

# A Promise Kept: 2022 Work Camp in Yauyos

Last June, a group of high school students from different parts of the United States traveled to Quisque, in the mountains of Yauyos, Peru. The aim of the service project was to help restore the local church and give English classes to children in the area.

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Youth Service International, the entity sponsoring these social service trips, has been encouraging young men since 2012 to spend part of their summer vacation lending assistance to the people in Peru. From 2012 to 2019, over a hundred high school students have taken part in these efforts, refurbishing a number of old churches in the mountainous central district of Peru.

When they finished their last project in the town of Aquicha in June 2019, no one imagined a global pandemic would soon break out. Before returning to the United States, the group promised Father Edgar Romero, the pastor in Yauyos, that they would return the following summer to restore the church in Quisque. But it turned out it would be almost three years before they could fulfil their promise!

Thanks be to God, in June 2022 we once again had the possibility of returning to Peru with a group of students from Washington, D.C. and New York who take part in the apostolic activities for young people organized by the faithful of Opus Dei. We reached Lima on June 11<sup>th</sup>, and after spending a night in a school in Lima, we rented two large vans and headed for San Vicente de Canete in the mountains of Peru.

When we arrived in that city, we toured the installations of the Valle Grande Institute of Higher Education in Technology, a corporate work of Opus Dei, which provides technical training for young people in the areas of farm production and systems analysis, among others. We also met some of the teachers.

That same day we set out towards the Nature Reserve of North Yauyos, a place that invites one to

contemplate the breath-taking mountain scenery, although the road we had to travel on required the driver's complete attention, due to the numerous precipices alongside.

During the next two weeks we lived in the town of Llapay and traveled an hour and a quarter every morning to work on the church in Quisque and teach the local children English. It was truly an unforgettable experience.

The local authorities and the staff of the school received us very warmly. There was great cooperation between the group from the United States and the teachers, students and people of Quisque.

One of the participants, Santi Bendeck, says: "During those two intense weeks, we not only strengthened the bonds of friendship among all of us, but we also grew in discipline and fortitude. I want to try

to keep up the good habits that we learned on our trip to Peru.”

Joe Kilner, another student who took part in the project, confides: “The trip to Peru was an incredible experience that strengthened the comradeship in our group, as well as deepening our appreciation for cultures different from our own. It was moving to see people with absolutely no material means carrying out their daily tasks and being very happy at the same time. They were grateful for the simplest things in life: having enough food to eat, a roof over their head, and warm clothing for the cold. It has truly helped me to live the virtue of spiritual poverty better.”

On the last day, the chaplain of the group, Father Diego, celebrated Holy Mass in the newly restored church in Quisque. The townspeople prepared a big fiesta for us with great

affection, and everyone was very moved.

As Saint Josemaria says in *Christ is Passing By*: “A man or a society that does not react to suffering and injustice and makes no effort to alleviate them is still distant from the love of Christ’s heart. While Christians enjoy the fullest freedom in finding and applying various solutions to these problems, they should be united in having one and the same desire to serve mankind. Otherwise their Christianity will not be the Word and Life of Jesus; it will be a fraud, a deception of God and man (no. 167).”

God willing, a new group of young men will return in June 2023 to restore other churches and teach the local children some English, and strengthen ties between Americans and Peruvians.

*In the short video below, "before and after" images are shown of the restored church in Quisque:*

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