Columns
Horizons
Social Justice



(Unsplash/Elin Tabitha)



by Emily TeKolste

Contributor

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

July 25, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

During my community's recent annual meeting, we started our time together with a reflection on hope and beauty offered by our chaplain. At lunch that day, our table conversation continued, and one of my sisters turned to me and said, "I don't know how you stay hopeful, doing the work you do."

She was referring to the terrible budget bill that was, at the time, on the threshold of passing the Senate. She was referring to the masked U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents kidnapping people from streets across our country. She was referring to our nation's descent into fascism and authoritarianism.

And I understand why it's hard to stay hopeful. The damages are real. People will lose their lives. People are already being torn out of their communities, and it will only get worse as ICE's budget just got a massive increase. Sometimes I get lost in those realities, too.

Yet I stay hopeful because I see reasons to be hopeful every day. I see people waking up. Our local "No Kings" rally on June 14 had well over twice as many people attend as the "Hands Off" rally did just a few months before — nearly 1,000 people showed up in Terre Haute, Indiana.

I see people jumping in to learn new skills, to do things they've never done before because they know that the stakes are so high that they have to do something.

I've seen community threads wind tighter as people gather to grieve, to build, to fight and to celebrate.

In early December, a few of us opened space at our motherhouse for a gathering that we called Practicing Community: A Ceremony of Grief and Gratitude. People who had never met each other came out to share stories, to mourn together and light candles symbolizing that we were the hope in the darkness.

An offshoot of this group has continued gathering since. I've made new friends from that group. Members have started gathering every Saturday afternoon at a local park to share food and community with anyone who comes by.

Advertisement

Together, we have built community among people who come together to fight back against authoritarianism and build a community of mutual care in our own backyards.

We are fighting back in big ways and small ways. We are refusing to let the fascists win.

I see it across the country every day through my daily work with NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice. I work closely with passionate groups of individuals across six states who have had meetings with legislators, who have coordinated rallies and local prayer vigils, who have written letters to the editor and taken to social media to advocate for an economy that works for all of us.

Together, NETWORK Advocates made nearly 2,500 calls to members of Congress about the budget bill, had more than 150 meetings with congressional staffers, had 12 letters to the editor or op-eds published in their local newspapers, coordinated or co-sponsored local prayer vigils and rallies, and showed up in droves to local events in their own communities.

We often talk at NETWORK about hope as an active virtue, and it's not an empty platitude. Perhaps I'm actually in a uniquely privileged position to be able to see on a daily basis all the reasons to be hopeful in the midst of such tragedy.

I'm reminded of a story Christopher Pramuk, one of my former professors, told me when I interviewed him recently for an episode of my community's JUSTus podcast. He shared a writing assignment he offered to some students of his. He asked the question about Billie Holliday's song "Strange Fruit," about whether there was anything hopeful in the song. One student reflected that there was nothing hopeful in the song but that singing the song — telling the truth — was itself a hopeful act. He later learned that this student was a survivor of sex trafficking, a fact that I think makes her reflection all the more potent.

We owe it to ourselves, our family and friends, and our neighbors who have been pushed to the margins of our society to remain hopeful because that hope is what keeps us able to continue fighting for the liberation of all creation. To stay hopeful, we have to stay active and grounded in community. We have to tell the truth.

And when we defeat the fascists, there will be work to do to rebuild a society that truly works for all. We can't go back to business as usual — there was already too

much devastation in the world before the fascists took over. Are you in it with me for the long haul?