

## Spaciousness of Spirit

The readings for the [first Sunday in Lent](#) ground me and open a spaciousness in my spirit. The story from Genesis of the rainbow after the flood and from the Gospel of Matthew of Jesus' forty days in the desert bring back vivid memories from my years living in the Holy Land. They evoke the late winter season when the chilly, wet weather gives way—sometimes dramatically—to the beauty of spring.



I remember one late winter day driving through the West Bank after a rain, when I could barely keep to the twisting road, so distracted was I by one massive rainbow after another appearing among the steep hills terraced with olive trees. Another day, driving from the hilltop of Jerusalem down into the desert at Jericho, the winter snow and rain had irrigated the desert hills and brought forth an incredible bloom of red poppies. Thousands of them covered dozens of normally bare slopes, a miracle bloom that would last just one day.

Although Lent is often seen as a time of turning inward and depriving the senses, these readings make me wonder if Lent could be instead a time in which my senses and spirit expand outward, opening to God in new ways. The readings also offer intriguing clues of how that expansion might happen. As I read the story of Noah, I am struck by the nature of God's promise after the flood:

When I bring clouds over the earth,  
and the bow appears in the clouds,  
I will recall the covenant I have made  
between me and you and all living beings.

The covenant is not just between God and human beings; it is “between me and you and all living things.” So, might Lent be a time for me to rediscover the nature of my relationship with God—that it is not just something private between the two of us, but rather deeply connected to my relationships with “all living beings,” my fellow humans as well as all of creation?

And then there is the intriguing passage about how Jesus spent his forty days in the desert:

He was among wild beasts,  
and the angels ministered to him.

Jesus was “among” the wild beasts—not fighting them, hunting them, riding them, working them, or even caring for them, but simply being among them in peace. Could I make time to spend in nature during Lent, not controlling or changing anything about it, but just being there in

peace? I could listen to the shifting breeze, watch the migrating birds, and observe the buds swelling on the trees. That might well foster spaciousness of spirit.

The angels who ministered to Jesus during his time in the desert also interest me and lead me to ask whether I can be as attentive as an angel ministering to Jesus—in the form of my sisters and brothers—while He is in the desert. There are so many people around me living in the desert of their lives, for example victims of gun violence in my city or of disastrous wars in Gaza and Ukraine, who cry out for my loving attention.

God, help me during Lent to cultivate a spaciousness of spirit. Help me to rediscover in that space your covenant with me and all living things, and to learn each day how to be your ministering angel.

Michele Dunne, OFS  
Executive Director

**Suggested action:**

Take a prayerful walk or sit in nature this week, using the time to listen to how God is calling you to new ways of being in loving relationship with your fellow humans and other living things this Lent. Peruse the suggested actions below to discover where your loving voice or action might be needed.

**Suggested petitions:**

In prayer this Lent, help me to seek your voice and your will rather than my own, O God...

In fasting, help me to refrain from words or actions that prey upon or victimize my fellow living creatures, O God...

In almsgiving, help me to remember that whatever I give is only a small return for your rich gifts to me, O God...

**Prayer: [Creation Care Prayer](#)**

**God, maker of marvels,  
you weave the planet and all its creatures together in kinship;  
your unifying love is revealed  
in the interdependence of relationships  
in the complex world that you have made.  
Save us from the illusion that humankind is separate and alone,  
and join us in communion with all inhabitants of the universe;  
through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer,  
who topples the dividing walls by the power of your Holy Spirit,  
and who lives and reigns with you, for ever and ever.**

**Amen.**

<b>Gaza Ceasefire Actions</b>
-------------------------------

*[Image courtesy of Albraheem Abu Mustafa, Reuters](#)*

FAN is part of a growing coalition of Christian organizations working together during Lent to advocate a ceasefire in Gaza as well as hostage releases. FAN will cosponsor an in-person **Ash Wednesday Mass and an Ecumenical Prayer Service for Peace** in front of the White House tomorrow **Wednesday, February 14 at 11am ET** which we will livestream on FAN's [Instagram account](#). Register [here](#) to attend and [here](#) to learn more about the Lenten Campaign.



Even if you are far from DC, now is a critical time to ask your representatives to promote peace instead of funding more destructive weapons that will only fuel further violence in Gaza. **Your voice for peace is needed now!** [Click here to take action](#).

## Thank you for donating to the Polar Bear Plunge

On Saturday, February 10 Franciscan Justice Circle member Mike Gering and FAN executive director Michele Dunne plunged into the Potomac River with hundreds of others at the Chesapeake Climate Action Fund (CCAN) event at the National Harbor with Sr Louise Lears on hand to video the event. FAN associate of campaigns, Gabby Martinez plunged at a different site on the Potomac River. The water was chilly but spirits were high due to the generous support of those who care for God's beautiful creation all year long. Thank you to those who donated!



[Please watch our plunge here.](#)

## Last Chance to Get Your FAN Hoodie

Have you been wanting a Franciscan Action Network hoodie? Wearing one is a great way to keep warm while at events and actions during the cool weather. It's also a great way to show your Franciscan heart!

This is the final chance of this **limited time opportunity** to get a union-made FAN hoodie for yourself or someone you love. **Tomorrow, February 14** (Ash Wednesday) is the last day to [order](#). When you make a donation of \$60 or more to FAN, we will send you a FAN hoodie as a thank you gift. You have succeeded in





helping us meet our goal of at least 24 hoodies to make the order, so you will have your hoodie in hand by Easter.

There is still time to [fill out this form](#) and a FAN staff member will contact you to confirm your donation details.

## Stop the War on the Border: Migrants Speak

The Immigration Law & Justice Network (ILJ) and their partners are hosting a webinar Thursday, February 15 at 3pm ET (12pm PT) to hear directly from migrants at the northern Mexico border and inside the U.S. about how restrictions on asylum and humanitarian parole affect their lives.

[Click here to register.](#)



## Advocacy works: Two Climate Wins

Advocacy for justice and peace is usually a long process with many setbacks, but sometimes there are successes! Recently, the Biden administration took two steps on climate/environment for which FAN and many others had long called.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on February 7 strengthened limits on soot in air pollution, an important issue that often disproportionately affects the health of low-wealth communities living close to industrial facilities. Many faith leaders [praised](#) the move, including FAN's Creation Care Advocate Sr. Louise Lears, who remarked that, "Everyone should be able to simply breathe clean air."



The second measure was a White House pause in approving any pending liquified natural gas (LNG) export terminals, [announced](#) on January 26, while potential harms to planet and people, particularly frontline communities, are reviewed. National Climate Advisor Ali Zaidi [cited](#) the COP28 decision to transition away from fossil fuels and the advocacy of youth and frontline organizers as key drivers of this decision.

The importance of these decisions cannot be overstated. They are the direct result of a sustained, powerful campaign by grassroots organizers in frontline communities. Click here to [thank President Biden for his efforts](#). FAN will continue to provide advocacy opportunities to make this change permanent.

## Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

*Convener of Virtual Nationwide FJC, Carolyn Townes, OSF*

The **Virtual Nationwide Franciscan Justice Circle** continues to meet twice a month over Zoom and is in the process of discerning and committing to advocacy actions in the new year. To assist in further spiritual growth, they will read Rev. John Dear's latest book, *The Gospel of Peace, A commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke from the Perspective of Nonviolence*.

The next monthly national call, open to people in Circles or considering it, is scheduled for tomorrow, February 14 and will be a [shortened 30 minute call](#) starting at 4:30p ET (1:30p PT) to allow for attendance at a special Ash Wednesday [prayer service](#) at 4p ET (1p PT) organized by the newly formed group, Nuns Against Gun Violence, with which FAN is actively connected.

If you'd like more information about joining or forming a [Franciscan Justice Circle](#) in your area, please [contact us](#).

