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President Joe Biden awards the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Sr. Simone Campbell.

President Joe Biden awards the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Sr. Simone Campbell, a longtime advocate for economic justice and health care policy, during a ceremony at the White House in Washington July 7, 2022. (CNS/Reuters/Kevin Lamarque)



by John Dear

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This week on "The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast," John Dear speaks with Sr. Simone Campbell, a well-recognized voice, organizer and leader for social and economic justice in the U.S.

A Sister of Social Service, Campbell is a religious leader, attorney, author and recipient of the 2022 Presidential Medal of Freedom. For 17 years, she was executive director of Network, the national Catholic lobby for social justice and the leader of "Nuns on the Bus." Her health care policy work was critical in the passing of the Affordable Care Act in 2010.

Before that, she spent 18 years working at the Community Law Center in Oakland, California, which she founded. She also has served as the leader of her religious community and now serves on their governing council. Her two award-winning books are *A Nun on the Bus* (2014) and *Hunger for Hope* (2020). Campbell is also a board member of the National Catholic Reporter.

In the first part of this two-part conversation, Dear asks Campbell about the growing authoritarianism and fascism under President Donald Trump.

"We have a two-party system, and what we're experiencing is the end of the Republican Party," she said. Now, in this crisis, "we have to learn how to talk to each other nonviolently and find the best practices to be engaged and talk to each other, and listen to one another. We have a lot of work to do."

She said she was radicalized with her younger sister in 1963 while watching television when the children in Birmingham, Alabama, were fire-hosed and attacked by dogs for marching for an end to segregation.

"I was horrified but motivated by that," Campbell said. "From then on, the Gospel and Jesus were always connected with justice. After my sister died of cancer, I picked up her spirit and decided to carry on the journey for justice and have her with me along the way."

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Network was founded by Catholic sisters in 1972 "to be a network of Catholic sisters around the country to do advocacy for economic justice and environmental issues, to bring the voices of real people to inform pending legislation," she said. She added that the work of the sisters became the tipping point to pass the Affordable Care Act, which is under assault right now by Republicans in the current government shutdown.

When asked how she has maintained her work for justice over decades, Campbell said, "It starts with a contemplative practice, which is about deep listening to God, to the needs of the time and being present. That leads to holy curiosity, a deep desire to understand the other. With curiosity, deep listening, and sharing stories, we can build community and new connections."

"The Gospels are full of Jesus' curiosity," Campbell said. "It's the invitation that creates the weaving of community."

"Everyone has a piece of the work of justice to do, so what's yours?"

Listen to the full episode here.

**Read this next:** Q & A with Sr. Simone Campbell on her year since leaving Network
This story appears in the **The Nonviolent Jesus Podcast** feature series. View the full series.