

Peru International Encounter

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I had the honor of attending the Adele Social Justice Project's (ASJP) first International Encounter in Lima, Peru. As chair of the ASJP Core Team, I heard the Encounter take shape each month on our calls. I became excited for this experience as I heard the plans, where we would be visiting, and saw the agenda. However, the week ended up being so much more than what I could have ever expected.

The International Encounter was shaped around the idea of *convivencia*:

The Spanish word “convivencia” does not have a direct translation in English, but it is the heart of the Peru Encounter. The literal translation of convivencia is “a living with.” But it is so much more than living together – it is forming intentional Christian community with one another.

For one week 12 young adult Lay Marianist from the United States and 5 young adult Lay Marianist from Peru lived in *convivencia*. We learned about each other's lives and culture. We talked about social justice issues revolving around racism and gender inequality. We discussed how the lives we live as Marianists can make an impact on social change. We also had the opportunity to visit Marianist ministries around Lima and shared with one another the stories of our Lay Marianist communities and how we are attempting to live out our Marianist mission.

The Centro de Albert Mitchel, where we stayed, is a gathering place for lay Marianists. As soon as you walk in you feel welcomed. One of the most interesting aspects of the week was that we did not all know each other before we arrived in Peru. However all of us had something in common – something at our core. We recognized throughout the week that it was this sense of community and love for the Marianist mission. Even through the language barrier it was easier than expected to be in *convivencia* with one another. We each came with an intentional purpose to learn from and be with one another.

I am still reflecting and taking in everything from the week, but I am starting to move into the “now what?” part of my reflection. I was amazed by the work that is taking place in Peru. One of the greatest impacts for me was learning about the lay communities. I am a part of a lay Marianist community that has started the discernment process of figuring out what we would like to do as a community to work towards social justice. There was one presentation from Peru that really hit home for me. Gustavo, who is a part of the young adult CREES (Creamos Esperanza or Create Hope) community, talked about their community's action towards social justice. They work with a rural town called Otuzco. CREES has built a close relationship with the people of Otuzco, learning what the needs of the community are. CREES found that one of the greatest needs was that the children were malnourished. They worked with non-profits to fund a nutrition program and offer nutrition bars to the children of the community. Currently, they are looking into how the nutrition program has affected the community and what would be the best way to

move forward with the project. In addition, CREES does different projects each month based on the needs of the Otuzco community.

I was completely blown away by the CREES community and their commitment to the people of Otuzco. Working with the people from Otuzco is not their full time job. Yet, they have a passion for serving and working with them that takes a lot of time and dedication. This is something that I want to keep with me as I move forward through my own Marianist commitment and discernment process. Where can I best meet the needs of my own community and read the signs of the times?

The International Encounter in Peru is something that I feel will impact me throughout my life. I hope that it will be a constant reminder to remain open and hospitable, to not be afraid to immerse myself in new cultures, and experience something different. I will continue to encourage myself to start up conversations that need to be had regardless of the difficulty of the conversation. It will also be a constant reminder to “Do whatever He tells you” as I see the needs of my own community.



Encounter participants gathered in the main square in Lima to join thousands of others cheering on the Peruvian soccer team playing archrival Chile