Español

subscribe

about ee connect ee news ee gatherings ee contact

donate 🗸

Young Nuns on the Bus

Giving Voice sisters were in the center of the action this fall with NETWORK Lobby's Nuns on the Bus! Check out our interview with two of our younger sister participants, Sisters Julie Fertsch, and

Sister Mumbi Kigutha! Sister Julie Fertsch, a Sister of St Joseph from Philadelphia traveled on the first leg of NETWORK

Lobby's Nuns on the Bus trip from their kick-off in Los Angeles, all the way to Tuscon, AZ. Julie described her the experience as a holy space, full of energy, dedication and bridge-building. Sister Julie works for the St. Joseph Worker Program, and is currently living in Philadelphia. She became connected with the Nuns on the Bus in 2013 during one of their first stops in Camden, NJ, and remained in occasional contact with their staff. She was invited by NETWORK for the first leg of the trip.

GV: How were you involved with in Nuns on the Bus?

Sister Julie: I first became connected with Nuns on the Bus when they came to Camden NJ, in I think 2013. I was working at one of the sites where the bus made a stop. When they came through at the DNC in 2016 I became friendly with one of their staff, Meg Olsen. So I just got to be talking to Meg and we reconnected at LCWR in 2017 and so I was invited to be on the bus by NETWORK.

Typically sisters join the bus for a leg at a time, usually about a 4-leg journey. It's broken up into

weeks, and so you are asked what week you can do, and you pick what you can do. The best week for me, because there weren't any recruiting fairs, I could go the first week, Oct 7th through the 12th, which was the kick-off leg on the trip. We began in Los Angeles, and we went all the way to Tucson. And then there were other legs that went from Omaha and that went to Cleveland, then Cleveland through DC, then DC to Mar-a-lago.

GV: What was your role while traveling with Nuns on the Bus?

Sister Julie: Basically, the Sisters on the bus served as companions to the Simone Campbell and the staff at Network! We were their teammates so we participated in lobby visits, in round table discussions, in site visits in different cities, and we helped to facilitate the town hall meetings that happened in a number of cities to help to unpack the repercussions of the GOP tax bill. Our role in town hall meetings was to help facilitate conversations with the crowd and make connections. We were there as companions to each other.

Always, our role was to be faithful companions to the people we encountered on the journey and to be what people asked of us — witnesses of hope in a very dark time in our country! That's what we were charged with, to be witnesses to hope. I felt very humbled and very privileged at every turn. You know how you tread carefully at places

that are really holy? You tread gently, softly. I just felt like that the whole time. I had the privilege to sit at a round table with members of the Culinary Worker's Union in Las Vegas, and listen to their stories. I had the privilege to go to Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles and really listen to the inspiring stories of some of the staff members who once received services at Homeboy Industries and have been through an amazing process of transformation! I felt like the luckiest person alive! The sisters I spent that week with, from all over the country, all different communities, were wonderful! They were some of the most wonderful people I've ever met. Such great energy, such great women, bold, passionate and committed, living with conviction and purpose and mission and they were so inspiring! **Sister Mumbi:** The first night when we gathered together in Omaha, was a briefing night. Prior to

joining the bus we'd participated in webinars, where we covered the tax bill, various talking points and the purpose behind getting on the bus again. We also did a small practical training on how using a human (the nuns) bar graph at our town hall meetings over the next week, we would demonstrate to our audience the effects of Reaganomics on the American people and how the tax bill is going to affected life for the various economic quintiles in America. We also agreed to take turns addressing the different forums during the trip and also to each write a blog covering a part of the week. We tried to link up sisters from various places they had lived or worked, so that each stop had a local representative from Nuns on the Bus. I ended up doing the main introduction at the town hall at Saint Sabina's church in Chicago be-

cause Sister Simone could not be there, and then Sister Simone asked me to do the introduction in the East Lansing town hall as well. GV: Can you explain the main message of the tax bill from this year's Nuns on the Bus trip?

Sister Mumbi's Tax Bill Recap: America tends to be divided into 5 economic quintiles, but there is also a 6th, which is the 1%, and

on top of all that are the mega players - the corporations. The first and second quintile represents people living in poverty or close to poverty. When the audience was asked who do they think suffers the most stress, most answered the lowest quintile. It has been proven, however, that the second quintile is going through as much if not even more stress than the first quintile of people — because the place they live is full of constant stress. A change in the household such as illness or death can plunge them into poverty overnight. Since 1980 when Reaganomics was introduced into America, the standard of life for Mose quintiles has not improved, it has actually worsened. We are preparing to usher a whole new of bunch of people into poverty with the new tax bill and

the subsequent effects. Another amazing statistic that would amaze readers, is that it's projected in the next year the country will go into \$19 trillion into debt. How many generations will it take to repay this debt? We have a hint already of how politicians are envisioning offsetting this debt, while on the bus Mitch McConnell was quoted as saying that some programs would have to go. These programs mean life and death for many people living in this country. This is the safety nets that protects many families from poverty. GV: In what ways is Nuns on the Bus preparing people to spiritually deal with this and the potential for despair?

Sister Mumbi: We talked a lot about how we bring about hope. Sister Simone says that the biggest lie sold in America is the lie of individualism. The constitution of this country says "We the Peo-

ple." America was built because families and communities banded together to withstand the challenges of pioneering days to build this nation that is now looked upon as a world power. We have a saying in Kenya that says if you want to go fast, go alone but if you want to go far, go with other people. Hope happens out of community, there is no way you can be a person of faith and not desire community. There is nothing like individual faith or individual hope. Because hope begets hope, and I think even by publicizing the fact that we took time each morning to pray and reflect together. Our prayer lives are what propel and sustain us in these essential work. It's how you help to balance the very, very sad stories and and also envision something new emerging from places of great despair. How can NETWORK staff sustain themselves, living in DC and working so hard to lobby and having significant failures? After successfully helping push Obamacare, to now seeing it being trampled upon? It can only come from a place of deep faith. And how do you sustain this hope? It's also by celebrating these small moments. For example, Many of the Representatives that we visited who refused to meet with their constituents or had

abysmal voting and performance records were ousted in the midterms. So take that moment and remember those small successes, so you can go back to that moment in the future when the battle seems uphill and remember that this work is not in vain. We often times fail to celebrate the small victories. I read an article after the election that said that the 'blue wave' that had been predicted was only a sprinkling — and I said NO these are naysayers, and such a sore loser moment. Because if you look at it, how many 'firsts' were happening? We had the first refugee woman — a Muslim woman, elected. In Chicago, Lauren Underwood won in a place where they said no woman of color could win. You just have to take a moment to celebrate. We have a young working class woman from NY. We have a woman and man both identifying as LGBTI representing the American people. What a moment in history! GV: Where is Nuns on the Bus in the context of the Catholic Church? **Sister Julie:** I guess what I see is that women, both in politics and in the church operate in a totally contributed photos. different paradigm [than men]. We love to collaborate, we love to envision something and see how

things can be. I feel like Nuns on the Bus is a picture of how things can be, that you can bring people together, that you can talk about the

things that matter, and that you can do that in a way that is civil and respectful. What was really important for me, was that we stood for something. That we spoke out about something. And as women religious, that is what we MUST do right now. WE have to speak out about something. There are a million things wrong in our World and in our Church right now and we have to be the ones that are speaking out, in a way that is clear, and gentle and loving and yet real, and honest. We experienced some heckling and some adversity in one of the cities, because inadvertently we were supporting the democratic candidates. We were talking about the GOP tax law and about its repercussions of the tax law and how most of the people in this country will not

reap the benefits that billionaires or corporations will. Then advertently we were supporting the democratic agenda which never would have passed this tax law. There was some push-back from single-issue pro-life groups. It wasn't the majority.

Sister Mumbi: The back of the bus had a quote by Pope Francis saying "a good Catholic meddles in politics," and for me, that's what it is the church is about the whole person. We've had this treasure in our church for years and years, in the form of Catholic Social Teaching. You cannot evangelize without addressing the entire person. You cannot speak of the good news when you are not experiencing the good news in your temporal body. I think my take on this issue is that, the bread of life and the temporal bread go hand and hand. The missionaries discovered this when they came to my country and others years ago. That unless you educated me, and were sure I was fed and healthy, how could I believe in a God who loves me? We were put on this earth to be Jesus' hands and feet and eyes and this is what Nuns on the Bus is doing.

Jesus went into the temple and uphended tables, calling out the corruption in his days. This is what Nuns on the Bus is trying to do, to say you have to take care of everyone. We have to call to accountability those who seem to have lost their moral compass. And we do it out of love. not just for our vulnerable sisters and brothers but also for our elected leaders. It's amazing that so many politicians have had Catholic education. Our faith compels us to act. It's not just about faith but it's also about our actions. The Church has to be prophetic and that manifests in different ways. There was a sister on the bus who actually spent time in federal prison for civil disobedience. At 83 years of age, she is still bearing prophetic witness. There are a number of prophetic stances, and each person has to discern what that means for them and then act. There is something for everyone to do. GV: In what ways has Nuns on the Bus contributed to bridge-building within communities of women religious and the greater US? Sister Julie: We, ten Sisters...Dominicans, Sisters of St. Joseph, Sisters of Social Service, Daughters of Charity, and Ursulines spent a significant amount of intense time together and we still have a really great group text! Many women religious came out to support our events

whatever way possible! During my experience on the bus, it became very clear to me that now more than ever we have to come together as women religious! It's no longer about individual congregations or even federations — it's now about all women religious coming together and standing with people, standing with those who are marginalized — standing up for something together! There was a seismic shift in me of how we actually all need to come together and give witness to something at this time. I feel like Nuns on the Bus really modeled a way that religious life must look now and in the future.

which really fostered bridge-building! My sense is that we, women religious, are really proud of each other and want to support one another in

a chance to talk about our charisms and the work we've involved in in different places. We got to see the beauty of each charism and how it plays out in each of our lives. And I kept noticing different things. I was with a Daughter of Charity and her charism came up so many times in her reflections and it shows the beauty in what you notice first, and what you are drawn to first. For me as a Precious Blood Sister, that manifests as hearing the cry of the blood and being a reconciling presence. Every morning we were gathered in prayer, staying in the motherhouses and convents across the US. That really struck me, how sisters

Sister Mumbi: I think at some point because we had a documentary filmmaker on the trip with us, and she wanted different clips, we got

were so hospitable, and participating also in Nuns on the Bus in their own way. We did a recap each evening and it was a blessed time. Every convent was so different and every congregation were so different, so it was a joy to get to experience the different charisms. GV: What surprised you about the trip? How do you walk away from this experience? Sister Julie: Two things — It was such a gift for me personally. It was all incredibly inspiring and I just felt so charged by the women I was

with and the people we were coming in contact with and the people I shared conversations with! At the start, I had no idea of how much I was

the future.

in need of an experience like this! What a gift to have had so much life breathed into me! The other piece is that, I have SO much energy right now! I am pretty intense and deep and have so much energy to share and no experience actually quite captures what I have to give to something and the amount of energy I can contribute but this actually did — this met me at

my energy level! It actually took me to another realm of energy and I loved it! I loved the intensity of it and the connections that we made and the purpose of the message and delivering the message and working with the staff, meeting all of the people and it's rare that I find an experience like that where I feel really called to love at a great depth, height, length, and breadth! Sister Mumbi: I walk away affirmed that sisterhood is one of the most powerful movements that we have. Hopefully I can harness this for my own country [Kenya] in places like peace and justice work. When I see how much ground was covered in just a few weeks, I want to tap into the power of numbers and just how powerful women can be. And we're stronger together not just in this country but globally. It's about

mobilizing around specific issues, and religious inhabit a space that enables them to meddle in issues more than what others might be we able to or feel safe enough to do. When I saw that Sr. Teresa Maya was invited to address our brother bishops, I'm reminded of the wealth of experience and wisdom that

women religious bring to the table. When she stood before that assembly last week, she represented every religious woman.

It was a life-changing experience, I had such withdrawal from it! I would definitely get on the bus again if I had the time and ability to do it in











braska, to Cleveland, Ohio, making several stops along the way; second, Sisters and participants; third, inside the bus; fourth, Sister Mumbi with Sister Simone Campbell; fifth, opening up the evening at St. Sabina's in Chicago; bottom, Sister Julie on left with Giving Voice participants in Los Angeles;