



Franciscan Action Network

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

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Fifth Sunday of Easter (May 22, 2011)

Reflecting on the Readings: Planting Living Stones

The readings for the Fifth Sunday of Easter consider how the Christian community responds to the needs of its time. In Acts, we see the origins of the diaconate in a ministry of service at table to address issues of distributive justice (6:1-7). In Psalm 33, “we place our trust” in God and seek his mercy as we offer thanks and praise. In the First Letter of Peter, we receive the call to respond to Christ the cornerstone by allowing ourselves to “be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices” (2:5) and to praise “him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (2:9). As Jesus prepares to depart for his Father’s house, he reassures his disciples that those who have seen him have seen the Father; they are so closely united that Jesus’ words and works come from “[t]he Father who dwells in me” (Jn 14:10). As with the invitation to become living stones, Christ proclaims that “whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these” (Jn 14:12).



FAN Action Commissioner Sr. Maryann Mueller, CSSF reflects below on her visit to Kenya and how small groups of committed living stones have begun to renew the earth around Mount Kenya through planting trees. They experience resurrection in creation in restoring an arid habitat that used to be forest. May their witness call us into closer communion with one another as the Body of Christ, doing great works to bring our world out of the darkness of environmental and social degradation into his wonderful light.

Reflecting on Today: Planting Living Stones

While visiting Materi Mission in Meru, Kenya this past summer I was struck by the dusty, parched, treeless landscape, so I was shocked to hear that a century ago (a short 100 years), the area had been a forest. Meru is located northeast of Mount Kenya and is one of eight missions in which the Felician Sisters minister around Mount Kenya.

When I returned home, I researched the environmental changes due to deforestation and discovered that indeed Kenya, as with many countries throughout Africa, has experienced a significant loss of forest in the past fifty years. Although forest covers only two to three percent of Kenyan soil, a large proportion of the Kenyan population live in the vicinity of the forests. Previously, this land was covered by thick vegetation that served to trap moisture and keep temperatures cool. Deforestation has led to a loss of biodiversity due to drought and changing rain patterns. Farmers can no longer predict rainfall, which has resulted in crops drying up some years, leading to lack of food, and threatening the lives of subsistence farmers.

The International Small Group and Tree Planting Program, or TIST, is helping small communities of subsistence farmers to reverse the effects of deforestation. Over the past decade, TIST has worked with small, local groups, and today works in over 1,600 villages in Kenya. TIST trains and encourages the groups to develop and share “best practices.” TIST provides small stipends to groups and helps local farmers meet their economic needs, even during times of drought. The farmers adopt new farming practices using existing tools and natural fertilizers that protect soil and increase crop yield. The group is involved in decision-making, and they decide which species to plant.



In Kenya, TIST has planted over 5 million trees. The trees provide a new “virtual cash crop” in greenhouse gas credits. According to the TIST website (<http://www.tist.org/>) this is how greenhouse gas credits work:

- Carbon, a part of CO₂ is used by trees and is stored in soil and trees. This carbon storage can be measured and the proven results sold as “greenhouse gas credits.”
- With palm computers and Global Position System (GPS) technology, TIST data on tree growth and carbon storage is collected and transmitted through the internet.
- Small cash stipends for every living tree are then deposited regularly into bank accounts opened by Small Groups for this purpose. This stipend encourages groups to devote the time and care necessary to ensure the trees’ survival while providing a source of income for years to come for family necessities such as medication and school fees.

In Kenya, TIST goes beyond “sustainability” by allowing the current generation of farmers to meet its economic needs. It leaves a legacy for their children and improves the ability of future generations to meet their needs. [Catholic Relief Services](#) supports TIST’s work.