

Virginia Parishioners Visit Peru on Mission Trip

by Andrea Lang | August 30, 2017 | [Around the Province](#)



Last month, as they have done for a decade, members of St. Francis of Assisi Parish in Triangle, Va., [traveled to Peru](#) to help the people and to learn about the country. The missionaries – whose ages ranged from the 20s to 70s – varied in their experience; some had made the trip before and others were new to Peru.

*Included in the group was **Henry Fulmer, OFM**, friar liaison, who said the parish has supported various projects over the last 10 years to assist the HNP friars stationed in Peru. “There have been times in the past where the team did manual labor by repairing buildings, painting classrooms or completing other projects. This time, our plan was to carry about 100,000 doses of children’s vitamins and 20,000 doses of prenatal vitamins on the aircraft,” he said. “The music ministry at St. Francis donated \$315 for recorders and music stands for the school in Lima. The students at St. Francis of Assisi School have an annual fundraiser called Pennies for Peru, which began in 2007 and has raised \$17,000 in donations for our sister parish Santa Ana. In October, the parish will begin fundraising for vitamins, scholarships for students and any other assistance that our brothers will need for the coming year.” Below, a first-time missionary to Peru reflects on her experience.*

When I learned that I would be traveling to Peru this summer for a mission trip, I did not know what to expect. Previous missionaries could not stop telling us newcomers about how much we would love it — how this experience would be life changing. I wondered if I would feel the same way. How would this experience change my life? The Lord calls us to serve our brothers and sisters, but there is always apprehension when going on a mission trip. Will I be useful, I wondered. Will I be able to contribute and help those in need? In the end, I realized that not only did I give, but I received so much more.

Ten of us from St. Francis of Assisi Parish traveled to Peru on July 2, carrying prenatal and children's vitamins for the medical clinics at Santa Ana Parish and the surrounding community. We spent a week, from July 2 to 10, visiting ministries where Holy Name Province friars – **Carlos Sarmiento, OFM, Dac Tran, OFM, and Anthony Wilson, OFM** – serve.

We were told that every missionary trip is different. Sometimes there is more manual labor to do and other times, there are more opportunities to visit with people and share fellowship. This missionary trip was really about the people of Peru. We call Santa Ana our “sister parish,” but it wasn't until I was visiting and connecting with the people of the parish that I truly understood what that means. The Peruvian people were so warm and welcoming to us. They called us their brothers and sisters, welcoming us with open hearts into their community. Although they had so little, they gave so generously.

The highlight of the trip was when we visited the home of a Santa Ana parishioner to have lunch with some of the women in the parish's microloan program. The women were so gracious and honored to have us in their home. We felt so honored to be welcomed into their home. It was a wonderful afternoon sharing in fellowship and getting to know one another. We may live thousands of miles away and have different cultures, but we all are so much more alike than we are different.

By traveling to different parts of Lima, one can see the huge gap between the rich and the poor. Peru is considered a growing country economically, yet the poor are often ignored or not accounted for. We saw examples of this throughout our visit.

We visited another parish in Lima, Holy Name of Jesus. The church and the surrounding neighborhood are stunning, with beautiful homes and lush parks. It was incredible to think that people live in shacks on dirt roads just a few miles away. Driving to Santa Ana, you could see grass being planted and watered, but in another part of Lima, there are people who have no access to running water. There are gorgeous parks, but you have to pay to visit them. Although Peru is quickly becoming a developing country, there is an enormous gap between the rich and the poor. It was hard to see. It felt as if these were the forgotten people. By being able to spend time with the poor, you come to realize that they are rich in spirit.

My travel to Peru did have a life-changing effect on me. It taught me to be more conservative in the resources I use and take for granted. As our trip was coming to an end, we discussed what we could take away from this trip. I realized that I didn't have to travel thousands of miles away to help the poor. I can help the poor right here in my own country. While we live in a country where we have infrastructure that can provide for the poor, I can donate and give of myself in order to spend time with my brothers and sisters who are in need right here in my neighborhood.

Not a day goes by that I do not think of my time in Peru and the people that I had the privilege to meet. I wonder if they realize how much they have impacted my life and the lives of others who have traveled there.

— *Andrea Lang has belonged to St. Francis of Parish for eight months. She graduated from James Madison University in 2009 with a bachelor's degree in international affairs.*