

# Franciscan Action Network

## Transforming the world in the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

### Introduction & History



The Franciscan Action Network (FAN) is a new effort of the Franciscan family of the U.S. to bring the vision and hope of the Franciscan spiritual message to the process of social change. 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 U.S. It was with this perspective that 135 Franciscans from 69 distinct entities - friars, sisters, secular and lay – came together in Baltimore, Maryland on March 7-9, 2007. At this gathering the participants prayed with one another, learned from one another and reflected with one another in the best tradition of the Franciscan spirit. Our aim was, and is, to discern how we might move forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as agents of transformation, rebuilding the world through the inspiration of our common Franciscan experience.

At the Baltimore gathering, the group accomplished two major actions:

First, the gathered community 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 our 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 were commissioned to a steering committee comprised of representatives from across the diverse Franciscan family in the U.S. The committee members were charged with establishing a network for advocacy and action for change that would reflect the hope of the Franciscan charism.

The steering committee humbly submits this strategic plan for the Franciscan Action Network to its members and the larger world.

## **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 inspires 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, that is lived in healthy communities, which God created them 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 & 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.

## Franciscan Action Network Change Strategy

### How will the mission, vision and values be implemented?



The Franciscan Action Network's desire is to effect positive changes in social policy that will transform the larger society through a focus on Washington, DC-based institutions that affect the lives of billions of persons for good, for ill, or not at all. Shaping these institutions is a matter of power. For Franciscans, power is the ability to join our voices with the voices of marginalized persons and creation in an effort to speak truth to injustice.

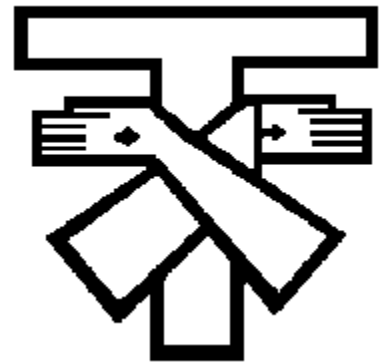
The process of projecting a truth-filled power in governmental and corporate institutions has become more complex over the last several years. As such, our approaches and actions require that we understand the intricacies of power and how to use it for good.

To project power for change in a modern democracy as faith-based actors, there is a need for a coordinated number of voters to express a common message that is echoed and enhanced by the use of the secular and religious media. To build and project this solidarity power, the Franciscan Action Network is comprised of three interrelated parts:

*Members of the FAN:* The backbone of the Network is the friars, sisters, secular Franciscans, ecumenical Franciscans and the men and women with whom they minister. The members of FAN will seek to animate the grassroots of their ministries and places of service to be advocates of transformation. At the same time, by nature of the relationships of service to persons who are poor or marginalized, the members have a unique and privileged perspective to share in articulating the change we seek.

*Action Commission:* this Commission is comprised of a representative body of the FAN membership entities. The Commission serves as a recognized group of leaders who will work to build the relational network of persons and ministries and help the larger FAN formulate and focus the issues of advocacy for transformation. They also serve to enhance the communication conduits of the FAN.

*Action Center:* The Action Center is based in Washington, DC, with staff trained and dedicated to help the FAN achieve its goals of social transformation. The staff of the Center will monitor and advise the course of the strategic decisions of the FAN to attain maximum effectiveness.



Using these three interrelated parts of FAN we will work to develop a broad network of persons that can be activated at key times to express a voice for inclusive transformation. As the Action Commission and members of FAN in the network are expressing their coordinated message, a public communications effort in the secular and religious press, as well as through web based media, will be echoing their message.

To get this message heard, the network of relationships that will physically comprise the Franciscan Action Network must be large enough to have an impact. There are multiple ways to achieve this end.

The Franciscan institutions that have joined FAN have a variety of persons, ministries and ways to interact with the larger world. In local settings, teams of leaders can be trained to serve as local animators to encourage others to join in the message for change. In particular, lay persons associated with the ministry will be trained as leaders as well as invited to add their voice to the call for change.

Along with attempting to raise local teams in ministries, individuals associated with the Franciscan entities which are part of FAN also will be encouraged to be actively associated with the network. In addition to their own involvement, they will help to actively build the network by encouraging other Franciscans and lay persons to participate with FAN through the various internet and other communications portals.

Finally, individuals drawn to the Franciscan spirit also will actively participate in FAN through the internet and the other communications portals of the network.



Through the teams organized in Franciscan ministries and other individuals with a desire to associate with the Franciscan message of inclusive transformation, a network will emerge to collectively express its power of solidarity as voters. To work, the network must be built to have open communication lines between the various elements that comprise this effort. This design will allow FAN to take advantage of its breadth by gaining from and sharing with each other specific experiences and contacts at strategic times. More importantly it models the shared responsibility and care for humanity and creation for which FAN is striving in its advocacy.

To be most effective, the specific issues that the FAN will actively advocate upon will necessarily be limited in number. By focusing its efforts on only a few issues, FAN will be able to more powerfully articulate the needs of persons who are poor and marginalized with whom Franciscans walk and thus have a greater chance to be successful in its effort.

The process of deciding these particular issues will be dialogic in nature: the Action Commission, the FAN members and the staff of the Action Center will discern where they can have the most impact in the particular context of the U.S. Congress, U.S. Administration and/or other public institutions upon which FAN focuses. As Franciscans we believe that our greatest credibility and spiritual foundation will revolve around three issue areas: a) peacemaking, b) care for the poor and marginalized both in the U.S. and internationally and c) care for creation.

Building and activating a trained and sophisticated network of persons and relationship is the strategy for change that FAN will utilize. It is one that recognizes the power we have,

as well as the hope to use it in a faith-filled way to answer the God's invitation to bring transformation to justice, peace and care for creation in our world.

Goals, Objectives, Organizational Benchmarks—



The vision, mission, values and change strategy of the Franciscan Action Network will require us to develop goals, objectives and organizational benchmarks in four areas:

*Area #1—Broaden and Deepen the Network among the Franciscan Family in the U.S.*

*These goals, objectives and benchmarks will give us the particular numbers and types of relationships that will comprise the FAN. This in turn will point to the program work that the various parts of the FAN will need to do over the next few years.*

*Area #2—Activate the Network*

*Once there is a network, its purpose is to be activated at strategic times to bring about transformation. These goals, objectives and benchmarks will point to the ways we see this actualized.*

*Area #3--Communications for Change*

*How are we to develop the internal and external communications to amplify and echo the Franciscan message for social transformation?*

*Area #4—Organizational Development*

*What particular actions need to be accomplished regarding the various parts that comprise FAN? What budgetary benchmarks and processes need to be accomplished?*