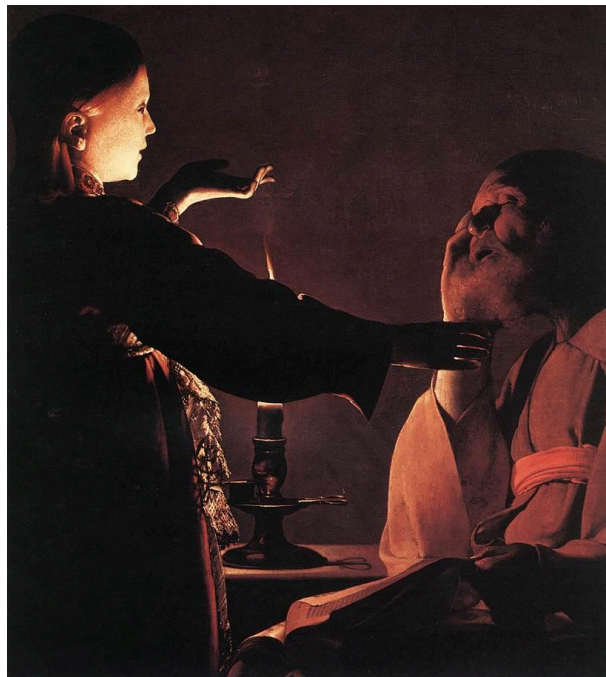


Publication Date: December 16, 2025

Reflection Date: December 21, 2025 - [Fourth Sunday of Advent](#)

Fear of the Answer

The acronym FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) has found its way into our modern lexicon. But long before FOMO, there was FOTA—Fear of The Answer. This meant: you know you should ask a colleague/supervisor/friend/spouse/parent whether an action you plan to take is appropriate or meets their approval. But you don't ask, because you're afraid of what the answer might be. You're afraid you'll be told that you can't—or shouldn't—do something. FOTA. So, instead, we may just skip the question while mentally invoking the motto “better to ask forgiveness than permission.”



Georges de La Tour: Joseph's dream (1628-1645)

In the first reading for the [Fourth Sunday of Advent](#) (Isaiah 7:10-14), is Ahaz *really* sincere about not wanting to tempt God? Or does he just have a case of FOTA? Well, Isaiah's response, describing the sign was certainly startling: a virgin will have a child whose name will be “GOD with us.” We don't know how Ahaz received this response, but the gospel reading from Matthew (1:18-24) tells us about the question of Joseph, the righteous man.

In Joseph's case, the law was clear on the answer to his dilemma. He didn't have to actually ask the question. The law said that a pregnant, unmarried woman was to be exposed to public disgrace and stoned. Pretty harsh. Joseph knew this answer, and it troubled him. He wanted to

respect Mary's dignity as a human being, while still maintaining his integrity, so he decided to quietly end their betrothal.

Joseph must have found peace of mind with that decision, because he is able to fall asleep. And then he has a dream—a dream that provides an incredible answer to the question Joseph was asking himself. Joseph is to *cherish* Mary as his wife, bring her into his home, *accept the child*, raise the child as if he was his father, and name him JESUS. God's answer, as conveyed by the angel, went well beyond Joseph's 'discreet divorce' solution to saving Mary's dignity.

How often are we like Ahaz, not asking a question because we don't want (or are afraid) to hear the answer. How often are we like Joseph—quietly asking the question and sincerely seeking answers in laws or rules? Do we consider honoring the dignity of other people who will be affected by our decision, or do we focus on preserving our own dignity or status by invoking strict rules? As we work to build a more just society, may we keep the angel's message in mind: to protect the dignity and integrity of our brothers and sisters, even if that means s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g our own dignity and pride.

Sr. Karen Stapleton, OSC

FAN Board Member

Suggested Action: At a time when many immigrants face uncertainty and harsh criticism for their irregular status, thanks to our broken immigration system, you can urge your members of Congress to [pass the DREAM Act of 2025](#).

Suggested Petitions:

May we have the courage to rely on the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, and ask the hard questions, without fear of what God's answer may be, we pray to the Lord.

May we actively look for ways to respect and preserve the dignity of our brothers and sisters, avoiding harsh judgments and shaming, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer

God,

Please help us to turn away from fear and judgement—and toward your mercy and understanding. Help us to become instruments of your love and peace, building the Kingdom, through faith and compassion. Please guide us, as we seek to replace unjust social structures and norms with ones rooted in the dignity and worth of every person.

Amen.

Advent Prayer Service: Welcome the Children



Please join FAN in an online **Advent prayer service tonight, December 16, at 7pm ET.** As we draw near to the Feast of the Birth of the Christ Child, we will reflect upon the birth of Christ and join together to pray for the thousands of immigrant children impacted by our government's current policies and actions. Please join us as we pray to "Welcome the Children" this evening. **Register [here](#).**

Walk with FAN in 2026

As we move through this Advent season, a time of hope, renewal, and preparation—we invite you to join the Franciscan Action Network in shaping a more just and compassionate 2026. Your generosity helps us do the quiet, steady work of forming advocates, strengthening Franciscan Justice Circles, and ensuring that voices rooted in peace and dignity are heard in places where decisions are made. One of our supporters recently shared, *"I'm only too happy to contribute to FAN's effort to make the gospel a living document," (Mark Shedden, OFS).* This spirit of shared mission continues to guide our work each day. Your generosity this season ensures that together, we continue turning the gospel into living action. **You can donate [here](#).** Thank you for walking with us.



Faith in Democracy: Facing the Challenges of 2026

On **Tuesday, January 6, 2026**, please join us for the next event in our annual 'Faith in Democracy' series, an *online* panel discussion: **Faith in Democracy: Facing the Challenges of 2026.** The digital panel will be moderated by **Chris Crawford**, the Senior Director of Civic Strategies at Interfaith America, and feature **Jim Wallis**, the founding Director of the Georgetown University Center on Faith and Justice; **Gloria Purvis**, senior fellow at Georgetown University's Initiative on Catholic Social



Thought and Public Life; and **Sharon Brous**, senior and founding rabbi of IKAR, a Jewish community based in Los Angeles. The panel will explore the connection between faith and democracy, the challenges to US democracy at this moment in history, and ways people of faith and faith communities can work together to strengthen democracy moving forward. **You can register [here](#).**

Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence



On December 10, FAN cosponsored the **13th Annual National Vigil for All Victims of Gun Violence** at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. The Vigil featured powerful speeches calling for action in response to the epidemic of gun violence in the United States, a solemn, moving procession where friends and loved ones spoke about those they have lost to gun violence, inspiring music, and communal prayer. FAN Advocacy Associate Claire Fisher honored her former classmate Ryan Realbuto, a 23-year-old volunteer with Cap Corps who was shot and killed in Washington D.C. last year. She later recalled: "Ryan was a beautiful illustration of the Franciscan charism, especially in his gentleness and radical joy. His life was a great example to me as I discerned my own year of service; I hold his memory

close to my heart as I work to serve others the way he always did."

Protect U.S. Coastlines from Drilling

The Franciscan Action Network is urging the U.S. administration to oppose a proposal to expand offshore drilling along our U.S. coastlines. Expanding drilling into the Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic, and Eastern Gulf of America, which are still largely undefiled, would put coastal ecosystems at risk. This is a key opportunity to promote action that will protect our oceans and coastlines. [Click here](#) to add your signature to this joint comment.



Franciscan Justice Circles



On December 13, members of the **Metro DC-area FJC** joined the Archdiocese of Washington's 'Walk with Mary' procession, in solidarity with immigrants.

The **Ohio FJC** will join Bread for the World's collective letter-writing action "An offering of Letters in 2026." Circle member Bob Gedert invited others to join the *Faith Communities Go Green's* webinar on the harms of plastics, where he shared: "Untangling Ourselves from the Creeping Web of Plastics" on Dec. 10. Members continue to participate in prayer vigils.

Members of the **Twin Cities Metro FJC** met to share a meal and attend an anti-authoritarianism strategy session with thousands of other people of faith in Minnesota this month.

The **Virtual FJC** held a beautiful prayer vigil for victims and survivors of gun violence in communion with prayer vigils being held nationwide. The Circle members engaged in powerful conversation about gun violence experiences and ways to prevent future violence and harm.

Upcoming [Franciscan Justice Circle](#) (FJC) gatherings:

NYC-area FJC: Tue. Dec. 16 at 7:30 pm ET via Zoom

Michigan FJC: Wed. Dec. 17 at 7:00 pm ET via Zoom

Pacific Northwest FJC: Thur. Dec. 18 at 1:00 pm PT via Zoom

Boston-area FJC: Thur. Dec. 18 at 7:00 pm ET via Zoom

Phoenix-area FJC: Thur. Dec. 18 at 5:00 pm MT via Zoom

W. Pennsylvania FJC: Thur. Dec. 18 at 7:30 pm ET via Zoom

CT-RI FJC: Tue. Dec. 23 at 7:00 pm ET via Zoom

Texas FJC: Tue. Dec. 23 at 7:15 pm CT / 6:15 pm MT via Zoom

SE Wisconsin FJC: Mon. Dec. 29 at 7:00 pm CT via Zoom

Twin Cities FJC: Mon. Dec. 29 at 7:00 pm CT via Zoom

Chicagoland FJC: Mon. Jan. 3 at 10:00 am CT via Zoom

To find out more about any of the [FJC](#) gatherings coming up or for information about joining or forming a Circle, please sign up [HERE](#).