

# NETWORK CONNECTION

THIRD QUARTER 2022



# A TIME TO BUILD

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

Tools for Beginning Local Advocacy  
Q&A with Biden's Infrastructure Czar



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

**NETWORK LOBBY FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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NETWORK Government Relations staff (left to right) Laura Peralta-Schulte, Min. Christian S. Watkins, Ronnate Asirwatham, Chiquita Jackson, and Gina Kelley speak to attendees of NETWORK's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Advocates Training. *Photo by Shedrick Pelt*

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# Toward the Kin-dom

*A More Just Future Depends on Everyone Building Together*

**M**ovements of people striving for justice have the power to affect real change by pushing for policies that build up the common good. Throughout history, we have seen social and political movements arise, especially from moments of destruction and turmoil, to deliver righteous change. Advocates, organizers, and people of faith know that the process of building so often begins with rebuilding, with emerging from a deep hole and the rubble of broken structures and systems.

The process of re-building from a solid foundation has biblical roots. In the book of Isaiah the Lord says, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed. I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line” (Isaiah 28:16-17).

Such is the model and inspiration for NETWORK’s Build Anew agenda. We seek to build up God’s beloved community, a kin-dom of God. Where our political and social systems in this country are not built to include and provide for everyone, we must dismantle, reimagine and build a new foundation, based on the cornerstones of justice, equity, and solidarity.

Pivotal movements such as the Civil Rights Era show us a road map for rebuilding. Racist policies and practices were denying people of color the right to participate fully in a society where they could feel safe and flourish. Civil Rights leaders and activists knew this was not the world God promised, and took on the responsibility to work toward dismantling the old racist structures and building a new social contract that includes everyone. The Catholic Sisters who founded NETWORK 50 years ago were operating out of the same Spirit.

We see these same efforts taking place now through the work of NETWORK Advocates teams and the policies being delivered by this Congress and Administration. The last several years left us in a crater socially and politically — with a global pandemic and political insurrection, on top of distrust in political leadership fueled by a politics of xenophobia and white nationalism. To build anew we must first emerge from this deep hole.

Congress and the Biden administration have stepped into this moment with policies promoting justice and equity.



Mary J. Novak



Joan F. Neal

With legislation like the EQUAL Act and the Sentencing Reform package moving through Congress, we see a desire to repair practices that perpetuate racism and white supremacy and foment Christian nationalism. The advocacy work of our community on issues such as Title 42 expulsions at the border and establishing a federal reparations commission show the dedication to building anew.

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*It is not optional to sit by and allow the destruction of a vision of our society that we know is possible. Now is the time that everyone, not just leaders, must step up and do their part.*

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The signs of our times are troubling and at times terrifying. With growing extremist ideology, an increase in violence, and pernicious political polarization, it can be hard to imagine creating a new world where all can live in dignity and peace. We are looking at the very real possibility of losing our democracy, and if we do, there will be no building anew for a very long time.

But this is our call. Democracy carries both rights and responsibilities. It is not optional to sit by and allow the destruction of a vision of our society that we know is possible. Now is the time that everyone, not just leaders, must step up and do their part.

We must take inspiration and teachings from the change-makers who came before us to continue building towards our vision of the kin-dom. We all have to do whatever we can to redeem the foundation upon which we were founded so that we can build “a new heaven and a new earth,” a future that embodies the truly representative, multi-racial society we all envision, centered on human dignity. ☀️

*Mary J. Novak is executive director of NETWORK*

*Joan F. Neal is NETWORK’s 1<sup>st</sup> deputy executive director and Chief Equity Officer*

## Notable Quotables

What justice-seekers have been saying this quarter

"You have an important opportunity now to shape a new generation, to form their minds and their understanding in such a way that the sin of racism might someday cease to exist."

Joan F. Neal accepting College Theology Society Presidential Award on behalf of NETWORK

"There's these profiles of people along the way that all collectively kind of stood in the breach to protect democracy and I think that's the story worth telling."

Rep. Pete Aguilar (CA-31) at the January 6 Committee Hearings

"Unless this country reckons with its racism, it will be continued generation after generation after generation."

Rev. Traci Blackmon speaking at NETWORK Reparations Vigil in Cleveland, Ohio

"Combatting poverty is a core part of the unfinished business of the civil rights struggle."

Rev. Adam University in Erie Taylor in an Op-ed published at Sojo.net

"My dream for the future of this country is to repair and rebuild from the ground up as a collective to bring about real solutions in our flawed systems."

Haziel A., DACA recipient, reflecting on 10th anniversary of the DACA program

"God does not disown any of his children."

Pope Francis writes about LGBTQ+ Catholics in a May 8 letter to Fr. James Martin, SJ

"I used it to help pay my electric bill, my water bill, my grocery bill...this isn't just some money in my account, this is a quality of life difference."

West Virginia mom Kristen Olsen speaking in favor of the Child Tax Credit at a NETWORK press conference

"Not only is it our duty as people of faith to support those seeking refuge, but it is our duty as Americans to fight for policies that welcome asylum-seekers."

Mary J. Novak in a joint op-ed on Title 42 with Barbara Weinstein

"It is impossible to narrate Black sisters' journey in the United States — accurately and honestly — without confronting the church's largely unacknowledged and unreconciled histories of colonialism, slavery, and segregation."

Dr. Shannen Dee Williams speaking to the Associated Press about writing a history of Black Catholic Sisters

"Why is it that when Congress wants to tighten its belt, it always tightens it around the necks of the poor?"

Rev. Jim Wallis on corporate tax breaks in budget reconciliation

"The central role of capitalism in ecological degradation further exemplifies the way in which the ecological crisis is inseparable from our structures of economic, racial, and social oppression."

Virginia Schilder on integral ecology for Laudato Si' Week



Chris Riehle, Michelle Knight, Rhonda Lewis, and Barb Rosenborough of the Erie NETWORK Advocates Team prepare to deliver a letter signed by 1,691 Catholic Sisters and 4,328 interfaith advocates to their Senators, demanding reduced funding for deportations, detention, and border militarization.

## An Erie Connection

### *The Solidarity Needed To Transform Society Is a Local Issue*

*By Don Clemmer*

**E**rie, Pennsylvania shares many things with other communities, especially former industrial cities, in the U.S. Endemic problems like gun violence, high rates of poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness are common, as well as familiar to residents.

“Those issues have always been dominant in my mind,” says Dr. Laura Lewis, chair of the Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work at Mercyhurst University. “And all these issues are interrelated.”

“It’s small enough of a city that things don’t hide very well,” adds Michelle Scully, Mercyhurst campus minister.

Michelle Knight, a retired social worker and a member of the Erie NETWORK Advocates Team, says the dynamics of the city were daunting for her as a social worker relocating to the area.

“If you don’t know everybody, you don’t know anybody,” says Knight. But that didn’t stop her from starting up a NETWORK Advocates Team in 2019, a year after the Nuns on the Bus made their second stop in Erie. A core group of about 8

people meet via Zoom from across a range of backgrounds and roles in the community.

“What we have is a real shared love for Catholic Social Teaching and the social justice vision that that embodies,” says Knight. “All of us are involved in other things that are helping the community.”

Wider efforts to foster solidarity in Erie reflect the efforts of the NETWORK team, with justice-seekers drawing from the charisms of women religious and relying on education to push past direct service into dismantling structures. They may not be working in direct coordination, but their discernment leads them to a shared justice vision.

### **Bridging Disparities**

Prior to her retirement, Knight helped administer the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, connecting people in and around Erie to benefits. A divide she encountered was how social services were located in the city, but the rural outlying

*(continued on page 6)*



Dr. Laura Lewis, chair of the Department of Applied Sociology and Social Work at Mercyhurst University.

county had lots of poverty and many residents who couldn't travel, whether for lack of a car or gas money.

"Almost all of the benefits were more easily accessible if you had a computer — not a phone, not an iPad — but a computer and good internet," says Knight, who described her work as comparable to an IT person, walking with people through the steps of the application process. "I talked on the phone with people. Many people around here don't have internet."

Mary Bauer, who graduated from Mercyhurst University in Erie this year with a bachelor's in social work and criminal justice, says she came to college largely unaware of societal problems, but that quickly changed.

"Living in Erie I was able to see it first-hand," she says. Bauer would grow into a campus leader, organizing events including walks for suicide awareness and racial justice and helping NETWORK to plan an Intro to Social Change virtual event in 2021 with students and staff.

"They have been willing to listen and reflect and engage with the community," she says of the campus, citing the influence and values of the Sisters of Mercy, who are also active — along with Benedictines and the Sisters of St. Joseph — in service to the wider community. "If we don't embody these values, then we stand for nothing, really."

"I've had other [Mercyhurst University] classes that have been strong when it comes to advocacy, but this has been a great group," Dr. Laura Lewis, who retired this year from her role leading the social work program after 23 years at Mercyhurst, says of her final graduating class.

An animating value of Lewis's tenure has been the necessity to push her students to get involved in the community and to think about issues at the systemic level.

"We need social workers working to bring about change at all levels," says Lewis, "direct service, organizing, improving organizations, and, importantly, influencing social policy. Without systemic change we will not create a society where all can thrive."

While not Catholic, Lewis has found NETWORK to be a tremendous resource, even welcoming her and a group of students to the NETWORK offices to meet with staff, learn about the Earned Income Tax Credit, and prepare for a lobby visit to Senator Bob Casey's office.



Mary Bauer, a recent graduate of Mercyhurst University in Erie, Pa., speaks at a campus event she organized. Bauer, who majored in social work and criminal justice, also collaborated with NETWORK during her time at Mercyhurst.

"It was a great experience overall," says Lewis. "We could not have a better visit than the one we did at NETWORK. It was just so helpful to me and the students."

### Roads to Racial Justice

One of the students to participate in the visit to NETWORK was Michelle Scully, who graduated from Mercyhurst in 2016 and, after participating in Notre Dame's Echo Graduate Service Program, decided to integrate her social work degree into ministry. She recently completed her fourth year as Mercyhurst campus minister.

"It adds another dimension to the work, of doing the work in different ways and supporting people in personal ways, as well as on the advocacy level," says Scully.

For the last four years, a standout advocate for justice has been Janiece Withers, who graduated in 2022 with Mercyhurst's highest student honor, the Carpe Diem Award.

"She is one of the most hopeful people that I know," says Scully. "She's become a great community organizer."

I definitely think change  
will happen in Erie.  
I just don't think it will  
be super-fast.

The turning point for Withers was when she faced returning to campus in the wake of George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020.

"I was terrified," says Withers, at the prospect of finding out what close friends thought of the events of that summer.

"If you honestly believe that there's nothing wrong with the number of Black people who have died," she says, "I can't be in the same area as you and trust you, because my life may be in danger."

Withers found herself speaking up in many different spaces, helping people to see the urgency in being anti-racist. The Erie NETWORK Advocates Team, who have worked on immigration and climate issues, have also seen their work increasingly move into dismantling systemic racism.

Part of this involved hosting NETWORK's workshop on the Racial Wealth and Income Gap, which breaks down the many factors contributing to the longstanding income and wealth gap between Black and white people in the U.S.

"Most of our team participated in a workshop, and we were just amazed," says Knight, who notes that members of the Erie team have lead the workshop locally several times.

"We've decided to focus on the racial justice piece," she says. "The community is speaking the words of being concerned. ... The diocese is talking about wanting to do things. ... It feels like a moment."

Whether that moment takes hold, Bauer is hopeful, as she leaves Erie following graduation to intern as a social worker with a police department near her native Pittsburgh, her focus on civil rights concerns.

"I definitely think change will happen in Erie. I just don't think it will be super-fast," she says. "The Erie community is willing. It's just going to take some time and a lot of effort."

"Everyone in the community follows the Sisters of Mercy in their values," Withers says, noting that one one of those is anti-racism. "They just needed someone to lay it all out in front of them." 

*Don Clemmer is NETWORK's Content and Editorial Manager.*



Janiece Withers, a recent graduate of Mercyhurst University in Erie, Pa., speaks at a campus racial justice event. Withers was honored at her 2022 graduation with the university's highest student honor.



Michelle Knight of the Erie NETWORK Advocates Team speaks at a vigil to defund inhumane immigration policies. The Erie team began its work in 2019, an example of justice-seekers working to bring positive change to their community.

# The Power of Spirit-Filled Organizing

**N**ETWORK has worked for justice in our federal policies since 1972, and the *Advocates Team* model of uniting justice-seekers around the country has been with us since NETWORK's inception. Today, NETWORK has more than 100,000 members and supporters across the country with a presence in nearly every congressional district.

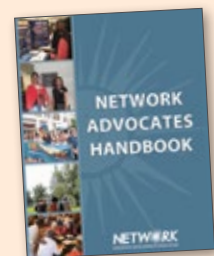
Every time you make a phone call, send emails, sign petitions, attend town halls, or participate in lobby visits, your action increases NETWORK's power on Capitol Hill. NETWORK's work would not be possible without the commitment and persistence of our Spirit-filled advocates for justice.

## NETWORK Advocates Teams

If you live in a strategic building state, we invite you to join an existing Advocates Team or work with us to start a new team composed of people united by a shared passion for justice, desire to learn, and commitment to advocacy.

Advocates Teams welcome people with all different levels of experience and backgrounds. Some team members have been involved with NETWORK for decades, while others are new to advocacy.

With the support from NETWORK staff and one another, team members grow in their understanding of federal policies that support the common good. They participate in strategies



This content is excerpted from the newly published NETWORK Advocates Handbook. Download the full handbook or order a copy at [networklobby.org/AdvocatesHandbook](https://networklobby.org/AdvocatesHandbook).

that have a national impact—at a level far beyond individual or uncoordinated efforts. Much of this impact can be attributed to the meaningful relationships team members develop with their Members of Congress and their staff.

## Living Out Sister-Spirit

Since 1972, the NETWORK community has grown far beyond only those who are Catholic Sisters. Whether you are a Catholic Sister or not, everyone can live out *Sister-Spirit*, the radical, joyful, and inclusive energy that motivated NETWORK's founding and continues to animate NETWORK's political ministry today.

We live out Sister-Spirit when we...

1. Listen with curiosity and humility and are open to learning.
2. Root our understanding in encounter, not ideology.
3. Approach situations and people with hope and welcome.
4. Act out of a grounded spirituality rooted in contemplation and reflection.
5. Pursue Gospel justice with joy and persistence.
6. Prioritize the well-being of others, especially those at the margins.
7. Work collaboratively in community, not "presiding over."
8. See everyone as people first, not just roles.
9. Trust our instincts, are bold, and are willing to do the unpopular.
10. Celebrate together, use humor, and are feisty.

## Centering Racial Justice

Because racism is embedded into our society's systems and structures, we intentionally prioritize dismantling systemic racism and white supremacy in our political systems as well as our economic and social structures. To do this work for racial justice effectively, advocates must engage in ongoing development and learning about racial justice and regular self-reflection. NETWORK resources are available to equip you to do the work of racial and economic justice, organize in solidarity with people of color, and educate yourselves and others in your community about racism.



Justice-seekers organized and executed 20 "Team Democracy" events last year, engaging more than 400 people, including democracy advocates in Monroe, Michigan shown here.



## Encounter-Based Advocacy

Pope Francis often speaks of the importance of creating a “culture of encounter” to bridge divides and Catholic Social Justice instructs advocates to *be* and *act* in solidarity with those who are most marginalized by our systems and structures. In other words, the best solutions to problems will not come from the outside but from those who are most directly impacted by the injustices.

Lived experiences are the most important component of the meaning-making that informs our advocacy, therefore, we strive to center the voices of those most directly impacted by the injustices we seek to end.

- Look first to resources, skills, and perspectives held by impacted communities.
- Reject a deficit-based approach; instead, recognize the assets already existing in communities.
- Center peoples telling their own stories and sharing their lived experiences in our advocacy.
- Involve impacted communities in devising solutions to the challenges they face.
- Recognize that impact is more important than intent and approach each situation with intentionality and a commitment to recognizing and addressing unintended consequences.

## The Power of Organizing

The goal of organizing is to get other people to join us in working for a more just world. When we grow our community of justice-seekers, we strengthen our power. Organizing tactics include conducting one-on-ones, planning effective meetings and conference calls, canvassing, hosting a house party or site visit, holding town halls, planning a demonstration, organizing a group to contact elected officials, speaking to the media, or spreading your message online.

As we work for justice, how do we continue to learn and grow? Through feedback and reflection. NETWORK staff are available to help you debrief any meeting, event, or campaign so you can continue to improve your organizing skills. Whether it is talking through a challenge you have encountered or exploring training needs, we are here to help.

NETWORK also has a number of organizing workshops, and we are always working to add more. We offer both topic-based and skill-building workshops including:

- About NETWORK
- Catholic Social Justice



Sister Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN canvasses voters in Cleveland, Ohio during the 2016 Nuns on the Bus tour.

- Intro to Faith-Based Advocacy
- How to Lobby/Prep for Lobby Visit
- Build Anew Policy Briefing
- Racial Wealth and Income Gap
- Human Bar Graph on Income Inequality
- Town Hall for Tax Justice
- Transformative Conversations to Bridge Divides
- Tax Justice for All: Unveiling the Racial Inequity of the U.S. Tax Code

We encourage you, our members, to share your passion for justice by learning a new organizing skill or revisiting ones that you have used in the past, especially as we approach the 2022 midterm elections. This is a critical time to mobilize fellow justice-seekers to vote for candidates who will advance racial equity and economic justice.



Whether you live in a state with a NETWORK Advocates team or not, we would love to brainstorm ways to multiply the effects of your advocacy with you. Contact the NETWORK staff by emailing [info@networklobby.org](mailto:info@networklobby.org). *We look forward to talking with you!*

# To Die to White Supremacy

*Ingrained Racism Keeps Many From Seeing God in Everyone*

When confronted with racist or nativist violence or policies, many white Americans respond with the assertion “This is not who we are!” Others claim that calling out white supremacy is an indictment of the very foundation of the United States. And this second group is actually right, though not in the way they intend. White supremacy is indeed the foundation of our nation, and it continues to show up in the attitudes of people as well as the policies and structures on which our society is built.

“White supremacy is the non-rational, instinctual, visceral conviction that this country — its public spaces, its political institutions, its cultural heritage — that these belong to white people in a way that they do not and should not belong to others,” says Father Bryan Massingale, professor of theological and social ethics at Fordham University. NETWORK’s April 9 conversation with Father Massingale, Dr. Robert P. Jones, and Dr. Marcia Chatelain laid bare that this is precisely who we are — and especially who white American Christians are.

Faced with the stark data from Jones’ research as founder and CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), that just sitting in the pews (in a white congregation) increases your chances of holding racist views, what are Christians — and especially white Christians — to do? According to Jones, “The biggest problem is that white people think they have nothing at stake in this conversation.”

In other words, racism harms all of us. As an organizer, I talk about self-interest regularly, because self-interest can be a fruitful place for people to work together for a shared good. And in this case, that shared good is economic opportunity and a basic standard of living. My grandparents got it as beneficiaries of the GI Bill. Their wealth paid for much of my college (with significant tax benefits that are not granted to those who have to take out student loans).

But as soon as public goods started to open up to people of color, elite white people rebelled and began convincing poor and middle-class white people to choose their racial interests over their class interests — to ensure that Black people didn’t get access to public goods — and in doing so, to prevent themselves from accessing those same public goods. We need a multi-racial coalition to build an economy that works for everyone and not just the ultra-wealthy elite. We can’t do that if we continue as we have been.



Joan F. Neal of NETWORK dialogues with Dr. Robert P. Jones of the Public Religion Research Institute and Fr. Bryan Massingale of Fordham University during NETWORK’s April 19 event, *White Supremacy in American Christianity*.

In the words of Father Massingale, “The Gospel of white supremacy is the functional religion of many white Christians and many white Catholics.” Which is to say, “white identity is the primary source of their locus, their commitment, their loyalty.”

This kind of truth-telling is critical if we want to move to real racial reconciliation. Conversion requires knowing we are wrong *and* acting to make amends. If we have any hope of being “alive to Christ,” we must embrace the death of white supremacy and act to bring about the death of white supremacy so that we can be alive to Beloved Community.

Dr. Marcia Chatelain, professor of history and African American studies at Georgetown University asked us if we could imagine a church that was seriously willing to give up power “in order to show that another world is possible.” Father Massingale asked us if we could imagine Jesus in Black and Brown bodies.

Imagination is a spiritual practice, especially when we imagine something that doesn’t yet exist. But the kin-dom of God doesn’t yet exist in its entirety, so we must imagine it. We must create and use images of Christ in Black and Brown bodies. Because if we only see God as a white man, then our subconscious will continue to tell us that only white men should be in positions of authority here “on earth as it is in heaven.”



*Emily TeKolste, SP, is a Sister of Providence and NETWORK Grassroots Mobilization Coordinator.*

# Be Angry for the Right Reasons

*Sadly, U.S. Immigration Policy Has No Shortage of Outrages*

**T**une in any news outlet with a right-wing editorial slant, and it won't be long before you encounter stories, narratives being pushed, of activities at the U.S.-Mexico border intended to frighten or enrage you, the viewer. This could be how drug seizures are depicted as if the government is somehow not doing its job, or it could be the dehumanizing portrayal of men and women seeking asylum in this country as some kind of threat to the safety of people living in the United States.

The racism, xenophobia, and fear-mongering wrapped up in these narratives are a gross misuse of the responsibilities held by the media. Their job is to inform, not to poison people's minds with distortions and misinformation. But what's also really tragic here is that, when it comes to immigration and issues at the border, there are plenty of issues that are worthy of our rage! But that rage is misplaced time and again, as a result of campaigns based on fear, not compassion.

The real issues worth being mad about are the result of a very deep hole the U.S. has dug in recent decades through both inaction on immigration policy and direct action, most notably by the previous presidential administration, to make life somehow even more hellish for some of the most marginalized people in the world — those who've fled their homes and countries in hopes of finding peace and security in a new land.

An especially egregious example of this was the previous administration's March 2020 move to invoke Title 42 of the U.S. Code to prohibit entry of asylum seekers, using the possible spread of COVID-19 as the excuse. This order has been misused for over two years to illegally block migrants at the border, even though public health experts repeatedly declared the order has no true medical basis or justification. Title 42 has resulted in over 1.6 million expulsions of asylum seekers back to harm and over 10,000 incidents of kidnapping, torture, rape, and other violent attacks against migrant people.

No court in the United States has yet said the policy itself is legal, as legal challenges so far have only upheld it from the standpoint of administrative practice and capacity. The Immigration and Nationality Act says that seeking asylum is legal no matter how you cross the border.

As Joan F. Neal, NETWORK's deputy executive director and chief equity officer, has noted: "Seeking asylum is a fundamental human right. The continuation of unjust, immoral Title 42 expulsions dishonors the God-given dignity of migrants and violates the internationally-recognized right to seek asylum. We must restore asylum at our southern border."

Delays by the current administration in rescinding this policy prompted more than 80 Catholic Sisters from across the U.S. to come to Washington last December. Carrying signs and praying, they marched past the White House, demanding an end to this racist policy. When President Biden finally moved to rescind Title 42 expulsions this spring, a federal judge issued an injunction blocking the administration's action.

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Christians should allow their hearts to be broken open by the plights of the people who think that, for all its flaws, the U.S. is still somewhere they want to make a home.

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The inability to rise above our dysfunctional immigration policies is also worth people's anger. Administration after administration, Congress after Congress, has failed to pass meaningful immigration reform, despite the fact that they have the power to bring millions out of the shadows and into the recognition of their dignity as citizens. Bishops and popes have called for these very policies — whether some version of the DREAM Act for people who entered the U.S. as children or comprehensive reform that provides a path to full inclusion and participation in society for everyone. Rather than recognizing the power they have to affect transformation of so many people's lives, our leaders have squandered this opportunity, instead allowing our politics and society to indulge the lies of racism and white supremacy.

Christians should allow their hearts to be broken open by the plights of the people who think that, for all its flaws, the U.S. is still somewhere they want to make a home. We could build something beautiful, an inclusive future for our immigrant neighbors in this country, in which everyone's contributions are valued and rewarded — if we just let the right things make us angry.



**Ronnate Asirwatham is NETWORK Government Relations Director. In May, Washingtonian named her one of Washington's 500 Most Influential People in shaping policy today.**



| our spirit-filled network |

# Celebrating Justice Ablaze



The Sr. Catherine Pinkerton Legacy Award honored advocates who have spent their lives working to change structures that cause poverty and inequality. Recipients were the Friends Committee on National Legislation and NETWORK's first five executive directors: Sr. Carol Coston, OP; Sr. Nancy Sylvester, IHM; Sr. Kathy Thornton, RSM; Sr. Maureen Fenlon, OP; and Sr. Simone Campbell, SSS.



Miguel Bustos, Senior Director of the Center for Social Justice at Glide Foundation in San Francisco, served as the gala's master of ceremonies.



The National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC) received NETWORK's inaugural Distinguished Justice-Seeker Award in celebration of the NBSC's dedicated and persistent witness for racial justice in the Catholic Church and society.

**NETWORK 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary gala and advocates training**  
Photos by Shedrick Pelt

## ▼ Memories from the NETWORK Advocates Training ▼



The NETWORK Government Relations Team educated Advocates Training attendees on the Build Anew Agenda to kick off the three-day event.



Josh Dickson, White House Senior Advisor for Public Engagement, addressed NETWORK advocates over breakfast.

During a break in the training, advocates enjoyed an ice cream social.



NETWORK advocates learn how to write compelling Letters to the Editor (LTEs).



NETWORK's Racial Wealth and Income Gap experience teaches participants about federal policies that negatively impacted generations of Black Americans.



Members of SongRise, a DC-based women's social justice a cappella group that encourages perseverance, raises awareness, breaks down barriers, touches hearts and inspires action through song, performed during the gala.

Christian Soenen, Ivonne Ramirez, Jennifer Koo, and Taylor McGee (L-R) received the Social Poet Award for their dedication to transforming the future by pursuing Gospel Justice.



Tom Volkert, member of the NETWORK Philadelphia Advocates team, received the Bridge Builder Award in recognition of his dedication to anti-racism, immigration reform, and voting rights.



## ▼ On the Ground in West Virginia and Ohio ▼



On May 24, West Virginia parents and faith leaders and advocates gathered to call on Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) to support making the expanded Child Tax Credit permanent. Kris Olsen, West Virginia Parent, said: "When I got my first Child Tax Credit payment in July of last year, the amount of relief I felt is difficult to describe... Senator Manchin, this is your opportunity to show us that you have faith in us and believe in our children."



**REPAIR AND REDRESS**  
On June 15, NETWORK advocates organized a prayer vigil for reparations at a parish in Cleveland, Ohio. Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister of Justice & Local Church Ministries for The United Church of Christ, spoke at the vigil: "Reparations is about the church and the people and the society moving from charity to justice."



# Delivering for Communities

## Q&A With Mitch Landrieu



A major accomplishment of President Biden's first year was the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, a \$1.2 trillion effort to modernize U.S. roads, bridges, transit, broadband, drinking water and wastewater infrastructure.

Leading this effort is Mitch Landrieu, a Catholic and former mayor of New Orleans (2010-2018). As mayor, Landrieu performed an infrastructure improvement of sorts when he removed the city's Confederate statues.

He shared with *Connection* about his work for the Administration and its importance in rebuilding solidarity in society.

### Q: What is the most significant aspect of the work you've so far overseen for the Administration?

**ML:** When President Biden asked me to lead infrastructure implementation, he was clear in his charge: Build a better America without unnecessary bureaucracy and delay while doing what is difficult for the sake of what is right.

And that is what we have done in the past seven months.

We have already pushed \$110 billion out the door – money that is going towards cleaning up communities, fighting climate change, creating new and better jobs, and building a bridge to our future economy. And we have got nearly 5000 projects all across the country — in every state, DC, and Puerto Rico — that are identified or are already underway.

I am also really excited about the work we're doing to close the digital divide, both in terms of laying new broadband and providing affordable high speed internet for those who cannot afford it.

That's real results where people live and where it really matters. And we are just getting started.

### Q: What role does investing in infrastructure play in recovering a sense of solidarity in our society?

**ML:** President Biden often says that America can be defined in one word: possibilities.

And that's what we are proving with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. We, as Americans, can do big things again.

And we can work together to get things done.

This once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure is an opportunity to build a bridge — both literal and figurative — to the future. A bridge to a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy where every

American has access to good-paying jobs. A bridge to a resilient nation that can withstand the natural disasters that tear our communities apart. A bridge to an America where no American is forgotten or left-behind — and we are more united than divided.

Bridges connect us — they connect people, communities, and the country — and that is exactly what we are doing with the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

### Q: How does your faith inform your work?

**ML:** I am a big believer in the common good and lifting people up. It's why I am so driven to racial equity work. It's why I think we have to have a moral movement against poverty.

A Jesuit priest, Fr. Harry Tompson, who served as a mentor to so many in New Orleans, told me to “go where you can do the most good for the most amount of people in the shortest amount of time.” That has always stuck with me.

I take that with me in my work each and every day.

### Q: You removed Confederate statues as mayor of New Orleans. What did that teach you about community?

**ML:** A big part of removing the Confederate statues in New Orleans was about reconciling our past and choosing a better future for ourselves — making straight what had been crooked and making right what was wrong.

Sometimes inequity is right in front of us – like the statues were for me — but we do not see it. Once you do see it, it is hard to look away.

The other thing that was more basic is that our public spaces belong to all of us. The names of buildings, the statues we erect, the way we remember our history do really matter. Making sure everyone is included is critical.

With the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we are taking a large step in the right direction. We are ensuring every community has access to safe and clean drinking water. We are ensuring every community has access to high-speed Internet. And we are ensuring every community is protected from the devastating effects of the climate crisis.

The future of our communities requires righting the past and building for the future. And that is what we will do with President Biden's once-in-a-generation investment in infrastructure.

Photo: Moody College of Communication via Wikimedia Commons (flickr.com/people/42941359@N06)

ORGANIZATIONS

Benedictine Sisters of Chicago  
 Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary,  
 Eastern American Province  
 Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth  
 Sisters of Mercy of the Americas  
 Sisters of St. Joseph, Watertown, NY  
 Daughters of Charity, Province  
 of St. Louise  
 Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate  
 Heart of Mary, Scranton, PA

INDIVIDUALS

Judith Beck  
 James Benjamin  
 Peter Cline  
 Lynn Corwin  
 Barbara Davies  
 Dawn-Marie Driscoll  
 Donna Fathke  
 Br. Cristoforo Fernandez, OFM Conv.  
 Anna Gallagher  
 Elizabeth Gavula  
 Michele Gonzalez  
 Paulette Grandmont  
 Jill Hamze  
 Caroline Helmuth  
 Kathleen Hennessy  
 Michael Holland  
 Jane Houtman  
 Diane Imhoff  
 Peter Kearney  
 John Keiser  
 Lyn Kirkconnell  
 Donald LaSalle  
 Sr. Emily Masse, OP  
 Mary and Nicholas Mele  
 Connie Hohlfeld Molbeck  
 Kevin O’Keefe  
 Sr. Joan Petito, CSJ  
 Doris Piatak  
 Kay Randolph-Back  
 Sr. Carol Ries, SNJM  
 Felicia Silcox  
 Betsy Spiering  
 Thomas Stang  
 Richard Stempien  
 Peter Toms  
 Kathleen Wagner  
 Mary Wehrle  
 Mary T. Yelenick



Thank you to all those who have joined us in celebrating our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary so far this year, including those contributing to our goal to raise \$5 million to build our Endowment Fund. In the time after we shared this goal in the last issue of *Connection*, we have now reached \$3.96 million in gifts and pledges, 79 percent of our goal. This fund will anchor the future work of NETWORK, ensure the continued work for the common good, and allow us to grow our capabilities in the exciting years to come.

We are grateful to recognize the following organizations and individuals who have contributed to building the NETWORK Endowment Fund since our public phase launched in April, as of the time of this printing. If your name was omitted or was recorded incorrectly, we hope you will understand and inform us so we may make a correction. We will continue to acknowledge gifts and pledges made throughout 2022 in *Connection*, and we invite all members of the NETWORK community to join in this joyful investment in the future of our political ministry.



To make a contribution to the NETWORK Endowment Fund today, please go to [www.networkadvocates.org/endowment](http://www.networkadvocates.org/endowment), or include your gift with the envelope found in this issue of *Connection*, with “Endowment Fund” written on the memo line.

The NETWORK Endowment Fund is a board-designated quasi-endowment administered by NETWORK Advocates, a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization, and this donation is tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. If you have any questions or would like to discuss your involvement with the NETWORK 50<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary Endowment Fund Campaign, please contact Kristin Schol, Major Gifts Officer ([kschol@networklobby.org](mailto:kschol@networklobby.org)), or Maggie Brevig, Development Director ([mbrevig@networklobby.org](mailto:mbrevig@networklobby.org)), at (202) 347-9797, extensions 202 and 217, respectively.



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## HOW IT STARTED



## HOW IT'S GOING



*NETWORK Foundress and first executive director Sr. Carol Coston, OP (center), pictured with former NETWORK board member Sr. Pat Siemen, OP (left) and NETWORK's first lobbyist Sr. Maureen Kelleher, RHSM (right) in a photo from the NETWORK archives and during NETWORK's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala and Advocates Training in April.*