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Nuns on the Bus tour returns to Ohio

Sharon Abercrombie | Oct. 13, 2012 NCR Today

COLUMBUS, OHIO --Mimi Brodsky Chenfield had the date wrong. She showed up a day early for the Nuns on the Bus rally last week. Chenfeld had been attending a morning concert at her synagogue. After skipping lunch to rush across town to be on time at the Ohio Dominican University Campus, the senior arrived to find no bus and no sisters waiting in the parking lot.

No problem. Chenfeld, an ardent life-long social justice activist just came back on Friday, October 12. ?The sisters have inspired and touched me. They stand for everything a Jewish-American friend believes and shares. Their message needs to be heard by everyone.?

An estimated crowd of 250 joined with Chenfeld to greet the sisters as they stepped off their colorful bus. This was the sisters? second swing through Ohio and is a non-partisan effort to promote faith and social values in the 2012 election year. The passengers this time are Ohio sisters who work with the poor and know first-hand how their friends? lives could be negatively affected should social programs be cut from the national budget.

Starting in Cincinnati Oct 10 and concluding October 15, it has involved a 1000-mile trip to Dayton, Columbus, Lima, Youngstown, Fremont Toledo, Cleveland, Athens and Marietta to visit health care and educational centers that assist needy people.

The Sisters? initial trip last June was organized by Sister of Social Service Simone Campbell, director of NETWORK, a Catholic social justice-lobbying group supported by religious. It comprised a nationwide visit to nine states to call attention to the inadequacies in Wisconsin Republican Congressman Paul Ryan?s proposed budget passed by the House. The U.S. Catholic Bishops have called it unacceptable.

Ryan is now the Republican vice presidential running mate of Gov. Mitt Romney. Ohio is seen as a major battleground swing state between Republicans and Democrats.

But the sisters? focus this time has targeted both political candidates and what is missing from their campaign messages and debate.

?I?m still waiting for a real debate about the poor,? Dominican Sister of Peace Judy Morris, told the crowd. Morris, director of justice programs for her Columbus based community, remarked on the appropriateness of the bus coming to a college campus. ?We are students as long as we live, and we are impelled to learn about and to be rooted in the Gospel tradition. Jesus was not executed for saying prayers.? He had both feet planted in his work with the poor, she said.

?If we are rooted in the Gospel tradition, we need to ask what will happen to senior citizens if Meals on Wheels is cut? What about the students here? What will happen to their Pell grants? What about health care for all people? There are currently 27 million people without health care.?

Education was a recurring theme at this ?classroom in the parking lot.?

Sister Mary Wendeln, a Precious Blood Sister from Dayton, and a 2012 Cesar Chavez awardee for her work with the Latino immigrant community in Cincinnati, lamented the direction of the 2012 campaign, with its excessive, negative rhetoric. ?People don?t know what to believe.?

Wendeln said? it is time to ?put God?s people back into the conversation,? and one way to do it is to learn about the Faithful Budget, and push for its adoption by lawmakers. ?Whoever wins this election, we will still have to keep on working with them for a budget that includes all of God?s people.?

Christian, Muslim and Jewish groups in Washington, D.C drew up the Faithful Budget some months ago. Instead of cutting spending, it calls for reasonable revenue for responsible programs, comprehensive and compassionate budget principles that will protect the common good. and help lift the burden on the poor.

On the same topic, Sister Monica McGloin of Cincinnati, a member of the Dominican Sisters of Hope and an advocate for worker justice and the Affordable Care Act, added that ?everyone has the right to work, and have access to job training and housing. Show me your budget and I?ll tell you what your values are.?

Ohio Dominican University?s president, welcomed the nuns on the bus, and then gave the crowd a bit of Catholic history?s compassion for the poor. ?It is not just an ideological position...It goes back to our origins,? said Sister Margaret Ormond. In the 1840?s her own community went towards the margins of society to work with the poor and voiceless. Fifteen century Dominican community founder, Dominic, sold one of his precious parchment books to feed the starving during a famine.

Fourth century saint Basil reminded the faithful ?if you have two coats, one of them belongs to the poor.?

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