

## The Shepherds of Today

Image by [Adina Voicu](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The [Gospel message on Christmas](#) depends heavily on which Mass one attends, at least in the Catholic Church. The Vigil Mass offers the genealogy of Jesus or, as an alternative, the brief story of “how the birth of Jesus Christ came about” (Mt 1:18). For Mass at Dawn, we hear Luke’s story of the visit of the shepherds to the Nativity. For Mass during the day, there is John’s spiritual account of the Incarnation, with no details about Jesus’ birth. In the final option, Mass at Night, Luke introduces the device of the Roman census in order to place Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem, telling a simple story of Mary giving birth, and concluding with the angels’ message to the shepherds nearby.



Whether or not the Roman census actually took place at the time of Jesus’ birth, considering how the Roman Empire looked at its inhabitants brings my thoughts back to the shepherds. Luke’s story says, “In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.” The shepherds did not return to their hometowns to be registered. They were on the very bottom rung of society. They could not pay taxes and probably were not even expected to. They were nobodies. Imagine what it would feel like to be told by society and the government for your whole life that you don’t count. You don’t matter. You aren’t even worth the trouble to write down your name on a list so you can pay taxes. This was the case for those tending the sheep outside Bethlehem on that blessed night. Yet these chosen few were told first of the birth of the Redeemer Christ.

After the Angel departed from them, the shepherds could have stayed in the fields with the sheep; they knew the territory there, they had a job to do, and they knew they were not welcome in the city anyway. But they had both the raw courage and the profound generosity to share the message, to share the Good News, with people who had never valued them. That is grace. That is joy. That is a life transformed by the gospel.

Recently two of my FAN colleagues traveled to [El Salvador](#) and [Honduras](#) as part of a faith delegation of accompaniment, support and solidarity with local activists and organizations working to address the injustices there, and to enhance their awareness of the US government’s role in perpetrating those injustices. Equipped with this information, their objective was to take actions in the US, in solidarity with those they encountered, to address the injustices.

FAN Advocacy Director Sr. Maria Orlandini told us of her heartbreak at seeing the poverty around her. Advocacy Associate Merwyn De Mello, an Indian citizen and US permanent resident, experienced being singled out and harassed at the Honduran border. In the ensuing 3 1/2 hours, the delegation accompanying Merwyn collectively implemented a range of tactics including the power of moral persuasion, prayer, and contacting persons of influence, while always including the Honduran official in the process and upholding his dignity. Merwyn was

never left alone. Ultimately what started out as a deportation ended up with Merwyn being granted a Honduran visa, a joyful victory for the power of nonviolence. The grace with which Merwyn endured the situation was described as inspirational.

People who are treated as “less than,” whether inside their country or at the borders, are the shepherds of today. Their courage and personal stories remind us of the shepherds in the gospel and provide a Christmas message we all need to hear and spread: God loves us so much and wants us to know that we count. You matter. You are important. The Kingdom of God needs you.

Janine Walsh  
FAN Communications Coordinator

### **Suggested Action:**

Can you think of anyone you might treat as “less than”, whether intentionally or unintentionally? Meditate on how you respond to people who are of a different color, have different beliefs than you, etc. Ask God to open your heart to everyone and recognize that God’s love is unconditional.

### **Suggested Petitions:**

For migrants, that they be treated with respect and love wherever they go, we pray...  
For anyone who feels like they don’t matter, may they find acceptance in God’s love, we pray..

### **Prayer:**

**Lord of the Highest Heavens,  
please allow me to have acceptance of all  
people and things in my life and  
give my heart a peace that passes all understanding.**

**Amen**

## **Support FAN with a Year-End Donation**

As we begin the last month of 2022, we take a moment to look back with a grateful eye on what you, our network, has done over the past year. We are honored to continue bringing your Franciscan-hearted voice to policy advocacy, education, and organization of Franciscan Justice Circles.

We hope you consider FAN your humble servant, working to make explicit our shared Franciscan values in Washington D.C. and around the country. It takes a lot of resources and we urge you, if you haven’t had the chance, to [make a year-end donation](#). It is through your generous support that we are able to grow and find new ways to connect our Franciscan charism to our country’s policies. [Thank you for your generosity](#).



Please note: Franciscan Action Network's new mailing address is 1400 Quincy Street NE, Washington, DC 20017.

## Franciscans in North Carolina at Senator Tillis' Office

On Friday, December 9th, the Interfaith Immigration Coalition held a [vigil outside of Sen. Thom Tillis' \(R-NC\) office](#) to advance the cause of immigration reform, specifically a pathway toward citizenship. Franciscans were in attendance as FAN friend and supporter Fr. Jacek Orzechowski, OFM, brought people from his parish of Immaculate Conception in Durham. (Pictured)



Speakers included impacted persons ranging from TPS workers to individuals who had family members who were DACA recipients. Songs and prayers were lifted up that focused around visibility, empathy, and change in policies as they relate to the immigrant. Members of the NC Conference of the United Methodist Church led a chant for the benediction that reminded Sen. Tillis that immigrants are here to stay.

## December Issue of Stop Trafficking Newsletter

In the past, human trafficking was typically viewed through a criminal justice point of view, which influenced any response to it. A criminal justice response to trafficking provides identified victims with services that are often of short duration and focused on what victims need to be able to become witnesses against their traffickers. While this perspective is important, trafficking is also a public health issue that affects individuals, families, and communities across generations. A public health approach complements a criminal justice approach to preventing and ending human trafficking.

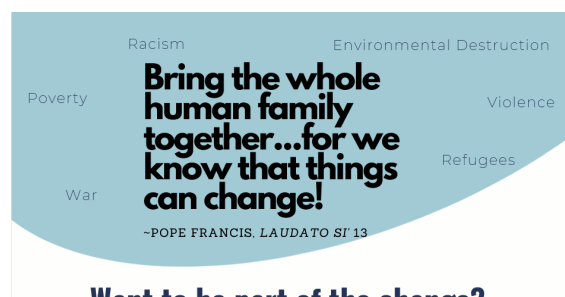


Public health prevention aims to rectify the contributing conditions that make people vulnerable and develops, implements, monitors, evaluates, and revises prevention programs targeted at specifically identified at-risk groups.

The December issue of the Stop Trafficking Newsletter, which focuses on human trafficking as a public health concern, may be accessed by [clicking here](#). The newsletter is available in both English and Spanish.

## Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

After a motivating and inspiring first FJC National Gathering in November, FAN staff are already looking to plan a second one in 2023 that could include some exciting new elements. We would greatly appreciate getting your feedback to ensure it meets your interest and availability. ANYONE who would like to



participate is welcome, even if you're not in a Circle, and we humbly ask that you take just 2 minutes to [answer a few questions](https://forms.gle/qEcZ6SE7iyhDzHiq7) to help guide us, thank you! Here is the link:  
<https://forms.gle/qEcZ6SE7iyhDzHiq7>

If you're looking for more information or guidance about forming a Franciscan Justice Circle, we invite you to take a look at the FJC [Member's Handbook](#), which can also be found on the [FJC Resources Page](#) of the FAN website, along with many multimedia resources and prayers. Please [contact us](#) if you'd like to find out more about the Franciscan Justice Circles.