



# NETWORK CONNECTION

SECOND QUARTER 2023

*Inside This Issue*

The Voting Vision of Gen Z Catholics  
2022 Annual Report



# *The Community We Seek*

*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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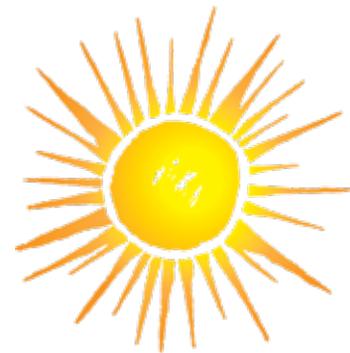
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**ON THE COVER**

Christian leaders gather across from the U.S. Capitol Building for a sunrise vigil organized by the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and Faithful America, marking the second anniversary of the January 6 insurrection. Photo courtesy of BJC.

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# Relational Politics

## *Democracy's Future Depends on Fostering Community*



Mary J. Novak is  
NETWORK's  
Executive Director.

**E**arly in the morning on Jan. 6 of this year, a diverse group of faith leaders from different Christian denominations gathered across from the U.S. Capitol for a sunrise prayer vigil. I spoke at this event, representing NETWORK and the concerns that many Catholics have for the future of the United States. We prayed together for our democracy, and it felt like a glimpse of the Beloved Community that our system of government is capable of fostering.

The challenge that faces all of us is that this group was not representative of the rhetoric and political movement currently claiming the mantle of “Christian” in U.S. politics. One of the results of the 2022 midterm elections has been the ascendancy of extremists in Congress who assert a nationalist brand of politics that is corrosive to our system of government. If anything is clear from the January 6 Committee hearings and other current signs, our democracy is not yet out of the woods.

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*We cannot achieve lasting change  
without authentic investment in the  
human relationships that run through our  
government and our society.*

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Democracy is the container for all the social and political issues that our Catholic tradition so richly informs — the dignity of the human person, economic equity, the rights of workers. We work for them in a pluralistic context, always seeking to build up the common good. Democracy offers protections that policy alone cannot cover and which other systems and philosophies, like Christian nationalism and Catholic integralism, openly reject. These seek to ascribe some uniquely dominating role to Christianity in society and invariably end in oppression and violence. The protections of democracy have remarkably held us through these past years, and the midterm elections played out without violence, despite coming a year after the insurrection of January 2021. I believe this was possible precisely because people got involved, especially at the local level.

At NETWORK, our field is very engaged and active among the countless justice-seekers who have been awakened in the

past six years. I see in them an opportunity to recapture a certain relationality in our politics that has been lost in recent decades, and some NETWORK Advocates Teams are already embracing this in moving ways. We cannot achieve lasting change without authentic investment in the human relationships that run through our government and our society. The Catholic Sisters who founded NETWORK believed in this model, and we have seen it start to re-emerge with a new generation of political activists, as was evident in the awe-inspiring turnout of Gen Z in the last election.

But what we need for the long haul is a true political movement that breaks through the polarization and moves us into a space where we can creatively imagine what our democracy needs to look like to meet people’s needs and truly respond to the signs of our times.

One of the real hazards of our politics, as pointed out by Rachel Kleinfeld and others, is that the very polarization and obstructionism that creates gridlock in our politics wears down people’s faith in our system of democracy over time, because they do not see it delivering for them. People need clean air, clean water, affordable housing, pathways to home ownership, protections against discrimination — things that the government can and has delivered for people in the past! And we have been fortunate that the Biden administration has been able to deliver in areas like infrastructure and pushing back a bit against trickle-down economic policy.

But so much remains to be done. Part of our democracy work is addressing spiraling wealth inequality, the stratospheric inequity in our society that keeps wealth out of reach for so many and concentrated in the hands of the few. The wealth divide works to severely undercut people’s belief in this democratic system, because they do not see it as fair, they see that it can be corrupted, and again, they do not think it can deliver for them.

Despite the peril of the present moment, so many people of goodwill are responding to the challenge. Are enough people unsettled? No, frankly. But in our frustration with the polarization and stagnation brought about by a small number of ideological extremists with access to way too much funding and power, we can look around and see that we are not alone. We even find community in that space. And as we continue to organize and unify our vision and work for lasting change, we find something to be hopeful about, which can ground us for the long haul. 

# Notable Quotables

What justice-seekers have been saying this quarter

"These bishops have to have a process of conversion."

Pope Francis, in a Jan. 24 interview with the Associated Press, calling on the world's Catholic bishops to oppose laws criminalizing the LGBTQ+ community

"It is important to understand that a Christian's life must be lived in synodality, if not we are not a part of the church of Jesus Christ."

Dr. Emilce Cuda, an Argentine theologian and Co-Secretary of the Vatican's Commission on Latin America, in a conversation on NETWORK's Just Politics podcast on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the election of Pope Francis

"It is the job of people of faith to keep the faith. And that is as true in a democracy as it is in a worship community."

Rep. Katie Porter (CA-47) on a Vote Common Good livestream event

"Everything we do to influence Congress to minimize potential harms and secure wins where we can is critical."

Joan F. Neal, NETWORK Deputy Executive Director and Chief Equity Officer, in NETWORK's March 2 webinar on What to Expect from the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress

"I learned you have to keep focused and keep your eye on the prize. You also really need to do your homework and know these issues."

Deacon Sia Barbara Kamara of the United Church of Christ, in a NETWORK Community Conversation, sharing her lessons from the Civil Rights Era

"Pass my proposal for a billionaire minimum tax. Because no billionaire should pay a lower tax rate than a school teacher or a firefighter."

President Joe Biden in his Feb. 7 State of the Union address

"We saw radicalized individuals shoot and kill Black grocery shoppers in a Buffalo supermarket, undocumented immigrants on the border, and patrons at Club Q. This widespread denial of human dignity in our society simply cannot continue."

Mary J. Novak, NETWORK Executive Director, reflecting on the rise of Christian nationalism in remarks at NETWORK's Jan. 18 Unpacking the 2022 Voting Record webinar

"I look at how we tell the story of who we are as a nation and how we got here, and Catholics just don't talk enough about the realities of how, as a church, we not only participated in but benefitted from slavery and its aftermath."

Dr. Meghan Clark of St. John's University in New York City on NETWORK's Just Politics podcast

"We have that opportunity, with our whole hearts, to engage and reflect on and grapple with this history and what we need to do about it."

Fr. Chris Kellerman, SJ, author of "All Oppression Shall Cease," on NETWORK's Ash Wednesday prayer service, Feb. 22

"We are a church without borders. How do we live that out in the world today? ... We need to respect the sanctity of life of all people, especially migrants and refugees and newcomers."

Sr. Maureen Jerkowski, SSSF, on NETWORK's Just Politics podcast



Colin Martinez Longmore and Sr. Elis McCulloh, HM, of the NETWORK Grassroots Mobilization Team and co-hosts of the Just Politics podcast, stand with a cutout of Pope Francis at University of Detroit Mercy on Oct. 12, 2022, on NETWORK's Pope Francis Voter Tour.

## Gen Z's Voter Vision

### *Young Catholics See Connections to Their Faith When They Vote for Justice*

BY NORA BRADBURY-HAEHL

On Nov. 9, 2022, the day after the midterm elections, President Joe Biden expressed his gratitude to young voters. “I especially want to thank the young people of this nation, who voted in historic numbers,” he said, and named the issues they came out for: “They voted to continue addressing the climate crisis, gun violence, their personal rights and freedoms, and student debt relief.”

Gen Z has embraced a platform of social justice — economic, racial, climate, immigration — and they don’t just care about it, they vote about it. In 2018, young people ages 18-29 set a record for voter turnout, 28.2 percent, and again this past fall they came just short of that previous performance at 27 percent. Indeed, Gen Z voters, the largest and most diverse generation of American voters in history, are making waves — and stopping them. The much-hyped “Red Wave” of Republican victories in 2022 never came ashore. The nation’s youngest voters made sure of it.

The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) urges that “all citizens be mindful of their simultaneous right and duty to vote freely in the interest of advancing the common good.” The Venn diagram of Catholic Social Teaching and the values of Gen Z voters has a wide region of overlap.

But do Gen Z Catholics know it?

#### Seeing Connection

According to Colin Martinez Longmore, they do. Martinez Longmore is the Grassroots Outreach and Education Coordinator at NETWORK, where he works on equipping young justice-seekers with faith-based advocacy skills and opportunities. A co-host of NETWORK’s “Just Politics” podcast, produced in collaboration with *U.S. Catholic* magazine, Martinez Longmore spent several weeks in the fall of 2022 visiting

*(continued on page 6)*

college campuses and other venues as part of NETWORK's Pope Francis Voter Tour, making the case for multi-issue voting across generational lines.

Gen Z voters, one of the most racially and ethnically diverse generations, "are also growing up surrounded by an American popular culture that is much more accepting of diversity than before," says Martinez Longmore. He contends that because of this, their understanding of the equity and social justice aspects of Catholic Social Teaching is more innate than previous generations.



Emely Hernandez

Emely Hernandez, a 24-year-old studying and working in Chicago, also makes the connection between the church's social teaching and her own vote.

"There is so much beauty and thoughtfulness in the teachings of the Catholic Church that focuses on upholding the dignity and respect for every human," she says, naming the call to family, community, and participation as the principle that motivates both her vote and her career. She describes the latter as "focused on advocacy work against human injustices" and "working to promote the greater good for those who are poor and vulnerable." Her current position involves supporting unhoused individuals, low-income families, immigrants, and refugees.



Ethan Carrino

Ethan Carrino is a Michigan-based college student and a recent convert. He describes a "disconnect" he encounters with some older church leaders over hot-button and social issues.

"As a mixed-race Catholic who's felt racism in the church, raising awareness,

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"[B]eing Catholic helps me to see how the issue impacts everyone, especially those in need."

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ETHAN CARRINO

ending bias, and having inclusion is very important." Carrino grew up going to Catholic schools but came into the church through a campus RCIA program.

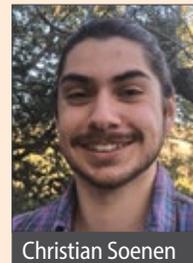
"Our church calls all cultures/ethnicities to itself," he points out. Regarding voting, Carrino says his faith pushes him to take note of things Jesus would speak on and think about what the Gospel calls him to do.

"It's easy sometimes to only see an issue a certain way, but being Catholic helps me to see how the issue impacts everyone, especially those in need," he says.

According to Tuft University's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), a non-partisan, independent research organization focused on youth civic engagement in the United States, "Youth are increasing their electoral participation, leading movements, and making their voices heard on key issues that affect their communities." The first Gen Z member of Congress, 25-year-old Maxwell Frost, got his start organizing with the anti-gun-violence group March for Our Lives. Voters of Tomorrow, a pro-democracy research and advocacy organization, was founded in 2019 by then 17-year-old Santiago Mayer.

### What is Meant by Catholic?

Do Gen Z Catholics see a connection between the church's teachings and their vote? Christian Soenen, projects manager of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University and one of NETWORK's 2022 Social Poets, says perhaps.



Christian Soenen

"I think this largely depends on which circles of Gen Z Catholics I am in," Soenen says. He observes that very devout Catholics on both the left and the right connect their Catholic identity with their vote but that different aspects of religiosity inform their different conclusions on politics.

"Among my friends on the right, ritual, symbol, and personal discipline are components of their practice of faith that then create a cultural lens through which to understand politics" Soenen says, which in his observations translates to conservatism. On the left, "the social message of the Gospels and the prophets form the core of their understanding of their faith."

Among left-leaning young Catholics, this understanding manifests as a desire for a more inclusive and equitable society that prioritizes issues like poverty and healthcare.



Audrey Carroll

Audrey Carroll, 24, is a political communications professional and former NETWORK staff member. She says her faith provides a framework for the values she cares about and

votes for, "by encouraging me to always be in pursuit of justice and the common good." Carroll says being Catholic teaches her to avoid supporting "policies and legislation that only protect and benefit people with power and privilege" and to reject pol-

icies that “intentionally marginalize underserved communities and individuals.”

Nick Cook, 24, works in Rochester, New York at a refugee outreach center. He has worked with homeless veterans and, during college, volunteered with a Catholic organization that serves the people living in poverty in rural Pennsylvania. Cook says he votes the way he does because of his Catholic faith and Catholic Social Teaching. The issues that he identifies as a part of that influence also have wide appeal among his peers: “Respect for all God’s creation — environment, option for the poor and dignity of the human person — higher minimum wage, more expansive public benefits, care for refugees, the homeless, anti-death penalty, anti-gun.”

But he also identifies two big sticking points: “I disagree with a narrative I hear that Catholic voting should lead to voting for anti-abortion candidates without regard for any other issues, especially because I believe conservative candidates have more opinions opposing Catholic social teaching than more liberal candidates.”

His other concern is also common among Gen Z voters: “Thinking about the term ‘Catholicism’ sparks ideas of a lack of openness to issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, even though I and many Catholics I know are open to that. I also believe respect for the gay and transgender community should be included in respecting the dignity of the human person too.”

### Where We’re Rooted

Gen Z Catholics, depending on where they worship and what movements or media they are connected to, may or may not hear their own views and values supported by church leaders. Nonetheless, those who are committed to Catholic Social Teaching seem to be firmly rooted.

Martinez Longmore describes his own sense of it: “My Catholic faith in-

stilled in me a deep sense of reverence for the inherent dignity of every person, and an awareness of God’s unique preference for marginalized and shunned communities. So I see issues like creating a just immigration process, or reforming the criminal legal system, or addressing the root causes of poverty through public policy as a very Catholic thing — even if I don’t hear those issues talked about at my local parish or by faith leaders.”

Soenen at Georgetown offers a caveat on the importance of formation: “A Catholic whose faith formation hasn’t included any significant focus on the social dimension of the Gospel will have very little reason to reject the present destructive forces in politics: populist nationalism, nativism, and romanticized notions of the efficacy of capitalism, to name a few. In this case, faith might actually become an obstacle to social justice, especially if it is understood to place morals in a dimension that is somehow separate from the public square.”

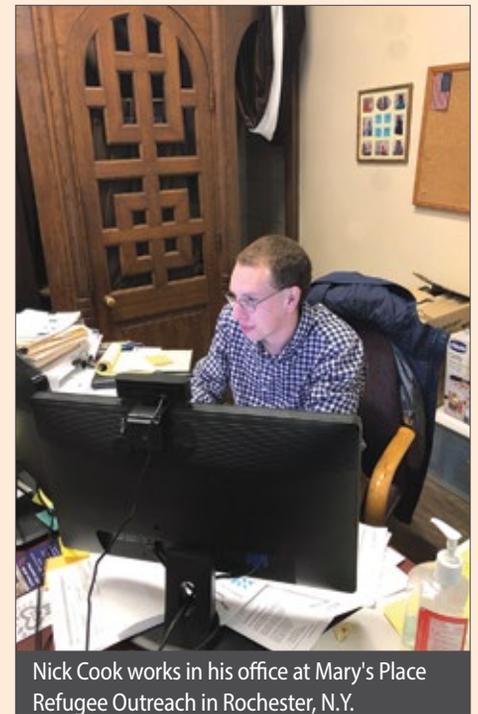
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“I see issues like creating a just immigration process, or reforming the criminal legal system, or addressing the root causes of poverty through public policy as a very Catholic thing — even if I don’t hear those issues talked about at my local parish or by faith leaders.”

COLIN MARTINEZ LONGMORE

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But Soenen’s thinking on young Catholics whose faith causes them to care about social justice is that they will have “an extraordinarily impactful dedication to social justice and will carry with them a moral that is more consistent, coherent, and focused on the common good than another system of social values.”



Nick Cook works in his office at Mary's Place Refugee Outreach in Rochester, N.Y.

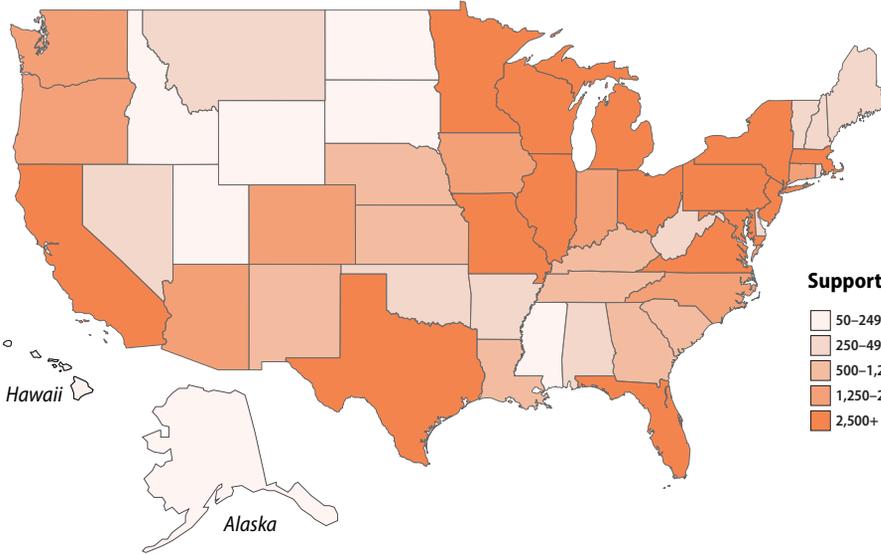
He adds, “When faith and politics are understood together, the faith adds a sense of transcendent importance to the politics, while knowing that that importance is fully expressed in human terms. My Catholicism, for me, means that a political injus-

tice offends both God and humans, and because of that, it has a much stronger hold over my conscience than it would have if the religious component were absent.”

*Nora Bradbury-Haehl is the author of “The Twentysomething Handbook” and “The Freshman Survival Guide.”*

# OUR NETWORK Community

We were honored to have more than **94,000** supporters across the country in 2022



## Our Work By The Numbers

**3,148,914** emails sent to NETWORK supporters in **162** email blasts

**364,412** visits to the NETWORK websites by **112,979** visitors  
**189,338** NETWORK text messages sent to advocates

**29,539** Connection issues mailed to NETWORK members

**810,890** calls to Members of Congress

**132** blog posts published to the NETWORK website

**83** sign-on letters, bill endorsements, and vote recommendations supporting/opposing legislation

**847** press hits highlighting NETWORK's work/positions

**235** press hits highlighting NETWORK's work/position

**37** press releases

**21** op-eds placed

**58,337** TOTAL FOLLOWERS ON NETWORK'S SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

**11,519** Twitter

**965** Instagram

**28,451** NETWORK FB

**17,402** Nuns on the Bus FB

**373** meetings with Congressional policymakers (including **112** by our NETWORK Advocates)

**29** published letters to the editor

**24** workshops for high school and college students

**7** reparations vigils

**POPE FRANCIS VOTER TOUR**

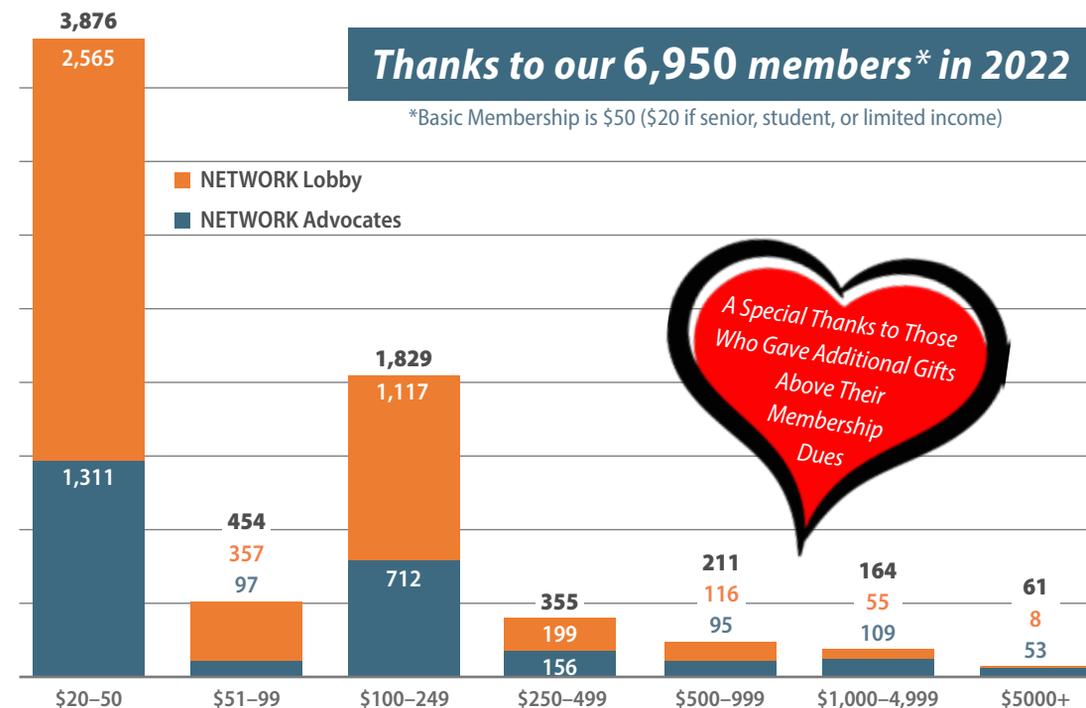
**7** town halls for Spirit-Filled Voters

**5** site visits

**4** multi-issue voter workshops at colleges and universities

## Thanks to our 6,950 members\* in 2022

\*Basic Membership is \$50 (\$20 if senior, student, or limited income)



**1,696** first-time donors

A Sister-Spirit welcome to our newest members!

**534** GEMs

People who participated in the Giving Every Month program

**2,603** Loyalty Society

People who have given consecutively for five years or more

# Bread & Roses

~ SOCIETY ~

Members of NETWORK's Bread and Roses Society play a vital role in building the justice movement for many years to come. By planning to remember NETWORK in their will or estate plans, members will make substantial, enduring commitments to our community's long-term work to create a society that promotes justice and the dignity of all in the shared abundance of God's creation.

For more information on how to make a planned gift to NETWORK, please contact us at [development@networklobby.org](mailto:development@networklobby.org).

Alice and Robert Beezat  
 Kim+ and Stephen Benoit  
 Margaret Betz  
 James Biechler  
 Carol Ann+ and Lee J. Breyer  
 Dawn Calabia  
 Derek Coelho  
 Susan Doherty  
 Albert Eisch  
 Jean Hamann  
 Jane Houtman  
 Irma and Robert Howarth

Mary and Calbert Hubbard  
 Lyn Kirkconnell  
 Alice Kitchen  
 Dr. Norma LaSalle  
 Anne Laurance  
 Sarah Marin  
 Elizabeth Morancy  
 Fr. John Oesterle  
 Rosemarie Pace  
 Suzanne Polen  
 Bernadette Powell  
 Noraleen Renauer

Linda Rich  
 Barbara and Brian Roos  
 Jean Sammon  
 Imelda Smith  
 Rev. Charles Topper  
 Bernadette Tourtual  
 Carol Watchler  
 Francine Wickes  
 Amy and Stephen Zeder  
 Dr. Jerome Zurek

+ deceased

## IN MEMORIAM

We honor the memory of those whose estates supported NETWORK in 2022. We also recognize those who passed in 2022 and were remembered through gifts from relatives and friends.

We are honored to be entrusted with their legacies, which sustain this work for many years to come.

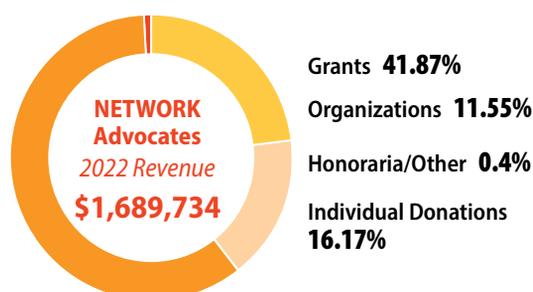
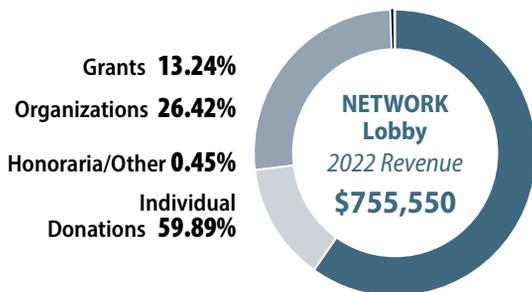
### Estate Gifts

Michael Reilly  
 William Starr

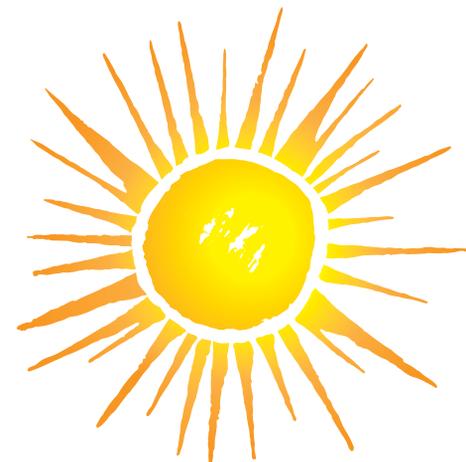
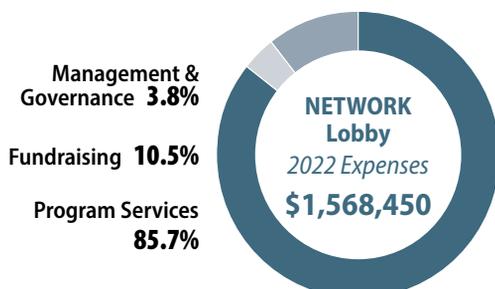
### In Memory

Anthony Albergate  
 Marie Braun  
 Sr. Rosemarie Burke, SIW  
 Madeline Cain  
 Margaret Christensen  
 David Fleming  
 Stuart E. Graham II  
 Joan Kelly  
 Eileen Lebow  
 Grace Lyons  
 Therese Maxwell  
 Sr. Miriam Provo, OSF  
 Edouard Rocher  
 Barbara Sides  
 Louis F. Smith  
 Dan Ward  
 Barbara Winchester

## Where Our Financial Support Comes From



## How Your Financial Support Impacts Our Mission



# Rethinking the Future

## *Sisters Will Continue to Work In and For Community*

I am often asked “what it is like to be a young sister?” I hear this question a lot, by well-intended, inquisitive people, people who seem sincerely interested in my response. I have a good friend who likes to respond to the well-intended questioner with, “She is not as young as she used to be.”

And we all laugh. Indeed, none of us are as young as we used to be.

While it is a question that is often asked of me, my age — or rather the chronological age among my community — is something I rarely think about. When I entered the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland 17 years ago, I knew with all my being that I was called to religious life at this moment in history, and the probability was high that I would always be the youngest. You see, no one has entered the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland since me. My lifelong yes to living a life of chastity, poverty, and obedience also came with saying yes to living out the call as the youngest.

Being the youngest is an incredible gift. I have had and continue to have the best teachers — women who have paved the way in mission, ministry, justice, and advocacy, women who have modeled for me strength and a lifelong commitment to learning and formation. My sisters have taken risks, spoken out, and have advocated for the most vulnerable among us, especially women and children. And I continue to be humbled by the ways my sisters show up for me. When I start a new ministry, when I need help in learning the ways of faithful service, and

when I simply need to be reminded that we do the work together and with all of our collaborators, I am not alone.

Religious life is transitioning, changing, evolving. The truth is that all Catholic Sisters aren't as young as we used to be. The numbers of women religious actively serving in hospitals, schools, and social service agencies are declining. Many congregations are having conversations about the legacy they will leave when their communities reach completion. Our legacy, charisms, and missions are being lived out by our associates, co-members, and co-workers. And this is where the mission of NETWORK enters the picture as well.

When I arrived at NETWORK, I was no longer the youngest. Instead, I joined a multi-generational, diverse group of talented, committed, and dynamic people. I arrived at a time when NETWORK was celebrating its 50-year history and taking the long look back. And while we took the time to look back to our foundation, we have also been taking the time to look forward to the next 50 years and all the ways the organization can continue to engage in meaningful political ministry.

And this is part of the legacy that Catholic Sisters leave as well. At NETWORK I see how Catholic Sisters, even with our declining numbers, will continue to work in community in the years ahead. Our calls and our charisms are broken open, beyond the boundaries of religious life, and shared with people from different walks of life in communities far and wide. And this new and different form of community works together for changes in laws that will foster ever-deeper and more inclusive communities. This is a rethinking of the future of religious life, but one that brings the Gospel ever more fully out into the world.

The same God who called the thousands of women religious before me is the same God who called me. And it's the same God who calls Catholics to live their baptismal call out in the world and who inspires people of goodwill to work for justice and build up the common good. Today and each day, I renew my “yes” filled with hopes and aspirations, limitations, and weaknesses to live this life with my sisters, colleagues, and everyone who shows up wanting to make the world a more just and inclusive place.



Sisters and Collaborators: Members of NETWORK's New York Advocates Team attended an event in Rochester on March 12 with author Katherine Stewart (center) on the threat of religious nationalism. Also pictured left to right are Jane Sutter Brandt, Sr. Phyllis Tierney, SSJ, Sr. Beth LeValley, SSJ, Vincent Stroud, Virginia Fifield, and Sr. Catherine Darcy, RSM.



*Sr. Erin Zubal, OSU, is NETWORK's Chief of Staff.*

# We Have Power to Use

## *Positive Change is Not Inevitable; Nor is it Beyond Our Grasp*

In a world that is moving and changing seemingly at an uneasy pace, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness are quite pervasive. With social media hyperstimulation, news cycle fatigue, and electronics exhaustion, it can be paralyzing to do anything other than what is necessary just to exist. When billionaires can financially influence elections, nominations to the Supreme Court, and entire media platforms in hopes of steering events according to their will, the power of the individual can be easily neglected. But regardless, one thing the sacred texts and my mother constantly remind me of is that we have more power than we think.

The system of democracy has been credited to the ancient Greeks. *Demos kratos* literally translates to “people power.” I constantly see the power that one person’s voice can have in the halls of power. Every time I engage Congress and the Administration, whether through meetings or direct public actions, when people show up, when people use their presence and voice for good, good things happen. This greatly informs how NETWORK approaches all of our key policy areas like criminal legal reform, voting rights, and reparatory justice. It’s all about what we decide to do with the power of the voice and the presence we possess.

April 4 marks the 55th anniversary of the martyrdom of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. An assassin’s bullet may have killed the man, but it couldn’t kill the dreams, prayers, and work of righteous people. One aspect of his legacy that still resonates is how a young Baptist minister from meager beginnings was able to be such a catalyzing force in the movement for good in U.S. politics. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and ‘60s culminated in the passage of civil rights, voting rights, and fair housing for Black and impoverished people all throughout our country. Dr. King knew how to build power, through and with people, on and for purpose.

Gains made back then are still active struggles today. As my mother says, it’s an unbearable reality that the rights she marched and voted for in the ‘60s are still in question today. But it is soul-settling to know that Dr. King’s advocacy and pastoral legacy through Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church is alive and well through the life and witness of Rev. Senator Raphael G. Warnock.

It is a blessing that Senator Warnock does not stand alone as a high-profile person of faith engaging with U.S. politics. Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, Rep. Emmanuel Cleaver, II (D-MO), Jeanné Lewis of Faith in Public Life, Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, Rev. Dr. Barbara Williams-Skinner, and Rev. Dr. Frederick D. Haynes,

III are just a few examples of people I believe embody Dr. King’s legacy of faithful public witness and leadership.

Their witness matters especially because we see today too many bad examples that confine Christian political belief to be represented by a small but extremist segment. Most of them fall under the heading of Christian nationalism — the belief that the U.S. is meant to be ruled by white Christians to serve white Christians. That belief system is contrary to the lofty principles and unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness enshrined in our country’s founding documents.

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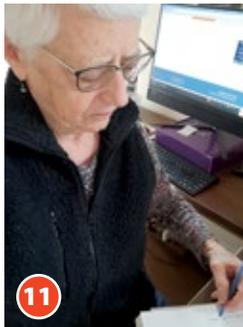
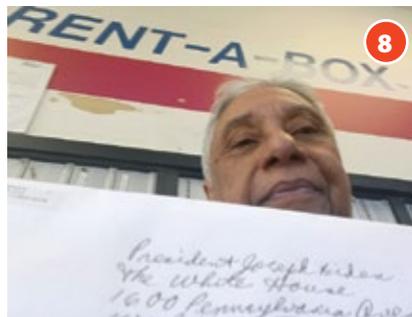
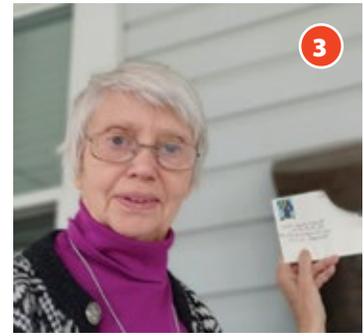
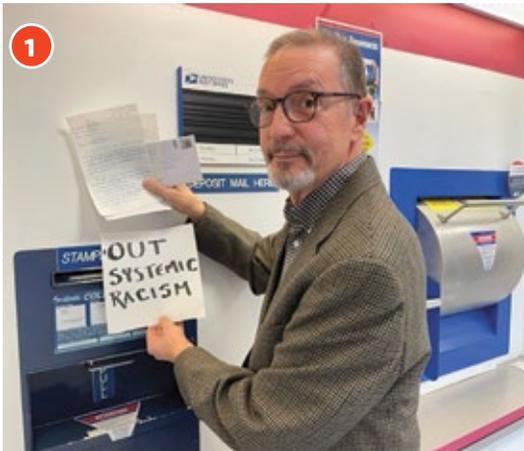
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A tragic consequence of this – in addition to the exclusion, oppression, and loss of life that are the natural consequences of nationalist policy — is that religious faith in the public square becomes synonymous with intolerance and hatred, hostile to other belief systems expressed throughout the nation’s citizenry. It is unfortunate that the faith-filled justice-seeker is a strange, unknown construction to many people in the U.S., especially among younger generations.

As a Black man from the South and minister of the Gospel, I find hope and strength in the model of Dr. King. He reminds us: “Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.” It is a sin — a deadly one — to assume the cause is lost and not take any action at all. It is a virtue to keep showing up. It is a virtue to honor your God-given gifts through presence and witness. This is how we ultimately push past hopelessness and helplessness in our lives. May your power compel you to keep on showing up for justice, peace, and equity.

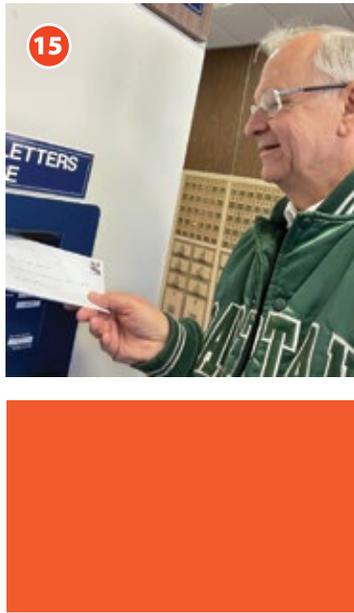


*Min. Christian Watkins is a NETWORK Government Relations Advocate and minister of The United Methodist Church.*



During Black History Month, NETWORK invited our members and supporters to mail a letter to President Biden, asking him to create by executive action a commission to study the question of reparations for Black people living in the U.S. as a form of reparatory justice for slavery and centuries of racism. The commission, a campaign promise of President Biden, would mirror the one called in the longstanding piece of legislation in the U.S. House, H.R.40.

Over 100 people completed the NETWORK form saying they would send their letter to President Biden. These include: 1. Bob Kuchurek, 2. Theresa Rinkowski, 3. Sr. Alice Gerdeman, CDP, 4. NETWORK Executive Director Mary J. Novak and past NETWORK Executive Director Sr. Nancy Sylvester, IHM, 5. Annie Kuchurek, 6. Tom Clarkson, 7. Salkana Schindler, 8. Sandy Figuerora, 9. Anne Gibbons, 10. Odile Coirier, 11. Sr. Carren Herring, RSM, 12. Alex, Mikulich, 13. Bob Kloos, 14. Anne Kiefer, 15. Al Weillbaecher, and 16. Sr. Danielle Bonetti, CSJ



At the start of the year, NETWORK members delivered copies of the 2022 Voting Record to their Members of Congress, especially those who scored 100% last year. These included to: 1. Rep. Matt Cartwright (PA-8), 2. Rep. Mike Thompson (CA-5), 3. the staff of Rep. Andre Carson (IN-7), 4. Madeleine Dean (PA-4), and 5. the staff of Sen. Cory Booker (NJ)



# The Catholic Case Against Billionaires

*A Conversation With Dr. Kate Ward*

When President Biden called on Congress to support the **Billionaire Minimum Income Tax** (which would tax the wealthiest Americans at least 20 percent on their full income, including unrealized appreciation), he tapped into a growing sentiment — that too much economic power in the hands of a few individuals goes against the common good.



To better grasp Catholic teaching on this, NETWORK turned to **Dr. Kate Ward**, a scholar of Christian ethics at Marquette University, whose work centers on economics, ethics, wealth, virtue, and inequality. Listen to this interview in

its entirety on the April 17 episode of the Just Politics podcast, “No Good Billionaires.” Visit: [uscatholic.org/justpolitics](https://uscatholic.org/justpolitics)

## *Why should people be concerned about wealth concentration?*

Inequality harms societies across the board. Societies with higher inequality, whether they're U.S. zip codes or countries, have higher levels of early death and incarceration and lower levels of social trust. ... Many persistently harmful issues are worse when inequality is higher.

It's a social issue, and, as Pope Francis has framed it, a spiritual issue. When we have high inequality, we're concerned about the concerns of the rich, not about the well-being of the poor. Class segregation increases: So many of us are literally not even encountering and seeing our neighbors who are poor. ... The gap between the rich and the poor is something that affects all of us. It's a sign that our society is fundamentally sick.

## *How far back does this teaching go?*

The roots of modern teaching on inequality absolutely go all the way back to scripture — which says we have a responsibility to be concerned about the poor and not striving for wealth. The modern idea that the wealthy deserve what they have is the opposite of what we find in scripture: that God intended the goods of the Earth to meet the needs of everyone.

I don't have any more right to what I make than someone else, once I'm able to meet my own needs. That's what the Catholic Social Tradition draws on in developing responses to our modern situation. So, there's very much a direct through-line from scripture and tradition to Pope Francis and others today who say: inequality kills.

## *How should Catholics think about the tax code?*

It is reasonable to expect that those who have well beyond what they need would pay something in taxes, even a significant amount. They are not in danger of falling below being able to live in comfort and dignity, and that's what the church is really concerned about.

Billionaires have more than they could spend or use in their wildest dreams, and we have many who are hungry and dying because of lack of healthcare. So there's a very clear, consistent justification in Catholic teaching that taxing billionaires is a good thing.

The church would also point out that all work contributes to the creation of societal wealth. There's the idea that Jeff Bezos “earned” his billions, but there are many Amazon workers, drivers, and pickers contributing to the building up of that wealth. ... It's not one person alone who earns a billion dollars; it's the work of a very large community.

## *Do younger generations not have access to the same economic opportunities as earlier generations?*

Yes, I definitely feel like we're living that out. Many of my peers are not in a position to consider home ownership, while my parents were homeowners at a younger age than I am now. Affording the number of kids that one might like to have is very much a live question. ... Younger generations also don't buy into the materialistic American dream idea that happiness looks like working and achieving possessions and social status. Unfortunately, many Millennials and Gen Z-ers are able to reject that idea because it's out of reach for them.

## *At NETWORK, we do work around tax justice. How do you envision a tax code that works for all?*

I think the Catholic tradition would endorse a tax code which is progressive and asks more from those who have more to spare, in which we can use the money to support families and give people a basic, stable life with dignity. ... A healthy society is one where we can trust that we'll be taken care of, even if we're not able to directly pay for it.

We contribute even when we're doing things that don't involve money or consumption: helping our neighbor, giving care at home, raising the next generation, caring for elders, making art and liturgy that makes life worth living. That's contribution.

# NETWORK Endowment Fund

FAITHFULLY SEEKING JUSTICE, INSPIRING CHANGE, TRANSFORMING POLITICS

We are so grateful to all who joined us in celebrating our 50th Anniversary, including those contributing to our goal to raise \$5 million to build our Endowment Fund. Through your gift to NETWORK's 50th Anniversary Endowment Fund, you help fulfill our shared duty to future generations to ensure justice will flourish for us all.

Our campaign to build the NETWORK Endowment Fund is coming to a close this April, a year after the public launch of this effort. Thank you to the hundreds of supporters who have come forward to support the future of NETWORK's political ministry. As of March 15, we have raised \$4.966 million in gifts

and pledges, 99.3 percent of our goal. With less than \$34,000 left to raise to complete this campaign, we encourage you to make an investment in the future of our political ministry with a gift or pledge by the end of our anniversary year, by April 30, 2023. All contributions made by this date will be recognized on the Endowment Fund Campaign page on our website.

We are grateful to recognize the following organizations and individuals who have contributed to building the NETWORK Endowment Fund from December 15 through March 15. If your name was omitted or was recorded incorrectly, we hope you will understand and inform us so we may make a correction.

## ORGANIZATIONS

Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose  
 Dominican Sisters of Springfield  
 Franciscan Sisters of Peace  
 Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration  
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 Maryknoll Sisters  
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 Nancy Woodley

## INDIVIDUALS

Robert Anthony  
 Joan Baffa  
 Fr. Ardel Barta  
 Will Baurecht  
 Patricia and Mark Bibro



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 deduct-

ible 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.



820 First Street NE, Suite 350  
Washington, DC 20002  
phone: 202-347-9797  
fax: 202-347-9864  
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- ▶ Writing a Letter to the Editor
- ▶ Hosting a simple supper and discussion
- ▶ Canvassing in your local community
- ▶ Hosting a prayer vigil
- ▶ Visiting local food pantries or hunger centers to conduct a simple survey
- ▶ Organizing a rally

**Visit [networklobby.org/thrivingcommunities](http://networklobby.org/thrivingcommunities) or call 1-888-897-9753 to get involved!**

