



# Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

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## Franciscans “Launch” Inspirational Social Change Network

*--New Level of Public Action Envisioned*

**March 8, 2008; Washington, DC**—With spiritual and social transformation on their mind, more than 130 representatives of the new social advocacy organization, Franciscan Action Network, celebrated a transformation of their own—one from shared idea to joint reality. Michael Perry, OFM, formerly with *Franciscans International*, was one of the evening’s two keynote speakers. Fr. Perry, a friar from the Sacred Heart Province in the nation’s heartland, touched on the theme of an idea whose time has already come.

“Much like the Franciscan movement of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Franciscan Action Network arises at a particularly critical moment in the course of human history,” said Fr. Perry. “It comes at a moment when the future of the planet and its inhabitants is being decided.”

Fr. Perry put the nascent network, called “FAN,” into this context of a world in crisis, a world in need of faith-based innovation. The speaker implied that partnership with the UN-based non-governmental agency, FI, and other like-minded non-profit organizations, would be a part of the new network’s overall strategy.

FAN’s kickoff celebration, slated as a halftime event at Ecumenical Advocacy Days (EAD), underscored another part of that strategy. From March 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup>, EAD played host not only to FAN, but to over seven hundred other religious advocates in a weekend that culminated in 250 visits to congressional legislators on Capitol Hill. During the visits, EAD participants from all religious denominations advocated for a truer vision of security, one based on human and ecological well-being rather than fear and mistrust.

“It is just this type of integrated awareness—of faith with social responsibility—that our new network seeks to facilitate,” said Russell Testa, executive director of FAN. Mr. Testa, a layperson, cited the support of fellow ecumenical leaders as crucial to the organization’s ability to realize its full potential.

“Many people don’t know it, but St. Francis was ecumenically-minded, to employ a modern term,” he said.

“In reaching out to a leader of the Muslim faith by traveling to Egypt and Syria during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Francis demonstrated the kind of moral courage from which we hope to draw inspiration.” Mr. Testa said that FAN is dedicated to bringing a Franciscan approach to Christian-based social advocacy. Over the next few years as it grows, FAN will help the more than 450 Franciscan ministries in the U.S.

organize their efforts at advocacy by amplifying their voices for greater effectiveness and impact. Franciscan orders comprise the largest religious body in the Catholic Church.

Drawing inspiration from leaders as diverse as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr.--and especially from St. Francis' and St. Clare's effort to follow Jesus Christ--many of FAN's new members echoed that same sentiment during the weekend-long EAD event. One Episcopalian Franciscan who stopped by the FAN booth before heading back to Delaware put it this way:

"When we are united by urgent need, our differences have a way of falling by the wayside," she said.

Sr. Eleanor Goekler, a Missionary Sister of the Immaculate Conception who drove down from New Jersey for the weekend, also admitted to being caught up with the spirit of hope.

"I just think it's great to see all of us Franciscan-hearted people finally coming together," she said. "If we can do that, the rest may take care of itself."

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Dr. Maryann Cusimano Love, keynote speaker, shares the importance of religious institutions being engaged in public advocacy.



Franciscans from North Carolina join in the celebration and challenge of FAN



Sr. Sheila Kinsey, OSF, Deacon Tom Bello, SFO, Fr. Michael Perry, OFM and Fr. Larry Dunphy, OFM lead the community in prayer and reflection as Franciscans seeking change.