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Nuns on the Bus tour ends in Washington, D.C.

Maureen Fiedler | Jul. 2, 2012 NCR Today

I have just come from the sidewalk across the street from the Supreme Court and the U.S. Capitol, immediately in front of the Methodist Building. (All sorts of interfaith meetings for justice and peace take place at the Methodist Building every week.) It was an apt spot at which to greet the returning Nuns on the Bus.

It was about 95 degrees in the shade, but a breeze helped moderate that heat for the enthusiastic crowd of about 300 people gathered to welcome the nuns home.

These nuns had just completed a nine-state tour calling for economic justice, specifically the defeat of the federal budget authored by Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI). That budget would cut programs for the poor and vulnerable, gut Medicare and Medicaid, and provide large tax breaks for the wealthy. "Immoral," they called it, and the crowd responded with resounding applause.

Interestingly, the nuns were greeted by interfaith speakers and an interfaith crowd. At one point before the bus actually arrived, I turned around to see about 20-25 young women in hijabs, Muslim head scarves. Given as I am to fostering good interfaith relations, I walked over to talk to them and discovered they were from Qatar in the Middle East. They wanted to know more, so I explained the purpose of the bus tour, acknowledging the strong tradition of social justice in Islam. They seemed to understand the principles at stake. And when someone began leading the song, "Down by the Riverside," they really resonated with the line "ain't gonna study war no more."

When the nuns finally arrived and speeches began, several nuns told touching stories they had heard on the trip, stories of heartbreak, unemployment, hardship and need. These women had been deeply touched by the people they met, convinced more strongly than ever that the Ryan budget must be buried. t

I interviewed Sr. Simone Campbell, the executive director of NETWORK, for Interfaith Voices this past week when the bus was in Cleveland. I pointed out that though the Ryan budget had passed the House, it would go nowhere because the Senate is controlled by the Democrats. "So why do this?" I asked.

She pointed out that this budget is a bargaining chip on Capitol Hill and in the fall campaign. And it's embedded in the thinking of its sponsors on the Hill.

Simone Campbell was greeted as a heroine when she spoke to that crowd on the Hill. And well she might be. She and the women of NETWORK, the Catholic social justice lobby, pulled off a spectacular event with this bus tour.

Paul Ryan, Catholic that he is, should just say "Yes, Sister" and forget that budget.

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