



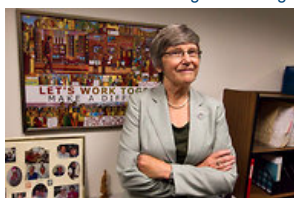
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Nuns, Rebuked by Rome, Plan Road Trip to Spotlight Social Issues

By LAURIE GOODSTEIN
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In a spirited retort to the [Vatican](#), a group of Roman Catholic nuns is planning a bus trip across nine states this month, stopping at homeless shelters, food pantries, schools and health care facilities run by nuns to highlight their work with the nation's poor and disenfranchised.

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Doug Mills/The New York Times
Sister Simone Campbell is organizing a bus tour to draw attention to nuns' work with the poor and to protest planned aid cuts.

The bus tour is a response to a [blistering critique](#) of American nuns released in April by the Vatican's doctrinal office, which included the accusation that the nuns are outspoken on issues of social justice, but silent on other issues the church considers crucial: abortion and gay marriage.

The sisters plan to use the tour also to protest cuts in programs for the poor and working families in the federal budget that was passed by the House of Representatives and proposed by Representative Paul D. Ryan, a Wisconsin Republican who cited his Catholic faith to justify the cuts.

"We're doing this because these are life issues," said Sister Simone Campbell, executive director of [Network](#), a liberal social justice lobby in Washington. "And by lifting up the work of Catholic sisters, we will demonstrate the very programs and services that will be decimated by the House budget."

The bus tour is to begin on June 18 in Iowa and end on July 2 in Virginia. The dates overlap with the "Fortnight for Freedom," events announced by Catholic bishops to rally opposition to what they see as the Obama administration's violations of religious freedom. The bishops object in particular to a mandate in the health care overhaul to require religiously affiliated hospitals and universities to offer their employees coverage for birth control in their insurance plans.

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Doug Mills/The New York Times
The bus's decal.

Sister Simone, a lawyer who ran a legal clinic for the poor in Oakland, Calif., for 18 years, is not completely on board with the bishops' religious liberty campaign. She said that financing for Catholic social services had increased significantly in the three years since President Obama took office: "We're celebrating the

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religious freedom we have.”

She recently spent time with the Iraqi Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine, and said: “If you want to talk about religious liberty, look at them. Their mother house was in Mosul until it got bombed.”

But the nuns do find common cause with the bishops on the budget cuts, and their bus tour will publicize letters the bishops recently sent protesting the budget. The nuns are inviting bishops whose dioceses they will pass through to join them. The tour will stop at local Congressional offices and lobby along the way.

Network, where Sister Simone and two other nuns serve on a staff of nine, was singled out in the Vatican’s recent critique of the nuns. The critique focused on the [Leadership Conference of Women Religious](#), an umbrella group for leaders of about 80 percent of women’s orders.

Network is not formally affiliated with the Leadership Conference. But Sister Simone and other nuns angered some bishops by lobbying to help pass the Obama administration’s health care overhaul. The Vatican document criticized nuns for challenging bishops, “who are the church’s authentic teachers of faith and morals.”

The tour, “Nuns on the Bus: Nuns Drive for Faith, Family and Fairness,” includes stops in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Maryland. The bus, with a sound system, signs and a podium, will seat only 12, and Sister Simone said she had had to turn away many would-be riders.

A rotating group will be on board, including [Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary](#), the [Daughters of Charity](#) and the [Sisters of Social Service](#), Sister Simone’s order. They plan to sleep at mother houses of the religious orders.

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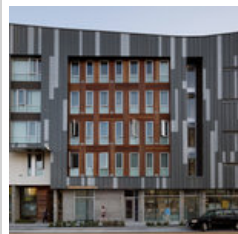
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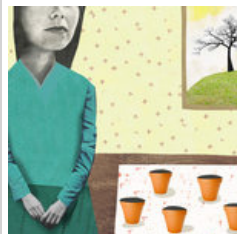
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