



FAN Action Commission Feels the Spirit in the Windy City

**Group gathers in Chicago to chart
aspects of FAN's organizing endeavors
September 14, 2009**

**By Rev. James Hoffman, OFM,
FAN Action Commissioner**

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Chicago, IL- We, FAN Action Commissioners, together with the FAN Action Center Staff, gathered to share our experiences at our bi-annual two day gathering at The Cenacle Retreat Center in early September. Our time together, which consisted of shared meals, meetings, and prayer, helped us discern positive directions and challenging dimensions of FAN's growth and clearer ways the Action Commission can contribute.

One question that we often hear, and which we reflected on at length, is: "In whose name does FAN speak?" In reality, FAN speaks in the name of its individual and institutional members whose insights we garner for charting the organization's course. Institutional supporters of FAN realize their grassroots members are not always comfortable making phone calls or engaging in direct action with Members of Congress.

Another concern that was raised was how to counteract the misinformation being disseminated about FAN's priorities as these relate to the issues of health care reform, compassionate immigration reform, and climate change. As congregations confront dwindling membership, FAN is a resource for individuals within these communities; persons can maintain an active civic engagement commitment while they serve in other ministries. FAN's website connects many resources that have information about various social justice issues and events.

We spent significant time prioritizing and reaffirming our tasks as Action Commissioners. Presently, the Action Commission views its main priorities as:
(1) helping to build FAN's base of individual members through outreach to Franciscan-hearted persons, (2) inviting new institutional members to contribute to the support of FAN, (3) encouraging institutional members

to identify their key members in the various regions of the country, and (4) animating better communication with the institutional members.

We recognized that a core activity of each Action Commissioner is to have a sense or pulse of what is happening in strategic areas of our regions (since the entire region is often too large for this to occur easily), and to readily develop a sense of the issues among the local Franciscans and Franciscan-hearted. Although it is difficult at times for us to find time to keep in touch with the Franciscans, Franciscan-hearted people, and other Action Commissioners in our region (because of our full-time ministries elsewhere), it is important that we maintain these relationships to help build our network. Likewise, we need to take time to learn where local and national elected officials in our areas stand on FAN's issue priorities. This helps us to serve as advisers to FAN's staff on civic engagement issues.

At the 2007 Baltimore meeting that started the initial group of institutional supporters on the path to the realization of FAN, there was a desire to know and understand how U.S. policy is affecting the lives of people in the world. U.S. policies often have a direct impact on many millions of people outside the borders of our own nation. FAN needs to consider policy issues in a way that better incorporates these perspectives.

Finally, we all left Chicago with some homework. Action Commissioners will try to identify local leaders and Franciscan-hearted activists in our region by the 2010 Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, DC. We hope to hold training sessions for the identified leaders in each region, which will be done utilizing a combination of local leadership, web conferences, in person visits, and other communication means.

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Quote:

Peace is not the product of terror or fear.
Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.
Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.
Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.
Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity.
It is right and it is duty.

Archbishop Oscar Romero