

# Nuns On The Overpass: Question Austerity

By noise of rain · Wednesday Jun 20, 2012, 11:46 p.m. EST

When the Overpass Light Brigade contacted the D.C. coordinators for Nuns on the Bus, we didn't really expect to get the busy Sisters out to one of our bridge parties. We really just wanted to extend a warm Wisconsin welcome to their tour, where they are highlighting the human side of politics by reminding people that the poor are the most asymmetrically affected by the current systematic dismantling of public services. We were delighted with their response. "See you on the bridge Tuesday night!"

Word got out. The nuns have gained some real momentum, and progressives in Wisconsin are hungry to continue and build, amplify, tweak, sustain our own momentum. OLB events have grown so much that we no longer even request response in order to tailor the message to the number of Holders of the Lights. We just know folks will show up.

There were 90 people on the bridge last night. I was off trying to get some pictures from ground level when I heard a massive cheer, sounding like a winning Badger touchdown at Camp Randall. It was 9:00, and the bus was spotted, heading for our exit. Wow.

We had worked to figure out a good message that would resonate with the nuns' tour. They had spent the day in Janesville, bringing visibility to Paul Ryan's ridiculous budget proposal that seems to have caught the limited imaginations of rank-and-file Republicans. Austerity. Question Austerity. That's it: simple, to the point, and the beginning of a social media campaign. Hashtag for twitter, and the simple narrative structure: "I question austerity when ... [fill in blank]" which is already picking up some steam. Please help us with this! Question Austerity!

Sister Diane walked right up to the cyclone fence when she saw the words over the highway. She seemed overjoyed, like a kid in a candy store. "The Overpass Bagpipe Brigade" (Denny) punched up the bladder and began an amazing bagpipe anthem as we slowly escorted the Sisters to the bridge. Cheers abounded. It was so crowded with photojournalists, videographers, friends, volunteers, well-wishers, that I was thankful that the police didn't visit us at that moment, since we were breaking "do not block the walkway" rule. The bridge was also doing a bit more swaying than usual.

It was Sister Mary's 72nd birthday, and she looked profoundly happy holding the letter "E" when everyone kicked into a rousing version of Happy Birthday To You. It was simply wonderful looking at this community that we've been building, and its growing interconnections with other peace/justice activist groups. This Nuns on the Bus tour is a powerful thing, because the Sisters are creating a context for their own essential visibility. They will not let their moral compasses be dictated from disconnected hierarchies, and their insistence on civil engagement is their core power.

After holding the letters for a while, the busy Sisters needed to get to their evening respite. It had been a very long day for them and they were tired. We did a quick "human microphone" to thank them for the visit, and escorted them back to their bus, bagpipes and all.

This morning, there was a nice email from the Nuns on the Bus Team in my inbox: "This was great last night, we all truly enjoyed it and it lifted our spirits to do something so fun after such a successful and long day." I also noticed the signature line on an earlier email sent by Sr. Mary Ellen, when we were first coordinating this wonderful bridge party. It cited "Dorothy Day - Catholic Worker" and went like this:

"What we would like to do is change the world — make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute — the rights of the worthy and unworthy poor, in other words — we can, to a certain extent, change the world ..."

I'm not a particularly religious person, but I'll certainly say Amen to that!

