Columns
Horizons
Social Justice



Women religious on the fifth Nuns on the Bus tour speak to a crowd about income inequality July 29, 2016, in Philadelphia near where the Democratic National Convention was held. Network's eighth Nuns on the Bus tour begins Sept. 30; its campaign is Vote Our Future. (CNS/CatholicPhilly.com/Sarah Webb)



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August 23, 2024

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In a little more than a month, the Catholic social justice group Network will once again hit the road with Nuns on the Bus and Friends. This year, our campaign is Vote Our Future. What exactly does this mean?

We say: Vote our future so that everyone thrives … no exceptions! When I think about voting our future, I think about community. I think about going all in … together. It's about taking care of one another. It's about sharing from the same common pot to make sure that we all have what we need to thrive.

This concept of ensuring that we all have what we need to thrive has been at the heart of our Network campaigns since last spring when we launched our Thriving Communities Campaign. When we imagine what a thriving community looks like, we talk about making sure that we have a child tax credit that helps all children and their families; we talk about ensuring that there is both access to asylum and welcoming communities to greet new arrivals; and we talk about ensuring that we are able to live free from harm.

Working on the policy side of things feels daunting. More often than not, we hear about the failure to enact policies and legislation that help all people. It feels like we've gotten lost in the fighting and forgotten that our policies need to ensure that we have a future for the next generation.

When I am home, the need to live into the belief of a future full of hope becomes real. I see an apartment building in Youngstown razed after an explosion. And, I ask, what about the people who lived in that apartment or the neighboring apartment? I see migrants and refugees trying to survive in a new country away from their friends and family. Does my city welcome them? How is it just that someone waits years for an asylum verdict? The realization that my home state does not protect the rights of marginalized communities or LGBTQ+ people makes me advocate more for legislation that ensures that all people can live free from harm.

Voting our future means that we must dare to create the future of which we dream. We must live in the hope that this future is possible. It doesn't mean ignoring the devastation and virulent hatred around us, but it means leaning into the belief that we can achieve something when we come together as a community of people who care. I was reminded of this when my colleagues and I hosted an election year training at my community's motherhouse. Members of both the Cleveland and Erie advocates team, sisters, associates and apartment residents, and other faith-filled justice seekers gathered to learn, dream and plan together. For me, it was a reminder of the beauty and power of community.

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In the midst of crises around the world and in my hometown, I've been struggling to remember the power that comes from people gathering together to do good. However, Fr. Bryan Massingale's LCWR Assembly 2024 keynote address reminded me that after we grieve and lament the violence and hatred in our world, we must come together to dream. He said:

> My sisters: I invite and urge you: Grieve. Lament. And then, dare to dream. Dare to dream boldly. To dream audaciously. To dream subversively. For in the face of war, environmental catastrophe, xenophobic nationalisms, anti-queer hysteria and anti-Black violence, we don't need less imaginative hope. We need more. We need more. Dare to dream.

In that moment, I realized that, at the heart of our work, is our willingness to dream boldly. To dream when people tell us that a future of hope isn't achievable. We dream of a thriving community–one where everyone has what they need to thrive. As Sara Thomsen sings:

> People say to me: "You must be crazy!
> How can you dream in times like these?
> Don't you read the news? Don't you know the score?
> How can you dream when so many people grieve?
> And people say to me: "What kind of fool believes
> That dreams will make a difference in the end?"
> By way of a reply I say: A fool such as I,

Who sees a dream as somewhere to begin.

So we dream of a community where all people — no matter if we are Black, brown or white … recent immigrant or resident of the same land for generations … young or old … straight or queer — have the freedom to dream boldly of a future yet unknown.