

Franciscan Voices

Living and Promoting Active Nonviolence and Peacemaking | March 2024

— Restorative Justice Practices —

As part of our 2021 Chapter Commitment Statement, we committed to creating sacred spaces for reconciliation and repair of harm on multiple levels. Sister Janet Ryan's active ministry in restorative justice practices is one example of bringing healing, hope, and humanity to people.

Restorative justice is a set of principles and practices, grounded in Indigenous teachings, that create a different approach to dealing with an offense and its impacts. When someone causes harm, restorative justice provides a process for addressing it, while respecting everyone involved. It focuses on the needs of the one harmed and repairing the relationship rather than primarily on punishment. As Catholics, restorative justice invites us to live out the principles of Catholic social teaching and to model Jesus' reconciling way.

"Restorative justice is really a way of being, being in relationship with others," expressed Sister Janet Ryan. When someone causes harm, restorative justice gives a way of addressing it, without causing more harm. "The three R's of restorative justice are relationship, respect, and responsibility. You are saying yes to being in relationship with one another - reaching out, building trust, and being



Eric Anderson, standing at right, helps set guidelines during a Peace Circle Keeper Training at Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, IL.

open. Respect is a foundational piece as it includes respecting yourself and everyone else. And responsibility is being accountable for your words and actions. I like to add being responsible for your thoughts, too, as it allows you to take note of judgmental views you may have," explained Sister Janet.

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— Fast for an End to Gun Violence —

by Jennifer Kryszak, Director of Strategic Planning, Franciscan Peace Center

"Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke?" - Isaiah 58:6



On Ash Wednesday, members of [Nuns Against Gun Violence](#) gathered to pray for an end to gun violence and to dedicate ourselves to a Lenten fast for gun violence prevention. Nuns Against Gun

Violence is a coalition of Catholic Sisters and their allies that affirms the value of human life through prayer, education, and advocacy for common sense, evidence-based gun violence prevention. The Sisters of St. Francis joined the coalition when it formed in April 2023.

As we move through the season of Lent toward the cross and resurrection, our faith calls us to reflect on

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— Restorative Justice continued... —

Peace circles are an Indigenous, restorative practice that offer a safe space where repair of harm and reconciliation can take place. Sister Janet is a trained circle keeper and offers peace circles and circle trainings in the community, inside correctional facilities, and at [Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation](#) in Chicago, IL, where she has ministered since 2014.

In May 2022, Sister Janet began corresponding with Eric Anderson and others about offering a peace circle training at Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center in Kewanee, IL, the facility where Eric was incarcerated. They met in person for the first time in March 2023 when a four-day circle training was led by Sister Janet, with Eric as a participant.

At the start of each circle training, values and guidelines are established. Four core values – truth, listening, respect, and confidentiality – are usually fleshed out through the guidelines. “At the correctional facilities I’ve worked in, each circle training opens the opportunity to gain skills to hold peace circles among themselves in their facility to bring healing and build relationships. Everyone has a voice. It’s a safe space where you aren’t rejected, ignored, or talked over,” explained Sister Janet.

Eric Anderson spent almost 28 years of his life incarcerated for a crime he committed when he was 15 years old. He was freed on April 25, 2023. “I wake up every day with a hope of trying to honor those who I have hurt the most. I can never pay down the debt I owe. Every day I try to make a payment toward that debt. It is my belief that one of the ways I can make an impact is by bringing peace circle keeper training, and circles in general,

into places where these kinds of restorative, trauma-informed safe spaces could never have existed before: namely prisons,” Eric shared in a [blog post](#).

Since his release, Sister Janet and Eric, now a Future Leaders Apprentice with the [Restore Justice Foundation](#), have worked to create opportunities for men and women inside correctional facilities to receive their training. Thus far, they have held circle keeper trainings at Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, IL; Logan Correctional Center in Lincoln, IL; and the Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center. You can read testimony from participants, beginning on page 46, in this edition of the [Kewanee Horizons newsletter](#).

Sister Janet and Eric held an educational session in January on “Circles, Circle Keeping, and Training — Inside Correctional Facilities” at the 5th annual Restorative Practices Conference held at the Oak Park, IL, Public Library. During the session, the duo shared experiences starting circle practices inside a correctional institution and discussed the inception and evolution of the program, including their roles and what their best practices have been thus far.

“The whole experience is transforming! Peace circles can be used anywhere as they are life-giving. We can use circles for celebration, grief, conflict, to share information, to make collective decisions, to come up with creative solutions, and more. With honest sharing and deep listening, you build trusting relationships,” said Sister Janet.



Sister Janet Ryan and Eric Anderson after his release.



Peace Circle Keeper Training at Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center, Kewanee, IL, in March 2023.

Coldest Night of the Year

The [Coldest Night of the Year](#) is a family-friendly, winter walk to raise money for local charities serving people experiencing hurt, hunger, and homelessness. By walking in the cold, participants feel a hint of the challenge faced by persons experiencing homelessness during winter.

Did you know the average homeless person walks 10 miles a day just to meet their daily needs?



Coldest Night of the Year Participants

This year's walk, which raised funds for the Clinton YWCA Empowerment Center, was held on February 24 from 4:00-7:00 p.m. and offered a 2km or 5km route through Clinton's downtown and along the river front. Nearly 100 community members came together to participate in some aspect of the event, from walkers, greeters, food prep and servers, etc. The walk declared concern for people who have no home and take shelter in nooks and crannies; for those whose struggle to house and feed their families; for people driven from home by violence and abuse; and for people overwhelmed by isolation, guilt, and despair.

Sisters and residents of The Canticle took up a collection to donate to the cause. "This year, it was even more important that we reached out to help the vulnerable in our city/county as both state and federal funds have been drastically reduced," said Sister Kathleen Holland, who served as the captain of team "Step by Step, We Make a Difference." All funds raised will assist the YWCA Empowerment Center to enact change in the community and provide hope for persons hurting, hungry, and homeless, or on the verge of homelessness, in Clinton and Jackson counties.

The Clinton YWCA Empowerment Center advocates and provides case management and access to supportive services for families and individuals who are experiencing poverty, homelessness, or who are at-risk of homelessness due to domestic violence, economic hardships, and other issues affecting housing stability. "I was humbled to be able to take part in this event. I walked knowing that each step brought someone closer to safety, health, and home. Thanks to the many folks who supported the walkers, the funds we generated helped us to provide shelter and other necessities for our homeless brothers and sisters," said Sister Kathleen.

Catholic Sisters Week

Catholic Sisters Week, March 8-14, shines a light on the spirituality, mission, and community building of women religious. Catholic Sisters Week began in 2015 as a part of National Women's History Month.

With a theme of "Celebrating Traditions, Changing the World," this Catholic Sisters Week we will be spotlighting our partnership with the [Women Religious Archives Collaborative](#) (WRAC).

The Sisters of St. Francis, Clinton, Iowa archives contains invaluable records showing the remarkable impact our sisters have had in the communities they've served for the past 158 years.

It is critical to ensure archival collections from religious congregations like ours are safeguarded for the long term. As shared in our December 2023 edition of [Franciscan Voices](#), we committed to

join WRAC so our archives can be stored in a permanent repository with other women religious congregations from the region.

WRAC has launched a multi-million dollar [campaign](#) to support the building of a Heritage Center to open in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2025. The center will be the nation's first independent repository for Catholic Sisters' archival collections. It will offer dynamic public programming, exhibitions, meeting space, and be an important place for research and remembrance.

During Catholic Sisters Week, follow the [WRAC Facebook page](#) (or our Facebook page) to learn more about the project and hear testimony from sisters, including our president, Sister Jan Cebula.

The FOREST Act: Protecting Our Common Home

by Laura Anderson, Director of Digital Outreach and Advocacy, Franciscan Peace Center

In the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, who saw all of creation as a gift and a reflection of the Divine, the Franciscan Peace Center joins with the Catholic Climate Covenant and a wide consortium of faith and environmental organizations in support of the **Fostering Overseas Rule of Law and Environmentally Sound Trade (FOREST) Act**. As stewards of our common home, we believe it is our moral responsibility to protect the Earth and its vulnerable inhabitants, echoing the sentiments expressed by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'*.

Forests, often referred to as the lungs of our Earth, are facing unprecedented threats. The alarming loss of 16 million acres of forest in 2022 alone emphasizes the urgency of our advocacy. The FOREST Act, with its provisions to prohibit importing agricultural commodities from illegally deforested lands, demands responsible sourcing and traceability, creating a framework for transparent and accountable global supply chains.

"The urgency of climate change and the rapid depletion of global forests demand our immediate attention and action."

The urgency of climate change and the rapid depletion of global forests demand our immediate attention and action. Our faith teaches us that caring for creation is not an option but a sacred duty. The loss of forests, as Pope Francis eloquently stated in *Laudato Si'*, not only affects the environment but also endangers species vital for food, medicine, and other essential resources.

Since 1900, industrial forces have ravaged nearly 20% of the world's forests, impacting the delicate balance of ecosystems and threatening countless species. It is in this context that the FOREST Act emerges as a crucial legislative initiative that aligns with the principles of *Laudato Si'* and our Franciscan commitment to the integrity of creation.

The FOREST Act seeks to defeat global illegal deforestation by prohibiting the importation of products linked to such activities, including meat, soy, palm oil, and cocoa. Drawing inspiration from the Lacey Act and the European Union's similar legislation, this bill

aims to ensure that the United States does not become a sanctuary for illegally sourced products. It upholds the dignity of both the environment and our fellow human beings by protecting domestic agriculture from unfair practices and prosecuting those driving illegal deforestation worldwide.



In accordance with Catholic social teaching, which places the needs of persons who are poor and vulnerable at the forefront, the FOREST Act addresses the disproportionate impact of climate change on marginalized communities. It recognizes the link between illegal deforestation and human rights abuses against Indigenous peoples defending their land and way of life.

Moreover, this legislation takes a proactive approach to mitigating climate change by establishing a fund to help countries transition away from deforestation and enhance conservation and enforcement systems. In a world where critical ecosystems like the Amazon are on the brink of irreversible damage, the FOREST Act represents a beacon of hope for the future of our planet.

As followers of St. Francis, we are called to be instruments of peace and stewards of creation. The FOREST Act aligns with these principles by not only addressing deforestation but also tackling corruption, crime, and financial wrongdoing associated with it.

By supporting the FOREST Act, we uphold the values of justice, stewardship, and compassion embedded in our Franciscan charism. In advocating for this legislation, we contribute to the collective effort of safeguarding our common home for current and future generations.

How can YOU take action?

The World Wildlife Fund provides an opportunity to contact our elected officials to urge them to cosponsor and champion the bipartisan FOREST Act to help protect forests and communities and remove illegal deforestation from the products we consume every day.

Click to [TAKE ACTION](#) today!

Fast Continued...

our relationship to God and to consider whether we are following the path of Jesus Christ. Our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving assist us in assessing our lives, habits, and thoughts so that we can turn back to God. This returning to God is not an individual, isolated journey; rather, our relationship to God relates to our relationships with others and our responsibility to our communities, especially the most vulnerable among us.

As the prophet Isaiah notes, we can be lulled into falsely thinking that our fast is beneficial if we only think of ourselves, assume that we know what God asks of us, or ignore the plight of those around us (58:1-5). In contrast, God calls us to a different fast, a fast that frees not only ourselves but others, a fast that brings our world closer to the reign of God.

"Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh?" - Isaiah 58:6-7

This fast is a call to bring peace and justice to our world, which in turn draws us closer to God.

It is with this in mind that Nuns Against Gun Violence invites people to fast for gun violence prevention. As [Giffords Law Center for Gun Violence Prevention](#) asserts, 43,000 Americans die from gun violence each year, which far exceeds gun deaths in other high-income nations. Gun violence is the leading cause of death of children and teens and disproportionately affects communities of color. These individuals and their families, friends, and communities continue to be affected by the emotional, financial, physical, social, and spiritual costs of gun violence. Our fast can draw attention to the continuing suffering and trauma of those affected by gun violence. Moreover, publicly acknowledging our fast can call our federal and state legislators to pass legislation

to assist victims and survivors of gun violence and to ensure that no more life is lost due to gun violence.

To influence federal legislation, Nuns Against Gun Violence is focusing on three pieces of gun violence prevention legislation:

- [H.R. 698/S. 25, the Assault Weapons Ban of 2023](#) bans assault weapons and large capacity magazines,
- [S. 173/H.R. 660, Ethan's Law](#) for safe and secure storage of firearms, and
- [H.R. 6618, the Americas Regional Monitoring of Arms Sales \(ARMAS\) Act of 2023](#), which addresses U.S. firearms trafficking to Latin American and Caribbean countries.

Each of these pieces of federal legislation seeks to make our society safer and to protect the most vulnerable among us. Those participating in the Lenten fast are encouraged to make their fast public on social media or to contact members of Congress to advocate for the passage of this life-saving legislation.

To demonstrate your commitment to undertake this fast, please complete this [form](#). More information and resources for contacting members of Congress are available on our [website](#).

And so, we ask you to join us in this Lenten journey.

Join us as we fast for an end to gun violence.

Join us as we call on our legislators to enact laws that will protect the vulnerable.

Join us as we promote peace and nonviolence within our societies and turn again to our God of Life.



— Watching *Barbie* Through the Lens of Active Nonviolence —

by Marsha Thrall, Director of Programming, Franciscan Peace Center



*"Humans only have one ending.
Ideas live forever."*

- Rhea Perlman, as Ruth Handler
from *Barbie*

The "idea" of active nonviolence is not a new idea. The earliest form of Christianity, known as "The Way," committed its faith practices in the aftermath of the life, ministry, and death of Jesus. Early followers of "The Way" built community around the ideals of resolving conflict interpersonally, sharing what they had with one another, and using the lessons learned from Jesus' ministry to reach as many folks as possible while living within all of the trials and tribulations presented within first century Palestine.

Greta Gerwig's 2023 hit film [Barbie](#) explores the ideas of existing within both a matriarchal and patriarchal society while highlighting the types of violence that exist within both types of social hierarchies. In the matriarchal society that is Barbieland, women do "all of the things that men do in the real world," including holding all positions of power. And in a fashion that is a mirror of the "real world," in Barbieland men are objectified and only hold value if they "fall under Barbie's gaze." In other words, men in Barbieland are subject to a covert type of violence, a violence that diminishes the value of Ken's worth to a mere object. At the same time, in Barbieland — much like in the real world — different, discontinued, and "weird" Barbies are treated as outcasts and pushed to the margins of the Barbieland society.

After a trip to the "real world," Ken discovers the idea of patriarchy and takes its concepts back to Barbieland, which leads to shifting power roles, general discord in Barbieland, the reduction of Barbies from powerholders to servants, the continuation of pushing those "different" and "weird" to the margins of Barbieland, and eventually, even physical war. In a moment of disgust, Ken confesses to Barbie that "when I found out the patriarchy wasn't about horses, I lost interest."

The film culminates with the Barbies working together in a manner that nonviolently restores power to the

Barbies, by finding a language that all of the Barbies can understand and relate to. A new idea for Barbieland is formed, an idea that neither women nor men should hold all of the power within their social structure while also promising that their shared society will work towards building a community that is equitable to all who live within it.

About eight hundred years ago, disillusioned by acts of war and social inequity that he both lived within and participated in, Francis of Assisi discerned that a life intentionally lived as a practice of active nonviolence held the power to transform lives and social structures. Francis, or even his followers at the time, would not have named their ministry as "active nonviolence." Instead, Francis may have described this way of living and relationship building much like Mahatma Gandhi did as respect, understanding, acceptance, appreciation, and compassion towards one another and all of creation. This "way" of nonviolence when lived as an ethic of love, care, and concern for both self and those with whom we are in community has outlived Jesus, Francis, and even Gandhi, and thrives within the work of the Sisters of St. Francis and the Franciscan Peace Center.



Upcoming Programming

In recognition of Women's History Month, on **Saturday, March 16, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.**, the Franciscan Peace Center, in collaboration with the Clinton Public Library, will be hosting an event in the **Clinton Public Library commons**, located on the second floor of the Clinton Public Library at 306 8th Avenue South.

The event will culminate a week of spring break programming being administered by the Clinton Public Library. We will be showing a film and providing creative, open, and friendly space for sharing ideas gathered from the movie – including all-ages crafts and guided conversations focused on active and nonviolent solutions to conflicts that we all face within our communities.

For more information about this event, please contact Marsha Thrall at mthrall@clintonfranciscans.com or call (563) 242-7611.

Share Our Sandwiches to Celebrate 10 Years

We are all brothers and sisters. *Fratelli tutti*. Even persons marginalized by society are our brothers and sisters — we are all interconnected.

Because these relationships are central to our beliefs, we, the Sisters of St. Francis, felt it was imperative to help local individuals experiencing food insecurity. As it says in Matthew 25:40, "Jesus said, 'whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"

After months of conversations and studies, Share Our Sandwiches was established in July 2014 and became a weekly program of our Franciscan Peace Center. The name was chosen after being suggested by the late Francie Hill, an Associate of the Clinton Franciscans.



Sisters Teresa Kunkel and Joan Theiss prepare sack lunches on Day 1 of Share of Sandwiches in 2014.

Share Our Sandwiches offers sack lunches and personal hygiene items to persons in need. Each Thursday, a group of sisters and other volunteers put together bags of food. This usually includes a sandwich, chips or crackers, fruit, dessert, and candy. Additional volunteers

load up their vehicle with this food and other needed items and deliver it to a distribution site.

"In the beginning, grocery stores were visited to see if they would be willing to help by donating food on a weekly or monthly basis. We had regular volunteers who would drop off homemade baked goods to be included in the sacks," explained Share Our Sandwiches volunteer Sister Teresa Kunkel.

Different suggestions were made to expand advertising and distribution. It wasn't long before things changed and, during the next few years, the



Share Our Sandwiches

average weekly count was around 40 attendees, approximately 2,080 sack lunches a year.

"The food began to be received from the Riverbend Food Bank and we had around 30 volunteers. We used multiple distribution sites but,

gradually, only two places were chosen. In 2019, we were making 60-75 lunches due to the increasing number of homeless persons in Clinton," said Sister Teresa.

When COVID-19 hit, the world changed but Share Our Sandwiches was maintained with strict health guidelines. Only one distribution site — St. Paul Lutheran Church — was used and the average number of visitors per week fluctuated.

In the last year and a half, 32 sack lunches have been prepared weekly. In the last month, that number has raised to 40 and is anticipated to be raised again heading into the warmer weather months.

Share Our Sandwiches lunches are currently distributed inside Information, Referral, and Assistance Services located at 219 1st Avenue in Clinton. Lunches are available each Thursday from noon to 1:00 p.m.

As the program looks to celebrate 10 years, Sister Teresa shares, "God has given us so much. Being raised on a farm, I was never hungry. I can't imagine why we, the people of the United States, one of the wealthiest countries in the world, can let people go hungry."

Volunteers Lou and Gabriela Egging distribute sack lunches in April 2020.



— “Transforming Grace” Initiative —

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) invited congregations in November 2023 to engage in the initiative of “Transforming Grace: The Work of Transformative Justice” through November 2024. In this 12-month process, participants are invited to take responsibility for personal and collective responses that can be made in the face of the challenges encountered during the U.S. national election period.

The work of transformative justice is grounded in contemplation and is an engagement in learning the skills and practices that will lead to decision-making and action that steers to being in right relationship with Earth and all human persons.

Part I, “Transforming Consciousness,” provided weekly reflection tools posted on the LCWR website, and shared electronically with members of the Clinton Franciscan Family, that invited collective discernment on the question: “What is ours to do at this time?”

Part II, “Transforming Presence,” began in January and invites all participants to explore skills toward building a personal and collective

response to the divisions that are particularly apparent today in U.S. society. Weekly reflections for “Transforming Presence” continue through Lent into Easter.

The remaining two parts, featuring monthly reflections, are:

“Transforming Care”: Easter into Pentecost

“Transforming Practice”: June through November

Reflections include a short video, a brief reading, two or three questions intended to deepen conversation, and a contemplative prayer. All materials for the four-part program can be accessed at www.lcwr.org/transforming-grace.



— Lenten Events at The Canticle —

We invite you to join us at our **Lenten Prayer Services** each Sunday of Lent (except Palm Sunday) beginning at 6:00 p.m. in the chapel of The Canticle, 841 13th Ave N in Clinton. Remaining dates are March 3, 10, and 17.

Each 30-minute service will take a fresh look at the Lenten Pillars of Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. It is requested that all attending be fully vaccinated against COVID-19. Individuals will be screened upon entering.



Lechtenberg

A **Lenten Day of Reflection** will be held Saturday, March 2, at The Canticle from 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sister Mary Lechtenberg, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis in Dubuque, Iowa, will facilitate. Pre-registration was required.

The day will include time for reflection, sharing stories, song, and writing. The morning session, “Called by Name,” will be spent reviewing names in Scripture, our names for God, and God’s name/s for us. In the afternoon session, “Wholesome Wisdom Wonderful Women,” participants will reflect on courageous women they’ve known and women in Scripture, including the women who stood by Jesus at the end of his life.

If you’d like to be added to our retreat/spirituality events list, let us know!



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