

Peru Service Project

A group of high school boys from Washington D.C. spent several weeks this summer in Peru restoring two small but artistically rich churches in villages high in the Andes, and teaching English and Catechism to the local children.

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Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (no. 123) wrote: “Popular piety enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on.

Once looked down upon, popular piety came to be appreciated once more in the decades following the Council. In the Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI gave a decisive impulse in this area. There he stated that popular piety ‘manifests a thirst for God which only the poor and the simple can know’ and that ‘it makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of bearing witness to belief.’ Closer to our own time, Benedict XVI, speaking about Latin America, pointed out that popular piety is ‘a precious treasure of the Catholic Church,’ in which ‘we see the soul of the Latin American peoples.’”

A large group of high school boys spent several weeks this summer, from June 19 to July 11, in the province of Yauyos in Peru restoring two small but artistically rich

churches in villages high in the Andes. The young fellows spent each morning cleaning, plastering and painting. After lunch and a brief rest, they switched jobs and gave classes in English and the Catechism for the local children. On weekends, they had the chance to make cultural trips to nearby sites and went for long hikes in the spectacular scenery of the surrounding mountains. The daily schedule included Mass celebrated by the priest who accompanied them and times for prayer.

The service project was organized by Tenley Study Center in Washington D.C. Since the two villages, Huancaya and Vilca, are quite remote and can only be reached by one lane roads winding through the mountains, they had to bring much of their food with them and all the materials needed to restore the churches.

The local villagers were very appreciative of their efforts and did all they could to assist the young people. Their gratitude on seeing their churches come back to life was evident to everyone. The local priest who travels to many villages in the nearby mountains on his motor bike will now be able to offer Mass on a regular basis for them.

The children were also grateful and excited to be taught by real “Americanos,” and many friendships were forged.

This is the fourth summer that Tenley Study Center has offered this service project. The boys had a chance to visit the two churches that were restored last summer and were pleased to see that both churches, which previously had been abandoned, were now being used on a regular basis by the local villagers, who showed great pride in keeping

them clean and in good condition after all the hard work put into them a year ago.

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