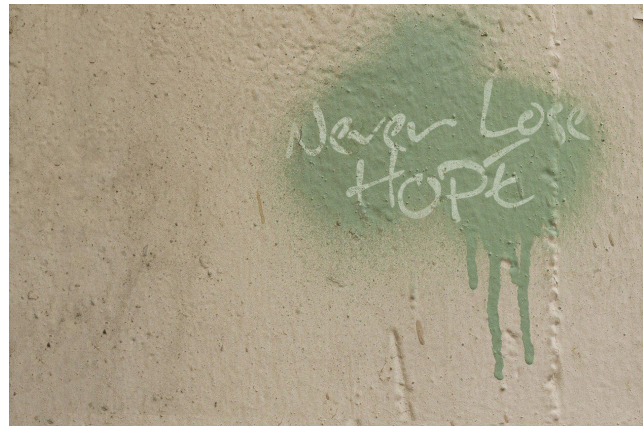


Hoping Against All Hope

If you watch the daily news there is a danger of losing hope that we are capable of reducing the suffering of people and creation in any significant way. To allow hope to fill our hearts, in spite of what we see, is yet another reason we need God in our lives. The story of Abraham and Sarah being chosen to be the Father and Mother of “multitudes” in the first reading for the [Second Sunday of Lent](#), was certainly, on Abraham’s part, “hoping against all hope.” Like Abraham, we too have limitations that, logically speaking, are reasons to stop hoping. We all see our limitations (at least I do!) rather than our God given powers.



I chose to focus on [Romans 4:18](#) because I have been struggling with finding a life-giving hope, but one that is not sweet and syrupy, and I found it there.

Hoping against hope, he [Abraham] believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old).

And yet hope, like all of God's blessings, is a double edged sword. Yes, the hope Abraham had was far-fetched – but it was not human hope, it was God's Hope. This tells me that our hope is not God's Hope, because God does not Hope for what I want for my immediate gratification, but rather for building his kingdom. Our human-generated hope is often, at least in my experience, self-centered and short-sighted. I have an immediate problem today that I hope will be solved. I hope that peace will reign in Gaza and Ukraine – today! But God's Hope is not delusional and easy and simple as human hope. I don't understand the quality of God's Hope, but I do know that it is completely beyond human understanding, except in retrospect. Have you, as I have, ever had bad things happen, things that you absolutely hoped would NOT happen, but did... and then later, perhaps years later, when you look backwards, you see that the bad thing was actually a good thing?

Let's get specific now. Besides my family and Church, my focus is on God's creation and what we humans are doing to destroy it. When I read the latest science reports, I am not filled with hope, but with despair at what I feel is a near-foregone conclusion that we are heading down a path that is killing life on earth and that will eventually include us. So how can I hope? I can hope that when we shift our vision of ourselves, our civilization, and our natural world to see them through God's eyes, we can stop what we are doing to HIS creation. Quite frankly, that's imagining something as improbable as barren Sarah getting pregnant by 100-year-old Abraham. And yet, that happened because of Abraham's faith so it can certainly happen today. To shift

society's vision, we continue promoting the Franciscan vision that is transformational, demanding change and conversion. This transformation results in action in the form of advocacy on behalf of all of God's creation.

Gordon Kubanek, P.Eng.
Third Order Franciscan & Writer

Suggested Action:

Say a prayer this week and open your heart to transformation toward God. Then, take one action as suggested in the following newsletter.

Suggested Petitions:

For all creatures without a voice that need us to advocate on their behalf, we pray...
For the Franciscan foolishness to hope against all hope, as Abraham and Sarah did, we pray...

Prayer:

God of Hope, our past, present and future has always rested in Your capable hands. Open the eyes of our hearts to see and to know Your Hope. Help us feel new hope by your constant presence in our lives. Please take away our uncertainty and change it to confidence in You. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Lenten Program: Preparing our Hearts to be Peacemakers

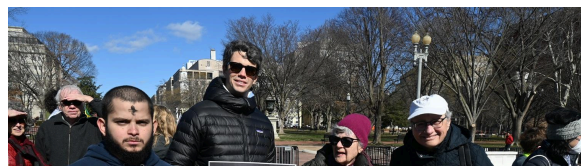
Please join the Franciscan Action Network on **Thursday, February 29 at 7pm ET (4pm PT)** for an online Lenten program, "[Preparing our Hearts to be Peacemakers](#)." There is no cost to register for this event, but please [consider supporting our work](#) if you are able with a donation of \$20, \$50, \$100 or other amount.

Our speakers will be renowned Franciscan scholar **Fr. Michael Cusato OFM**, scholar in residence at St. Bonaventure University, and **Rachel Kleinfeld, Ph.D.**, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and scholar of democracies experiencing polarization. Their presentations will be followed by an opportunity to discuss in breakout groups how we as Franciscan-hearted people can contribute to a more peaceful atmosphere in our communities, country, and world during challenging times. [Click here to register](#).



Gaza Ceasefire Actions

FAN is part of a growing coalition of Christian organizations working together during Lent to advocate for a ceasefire in Gaza as well as



hostage releases. Last week, FAN co-sponsored an in-person [Ash Wednesday Mass and Ecumenical Prayer Service for Peace](#) in front of the White House as the launch of a Lenten Ceasefire Campaign. *(Pictured)* Watch the recording posted on our [YouTube page](#) and [click here](#) to learn more about the ongoing Lenten Campaign. This week, members of the Campaign will join the final leg of a [Pilgrimage for Peace](#) from Philadelphia, which will arrive in Washington DC on February 21.

More and more people are raising their voices in support of peace. Last week, the leaders of women's religious communities in the Northwest U.S. released a joint statement with several Catholic Bishops calling for peace in the Middle East. [Read the statement here.](#)

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.](#)

Lenten Resources and Actions on Immigration

The Interfaith Immigration Coalition (IIC) of which FAN is an active member, has released this Lenten [resource](#) to use throughout the season to pray for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. FAN Associate Director Sr. Marie Lucey and Director of Advocacy Sr. Maria Orlandini have both contributed to the resource. [Download it here.](#)

Occasionally, FAN will pass along news items and opportunities for further action and advocacy on the broad issue of immigration. We use an email Google group to keep our members informed. Please [let us know](#) if you'd like to be added to our Immigration Google email group.

As Congress continues to debate potential border measures, we must continue to raise our voices and urge Congress to uphold our moral and legal responsibility to welcome people seeking safety. Please consider sending to your members of Congress this [action alert email](#) developed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.



Longing for Light:

Protect Biodiversity and Decrease Illegal Deforestation

Image by [Bertsz](#) from [Pixabay](#)

Franciscan Action Network recently signed on to a letter urging Congress to pass the FOREST Act of 2023 ([S.3371/ H.R. 6515](#)). This bill, designed to stem illegal deforestation through international trade, is a critical step in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss around the globe, while promoting good governance and supporting responsible businesses at home and abroad.

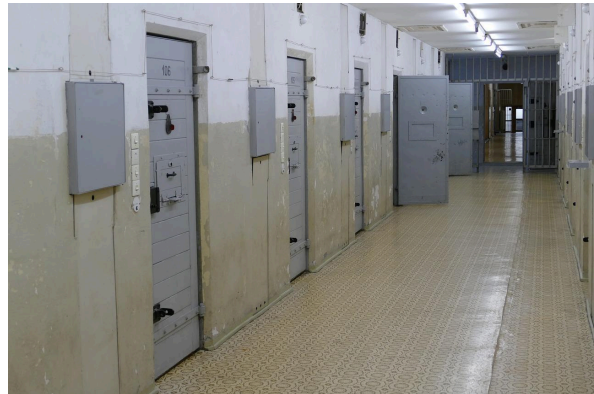


We also support this bill out of our solidarity with the global Indigenous family, who have been protecting an estimated 80% of all biodiversity and critical forest habitats for millennia. The FOREST Act is one mechanism for weakening the link between illegal deforestation and violent land invasions that lead to food insecurity, loss of livelihoods and forced displacement.. [Click here to sign on to the letter.](#)

Take Action to End Solitary Confinement

Image by [falco](#) from [Pixabay](#)

The End Solitary Confinement Act was recently introduced in the U.S. Senate on the 10th anniversary of former South African President Nelson Mandela's death. This bill would end solitary confinement in federal prisons, immigration detention centers, and other federal and federally-contracted facilities with very limited exceptions. Ending solitary confinement would uphold the God-given dignity of all people, stop this form of torture, save lives, and improve safety for everyone held in detention facilities. Click here to [urge your Senators to cosponsor the bill.](#)



Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

[Franciscan Justice Circles](#) (FJC) are local affinity groups for individuals who feel called to carry out advocacy on climate, justice, and peace rooted in Franciscan values and spirituality. This month the **DE Valley FJC** observed Black History Month through prayer, reflection and dialogue around racism, its presence in ourselves and our communities and how we may continue the anti-racism journey especially during Lent. The **St.**

Bonaventure U. FJC continues to meet monthly in person, acting in various ways that



support efforts around sustainability, care of creation and solidarity within the community. To be an aid in our spiritual journey this Lenten season, a member of the **NYC-Area FJC** would like to share [Stations of the Cross In the Wake of our Climate Crisis](#) written by Metro NY Catholic Climate Movement based upon Laudato Si' and Laudate Deum.

Upcoming Franciscan Justice Circle (FJC) meetings:

Driftless Region FJC (MN, WI): Mon. Feb. 19 at 6:30pm CST via zoom

Cleveland-Area FJC: Tues. Feb. 20 at 7:15pm EST via zoom

E. Wisconsin FJC: Thurs. Feb. 22 at 4:00pm CST via zoom

CT - RI FJC: Thurs. Feb. 22 at 7:00pm EST via zoom

Chicagoland FJC: Sat. Feb. 24 at 10:00am CST In Person with refreshments

Richmond, VA FJC: Mon. Feb. 26 at 7:00pm EST via zoom

To connect with any of these meetings or other Circles, please contact FAN staff [Nora Pfeiffer](#).