



# Franciscan Action Network

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

P.O. Box 29053 • Washington, DC 20017 • 202-527-7575 • 1-888-364-3388 (toll free) • 202-527-7576 (fax)

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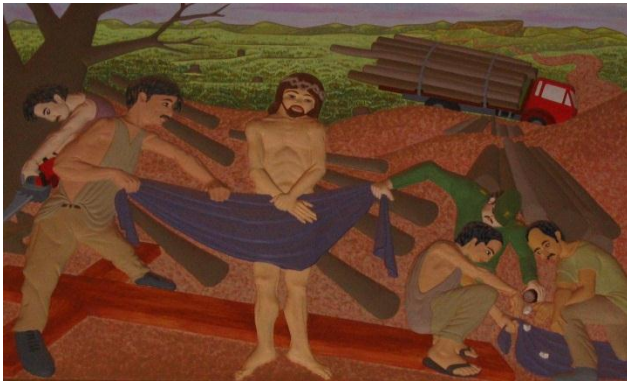
## Easter Season 2011: Resurrection in Creation

*Returned Franciscan Mission Service (FMS) Missioner Kristen Zielinski-Nalen shares her reflections on resurrection in creation in light of the Easter season. We must take part in the rising and we ourselves will be healed. How can we participate in God's renewal of creation and communities?*

As co-creators, are called to participate in God's renewal of creation. I witnessed renewal through Franciscan Mission Service as a Franciscan missioner in Bolivia. Over the course of three years, my consumer-mindset was peeled away as I saw what little I actually needed to survive and what little others were given. I was made aware of how much I was consuming and how my consumption was directly related to the plight of others.

In the Bolivian Altiplano highlands, I saw potatoes, beans and quinoa grown by families using organic sustainable farming methods. Franciscan Proyecto Oscar in the Amazonian lowlands showcased the success of mixing crops that mutually benefit each other while providing a work camp for Bolivian young men to serve as an alternative to military service. Absent were agribusiness, choking pesticides and fertilizers. Natural rubbish was eaten by donkeys, goats, pigs, etc. I was exposed to a deep respect in even daily rituals to honor Mother Earth, la Pacha Mama. The Bolivian people understand the interdependence of humankind and the rest of God's good Earth.

However, I also saw another reality. Deep in the Amazon Basin along the shared border between Bolivia



and Brazil, forests were burned and cleared for grazing cattle. Loggers infiltrated the protected forest reserves, looking for prime old-growth wood. Rural residents hauled wood down the Beni River. In Chile, I saw plantation forests, eerily absent of animal life, chipped up and loaded onto Japanese ships to become paper towels and other disposable items. I began to rethink paper products and unlimited photocopies. I began to question Home Depot's and Lowe's wood supply. I began to ask what it means to throw away furniture without reusing good wood.

I also began to rethink plastic bags. Without trash collection, rural communities burn leftover rubbish, mostly plastic bags and wrappers, either in their family yards or at the edge of the neighborhood. There is no education about the cancer-causing dioxins released into air, soil, and water by burning plastics. Unburned plastic bags blew away into the trees and bushes. One Cochabamba town sent all its plastic trash into the river because it "takes it away." Can we imagine a different reality if we all used reusable cloth bags instead of plastic?

I returned to the United States with a more-informed idea of God's renewal of creation. My journey has led my husband and me to Camden, NJ at St. Anthony of Padua Parish. The Franciscan value of caring for creation in Bolivia and in the U.S., along with the Camden immigrant community's imported agricultural wisdom and experience, point towards a rich collaboration in co-creation of new life and hope in Camden. I started thinking about my food choices and became more interested in where my food was grown. Our family decided to compost! I discovered that God's renewal of creation is present in the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia's Red Hill Farm and in city gardens, like the many community gardens that bring much-needed fresh produce to Camden, NJ, especially through the Camden Children's Garden. There is life in growing food in local gardens and nourishing them with compost!

This year in Camden, Br. Jerry's Garden has expanded to 40 plots. Our gardeners have already spoken of their excitement to share their harvest with the community as well as designating four plots specifically for the needy, including the Diocese of Camden soup kitchen, our own parish Food Pantry, the mentally challenged kids of Faith and Light, and a plot for the children from St. Anthony School. Gardeners experience the mystical process of death and new life by placing the seed in its tomb. It must die before it can germinate in the soil and break out of the seed walls to shoot forth a root that reaches up to the sun. The gardeners recently planted potato and onion bulbs, as well as lettuce and herbs. The energy of the sun will nourish them, drawing the plant out of darkness into the light. Creation is our teacher!



We can also support life in the way we consume our food by choosing plates, cups, napkins, rags, towels and bags that are reusable. Consider the consequences of paper and plastics and the limited supply and costly extraction of resources. The Bolivian way is to keep a soapy bin and clear bin of water ready at any mealtime for washing of plates and utensils. St. Anthony of Padua Parish is slowly collecting plates and silverware to gradually free ourselves from Styrofoam and plastic and grow accustomed to washing plates, forks and cups after eating at community events! Say a prayer that it works!

There is also resurrection hope in Bolivia. The Célula Ecológica of the Franciscan Justice and Peace office produced a video about Cochabamba's trash. The ecological team visited elementary and high schools, local universities, and civic organizations to raise awareness about the pitfalls of a consumer society and how and where to recycle. Current FMS Missioner Nora Pfeiffer teaches composting by using recycled tires in the courtyard garden of the Franciscan Social Center in Cochabamba, which hundreds visit weekly, and at a neighborhood chapel. The "Movimiento Franciscano de Justicia y Paz" has allied itself with EcoBolivia, which helped found Madidi National Park (Bolivian Amazon) and involves Tacana indigenous groups in the administration and staffing of the park. These lessons and actions protect and bring forth life!

St. Augustine in the 5<sup>th</sup> century said, "Some people, to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"

I forever will be grateful to the Franciscans, Bolivian/Andean cosmology and Camden engagement for opening my mind to our continuing role as co-creators of new life and hope in this world.