

NETWORK CONNECTION

THIRD QUARTER 2023

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Justice-Seekers Demand Care, Not Cuts

The Border Policies We Really Need



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SOLIDARITY

Grounded in Gospel values and the Catholic social justice tradition, NETWORK transforms our society by shaping federal policies that achieve racial, economic, and social justice; serve the common good; and honor the dignity of all.

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ON THE COVER

Fr. Frank Pizzarelli, Sr. Tesa Fitzgerald, Angel Reyes, Serena Martin-Ligouri and Monique Fitzgerald participate in NETWORK's Long Island Care Not Cuts rally on May 22 in Brentwood, N.Y. Leaders in community care came together with other justice-seekers to oppose cuts to healthcare, housing, and nutrition as a way of lowering deficits in the federal budget. Photo: Colin Martinez Longmore

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The Edge of Solidarity

Renewal Comes From Expanding Our View of the Human Family



Joan F. Neal is NETWORK's Deputy Executive Director and Chief Equity Officer.

This past spring, the Vatican issued a document repudiating the “doctrine of discovery,” which was used to justify colonialism and atrocities against Indigenous people for centuries. While this movement by the church is welcome and long overdue, it is not without its flaws. Not only does the Vatican document minimize the church’s active and supportive role in colonialism and the oppression and abuse of Indigenous people, it also makes no mention of the transatlantic slave trade. Once again, the institutional church has failed to take responsibility for its role in enslaving human beings.

This is a helpful illustration of how even those who seek to be allies in the struggle for justice in our society will be confronted time and again by the limits they place on solidarity — by the people whose struggles we fail or choose not to see. Solidarity is like the edges of a canvas or picture frame. It can be extended wide to include the entire human family. Or it can be narrowed so that some individuals, or even entire communities, are left standing beyond the edges of our “family picture.”

Solidarity can also be like the aperture that adjusts how much light is let into a camera lens. When we set the aperture of solidarity wide, the light can be dazzling, causing so many people — overcome by their role in systems and structures of injustice and oppression — to shut down and retreat to a place of defensiveness and frailty. Every time a politician or media figure decries “wokeness” in our society, I shake my head, sadly aware that this is probably a person who sees the systemic problems and injustices in our midst, but also doesn’t want to do the work to correct these problems, perhaps afraid of what they might be asked to give up in the process.


It is essential that we persist in doing the real work of solidarity — that we let in the light and extend the frame to the whole picture. We know from Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching (such as articulated by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*) that all of us are connected. When we’re selective in our solidarity, we can make well-intentioned missteps. Recall, in the wake of the 2016 election, how reporters flocked to diners in rural Pennsylvania in an effort to understand and empathize with the “left behind” Trump voter. This attempt at solidarity with one group was admirable, of course, but failed to recognize the wave of destructive policies against Black and Brown communities and the very fabric of U.S. democracy that was unleashed by Trump’s victory.

Today, it’s clearer than ever that we face a political movement in this country whose capacity for solidarity is completely closed off to others and only includes themselves and people who look and think like them.

Christian nationalism embraces the dismantling of democratic structures and weaponization of systems of government to punish those outside of their group and to further oppress people who question this raw use of power that benefits only a white, wealthy few.

This aggressive anti-democratic movement has been on full display as it moves through state legislatures and other government bodies. It is animated by an awareness that, ironically, feeds into the worst aspects of its own rhetoric: that white Christians represent a shrinking, dying demographic, and that their values are not shared by younger generations. Of course, full participation in society by a multitude of diverse communities is not the end of anyone’s way of life, unless that way of life is defined by racism. The fear of being replaced by one’s neighbor is the antithesis of solidarity.

Pope Francis has distinguished between populist political movements, which destroy democracy, and movements that are truly popular — that is, of the people — which can be a source of deep renewal in their societies. During this first half of 2023, NETWORK has embraced Pope Francis’ distinction and embarked on a movement for unflinching solidarity, declaring that communities in poverty cannot be held hostage to reckless and cruel budget cuts. That migrant people cannot be left out of our calculus of who matters as we build this country anew. That Black and Brown people, women and children are also made in the image and likeness of God, and their dignity must be respected. That solidarity is our only path out of the destructive environment of our society today.

We affirm time and again that universal solidarity cannot be separated from the long-term protection of our democracy and the transformation of our politics. In fact, it is the key to lasting freedom and equality, and to the renewal and the authenticity of our own popular movement. Leaving people neglected outside the limits of our frame is a recipe for disaster. But journeying together in true solidarity is indeed the way to the Beloved community, “one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” 

Notable Quotables

What justice-seekers have been saying this quarter

"Voting rights won. But we must continue to be vigilant so that all citizens enjoy their right to choose the leaders they want, and they and their families can live and thrive."

— Joan F. Neal, NETWORK Deputy Executive Director and Chief Equity Officer on the Supreme Court's June 8 *Allen v. Milligan* decision

"Both the Asylum Ban Rule and the House bill are failures of courage and justice. The recent tragedies including the killing of asylum seekers in Brownsville, Texas and the deadly fire in Ciudad Juarez remind us that U.S. immigration policies lead to the death of our immigrant siblings and stoke fear in our communities."

— Ronnate Asirwatham, NETWORK Director of Government Relations, May 10

"Political violence is always unacceptable and should be called out as the affront to our democracy that it is."

— Mary J. Novak, NETWORK Executive Director, on the attack on Rep. Gerry Connelly's office in Virginia, May 15

"For 50 years, Network has been lifting up the moral voice of the sisters, one of the most powerful moral voices we have nationally and globally; this is a real boon for those of us working for climate action."

— José Aguto, executive director of the Catholic Climate Covenant, quoted in an NCR Earthbeat article on the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration gifting NETWORK \$1.5 million to get into climate advocacy

"The Gospel is a social Gospel. The gospel is a liberating Gospel. And if, when you preach it, it does not do those things, it is not the Gospel."

— Rev. Traci Blackmon, quoted in 'The Gospel Is a Social Gospel' by Gary Dorrien in *Commonweal*, May 5

"The God that I believe in always fed people. So much so that he even had his son feed people."

— Lauren Reliford of Sojourners at the Care not Cuts Rally on Capitol Hill, April 26

"[A]ll of us are called to cultivate relationships of fraternity and cooperation, avoiding divisions, not retreating into our own community, not concerned to stake out our individual territory, but

rather opening our hearts to mutual love."

— Pope Francis, from his homily in Budapest, Hungary, April 30

"I believe that human beings have the capacity to learn and grow past the sin of racism and all its ugly patterns."

— Jarrett Smith, "AAPI Heritage Month Invites Reflection and Reparation," May 1

"Making work that's dignified and accessible is really where we need to put our attention in policy work."

— Sr. Robbie Pentecost, OSF, NETWORK board member, in remarks at a dialogue hosted by the Georgetown Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, May 31



This is the wall at the U.S - Mexico Border in San Diego. Source: Amyyfor via Wikimedia Commons

Care for the Border

True Investment Means a Move from Militarization to Community

BY BRIANA JANSKY

When the COVID-19 pandemic stopped the world in its path in 2020, the Trump administration used it as an excuse to prevent asylum seekers from coming through at the U.S.-Mexico border. These policies aggressively restricted access to ports of entry for those who were fleeing imminent danger. Now, three years later and with the state of emergency officially ended, migrants still face unjust policies and unethical barriers that prevent them from safely seeking asylum in the United States.

Asylum is a necessity and a human right. In his message for the 2023 World Day of Migrants and Refugees, Pope Francis writes that “even as we work to ensure that in every case migration is the fruit of a free decision, we are called to show maximum respect for the dignity of each migrant; this entails accompanying and managing waves of immigration as best we can, constructing bridges and not walls, expanding channels for a safe and regular migration. In whatever place we decide to build our future, in the country of our birth or elsewhere, the important

(continued on page 6)

thing is that there always be a community ready to welcome, protect, promote and integrate everyone, without distinctions and without excluding anyone.”

In contrast to a witness like this from the world’s most prominent religious leader, in the U.S. policymakers struggle to provide ethical and welcoming pathways and policies for migrant people. The U.S. government refuses to enforce the law, where asking for asylum is legal regardless of the manner of entry to the country, and continues to focus on more militarization. Increased militarization at the border continues to make life even more difficult for incredibly vulnerable people and harms the fabric of solidarity in communities.

Policy Breakdown

The Title 42 expulsion policy, a pandemic rule put in place by President Trump and continued under President Biden, allowed U.S. officials to swiftly turn away migrants seeking asylum at the border. While Title 42 ended on May 11, when President Biden ended the public health emergency, the Administration has expanded and enacted other policies to further attack the right to asylum, despite President Biden’s promise to put an end to such practices. The new laws are the most aggressive ban on asylum the U.S. has seen in almost 30 years, preventing access to protection for migrants at the border by over 50 percent.

A May 11 statement from 16 Catholic organizations — including NETWORK, Jesuit Refugee Service/USA, Hope Border Institute, Kino Border Initiative, Franciscan Action Network, Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns, and Pax Christi USA — gave voice to Catholic outrage over the move:

“Through continued restrictions on asylum and the militarization of the

“In our attempt to provide fundamental humanitarian aid to those most vulnerable, our community gets policed as though we are criminals for being good Samaritans.”

PATRICK GIULIANI

border, the U.S. government has shut the door to many of our siblings who are calling out for help. This failure to provide welcome sends a clear message to the rest of the world that the U.S. will not keep its previous asylum promises and instead continues to turn away from those most in need,” the statement said.

The Biden administration’s new rule — the “Asylum Ban” — guts current asylum law. Currently, it is legal and right for people seeking asylum to come into the U.S. and ask for asylum at the border or after crossing it and encountering any government agent. The Biden administration has superimposed the Asylum Ban onto this law.

“The current Asylum Ban policy is set for one goal and one goal only — to keep people out. Policies supporting asylum must uphold the national and international protection norms, and this rule does not do that,” says Ronnate Asirwatham, Government Relations Director at the Network.

The current rule makes setting up an appointment via app the sole means of accessing asylum in the U.S. Use of the CBO One app disproportionately affects Black, Brown and Indigenous immigrants because their access to technology is harder, and they are discriminated against three times as much as lighter skinned immigrants.

“The proposed rule seeks to make migrants passing through other countries first claim asylum in those countries, and in most cases, especially for Black,

LGBTQ+, and Indigenous immigrants, that is impossible,” notes Asirwatham. “The ways in which these laws are applied target the only way that people can seek asylum and this truly affects the most vulnerable.”

“These people who are migrating are still there, and still need our help,” points out Marisa Limon Garza, executive director of Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy center. “It’s troubling that so many people are unclear about their path forward. We’re still unclear about a lot of the logistics and what will come next.”

Many migrants face dangerous conditions in their home countries, including extortion and torture, only to be met with resistance and restraint at the border. Turning them away from safety and security doesn’t make those problems go away, and deterring and detaining them only leads to a host of other issues.

“People on the move face lots of dangers,” says Mayte Elizalde, communications specialist at the Hope Border Institute. “Migrants in different countries are targets for violent attacks. In Mexico, there are reports of people being extorted by authorities.”

The Footprint of Militarization

Instead of creating policies that result in an intricate system of oppression of human rights, the government could enforce the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which clearly states that seeking asylum is a legal right regardless



Sr. Tracey Horan, SP, left, participates in an action at the U.S.-Mexico border.

of the way one enters the United States. The U.S. government could also fund and train more people to help evaluate asylum seekers' applications and assist the organizations at the border and in the interior that welcome migrants with food, water, and adequate shelter, and promote agency and well-being. The U.S. government aids detention centers significantly more, funding them up to 200 times more than organizations that are focused on serving and caring for migrants.

In Mexico, there is a lack of transparency around the conditions of the detention centers, and the human costs are catastrophic. The sordid conditions rose to U.S. national news back in April, when 40 migrants died in a fire that broke out at a detention center in Ciudad Juárez.

"Based on reports of the detention center in Ciudad Juárez, it showed that the center was lacking clean water, food or hygiene products," notes Elizalde.

"These people who are migrating are still there, and still need our help."

MARISA LIMON GARZA

"What happened in these detention centers was a reflection on what our immigration system does. Mexico has now become a host country and has not met the humanitarian needs of the people they have accepted to host. ... The U.S. creates policies that force people to be in a country where they are not taken care of, but instead put in danger."

It is not only detention centers outside of the U.S. that are failing to meet the basic needs of immigrants, but ones within the U.S. as well. There have been repeated warnings and reports of inhumane and illegal policies and practic-

es that take place in CBP custody, and yet the U.S. government has not done anything. In May, Anadith Alvarez, an 8-year-old Panamanian girl, died at a U.S. detention center in Texas. She was the third child to die in U.S. government custody in six months.

As NETWORK lobbies Congress and the Administration to move the U.S. government away from militarization and toward building community, organizations such as the Hope Border Institute, Kino Border Initiative, and the Haitian Bridge Alliance see first-hand how current policy harms everyone.

"We often welcome groups from all across the country to learn about the bi-national community at the border and what people migrating today are facing. Last year we had to complain to port officials because we noticed that students of color were being more frequently sent to secondary inspection or asked more questions, even though they were born in the U.S.," says Sr. Tracey Horan, Associate Director of Education and Advocacy for the Kino Border Initiative in Nogales, Ariz. "It is frustrating to see how my co-workers of color who cross the border regularly face more checks and interrogation both at the ports and at checkpoints in the interior."

Patrick Giuliani, policy analyst at the Hope Border Institute in El Paso, Texas, concurs: "We see the U.S. surge resources that are used to further criminalize migrants and police not only the border but our community. In our attempt to provide fundamental humanitarian aid to those most vulnerable, our community gets policed as though we are criminals for being good Samaritans."

Briana Jansky is a freelance writer and author from Texas.

Encounter Changes Everything

Kim Mazyck on Dialogue and Solidarity in Politics



Kim Mazyck is the associate director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University. She has served in key positions at Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Charities USA, and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur East-West Province. She is a graduate of Georgetown University's Walsh School of Foreign Service with a degree in international relations and has a certificate in African studies.

She spoke with *Connection* about her work with the Initiative and what her journey has taught her about the power of dialogue and encounter.

What do you see as the factors that keep solidarity from taking root in our politics?

KM: I think it's taking root in some places but not everywhere. I think mostly what we hear in the news is that which isn't taking root. But I do think that there are politicians and political entities that are still considering what it means to walk with people, what it means to be in solidarity with them. There are some in politics who are really thinking about the impact on the least of these, those living in poverty, those living unhoused. I think there are many people really making sure that as we think about policy largely, we don't get distracted with things that aren't important, and we remain focused on people who are really struggling.

That being said, there seems to be a ton of infighting and a ton of distraction with other issues that don't quite draw us into solidarity. They don't have us think about the people who really need us to

be considering them every time we think about policy and big decisions. I think that people are, to use the phrase we often use, not keeping their eye on the ball. When people are elected to represent a Congressional district, or to the Senate, or to any office, even if it's a local municipality, that comes with the responsibility of representing those people who have put you in office. Solidarity is when we think about, what's impacting schoolchildren, are schoolchildren eating? How do we make sure people have the things they need, like Wi-Fi in a small county in which a lot of things are generally inaccessible? How do we make sure people can meet their basic necessities? I think some people are really speaking into that. But I also think that the voices that we're hearing mostly are the ones that don't speak into why that's so critically important.

What was the call that you answered to engage on a path of solidarity?

KM: Before going to Georgetown I remember sitting in Mass one Sunday ... being challenged to think about service. That translated into me applying to and enrolling at Georgetown, eventually in the School of Foreign Service, thinking about diplomacy and the U.S. Foreign Service specifically.

I was in school during a time when the policy of apartheid loomed large in South Africa, and there were lots of protests on campus. By the end of my freshman year, I was very focused on African studies, primarily Sub-Saharan African. That really did shape and form my time there.

I spent a year after graduating teaching in South Africa, in a post-bac program developed by Georgetown to put people in place to address the issues of

what was going on in schools at that time in South Africa. I did that sort of thing for a year, and that year of service was the thing that shifted everything. I connect everything, even where I am now, back to that year in South Africa.

Bryan Stevenson said, "If you want to be a force for justice, you need to get proximate to people who are suffering." You have worked with Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities USA. What did you learn about becoming a force for justice through proximity?

KM: I love Bryan Stevenson! I think the important thing about both the work of CRS and the work of Catholic Charities USA is that they are working to alleviate poverty, and to really address what's going on in communities. Primarily at CRS, before I left and went to CCUSA, I led a number of delegation trips over to different countries in Africa, and that was where we got to encounter. It goes back to what Pope Francis says is so, so critical — that you encounter people.

Within that encounter, you may see suffering, you may see the impact of poverty, you may see what happens when people have been diagnosed with something like HIV, and you may think, there's no hope. From trips to Uganda where I met night commuters, or communities protecting children from the LRA, to people living with extreme drought in Ethiopia, or a center for child brides... I've seen some incredible things. And yet, I always came back with the joy that I experienced more than anything else. I can look subjectively with my American eyes and say, wow, this is a situation I can't imagine living in. And then I sit down and talk to

somebody, I sit and spend some time with someone, and what I walk away with is my cup being filled with joy and community. I remember that I can't just see them through the lens of poverty, through the lens of oppression, through the lens of a disease. There's a full person there. And that full person is reminding me that I see God, and that God is also telling me that there's joy in that experience.

For me, that reflection is what I see at the heart of CRS and the heart of CCUSA — encountering individuals. When we do that, we really know what the joy of the Gospels is all about. We know the joy that Pope Francis is reminding us about. That's when we are in community with each other. Our brothers and sisters remind us that we're on this journey together.

You're at the Initiative, a convening space. Francis talks powerfully about dialogue, telling the U.S. bishops, "Dialogue is our method." What have you learned about the power of dialogue?

KM: I'm so fortunate to sit with John [Carr], Kim [Daniels], Anna [Gordon], and Christian [Soenen]. What I've known about dialogue is that, again, it really fosters that sense of connection. That encounter is so critical. It brings back to me a quote from Pope Francis, that dialogue is the way of peace. Dialogue fosters listening, understanding, harmony, concord, and peace. That's what we try to do.

When we set up these dialogues, we are trying to bring people who are maybe not on the same path or occupation. As we approach the issues, how can we bring them together to model what dialogue does? Pope Francis keeps reminding us that when we talk to each other, our opinions and approaches don't seem as far apart as we think they are. When we focus on the heart of the matter, then we can really talk about what needs to be done. We can inspire not just those

who are in that dialogue, but even other people if they experience it or watch it. I think we inspire them to have those same dialogues in their parishes, in their schools, and in their families, and hopefully on a larger scale in their communities, in the county, in the state, and in the country. That, to me, is really impactful.

Where do you see your perspective as a Black Catholic woman fitting into a convening space, in those dialogues?

KM: We want to have multiple perspectives, we want to have different ways of looking at an issue. My lived experience as a Black woman, and as a Catholic, all filters into how I see things — maybe differently from you, or John, or Kim. But by dialogue, we listen to each other. That's when we begin to understand each other. And through that listening, we foster understanding. That's what dialogue is about: not me coming in prepared to say, "oh, I need to make sure I hit these three points." But listening to what the other person is saying so that I'm not just ready with my next response — I'm really processing. And that's the only way we can talk about harmony, and the only way we can talk about really building community.

Compromise is a dirty word in so many spaces. How can lawmakers come together? In what ways can we work together, so that solidarity is not a casualty, and the most vulnerable people are not collateral damage?

KM: When we bring together our dialogues, we try to give a mix of perspectives, and I think that's a tool. We continue to invite women religious, many of whom are on — I hate using the term "front lines" because it sounds so militaristic — but they are the ones responding in schools, in hospitals, in soup kitchens, in places where there's the greatest need.

And so we try to reflect that perspective, including with professors and lawyers, and we invite lawmakers to be a part of that so that they begin to also have a new perspective.

Again, it's the modeling. We've done 151 dialogues; we've had almost 300,000 people listen to us. What does that change look like? How are people thinking differently? How are they conversing? We have a gathering after a dialogue, in person, so that there's an opportunity for people to break bread, if you will — to talk, to have conversation, to not have to be on a microphone, so that they can ask a question maybe they were too embarrassed to ask in front of a large room.

We can't be labeling each other because we disagree. When we're invited into dialogue, we're here together, we're going to work on this together. That's what Pope Francis is asking, too. The initiative is saying that if we sit down and listen to each other, then we're going to foster and better our understanding of each other. And even if we have completely divergent perspectives, we only get closer. It's like anything — when you know somebody, it's harder to demonize them, when you've actually sat next to them and had a conversation. Then they aren't this person who thinks so differently than you. They are a human being with thoughts and a heart, like you. That goes back to solidarity. It's when we see each other as both children of God, both built in the image and likeness of God.

What does healing our politics even begin to look like?

KM: The discourse of nationalism is about who is and who isn't an American, but what I believe and know to be true is that we're all Americans. We need to be more clear about that and have conversations about that.

The Welcoming Call

Solidarity With Migrant People is Intrinsic to the Vocation of Catholic Sisters

For generations, Catholic Sisters in the U.S. have served alongside immigrant communities. Time and again, we have responded to the call to open our homes and hearts to meet the needs of families seeking asylum or newly arrived refugees. Our sisters and our communities have sponsored refugees, opened service agencies, taught English as a second language (ESL), served along the border, accompanied individuals and families, represented them in court, and advocated for just immigration policies. In so many ways, we have lived the call in Scripture to welcome the stranger and love our neighbor as ourselves.

My own story of ministry is a part of this multi-generational call. In 2010, I began my own journey working with the Somali refugee community in St. Cloud, Minn. In subsequent years, I ministered alongside people from Bhutan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Burma (Myanmar), Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, and so many other countries. I learned about the asylum system in Immokalee, Fla. and witnessed the conditions that force a person to flee their homeland in Haiti or Guatemala. My own community, the Sisters of the Humility of Mary, remains connected through the sponsorship of Mary's House in Cleveland. This work connects me with generations of sisters who have felt this call.

Ministering alongside asylum seekers, refugees, DACA recipients, and other immigrants has shifted the way many of us Sisters understand immigration policy. We can no longer distance ourselves from the dangerous anti-immigrant rhetoric that has energized lawmakers to pass legislation to shut down and militarize the border, expand Title 42, deport asylum seekers from Haiti, or create an app that only recognizes white faces.

These horrible policies impact the people who are a part of my extended community. They affect our neighbors. They affect members of our own family. We no longer have the luxury of waiting for Congress to fix the broken immigration system; we must do our part to ensure that a just and equitable immigration system remains at the forefront of our representatives' minds.

It was this sense of urgency that drove over 100 sisters and associates and their sponsored ministries to Washington DC in December 2021 to march for, pray for, and call for the end of Title 42. At that event, Sisters shared stories of ministering at the border, in Florida with the Haitian community, and in cities across the country. We shared a common understanding that our lives are forever changed by time spent ministering in El Salvador, Honduras, and many other countries.



We shared with each other our own experiences of accompanying a family seeking asylum, only to watch helplessly as they were turned away by Border Patrol, or telling an individual that, according to current policy, they do not have a valid asylum claim even though a return to their home country would most certainly result in death. We also shared about moments of community — of shared meals of pupusas or beans and rice that made the Body of Christ a tangible offering that widened our understanding of community. All of these moments further strengthened our deeply held belief that the country's immigration system needs an overhaul.

As women religious, our individual community's charism informs how we respond to the call to minister alongside our country's diverse immigrant communities and advocate for justice. While our ministerial actions might vary, we *all believe* that all people, no matter their country of origin, economic status, family composition, gender or sexual orientation, or reason for migrating, deserve the opportunity to apply for asylum.

This is the foundation of our belief as Christians: that all people reflect the *Imago Dei* — the image of the loving God who created them. Therefore, we will continue to call on our elected officials to stop playing politics with the lives of our immigrant siblings and create an immigration system that works for all people.

Sr. Eilis McCulloch, HM, pictured above with Eilis, a member of the Congolese community in Cleveland, Ohio, is NETWORK's Education and Organizing Specialist and a co-host of the podcast Just Politics, produced in collaboration between NETWORK and U.S. Catholic magazine.

The Smoke of Manufactured Crises

When Fearmongering Clouds Our View, We Risk Embracing Terrible Policy

When we see smoke where it shouldn't be, for instance in a residence or other building, our survival mechanisms kick in, and we move as quickly as we can in the opposite direction. This is a natural, even understandable response. But in Washington, the old saying "Where there's smoke, there's fire" could be replaced with a new formulation, which goes something like, "Where there's smoke, there's somebody trying to goad you into doing the wrong thing."

A fire is an emergency. But a fake fire, a manufactured crisis, is more like a virus that has infected our politics. This year has seen several of them playing out, all of them set intentionally, all of them engineered to try to get someone else to do the wrong thing, whether out of fear or other questionable motives. When someone buys into the toxic narrative of a manufactured crisis, they hasten the harm they sought to avoid. Anthony De Mello, a Jesuit priest, once noted that reality cannot hurt us, but our reaction to it can. That wisdom applies here.

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is more like a virus that
has infected our politics.

Most recently, we witnessed the debt ceiling debacle, in which House Republicans demanded a budget that slashed vital human needs programs such as Medicaid, SNAP, and WIC in exchange for raising the debt ceiling and keeping the U.S. from defaulting on its debt. Never mind that the same Members of Congress voted to raise the debt ceiling without any conditions three times during the Trump administration. The threat of default was a purely manufactured crisis employed by these members to get President Biden and Democrats to do something that their constituents didn't want them to do.

While the deal struck between the President and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy could have been far, far worse, it will still impact millions of people who rely on SNAP for their basic food security. And placing the burden on people living in poverty is a morally abhorrent way to reduce deficits in the

federal budget, especially when raising revenue through taxes on the ultra-wealthy and corporations would be far more effective.

Sadly, making life more difficult for communities of people who need support is an element all of these fake crises have in common. At the state level, we have seen this year a record number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills (over 400 as of April!) introduced in legislatures across the country. These bills stoke a narrative of hysteria that presents drag queens and transgender people as the greatest threat to children. Not gun violence or Christian nationalism. It's especially alarming because manufactured crises at the expense of marginalized groups of people is a well-documented tactic of authoritarian regimes in their efforts to grab and consolidate power against the will of the majority.

Finally, we have the U.S.-Mexico border and the insistent bad faith chorus decrying the very conditions that they made possible by inconsistent and inhumane policies at the border. By not wishing to be portrayed as weak on the border, the Biden administration has perpetuated enforcement-only measures, such as the asylum ban, which exact a terrible human toll on people fleeing violence and other dangerous situations in their home countries. NETWORK and our immigration coalition partners opposed these rules by the Administration, as we also oppose bad bills in Congress, such as the Secure the Border Act (H.R.2) and a bipartisan Senate bill aimed at replacing Title 42.

What then can we do? We must stay awake and vocally oppose the efforts of those trying to goad us into doing the wrong thing. The more we change our behavior out of fear of what bad actors might say or do, the more we ensnare ourselves in those webs. We owe the vulnerable people targeted by these manufactured narratives a response of true solidarity. That is the healthy defensive response that needs to be developed in our politics. Rather than the smoke of fake crises, we should be devoting our energy to kindling the fire of justice, renewing the face of the earth.



Ronnate Asirwatham is NETWORK's Director of Government Relations. In 2023, Washingtonian Magazine named her among the 500 most influential people in Washington for the second year in a row.



Justice-Seekers Call for #CareNotCuts



[Above] NETWORK Executive Director Mary J. Novak speaks at the April 26 Care Not Cuts rally on Capitol Hill, denouncing proposed cuts to vital human needs programs in the House GOP's budget bill. Novak noted that people concerned about budget deficits should raise revenue by taxing the ultra-wealthy and corporations, not slashing food, healthcare, and housing for millions of people.



[Above right] Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut speaks at the April 26 Care Not Cuts rally on Capitol Hill. She denounced the House budget bill as defaulting on America.



[Right] Monique Fitzgerald, a climate justice organizer with the Long Island Progressive Coalition, speaks about the dangerous intersections of inadequate health care, food insecurity, and ecological denigration at the Care Not Cuts rally in Brentwood, N.Y.



[Above] Gina Kelly of Prosperity Now opposes cuts to housing programs at the April 26 Care Not Cuts rally on Capitol Hill.



Over 85 attendees and 12 community organizations from Long Island gathered on the campus of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Brentwood, N.Y. on May 22 for a local Care Not Cuts rally. Speakers included Angel Reyes [right] of Make the Road NY and Ani Halasz [above] of Long Island Jobs with Justice, who described the cuts as "an attack on all of us."



[Above] Members of the Erie Advocates Team pose with Sr. Ellis McCulloh, HM, holding signs that advocate just access to housing, health care, and food.



[Above] Laura Peralta-Schulte, NETWORK Senior Director of Public Policy and Government Relations, meets with President Joe Biden in Accokeek, Md. on April 19. The President spoke about the need to provide good jobs to working families rather than more tax cuts to the wealthy.



[Top] Gary Horton, manager of the Urban Erie Community Development Corporation and president of the NAACP of Erie, speaks about how harmful economic cuts reflect attempts to undermine our democracy.

[Middle and bottom] Erie Mayor Joe Schember and Erie City Council Member Susannah Faulkner, Director of Development for the SSJ Neighborhood Network, speak at the May 23 Care Not Cuts rally in Erie, Pa.



[Above right] Catholic Theological Union honored Joan F. Neal, NETWORK Deputy Executive Director and Chief Equity Officer, with an honorary doctorate on May 25 at their commencement in Chicago. She is pictured here with CTU President Barbara Reid, OP and fellow honoree Rev. Edwin David Aponte.

[Above left] Sr. Ellis McCulloh, HM, NETWORK Grassroots Education and Organizing Specialist, stands with Rev. Carla Robinson of ACTION Trumbull County at the May 26 Care Not Cuts event in Youngstown, Oh.

Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice Commit to Climate Justice

\$2 Million Gift Will Expand NETWORK's Mission

June 6, 2023

WASHINGTON — The Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice are embarking on a new collaboration in mission. Recognizing a strong alignment of mission and vision, FSPA has approved two significant donations to strengthen NETWORK's systems and to work toward NETWORK's goal of confronting the existential threat of our time that is climate change.

"As FSPA, we have committed to the seven-year *Laudato Si'* Action platform journey to intensify actions for greater social and environmental justice," said Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration Sue Ernster, president. "In our efforts to educate, advocate, and act for the healing and care of all, we consider this partnership with NETWORK an opportunity to collaborate in advocacy for the systemic changes that are needed to face the enormous challenge of climate change."

NETWORK has committed to developing and implementing a multi-faceted advocacy effort to address the existential threat of climate change and advance integral ecology as part of its latest strategic plan.

"Because our environmental and social crises are so inextricably intertwined, NETWORK is answering the call from women's religious communities to pick up climate justice advocacy explicitly grounded in the integral ecology approach of *Laudato Si'*," said NETWORK Executive Director Mary J.

Novak. "The generous support and partnership of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration enables us to expand our mission."

NETWORK's Development Director Maggie Brevig added, "We are excited that \$500,000 of FSPA's \$2 million gift will enable us to complete NETWORK's 50th Anniversary Endowment Fund campaign to sustain our ongoing mission for many years to come. The rest of their transformative gift—\$1.5 million—will support the strategic expansion of our political ministry into climate justice."

Both grounded in Gospel values and the Catholic social justice tradition, and approaching action through a *Laudato Si'* lens, FSPA and NETWORK hear the cry of the Earth in this collaborative advocacy effort.

About FSPA

Based in La Crosse, Wisconsin, Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are women religious engaged in furthering the work of the Catholic church and the Gospel. Their partners in ministry, including affiliates and prayer partners, join them in service of God's mission. The sisters work in the United States and internationally in varied ministries, collaborating to minister in areas of greatest need, living the Gospel through contemplation and action.



Justice-Seekers, Use Your IRA Distributions to Work for Justice!

Did you know? You can designate your IRA distributions to support our political ministry!

Are you 70½ years of age or older and have an IRA account?

Or did you inherit an IRA that you must withdraw from?

If so, you may be able to make a charitable gift with your required distributions.

The Charitable Rollover allows you to make charitable contributions directly from your IRA to charitable 501(c)(3) organizations like NETWORK Advocates, without claiming increased income for federal taxes. It also allows your gift to count toward your Required Minimum Distribution. A rollover can't be counted as a charitable gift for income tax purposes, but it does fulfill your obligation to withdraw funds from your IRA.



If you have the ability to comfortably designate some of your Required Minimum Distribution to NETWORK Advocates' mission of justice and peace, your gift will be put to work right away. Your gift will equip activists with the resources and platforms needed to meet the challenges ahead.

Questions?

For more information, contact Maggie Brevig at mbrevig@networklobby.org or (202) 601-7864.



820 First Street NE, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20002
phone: 202-347-9797
fax: 202-347-9864
www.networklobby.org
www.networkadvocates.org

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Connection Wins Catholic Press Awards



Connection magazine won four magazine awards and two honorable mentions from the Catholic Media Association at its annual conference in June:

- **First Place, Best Coverage** — Political Issues
- **First Place, Best Regular Column** — Religious: “Spirited Sisters”
- **Second Place, Magazine of the Year** — Professional and Special-Interest Magazines, including Clergy, Religious, Prayer and Spiritual Magazines
- **Third Place, Best Special Issue** — “Celebrating Sister-Spirit” on NETWORK’s 50th anniversary



“Highly relevant content presented in a clean, crisp, informative, and actionable format. Well written and well-illustrated. Vibrant, engaging layout.”
