



Hello. I am Sister Louise Lears, and it is my privilege to work on Creation Care Advocacy for the Franciscan Action Network. As part of our Lenten series, “Seeing Anew with the Eyes of the Heart,” I invite you to listen to this story about a young activist who followed his heart by fasting for climate justice.

Would you sacrifice your health and comfort for an issue you care about? Paul Champion embraced that challenge in 2021 when he went on a hunger strike for climate justice. The now 26-year-old Silver Spring, MD native had been passionate about the environment for many years. Inspired by Pope Francis’ encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, Paul studied environmental science at Loyola University Chicago to learn more about how to combat the climate crisis. He joined the Sunrise Movement, a youth organization focused on political action for climate change.

In 2021, Paul found himself frustrated with the lack of progress in Congress regarding the environment and knew he had to step up and do something to express the urgency he and his fellow activists were feeling. On October 20th, 2021, Paul began his 11-day hunger strike for climate justice alongside four other activists. They were clearly visible in the view of the White House.

Why a hunger strike? Paul remembers as a child seeing his father fast in preparation for the season of Lent, and hearing the Gospel story about Jesus fasting for 40 days and 40 nights in the desert. Both of these experiences gave him a personal and spiritual connection to the practice of fasting. Inspired by the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr, and Mahatma Gandhi, Paul wanted to step into a legacy of nonviolent action for justice. Through the difficult moments in his 11-day fast, Paul drew on meditations, morning reflections, and his Kairos cross as reminders of his purpose for fasting.

Paul Champion embraced the message of Pope Francis that Catholics must be involved in politics, even if it is “frustrating and fraught with failure.” Organizing communities and

churches, raising awareness about climate justice, and participating in nonviolent actions are all ways to hear the cry of the poor and the cry of our Sister Mother Earth. When times are challenging in the work for justice and we feel discouraged, we can look to Paul and other young, faith-based advocates for inspiration!