

New Life from Fallen Grains

Image by [Batatolis Panagiotis](#) from [Pixabay](#)

In the readings for the [Fifth Sunday of Lent](#), we hear powerful, yet brutally candid words from the Prophet Jeremiah who speaks a message from God: “I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” The author of the Letter to the Hebrews shares, “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered....” Finally, Jesus himself shares a profound truth: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit.” The Lenten message here offers perspectives on suffering, sacrifice, and service. It is from suffering and sacrifice that service emerges. This is the transformative power of pain and suffering.



Like the grain of wheat that must fall to the ground and die in order to produce fruit, our experiences of pain and suffering can serve as fertile ground for positive change. This is not to diminish the very real and often unbearable nature of suffering, but rather to recognize that it can create profound shifts in both individuals and societies. Through adversity, we can develop resilience, empathy, and a deeper understanding of ourselves and others. Just as the grain of wheat produces much fruit after it dies, our efforts to alleviate suffering can yield significant results. This requires a willingness to engage with suffering rather than turn away from it, to empathize with those who are hurting and to take meaningful action to address the root causes of that suffering.

Engaging with suffering can be extremely difficult, as we live in a society that often turns away from the broken and hurting, neglecting those who are on the margins and even refusing to see those who are in desperate need. One way we can help alleviate suffering is by fostering compassion and solidarity within our own communities. By acknowledging and validating the pain of others, we create space for healing and support. This can be as simple as lending a listening ear to a friend in distress or volunteering at a local shelter or soup kitchen. Through acts of kindness and empathy, we sow the seeds of hope and solidarity that can help alleviate suffering and bring about positive change.

The Franciscan Action Network has many opportunities to help alleviate the pain and suffering of those who are often forgotten – migrants, victims of gun violence, those suffering from the ravages of environmental injustices, just to name a few. As we wind down this Lenten season and approach Holy Week, just as we look at the suffering and sacrifice of our Lord as he enters into his passion and death, let us also look around our own communities. Where are the suffering? Where are the broken? Where are the lost and abandoned? We know the end of the

passion story. Let us do what is ours to do to create a better ending for our suffering brothers and sisters.

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS
Former Board Member and
Convener of Virtual Franciscan Justice Circle

Suggested Action:

Consider registering for FAN's [Dialogue with Palestinian and Israeli Bereaved Families for Peace](#). Listen to the stories of the speakers and allow their suffering to spark compassion in your heart and transform your mind toward peace building. The event will be recorded and sent to everyone who registers.

Suggested Petitions:

Help us to trust that, like the grain of wheat falling to the ground, our challenges can lead to growth and spiritual abundance, we pray to the Lord...

May we educate ourselves on systemic issues that contribute to widespread suffering, such as poverty, discrimination, or inadequate treatment of migrants and refugees, we pray to the Lord...

Prayer for Compassion and Solidarity:

Lord, instill in our hearts a deep sense of empathy and compassion for those who are suffering around us. Grant us the wisdom to be present for others in their times of need, offering solace and understanding. May our communities be characterized by a spirit of solidarity, where each person's pain is acknowledged, validated, and support is freely given.

Amen.

Dialogue with Palestinian and Israeli Bereaved Families for Peace

There is still time to register for FAN's [Dialogue with Palestinian and Israeli Bereaved Families for Peace](#) this **Thursday, March 14 at 3pm ET (12pm PT)** via Zoom.

The event will feature two speakers from the Holy Land, one Israeli and one Palestinian, who are members of the [Parents Circle – Families Forum](#). They will share their personal stories of loss and discuss how they continue to work together for peace and reconciliation even under current challenging circumstances. The 35-minute presentation will be followed by another 30 minutes of Q&A. Read more about our speakers by [clicking here](#). **The event will be recorded and sent to everyone who [registers to attend](#).**



Christians for Ceasefire Lenten Actions

The Lenten Christians for Ceasefire campaign continues to host actions in Washington, D.C. calling for peaceful resolution to the conflict between Israel and Hamas. On March 6, as an Israeli invasion of Rafah loomed, members of the Campaign including FAN's Just Peace fellow Eli McCarthy and other FAN staff participated in a prayerful action in front of the White House with Muslim and Jewish partners, as well as a delegation recently returned from Bethlehem. Watch the [live stream here](#) and see [photos from the day here](#).



On **Thursday, March 21 at 1 pm**, the Lenten Campaign continues with a Pray-In for Ceasefire in Gaza near the U.S. Capitol. For more information on March 21 and other actions as it becomes available, please [sign up here](#). There will also be Gaza Ceasefire Pilgrimages organized by Churches for Middle East Peace in Washington, DC, Chicago, and the Twin Cities on Saturday, March 23; click [here](#) for more information.

Environmental Justice Workshops + Monthly Newsletter

This year, FAN's [environmental justice](#) work will build on our work of the last two years by offering skills to our network. Our first initiative is a 2-part workshop series dedicated to learning environmental justice research skills. This 2-part Virtual Workshop series, "[Awakening to Environmental Justice](#)," will be held on **April 2 & 9 at 4p-5:15p ET (1p-2:15p PT)**. Join us to learn how to research cases of environmental injustice in your state and how to respectfully engage with local activists. [Click here to register](#).



FAN publishes a monthly electronic newsletter called *The Current* that contains news items and advocacy opportunities related to environmental justice. Each month, you will find ways to advocate for clean air, water, and common sense environmental legislation to protect our common home. Click here to [receive The Current](#).

Faith Based Organizations Rally around Annunciation House

Last month, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton took action to shut down [Annunciation House](#), a Catholic humanitarian organization in El Paso that has provided hospitality and other life-saving services to migrants for decades. In response, 268 faith leaders and 165 faith-based organizations, including FAN and several Franciscan Justice Circles, signed [an interfaith](#)



[statement](#) to express solidarity with Annunciation House and decry the attempted criminalization of their faith-based work.

You can [send a message to the Office of the Attorney General Of Texas](#), expressing your support of the vital and Gospel-centered humanitarian work of Annunciation House and your hope that the attorney general's office will stop this attack on this life-saving ministry.

Thank you, Felician Sisters of North America!

Franciscan Action Network is extremely grateful for the ongoing support of its institutional members, the Franciscan communities who founded FAN to be a collective Franciscan voice for justice, peace, and creation.

This week, we honor the work of the [Felician Sisters of North America](#), a joyful international community of vowed women religious who lead contemplative-active lives of service. Their foundress, Blessed Mary Angela Truszkowska, was inspired by the lives and spirituality of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare, and Saint Felix of Cantalice. Since their arrival in North America in 1874, Felician Sisters have led the way in building the social service landscape. Thank you, Felician Sisters, for your support of FAN and all the good work you do!



Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

In a bridge-building spirit, a member of the Central Indiana Franciscan Justice Circle [wrote a Letter-to-the-Editor](#) which was published Feb. 29 in his local newspaper, the [Huntington Herald-Press](#). In the letter, he offered thoughts for this election year, citing three historical figures: Washington Gladden (an American Congregationalist pastor), Abraham Lincoln, and John Adams. The letter closed with these words, "America needs more uniters, not dividers; more advisers, not yes-men; more liberals, not socialists; more conservatives, not fascists; more calm, not chaos. And most of all, America needs prayers. Lots of them."

MAKING SPACE
to invite grace



Upcoming Franciscan Justice Circle meetings:

Delaware Valley FJC: Tues. March 12 at 7:00pm Eastern via zoom

Monthly National FJC Call: Wed. March 13 at 1:00pm Pacific / 4:00pm Eastern via zoom

Northern California FJC: Wed. March 13 at 7:00pm Pacific

Connecticut - Rhode Island FJC: Thurs. March 14 at 7:00pm Eastern via zoom

Seattle-Tacoma FJC Come & See: Thurs. March 14 at 7:00pm Pacific via zoom

Driftless Region FJC (WI and MN): Mon. March 18 at 6:30pm Central via zoom

If you would like to learn more about the [Franciscan Justice Circles](#) or if you'd like to connect with any of the above meetings, please contact FAN's Director of Justice Circles Nora Pfeiffer.