

March 2, 2011

Hello Everyone. Pastor Dana has asked me to write this bi-monthly newsletter (which is a bit late!!). Well, I hope you don't mind if I write a little bit about buildings – in particular, the buildings of the Lutheran Church here in Peru (ILEP). As an architect and consultant for ILEP for the past year or two, I am finally getting oriented with most of the church buildings.

Of the 17 ILEP churches here in Peru, I have worked with or at least seen 11 of them. The other six are in different locations in the country – four in Trujillo, one in Iquitos, and one in Huancayo. Even of those six, I understand 2 or 3 of them do not have a building and worship in a home. Of the 11 others they all have a specific space for their congregation.

The 11 churches that I know can be broken up into three groups:

Group One: Four fairly steady congregations that are in buildings 20-40 years old. They function fine but they all could use some updates and fixes.

Group Two: The next group of 4 consists of recently built structures (within the last 10 years) that are completely built or partially built.

Group Three: The last group consists of 3 congregations that have an existing space or are renting and who are looking to build new in a few years.

Just like in the United States, church buildings are both a blessing and a huge challenge. Creating a building from scratch (or just remodeling) can energize a congregation, unite it, and help it grow. On the other hand, buildings cost a boatload of money, need constant maintenance, and may hurt the mission of the congregation.

Here in Peru, we have examples of both scenarios. Our congregation, Cristo Rey (a Group One church) has recently added a bell tower and painted (with the generous help of two ELCA volunteers) the outside of the building. Both of these actions, I think, have helped bring our congregation together and strengthen our identity in the neighborhood. A counter example is a small congregation, which has a new building (Group Two), seems to have lost some energy. Before their building, they were meeting in homes and unfortunately that grassroots energy has dissipated. And, the congregations that have partially-built structures are stuck in a bit of a time warp as they can't quite function how they hoped. In a way, instead of owning a building, the building owns them.

One of the difficulties in Peru is the lack of a mortgage system (although, it is definitely growing). So, churches build what they can with the resources they have. The building is basically unfinished until the congregation can provide more monetary resources. A lack of competent and trustworthy builders and construction supervisors leads to a lack of priorities on what gets built first, second, and so on. This can lead to lots of stress in the congregation and on the financial supporters of the congregation.

What can get lost is the congregation's mission – and as most of the congregations are located in the poorest parts of Lima and other cities, their programs tend to focus on children, women, health, education, etc – because buildings can use up a lot of energy and resources of the congregation.

So, as ILEP continues forward and creates a new 5-year strategic plan this year, let us pray that God walks along with the leaders of ILEP as they discern how to best forward the mission of the Peruvian Lutheran Churches. And, let us pray that any church construction (whether here in Peru or in other parts of the world) not only be beautiful, functional, spiritual, and earth-friendly, but also at the same time enhance a congregation's mission and not distract from it.

Peace,
Tom

P.S. Gracias Tom! (Dana now writing) I am so happy to share with you some photos of Gabriel, Eymi and Nicolle, three children in Cristo Rey Lutheran church who celebrated their First Communion last month. There is also a photo of a worship service we had on the beach. (It is still lovely summer here). And there is a photo of two members, Andrea and Roberto, on the roof of Cristo Rey near the bell tower, painting the cross.

God bless you.

Thank you for your prayers for and with the Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Church.

- Pastor Dana, Tom, Tana (8) Anthony (4)

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Click on the text below the photo to see a larger version



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[First Communion](#)



[Gabriel, Nicolle, Eymi](#)



[Beach Service](#)



[Painting](#)