

Bernardin Lecture 2015



Guest Speaker: Simone Campbell, SSS Executive Director of NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Sister Simone Campbell is a religious leader, attorney and poet with extensive experience in public policy and advocacy for systemic change. In Washington, she lobbies on issues of peace-building, immigration reform, healthcare and economic justice. Around the country, she is a noted speaker and educator on these public policy issues.

Rooted in a deep spirituality of compassion and service, Sister Simone gives voice to the hunger, isolation, and fear that so many people in America are feeling right now and shows us how we can create real transformation in our communities and in our own hearts through the contemplative life of prayer.

She has led three cross-country “Nuns on the Bus” trips, focused on economic justice, comprehensive immigration reform, and (most recently) voter turnout. Simone has often been featured in the national and international media, including appearances on *60 Minutes*, *The*

Colbert Report, and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. She has received numerous awards, including a “Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award” and the “Defender of Democracy Award” from the international Parliamentarians for Global Action.

Tuesday, OCT. 27, 2015

Lecture: 6:00 pm, Capstone Campus Room

Topic: “Bridge the Divides, Transform Politics: A View From the Bus”



Sister Simone began her talk saying that Cardinal Bernardin “gave me so much hope at a time when things were getting so challengingly polarized within our beloved church. His efforts to reach out and bridge divides is a wonderful, wonderful tribute and anchor for my life as a woman Religious in the United States. He brought me joy.” She then went on to mention Pope Francis’ visit to the US, his calling for dialogue and engagement, reaching out to people who think differently. We are trying to figure out how to come together, she said, and Cardinal Bernardin’s message is needed now more than ever.

Evening Lecture



Dr. Stephanie Y. Mitchem, professor with the Department of Religious Studies and Chair of the Bernardin Lecture Committee, opened the evening's events. She was followed by Dr. Anne Bezuidenhout, Senior Associate Dean for the College of Arts & Sciences giving welcoming remarks after which Sara Damewood, State Team Lead, for NETWORK of SC, Sister Simone's national organization, introduced the speaker.

Campbell began by speaking of Cardinal Bernardin's idea of the "seamless garment," of all of us woven together. We are trying, she said, to find out how do we fit together in a world and nation so polarized, pulled apart by political posturing. His message is needed now more than ever. Pope Francis raises four processes for weaving this garment back together, four steps for building peace in situations of conflict.



First: time is more important than space. If we want to build peace we cannot protect our own turf, we cannot try to bring the other to our side. We have to first engage in dialogue about what really matters.

Second: the hunger for unity must prevail over conflict. I have to hunger for unity enough to give up my desire to win

Third: realities are more important than theories. The stories and lives of real people are more important than any theories I have that explains reality. The challenge is when we talk to each other to make sure the theory takes into account what is actually going on with real people, not just about theory removed from real people.

Fourth: the whole is greater than the parts. If you're missing one of the parts at the table, you cannot make peace. Democracy and policy requires that we have everyone engaged in the conversation.

Campbell then invited the audience to join her in a visual demonstration of the changes in the financial realities of the past 60 years. From 1949 to 1979, after World War II, everyone's income in the US went up around 100%. The top 20% went up 86% while the bottom 20% went up 116%. She reminded the audience that 116% of a very small number is still a small number and 86% of a very large number is an even larger number. But until 1979 things were improving for everyone.



From 1980 to 2014 (the most recent year for which data is available) it was a very different story. She called for volunteers from the audience to help her create a human bar graph to represent the changes in income in the past 34 years. Donna represented the top 20% which saw an increase of 61% in that time. Marking off one step for each 5% change sent Donna off toward the end of the room, 12 steps.

Marilyn, representing the next top 20% who saw an increase of 28.8%, took 5.5 steps toward the end of the room. The middle class, portrayed by Janet, increased by 15%, stepped off at 3 steps, just to the right of the podium. Campbell noted humorously that everyone believes they are the “middle class” regardless of income and unencumbered by data.



Catherine, showed the 20% who are next to bottom; they gained only 6% in that period, just one step. And then she came to Katie depicting the bottom 20% who actually saw their income decrease by 8.5%, 2 steps backwards. But then she noted that within the top 20% there were two hidden statistics. She called on Allan and Sarah to show the relative change in income for the top 5% and top 1% respectively. Allan, as the top 5% walked off 21 steps to the far corner of the room, marking the 106% increase this group saw in the same 34 year period. Sarah then walked to the same far corner, down the width of the room and along the back until she was even with the podium in the middle of the room: 45 steps, a 224% increase.

American individualism based on the desire to win for oneself, one's family, leads inevitably to competition for resources, division, separation and the fragmentation of our society. When I think I'm the only one who has to take care of my family then I don't want to be cooperative; I have to protect my family; our defenses up, and we perceive the needs of others as a threat to our own wellbeing. We have to find a way to come back to the understanding that it's not about just me, the individual. All faiths teach us it is about community, we are all in this together. The past wealth of our nation has given us the mistaken idea we can get by on our own, that we don't need each other. We tend to “write off” whole sections of our society that “don't matter” in my own individual life and world. Bernardin's concept of the seamless garment is to remind us that we are in this together, one body, and all have to play our part.



Campbell concluded by offering four virtues for the new year:

1. Have a modicum of joy – the challenge is to find the joy; the essence of the spiritual life. Make joy part of how you examine your life.
2. Exercise holy curiosity – want to know what is happening with all the different people and parts of our society; ask pesky questions; talk to the people around you. Most people have thought about these issues; talk with them.
3. Sacred gossip – share the stories with friends of what you have discovered in holy conversation. Re-weave our seamless garment
4. Do your part – do one thing. There are so many insistent requests for help; it is overwhelming and we tend to shut down. But just pick one thing and do it.



If we are in it together we can become the seamless garment, caring for all life, all creation, and make peace the way Pope Francis challenges us to do, in dialogue, not demanding people agree with us. Let us invite everyone to the table