



NETWORK CONNECTION

SECOND QUARTER 2016

Living in the Income Gap: Impact on Women and People of Color

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we can mend the gap... p. 10*



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CONNECTION HAS A NEW LOOK!

As a valued NETWORK member, you're getting the first peek at our new branding! A new logo and a new look for *Connection* are the first steps in this "refresh." Our hope is to more clearly communicate who we are while celebrating the Sister-spirit that NETWORK has been known for since our founding in 1971. You can still expect the best policy analysis, stories, and joy that you have come to trust from *Connection*. And stay tuned for other changes — like our new website — coming soon!

ON THE COVER

Christy at work at Thistle Stop Café, a ministry of Thistle Farms.
Photo credit: Jon Whittle

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Looking at the Future through Two Lenses

NETWORK Recommits to Focus on Women and People of Color Affected by Economic Divides

BY SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL

Two societal events are tearing at my heart. The first is the level of anger and hate that has been unleashed this election season. We hear of political rallies that result in violence against people of color and those who disagree with the speakers. A friend told me of an African-American colleague in North Carolina who in a parking lot faced two white men who pointed a shotgun at her and told her to go back to Africa where she came from.

The second is Pope Francis's lament in *Laudato Si* where he states that too often the excluded are considered an "afterthought" in the economic and environmental considerations of our time. He challenges us by saying that true engagement must be both environmental and societal. He goes on to say that we need to "hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

We at NETWORK have been listening to these cries and having our hearts broken open at every turn. What we have come to see is that if we are serious about mending the gaps in our economy and in our society, we must give special focus to the issues of both race and women.

The economic disparity that is so prevalent in our nation illustrates this for me. The fact our middle class income has grown only 15 percent in the last 34 years is distressing. This is exacerbated by the fact that the top 1 percent's income has grown by 169 percent in that same time frame. We all know that 15 percent of a small number continues to be a small number and 169 percent of a large number becomes an even larger number.

As we studied this data, we saw that as bad as these aggregate numbers are, they hide a further truth: people of color and women experience even deeper economic and social divides. Women continued to be paid less than men for performing the same work and those who are African-American or Hispanic are disproportionately excluded from our economic prosperity.

In Kansas City last September, I met Jeanette who works as a home health aide. She could not get a single full-time job, so she worked for two different home health agencies for 20 hours a week each. While this amounted to a full-time job, she

did not get benefits because she was only "part-time." In order to make ends meet, she worked on weekends at a hospital. For more than three years she had worked every single day. She told us she had finally gotten sick and was hospitalized. While she was worried about her health, she was grateful to finally have some time off.

In Ann Arbor, I met Lit, an African-American teacher who after decades teaching in the Detroit schools was laid off in the

bankruptcy of 2013. After losing her job, she applied for many jobs, but could find nothing. She was "overqualified" or "not suited", or just plain tossed aside. After a year, she lost her house and was homeless. She "couch surfed" where she could and finally tried re-locating to Ann Arbor where she thought there were more opportunities. But she continues to be unemployed. She is turning her experience into activism. We need to hear

Lit's cry for an economy that includes her and others like her.

Women like Jeanette and Lit are working hard on the margins of our economy but consistently kept from earning living wages. At the same time, women and people of color have become the focus of white middle class anger. In the frustration of economic stagnation, political rhetoric shifts the blame away from those who control the economy and toward those who are most marginalized. We know that if we are going to mend these gaping holes, we must address the realities of racism and sexism. Failing to do so not only permits their continuation, but makes us complicit in this sin.

We at NETWORK commit ourselves to ensuring that those at the margins of our society are not an afterthought in our advocacy. To do this, we will use the lenses of race and impact on women as we work to mend the gaps. We will do this by acknowledging when there is privilege that exists only for some and ensure that we share it with all. This analysis and action are the first steps in mending the gap. Please join us in this crucial effort to speak up for what is best in our democracy. Mend the gaps created by the biases we have about race and women. This will lead us to "form a more perfect union" and not tear ourselves apart. ☀

We know that if we are going to mend these gaping holes, we must address the realities of racism and sexism.

Notable Quotables

What justice-seekers have been saying this quarter

"The holier-than-thou claims by presidential candidates wearing Christian costumes will not effectively address immigration reform or the problems of U.S. poverty and economic inequality."

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño and Sister Simone Campbell responding to Donald Trump sparring with the Pope on what is Christian

"We (sisters) have not seen ourselves as others see us, as powerful women with life and faith experience for which our world hungers."

Sister Bernadine Karge, OP in a NETWORK guest blog, "The Power of Sisterhood"

"They treat us like dogs."

Maribel Zelaya, an asylum seeker on her experience being held in a detention center as quoted in a ThinkProgress article

"Why an Economy for the 1% Is Bad for Business, and Government"

Headline of a Forbes article that supports our message to #MendTheGap

"We applaud @SpeakerRyan for spending time with his family, and we want all workers to have this opportunity!"

@NETWORKLobby Tweet in support of family-friendly workplace protection policies

"From my 24 years of ministering in rural Mississippi, I sure haven't seen any trickle down."

Sister Mary Joel Curcio, SLW responds to theory of trickle-down economics in the Global Sisters Report's "Justice Matters"

"Proud to have done our part to get the #ACA passed!"

@NETWORKLobby Tweet in response to the fact that 20 million have been insured thanks to the Affordable Care Act

"No one who works full-time should live in poverty — and that starts with raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour."

Senator Elizabeth Warren (Massachusetts) in an op-ed on her support of family-friendly workplace protections

"My experience at JAW (Just Advocacy Week) gave me access to a group of people who are making real change."

Jalen Brooks-Knepfle, a second-year student at the College of Charleston in South Carolina, reflecting on her 2015 JAW experience

"We all have the obligation to set a place at the table for everyone else. That includes immigrants as well as Donald Trump supporters."

Sister Simone Campbell's response to current events in a Reverb Press interview

"Proud to receive such high marks from NETWORK Lobby's 2015 Scorecard."

Congressman John Sarbanes's (Maryland) Facebook post on receiving a 91% NETWORK Voting Record

"Trust your heart and just do it!"

Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF giving advice to justice-seekers in a blog on NETWORK's website

How Economic Gaps Disproportionately Impact Women and People of Color

Without Living Wages, Women Face Instability

BY SISTER JANET KINNEY, CSJ

As the Executive Director of Providence House—a Brooklyn nonprofit providing transitional and supportive housing to formerly incarcerated women and homeless women and their children—I hear *every day* the heart-wrenching stories of women struggling to make ends meet, and their searches for suitable employment that will help them care for their children and get back on their feet. Each of them desperately wants to return to the mainstream of life, living in their own apartments. Time and again the frustrations they express are very real—because the wages they receive for the hours they work, just don't match up to the cost of living here in New York City.

Stories like Marisa's, a 35-year-old Hispanic woman with a three-year-old daughter who entered the New York City shelter system in September 2015 due to domestic violence abuse. Prior to moving to Providence House she had been working for five years in a bookstore as a barista. In those five years her wage crept up to a mere \$9.50/hour. Before taxes this would equate to an income of \$1,520/month: barely enough rent for a one bedroom apartment. Add utility costs, food costs, and general living expenses, it was clear that as a single wage earner she needed to either find higher paying employment, take

(continued on page 7)

Why Small Debts Matter So Much to Black Lives

BY PAUL KIEL, PROPUBLICA

If you are black, you're far more likely to see your electricity cut, more likely to be sued over a debt, and more likely to land in jail because of a parking ticket.

It is not unreasonable to attribute these perils to discrimination. But there's no question that the main reason small financial problems can have such a disproportionate effect on black families is that, for largely historical reasons rooted in racism, they have far smaller financial reserves to fall back on than white families.

The most recent federal survey in 2013 put the difference in net worth between the typical white and black family at \$131,000. That's a big number, but here's an even more troubling statistic: About one-quarter of African-American families had less than \$5 in reserve. Low-income whites had about \$375.

Any setback, from a medical emergency to the unexpected loss of hours at work, can be devastating. It means that harsh punishments for the failure to pay small debts harm black families inordinately. Sometimes, the consequence is jail. Other times, electricity is cut, or wages garnished.

The modern roots of the racial wealth gap can be traced back to the post-World War II housing boom, when federal agencies blocked loans to black Americans, locking them out of the greatest wealth accumulation this country has ever experienced. More recently, the bursting of the housing bubble and subsequent recession slammed minorities. In 2013, the median wealth of white households was 13 times the median wealth of black households, the widest gap since 1989.

Sometimes the consequence of not having the money to pay a bill is immediate: The power goes out. In a 2009 national survey of lower-income households by the federal Energy Information Administration, 9 percent of blacks reported having their electricity disconnected in the previous year because they had been unable to pay. For whites, the number was less than 4 percent, according to an analysis of the survey by the National Consumer Law Center.

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Sister Janet with members of the Providence House community in Brooklyn.



Cori Winfield, a single mother in St. Louis, feels the effect of the racial wealth gap when surprise expenses cause unavoidable struggle. (Edwin Torres/ProPublica)

“Small Debts” continued...

And sometimes the consequence of unmanageable debt is to fall further into debt. In a 2013 Federal Reserve survey, about three times as many blacks reported taking out a high-interest payday loan in the previous year as did whites at the same income level. Desperate consumers turn to these loans as a way to catch up on bills, but often get tripped up by unaffordable interest payments.

When combined with discriminatory policing practices, the effect of the asset gap is to magnify the racial disparity. In its report on the Ferguson, Mo., Police Department, the Justice Department found that officers disproportionately stopped and ticketed black citizens. For a “manner of walking” violation, it was \$302; for “high grass and weeds,” \$531.

Blacks accounted for about 67 percent of Ferguson’s population and around 85 percent of the municipal court cases. But the numbers were even more lopsided when it came to the harshest consequences. Blacks accounted for 92 percent of the cases where an arrest warrant had been issued to compel payment.

And this wasn’t a problem only in Ferguson. Earlier this year, the American Civil Liberties Union sued DeKalb County, Ga., which includes part of Atlanta, for jailing citizens over unpaid court fines and unpaid fees charged by a for-profit company that runs probation services for the government. About 55 percent of DeKalb County’s population is black, but the ACLU found that nearly all probationers jailed for failure to pay those fines and fees were black.

The racial wealth gap “creates this cyclical effect,” said Nusrat Choudhury, an ACLU attorney. An unpaid speeding ticket may result in a suspended driver’s license, which may lead to a more severe violation. Unable to pay their fines, black defendants become more crushingly entangled in debt.

Cori Winfield, a single mother in St. Louis, got caught up in this cycle. After she was unable to keep up the payments on a subprime auto loan she took out in 2009, the car was repossessed the next year, but the consequences didn’t stop there. Because the debt continued to be bloated by interest charges, the lender began garnishing her wages in 2012. The garnishment continues today. Because she was unable to repay, she will end up paying far more than she owed in the first place.

Making matters worse for Winfield, while her wages were being garnished, she was arrested for driving with a license that had been suspended because she had failed to pay a speeding ticket. She ended up spending a weekend in jail and having to pay the cost of bail.

Winfield has a decent clerical job, earning about \$30,000 a year. But she lives month to month. When hit with an unexpected expense, she is left reeling.

Her vulnerability is typical. In a recent survey by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the typical black household earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 reported having emergency savings of \$400. The typical white household in that range had \$2,100.

Black families were much more likely to report difficulty in recovering from a financial setback or to have fallen behind on a bill in the past year. This financial insecurity extended up the income scale. Of black households with income between \$50,000 and \$85,000, 30 percent said they had been unable to pay a bill. By contrast, only white households with incomes below \$25,000 reported similar trouble paying bills; 31 percent said they had fallen behind.

What can be done? The best place to start is by identifying practices that are particularly damaging to black communities, and then fixing them. Policy makers should pay attention. Making it easier to recover from small setbacks can make a big difference in peoples’ lives.

Originally published as part of the series “The Color of Debt” available at propublica.org. Article has been edited for length.

The Gender and Race Wage Gap

For every dollar earned by a white man in the U.S., less is earned by a woman, and even less by most women of color.

Source: AAUW



\$1.00

White Men



54¢

Hispanic or Latina Women



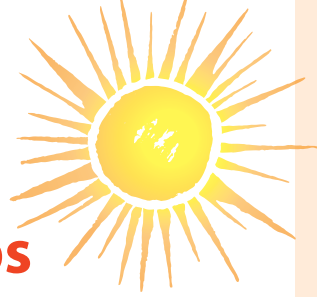
59¢

American Indian and Alaska Native Women



64¢

African-American Women



NETWORK'S 2020 POLICY VISION

Mend the Gaps

Federal policies enacted since 1980 have exacerbated vast economic and social divides in our country. These divides are eroding the very fabric of our society. Enlivened by Pope Francis's challenge, NETWORK renews its more than 40-year commitment to create an economy and a society of inclusion.

Through 2020, NETWORK will focus on promoting policies that mend the gaps and bridge the divides in our country, with a special focus on the policies that disproportionately impact women and people of color.

Mending the Wealth and Income Gap

Three sets of policies can help mend the U.S. income and wealth gap:

- ✓ **Tax Justice:** Tax policy changes are made to reduce the income gap, especially the racial/ethnic and gender wealth gaps.
- ✓ **Living Wages:** National legislation moves from adjusting a minimum wage to creating a living wage.
- ✓ **Family-Friendly Workplaces:** The needs of women and families are integrated into federal workplace policies.

Mending the Access Gaps

Economic disparity has created perilous gaps in access to four key areas that burden daily lives and livelihoods:

- ✓ **Access to Democracy:** No individual or community of color is disenfranchised by federal policy.
- ✓ **Access to Healthcare:** Racial and economic disparities in healthcare are eliminated.
- ✓ **Access to Citizenship:** Immigrants are welcomed into the country.
- ✓ **Access to Housing:** Everyone has access to safe, affordable housing.

While working to mend the gaps, NETWORK will continue its advocacy to ensure that current, successful federal programs are protected and enhanced so as not to increase the current divides.



65¢

Native Hawaiian and
Other Pacific Islander
Women



78¢

White (non-Hispanic)
Women



90¢

Asian-American
Women

"Living Wages" continued...

on a second part-time job, or do a combination of the two. Because Marisa did not have a high school diploma her options were limited. She received training as a Home Health Care Aide, and was able to add 15–25 hours of health care work at \$10/hour, though the hours are inconsistent: a worry for Marisa as she tries to save while juggling these two jobs.

Then there is Thomasine, a 31-year-old African-American woman with an eight-year-old son. Thomasine is already working two jobs—one as a security guard and the other as a waitress in a restaurant. Her combined income from these two jobs barely hits \$1,500/month before taxes. She has now resided in our shelter for two years.

Mary Lou, age 34, a white woman with two children has lived at Providence House just over a year. She is a delivery supervisor at a restaurant, earning \$11.25/hour, with a before taxes monthly income of \$1,800. Mary Lou is working hard to save her money for the security deposit and first month's rent of a two bedroom apartment—which range from \$1,500–\$1,800/month—but again, it is an upward battle.

The economic divide here in New York crosses racial lines, although people of color are disproportionately affected. In New York the minimum wage has just been raised to \$9.00/hour and both the mayor and governor are challenging the legislature to adopt a \$15.00/hour minimum wage phased in over three years. Across the country, the federal minimum wage is even lower, only \$7.25/hour.

Fighting for a living wage is more complicated than simply raising the hourly minimum wage. Workers today face multiple challenges, such as employers increasing part time and contract work, receiving different wages for tipped work, and decreasing benefits.

Living wages also depend on having access to affordable housing and maintaining savings. There was a time when 'the norm' was an individual or family dedicating 30 percent of their income to rent, which allowed them to not only pay for other living costs (food, utilities, clothing, medical, transportation) but also contribute to a savings account or pursue further education. The women I work with will be lucky if two-thirds (67 percent) of their income is dedicated to rent. Savings become difficult, if not impossible, so even when one of our group of women can earn enough to afford her own apartment, without savings, she lives on the precipice of future homelessness if any part of her fragile income stream falters.

Living wages ensure workers can care for themselves and their families and meet their housing, nutrition, health, and other needs regardless of where they live. A minimum wage is not enough; we must have living wages.

Sister Janet Kinney, CSJ is the Executive Director of Providence House in Brooklyn, New York. www.providencehouse.org

Living Wages and Family-Friendly Workplaces for All

*An analysis of a NETWORK policy area
from the perspective of Catholic social justice tradition*

NETWORK's advocacy for living wages is grounded in the tradition of Catholic Social Justice, which has always affirmed that wages must not be left up to market forces, but must enable workers to provide for all their families' needs.

For more than 100 years, Catholic Social Teaching has been clear—a just society ensures all workers earn a living wage. Lay Catholics and people of all faiths have affirmed this teaching by joining the labor movement and standing in solidarity with workers. At the core of this teaching is the belief that every human being has essential dignity and that contributing to the good of society through work is a way of expressing this dignity.

As Pope Francis has reminded us, “It is necessary to reaffirm that employment is necessary for society, for families and for individuals... work has not only the economic objective of profit, but above all a purpose that regards man and his dignity” (Vatican audience, March 20, 2014). When workers are forced to work 90 hours a week or can't afford to pay for basic necessities such as housing, they are not able to fully express their God-given dignity.

Rooted in Catholic Social Justice, NETWORK advocates for federal **legislation that ensures all workers are able to live dignified lives, meeting the economic needs of themselves and their families.** Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. A living wage is integral to our understanding of work. Living wages ensure workers can care for themselves and their families and meet their housing, nutrition, health, and other needs regardless of where they live.

Jobs that are lifeless or isolated cannot strengthen or build community, therefore we encourage **employment that benefits society as well as workers.** As workers are engaged in meaningful work, they are better able to contribute to the common good and to a healthy economy. Full time work at

a living wage makes it possible for workers to contribute to the revenue streams at federal, state, and local levels. Flexible scheduling and sufficient wages that allow a person to work only one job give parents and caregivers more time to spend with children and dependents.

We also support **requirements for employers to pay equitable wages and provide safe, healthy, and humanizing conditions for all workers.** We call for workplace policies and employment protections that show care for women and other vulnerable populations. Women should receive equal pay for equal work. Family-friendly workplace policies should be implemented for the benefit of all workers and their families.

We believe in the importance of protecting **workers' right to bargain collectively to improve wages, benefits, and working conditions.** Employers hold power in the workplace. Workers have

lived with stagnant wages during the last 30 years and today unions face increasing curtailment as they try to protect workers' rights. Unions are repeatedly supported in Catholic Social Teaching as honorable, essential institutions that protect and promote workers' rights.

Finally, we call for **legislation that pursues full employment across the United States.** Full employment is the foundation of a just economy. All workers have a right to employment that pays a living wage as well as a responsibility to contribute to society as they are able. When we fail to provide employment for all, we choose profit over people and deny the dignity of every person.

The long tradition of Catholic Social Justice encompasses the teachings of scripture and the Church, and the lived experience of women religious and people of faith who have worked for justice over the ages. Inspired by this tradition, NETWORK seeks to mend the gap in our society by advocating for living wages for all workers. ☀

Rooted in Catholic Social Justice,
NETWORK advocates for federal
legislation that ensures all workers
are able to live dignified lives,
meeting the economic needs of
themselves and their families.

Income Inequality Dims the American Dream

Silicon Valley Congressman Reflects on the Wealth Gap

BY U.S. REPRESENTATIVE MIKE HONDA

As the son of immigrants, the American Dream lives within me: work hard, do your best, get a good education, to create a better life for your kids than you started with.

Unfortunately, for too many Americans, that Dream is no longer reality. Disparities in income and wealth between wealthiest and poorest have increased so dramatically, it is harder than ever for generations to move “up the ladder.”

That chasm gapes even wider for communities who are traditionally underserved by our entire economy: women and communities of color.

Wealth is created primarily by income, and the gap between the highest and lowest earners is greater in America than at any time during the Great Depression. The situation is not improving: wages for the top one percent continue to skyrocket, while the average American struggles to stay even with inflation.

Women and Americans of color are harder hit, even as they tend to earn markedly less than white men who do the same job.

Income inequality is particularly bad in my home, the San Francisco Bay Area. According to the Silicon Valley Institute for Regional Studies, the gap between low and high income households in the Bay Area is \$263,000, far more than the national average of \$178,000.

This impact is particularly felt in African-American, Latino and many Pacific Islander communities. African-American families in the Bay Area are nearly twice as likely to be in the bottom 20 percent of households by income, and near-

ly half as likely to be in the top 20 percent. Latinos are slightly less likely to live in poverty, but are still only half as likely to be top earners.

This is not a regional anomaly, according to the

St. Louis Federal Reserve Bank, “Wealth disparities are even larger when examining wealth distributions by race. A plethora of research shows that the typical black family holds between 5 and 10 cents for each dollar that a white family owns.” The numbers are similar for Latinos.

This inability to create income and pass down wealth, even in the home of innovation and imagination that drives our country, means that if you are in the lower 40 percent when you’re born, particularly if you’re a minority or a single woman, it is most likely that is also where your kids will begin their lives.

That is not the American Dream, it is a nightmare.

To fix our nation, let’s start at the beginning. Education equity is one of the top issues we face. Once future generations have a great education, they must have a chance to use it to build their lives and feed their families. Every American, everyone, regardless of race or gender, must be able to count on get-



Rep. Honda talks with young constituents who live in a region with a severe wealth gap.

ting the same wage for doing the same exact work.

Our government must create and rebuild the infrastructure that allows American businesses to excel. Regulations must protect our nation, our people and our environment, but not harm small businesses.

Most importantly, we must create a tax code ensuring everyone pays their fair share: from the top 1 percent, who benefit from national stability and markets made fair through our laws and government, we ask for a little more; and for those who live in the shadows or who have taken immense personal risk to start a small family company, let’s encourage them with a lower burden, so they will grow, prosper and pass on wealth to the next generation.

That is the American Way.

Mike Honda is the Representative for California’s 17th Congressional District in the heart of Silicon Valley. Honda’s district is the first Asian American-majority district in the continental United States.

With Love We Can Mend the Gap

In 1997, Episcopal priest Becca Stevens opened one home for four women survivors of trafficking, addiction, and prostitution with the name Magdalene. Today, Magdalene has grown into Thistle Farms—a residential program and social enterprise that offers healing and empowerment to women locally, nationally, and globally. Thistle Farms believes that love is the most powerful force for change in the world.

One of the driving forces behind Becca's original vision was her concern for survivors' finances as a barrier to healing. She knew that the women seeking a recovery community needed a place to come home to each night, but they did

not have the funds to make that need a reality. So, she drew from the Benedictine model of radical hospitality—survivors would receive free housing for two years in order to focus on their recovery. Becca reflects, "We figured out, when the women came, that they were doing great work in their recovery, and making restitution with the courts and with their families. The problem was that they were still dirt poor. That's why we started the social enterprises of Thistle Farms."

After humble beginnings pouring candles in a church basement, Thistle Farms' social enterprises now employ about 40 residents and graduates. They include a natural bath and body

product line, the Thistle Stop Cafe, an artisan studio, and a global shared trade marketplace. Employees earn wages to contribute to their savings, learn new job skills, and build their resumes—all in the hopes to gaining true economic freedom.

The women of Thistle Farms share a common story of sexual violence and assault that they have had to bear individually but that rose out of larger communities. No one ends up on the streets on her own. On average, residents were first raped between the ages of 7 and 11, and they hit the streets between ages 14 and 16. Experiences of trauma, violence, abuse and instability make the women who come to Thistle Farms some of the

Sister-Spirit

Connection sat down with Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF following the Sisters in Public Leadership training in Washington, D.C. on March 3–4, 2016. Sister Robbie is the Coordinator of Planned Giving and Major Gifts for the Sisters of St. Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana.

To learn more about leadership and advocacy trainings provided by NETWORK, contact Sarah Spengeman, sspengeman@networklobby.org, 202-601-7874.

Connection Sister Robbie, why do you think Catholic sisters are such a powerful voice for justice?

Sister Robbie Catholic sisters are seen as people of integrity, faithful to the Gospel. Society does not see us seeking power for ourselves, but rather using our power to lift up the poor and marginalized. Our way of life, as seen by others, is consistent with who we say we are and we are passionate about making a difference in the life of others. Thus, we are seen as a trusted source without a hidden agenda. People listen!

Connection How did being a Nun on the Bus prepare you for the leadership training?

Sister Robbie Being a Nun on the Bus provided a practical context for the leadership training. On the Bus you must be ready for anything, particularly challenging questions and comments that may divert from the core purpose of the Bus. Prior to actually getting on the Bus, sisters are given a mini preparation on how to stay focused and to respond

to interview questions. However, this day and a half of leadership training was far more in-depth and provided a broad landscape to use these tools.

Connection What was the most surprising part of the training?

Sister Robbie Perhaps the biggest surprise of the training was in discovering the vast network of resources available to people of faith who want to advocate for justice issues. Faith in Public Life staff, along with NETWORK and a host of other groups have materials on many current justice concerns that they are more than willing to share and they will help in the research as well. But more amazing is their willingness to practice with you and help you prepare to advocate.

Connection What was the most valuable skill you learned or developed?

Sister Robbie Staying focused on the core message that you are trying to get across and telling a story in a concise way to hit home the core message. Remaining focused in an environment



Through a process of building community and recovery, women at Thistle Farms learn that "Love Heals"

most vulnerable members of society. It takes broken systems and communities to allow women to fall through the cracks, so it is no surprise that it takes loving communities to help undo the damage and welcome them home.

Thistle Farms survivor leader and storefront manager, Kristin, reflects on

her journey of recovery, "Thistle Farms was so different from every other recovery program because they didn't ask me for a dime. The rent-free housing model allowed me to focus on my recovery and to work toward financial stability. Now, I own a home, I own a car, I can buy my children new shoes and clothing. For the

first time, I don't feel like I have to rely on anyone else. I can't tell you how good that feels."

Though Thistle Farms is located in Nashville, TN, the Thistle Farms community reaches far and wide. There are currently 22 sister organizations across the United States that are replicating part of Thistle Farms best practice model in their own communities. Through Global Marketplace partners, Thistle Farms helps to employ another 1,000 women who are able to give back to their families and communities. Thistle Farms' continued growth over the past 20 years is evidence that love is good business, love heals, and love has the power to change the world.

Thistle Farms is in Nashville, Tennessee and online at www.thistlefarms.org.

that may be rather hostile can be challenging, but staying rooted in why you are doing what you are doing and not seeing those who disagree with you as the enemy helps to keep you focused. You don't have to know answers to everything that comes your way. Speaking your truth, as you understand it, is an effective method of communication. Perhaps an even more valuable learning was how essential meditation and prayer are to effective advocacy.

Connection How do you plan to use these skills in your work for justice?

Sister Robbie My current ministry, as the Coordinator of Donor Relations for my Congregation, is not necessarily seen as a direct advocacy role. However, mission should be at the forefront of our work in Advancement and we should seize upon opportunities to speak with donors or the public about the values our Congregations hold. Justice is at the heart of our mission, and thus speaking about justice and why the Sisters are passionate about many issues facing our world today can en-

gage our donors, as well, in furthering our mission. Often times we let fear keep us from speaking about issues of justice, fearing the loss of donations. The ability to engage donors on issues of justice, without alienating them, is critical to the work of our Congregational Advancement offices and this training helped me develop and hone these skills.

Connection What advice would you give other sisters and/or other people who want to advocate for social change?

Sister Robbie Trust your heart and just do it! But preparation and practice are vital steps in the process. Stepping beyond our fear of disagreeing with another or concern about what others may think of us is part of our faith journey. When we develop an ability to offer another perspective without disregarding the other person's perspective, there is a sense of freedom. Advocating for social change, even though a rather slow process, brings a sense of renewed energy. It is also about building community, recognizing we cannot reach the Kingdom of God alone.



DACA and DAPA: More than Just a Policy for Me

BY DIANA PLIEGO

For too long, my family has lived in fear and in the shadows. My parents are afraid of the most mundane tasks due to the very real and ever-present fear of deportation that looms over us and millions of others each and every day. Every trip to the store is a calculated risk, every commute to work is taken with extreme caution, and every sighting of the police incites fear and unease. My parents do not celebrate holidays like most Americans. Celebrating the Fourth of July, for instance would require leaving our house on one of the most patrolled nights of the year. A single stop at a DUI check point could result in my parents being detained and potentially deported.

Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) would mean they could obtain a driver's license and leave the house like any other American wishing to celebrate this great country on Independence Day, because they too have a unique sense of gratitude for this land of opportunity.

My family, like many others, immigrated to the United States in search of a better life. In 1994, Mexico experienced its worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. In 1996, my dad lost his job at a bank where he had

worked for seven years. There were no jobs to be found. My father tried to start a small business selling fruits and vegetables, but he had no car and was barely breaking even with his business expenses. He had four mouths to feed, another on the way, and the way things were going he would not be able to afford my mother's upcoming childbirth costs. So, he decided to come to the U.S. in search of job opportunities—a tem-



Thousands of mixed-status families in the United States, like Diana's, would benefit from DACA and DAPA



Senator Al Franken (MN)



Senator Dick Durbin (IL)



Senator Tammy Baldwin (WI)



porary solution while things got better at home. But, they never did.

A year later, after much prayer and internal struggle, my mother followed my father's steps and came to the U.S. with my brothers and me at her sides and in her arms. My older brother was five, I was three, and my younger brother was seven months old. My youngest brother was later born in the U.S. in 1998. This happened despite surgical efforts to prevent my mother from having any more children. You could say he was meant to be born. It is because of him that my parents qualify for DAPA.

DAPA would provide for them what Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) provided for my brothers and me in 2012. Because we had arrived in the U.S. before the age of 16 and met other requirements, we received work permits which allowed us to receive a social security number. That long-coveted nine-digit number allowed us to obtain a driver's license—a common rite of passage that to us meant belonging and safety. But more importantly, we received a two-year pro-

tection from deportation. We could finally get jobs, drive, and plan for our future knowing we now had one. We could now attend state colleges and could be employed upon graduation, a very real fear of many undocumented college students.

DACA changed my family's life. It enabled my family to pay for my first three years of my college because, despite earning a scholarship, it took every member of my family working, including my two high school brothers and me, to cover the costs of room and board. Three years later, our financial circumstances have shifted 180 degrees. We still face financial challenges like many families, but we no longer worry about where our next meal is coming from. For us, that is a victory. I can only imagine the change my family would experience if my parents were afforded the same opportunities for advancement.

Diana Pliego is a 2015–2016 Government Relations Associate at NETWORK. This is an excerpt from a post at www.network-lobby.org/blog.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT REACHES 20 MILLION ENROLLED

What a reason to celebrate! 20 million people have enrolled for healthcare through the Affordable Care Act! Here at NETWORK, we took a moment to reflect on this victory and the hard work it took to pass the ACA. Back in 2008, more than 50 million people lacked any form of healthcare, people could lose insurance do to a preexisting condition, and medical bills were a leading reason for personal bankruptcy.

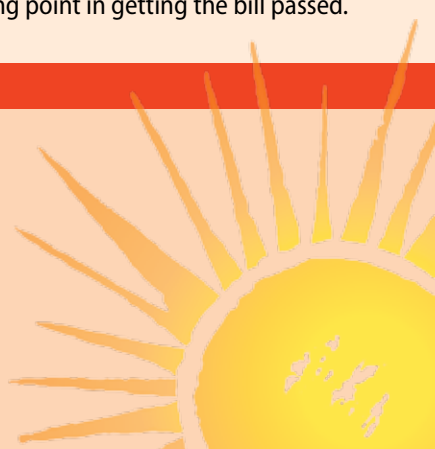
As advocates, we tend to move on quickly from victories to the next hurdle. And while there is still more to do to ensure all people have access to quality, affordable healthcare—we are still working to ensure all states expand access to Medicare, and we have to make sure the ACA is not weakened or dismantled—at this moment we pause to say a prayer of celebration and gratitude that 20 million people now have access to healthcare.

We knew that our tradition of Catholic Social Justice calls us to live in solidarity with one another, and that healthcare is a fundamental right. That's why we have worked on healthcare issues since the beginning of NETWORK, and we continued working throughout 2009–10 on healthcare reform legislation. When it got down to the wire, Sr. Simone wrote a letter of support for the Affordable Care Act, endorsed by 59 Catholic sisters. This gave pro-life Democrats the cover to vote for the bill—despite opposition from the USCCB—and was a tipping point in getting the bill passed.



Senator Jack Reed (RI)

NETWORK lobbyists have been busy visiting senators and representatives who earned 100% on last year's Congressional Voting Record.



House Unanimously Passes Housing Bill, Childhood Nutrition Needs Action

An update from D.C. on key votes held during the past quarter and social justice issues on the horizon



Key Vote: Housing

In a surprising vote on February 2, the House of Representatives unanimously passed HR 3700, the Housing Opportunities through Modernization Act (HOMA), 427-0. HOMA addresses the critical need to improve our housing policy. If it becomes law, this legislation will reduce wait times for public housing units, expand the reach of housing vouchers, and establish a Multifamily Housing Revitalization Program for rural communities. The bill also addresses specific needs for some of our nation's most vulnerable: people who are sick, living with disabilities, or caring for children.

Key features of the legislation include shortening extremely long waiting-lists for public housing and reducing wait times for public housing units.

While we wait for the Senate to take up HOMA for a vote, we commend the House of Representatives for its passage of broad, bipartisan legislation that will help millions of families and individuals live in dignity. As Pope Francis has said, "Lack of housing is a grave problem in many parts of the world, both in rural areas and in large cities, since state budgets usually cover only a small portion of the demand. Not only the poor, but many other members of society as well, find it difficult to own a home. Having a home has much to do with a sense of personal dignity and the growth of families" (*Laudato Si'*, sec. 152).



On the Horizon: Food Security

Every five years, Congress must take action to improve and strengthen child nutrition programs like Women, Infants and Children (WIC), school breakfast and lunch programs, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program. These vital programs provide healthy meals and snacks for kids and are a smart investment in our future. But reauthorization is long overdue and right now some kids are going hungry due to gaps in the current law.

The sooner Congress passes a strong Child Nutrition Reauthorization, the sooner families and communities across the country can increase access and participation in these programs and end child hunger.

In a nation as wealthy and abundant as the United States, we at NETWORK believe that ending child hunger is possible. We are hopeful that Congress will pass Child Nutrition Reauthorization soon, so communities can adequately plan for summer meals when children are not in school. The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry unanimously passed the Improving Child Nutrition Integrity and Access Act of 2016, but we are waiting for a vote on the Senate floor. The House of Representatives has yet to take any action and until they do, we must wait and see what points of agreement and discord are present in the Senate and House plans.

NETWORK—a Catholic leader in the global movement for justice and peace—educates, organizes, and lobbies for economic and social transformation.

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A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING *Creating a Legacy of Justice*



As a current member of NETWORK, you're already a vital part of funding our work. And we invite you to think about creating a legacy with us through a planned gift.

Planned gifts — such as bequests or charitable trusts — can be an advantageous way for you to invest in NETWORK's future.

While an annual gift tends to come from your current budget, a planned gift allows you to accomplish your long-term financial giving goals, either through a gift now or after your lifetime, while enjoying financial benefits for yourself and your loved ones.

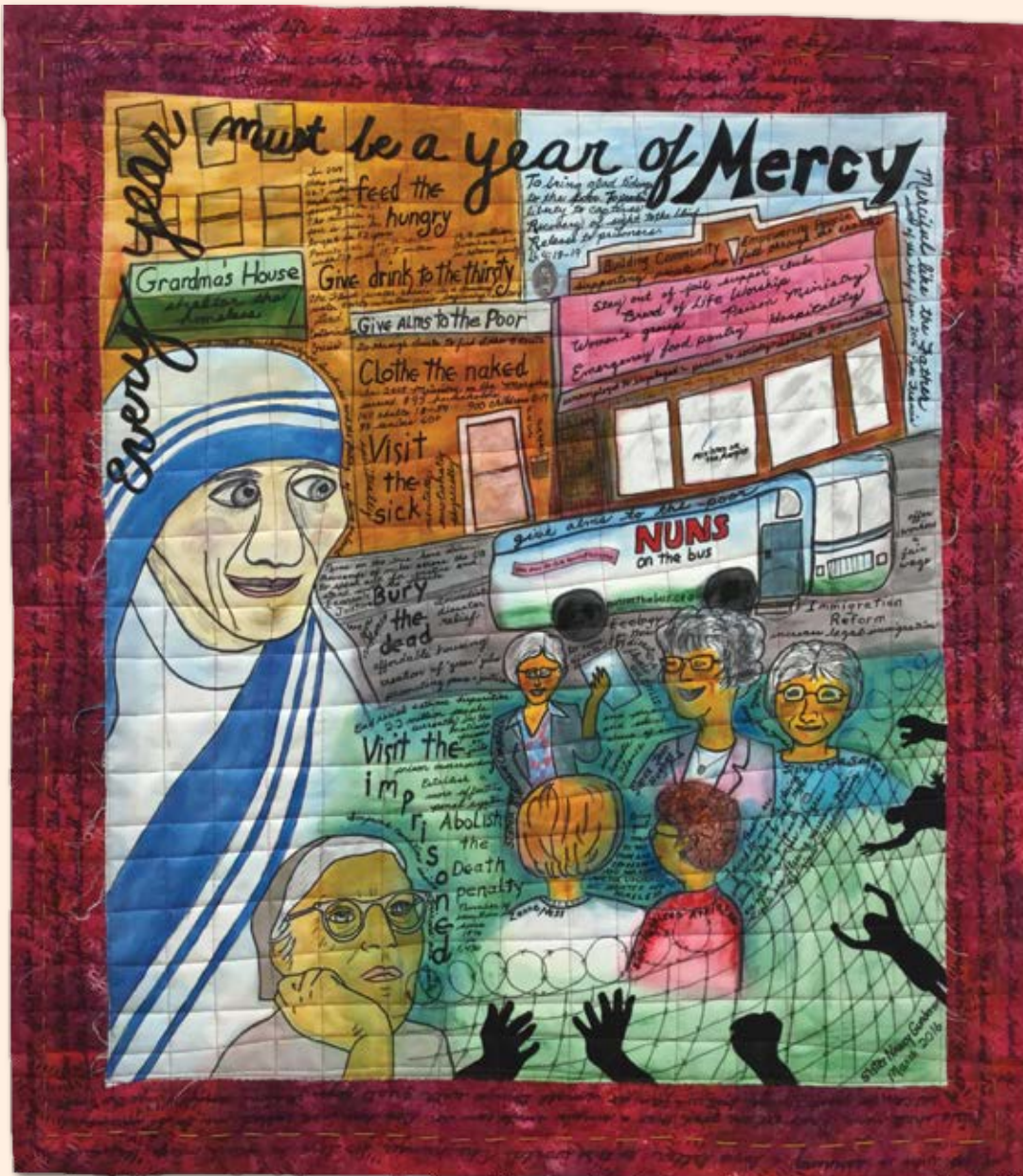
Wills and bequests, gifts of stocks, retirement plans, life insurance, and charitable trusts are all options which can support our ministry of justice both today — and in the future — while creating a legacy for you.

For more information on planned giving, please contact Maggie Brevig on our Development team at 202-347-9797, ext. 217. She can help as you determine which type of gift best suits your needs and financial goals.

All supporters who make planned giving contributions are invited to join our Bread and Roses Society. As a member, you will receive special updates on our work.

It's never too early to start thinking about your legacy. We hope that you'll take this opportunity to include NETWORK's future efforts and long-term impact in yours.

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“Lobbying to change the system is carrying out all the works of mercy in our day and age.”

Sister Nancy Gunderson, OSB, creator of the Mercy Quilt (left) featuring NETWORK's Nuns on the Bus. Her work will be featured at the Artists Celebrating Christ exhibit in April at the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota where she is an Assistant Professor of Theology.