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Of Socks and Shutdowns

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Almost ten years ago, about a month after September 11, when our world was shaken and shocked by planes flying into buildings and falling into fields, I found myself surrounded by dozens of pairs of socks I had emptied out onto the bed. Dress socks, sport socks, casual socks – socks for every occasion. Single socks with no partner. Mismatched pairs of almost look-alike socks.

For two hours, I sat there and organized my socks, tossed away lonely singles and ratty old ones, and neatly replaced them according to type and color back into the drawers. It was a comforting thing to do in the aftermath of events that seemed to have shifted the world on its axis forever. I couldn't end terrorism or stop planes in midair but I could have control over one thing that day – my socks.

In the week leading up to the agreement on the 2011 FY federal budget which averted a governmental shutdown, I felt like organizing my socks again.

It was extremely distressing to listen to the ideological posturing on matters which had nothing to do with reducing the deficit and everything to do with elections in 2012. I did go to Washington, DC, twice to lobby with people of faith to keep funding for Title X (read: funding for Planned Parenthood and other family planning clinics) intact and to bring the message that balancing the budget on the backs of those who are already poor is not acceptable or moral. It felt good to be with others advocating for the same things. My distress was alleviated for a bit.

But as the eleventh hour approached and the nation waited to hear whether or not there would be a shutdown, I looked at my socks. They were a mess again, but I resisted the temptation to dump them all on the bed and have at them.

A shut down was averted. Some compromises were reached – but we will have to endure this all over when the 2012 fiscal year budget is presented.

The “trickle down theory” of economics is bogus, especially when the top one percent of the wealthy in our country are holding onto the disproportionate chunk of assets they control. Their tax rate seems to have been written on the tablets that Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai. But the trickle down of cutbacks – from federal to state to local budgets – is devastating. Mental health services are slashed. Public education, including state universities, is pinched. Services to families and children are squeezed.

You know the story in your state or city or town. Where is the compassion? Where is the priority to care for those who have been shut out and marginalized? As Easter and Passover approach, may those of us who follow these faith traditions find hope, courage and the chutzpah to participate fully in the democratic process in a country which is supposed to be of the people, for the people and by the people.

The government is running, for now. My socks are a mess, for now.

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