we did a town hall meeting where we looked at the challenges and divides in their area and discussed what might be some ways forward to bridge those divides. In every town hall the issue of race came up at some point. In Fayetteville, it came up toward the end of the listing of divides, but in Little Rock it came up first. When I asked in Little Rock why this was, the unanimous and imme-



mediate answer is that Fayetteville is white and Little Rock is mixed.

In Topeka, we were picketed by Westboro Baptist Church members. It was difficult to figure out why they were objecting to us, but I went over to talk with them to see if there was any way to bridge the divide. I started with their signs and was puzzled by their statement "God Hates." They are clearly convinced that God does hate others, and only loves them. I was unsuccessful in creating any connection other than anger from them. I realized later as I reflected on the incident that maybe I should have started with family and asked their leader if these young folks were his children, and would he introduce me. It made me realize that I quickly start with the policy difference and should have started with what we have in common: family. I realized that Pope Francis spoke about families in ways that unified and lifted up the children. Building bridges might start with care for all children.



At every town hall, people at some point called out the streets or highways that were the dividing line. Though we on the bus didn't know where they were, all of the participants readily agreed. These are physical divides that keep people separated. But there was some good news too. In Columbus, we learned that the African American community had been cut off from downtown when the freeway was built because no bridges were built from downtown to that community. Finally, after years

People we met from around the country. Right: Vegetable gardens at Growing Places Indy, Indianapolis.

of isolation, they built a new bridge and already some revitalization is taking place.

In Little Rock we heard of Anika, a medical professional who lives south of the freeway in a low-income neighborhood. She helped organize her neighborhood to go look at other neighborhoods to see what could help them improve. They came back with all kinds of ideas for sidewalks, streetlamps, parks, etc., but the neighborhood decided to start with seeds. They planted flowers and vegetables and knew that these plants would help beautify their community. It built their pride in their community and they then began to fight harder for the basic amenities like sidewalks and streetlamps. They reported a fair amount of success in this effort.

In Wheeling, West Virginia we heard of the divide caused by the freeway, but we also heard about the dilapidated housing stock that is literally falling down. The rubble of the buildings might get hauled away, but this leaves cellars in the ground covered up. "Grow Ohio Valley" has taken it as their mission to bring in good compost and topsoil to fill in the basements. They have found that earthworms over time can break down the cement, helping to return the land to tillable soil. In the meantime, they have planted vegetable on the sites. This reclamation project is good for the morale of a low-income neigh-

borhood, but also provides much-needed nutrition in the form of fresh fruits and vegetables.

All of these stories are of men and women in our nation trying to build bridges across divides. At every stop we found both heartbreak and hope. But isn't that the pascal mystery?

And at every stop we were able to make short videos of people telling their stories. Our idea was to put them on an electronic tablet so that Pope Francis might see more people of our nation and know that we are working together to be our best selves. On Sunday evening, before Pope Francis boarded his plane to return to Rome, we were able to get this tab-

let with stories of "our people" to him. It gave me joy beyond measure to share with him and his staff the struggles and hopes of these Americans.

As I reflect on these weeks of faith and joy, I marvel at how big of a challenge we have to bridge these divides at a time when so many want to stir up the culture wars for their own benefit. What a challenge we have to stay rooted in the quest for freedom and unity of Abraham Lincoln. Let us work to end racism and ensure that all can participate in our democracy as Dr. King intended. Let us care for those at the economic margins and work to change the structures that oppress as Dorothy Day did. And let us embrace dialogue from a contemplative stance as Thomas Merton did. These are the heroes of our nation whom Pope Francis held up for us to emulate. Let us rise to this challenge. We can build bridges and in the process transform our politics. It is a daunting task ahead, but we cannot turn our backs on it. The future of our people and our earth are at stake.

Sister Simone Campbell (@Sr_simone on Twitter) is the executive director of NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby, and author of A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community. Information about NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus is available at www.nunsonthebus.org



Nuns on the Bus— Our 2015 Journey for Justice

On September 10, NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus kicked off this year's journey for justice, heading from our nation's heartland to Washington and arriving just in time to greet Pope Francis at the White House. Their new bus trip was a direct response to the pope's call to bring people together and transform our politics so it will serve the common good.

The sisters rode from community to community, meeting and engaging in dialogue with people, hearing their stories, and talking about solutions to our nation's problems. Many of the individual stories and reflections they collected are available on our website at www.networklobby.org/bus2015/stories. We are also now sharing these stories with elected officials, and an iPad containing the collection was given to Pope Francis while he was in the U.S.

The journey touched the hearts of all of us, and we invite you to learn more about it at www.nunsonthebus.org.

Sister Jan Cebula (pictured below) shared some of her moving reflections, written for the *Global Sisters Report* (National Catholic Reporter), with NETWORK. This is what she wrote just after seeing Pope Francis at the U.S. Capitol:



Of Echoes and Holograms

As we Nuns on the Bus gathered at the NETWORK offices from the West Lawn of the Capitol where we had just listened to Pope Francis address Congress, we were overwhelmed. The air was electrified by our excitement, joy, gratitude and our resolve to carry on.

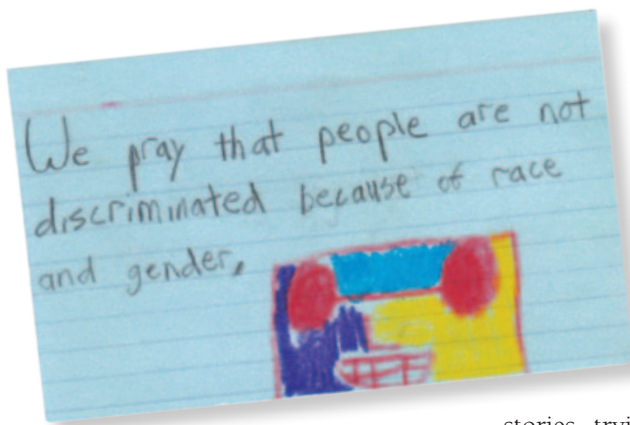
"Oh my goodness. What a blessing! And what people he lifted up. Wow!" exclaimed Oldenburg Franciscan Sister Robbie Pentecost, referring to Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. "It was great because

there were a lot of people around me who felt excited about the same kinds of things. It was just outstanding."

Notre Dame de Namur Sister Eucharistia Madueke, who is from Nigeria, shared her enthusiasm, "I think he said it all. I'm thrilled that he had the courage to say what he said and that [a] large number of people [came]—I looked at the crowd and said, oh my God, this is a whole lot of America."

After stating that Pope Francis "hit the issues that were important to us as a nation and as a world," Sister of the Living Word Mary Joel Curcio commented that his address was like hearing "echoes from the Bus."

Sister Mary Ellen Lacy, a Daughter of Charity, had a similar reaction: "I feel



like he just reiterated everything that we as sisters on the Bus and sisters in general have been pushing for, and I think that his coming here and stating the same ideals and same things is just a total confirmation or affirmation that we're all living the Gospel values in the same way."

Yes, various themes from Pope Francis's words echoed our Bus experience. We had just completed an amazing "Bridge the Divides: Transform Politics" trip through 7 states and 13 cities, with 33 stops. We went to talk with people, hear their stories, provide a space for conversations and learn how they are bridging divides.

Francis's words echoed the theme emblazoned on the side of our bus: "The contemporary world, with its open wounds which affect so many of our brothers and sisters, demands that we confront every form of polarization which would divide it into these two camps... It is my duty to build bridges and to help all men and women, in any way possible, to do the same,"



Dialogue was a recurrent theme of Pope Francis. He used the word six times in his address, expressing his desire to dialogue with the elderly, youth, working people, all people of the U.S. through the historical memory of our people, with countries at odds, for ending the armed conflict, and with all people about "our common home."

Pope Francis's words echoed our experience at every town hall when people stood up and expressed their desire to have similar conversations with an even more inclusive group.

"Common good, solidarity, cooperation, and fraternity," words used often

by Francis, expressed the yearnings of people we met all along the way.

In speaking of the refugee crisis, Pope Francis said, "We must not be taken aback by their numbers, but rather view them as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their

stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation."

Katherine's heartbreaking story in Kansas City, the women serving the immigrant community in Nashville, the Polish immigrant's experience of feeling excluded in Evansville, our meeting up with the 100 Women, 100 Miles (www.webelongtogether.org) echoed.



"Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a 'culture of care' and 'an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.'"

Our stops at Thistle Farm, Growing Places Indy, Mid-Ohio Foodbank and Grow Ohio Valley, Farm 18 echoed.

And we rejoiced with House of Hagar Catholic Worker as Francis lifted up Dorothy Day as an example of working for justice and the dignity of the person.

On the flight back to Kansas City while I was reflecting on the experiences of the day, I started thinking about holograms. They are three-dimensional images, every part of which contains the image of the whole object. I think of it as every part being a whole in and of itself, yet part of the larger whole.

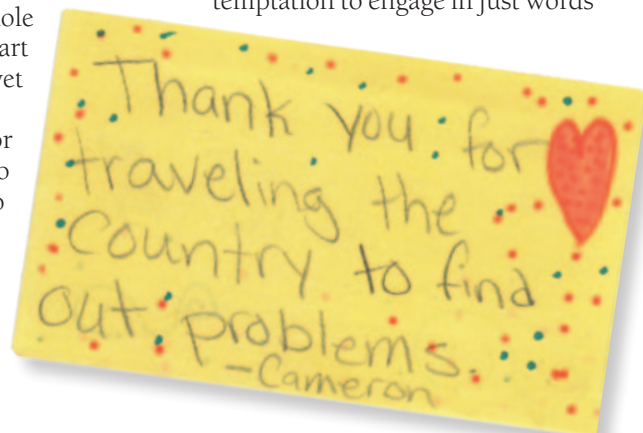
It seems a fitting image for Pope Francis and his call to each of us. He always is so personal, cautioning us to look beyond the numbers into the faces and hearing the stories of the individuals. His compassionate outreach recognizes the dignity of each and every person.



Yet he reminds us that we belong to a larger whole; we are interconnected to everyone and Earth herself. Repeatedly, he talks about subsidiarity and honoring cultures.

His address to Congress was a great example of how we can think about our U.S. hologram by highlighting our common values. He called upon us to "draw upon our deepest cultural reserves" by raising up four of our own, in addressing the critical issues of today. He emphasizes an integral ecology, making the connection between the marginalized persons and care for creation. All the while, he reminds us of the spiritual dimension.

And then Friday morning, I watched Pope Francis image a global hologram in his address to the General Assembly of the U.N. when he talked about the importance of international law, justice being essential to universal fraternity, balancing the power structures, and the rights of those excluded, and even of the environment. He cautioned against the temptation to engage in just words





and declarations, calling for immediate, concrete, practical and effective action, particularly with regard to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

It's kind of like those nesting dolls. We're to be about creating holograms in our personal lives, our communities, our nations and globally.

And We Nuns on the Bus saw those holograms of integral ecology all along our route.

I've learned a lot from Pope Francis and the people we met about what this entails:

- Step up and embrace your role in serving the common good.
- Remember the dignity of each person; focus particularly on those who have been excluded. Include the personal touch.
- Listen to the stories of others' experiences; enter into dialogue.
- Strengthen the connection to Earth to create sustainable systems.
- Be aware of the structural dimension and work for justice.
- Create community as you go.
- Widen your circles, become more inclusive, look for the interconnections.
- Create concrete, practical, immediate and effective ways to preserve the environment and put an end to social and economic exclusion.
- Adapt as you learn.
- Ground yourself in your spiritual center.

Sister Jan Cebula, OSF is U.S. liaison for Global Sisters Report, a project of National Catholic Reporter (<http://globalsistersreport.org>). She is a Sister of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa.

"The Francis Effect"

Stephanie Niedringhaus, NETWORK Communications Advisor, interviewed John Gehring soon after Pope Francis's trip to the U.S. John is the author of the recently published book, *The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church*.

Stephanie: What do you consider the greatest gift that Pope Francis has given to the U.S. church?

John: I would say he presents a different face of institutional religion even beyond Catholicism. He's renewing religion in the public square by what he says and even more importantly, what he does. I think this moment of deep spiritual reform really taps into something ancient. Pope Francis stands in a long line of spiritual reformers, including his namesake Francis of Assisi, who tried to remind the church of the profound simplicity and power of the Gospel. People still talk about Franciscan spirituality more than they talk about the fine print of the catechism because it reaches a place deep in the human heart. Francis is very rooted in walking with the people of God so he places a real value on discernment, which is about listening to the Holy Spirit, appreciating that there can be diversity in unity, and sitting with the inevitable tensions that brings.

S: Was there anything he said or did after you finished your book that surprised you, particularly during his U.S. visit?

J: I had the privilege of being at the Capitol for his speech—and when he mentioned Dorothy Day and [Thomas] Merton, I jumped up because hearing a pope reference those giants of social justice was so unexpected and amazing. I think overall what we saw during the visit was in keeping with what we've seen in him all along—someone who seems most animated when meeting not with the

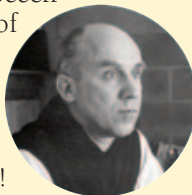
powerful, but when encountering those on the margins. You saw that when he went to a prison [and] when he was having lunch with the homeless. I love that after giving his historic speech to Congress, instead of having a power lunch with senators, he went to lunch with the homeless. I think that says everything about who he is and the kind of church he wants to build.

S: I was also in the crowd at the Capitol, and when he mentioned Dorothy Day and Merton, I saw puzzled faces around me. Some didn't know who they were or why he was grouping them with Lincoln and Martin Luther King.

J: After that speech there were a lot of people googling Thomas Merton, and I'm sure *The Seven Storey Mountain* got a nice boost in sales!

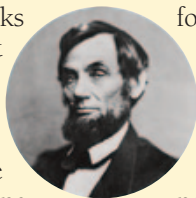
What I think he was doing was weaving the story of the United States through these iconic figures. With Dorothy Day he was elevating someone who lived out her faith in powerful ways that challenge the status quo and structural injustice. This is a pope who very strongly criticizes an economy of exclusion and inequality, who talks about inequality as the root of social evil. Instead of wagging a finger at American capitalism and saying "look at this income inequality," he pointed to someone who lived out the Beatitudes and treated the wounds of the poor—[and who] also said "Let's ask why the poor are being wounded." [With] Merton, I think he was elevating a contemplative in action—holding up that vision of prayer, discernment and spirituality and how that's connected with social activism.

That was a remarkable moment in the speech.



S: What kind of influence is Pope Francis having on today's seminarians?

J: I got a chance to interview about a dozen seminarians. John Paul II and Benedict very much shaped many of their world views because of the length of time they were popes. They are getting to know Pope Francis [and] what I heard most was how they are challenged by him. They realize there is an image of a pastor or priest who is above the laity and sometimes indifferent to the reality their parishioners face. I heard from these seminarians that the pope is challenging them to encounter people, to recognize that their most significant challenge is not to preach doctrine, but to attract people to the faith and to tap into what he calls the "freshness and fragrance of the Gospel." They were touched that he didn't move into the Apostolic Palace, for example. Pope Francis wants a church that is out in the streets and engaged with the messiness of the world. That's something these seminarians are grappling with because their heads are in theological books right now. They understand that their job as seminarians is to learn about the doctrine of the faith, but they see a pastor who is pope challenging them to recognize



that the greatest doctrine of the church is good news for the poor and mercy. He is reorienting their vision back to the Gospel in this very powerful way.



S: Some have questioned the pope's commitment to helping women find their place in the church. Did you hear anyone express optimism that women's equality in the church is a priority for him?

J: I think it was a mixed bag. Speaking as a man, my best answer for this one is always to defer to many smart women leaders in our church. Everyone [I interviewed] recognizes this is still a work in progress. On one hand, people recog-

nize that Pope Francis has great respect for women religious. On the other, he sounds like a man of his generation when he talks about women being "the strawberries on the cake" and [about] having women at the tables where decisions are made. I think it depends on whom you're asking, but the overall thrust was, "We can do a lot better."

S: If all goes well, what do you think our church will look like for your children and grandchildren?

J: I think all of us are inspired by the pope's vision of a poor church for the poor that goes out and encounters rather than wags a scolding finger. I hope you'll see the "Francis effect" trickle down to parishes. That is where the tension lies. Catholics in the pews are very inspired by this pope, but he offers a challenge to church leadership in terms of a different vision for a religious authority and servant leadership. Many [priests] are incredibly excited about Pope Francis. Others are not so sure. I think he's had an incredible impact at the 10,000-

foot level in terms of the Catholic narrative, and how people outside the church look at the Catholic church. That's already quite powerful. But whether his vision is embraced by most pastors and where most people experience Catholicism—I think that's an open question. My hope is [that] his vision of a church of open doors, of mercy, of healing, is the church we'll see in the future. For my kids and grandkids, I'd like a church that's more welcoming to women and the LGBT community. A church that really is grounded in the simple, but profound, message of the Gospel.

S: What else would you like to say about the impact Pope Francis has had on us?

J: Someone said this pope is ushering in a "revolution of

THE FRANCIS EFFECT

A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church

JOHN GEHRING



normalcy" in the papacy. He has this interior peace and he's comfortable in his own skin. He's funny and joyful and speaking from the heart. That's a very refreshing thing. [He] is making people look at the church again in a different way. It's amazing that he's not changing one comma in the catechism, but he's completely changing the conversation. He wants to meet people where they are, which is what Jesus did in the Gospel. When Jesus found his apostles, they were struggling, they were journeying. He said, "Hey! Come walk with me." Francis is saying, "Let's journey together." That's attractive to people, even [those] indifferent or hostile to the church, because it's a posture of humility and sends an attitude of "Let's figure this out together." A lot of religious leaders in this country can learn from that posture.

S: Yes, they can. Thanks so much, John!

John Gehring is the Catholic Program Director at Faith in Public Life in Washington DC. Information about his book can be found at <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442243200/The-Francis-Effect-A-Radical-Pope%E2%80%99s-Challenge-to-the-American-Catholic-Church>.



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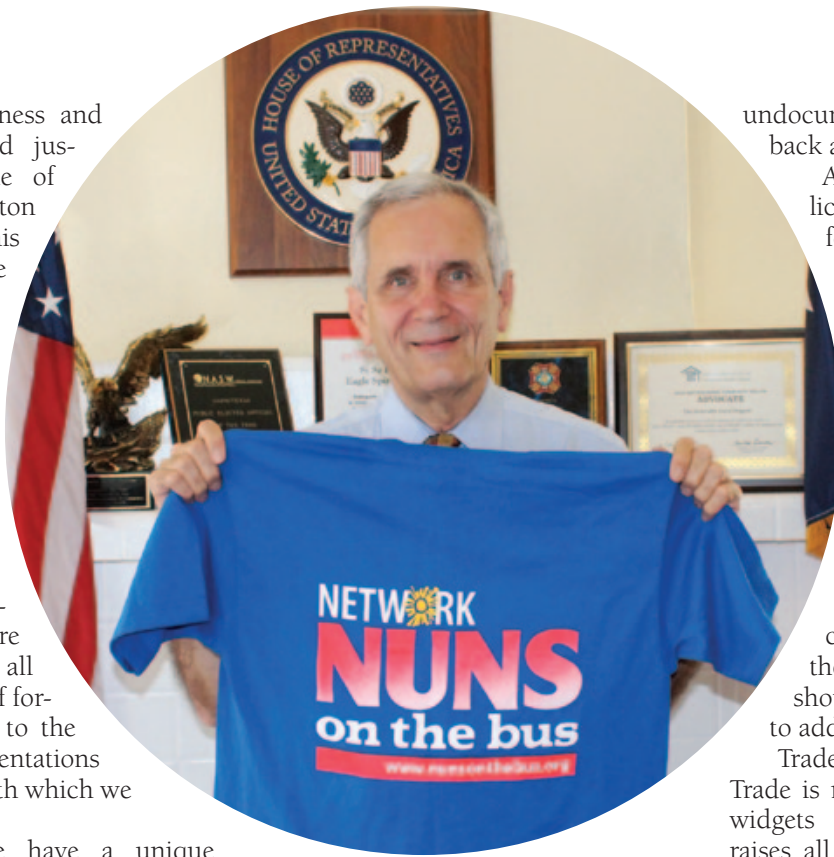
Pope Francis and Working for Justice

BY U.S. REPRESENTATIVE LLOYD DOGGETT

A message of goodness and hope, of peace and justice, touches people of all faiths. Washington was filled with this message during the recent historic visit of Pope Francis. Congress must heed his call for dialogue and cooperation to respond to the needs of the disadvantaged, reject violence, and serve as better stewards of our threatened planet. We were reminded that we all come from families of foreigners, an antidote to the poisonous misrepresentations about immigrants with which we are bombarded daily.

In Congress, we have a unique responsibility to help others. There are many ways to fulfill this obligation. Diplomacy, not war, should guide our efforts to solve international conflicts. I am a strong supporter of the Iran nuclear agreement. Bombing will make an Iranian nuclear weapon more, not less, likely. It would harm the innocent, inflame regional and sectarian tensions, and threaten our security. This important nuclear agreement, which has strong international support, will make all of our families safer. Its thorough inspection requirements mean genuine progress for all of us who believe that peace will make us more secure than war.

We also have a special obligation to those who cannot speak for themselves: our children. All children deserve to be raised in loving, abuse-free homes, with educational opportunities to help them thrive, not just survive. From pre-K to higher education, every child should be able to reach their full God-given potential. We must also reduce the scourge



of child abuse. I am leading the House effort to reorient the child welfare system toward preventing tragedies, not just reacting to them. My “Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities” will soon issue a report that will help develop a national blueprint to ensure every child is safe and loved. The first gathering of the Commission was held in San Antonio, with subsequent meetings throughout the country.

We must finally pass comprehensive immigration reform. We know that immigrants, including our DREAMers, have so much to contribute. Over 650,000 DREAMers have requested and been approved to receive a temporary and renewable work permit so they may pursue opportunities and enhance our communities. We must end family detention. Locking women and children in detention centers is not the answer. Over the years, I have worked closely with faith groups, human rights organizations and volunteers advocating with

undocumented individuals to push back against their demonization.

As the pope wrote in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, to continue to foster a healthy community, we must ensure the viability of our planet. Our world has seen devastation from too many droughts, hurricanes, tsunamis and wildfires already. Our current use of water, energy, agriculture, oceans and forests is not sustainable. At present consumption rates, there's simply not enough to go around. The time is long overdue to curb carbon emissions and mitigate the effects of climate change. We should all be able to work together to address these common concerns.

Trade must also reflect our values. Trade is more than just the number of widgets crossing borders. Fair trade raises all boats, but unfair trade sinks them. Capsized by competing with those whose average wage is 60 cents an hour and whose only union is the Communist party is no way to compete. Malaysia should not benefit from new trade benefits when it is failing to address modern-day slavery. We should not trade clean water for sour, pure air for fouled, or well-paying jobs here for ones that pay less than a dollar an hour.

I look forward to continue working with NETWORK to build stronger communities for our families—working to reduce poverty, pollution and violence. In Congress, I will continue to be a strong voice for those with none.

U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-TX), who represents parts of San Antonio, Austin and connecting communities, is a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee and serves as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Human Resources.

PHOTO COURTESY OFFICE OF REP. LLOYD DOGGETT

Finishing up Lackluster Year in Congress with Some Good News on Criminal Justice Reform

BY THE NETWORK GOVERNMENT RELATIONS STAFF

Following Pope Francis's speech to Congress, we are hopeful that our elected officials took his words to heart and will seek to "initiate processes rather than possessing spaces" in the remaining time this year.

Budget

Congress averted a government shutdown on October 1 by passing a short-term Continuing Resolution (CR). This funds the government until December 11 at the level of fiscal year 2015 (FY15)—with a further reduction of 0.2% funding across all budget areas. However, it includes the addition of \$38 billion to the Pentagon budget. Funding our military at a higher level than our nation's non-defense programs is troubling, and we are working to prevent this same outcome in the next budget agreement.

Speaker Boehner has said he wants to have a budget agreement in place before October 30. He and Sen. McConnell agree on the need for some additional spending above sequester caps to be authorized through the agreement, as was done in 2013 for the FY14 and FY15 budgets. In addition to the FY16 budget, Sen. McConnell is pushing for the inclusion of an overall spending limit for FY17 stated in the agreement. If this is included, it may eliminate sequestration for FY16 and FY17.

In the upcoming budget agreement, the struggle will come in determining "pay-fors." The Pentagon, corporations and the wealthiest among us continue to receive huge tax benefits—without

adjusting other programs' funding to pay for them. Meanwhile, any proposal to fund human needs programs requires cuts in other programs to cover the cost. One of the greatest threats is that legislators would cut funding for "mandatory programs" such as SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) or Medicaid to increase funding for other programs on the discretionary side of the budget—e.g., housing vouchers, healthcare clinics or child care. This is unacceptable.

Taxes

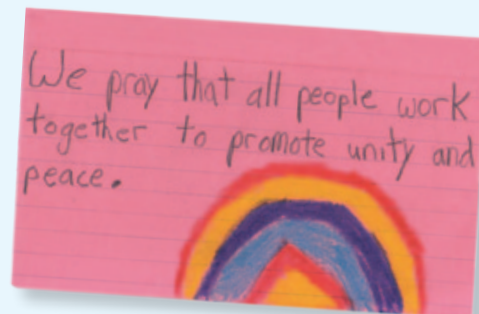
Advocates who support the 2009 improvements to the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit continue to call on Congress to take action this year to make them permanent and to expand the EITC to include young workers and those who are not raising children.

Thus far, House Republicans have voted to make a significant number of corporate tax credits permanent despite a one-trillion-dollar cost, according to the Joint Tax Committee. Meanwhile, there has been no action in either the House or Senate to make working family credits permanent although some in the Republican leadership have indicated they are open to doing so.

A group of tax credits known as tax extenders have expired and will likely be extended again at the end of the year. This tax extender package could provide a vehicle for strengthening the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit.

Immigration

Since the 114th Congress convened, there have been repeated efforts by anti-immigration proponents in Congress



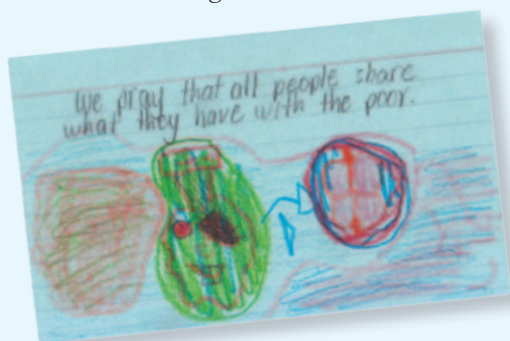
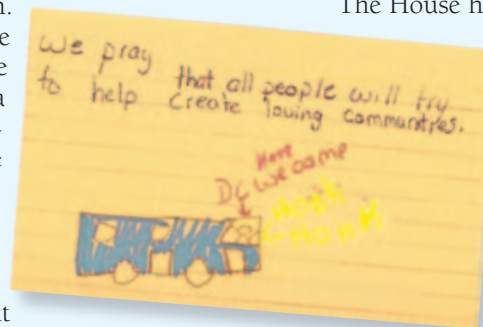
to cut back legal protections for immigrants and refugees. With the Republican presidential campaigns in full swing, the issue is becoming even more divisive as candidates attempt to appeal to the anti-immigrant contingent of the Republican base. Pope Francis's visit to the U.S. provided a brief break from the chorus of anti-immigrant rhetoric on Capitol Hill, but unfortunately, that reprieve was short-lived.

The House has already passed a bill

that would remove federal funding for cities that are "sanctuary cities"—cities in the United States that have policies designed to protect undocumented immigrants. There is also a bill in the House that would

provide refugee status to Christian refugees from Syria, but would not extend the status to refugees of other religions. The faith community continues to actively oppose these negative bills.

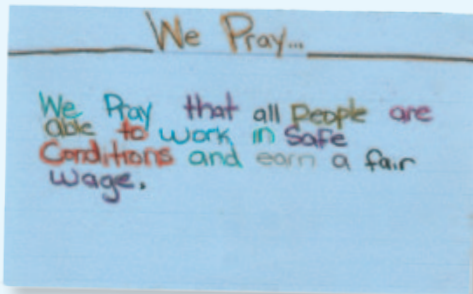
Meanwhile, faith and secular advocates are waiting to see if the Obama administration will appeal a ruling by U.S. District Judge Dolly Gee pertaining to the administration's unjust practice of detaining immigrant families in detention centers. During the summer, Judge Gee ruled that the practice of detaining children and their mothers violates the 1997 settlement in the *Flores v. Meese* case. That case set guidelines for the detention of unaccompanied migrant



children, mandating that if they are detained, they should be held in the least restrictive environment possible and cared for by licensed professionals. The administration has until October 23 to appeal the case, which we strongly oppose, and it is expected to do so.

Trans-Pacific Partnership

The Obama administration and leaders from 11 other nations concluded negotiations on the Trans-Pacific



Partnership (TPP) agreement in early October. Prior to the conclusion of the negotiations, the faith community registered significant opposition to provisions that would deeply impact people living in poverty and provide a means for corporations to attack health and environmental laws. While trade can be a mechanism to reduce poverty and promote development, it is clear that the rules must be written to address the needs of those who are most vulnerable. Previous trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), upon which the TPP is modeled, did not do so and have failed to achieve development goals.

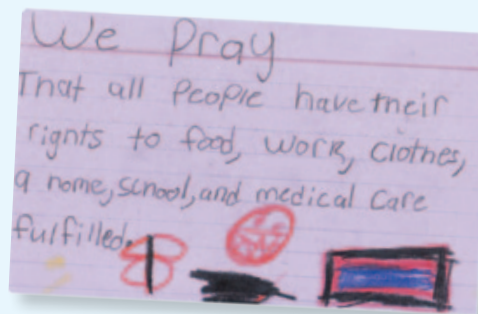
The actual text of the agreement was not made immediately available. A congressional vote is months away—February at the earliest, as the presidential race heats up. Under the fast track procedure passed earlier this year, the administration will submit the deal to Congress for a straight up- or down-vote without amendments. Passage requires

a simple majority of votes in both houses, and the bill cannot be filibustered in the Senate. If legislators feel the administration has not adequately consulted with them or followed congressional negotiating objectives, they may also strip fast track rules from the bill.

There will be a bruising battle in Congress over the agreement. Fast track was passed by very slim margins in the House and Senate earlier this year, and it is unclear whether the administration will be able to maintain support. A number of Republican members who led the fast track effort have expressed deep concern about the outcome of the negotiations. Likewise, Democratic members who supported fast track will be under intense pressure from labor, environmental and faith groups to oppose TPP, especially due to the 2016 elections. Presidential candidates have also begun to take positions on TPP, with Senator Bernie Sanders (I-VT) on the left and Donald Trump on the right vocally stating their opposition to TPP.

Criminal Justice Reform

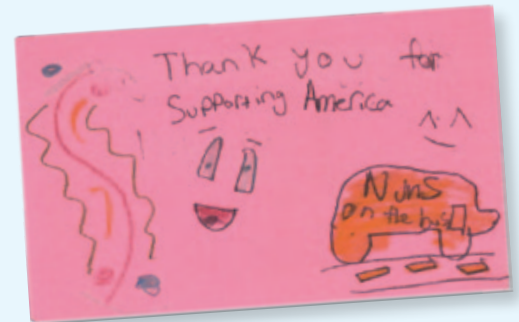
Just as advocates for criminal justice reform thought momentum was slowing, nine senators introduced a bipartisan bill, the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act of 2015. The bill includes both sentencing and prison reform, with the most significant reforms of the criminal justice system in decades. Although



time is running short for bills to be passed before the end of the year, this bill has an important co-sponsor—Senator

Chuck Grassley (R-IA), Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The bill would adjust mandatory minimum sentencing standards as well as allow some prisoners to reduce their sentences by participating in programs. It would also limit solitary confinement for juveniles and establish eligibility for



parole for juveniles sentenced to life terms. This group of reforms would have a positive effect on our criminal justice system and save taxpayers millions of dollars. Both the House and the Senate will need to debate and vote on the bill in the coming weeks.

Gun Violence

After learning of our nation's most recent mass-shootings, including the one in Oregon, the faith community continues to call for an end to gun violence and more restrictive gun laws. Democrats in the Senate have prepared legislation that would expand background checks and tighten regulations on illegal gun purchases. President Obama has said he wants commonsense gun laws to be a priority and the legislation has a great deal of support in the Senate, but it remains to be seen whether Congress will actually take action to reform our gun laws. That is reprehensible.

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

NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus and Pope Francis Call on Congress: Bridge the Divides and Transform Politics

“A good political leader is one who, with the interests of all in mind, seizes the moment in a spirit of openness and pragmatism.” —Pope Francis

Congress must build bridges to overcome polarization and pass a Faithful Budget that restores economic opportunity, invests in America, and cares for vulnerable members of society.

NETWORK calls on Congress to:

- ★ Pass a budget that fully funds human needs programs and lifts the spending caps imposed by the Budget Control Act and sequestration
- ★ Protect programs for low-income and vulnerable people. Fully fund programs providing child care, education, housing and home energy assistance, nutritious food, healthcare, mental health and substance abuse services – all of which offer the promise of escaping poverty
- ★ Make permanent three 2009 Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit improvements set to expire in 2017:
 - ✦ Maintain the reduction in “marriage penalties” so couples no longer lose a portion of their individual EITC benefits when they marry
 - ✦ Maintain the boost in EITC benefits for families with three or more children to help them cover the cost of raising children
 - ✦ Maintain the reduction of the Child Tax Credit earnings limit to \$3,000, preserving the credit for millions of new low-income workers.
- ★ Enhance the Earned Income Tax Credit for workers not raising children, the only workers who can be taxed into poverty.

As Pope Francis reminds us, there is an urgent need to build an economy of inclusion so all people can lead lives of dignity and promise. Politicians must engage in dialogue to create a faithful approach to economic justice and political consensus that prioritizes the common good.

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



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Thousands of NETWORK and Nuns on the Bus activists have taken this pledge. **Will you join them?**

I Pledge to Bridge Divides and Transform Politics. I Call on Congress to Do the Same.

Our nation's politics are mired in polarization and gridlock that harm everyone.
For our democracy to survive, this has to change.

Politicians and activists must move beyond polling data and soundbites.
They must connect with real people and hear about the injustices encountered daily.



By listening to the people and letting their stories break open our hearts, we can develop solutions that meet the real needs of people and prioritize the common good.

- **We must seek out the stories in our midst and share them.**
- **We must demand a new political reality.**
- **We must help our nation bridge the divides that harm us.**

**POPE FRANCIS'S RADICAL CALL IS TO CHANGE OUR POLITICS, NOT JUST OUR POLICIES.
BRIDGE THE DIVIDES. TRANSFORM POLITICS. THIS IS THE WAY FORWARD.**

NETWORK
A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

**Bridge the Divides:
Transform Politics**

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Go to
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to sign the pledge.

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Embracing Others' Suffering as Our Own

BY BETHAN JOHNSON AND RACHEL SCHMIDT

Inspired by Pope Francis's emphasis on dialogue and encounter, the Nuns on the Bus committed to having their hearts broken open through listening to people from across the U.S. heartland. These encounters have allowed us at NETWORK to become "painfully aware" of the divides people are experiencing in their communities—including racism, environmental hazards, and the lack of healthcare, housing and jobs with a living wage. As we spoke with them, we also experienced the hope that we can discover new ways to bridge these divides together.

We want you to experience with us the "joys and hopes... sorrows and anxieties" of the people we encountered (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1). We created the following activity for your use as an individual or with a group so that you too may be in solidarity with all those who have touched our hearts.

Activity One

For groups larger than five, please divide into smaller groups of two or three. Read the following selection from *Laudato Si'* and allow for a few brief moments of silence before beginning.

READER: "Let us review, however cursorily, those questions which are troubling us today and which we can no longer sweep under the carpet. Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it." (*Laudato Si'*, 19)

LEADER: Today, we are going to reflect on Pope Francis's call to become "painfully aware" of the struggles and sufferings of others and learn what it means to make these sufferings our own. NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus travelled across the country and heard many stories. We too can listen to these stories and also have our hearts broken open. We will then reflect on what actions we can take to bridge divides.

WATCH THE VIDEOS in the following order. After each video, encourage the small groups to talk about the discus-

sion questions for three to five minutes. If you are doing this as an individual reflection, you may want to silently reflect or journal.

- www.networklobby.org/bus2015/stories/moti-rieber
- www.networklobby.org/bus2015/stories/naomi-carranza
- www.networklobby.org/bus2015/stories/marlowe-tulloch
- www.networklobby.org/bus2015/stories/jennifer-clinger

QUESTIONS for small group discussion:

1. Is this part of your personal suffering? How?
2. If not, how can you make it part of your personal suffering?
3. Why is it important for this issue to be a personal suffering?

Activity Two

COME BACK TOGETHER AND DISCUSS the following questions as a large group. Continue to journal/silently reflect if you are doing this by yourself.

1. What does the term "personal suffering" mean?
2. Do you think it's necessary to suffer with? Why?
3. How do we use these feelings in our work/lives?
4. What will we do with these stories now that we know them?

Activity Three

If you have additional time, consider responding to these two discussion topics from our Nuns on the Bus town halls.

1. What divides or challenges are we experiencing in our community?
2. How can we move forward or bridge these divides?

Closing

EACH PERSON CAN SHARE a commitment he or she will make to do one thing this week, this month, or this year to bridge divides in your community.

END WITH A PRAYER from your own faith tradition.

Note: If you use this activity, please let us know your "divides" and your "bridges" at info@networklobby.org. Thank you.



Bethan Johnson is a NETWORK Grassroots Mobilization Associate and Rachel Schmidt is the NETWORK Communications Associate.



Joining Sister Simone Campbell (center) and Sister Mary Ellen Lacy are some of the children at St. Thomas Aquinas school in Indianapolis. The K-8 students drew the pictures on the cards shown throughout the magazine, like the one below.

NETWORK

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The strength of NETWORK is and always has been you, our community of supporters.

You are the reason that our **Nuns on the Bus** tour successfully brought the **stories of justice-seekers across the country to Congress and Pope Francis** this year. And **your support will be critical** over this upcoming election year to ensure that the people's call for justice and peace is heard.



You can make a real impact on our efforts and expand our community right now by giving a NETWORK membership to a loved one this upcoming holiday season. We will send a welcome package introducing them to our movement for social justice, as well as issues of *Connection* through 2016 (including this one).



Here are some options to make your gift membership:

- Fill out the enclosed envelope
- Call Megan Dominy at (202) 601-7866
- Go online to www.networklobby.org/gift

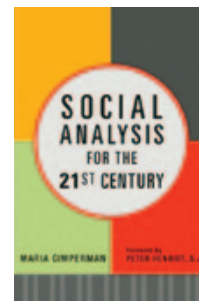
As a current NETWORK member, you can use our **special rate of \$40** for each gift membership—but be sure to do so by December 11 to ensure delivery for the holidays!



NETWORK recommends



Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness by Ilia Delio <http://www.orbisbooks.com/making-all-things-new.html>



Social Analysis for the 21st Century by Maria Cimperman, with a foreword by Peter Henriot, SJ. <http://www.orbisbooks.com/social-analysis-for-the-21st-century.html>

The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church by John Gehring (see interview with author on page 8) <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781442243200/The-Francis-Effect-A-Radical-Pope%E2%80%99s-Challenge-to-the-American-Catholic-Church>