

Bishop Gerhard Preibisch

‘Tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear . . .’(Matthew 6:25 NRSV )

This is a tough commandment to follow. Although Jesus tells us not to worry—it was difficult for us especially when we prepared to leave for Peru amidst reports that a powerful earthquake was shaking that country, killing hundreds of people and injuring thousands more.

My wife, Winn, and I were among eleven from Christ Lutheran Church in Chilliwack, preparing to visit our companion synod, the Iglesia Luterana Evangelica Peruana - ILEP (Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Church).

After much prayer and encouragement from the folks in Peru to come in spite of the earthquake, we decided to go. Although we had misgivings, it seemed important that we follow through with our commitment to visit our sisters and brothers in Christ especially in their time of crisis.

I am grateful to Rev. Pedro Bullon Moreano, the president of ILEP, for giving me the opportunity, together with two other members of our contingent, the opportunity to visit the area affected by the earthquake. We were accompanied by President Pedro and Roberto Funk, an engineer working with Lutheran World Relief. What we saw was overwhelming. I could not help but recall memories of the destruction in post-war Germany.

In the city of Pisco, eighty-percent of the homes were destroyed. Everywhere we looked, houses were reduced to rubble. People who had very little to start with, after the earthquake were left with nothing. Fearing more tremors, many were living on the street in make-shift housing— as far away as possible from any structure left standing. A few had tents but many more found refuge in hastily constructed huts made of straw mats.

We distributed what we had brought—flashlights, bottled water and toilet paper. The flashlights were the most sought-after items. They helped those patrolling after dark in order to protect from looters what little they had left.

Fortunately, not one of ILEP's congregations was directly impacted by the earthquake. As we visited many of the congregations I was impressed by their hospitality and their generosity. The members of Emmanuel in Collique, one of the poorest districts of Lima, provided lodging in their homes for our entire two week stay in Lima. In the home that Winn and I and four others stayed, the family gave up their bedrooms and living room in order to accommodate us. They cheerfully shared their food with us also.

As we were about to return to Canada, I was moved by a comment from one of our hosts. She thanked us for our visit and said: “*Many visitors come to our community to look around and then retreat to their hotel rooms, but you folks were willing to stay in our homes and see how we live.*”

I give thanks to God for the opportunity to meet so many of our sisters and brothers in Christ who are members of the Peruvian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Although many have very little, they are willing to share with others. In every church we visited there was an ingathering for the

victims of the earthquake.

I also give thanks to God that there is an ingathering among congregations of our ELCIC. We saw and heard how Lutheran World Relief was already responding to the disaster in Peru as a partner in Action by Churches Together (ACT)

Jesus words “. . .*do not worry*...” take on a whole new meaning for us now.

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