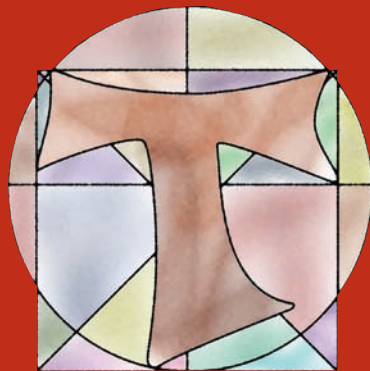
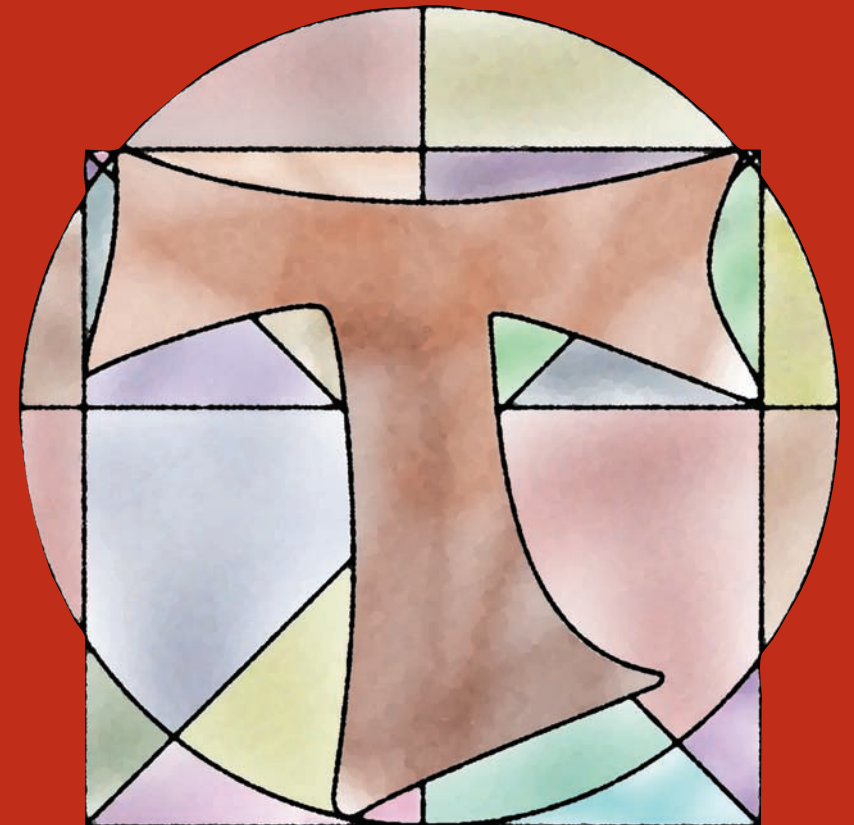


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Franciscan Colleges and Universities and the Franciscan Action Network — Together, Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

RUSSELL M. TESTA AND THE FAN STAFF

Franciscan Action Network • Washington, DC

Introduction — Forging a New Relationship

One of the central realities in the political process of 2008 has been the presence and impact of young adults. These individuals, particularly those in college, have played key roles in both presidential political campaigns. Many politicians, corporations and other institutions believe that the formation and decisions that young people make “set” the direction for future choices. This reality invites Franciscan colleges and universities to be ever more deliberate in forming young adults to bring a Franciscan-inspired perspective to decision-making.

This, too, is the goal of the newly formed Franciscan Action Network (FAN). FAN invites people to consider the particular gifts and opportunities that Franciscans and Franciscan-hearted people bring to the process of social change and to help “set” the direction for future decision-making.

This article offers an introduction to FAN, along with a history of the organization and its approach to social change. It concludes by suggesting a few ways that a relationship between FAN and Franciscan colleges and universities can be built and enhanced.

FAN, like many things Franciscan and the most effective efforts at grassroots, faith-inspired change, is made real through the quality and strength of its relationships. FAN, like the Presidential campaigns of 2008, recognizes the importance of young persons. Our hope is that this article will provide an introductory step toward growing relationship with Franciscan colleges and universities.

What is Franciscan Action Network and what does it do?

Inspired by the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi and the long heritage of men and women who follow in their footsteps as present day disciples of Jesus Christ, the Franciscan Action Network is designed to bring a coordinated and effective voice to matters of Justice, Peace and Care for Creation in our world. The particular focus of the Franciscan Action Network’s advocacy is the U.S. government and related Washington, DC-based institutions (e.g., World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization of American States). Advocacy issues are both international and domestic in scope. Through advocacy, the Franciscan Action Network hopes to bring a spirit of healing and reconciliation for the transformation of the world, as inspired by the Spirit of God.

The U.S. and its governmental policies clearly have a great impact on persons, especially ones who are poor and marginalized, both within and outside the country. It was with this perspective that 135 Franciscans from 69 distinct entities — friars, sisters, secular and lay — gathered in Baltimore, Maryland in March 2007. The participants prayed with one another, learned from one another and reflected together in the Franciscan spirit. Their aim was to discern how best to move forward in the 21st century as agents of transformation, rebuilding the world through the inspiration of their common Franciscan experience.

At the Baltimore meeting, the group accomplished two major actions: First, they wrote and unanimously affirmed a common statement of unity that called themselves and the larger Franciscan family in the U.S. to establish a structure to bring the humble force of the Franciscan charism to bear on social transformation.

We Franciscan brothers and sisters, Religious and Secular, from throughout the United States gathered together in Baltimore, MD to discern the possibility of a unified Franciscan Voice for justice. With great concern for dehumanizing issues in our society, we recognized trends contrary to our calling as followers of Christ. We see that we have the power to effectively advocate for the redistribution of resources, the responsible care for creation, and the healing of relationships within the Franciscan Family, the Church and society. To these ends, we commit ourselves and call all members of the Family to speak with one Franciscan Voice to effect the transformation of national social policy. By walking with our brothers and sisters who are poor and marginalized, we intend to advocate for peace and to reaffirm the dignity of all creation.

Adopted March 9, 2007

Second, with this common vision, a set of shared directions was commissioned to a steering committee comprised of representatives from across the diverse Franciscan family. The committee members were charged with establishing a network for advocacy and action for change that would reflect the hope of the Franciscan charism.

Since the gathering in Baltimore, the steering committee has developed the foundational framework of vision, mission and values statements, as well as the basic infrastructure of the network. The steering committee completed its assignment with the public launch of the Franciscan Action Network in March 2008 during the Ecumenical Advocacy Days gathering in Washington, DC.

FAN strives to transform the larger society through its advocacy focus on Washington, DC-based institutions that affect the lives of billions of persons. Shaping these institutions is a matter of power. Power, by itself, is neither good nor bad. For Franciscans, power stems from the ability

to join our voices with those of marginalized persons and creation in an effort to speak truth to injustice.

Franciscans have always enjoyed much greater power than they realized. This power arises from a moral foundation corroborated by actions, from a constant striving to live life with authenticity to the Gospel, and from the size and scope of our presence as citizens and recognized leaders. To illustrate this last point, it is important to realize that there are more than 500 identifiable Franciscan-sponsored ministries (e.g., colleges and universities, parishes, retreat centers, hospitals, social services, etc.) in the United States. These 500 institutions, and many others in which Franciscans serve, engage more than two million people on a weekly basis. The majority of these persons are excited and inspired by the Franciscan heritage and the invitation for social transformation. One of the chief tasks for Franciscan Action Network is to develop vehicles that can support, develop and organize these Franciscan-hearted people to be more effective in their civic engagement.

The process of projecting a truth-filled power in U.S. governmental and corporate institutions has become more complex over the last several years. As such, our actions require us to better understand the intricacies of power and how to use it for good. Projecting power for change as faith-based actors in a modern democracy requires a coordinated number of voters expressing a common message echoed and enhanced by the secular and religious media. To build and project such power the Franciscan Action Network is comprised of three interrelated parts:

Members of FAN: The backbone of the Franciscan Action Network is the friars, sisters, secular Franciscans, ecumenical Franciscans and the men and women with whom they minister. The members of FAN seek to animate their ministries and places of service to be advocates of transformation and to speak on behalf of persons who are poor or marginalized. “Membership” in FAN falls into three categories. **Institutional Membership** is comprised, at present, by the 42 provinces, congregations and national organizations that provide base-level funding and personnel for FAN activities. **Individual Membership** is free. Members receive electronic newsletters and action alerts and access “member only” sections of the Franciscan Action Network website. The individual members provide the best means to rapidly interact with thousands of persons in coordinated actions for social transformation. **Ministerial Membership** is a newly developing category. This type of member, which includes but is not limited to parishes, retreat houses, universities or colleges, might use the resources and support provided through FAN to develop their own local networks for justice, peace and integrity of creation. This group of members also helps to build the wider network for more effective and powerful actions as a Franciscan family seeking justice.

Action Commission: This Commission is comprised of a representative body from FAN Institutional Members. The Commission serves as a recognized group of leaders who work to build the relational network of persons and ministries and help the larger FAN formulate and focus the issues of advocacy for transformation. Commission members also work to develop and actualize the cords of relationships among Franciscans and others to further efforts for social change.

Action Center: The Action Center is based in Washington, DC, with staff trained and dedicated to help FAN achieve its goals of social transformation. Those in the Center work to guide the direction of FAN by monitoring the particular issues of social justice in Congress and the presidential administration. Staff members work with the Action Commission to help FAN members best use their time and resources to effect social change. In essence, the Action Center helps FAN members connect with one another and realize the transformation that the Franciscan charism calls for.

What sets FAN apart from other organizations seeking to effect change in Washington, DC is our Franciscan identity and presence — who we are. Franciscans bring to the process of social transformation an 800 year history of service and engagement with persons who are poor and marginalized, an 800 year history of being peacemakers, and an 800 year history of caring for creation. This legacy brings with it tremendous insight into human and natural relationships and a moral foundation from which to act. This foundation calls Franciscans to work for social transformation in a way that is different from the angry rhetoric and politics often experienced in our culture. The FAN approach seeks to build bridges and speaks truth that calls for accountability, regardless of political party or social position. Such a process can seem slow-moving but, when used effectively, has a greater and longer lasting impact. This process recognizes the need to challenge ourselves to live the Gospel life consistently and authentically. Whether we are heard or not depends on how “loud” we can be. Being “loud” in the political process is not about shouting, but having a large enough choir singing in unison. This requires training others in the skills of civic engagement and social change.

FAN uses four broad activity areas to form and grow its membership:

- ***Spiritual formation and practice*** — engaging deeply in the rich Franciscan heritage of contemplative action in both prayer and reflection;
- ***Capacity Building*** — helping the members of FAN increase the quality and quantity of justice, peace and care for creation opportunities that they can provide within their own institutions and ministries;

- **Networking** — helping Franciscans and Franciscan-hearted people connect locally, regionally and nationally for social action formation, direct service and other opportunities;
- **Effective Advocacy** — enabling the growing network of Franciscans to share and amplify their message of change in efficient, timely and strategic ways.

As Franciscans, our spiritual foundations and credibility are most firmly found in three issue areas: a) peacemaking; b) caring for the poor and marginalized, both in the U.S. and internationally; and c) caring for creation. The specific issues that FAN actively advocates for are limited in number. By focusing its efforts on only a few issues, FAN is better able to articulate the needs of persons who are poor and marginalized with whom Franciscans walk, as well as the importance of caring for creation.

How can the relationship between Franciscan colleges and universities and FAN be built to help bring about social transformation?

Franciscans, at their core, build and enhance relationships. There are many ways Franciscan colleges and universities and FAN might develop a mutually enhancing relationship. These means fall into two broad categories: a) academic and technical support, and b) student engagement.

Academic and Technical Support

Our collective effectiveness at social transformation will depend upon our ability to bring a message of change that is sound both spiritually and policy-wise. To accomplish this task, FAN will need the intellectual expertise of the faculty, staff and students from Franciscan academic institutions. Franciscan academic institutions can provide expert resources in economic policy, ecology, social welfare, peacemaking, immigration, law, the Franciscan intellectual tradition and countless other areas. FAN needs these experts to craft well respected cogent statements. Persons interested in exploring how they can contribute to FAN through research should contact the Action Center for further conversation.

FAN also brings its own set of experts to the effort. Persons with knowledge of how to build organizations for change, as well as policy experts on issues impacting our focus areas, are involved with our work on a daily basis. We are constantly evaluating how to maximize the impact of advocacy efforts, and how to best apply our faith and spiritual practices for effective peacemaking, care for creation and efforts to decrease poverty. In other words, we are continually striving to discover ways of actualizing our Franciscan tradition. These individuals and this ongoing effort can be of service to the faculty, staff and students at our Franciscan colleges and universities.

A case in point: Fr. Larry Janezic, OFM, who serves as an Issue Advocate in the FAN Action Center, with a focus on immigration and domestic economic justice issues, lectured at Neumann College, Aston, PA. He spoke on issues in immigration with students interested in careers in criminal justice. He explained the values and principles that are involved in advocacy in immigration and how these are grounded in the Franciscan tradition.

Similarly, Russell Testa, FAN's Executive Director, created and conducted a three-day workshop on effective techniques and practices for social change for students and faculty at Lewis University, a Christian Brothers' school near Chicago, IL.

Student Engagement

The best way to learn how to be effective advocates for social transformation is to participate in the process, developing practices, skills and techniques that can be useful for a lifetime. FAN offers an instrument for use in the work of social transformation. Students can take part in the various advocacy campaigns that FAN sponsors and learn, through actual practice, the skills needed for grassroots organizing. In 2009 FAN will lead a significant education, reflection and advocacy campaign on climate change. We believe that significant energy and climate change legislation will be passed in the U.S. in 2009. As Franciscans, we bring a particular perspective on caring for creation that recognizes the needs of persons who are poor.

One specific way that students and others can engage in social transformation is through participation in Ecumenical Advocacy Days. FAN is a major sponsor of Ecumenical Advocacy Days, an annual event in Washington, DC. During Advocacy Days more than 800 people of faith gather for prayer, education and meetings with their elected Congressional leaders. A part of the program is specifically aimed at students and young adults. Those interested should contact the FAN Action Center or go to www.advocacydays.org for more information.

Beginning in 2009 a deeper immersion in the learning process of grassroots, faith-inspired social change will be available through post-graduate internships with the Franciscan Action Network. Internships will allow graduates to get an "insider's view" of the legislative process in Washington, DC, develop leadership skills, and gain experience in the work of social change.

All healthy relationships allow the gifts and experience of both parties to be shared. Students have the ability to help FAN in the formation of the next generation of advocates through the internet's growing area of "social networking." Students are the primary force driving and shaping the growth of social networking. FAN is exploring how it can utilize these tools in its efforts to bring about social transformation. Students and others with interest in exploring how they can bring their expertise to this process are encouraged to contact the FAN Action Center.

Conclusion

Franciscan colleges and universities and the Franciscan Action Network have an incredible opportunity to bring their diverse gifts and expertise to the process of social transformation. This year, with a new presidential administration and congressional term, offers an exciting opportunity for this activity. At times of transition, our Franciscan spiritual heritage offers a much needed moral foundation. The creative energies of our Franciscan colleges and universities together with FAN's sophisticated advocacy capability can deliver this message to transform our world in the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare.

Appendix: Foundational documents for FAN.

During its inception, FAN has worked with its various members to develop their Vision, Mission and Values statements. These three documents serve as the road map for FAN's work.

Franciscan Action Network Vision Statement — How will the world be different with FAN?

The Franciscan movement was born at a time of reform and change in its society. This same spirit of reform and transformation inspired the creation of the Franciscan Action Network.

The Franciscan Action Network seeks a world that reflects the balanced and just society that the founders of the Franciscan movement, St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, believed that God invites all of creation to accept. This is a society that understands that the transformation of relationships is to occur in the multiple realities of created experience: local, national and global settings. Through the proper ordering of relations using the Christian Social Teaching principles of solidarity and the common good, we envision a world where all have what they need to reach the fullest of their individuated humanity; a world made up of the healthy communities which God created individuals to achieve. In such a world as this, creation, and humanity as part of it, would live in balance and peace with social justice. Our vision is encapsulated in the phrase — **Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi.**

Franciscan Action Network Mission Statement — Who, what, how & where is FAN to act?

The Franciscan Action Network is a network of U.S.-based ministries, institutions and persons following in the spiritual and social movement begun by St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi more than 800 years ago. Together, we seek to amplify our public voice and use our collective power to humbly advocate and act for an inclusive and transformed social policy and social structures arising out of the U.S. Federal Government and related Washington, DC-based institutions. Through our work, we hope to help build a society rooted in social justice, peace and care for all of creation.

Franciscan Action Network Values Statement What parameters of action do we bring to this work?

As Franciscans, our work for inclusive transformation must reflect the values of our Franciscan Heritage. In particular:

- Our means of doing advocacy will not dehumanize or demonize those with whom we disagree on policy matters.
- Our advocacy will use the lens of the preferential option for persons who are poor or marginalized to evaluate policy decisions. If persons who are poor or marginalized, including all creation, will not fare better after an action for change, then we cannot support the legislation.
- Our efforts will always be within a framework of the consistent ethic of life.
- Our efforts will be done in a manner that is non-partisan and with the hope that the legislation for which we advocate will come from bipartisan actors. This is both a value of proper relationality and a way of seeking greater effectiveness.
- We recognize that there are policies in the U.S. which result in actions that are unjust to people and the larger creation, and that many of us in the U.S. benefit from this injustice. Thus, as we attempt to shape policy, we must also seek to work on our own repentance and reconciliation in the larger social sphere.

- We will work in a collaborative and consultative manner both within the Franciscan family and with partners for social transformation in the religious and secular worlds. We recognize that it is impossible to advocate alone.
- We seek to balance the desire to be prophetic in our call for social change with the desire to make noticeable improvements in peoples' lives and the larger creation. This requires that we have a long view of the changes in society that will bring the Gospel's prophetic witness into existence; that we recognize that by advocating in "small steps," we move towards this reality.
- Our underlying value is love for humanity and the fullness of creation. The ability of love in action is our method and process of attempting to actualize how St. Francis and St. Clare lived in their effort to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

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Book Reviews

Johnson, Timothy J., ed. *Franciscans at Prayer. The Medieval Franciscans Vol. 4.* Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007. Pp. 507.

Franciscans at Prayer presents a compilation of research that provides a multi-faceted look at the topic of prayer in the medieval Franciscan tradition. The reader is bound to find material pertinent to one's own area of interest whether that be in theology, spirituality, philosophy, history, or art. Most articles presume a certain amount of familiarity with the Franciscan tradition and are therefore more suited to graduate level work. However, relevant material can also be extracted by the instructor and adapted to undergraduate courses. The notes also provide a wealth of scholarly information.

The book is divided into five thematic sections. In the first section, "Early Witnesses," Michael Blastic demonstrates how the writings of Francis and the early brothers emphasize prayer as an integration of praise, glory, and thanks to the all good God with a daily life of action that renders service through Gospel living. Blastic relates such an integration to the formula *forma vivendi forma orandi*. Prayer and life were to be thoroughly intertwined for the brothers so that one's very life was prayer and praise to God. Skipping ahead to the third article, J.A. Wayne Hellmann delves more fully into the theme of prayer as praise in Francis's life by tracing Thomas of Celano's depiction of Francis's prayer in his *Life of Saint Francis*. Elucidating Thomas's portrayal of Francis's life, Hellmann demonstrates how prayer encapsulated Francis's life from the time of his conversion, throughout his mission of preaching, until the time of his transformation into the crucified Christ and his subsequent death. Moreover, this prayer of praise continued on in the prayers offered by the faithful after Francis's death. Turning to Clare, Ilia Delio explores the notion of the mysticism of motherhood in Clare's letters to Agnes of Prague. Such mystical motherhood entails prayer, poverty, and humility by which the one who "gazes" on the crucified Christ becomes like Christ and is able to bear Christ to the world. Delio contrasts Clare's more sensory fourfold spiritual path of gazing upon the cross, considering, contemplating, and imitating the Crucified with the more intellectual monastic path of Scripture reading, meditating, praying, and contemplating. For Clare union with Christ results in bringing Christ to birth in one's life, thus becoming more one's true self in the image of Christ and God's co-worker in the vineyard.

The second division, "Contemplation and the Academy," begins with an essay by Timothy Johnson on Bonaventure's concern that the Friars Minor cultivate interior prayer which he regarded as particularly important for their mission of preaching. Bonaventure's attention to fostering contem-