

[Simone Mary Campbell \(1945–\)](#) ^[1]

By: Cleveland, Claire Keywords: [Campbell, Simone](#) ^[2] [Nun on the Bus](#) ^[3] [Affordable Care Act](#) ^[4] [Obamacare](#) ^[5] [Catholic Church](#) ^[6]

Simone Campbell is a Roman Catholic sister, attorney, and poet who advocated for social justice, especially equal access to healthcare in the US in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Campbell worked as a lawyer and served the working poor in California. As of 2018, she works for NETWORK, a lobbying group in Washington DC that focuses on broadening access to healthcare by lowering costs. In response to proposed federal budget cuts that would disproportionately affect the poor, Campbell organized Nuns on the Bus, a group of nuns who traveled across the US to publicize the potential effects of the budget cuts. She also organized the Nun's Letter that supported the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Campbell advocated for the Affordable Care Act that, once passed, increased access to affordable healthcare for women and children, and started a national dialogue about poverty in America.

Campbell was born on 22 October 1945 in Santa Monica, California. She was the eldest of four siblings. According to Campbell, she was given the name Mary because it was the middle name of her paternal grandmother and because her mother was devoted to the Virgin Mary. Campbell attended the Catholic school associated with St. Bartholomew's parish in Long Beach, California. The school was operated by the sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. According to Campbell's book, *A Nun on the Bus*, Campbell wanted to become a missionary doctor and attend the pre-medical studies program at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Missouri. She was unable to pursue that dream after her younger sister Katy was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a type of cancer that was incurable at the time. Campbell's sister was given three to five-years to live. Campbell wrote that the cost of her sister's medical care meant that Campbell's family could not afford to send her to St. Louis University. Campbell's sister died in 1968. According to Campbell's book, Campbell bonded with her sister over their shared interest in the civil rights movement and attributes some of her passion for social justice to her sister.

On 8 September 1964, Campbell joined the Sisters of Social Service. The Sisters of Social Service was an international Roman Catholic community of sisters who worked to serve their communities through community organizing, economic development, and legislative advocacy. In the Catholic Church, women can become sisters or nuns, collectively referred to as women religious. Although they have similar roles as priests, women are not allowed to become priests in the Catholic faith. According to her book, Campbell was influenced by the community's mission to be an active force for justice in the world, which often got the community in trouble, but was something that Campbell said fit with her personality. According to Campbell's book, people did not perceive the Sisters of Social Service as a traditional community. One traditional element that the Sisters of Social Service maintained was that sisters took new names when they began their religious lives. Taking on a name other than one's birth name is common in the Catholic tradition and symbolizes the new life that person enters when they take a religious vow. Campbell adopted the name Simone, a feminized version of Simon, after the Catholic saint Simon Peter. According to Campbell, she loved the biblical story when Jesus told Peter, during a storm on the sea of Galilee, to leap out of the boat and to trust Jesus to keep him safe. Peter jumped over the side. According to Campbell, the name Simone is representative of her self-identified traits of enthusiasm, being prone to mistakes, and being overextended.

In 1967, Campbell enrolled in school at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles, California, and took her first vows with the Sisters of Social Service. To become a sister in the Sisters of Social Service, Campbell was required to pass through various steps. According to her book, the first step was to move into one of Sisters of Social Service houses, which she called a living community. Next, she took her initial vows, which included promising chastity, poverty, and obedience, and following the constitutions of the community. The last step is to take the final vows, called the Final Profession, which required a sister to take perpetual vows in the community.

Campbell received a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1969 from Mount St. Mary's College. After graduating, Sisters of Social Service sent Campbell to a community in Portland, Oregon, to work as religious education consultant for the archdiocese. An archdiocese is a region determined by the Catholic Church, overseen by a single bishop, or a high-ranking male leader in the Catholic Church. Religious communities assign sisters to various archdiocese to work while the sisters are progressing through the steps to becoming a nun. As a volunteer community [organizer](#) ^[7] in Portland, Campbell organized for tenant's rights. She and other volunteers traveled to the Salem, Oregon, to offer testimony on behalf of tenants. According to her book, Campbell's lobbying experiences made her decide that she needed to be a trained lawyer to effectively participate in social advocacy.

After three years in Portland, Campbell moved back to Los Angeles to take her final religious vows in 1973 and officially become a nun. The Sisters of Social Service encouraged members to be active in society and in politics for the Catholic Gospel, which meant to work in politics to ensure that laws were in accordance with Catholic doctrine. Campbell went on to pursue a law degree. She enrolled in the University of California, Davis, in Davis, California, where she worked for a professor as a legal researcher. Campbell also worked on the UC Davis Law Review.

Campbell graduated from law school in 1977 and founded the Community Law Center in Oakland, California, which focused on

unmet legal needs of working-poor families. She designed the concept for the center during her final semester of law school. According to Campbell's book, she opened the Community Law Center in Oakland, because according to census data at the time, that area had the highest density of working-poor people in California. For the first year, Campbell ran the business out of her home's telephone closet, which was shared by other nuns living in the house. Campbell worked with clients on their legal needs, which included attaining permits for work and settling contract issues between tenants and landlords. Campbell handled any of the legal needs her clients had at a low price so that people with low incomes had access to legal work. Over the years, the center grew to include six attorneys, five paralegals, and other support staff.

In 1995, Campbell left the Community Law Center. In a UC Davis Alumni of the Month profile, she was quoted saying that she left the Community Law Center because it needed new leadership to remain sustainable, and she was ready to do something else. That same year, Campbell was elected to general director of the Sisters of Social Service, where she oversaw the activities of the Sisters of Social Service community in the US, Mexico, Taiwan, and the Philippines. She traveled to Chiapas, Mexico, in 1996 as a part of her job as general director. After finishing her term as general director, Campbell took a year sabbatical and spent seven weeks at a retreat in Tucson, Arizona, at the Redemptorist Picture Rock Retreat center.

In 2002, Campbell became the executive director of Jericho, an interfaith interest group that advocated on behalf of the poor. Founded in 1987, the group worked to protect and advance the interests of people living in poverty in California by providing interfaith communities with tools for advocacy, such as education and access to resources. Jericho's staff lobbied at the state capitol and in legislative districts for changes in public policy that would benefit the poor. Those policy changes included attempts to increase access to healthcare, reform housing regulations, and create better working conditions. In December of the same year, she traveled to Iraq as a part of a peace delegation, just three months prior to the US bombing of Iraq.

In November 2004, Campbell was recruited to be the executive director of NETWORK, a Roman Catholic group that supported social justice through public policy, which required her to move to Washington, DC. Around the same time, she took an active but informal role in the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, which was a coalition that represented the majority of Catholic American sisters and nuns. The association is made up of the leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the US. The conference served as a resource to members and as a collaborative group to cause social change by using its collective authority.

Between 2004 and 2008, Campbell and NETWORK lobbied in Washington, DC until the election of Barack Obama^[8] as president. In 2008, Campbell and NETWORK began working to help pass legislature that would become the Affordable Care Act. NETWORK lobbied, attended hearings, and testified in support of a complete overhaul of the healthcare system. Nancy Pelosi, then the House Speaker, announced that the Senate healthcare bill would be voted on during the week of 15 March 2010. Campbell and NETWORK joined the Catholic Health Association in publicly endorsing the Senate healthcare bill. The bill would maintain the Hyde Amendment, which controls and prevents federal spending on abortion^[9]. Catholic doctrine did not allow abortion^[9], and thus most followers of Catholicism, including Campbell and the NETWORK, did not support abortion^[9]. Because the Senate healthcare bill would not allocate federal dollars toward abortion^[9], but would increase access to healthcare for Americans, Campbell and NETWORK supported the bill. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops, however, came out against the bill because they asserted it was not strict enough on federal funding for abortion^[9].

Campbell and fifty women in religious organizations, including NETWORK and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, signed the Nun's Letter in support of the Affordable Care Act. The letter was also supported by the Catholic Health Association, who represents 1,200 Catholic sponsors, systems, facilities, and related organizations. The Nun's Letter asserted the importance of passing the bill associated with Affordable Care Act because it did not provide taxpayer funding for elective abortions, but would make a \$259 million investment in support of pregnant women, which the letter referred to as the real pro-life stance. According to Campbell, the letter was a rebuttal to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' lack of support of the bill. Pro-life meant that an entity or policy was not in support of abortion^[9], but the authors of the Nun's Letter argued that being pro-life was about supporting women, more than just not supporting abortion^[9].

In 2012, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious was investigated by the Vatican. The Vatican, the central governing body of the Catholic Church, consists of the pope and an administrative body. According to *The New York Times*, the Vatican investigated the Leadership Conference of Women Religious because they were concerned that the nuns' organization^[10] hosted speakers and published materials that strayed from Catholic doctrine, including matters involving the all-male priesthood, birth control^[11] and sexuality, and the centrality of Jesus to Catholic faith. Additionally, the Nun's Letter and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' support of the Senate health care bill were factors in the Vatican's investigation.

That same year, Campbell created the Nuns on the Bus, which was a travelling group of nuns who worked to raise awareness of the poor and disenfranchised. The first tour in 2012 covered nine states and around 2,700 miles. The nuns stopped at homeless shelters, food pantries, schools, and health care facilities operated by other nuns. The tour was planned in part to protest cuts in programs for the poor and working families in the federal budget that was passed by the House of Representatives. According to *The New York Times*, those cuts were proposed by Paul Ryan, a Republican representative for the state of Wisconsin, who cited his Catholic faith to justify the cuts.

As of 2018, Campbell still serves as the executive director of NETWORK and continues to lead subsequent Nuns on the Bus tours. Campbell continues to fight attempts by conservative, Republican legislators to repeal and replace the Affordable Care

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