



# LA RETAMA

**DECEMBER 2010**

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*Red Uniendo Manos*

*Bridge of Hope*

*Partners for Just Trade*

**CAMBIALO**

**PC(USA)**

## *The Spirit of Christmas*

*Conrado Olivera, Executive Director*



Earlier this month while seeing all the commotion in the streets I realized that the celebration of the birth of Jesus and a new year had already begun. However, in that moment it was hard to believe that an entire year had

passed since we last celebrated Christmas. With this in mind, I was later presented with the opportunity to visit one of the Bridge of Hope artisan groups, “Imac Sumac” in Villa Maria del Triunfo in the south of Lima. Listening to the story of Esperanza Rodriguez (a mother of two young boys), I reflected on the happiness that she felt because of the progress she had made over the past year, as her group of artisans had found better opportunities in work and in their own development.

This year brought us many sad stories, such as the loss of homes and property among the families of the artisan group “Mercurio” in Huancavelica following the rains and flooding early in the year, as well as other damage caused by climate changes throughout the country. At the same time, we have also experienced good works that perhaps did not make the news but did help improve the quality of life of artisan families that work together with Joining Hands Peru (Red Uniendo Manos Peru).

What has moved me more than anything among the stories of the artisans was the frequency with which they expressed their gratitude to God for each day of the year, always using the word “miracle” referring to each of the moments in which they had moved forward and been able to help their families. In these times of great skepticism and disbelief it was exciting to see and to hear, that despite all odds, miracles were being made among their families.

Upon hearing their stories I became convinced that each day brings with it miracles, many of which we

never even realize. Yet, there are among us families that open their hearts and commit their work and their money thinking of those in need of care and resources. They, while unknown to many, commit their lives as anonymous actors in helping those who are suffering and struggling.

In choosing the theme of this edition of *La Retama* I thought that one way of sharing the end of this year with you would be to celebrate the miracles that we find each day in our work yet do not recognize or give thanks for, such as the artisans of Bridge of Hope. In this way, the true meaning of life is not to be at the center of the story, rather it is to reside in the mystery that surrounds us. Esperanza Rodriguez, in every account of her life, has expressed gratitude for her work, hope for tomorrow, generosity and desire to serve others, thus inspiring us all with the great spirit of Christmas. Like Esperanza, each one of these artisan mothers is a miracle of life, encouraging us to continue is this spirit -- a spirit they share -- a spirit that makes them stronger than any storm the world might bring.



## *CAMBIALO Kids Stand Up For Their Rights*

By Jed Koball, Companionship Facilitator

On November 24<sup>th</sup>, the kids of **CAMBIALO** stood on the front steps of the municipal building of La Oroya and declared their rights as children. Celebrating International Children's Rights Day, the 15 kids who make up the group CAMBIALO (an acronym meaning "CHANGE IT", that when spelled out means "Building a Better Environment in La Oroya") organized a street fair of various youth environmental groups from areas around La Oroya. Each group presented a theatrical representation of one of their basic rights as children. The kids of CAMBIALO then lead all the other youth and passers-by in naming these basic rights ([see video](#)). Among the rights being declared were the right to an identity, a family, not being abused, education, health care, and a clean environment.

The kids of CAMBIALO were first organized in late 2009 in a cooperative effort of the Red Uniendo Manos Peru and its partner Filomena Tomaira Pacsi, with the mission of empowering kids in La Oroya to speak out against the contamination that has left 99% of the children of La Oroya with severe levels of lead in their bodies. Their hope is to generate an international movement of children to share the story of La Oroya in order to create greater urgency among political and industry leaders to address the contamination of La Oroya and the health care needs of the people.

Presently, CAMBIALO and the Red Uniendo Manos Peru are collaborating with the PC (USA) office of Environmental Ministry and the office of Child Advocacy to develop a curriculum for church schools in the United States and in Peru in order to further the campaign of CAMBIALO and support new justice movements of children and their families.

The curriculum will teach the methods and strategies of CAMBIALO while providing a Biblical basis for such ministry. All materials will be available on-line. Expected publishing date is June of 2011.



## *The Fight for Health Care in La Oroya*

By Conrado Olivera, Executive Director

Doe Run Peru, which filed for bankruptcy last year, is presently subject to a restructuring process as part of an ordinary bankruptcy proceeding with INDECOPI (Defense of Competition and Intellectual Property Protection) – the specialized Peruvian government body to ensure healthy competition and good market performance. This proceeding is in the phase of assessing and acknowledging of credits, prior to the installation of a board of creditors that will decide the fate of the company.

While it is a legal obligation that the company recognize the rights of its creditors, the need to re-establish a healthy environment in La Oroya and the health of its residents is of far greater importance. It is the right of all persons and living beings to enjoy a healthy and balanced environment. But, as we can see, the silence of the victims and the incompetence of those responsible for the contamination continue to allow that the people (mothers and children) continue being threatened everyday by vast contaminated areas and ecological damage caused principally by the metallurgical complex in La Oroya and mining companies in the area.



Meanwhile, Doe Run Peru and the Peruvian government continue to disagree over its responsibilities regarding the health of the environment and the contaminated soils. For us, the responsibility for environmental degradation in the area falls principally on those who polluted during the course of operations of mining and metallurgical enterprises. In this regard, the health of the population is directly accountable to Doe Run Peru while environmental liabilities should be recovered by the Peruvian state. And, each one must assume their responsibilities immediately.

Furthermore, we exert that we find private foreign mining companies accountable for ecological damage as they have been operating in the region while surpassing the environmental standards of their own countries. Unfortunately, the Peruvian government has not been able to define strategic actions to limit such risks, nor has it been able to control the abuses of the polluter. Therefore, we are requesting the immediate remediation of impacts caused by the environmental damage and for the application of the "Polluter Pays" principle.

## Water Justice and Trade Reform

By Jed Koball and Karen Wilson



In August of this year, our brothers and sisters from Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery (our partners for ten years!) sent a group of five faithful women to Peru in order to study the effects of the U.S.-Peru Free Trade Agreement that was inaugurated in February of 2009. Their objective was to gather factual and anecdotal evidence to support the [Trade Reform Act](#) being debated in the United States Congress that would effectively call for the review and reform of all Free Trade agreements between the United States and other regions of the world. Together, with our sisters Karen Wilson, Pam Jensen, Marilyn Banta-Lakaner, Heidi Nucholls, and Lisa DuLany, Conrado Olivera and I travelled from Lima to Ica, Huancavelica, Huancayo, La Oroya and back to Lima, along the way visiting with many of the partners of Joining Hands Peru (Red Uniendo Manos Peru), learning about the Red's campaigns in Water, Fair Trade and La Oroya, and hearing stories of hope amidst struggles in the face of growing economic disparity and environmental degradation.

Indeed, we were astonished to learn that over 60% of social conflicts in Peru can be attributed to environmental issues. For many years we have been facing this reality in the campaign for justice in La Oroya. Now, we are learning of this reality in the campaign for Water justice in the regions of Huancavelica and Ica. In particular, the mismanagement of water in Ica in order to support the agro-exportation industry (namely asparagus for export to the United States), has left countless families and communities with little to no access to water. Furthermore, the literal drain on water resources in the desert regions of Ica are amplified by the lack of investment in the upper regions of the Andes where the water originates before percolating down to the desert. As the snow caps in Huancavelica continue to melt due to global warming, water resources in the desert will vanish within twenty years if new regulations are not implemented.

These themes of environmental degradation and mismanagement of natural resources are indeed at the heart of many social conflicts in Peru. Furthermore, they are issues that can and must be addressed through trade agreements between the United States and Peru. As the agricultural industry on the desert coast continues to increase its exports to the United States, importers and consumers of goods such as asparagus and avocados that come from the region of Ica must be informed and empowered to demand environmental regulations be established and enforced so that the very people who farm the lands are not sacrificing their own families in order to feed ours.

To this end, it is gratifying to see the faith and commitment of our partners from Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery and from the [Presbyterian Hunger Program](#) as they fight for trade reform — a reform that can instigate real change and justice for the people of Peru.

*I recently returned from Peru, where I had the opportunity to speak with a day laborer for an industrial farm that exports produce to the United States. He was in the process of trying to get a permit to have electricity at his dwelling. He would have to run the wiring himself. He and his family of five live in the Ica, Peru, region, and have water service for only two hours per week.*

*Water is scarce because the industrial farmers are digging deep wells for irrigation in a desert region to grow the produce we find on our grocery shelves. This is decreasing the water table resulting in the shortage of water for the small and medium-size farmers who grow food crops for the local population and for people such as the individual referenced above.*

*When we grocery shop, we feel very fortunate to have fresh produce available year round. But we don't realize we're consuming these fresh fruits and vegetables on the backs of workers who work long hours for little compensation and no benefits. Each day is a struggle for them. Our free trade agreements (NAFTA, CAFTA, etc.) are not without cost.*

KAREN WILSON

**(This** letter to the editor first appeared in the *Telegraph*, in September of 2010 following Karen's visit to Peru).



## Lisa Hermann, First YAV to Serve in Ayacucho



Lisa C. Hermann, 32, of Charleston, South Carolina is a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) serving with Paz Y Esperanza in Ayacucho, Peru. Lisa is one of three YAVs sent by the Presbyterian Church (USA) to accompany partners of Joining Hands Peru (Red Uniendo Manos Peru). In fact, all three YAVs are serving with offices of Paz y Esperanza; however, Lisa is the first YAV to ever serve in Ayacucho.

Lisa is currently a candidate for Minister of the Word and Sacrament in the PC(USA) holding a Master's of Divinity Degree from Louisville Seminary ('09), and a

Bachelor of Arts Degree in History from Newberry College ('00). Her passions include pastoral care, mission, teaching, and worship, along with the outdoors, cooking, history, and drawing. Lisa comes to Peru from Winston-Salem, NC where she served as a chaplain resident at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center. She is an elder in the Presbyterian Church, and is sent and supported by many in Peru including her home church Santee Presbyterian (Santee, SC). Lisa has a mother, Julia Fletcher, and brother Andrew both living in South Carolina.

While working with Paz Y Esperanza this year, Lisa has been and will continue to work around the themes of Paz Y Esperanza that include, but are not limited to justice and access, women, domes-

tic violence, the environment, spirituality, and mental health. Her two responsibilities include working in partnership with the Peruvians who lead the mental health and communication departments in Ayacucho.

She has found herself traversing the countryside to accompany women and men who were affected by the years of internal violence in Peru (1980-2000). Together with, Milagros, Ruth, and Roxanna, they lead workshops on self-care, self esteem, anger, grief, and conflict. There is also time to assist with rituals of remembrance, and a project that provides a starter set of guinea pigs or chickens in the hopes that the women will create and raise more as a source of both food and income. Lisa's second role is in the area of communications. She travels to the protestant churches of Ayacucho to build bridges and network with pastors, church leaders, women, and the youth by worshipping, leading studies and workshops, as well as preaching. She helps maintain and write for a webpage [www.portaldevida.net](http://www.portaldevida.net) that is a site for articles, news, church information and resources.

Lisa has an English language blog that is serving as a written record of her work building relationships, teaching, but most of all learning by being present with the people of Peru.

[www.entocnesperutambien.blogspot.com](http://www.entocnesperutambien.blogspot.com)

You can hear Lisa talk about her service with Paz y Esperanza in this [video](#).

Also, look forward to meeting YAVs Rachel Hudson and James Lantz in future editions of *La Retama*.

## Where are They Now? — Updates on the 2009-10 YAVs

Red Uniendo Manos would like not only to thank the 2009-10 Young Adult Volunteers, but also provide an update on where they are what they're doing!

**Ginna Irby** is in Richmond, Virginia working on her Master of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary.

**Sarah Chancellor** is in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma serving as the Director of Children and Youth Activities at the First Presbyterian Church.

**Alyssa King** is in Louisville, Kentucky, studying at Louisville Theological Seminary.

**Joe Tobiason** is in Seattle, Washington immersing himself further in language study and advocacy work.

**Anna Gray** is in Seattle, Washington working as Customer Service Representative at CONTOUR.

**Sarah Terpstra** is in Oak Ridge, Tennessee making an honest living working in a lab.



## *PC(USA) Office of World Mission Visits Joining Hands Peru*

The first week of December, three representatives of the World Mission office of PC(USA) came to visit Joining Hands Peru (Red Uniendo Manos Peru) – **Maria Arroyo** (Coordinator for Latin America and the Caribbean), **Doug Welch** (Associate Director of World Mission), and **Sarah Henken** (Regional Liaison for the Andes).

Their visit provided the opportunity to reaffirm the partnership between the World Mission Office of PC(USA) and Red Uniendo Manos. During their time with the Red they met with the Directive Council, visited La Oroya, and went

shopping at the Bridge of Hope Fair Trade store in Miraflores, Lima.

Maria, Doug and Sarah also visited with other PC (USA) partners: the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Peru, the Reformed Evangelical Church of Peru, and El Recinto seminary.

The visit also allowed us to meet PC(USA) mission co-worker, Rev. Sarah Henken, who will serve as the new Regional Liaison for the Andes, while based in La Paz, Bolivia.

(Rev. Sarah Henken, at right.)



## *World Mission Matters Conference to Feature Joining Hands Peru*



The 2011 **Big Tent** event of the Presbyterian Church (USA) will be held in Indianapolis, Indiana, June 30-July 2. Among the many conferences held at this annual gathering will be the World Mission Matters conference. Invited to be one of four plenary speakers is Rev. Jed Koball, Companionship Facilitator of Joining Hands Peru (Red Uniendo Manos Peru) who will be speaking on recent developments in international partnership and advocacy campaigns addressing root causes of poverty. Also scheduled to speak is former Companionship Facilitator in Peru and present Director of World Mission, Rev. Dr. Hunter Farrell. In attendance will be members of the Joining Hands network in Peru, as well as their partners from Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery.

## *Fourth Annual Youth Congress to be held in Lima, Jan 24-28*

From January 24-28 in the city of Lima, Peru, Joining Hands Peru (Red Uniendo Manos Peru) will be hosting the fourth annual Youth Congress. Nearly one hundred youth from across the Americas will be gathering to share stories of their ongoing campaigns for water justice in their respective locales. The goal of the conference is not only to create an atmosphere of solidarity, but also to establish networking among the youth as they identify common themes and strategies in the struggle for environmental justice in the face of global warming and the irresponsibility of the extractive industry.

This year, the conference anticipates receiving youth from Peru, Bolivia, Chile and the United States. If you are interested in joining us for this event, please contact [Red Uniendo Manos Peru](#).



## *Giving Thanks for Volunteers and Visitors in 2010*

As we reflect upon the events of this past year, we at Joining Hands Peru (Red Uniendo Manos Peru) would like to take a moment to give thanks for the visitors and volunteers from afar who came to help us, encourage us, listen to us and share with us. The power of accompaniment can not be underestimated; for thus, we are so very grateful for our friends from afar:



**The First Presbyterian Church of New York City** – in February of 2010, a group of 15 ventured with us to the community of Huayanay in the outskirts of Huancavelica. Together with the community, they planted hundreds of trees and helped install 30 new smoke-reducing stoves. These simple yet effective projects are one small but important piece of our ongoing Water campaign. Thanks First Pres!



**Colorado College** – in March of 2010, a group of 10 students and 2 professors walked alongside the Youth Environmental Network of La Oroya as they participated in water and soil sampling to measure present levels of contamination in La Oroya, visited with mayors in the regions, and painted a mural in a public setting. Thanks CC!

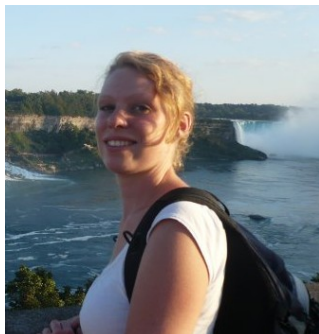


**Hudson River Presbytery** – in June of 2010, a group of 10 pastors and laypersons journeyed with us from Lima to Ica to Huancavelica to Huancayo to La Oroya and back to Lima in order to visit with many of our partners, get a glimpse of the reality of Peru in its various environments, and begin to understand our campaigns related to Water, La Oroya and Fair Trade. We look forward to partnering with Hud Riv in the years to come! Thanks Hud Riv!

**Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery** – in August of 2010, our dear and faithful partners of nearly ten years from the St. Louis area, sent a group of 5 amazing women to study the effects of the Free Trade agreement between the U.S. and Peru. Giddings-Lovejoy is supporting the Trade Reform Act in the United States, that would effectively revise current and future trade agreements between the U.S. and other countries. We're blessed by their continued hard work and the opportunity to walk side by side with our brothers and sisters of Giddings-Lovejoy.



*Giving Thanks... continued*



**Eva-Maria Kuntz** – from April – August 2010, our friend Eva-Maria from Germany accompanied the Bridge of Hope project, helping in product design and other menial tasks around the office. Her spirit of humble accompaniment was a blessing to us all. Thanks Eva!



**David Lozano** - from March – May, our friend from Spain accompanied the Bridge of Hope project, helping with web-design. Thanks David for all the laughter you brought to the office!

**Michelle Ngai** – for the month of October, our friend from Canada accompanied the Bridge of Hope project, teaching artisan groups about internet, email and skype. Thanks Michelle!



**Emily Piccone** – in November, our friend from New York spent time in La Oroya to develop a story for print media. Emily is a recent graduate of Vermont University where she majored in environmental studies and journalism. Thanks Emily for your dedication!



**Jill Verbenk** – from May to August, our friend from the University of Arizona accompanied our campaign in La Oroya. Jill, finishing her Master's in Public Health, helped design new workshops related to care of pregnant women amidst the contamination of La Oroya. Thank you Jill!



**Liz Toland** – from May to August, our friend from Columbia Theological Seminary accompanied us here in the Joining Hands office in Lima. Liz, working on her Master's in Divinity, helped design new curriculum related to children and the environment. Thanks Liz!

**Matt Reuer** – in August, our friend from Colorado College accompanied us in La Oroya. Matt, a professor in environmental studies and chemistry, is leading new environmental studies in La Oroya that will help us in the demands for remediation. Thank you Matt!



**Miranda Jennings** – in August, our friend from Nicaragua met with various partners of our network. Miranda directs a service learning program in Nicaragua and is interested in working with the network on developing short term volunteer opportunities to benefit the partners of the network. Thanks Miranda!



## From the Companionship Facilitator



*9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from, the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. -- John 2:9-11*

It was a grand event! The wine was flowing. The people were dancing. It was a wedding not to be missed. In fact, it was *my* wedding!

Dear friends, I could not be filled with more joy by announcing to you that Jenny Milagros Valles and I were married in her hometown of Moyobamba, Peru on the 9th of October. Surrounded by dear friends and our families, from across two continents, we celebrated our love and commitment to one another.

For those among you who have traveled to Peru, you may know Jenny. She has worked with the Red Uniendo Manos since 2003, and it was in the office where she and I met nearly two years ago. Yes, it was an office affair! And we continue to be blessed by an office of co-workers and partners in mission, who support us and encourage us in our love.

But, to be sure, despite the love and support we have felt from so many different people in our lives, the days leading up to our wedding were filled with nervous moments and doubts – but not doubts about our love, nor nervousness about spending our lives together. Rather, the nerves and the doubts had to do with this grand celebration we were planning that would bring together various cultures and languages and customs and traditions to a place, Moyobamba, that few people knew. In the high jungle of northern Peru, inspired by our love for one another, we were attempting to bring the world together.

But this event was not only multi-cultural and multi-lingual, it was also ecumenical. And, it was perhaps the bringing together of peoples of different religious traditions that most concerned us.

Peru is a predominately Catholic culture. Jenny herself is Catholic. I of course am an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Most of my friends and family in the United States are protestant, catholic, jewish, agnostic and even atheist. Many of Jenny's family and our mutual friends here in Peru are catholic. Yet, we also have dear friends here in Peru who are evangelical.

To be evangelical in Peru, is in some ways to not be catholic. And to be catholic is in some ways to not be evangelical. Some evangelicals indeed pride themselves on certain customs and beliefs they hold that clearly define them as something other than catholic. Most visibly, this can be seen in the strictly held belief by many evangelicals that one should not drink... nor dance.

Wanting to be sensitive to this, Jenny and I knew it would be important to have an abundance of non-alcoholic beverages in addition to the beer, wine and pisco sours that would be flowing through the night. And so, we had natural juices made from exotic fruits from the jungle – taperiva, maracuya, cocona, aguajina and more! And as for the dancing, well... there was not much more we could do than provide sufficient and comfortable seating for those who would not partake.

And soon enough, following the dinner, the toasts, the cutting of the cake and our first dance as husband and wife, the DJ opened up the dance floor and the people were moving to the rhythms of salsa, meringue and cumbia. A fiesta was happening!

After sharing dances with one another and still more with our families and friends, Jenny and I sought out our friends who weren't dancing in order to share a moment of joy and gratitude with all of our guests. We looked intently for one couple in particular— a young evangelical couple who had made the long and costly trip from Lima to celebrate with us. Searching the outskirts of the dance floor we could not find them anywhere. Worried that they may have left early for having been offended by the ample spirits and dancing, we frenetically began asking others where they were, when suddenly Jenny tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Jed, look on the dance floor!"

And there they were — dancing in the middle of the crowd.

After sharing a dance with them, Jenny and I said to them, "We didn't know that you two danced!" They replied, "We don't! It's against our tradition. But this is your special day, and we're here to celebrate, and we want to celebrate with you, in the way that you do, to know and share your joy and happiness."

In the Presbyterian Church (USA) today, we talk about doing mission in partnership. We talk about accompaniment – accompanying our partners. Walking with our partners. Being in solidarity with our partners. Humbling ourselves and sacrificing in order to know the pain and suffering of our partners. However, we forget sometimes to talk about knowing the joy of our partners. Less still do we talk about setting aside our customs, traditions and beliefs (if even for a moment) in order to more fully understand that joy.

Jenny and I are blessed. We are blessed by the presence of one another in each other's life. We are blessed by our families that support us unconditionally and encourage us in our love. And we are blessed by friends, evangelical and catholic alike, who humbly set aside their own beliefs, their own traditions and practices in order to be able to know and share in the fullness of our joy.

May our mission as the Church be blessed likewise. May we be so inspired and so humbled to set aside our ways in order to share in the abundance of life that is overflowing in our partners here in Peru and around the world.

Joyfully,

Jed Koball

([this letter first appeared](#) in October on the PC(USA) World Mission website).

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