



# Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

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## **Resurrection Politics in the Easter Season**

**By Dr. Maryann Cusimano Love**

The Easter Season brings a challenge: Do we really believe in the resurrection? It seems easy to believe that Jesus was resurrected 2,000 years ago; after all, He was God. But the scriptures also tell us that we are called to be an Easter people, we are called to go out to all nations and perform wonders through the power of the risen Christ. Do we really believe that is possible? Do we believe the resurrection is something we are called to practice today? Do we believe new life is possible in the most seemingly dead, broken, and hopeless corners of our world, and that each of us can participate in bringing life and hope to what might seem “dead on arrival” causes? Do we believe the Spirit will come upon us, and nothing is impossible with God?

Today we have powerful opportunities to practice what we preach, if only we recognize that we are not helpless, but can practice miracles. We must understand the value and opportunities for Faith-based Global Advocacy Networks in an age of globalization. Why do Catholic and other faith-based groups have a historic opportunity to practically and importantly influence international and local politics now? Because in an information age, ideas matter. And we have plenty of powerful ideas. The increased availability and decreased cost of information technologies, makes it easier to broadcast than to suppress ideas and values. This makes it possible, easier, and cheaper to organize and advocate across distances. In a 24/7 information environment, the “little guys” (we faith-based groups) can be unleashed. Symbols, pictures, values matter. We are stewards of a rich treasure trove of ideas and values, at a time when they matter and can be more easily brought to bear on real world problems with very practical results.

This creates valuable opportunities to practice what I call “Resurrection Politics,” taking issues (for example, war in the Congo, nuclear disarmament, or climate change) previously thought dead on arrival, and raising them up onto the agenda. In Resurrection Politics, we reframe issues with values and powerful images. We change the political space by drawing on the language and symbols of faith. Modern information technologies present greater opportunities for transparency politics, opportunities to shame and name harmful policies and players in global politics. This creates opportunities for transparency and “Sunshine Politics,” or what I call “Dracula Politics.”

Like the old Dracula story, there are some practices in global politics that are so bad they cannot stand the light of day. Simply shining a light on them can go far in defeating the problem. That is the rationale behind the bills in Congress requiring greater transparency in the sale of minerals from the Congo that fuel and finance the horrendous violence there. Shining a light on those practices can go a long way toward defeating them. Similarly, shining a light on problems of nuclear safety and proliferation are the necessary first steps toward reigning in those problems. Today, too many are ignorant and apathetic about nuclear issues, thinking wrongly that it's government's job alone to protect us from nuclear dangers, and that governments or the UN “have this covered.” Both those assumptions and practices are fatally dangerous. Combating those nuclear myths is an education, information, messaging and advocacy task, that we must collectively turn the attention of our Catholic networks, media, and Universities toward.

In doing this we must remember our track record of success. Throughout history Catholic and religious norms and institutions have often led, pressured, and informed the development of secular institutions. Non-state, voluntary norms and ideas (“soft law”) over time have ways of becoming “hard law,” adopted and enforced by states. For example, Catholic and religious norms of Just War were institutionalized over time into international and national laws and institutions, including the Geneva Conventions, the Laws of Armed Conflict, and the U.S. military codes of justice. Religious norms, organizations and leaders formed the Abolition Movement, which eventually succeeded in outlawing slavery around the world, and today continue to monitor enforcement of anti-human trafficking legislation. More recently, religious norms, groups, and leaders, in coalition with other civil society actors, have successfully led efforts to ban anti-personnel landmines, forgive debt, relieve poverty and disease in developing countries, and ban cluster weapons and munitions.

In each of these cases, development of new norms and institutions is made possible by the development and advocacy of norms by religious organizations, especially the Catholic Church. We have similar opportunities now. There is no reason we cannot build similarly effective transnational advocacy networks to promote nuclear disarmament, combat conflict minerals that fuel conflict in the Congo, and respond to a changing climate. Rather than feeling futile or fatalistic, helpless or hopeless in the face of such grave problems, we must acknowledge and channel the life-giving power that our faith and communities offer.

The question is, are we going to take advantage of the opportunities globalization brings us, to practice what we preach? Do we believe in our own agency, through the power of God? Do we believe that resurrection is possible, not just by Christ 2,000 years ago, but today, in our world? Do we believe we can be part of the resurrection story, that nothing is impossible with God?