



**Interconnected:
Families and Economic Justice**

dear members

The thing closest to my heart to share at this time is my joy at Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*. While there has been a lot of coverage of it as an environmental encyclical, what is stunning to me is the clear-eyed analysis of the intersection of the environment and the economy. Pope Francis speaks about how the earth and marginalized people are both exploited to serve the economy.

In Paragraph 196 he says: "The mindset which leaves no room for sincere concern for the environment is the same mindset which lacks concern for the inclusion of the most vulnerable members of society. For the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favor an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life."

In other words, the earth is as much an outcast as many of those who are marginalized in our society. We are challenged by Pope Francis to create a new reality, not just some superficial change. We at NETWORK are excited about this challenge and look forward to creating with you a new way forward. This is our work for the 21st century—when we commit to "Mend the Gap" and hold all in our care.

Simone Campbell, SSS

"Sadly, our modern economies often promote individual wellbeing at the expense of the family. As Christians, however, we must always look for ways to strengthen and support families, especially poorer ones."

—Pope Francis, June 3, 2015

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A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

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Third Quarter 2015—Vol. 43, No. 3, NETWORK Connection – ISSN 0199-5723. Published quarterly by NETWORK, phone 202-347-9797, fax 202-347-9864, email connection@networklobby.org, website www.networklobby.org. Annual dues: \$50/\$60 international.

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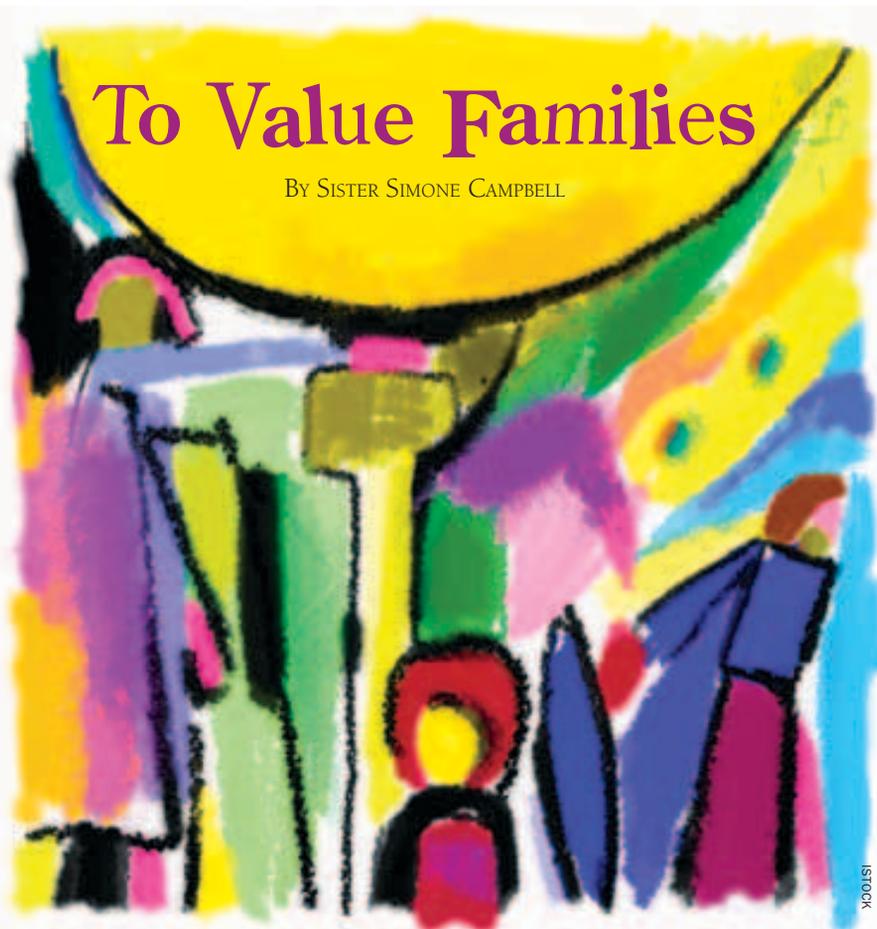
To Value Families

BY SISTER SIMONE CAMPBELL

fFor 18 years, I practiced family law in Oakland, California. I founded a practice and served as the lead attorney addressing the legal needs of working poor families in our county. It was a challenging practice that gave me much joy. What I learned there is rarely considered by politicians. I want to share it with you so that together we might raise the story of struggling families.

When hearing the stories of the break-up of a family unit, I often heard about how economics was at the heart of the conflict. Many clients talked about the fights over how a family should spend their limited dollars. Often, some crisis had been the tipping point. I remember one family who were barely getting by when both parents were working, but when the husband lost his job the family structure was undermined. The fighting became intolerable, and the family split. I know that a living wage and meaningful employment support families.

I had Mexican clients who were challenged to adapt to both a big city and the U.S. culture. I remember one client whose husband was physically abusive. She feared for herself and her children. When we talked, I discovered that she had found fulltime work as a house cleaner to support her family. Her husband only had day labor, which was sporadic at best. She recognized that he was humiliated because he could not support her and their two children as their culture demanded. The crisis was a clash of cultures and the economy. Without proper residence



ISTOCK

documents this situation was not likely to change. She needed to protect herself and the children, but I realized that the U.S., this beacon of opportunity to them, was turning its back on them and so many others because of our broken immigration system. Our laws were helping to break up families.

A case that touched me deeply was that of a lesbian couple who were splitting up. One of the women had given birth to a child following artificial insemination, and returned to her highly successful job. My client stayed home with the infant. When the child

if we were serious about taking care of children, we needed better laws

was five, the biological mother left the relationship with their daughter. My client had no legal standing to maintain contact with the child. It was anguish to know the trauma to the child and the two mothers. I then knew that if we were serious about taking care of children, we needed better laws so they can have the significant adults in their lives regardless of the adults' struggles.

There are so many stories showing that laws make a difference to families. Our refusal to raise the wages of hardworking people puts untold stresses on families. The refusal to fix our broken immigration system cripples families and undermines their capacity to adapt in the U.S. Our slowness to address the needs of gay and lesbian families has created great stress in children. We are better than this.

If we are to be a nation that lives "family values," then we must ensure that our laws actually value families. To value families is to make sure that they have the resources they need to live in dignity.

To value families is to ensure that we can live in our diverse culture knowing that we have inherent dignity in a variety of cultural expressions. To value families is to look at them from the place of our most vulnerable family members: those who are young and those who are aged. If we just stay locked up in caring about the economy, we will lose the heart of our faith call to love

each other and all of creation without measure. It is this love that leads us to focus

on real families and do the hard work to create laws that will support our people in ways that will end their marginalization and communicate to them the joy of the good news.

Sister Simone Campbell is NETWORK's Executive Director and author of *A Nun on the Bus: How All of Us Can Create Hope, Change, and Community*.



Economic Inequality and the American Family

BY SARAH SPENGE MAN

A few weeks ago I was waiting for my bus, which was very late, and I couldn't help but notice that the woman next to me looked very distressed. She held a baby in one arm and the hand of a toddler with the other. She noticed I was looking at her with concern and explained, "I can't be late. I have an appointment to get my WIC check, and if I don't make the appointment, I won't have money to buy food for the week. This is my only morning off, and I have to work this afternoon. If I am late one more time, my boss said he would fire me." Of course, I wanted to help. When I expressed my genuine sympathy for her situation, she told me that she and her husband were both working, but were not earning enough to provide for all of their family's needs. Fortunately, as we talked the bus pulled up and she seemed momentarily relieved. The immediate crisis seemed to be solved, but I knew that this mom had many hard days ahead of her.

I never asked her name, but I have been praying for her since. Like many of my fellow Catholics, I have also responded to Pope Francis's request that we pray for the upcoming Synod on the Family. Still, I know that my prayers are

not enough. As Francis reminds us in his recent encyclical, one person can't do everything, but we all must do something. Millions of parents, just like the mother I met at the bus stop, count not only on our prayers, but our actions! If we join together, we can build an economy where every person is able to find a job that pays a living wage, and where every man and woman can afford to take care of loved ones who are depending on them.

Reality of today's working families

To understand the present realities faced by today's working families, we have to look at the broader economic context, which is making it harder and harder for working parents to stay together, to provide for their dependents' basic needs, and to provide their family with a sense of security and hope for the future.

Last year, Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen gave a talk in which she highlighted some of the key features of our present economy. Yellen explained how the U.S. has experienced much larger growth in income and wealth inequality over the past thirty years when com-

pared to other industrialized countries. Especially troubling, the inequality we now see mirrors extremes of the late 19th century. We are living in a new Gilded Age!

For nearly a half century after the Great Depression, income inequalities were narrowing and parents could expect that their children would be better off than they were.

Today, that is no longer the case. This growing inequality, Yellen explains, is characterized by significant wealth gains for those at the very top and stagnant or falling incomes for the majority.

Today, the top 5% of households hold approximately 63% of our nation's wealth, while the bottom half own only 1%. The average net worth of a household in the bottom half is \$11,000—50% less than it was in 1989, adjusted for inflation. Even more troubling, one-fourth of these households report negative wealth. According to Yellen, the economic evidence shows that the greater the economic inequality within a society, the less intergenerational mobility we observe. Four in 10 children in the bottom income quintile remain in that quintile as adults, and fewer than 1 in 10 manage to reach the top quintile. So much for the “American Dream”!

Yellen says, “I think it is appropriate to ask whether this trend is compatible with values rooted in our nation's history, among them the high value Americans have traditionally placed on equality of opportunity.” Yes, let's all of us ask this question of ourselves and put it to our leaders. This trend is incompatible with our nation's values, and it is also incompatible with Catholic values.

As those at the top become further separated from the rest of us, we lose our ability to empathize with one another. It takes going the extra mile to understand the plight of low-income children when one's own children attend elite private schools and live in a gated community miles away. As Pope Francis tells us, “This lack of physical contact

A.J. Lanza, who lives in a homeless shelter, rides the metro after a day as a laborer on a construction site in Miami, Florida. He is part of the nearly one-third of the city's residents, 32%, who live in poverty.

and encounter, encouraged at times by the disintegration of our cities, can lead to a numbing of conscience and to tentatious analyses which neglect parts of reality” (*Laudato Si'*, 49).

The principle of the common good, Francis affirms, must serve as a renewed call to solidarity with all God's children. This principle teaches us that every per-

As those at the top become further separated from the rest of us, we lose our ability to empathize with one another.

son has a right to provide for their family's needs, while no person has a right to excess. Foundational to this principle, Francis says, is respect for the dignity of the human person and respect for her or his right to an integral development (157). How desperately our nation needs to recommit to these basic principles! If we walk towards each other instead of further away, in a true spirit of encounter and engagement, a new solidarity can heal our broken economy and our broken hearts.

Inequality and changing family structure

Often overlooked is the tremendous impact that economic inequality has on family structure. Changing family structures have, in turn, exacerbated inequalities. Professor June Carbone of the University of Minnesota and Professor Naomi Cahn of George Washington University recently made the case that just like health, education and other advantages, a stable two-parent home

has become a luxury only the well-off can afford. Their book, *Marriage Markets: How Inequality Is Remaking the American Family* (2014), argues that a stable two-parent family is now another marker of privilege.

A generation ago, marriage patterns of people at the bottom looked very similar to patterns of those at the top.

It was not unusual for the son of mechanic to marry the daughter of a banker. Not so today, and changes in the patterns of marriage and divorce are having long-term effects on our children. Indeed, this is the first time in our history that children cannot expect to be better educated, healthier or wealthier than their parents.

Carbone and Cahn show the ways in which economic inequality has affected men and women differently and the effect this had on the family. Financial rewards for the few men at the top have grown dramatically, while the number of men at the bottom greatly increased, thus shrinking the number of men in the middle-income brackets. While a few men rise to the top, a much larger group with only high school degrees are more likely than women with similar education to make up the long-term unemployed and incarcerated.

These men can no longer expect, as they could in the 1950s and 1960s, to find good union jobs that pay enough to support a family. In 1960, 96% of men with only a high school degree were employed and 88% were married.

JOE RAEDLE



Today, only 54% of men with a high school degree are married, and they are less likely than ever to be employed or the primary source of income for their family. Instead, they are increasingly marginalized through growing rates of unemployment, incarceration and substance abuse. Racism is also a factor since black men are disproportionately affected by incarceration rates.

At the same time, gender roles have changed, giving women more choices about whom and when they marry. As more women graduate from college, they look for partners as educated and successful as they are. Today's college graduates comprise one-third of young adults, and studies show they seek out similarly educated partners. Couples who are career-oriented are waiting longer to have children and can afford to provide their children with more financial resources. Since there are usually two parents to care for the children, and since they have jobs that provide family leave and flexible schedules, they also have more time to spend with them. The children then are better educated and college-bound.

The reverse is true for low-income Americans. Low-income men and women are unable to afford college, and have

attended schools that have not prepared them for it academically. Carbone and Cahn show that women with only high school degrees are finding it increasingly difficult to find partners who are able to contribute financially.

If stable families and quality education are good for children and increase their likelihood of success, then we must address growing economic inequality in our nation. Carbone and Cahn argue for "societal reconstruction." Restoring family stability means making structural

When we choose to not invest in jobs that pay a living wage, or in education for our children, we condemn an entire class of people to marginalization. We are throwing our children away as if they are expendable.

changes to our economy. It means that we must reform our "winner-take-all compensation systems" that "created incentives for executives to short-change workers and community interests" (9). Our national, state and local governments should invest in jobs that pay a living wage and provide family-friendly scheduling. In addition, we must invest in our children. We have to prioritize high quality, affordable child care for working parents, and we must renew our commitment to public education. Indeed the call of Carbone and Cahn to reconstruct our society sounds just like

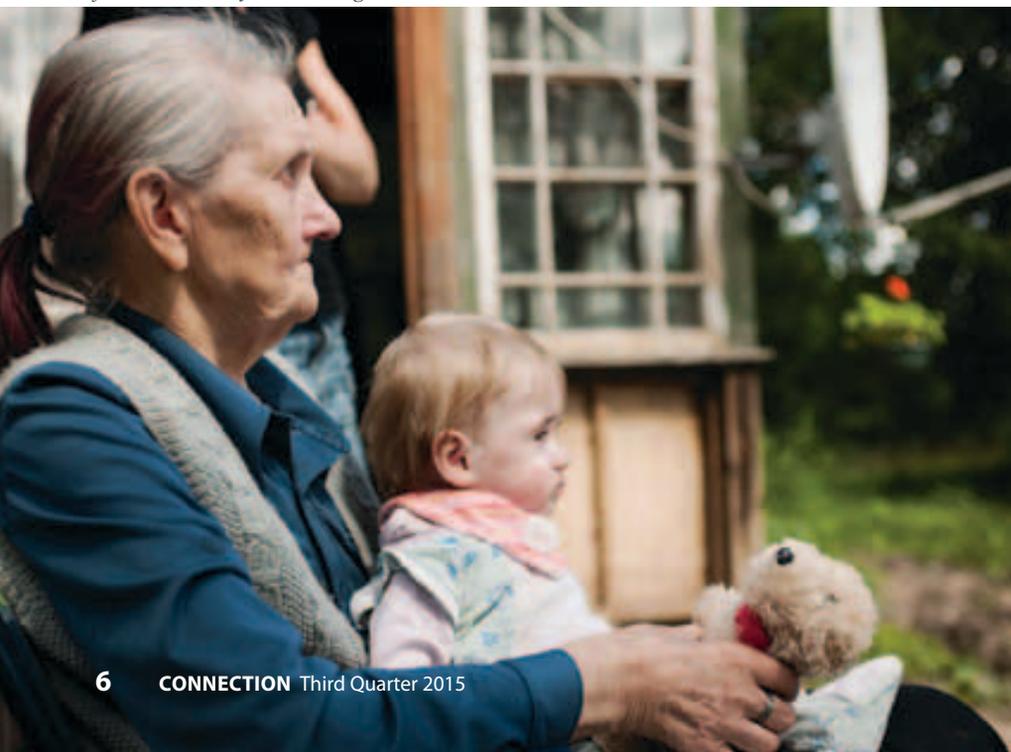
what Francis is calling us to—a conversion from an economy of exclusion to a culture of solidarity.

Professor Robert Putnam makes similar arguments in his book, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (2015). Putnam sent graduate students to interview parents and children around the U.S. What they found was alarming for a country that prides itself on equality of opportunity. Stories and data they collected show that kids who grow up in poverty remain in poverty as adults. As a comparison, Putnam tracked down every single student, white and black, with whom he had graduated from high school in 1950. All students who had grown up in low-income families had done significantly better than their parents.

What has happened between 1950 and today? Haven't we seen improvements for women and for minorities? While this is the case in many areas of our society, the lack of investment in American children means we are losing the intergenerational mobility that people of the United States once prided ourselves on.

Putnam's stories support arguments made by Carbone and Cahn. Higher-earning families consist of two parents in stable marriages. They have the time and money to invest in their children by spending time reading to them, paying for dance or music lessons, helping them with their homework, or going to bat for them when they get into trouble. Meanwhile, low-income parents are struggling just to put food on the table so they can't afford those enrichment activities that, when Putnam was in school, were provided by public schools and the local community. Now, schools to which low-income families send their children are underfunded and staffed by underpaid, exhausted teachers. Children from these families expressed little hope for the future and had low expectations for themselves and the world. When I recently saw Putnam speak at Georgetown University, he said that one with whom he kept contact had recently posted on Facebook that she had nothing to live for.

A 16-month-old girl with disabilities sits on the lap of her grandmother, while her mother looks on from the doorway in the background.



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DORI O'CONNELL

What is to be done?

When I read the stories Putnam and his team collected, I can't help but exclaim with sadness and frustration, "What are we doing to our children?"

Putnam talks about how when he grew up, everyone viewed children in the community as "our kids." The community saw the success of each child as a success for the whole community. Now, our individualism is destroying us. In his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis talks about "a throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish" (22). When we choose to not invest in jobs that pay a living wage, or in education for our children, we condemn an entire class of people to marginalization. We are throwing our children away as if they are expendable.

If we truly believe in "family values," then we must invest in our economy. At NETWORK, we have long been calling for a "Faithful Budget" that invests in just these kinds of public goods. We've been working on tax reform because we believe that no one should be taxed into

poverty and that higher-earning Americans have a responsibility to pay their fair share. Sister Eucharika Madueke, who works with us, is also leading the effort to lobby for expanded family leave, to ensure that working mothers and fathers can take care of those who are depending on them without fear of losing their job.

We are all interconnected, and that means your wellbeing really is tied up with mine.

As Pope Francis reminds us, healing our society requires a renewed commitment to the common good. We are all interconnected, and that means your wellbeing really is tied up with mine.

Francis says we must be converted from a "throwaway culture" to "a culture of care." Can we imagine a society where employers have an attitude of loving concern for their workers? Where communities have loving concern for every child? Everyone would be happier and healthier! Pope Francis says that this transformation of our culture requires strong, creative leadership.

As we head into the 2016 election, I

am paying close attention to what each candidate says about "family values." I am looking to see if the candidate understands that a commitment to our children, to parents, to families, means a commitment to mending the income and wealth gaps. Does he or she support a living wage, investment in early childhood education? Does he or she truly care about working families, and demonstrate this with their policy commitments rather than stories of how hard things were for them in their youth?

I am also praying for the upcoming Synod on the Family. We need the prophetic voice in this country! We need to preach human dignity and equality for all from the pulpit. I am not sure if I will see the woman I met at the bus stop again, but her children are not waste. They are irreplaceable children of God who have unique gifts to offer. Join me in praying and acting for a society and an economy where all children are viewed as "our kids."

Sarah Spengeman, Ph.D., is NETWORK's Policy Education Manager.

Making Congress More Accountable to the Pope's Message of Justice

BY NETWORK GOVERNMENT RELATIONS TEAM

NETWORK eagerly awaits Pope Francis's address to Congress on Thursday morning, September 24. His speech will come days before two significant end-of-September deadlines: the deadlines to complete budget appropriations and Child Nutrition Reauthorization. As you will see below, Congress seriously needs to hear the pope's message about justice. And we intend to make sure they do!

Budget and Appropriations

Both the House and the Senate appropriations committees are releasing appropriations bills that adhere to the severe sequester limits. For example, the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bills in the House and Senate provide \$14.5 billion less than President Obama's budget request and would significantly underfund crucial parts of the Affordable Care Act. Senate Democrats have promised to block all appropriations bills that underfund non-defense, human needs spending.

The only exceptions to this austerity trend are the Defense appropriation bills, which utilize the Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) fund to add an additional \$86 billion, thereby escaping sequester limits. The bills have been approved in the House and await a Senate vote. NETWORK calls on Congress to stop funding the Department of Defense through OCO and instead negotiate a Faithful Budget deal that ensures that appropriate funding is available for both defense and non-defense spending.

Find additional updates on appropriations for housing and nutrition assistance below.

Trade

Trade policy has been a dominant issue on Capitol Hill during the last two months. One of the key objectives in the final two years of the Obama presidency has been to secure "fast track" trade authority, which allows for expedited approval for trade agreements.

President Obama partnered with House and Senate Republican leaders and a small number of Democratic members of Congress to pass fast track, in spite of strong opposition from his progressive allies in Congress and the Democratic base, including labor, faith, environmental and consumer groups.

Having secured fast track, the president will now move to quickly conclude negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. The TPP would set a trade framework with key Asian and Latin American countries. We will be working in the near term to make the agreement more just.

Housing

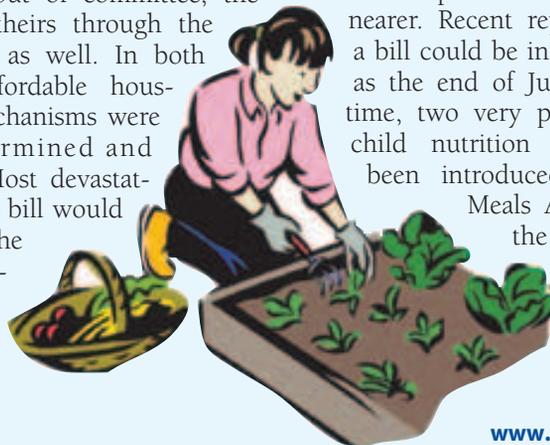
Both the House and Senate appropriations committees passed Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (T-HUD) bills out of committee; the House passed theirs through the entire chamber as well. In both bills, many affordable housing funding mechanisms were severely undermined and underfunded. Most devastatingly, the House bill would effectively end the National Housing Trust Fund,

which provides rental housing units for extremely low-income families, by permanently preventing Congress from funding it. Both bills would cut the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, which provides rental and purchasing assistance. The House bill also underfunds the Public Housing Capital Fund so that less than 50% of our nation's yearly public housing capital needs are met.

On a more hopeful note, the Supreme Court announced its decision in *Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs v. The Inclusive Communities Project, Inc.* on June 25. In a 5-4 decision, they ruled that housing policies can still be designated as discriminatory based on disparate impact analysis. In other words, motivation and intent don't matter. If a practice results in discrimination, it can be challenged and halted. This decision upholds years of precedent and ensures people can still, in the words of the Court, "counteract unconscious prejudices and disguised animus that escape easy classification as disparate treatment."

Hunger and Nutrition

Reauthorization of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (a process more commonly known as Child Nutrition Reauthorization) continues to gain momentum this summer as the September 30 expiration of the law draws nearer. Recent reports imply that a bill could be introduced as soon as the end of July. In the meantime, two very positive pieces of child nutrition legislation have been introduced: the Summer Meals Act of 2015 and the Stop Child Summer Hunger Act of 2015.



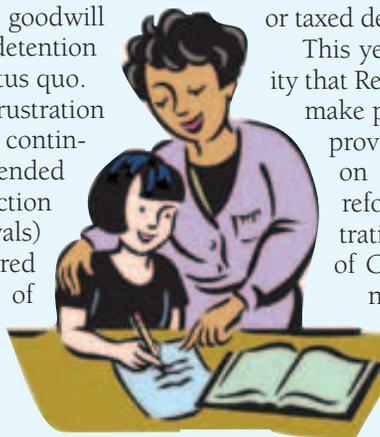
We hope that as September draws nearer, we will see additional acts with similar goals to increase momentum for Child Nutrition Reauthorization.

Unfortunately, on June 17, the House Appropriations Committee released its draft Agriculture funding bill for Fiscal Year (FY) 2016. It is \$175 million below its enacted funding level in FY 2015 and \$1.1 billion below President Obama's request. Most damaging is the devastating \$139 million proposed cut in discretionary spending for the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

Immigration

On April 24, Judge Dolly Gee issued a tentative ruling that the current policy of detaining children and their families violates the 1997 settlement in *Flores v. Meese*, which mandates that the government "release a minor from its custody without unnecessary delay as long as detention is not required to ensure a child's appearance in immigration court or for safety reasons." If the two sides can't reach an agreement, Judge Gee could issue one of three potential rulings: she could rule family detention illegal and order an injunction; she could give the government time to cease detaining families but not issue an injunction; or she could declare her satisfaction with the federal government's goodwill to "improve" family detention and maintain the status quo.

Meanwhile, frustration remains over the continued hold-up of extended DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and DAPA (Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents) in U.S. District Court.

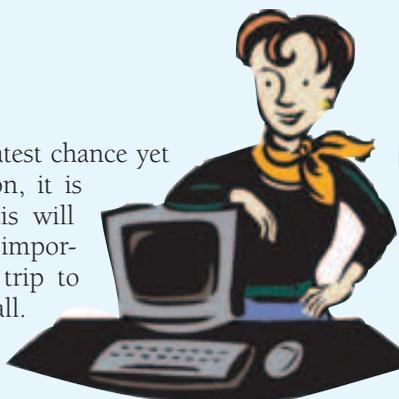


Along with this greatest chance yet to end family detention, it is clear that Pope Francis will make immigrants an important focus during his trip to the United States this fall. This should hopefully bode very well for our work to ensure all of our immigrant sisters and brothers are treated with compassion and respect.

Taxes

Republican leadership in the House and Senate officially declared that broad-based tax reform will not be taken up in Congress before 2017. There are, however, opportunities for tax credits for working families. NETWORK seeks to make permanent the 2009 Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) improvements set to expire in 2017, and expand the EITC. If they expire at the end of 2017, millions of people will be pushed into poverty or deeper into poverty. NETWORK seeks to enhance the EITC to include younger, noncustodial parents and childless workers. These workers are the only group who must pay taxes before their income reaches the federal poverty line, and therefore they are the only group that can be forced into poverty by their tax burden or taxed deeper into poverty.

This year, there is a high probability that Republican leaders will seek to make permanent key corporate tax provisions as a "down payment" on more comprehensive tax reform. The Obama administration and Democratic leaders of Congress have said they will not support permanence for any corporate provisions without making the EITC and Child Tax Credit permanent.



Healthcare

Since the Supreme Court issued its decision to uphold federal subsidies for all states in the *King v. Burwell* case, action on healthcare will move to Congress. In the coming months, members of the House and the Senate will continue to work on next fiscal year's budget. Through the budget reconciliation process, the Senate could send a bill to the president that dismantles the Affordable Care Act. This would entail wasting time and energy on writing and voting on a bill that is sure to be vetoed by President Obama. The reconciliation bill must be finished by the end of July, so Congress will be deciding soon whether or not they will include an ACA repeal in that legislation.

Medicaid and Medicare celebrate their 50th anniversary on July 30th. These are critical programs that are now sewn into the fabric of our society. Millions of people and families have been impacted by these programs, and their success is undeniable. As this anniversary approaches, we are grateful for these programs that provide health and security to so many people, and will work to ensure that Medicaid expansion will soon be achieved in all 50 states.



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Family-friendly Norway

Many European countries are famous for their family-friendly policies. We were able to question seven Norwegian mothers to learn what this means in their lives. We appreciate the assistance of Hanna Choat and Marit Ann Barkve, who were able to connect us with the mothers.

Care for Pregnant Women

Mari: All pregnancy-related doctor visits are free of charge. Normally, the pregnant woman can choose to have the regular health checks at her usual doctor's office or with a midwife. Both will be free, but usually the midwife has more time. During both pregnancies I was very troubled by tiredness, and I fell asleep at my desk on a daily basis more or less. Because of this I was partially (20–40%) on sick-leave for the final three months of the pregnancy. This was with full pay from day one. Since this was pregnancy-related, my employer was reimbursed fully to compensate for this, while normally the employer will have to carry the first 16 days of an employee's sick leave.

Hilde: While pregnant I received regular checkups from a doctor as well as a midwife; however I received some additional ultrasounds as I have Crohn's disease

Ida: We don't need insurance to gain access to these rights. Everyone who pays taxes receives these benefits. If one hasn't paid their taxes (worked for one year before they have a child) then they only have access to a one-time lump sum instead of *foreldrepenger* [financial assistance for parental leave, administered by the Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration].

Lise: I was employed fulltime as a teacher. I received *foreldrepenger* beginning when I was 37 weeks pregnant for ten months, being paid 100% of my salary from the government.

Irene: In 2005, I was a student and received an education stipend [approximately \$760]. When I had my daughter I also received a *forsørgerstipend*

(approximately 1,200 NOK [\$152] per month). [This is a stipend for a student with a child under 16 living with her/him.] As I had a part-time job and made more than a certain base amount, I also received *foreldrepenger* equal to the average monthly salary I had received the previous six months. In 2009, I had full-time employment as a teacher. I could choose if I wanted to have ten months maternity leave with 100% of my salary, or 12 months maternity leave with 80%. I chose the latter.

Giving Birth

Ida: A three-day stay in the hospital is normal for mother and child. In increasing frequency, a more child-friendly hospital with a maternity hotel is arranged for new mothers. Such a hotel has a double bed for the mother and father as well as a private bathroom. It is in the same building as the hospital but functions more as a hotel where a new family can relax, receive breastfeeding guidance, and get follow-up from doctors, midwives, pediatricians, etc. It's a wonderful option.

Mari: With the first baby: after giving birth we stayed at the hospital four nights. The normal is three for the first birth, but we had one extra day due to breastfeeding problems. With the second baby we stayed two nights. This is normal for the second baby with a healthy baby/mother. Our hospital has a "patient hotel" where healthy mothers and babies can stay (if there are no complications during/after birth). This is free for the mother/baby. The partner can stay with the mother/baby in the family room, but will have to pay for bed and board.

Lise: I was encouraged to stay in the hospital for four days until I had become accustomed to bathing Oliver and was comfortable breastfeeding.

Parental Leave

Mari: The parental leave was a total of 46 weeks when my first baby was born in 2010, and 49 weeks when my second baby was born last summer. This is with full pay, given that the mother has been working for the last six months up until giving birth. Alternatively, we could choose to receive 80% of our normal salary and have the period extended with another 10 weeks. The mother has to start the parental leave no later than three weeks before the due date, and also has to take the first six weeks after giving birth. Ten weeks are reserved for the father, and the remaining 27 weeks can be split between



Irene and her children, Tuva and Heine, shortly after Heine's birth

the mother and father as we desire. The social security reimbursed our employers according to the number of days we were on parental leave. Parents with a (very) high income, however, are not necessarily paid 100% of their normal salary. The social security reimburses the salary up to “6G”, approximately \$75,000 with the current exchange rate. Some working places will, as a social benefit to the employees, reimburse the remaining if the employee earns more than “6G.”

So, to sum it up: I or the father stayed at home with the baby for almost a year with full pay. It is truly fantastic. When I was born, my mother could stay at home for 4 months with full pay.

I would also like to mention that by law, the working mother can have the working day reduced by one hour to breastfeed her baby, with normal pay. Some workplaces, mine included, allow up to two hours of fully paid time off to provide the baby with breast milk.

Eirin: Best: Time for my children. Not being guilty about having to put my children in daycare when they were too young, when they need their mom and dad. Calm and cuddles with a non-stressed mama (and papa). Worst: Little adult time and adult talk, career development stagnates a bit as one is so engulfed in baby-world.

Ingunn: My partner had two weeks off when the baby was born. The company he works for can choose if they want to pay him or not; he got paid. This is not covered by the social health care. He will have 10 weeks off from work in November; this is paid from the social health care.



As the Children Grow

Mari: In addition to the paid parental leave, we get a monthly benefit of \$125 per child until the child turns 16 (this amount has been unchanged for some 15 years, and there is currently a debate on whether it should be increased, or if it should be given only to those really needing it, or if it should be removed and replaced by free kindergarten and after-school care). This is paid by the government. The government also sponsors the kindergartens so that the parents pay much less than the actual costs. In addition, by law I have the right to 5 weeks/25 days of vacation each year.

Ingunn: I receive 970 NOK [\$125] per month per child from the government. From 13th month till 23rd month I can get an extra 6000 NOK per month [\$765] if the child does not attend kindergarten.

Ingunn: The law gives you 10 days off from work when the children are sick. 10 days for mum and 10 days for dad.

Mari: Many/most colleges/universities are practically free. All students can apply for (and will in most cases get) student financing from *lånkassa* [the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund], regardless of their parents' income. The majority of students finance their education with the help of *lånkassa* and a part-time job. Some will also be sponsored by their parents, but to save money for your children's college fund is not normal in Norway.

Healthcare after Birth

Mari: We received a home visit from a public health nurse a few days after returning home from the hospital. This was free of charge. Visits to the local health station, where we can discuss baby health-related issues, are free. There is a program of scheduled appointments to the health station to monitor the health and development of the baby (4 weeks, 6 weeks, 2 months... a total of 10 before the baby turns one year old, and then another four before the child turns 4), but if needing to discuss anything, one can get extra appointments. For more medical-related issues a visit to the doctor's office is free for children.

Irene: After birth, my child got routine checkups and follow-ups with needed vaccines. In Norway, all healthcare related to birth/children is covered by the government until the child is 16 years.



FAMILY PHOTOS

Tuva and Heine today

The EITC and Child Tax Credit—Vital for Families Like Ours

BY MERCYHURST UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Members of our social work club recently traveled to Washington, DC to advocate for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit. As a group of social work students, we are aware of the direct impact that nationwide legislation has not only in our communities, but also in our personal lives:

My name is Rachel and I am 29. I am a fulltime student, the wife of a disabled husband, and a mother of three children under 10. While in school, I found it next to impossible to work a sufficient number of hours and maintain home life, as my husband has a compromised immune system and is frequently ill, which often makes him unable to care for the children. We have gotten by for the last four years on his Social Security Disability and my sporadic income from part-time jobs.

The EITC has been a blessing for my family. We never owned a reliable vehicle, which made the 25-minute drive to school every day quite the challenge. It seemed that every year, right around income tax time, our vehicle would break down. Thankfully, the EITC has been there to save the day. We paid for two used vehicles because of this credit—IN FULL! Without a vehicle, I never would have been able to finish school. Now, I am starting my new career and am forever grateful. Please, consider the people that this credit was made to help, families like mine, who wouldn't make it without it!

My name is Danielle. My mother worked hard to support my brothers and me on a minimum-wage salary, which as a single parent was difficult at times. In an attempt to better her circumstances, my mother went back to school for ste-

nography. In the midst of her schooling she got into a car accident, which unfortunately left her unable to pursue the profession due to resulting back problems. My mother's recovery required her to cut back on shifts at work, which caused us to fall behind on our bills. For the first time in my life we were receiv-

The salary from working in the fields of agriculture is not enough to live months without working. My parents constantly have to be looking for other jobs in agriculture so they can cover all our family expenses. Farmers often provide housing to their employees but, given that my family has more children



ing notices that our utilities would be turned off. It was a difficult time.

What I remember most about that time was my mom saying, "If I can just make it until I get my income tax credit we will be okay." She was right; it helped her catch up on our bills and stabilize the household while she recovered. Minimum-wage incomes are not livable incomes. They do not allow for un-expectancies to happen as they often do in life. This is why the extension and expansion of the EITC and Child Tax Credit should be made permanent, as they are essential programs for working families such as my own.

My name is Miguelita. Growing up in a migrant family, my family's financial status was very low. My family currently travels from Florida to Michigan during the summers to pick crops to bring some money home to feed my family of nine.

than workers, employers did not want to provide us with housing. My parents have always saved their EITC and Child Tax Credit and used them wisely for house and car repairs, along with groceries and other household items needed during the in-between times that they are unemployed. This year, with the credits, my parents were able to save up enough money to buy a home in Florida.

The EITC and Child Tax Credits have truly helped my family and other families living the same situation.

The EITC and Child Tax Credits, however, cannot act singlehandedly as a tool against poverty. Rather, these tax credits must exist as a crucial element in a network of legislation, such as legislation to mandate a living wage, in order to overcome poverty in America.

The Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit

As people of faith, we must advocate for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC). We believe tax policy should focus on strengthening families and communities rather than enriching those at the very top of economic ladder. We believe, as Pope Francis has written, that **“the dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies”** (*Joy of the Gospel*).

We call on Congress to make permanent three 2009 Earned Income Tax Credits and Child Tax Credit improvements set to expire in 2017, and to expand the Earned Income Tax Credit for childless workers over the age of 21.

✓ The EITC promotes work, which is a matter of human dignity.

✓ The EITC benefits business by investing in the workforce.

Putting hard-earned wages back into workers' pockets is good for employees and employers. When workers can afford adequate food and nutrition, reliable transportation and child care, productivity increases.

✓ The EITC and CTC can help prevent working people from being taxed into poverty.

In addition to receiving scant benefits from refundable credits, noncustodial parents and childless workers are the only group who must pay taxes before their income reaches the federal poverty line. They are, therefore, the only group that can be forced into poverty by their tax burden or taxed deeper into poverty.

✓ The Earned Income Tax Credit and Children's Tax Credit have bipartisan support, and Pope Francis calls us to work together.

A Gallup poll found that George W. Bush's 2003 expansion of the credits achieved 86% public support. The House Budget Committee chaired by Paul Ryan reported that refundable tax credits are “an effective tool for encouraging and rewarding work among lower-income individuals.”

✓ Failure to take action on these two tax credits will push 1.8 million people into poverty and 14.6 million people deeper into poverty, according to the Center for Policy and Budget Priorities.

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



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Protecting our Families

“Those who have the task of governing are responsible for children...When it comes to children, in every case, there should be no utterance of ‘After all, we are not a charity,’ or ‘we’re sorry but we can’t do anything.’ These words do not count when it comes to children.”

—Pope Francis, General Audience (April 8, 2015)

**Sign NETWORK's
petition to make
permanent
and extend the
Earned Income
Tax Credit
and the
Child Tax Credit**



NICO CAMPO

www.networklobby.org/taxjustice

Turin, Italy, June 21, 2015: Pope Francis kisses a child with Down Syndrome during his visit to the Holy Shroud in Turin.

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Three Ways We Can Support the Pope's Message to Congress

BY SHANTHA READY ALONSO

1 Appreciate the historical significance of the Papal Address to the U.S. Congress.

On September 24, for the first time in history, a pope will address Congress. No pope in recent history has attracted as much public attention as Pope Francis. Already, Catholic legislators are on record anticipating how they will react to his address.

Pope Francis has consistently delivered a message that deeply challenges U.S. society at spiritual, practical and political levels. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he called us to say “no” to an economy of exclusion, and in *Laudato Si'*, his call was to relate to all of creation as our kin. His message is simple, yet radical. To live out his message would revolutionize the way we exist in the world. It challenges us to eliminate racist and sexist tools by which our nation profits from the suffering of many—immigrant labor exploitation, unfair trade agreements, and a rigged wage and tax system that keeps people at the bottom of the economic ladder, to name a few.

2 Tell all your friends about the important political timing of this Papal Address.

The pope's address to Congress is less than one week before Congress's deadline to complete the budget appropriations process. By midnight on September 30, the House and Senate must reconcile their appropriations bills and send them to the president to sign.

Pope Francis calls for an economy of inclusion that cares for everyone. He also warns against catering to war profiteers.

NETWORK compiled a list of ways that Congress can heed the pope's call before the September 30 deadline. In the box at right are legislative proposals consistent with Pope Francis's values that Congress should vote on now.

3 Urge your elected officials to vote the pope's values.

Send us pictures of your community doing your part to encounter others and build relationships, doing your part to improve solidarity in our nation. Email pictures to info@networklobby.org

Distribute “Spread the Word” of this *Connection* (pages 13-14) and circulate

the petition at www.networklobby.org/taxjustice

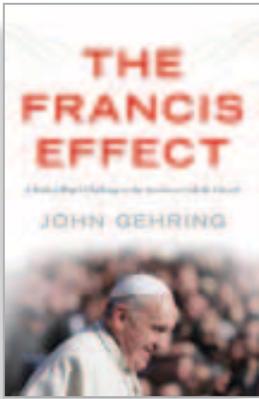
Email, call or set up a lobby visit with your members of Congress to convey your hope they will vote with the pope.

Go to www.networklobby.org/pope to get involved.

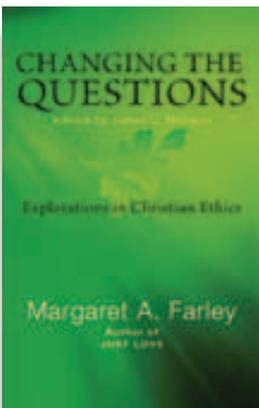
Shantha Ready Alonso is NETWORK's Community Mobilization Manager.

Here are seven things Congress can do right now to vote with the pope

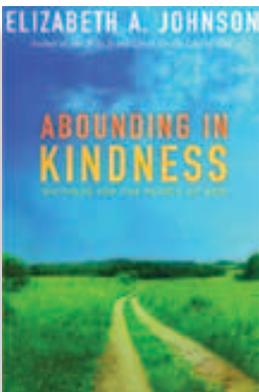
1. Make the most progressive aspects of our current tax code permanent: the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit.
2. Use the budget and appropriations process to strengthen social safety net programs that serve people living in or near poverty.
3. Promote healthy lives and healthy communities by fully funding the Affordable Care Act.
4. Begin the process of raising the minimum wage to \$12 by 2020, and index this new minimum wage standard to inflation as recommended in the Raise the Wage Act—as a step toward a living wage for all.
5. Pass comprehensive immigration reform with a pathway to citizenship and end the practice of family detention.
6. Ensure that all workers have jobs that allow them to care for themselves and their families. Congress should begin by passing the Healthy Families Act, which requires that employers provide paid sick days and medical leave.
7. When many are struggling to get by, it is unfair for the military to receive the special Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) slush fund in the federal budget. The OCO must be cut from the federal budget. We must invest in building human potential, not in weapons that destroy human lives.



The Francis Effect: A Radical Pope's Challenge to the American Catholic Church
by John Gehring, Rowman & Littlefield (available in August 2015) http://bit.ly/Gehring_The_Francis_Effect



Changing the Questions: Explorations in Christian Ethics by Margaret A. Farley; Edited and with an introduction by Jamie L. Manson www.orbisbooks.com/changing-the-questions.html



Abounding in Kindness: Writings for the People of God by Elizabeth A. Johnson www.orbisbooks.com/abounding-in-kindness.html

NETWORK

A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

25 E Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC, 20001
PHONE 202-347-9797 FAX 202-347-9864
www.networklobby.org

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The ability of the NETWORK teams to fulfill our mission of justice rests on your continued financial support. Your investment broadens our reach and helps develop activist leaders across the country.

College students who participated in Just Advocacy Week had this to say about their experience with NETWORK:



"I learned how racial and economic justice are intrinsically linked and are essential to remember in all work for justice; and that faith is an incredible foundation for justice work."

"I had an identity-changing experience not only from what I learned but from how to advocate it effectively."

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Thank you!

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