

Use Your Voice

The readings this week for the [5th Sunday in Ordinary Time](#) begin immediately with orders to be inclusive. Jesus calls us to be the salt of our society, to preserve what is good, true, and just in our society. In the first reading, Isaiah is clear on how to be light in the darkness: “share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless, and clothe the naked” (Is. 58:7) with a demonstration of Spirit and power (1 Cor. 2: 4). Each time we reach out to or speak up for those vulnerable and “othered” by society, our light shines before others, and we glorify our all-inclusive God. (Matt. 5:16)

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[“That Little Voice” is a short YouTube](#) video which addresses that little voice within each of us that urges us to stay silent, usually out of fear or self-interest, when we hear or see another person or group “othered,” bullied, or excluded. The video emphasizes the importance of finding your voice and making it heard whenever we see another person made in God’s image and likeness being “othered” or subjected to any non-inclusive behavior.

Use your voice. Be the salt of the earth. Let your voice be the light that shines in the darkness. Each time we do not speak up against language or actions that classify people as outsiders, it becomes more acceptable for us and others to engage in those same biased behaviors. People are less likely to participate in “othering” when we use our voice and help make non-inclusive behavior socially unacceptable.

As followers of our all-inclusive Jesus, who spoke for those “othered” in his time – women, children, lepers, sinners, and tax collectors – our voice matters in today’s society. Our attempts to live the Gospel of Jesus have concrete social and political ramifications. We must be the voice, the salt that preserves the values of inclusivity, truth, the interconnectedness of all, and the light that illuminates the significance of the common good to our divisive society and world where individualism reigns.

Sr. Maryann Mueller, CSSF
FAN Supporter

Suggested Actions:

Be alert to how those around you may be “othered” and excluded. Then, if you feel comfortable, speak up. If you feel uncomfortable, reflect on why and then what you could have said, and then vow to speak up the next time you are in a similar situation. Make your voice heard. [Franciscan Action Network’s newsletter](#) is an avenue to address issues that impact those who are othered by society, those who are vulnerable and subject to exploitation.

Suggested Petitions:

We ask for the courage to be salt and light so that our faith will guide our participation in our society and world, we pray...

That we will use our voices in our local, national, and global communities to speak for those othered by society, we pray...

Prayer:

Lord, give us new strength so that we can build places of belonging: to create a community for all to share their gifts, to know that each of us is loved, to help us to see the light of Christ in all that we serve. Let us remember that each of us is loved, each of us is willed, and each of us is necessary.

Amen

Join us in 2024 for a Peace & Justice Pilgrimage

Please join us on **FAN's first-ever [Peace & Justice Pilgrimage](#) to Assisi, Italy, in June 2024**, cosponsored by Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service. Led by Friar Michael Lasky, OFM Conv. and Dr. Ken Butigan, this one-week pilgrimage will be a unique opportunity to pray, study the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare, build community, and deepen our commitment to work for justice, peace, and Gospel nonviolence.



We seek applications for 30 pilgrims interested in learning how the examples of St. Francis and St. Clare can help us take another step on our own paths of spirituality and action. **Please apply soon.** Details, tentative schedule, pricing, and application are on our [website](#).

Ask the EPA to Strengthen the Methane Rule

In November 2022, President Biden and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed an [updated draft rule](#) to cut methane and other harmful pollutants from oil and gas operations across the country. Now, there is a public engagement process known as a comment period open (**through Feb. 13**) which allows people and faith communities the opportunity to voice their support for cutting methane and to urge EPA to finalize and implement the rule quickly.



Interfaith Power and Light has developed this easy-to-use tool for sending comments. Please make it your own by editing the text in the comment box. [Click here to leave your comment](#).

Twenty Years after Release of 'Strangers No Longer' Immigration Reform Still Needed

On January 22, the Catholic Church in the United States celebrated the twentieth anniversary of the pastoral letter [*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*](#). This landmark document, issued jointly by the bishops of the United States and Mexico, addressed the need to manage migration between the two countries more humanely and emphasized the importance of providing pastoral care to newcomers.



Twenty years after its publication, the need for a systemic reform of the U.S. immigration system has only become more apparent and urgent. Last week, FAN was one of [165 faith groups that sent a letter](#) to the Biden administration denouncing the announced plans to create a [new asylum ban](#).

US Chamber of Commerce Actions Support Immigration Reform

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is calling on elected officials to take immediate action to help address the nation's worker shortage. Their "[America Works Agenda](#)" focuses on specific policy items they claim will help close the jobs gap, including immigration reform.



U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Historically, immigration has helped fuel the American economy. Sensible immigration policies such as employment-based immigration and temporary work visas serve as a key ingredient in the future workforce and economic growth. We invite you to take action by [clicking here](#) to urge Congress to increase employment based immigration and visas.

When will it stop? Gun Manufacturers Advertising the "JR-15"

Gun violence is now the [number one cause of death](#) for children and teens in the United States, yet the gun industry continues to make and market weapons to children. Gun manufacturers are advertising real guns for kids, such as the JR-15 made by Wee 1 Tactical, that "looks, feels, and operates just like Mom and Dad's gun." (Ad pictured)

Please [take action](#) and ask Congress to pass an [Assault Weapons Ban](#) to safeguard our children and their future.

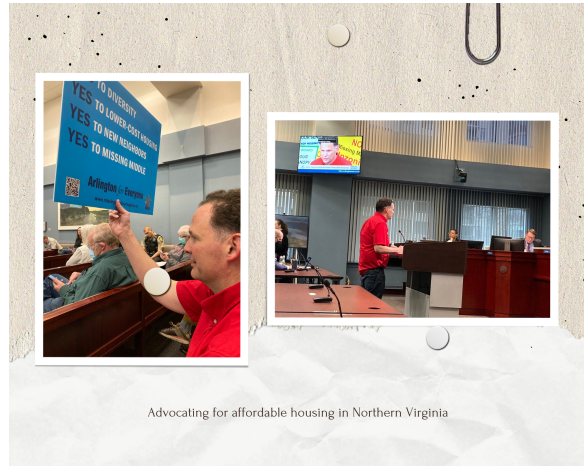


While guns are the **#1 killer of children in America**, the gun industry intentionally makes & markets weapons to children.

Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

Michael Gering, a member of the Washington, DC-area Franciscan Justice Circle, spoke before a zoning hearing of his local County Board on January 21 to advocate for affordable housing. Michael is active with YIMBY (Yes In My Back Yard) of Northern Virginia, a group that seeks to make housing affordable to all by enabling the development of more and denser housing.

Please [send FAN updates](#) on what members of your FJC are doing for justice, peace, or creation.



Advocating for affordable housing in Northern Virginia