



# Franciscan Action Network

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

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## STATEMENT FROM FAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### Peace and All Good:

The Franciscan Action Network, a grassroots faith-based advocacy organization, with a national base of ministries, institutions and persons inspired by the witness and examples of St Francis and saint Clare of Assisi stands in support of the rights of our brothers and sisters in Wisconsin and all across this great nation who care for the neediest, teach our children, care for the sick and protect us through their work for states and municipalities to form unions and collectively bargain. The right of workers to form unions and collectively bargain has been a fundamental principal of Catholic Social teachings. Pope Leo XIII in 1891 wrote a groundbreaking encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* ("On the Condition of Labor") which argued, among other things, that a worker had a right to a wage sufficient to support the worker and his or her family. The workers' rights also extended, said Pope Leo, to reasonable hours, rest periods, health safeguards, and a decent work environment. In their document *Economic Justice for All #104 Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*, U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1986 stated: "The Church fully supports the right of workers to form unions or other associations to secure their rights to fair wages and working conditions".

During these difficult financial times it is important to remember that the federal and state budgets are not balance sheets. They are not documents that say we take in so many dollars and we spend so many dollars so in the end we either have a deficit or we make a profit. These budgets are moral statements reflecting the moral values and priorities of our great nation as a community and each of us as a citizen. It is often said that the United States was founded on Judeo Christian principles. In the first book of the Holy Bible, Genesis 4:9, God asks Cain where his brother Abel is. Cain's response is: "Am I my brother's keeper". Throughout the Bible, God very clearly and definitely answers that question. Matthew 25:40 tells us: 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters; you were doing it to me!'

Catholic teachings suggest that a fundamental measure of our nation's moral compass is whether it enhances or undermines the lives and dignity of those most in need. When we make decisions to fund programs that build weapons over programs that care for the poor, we are making a moral and ethical decision. When we choose to spend our dollars on a war in Afghanistan instead of providing maternal and child health care for pregnant woman, we are making a moral decision. When we decide to cut funds for homeless shelters instead of increasing revenue to properly fund them we are making a moral decision. Make no mistake, these are very difficult times and difficult decisions; the choices that our elected officials make will have significant consequences for the poor and most vulnerable. If we are truly a nation of God then we must regain the moral high ground. We must do as St. Francis did more than 800 years ago when he taught us to feed the hungry, to catch those in danger of falling through the cracks of a society

that looked down on them, to care for those who can't escape the poverty that traps them in lives of constant hardship.

Today there are great changes taking place in our national economic structures, as the development of a world economy changes the way companies and factories do business. Many of us have forgotten the better working conditions won for our grandparents through the efforts of organized labor. It's important for us to remember the tradition of our Church in supporting all workers in their efforts to achieve a better life. As Catholics and members of the Franciscan family we at the Franciscan Action Network believe in and support the rights of all workers in both the public and private sectors to organize into unions and collectively bargain. We believe this is a fundamental catholic principal taught in Catholic Social teachings. To deny these rights is a moral decision with moral consequences.

Gods Peace and Love

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