News
Social Justice



Network Executive Director Mary Novak speaks at a press conference in Washington, D.C., July 23 announcing the return of the social justice lobby's Nuns on the Bus tour. (GSR screenshot)



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The nuns are getting back on the bus.

As the 2024 election season swings into high gear, the Catholic social justice lobby Network is bringing back its vaunted Nuns on the Bus tour — the eighth one since it began in 2012 and the first in-person tour since 2018, after the 2020 tour was held virtually because of the coronavirus pandemic.

This year's tour will visit 20 cities, beginning in Philadelphia on Sept. 30 and ending almost three weeks later in San Francisco on Oct. 18.

Network Executive Director Mary Novak, an associate of the Congregation of St. Joseph, said there is an unprecedented push to take away hard-won rights from Americans.

"We at Network have read the signs of the times and reached an inescapable conclusion: The world needs what Catholic sisters have offered for 50 years and what we at Network continue to offer, grounded in their vision," Novak said during a Tuesday (July 23) press conference in Washington, D.C.

She said America needs a government that works for everyone, not just white Christian men.

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So while the bus has traditionally been filled with nuns, this time it will carry 15 Catholic sisters and 15 multifaith and secular partners, including officials from several nonprofits and advocacy groups, such as the Friends Committee on National Legislation and the Children's Defense Fund.

U.S. Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, who was among those speaking at Network's press conference announcing the tour, praised Network's advocacy for social justice.

"Boy, do we need you," he told Novak. "I can't think of a time in our history when your work was more needed."

Sr. Mumbi Kigutha, president of Friends in Solidarity and a member of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, said that when she rode the bus in 2018, she saw people

working together in their communities to build a more just and equitable world.

"The Bible tells us that when one part of the whole suffers, we all suffer. We need not choose to remain in suffering, because we have agency. We have the power to transcend circumstances," she said. "The future does not have to be scary and bleak."



Precious Blood Sr. Mumbi Kigutha, president of Friends in Solidarity, speaks at a press conference July 23 in Washington, D.C., announcing the return of the Network social justice lobby's Nuns on the Bus tour. (GSR screenshot)

Debbie Weinstein, executive director of Coalition on Human Needs, said extremists are proposing "harsh, inhumane cuts that make it harder for people to afford rent and get good jobs," and want to replace social safety nets with "unneeded tax cuts for fat cats."

The expanded child tax credit enacted during the pandemic cut the number of children in poverty almost in half, Weinstein said, but Congress allowed it to expire.

"We have to stand with the millions of people who need to be able to join a union, with families who need affordable child care so they can work; we need to keep investing in basic human needs like affordable housing," she said. "The nuns have

always shown up and that's why I'm coming with them."

The bus tour is the latest aspect of Network's 2024 election education program, "Vote Our Future," which is focused on creating multi-issue voters. While single-issue voters make electoral decisions based on one concern, such as abortion, Network says many issues are "equally sacred," including being healthy, having a healthy planet, having a vibrant democracy, a strong social safety net, freedom from harm, and a nation that is welcoming and values dignity and human rights.

The program also includes the new Young Advocates Leadership Lab, or YALL, to engage college students across the country.



The 2024 Nuns on the Bus tour begins in Philadelphia and ends in San Francisco, stopping in 18 other cities along the way over nearly three weeks. (GSR screenshot)

U.S. Rep. Rosa DeLauro of Connecticut praised the tour, saying "Who doesn't love a feisty nun?"

"I love Network and I love Nuns on the Bus! I'm delighted to see Nuns on the Bus is still riding high," DeLauro said to cheers. "The 2024 election is vital to the future of our country. It is crucial that Catholic voices be fairly and truly represented ... above

all at the polling place."

Novak noted that previous bus tours focused on issues such as a moral budget, tax justice and mending gaps in the social safety net, while this tour is about protecting the basic freedoms required for a functional, inclusive democracy. She noted that Pope Francis has said the only future worth having is a future that includes everyone.

The Rev. Adam Taylor, president of Sojourners, said, "Our democracy only works if it includes everyone," and that the right to vote is tied to every other freedom Americans hold dear.

Fighting voter suppression is "a faith imperative," he said, "because every single human being and voter is made in the image and likeness of God."

Embracing that idea is the true American and Christian ideal, Taylor said.

"We can build a country where everyone is equally valued, where diversity is seen as a value not a weakness, where everyone can thrive," he said, while extremist proposals "would push our nation toward autocracy and Christian nationalism."

This story appears in the **Nuns on the Bus** feature series. View the full series.