

Peru Placement 2008

Mavis Crispin

Although this placement was part of my preparation for priesting, as soon as I arrived in Lima I knew it would be so much more than that. I received a very warm welcome both from the Peruvians and the English speaking residents. I had served as a SAMS mission partner terminating in 2006 so I did not need much orientation. Of course there were many changes - with rebuilding following the recent earthquake and preparations for the forthcoming ACAP conference. It was sad to see so many beautiful colonial buildings being demolished for tower blocks. More positively, I also sensed an increase awareness and practice of Fair-trade, recycling and compassionate farming.

Peru has a people- centred and face- saving culture. Although there is a down side to this –lack of punctuality, difficulties with saying no and need to use third parties in conversation, it does result in a generally affirming and relaxed approach to life. For this reason I spent the first part of my stay in re-connecting with people. I visited the shanty town missions and projects some of which I had initiated and are being developed well. I took my goddaughter to an Andean thermal bath area (involving a 6 hour hair-raising mountain bus journey) and visited the members of the Anglican Cathedral church of the Good Shepherd both those still active in the congregation and those more confined, needing pastoral input and home communion.

There were four Sunday services in English and the Daily Office was lead in the language of the first person to arrive. There were some Spanish services and one bilingual – the titular feast of the Transfiguration. All of these gave opportunities to preach and undertake deacon's responsibilities in a high church setting. One of the challenges for me was to retain a sense of joy in worship in a context where precision and attention to detail was required outside my usual practice. My supervisor, Dean John Park, taught me a lot both as we worked together, and during after lunch conversations. - a perfect example of an apprenticeship model of learning. I found the clergy meetings instructive especially the discussions around issues relating to the Lambeth Conference.

A number of tragedies and bereavements before I arrived lead me to initiate a theodicy course in the cathedral to which about twenty people came over three weeks. Peruvian education systems do not encourage much interaction but I think the less formal approach with drama and opportunities for questioning were helpful.

There were opportunities for me to learn some history through books and people. Long standing residents have memories of harder times, such as the terrorist years, as well the growth of the church of the Good Shepherd out of an Anglican chaplaincy in 1849. Formerly, I had the privilege of talking with Brenda Harriman whose long life in Peru and connections with the British council during the war years furnished interesting material for her book. Very different was my encounter with an elderly story teller in mountain dwelling in Churin, who recounted narrative interwoven with Inca culture. He also had interesting views about the Christian meta- narrative.

Peruvians love to say hello and goodbye properly so I have strong memories of my 'despedidas' (send off or farewells). My Peruvian family of adoption organized a paragliding session over the cliffs of Miraflores which took me round a light house and passed the windows of the British Embassy. The nuns of Santa Doretea, a convent where I lived for a while, did a power point presentation reminding me that time is a gift of God. One of the Anglican schools arranged a lunch with speeches and the recorder ensemble known as the Lima Tootlers played and sang Vaughn Williams 'God be with you till we meet again'. More simply but very poignantly the lay minister in one of the desert missions said 'if you are ever sad when you return to your country remember you have made the people of Ventenilla very happy. A rich experience to draw on indeed.

Books read in preparation or during the trip;

- The Selfless Way of Christ. Henri Nouwen. A popular spirituality in Peru.
- Kingfisher's Fire. Peter Harris. The story of Arocha which has a project in Lima.
- Dangerous Wonder. Michael Yaconelli
- An Unquenchable Flame. Phillis Thompson. The story of Alan Gardiner and the founding of the South American Mission Society.

- When your family's lost a loved one. David and Nancy Guthrie. Used for the theodicy course.
- A Generous Orthodoxy. Brian McLaren.
- Evil and the Justice of God. N.T.Wright
- The British in Peru. Brenda Harriman. Chapters on the Church of the Good Shepherd and Lima Cricket Club.
- Cuentos en Espanol. Insights into Latin culture.
- War by Candlelight. Daniel Alarcon. A Peruvian author who writes about the terrorism times in Lima.
- Eight feet in the Andes. A travel book.
- The Miraculous Fever Tree. The Jesuits search for quinine.
- Lima Survival Kit. Eleanor Griffis de Zuniga. Reference.