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Introducing Nuns on the Ferry

Maureen Fiedler | Sep. 25, 2012 NCR Today

American nuns, led by Sr. Simone Campbell of NETWORK, the Catholic social justice lobby, are not limiting their transport to buses. On Monday, about 200 nuns boarded the Staten Island Ferry to continue their protest of the Paul Ryan budget, which slashes programs for those who are poor and vulnerable.

The ferry trip drew comments from Rep. Michael Grimm, a Republican congressman who represents a district based on Staten Island and who voted for the Paul Ryan budget in the House.

According to Politicker [1], an online news source, Grimm said: "It's a little odd that Catholic nuns who have dedicated their lives to serving God and the community are now focused on something as political as the Ryan-Romney budget."

Grimm, who is a Catholic, offered his own advice: "They are putting a lot of effort into such a partisan matter, instead of taking to the streets in opposition to issues like NYC schools giving the morning after pill to teenagers, potentially without their parents' knowledge. For teenagers to be taught that abortion is an acceptable form of birth control is as disgusting and reprehensible as gender-select abortion, and furthermore shows the moral breakdown of our society."

"I would hope that the nuns will remain focused on these types of religious-based issues, which are far more in line with their apolitical Catholic faith," he added.

"Apolitical Catholic faith"? Since when? Grimm apparently does not think that economic justice is a suitable "Catholic" issue, or even a "religious-based" issue.

Sr. Simone Campbell understands these issues in a way that reflects a real knowledge of Catholic teachings on social justice: "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" from Vatican II and the social encyclicals.

"Our opposition is not political; it's about morality," she said in a statement responding to Grimm's criticism. "Representative Grimm's support of the Ryan-Romney budget hurts our nation because it cuts vital funding for safety-net programs. This does great harm to struggling families, and being pro-life includes saving their lives as well. Representative Grimm should know that."

I disagree with my friend, Simone, in only one way: The nuns' opposition to the Ryan budget is political as well as moral. It may be based in moral judgments and not partisan preferences, but it inevitably has political ramifications. In the current election climate, it cannot be otherwise. But work for social justice usually requires political action, usually in a legislature. Catholic teachings are not "apolitical" -- no matter what the issue.

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Links:

[1] http://politicker.com/2012/09/michael-grimm-finds-nuns-on-a-ferry-protest-against-him-a-little-odd/