

Peru-Covenant Mission Trip



“Seeds of Hope”

August 2019

Covenant Presbyterian Church--Madison, Wisconsin

In partnership with Rev. Jed Koball, Presbyterian Mission Co-Worker



Rear (L to R): Jennifer Morgan, Jacob Larget, Charlie Berthoud, Chris Turner, James Berthoud, Matthew Berthoud

Front (L to R): Deb Cohn, Izzy Malliet, Alaura Diaczun, Sara Lovell, Andrea Diaczun, Nancy Gunder



Our Itinerary

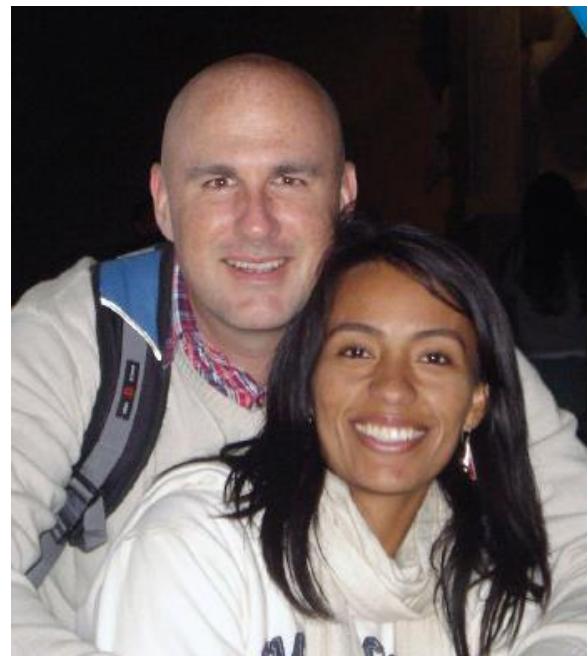
- Aug 3-4 Lima
- Aug 4-9 Huancayo and La Oroya
- Aug 9-12 Cusco, Machu Picchu, Lima



Rev Jed and Jenny Koball serve the Presbyterian Church (USA) in Peru, as Mission Co-Workers.

Jed Koball assists the Peru Joining Hands Network (Red Uniendo Manos Peru). Joining Hands is an initiative of the Presbyterian Hunger Program that addresses root causes of hunger in partnership with networks of churches and non-governmental organizations in countries with high poverty rates. These networks lead the struggle against hunger and poverty at the local level and are joined by Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presbyteries and congregational partners that address the same concerns on the global level.

Jenny is the Peru site coordinator for the Presbyterian Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) program, which sends people ages 19 to 30 to serve in communities of need in the United States and abroad. In addition to service, the YAV experience emphasizes living in intentional Christian community, spiritual formation and vocational discernment.



When a great crowd gathered and people from town after town came to Jesus, he said in a parable: “A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold.” As he said this, he called out, “Let anyone with ears to hear listen!”

--Luke 8:4-8

Saturday-Sunday August 3-4: Madison to Lima and Huancayo

After months of prep and prayer, and after a long day of travel we arrived in Lima. Presbyterian Mission Co-Worker Jed Koball met us in the airport and got us to Casa Kolping, a church-related hostel. After at least some sleep, we enjoyed breakfast and then went to the scenic walkway and park, overlooking the Pacific Ocean.



We stopped at a monument for victims of the violence of the 1980s and 90s, where 70,000 stones are etched with the names of people who died. After a quick lunch at a restaurant, we went to the airport and met Conrado Olivera, who works with Jed and Joining Hands, a network of Peruvian social service agencies. Conrado spent the next five days with us, sharing his insights.

We went back to the airport and flew on a half-empty plane from sea level to 11,000 feet at Jauja, an hour from Huancayo. At our hotel that evening, Jed gave us a good orientation to Peru and the environmental and mining issues. He has lived in Peru for over ten years, and he has been cultivating relationships in La Oroya for most of that time.

Jed reminded us that not long ago La Oroya was ranked as one of the ten most polluted cities in the world, and that over 90% of the children have lead poisoning. He encouraged us to think of our mission work as accompanying the people of La Oroya, rather than “doing something” for them.

He invited us to be awed by nature, to find joy in people, and to thirst for understanding.

We snuggled in bed on Sunday night; it was our first of many chilly nights in high altitude Peru, where the temperature was in the 20s.

Monday, August 5: Huancayo to La Oroya



After breakfast at the hotel in Huancayo, we drove two hours along the Mantaro River, to La Oroya, marveling at the Andes mountains all around. About 15 minutes before we arrived, we started seeing the results of the pollution from the smelter as the mountains turned white, damaged by acid rain.

We stopped at a gas station near the smelter and saw the pollution up close. The smelter processes various metals that are

mined in the region. And even though the smelter has been mostly shut down over the past 10 years, the environmental damage to the soil, the water, and the air remains. While we were there, it was running—producing smoke, which several people in La Oroya noticed.

Then we drove through the bustling small city and met with the group of youth environmentalists—Peruvian teens who would become our hosts and friends over the week.

After some icebreaker games we learned more about our schedule and about the environmental and economic challenges the Peruvians in La Oroya face.



We enjoyed a delicious lunch of chicken, rice, and salad, and in the evening we had squash soup with bread and rice pudding for dessert.

We bundled up at the hotel for a chilly night. It's was 21° at 6 AM so we were grateful that the hotel had small space heaters in each room along with electric-heated mattresses. But we were sad to hear that 99% of the folks in La Oroya do not have space heaters or heated beds. It was really cold at 12,500 feet.

Tuesday, August 6: La Oroya and Huari



Together with the Peruvian youth, we had breakfast of scrambled eggs, bread, and hot coffee and tea at Filomenas. During our four days in La Oroya, we had most of our meals and meetings at Filomenas—a community organization working with families, where the Peruvian youth gathered to learn and encourage each other about the environment.

After breakfast, drove about 30 minutes to a little village called Huari, where we met with some youth at their new school. Surrounded by vibrant blue skies and towering mountains, we made posters about the environment and then we planted some trees and flowers in the schoolyard.



After some soccer we enjoyed a lunch of freshly cooked trout from the local fish hatchery which we visited in the afternoon.



After a one-hour rest at the hotel we enjoyed dinner of chicken noodle soup back at Filomenas. Then we played musical chairs and card games with the Peruvian youth.

When we came back to the hotel, we spent an hour sharing devotions and reflections together. We re-read the Scripture passages that we've shared at most of our gatherings, including:

I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

- Psalm 27:13

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

- Romans 12:21

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

- 1 John 3:18

We shared something for which we are thankful and something that concerns us, sort of like a prayer: Thank you God for ____ and God we pray for _____. After a busy and beautiful day, we were grateful for our comfortable beds.

We enjoyed a nice walk thru town to see a tree nursery as well. We stopped for a soda and some crackers on our way out, together with about ten Peruvians. The Peruvian youth were very gracious and showing us around and telling us about the town. Again, we were in awe of the beauty of the area.

We piled in the van with several of the Peruvians and drove back to La Oroya.

Wednesday, August 7: La Oroya and Villa Del Sol

Breakfast was hard boiled eggs along with yogurt and fruit and bread, and hot tea or coffee, always appreciated on these chilly mornings. Together with about 10 of the Peruvian youth, we went to Villa Del Sol, a community on the outskirts of La Oroya.

We met Yolanda and her 83 year-old mother, known as Mama Toya.

Together they lead a conservation committee which has planted over 30,000 trees in the hillsides over the last 20 years, in an effort to reclaim the hillside.

Together with the Peruvian youth and some other community leaders, many of us spent several hours painting the murals that had been drawn on the stairway up the watchtower.

Some of us helped move rocks and make retaining walls for rainwater, and some of us helped

put in signs with inspirational messages. It was warm in the sun but cold in the shade of the watchtower. We continued the painting after lunch as the wind got stronger and it got colder. We enjoyed the view of the city and the mountains, and we were encouraged to see all the trees growing just a few miles away from the smelter.

We went back to the hotel for a short rest before dinner

and after dinner the consensus was not to stay and play games with the youth because everyone was tired. So we had a one hour meeting back at the hotel, going over logistics and sharing devotions, giving thanks to God for the beauty of Peru and the Peruvian people.



Thursday, August 8: La Oroya

We spent the morning at Filomenas office listening to presentations from the youth about the challenges and hope in their respective communities.

All of them mentioned mining contamination, affecting land, water, and air. Some of them discussed alcoholism and teenage pregnancy problems as well.



We appreciated their courage and conviction and creativity in their solutions. Many of them were working on the murals and increasing awareness about the importance of caring for the environment, trying to help adults and other kids be more involved in creation care.

La Oroya: Sara, Edit

Yauli: Elmer

Huari: Angela, Mabel, Jenifer

Carahuamayo: Valeria and Zeyda

Pucará: Jean Pier, Antony

We did a brief presentation on Madison and some of the environmental issues in our area, talking about lakes, farming, immigration, solar panels, and bicycles, while noting our “Green Team” at church. After an intense morning, it was time for some fun.



After lunch, we walked downtown with most of the Peruvian youth for some shopping, some basketball and soccer, and ice cream. After our deep conversations in the morning, it was good to relax and have some fun together.

Back at Filomenas, we had our final meal with the Peruvian youth and then we gathered for our *despedida* (good-bye party) and cultural festival. We presented the Peruvian youth with Covenant T-shirts, which they wore for two traditional dances.



Several people from Villa del Sol came with traditional costumes and did some powerful dances as well. Especially impressive was 83 year-old Mama Toya, dancing with passion. We sang two hymns in English and Spanish:

- Canto de Esperanza (Song of Hope/May the God of Hope Go With Us)
- Enviado soy de Dios (The Lord Now Sends Us Forth)

Filomenas Director Erlinda thanked us for coming and presented us with some gifts including pens and coasters in informational package.

We gave the Peruvian youth tennis balls, and they immediately asked all of us to sign them.

It was wonderful to see the connections among the Madison and La Oroya teens. We ended the night with lots of smiles, hugs, and some tears.





Friday-Tuesday, August 9-13: Cusco, Ollantaytambo, Machu Picchu, Lima, and Home

We gathered in the La Oroya hotel lobby at 5:15 for a 90 minute drive to the airport. We had a delay in Lima, but finally made it to Cusco by late afternoon.

Once in Cusco we toured Korikancha with our guide Edwin, and we enjoyed a stroll through beautiful Cusco including dinner at a restaurant.

On Saturday we drove through the Sacred Valley, enjoying majestic mountain views, along with a visit to the market in Pisac. We bought some souvenirs along the way, while also enjoying (?) bites of a freshly cooked guinea pig, a Peruvian delicacy and good source of lean protein. The last stop of the day was Ollantaytambo, the majestic fortress up in the mountains. After a nice dinner on the town square we went to bed early.

Our train left at six the next morning for Aguas Calientes, the little town outside of Machu Picchu. We reconnected with Edwin, and half of the group climbed Mount Machu Picchu and the other half climbed Wayna Picchu. Some folks did not have time to tour the main ruins but those who did really enjoyed it.



After a quick snack in Aguas Calientes we took the train back to Ollantaytambo and then a two hour van ride back to Cusco. Everyone really enjoyed our comfortable beds and a good night's sleep.

On Monday we drove to the airport and flew to Lima where we had a scheduled nine-hour layover. We arranged for a three-hour tour of downtown Lima which was wonderful. Most of us went to the Basilica of Saint Francis with stunning colonial architecture and fascinating catacombs underneath.

We all walked around the Central Square, enjoying the architecture and the busyness of the city. We went back to the Lima airport where we saw many athletes from the Pan-American games which had just ended in Lima the day before, traveling back to their home

countries all over the western hemisphere. We got on the redeye flight, and some of us got sleep and eventually we got back to Chicago and home to Madison.

With new friendships and good memories of La Oroya, we step back into our daily lives, with new ideas and energy to care for the planet, our common home.



Thank you, God for our big beautiful world. Thank you for Peru—the mountains, the rivers, the blue sky, the alpacas, and especially the people. We pray for La Oroya and all communities affected by pollution. We pray for the Peruvian youth *environmentalistas*, that they can persevere in their important work. Show us how to take better care of this planet, and give us the courage to do it. Help us to faithfully follow Jesus, who calls us to love our neighbors and to make your Kingdom a reality here on this earth. Amen.

Individual Reflections

The six Covenant youth and the ten La Oroya youth spent 4 days together—painting murals, planting trees, playing soccer, sharing meals, listening to music, and most importantly talking about mutual environmental concerns. How encouraging to see good seeds being planted—literally and figuratively.

While the youth exchange was inspiring and encouraging, I was equally inspired and encouraged by 83 year-old Mama Toya. About 20 years ago she founded the conservation committee in Villa del Sol, where over 30,000 trees have been planted. I spent about 15 minutes working side by side with her, moving rocks to build an irrigation dam. When I commented on her hard work, she paused and with tears in her eyes, she started talking about how much she loved her people.

Jesus teaches us to love our neighbors, which I believe means doing what we can to care for the earth to ensure that we all have clean air, water, and soil. I was inspired and encouraged by the passion of the youth and by the passion and energy of Mama Toya to make this world a better place and live out the teaching of Jesus.

--Charlie Berthoud (Pastor)



Having visited La Oroya last year, it was a very interesting experience to return and actually get to work alongside the community there. It was especially inspiring to see a bunch of 14-year old Peruvian boys eagerly pitching in to help build terraces to help trees grow. Their energy and enthusiasm, as well as the obvious belief in the importance of their work is something that I'm very glad to have witnessed. I can't wait to (hopefully) return some time!

--James Berthoud (Freshman at Washington University in St. Louis)

One day we went to a local park and played a big game of soccer with the youth environmentalists. It was a great time to decompress and really talk with them and get a more personal look at the problems we're dealing with.

This experience was really a representation of the trip as a whole, with the exchange of culture and information. Later we were playing basketball and sharing about our hometowns.

It was truly remarkable to learn and grow alongside the kids of La Oroya.

--Matthew Berthoud (11th grader at Memorial High School)



HOPE AMIDST DEVASTATION: I found the mission portion of our recent trip to Peru to be both humbling and inspiring. La Oroya, in the recent past, had the distinction of being one of the 10 most polluted cities in the world. The largest smelting operation in the Western Hemisphere owned by an American corporation called, "Doe Run," is located in La Oroya and for 90 years or so, melted down precious minerals that other American and Chinese companies had mined in the surrounding area.

The smelting operation has dumped acid rain on the entire area of La Oroya. The mountains are covered with a thick white deposit. The air is polluted. The ground is contaminated. Plant life is scarce. The rivers are dead. Children grow up exposed to lead and other dangerous minerals and chemicals. The smelter stopped running full time 10 years ago when the company declared that environmental



regulations enacted in Peru were causing it to go bankrupt. The smelter has been for sale since then but continues to run at 10% of capacity.

During our time in La Oroya, we were hosted by the Asociacion Filomena Tomaira Pacsi (or Filomena for short), a member agency of Joining Hands, the Peruvian umbrella organization with which Jed Koball, the Presbyterian Mission Co-Worker who accompanied us, works.

The director of Filomenia is Erlinda who has worked there for many years. On our last day in La Oroya, Erlinda broke down in tears as she spoke of how she struggled in vain to get people in La Oroya to be concerned about what was happening in the shadow of the smelter to the environment and their health. Approximately 13 years ago, her efforts finally began to make progress when she sparked interest among young teenagers in environmental issues. A Network of Youth Environmentalists now meets regularly at Filomena to receive training. The members of the group have made an impact on their villages by engaging their parents, teachers and friends in recycling and cleanup efforts along with planting trees. They have become enthusiastic champions for the environment.

Erlinda now has hope for the future of La Oroya and so do I.

--Deb Cohn

People, Animal and Land as ONE. That's what I got out of my trip to Peru. Being able to watch the connection and see the beauty was priceless. Seeing the youth working together building, painting, planting and playing soccer was great. Watching the youth from the first time they met, seeing them bond, wanting to make a difference in their country and seeing the sadness when they had to leave was heartfelt and amazing at the same time. Being able to climb to the top of machu picchu even if it took me a long time was a great accomplishment. Lastly, mingling with the people who live there whether it was at Filomenas or in Lima at a market was such a great cultural experience. This will be a trip I will remember for many years and I want to Thank all of you for the support.

--Andrea Diaczun



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” --Margaret Mead

This quote came to me repeatedly as we worked both with the Youth Environmentalist Network (supported by the ONG Filomenas, full name Filomena Tomari Pacsi, a member of the Peru Joining Hands Network) and the Conservation Committee of Villa El Sol made up primarily of older adults who have been reforesting their communal land on the outskirts of La Oroya. Both of these groups are composed of a small number of committed citizens who have become change agents in their communities. They are working in their own ways to return their part of the world, specifically their environments (land, water, and air) in which they live to healthy standards that support all kinds of life: human, plants, animals, etc.



The environments in which they live have been seriously degraded by a smelter that had been processing ores for many years without environmental controls and mining operations primarily run by foreign companies from the United States, China, and such. Currently around 80% of the Andes Mountains in Peru have the possibility of being mined for ores subject to an application from companies to do so. Unfortunately, most of these efforts have been destructive to the environment producing acid rain, run-off, and poisonous by-products such as arsenic trisulfide. The soil, air, and water in these areas no longer support life and consequently the impact on the Andes people that live in these areas has been dramatic.

And yet the youth participating in Filomenas program have taken it upon themselves to teach their peers, parents, and community members how to help the environment through proper trash disposal, recycling, and awareness of the environmental degradation by corporations and how to counteract these impacts. In addition, the Conservation Committee of Villa del Sol is working diligently to restore lands entrusted to them. Their goal is also to teach the general population about sustainability through signage, murals, and such about the importance of restoration and conservation of these natural areas. It's been an honor and privilege to work alongside both of these groups on behalf of Covenant Presbyterian Church.

--Nancy Gunder

It was a great experience to work alongside the communities in La Oroya, from planting new pine trees in the Huari high school courtyard to caring for mature pine trees in Villa El Sol. It really helped remind me that it's never too late to start and make a difference and that this work can have an incredibly long-lasting impact. I'm so glad to have been a part of it and I'm excited to keep in touch with the Peruvian youth through Facebook to see how the impacts continue to grow.

--Jacob Larget (Freshman at Notre Dame)



My favorite memory of Peru was getting to know the kids from La Oroya. I made some very good friends and I really connected with a girl named Mabel. On our last day with the kids we were allowed to explore the marketplace and play soccer with the kids. I knew in that moment when we were picking teams for soccer that she thought of me as a friend because she picked me first for her team. She was so sweet and did her best to learn as much about me and I did my best to learn all about her. She really made my experience at La Oroya special!

--Sara Lovell (12th grader at West High School)

I've realized that after coming home from an amazing trip like this that there is almost too much to talk about, Peru opened my eyes and helped me see the world in new light. I was able to see what life was like in economic classes different from my own as well as I was able to appreciate the 'norms' of another country as travelers coming to the U.S have been doing for years. Seeing the street life made me love the country but seeing the hard work that was being done by all of the locals made me respect and appreciate all of the things we take for granted. This trip was an amazing opportunity for me to get out of my comfort zone, it was also so 'cool' for lack of a better word for me to see how hard kids (my age and even younger) are working to improve their own lives.

Getting to know the kids in La Oroya was challenging at first and really tested my Spanish but the more time we spent with the kids the more I grew to love each and every one of them. I was able to experience first-hand the everyday life of the youth from La Oroya and surrounding communities even being able to play soccer at a local park and peruse a street market. Witnessing all of the hard work that these kids are doing and learning about their communities made leaving La Oroya one of the hardest goodbyes.



After Leaving La Oroya I was able to see even more of the beautiful country, traveling to Cusco and learning the history of the 'navel' of the incan empire. I was able to climb Huayna Picchu mountain and look over the ruins, we had an amazing tour guide and I was able to learn a lot more about the architectural abilities of the Quechua people then I ever knew possible. After leaving Cusco we flew back to the capital city of Lima. We had one final look around the city and I was able to visit a street market and see the beautiful colors one last time before we flew home. I hope to visit La Oroya again and I would love to see more of Cusco.

Thank you to everyone who made it possible for me to go on this trip :) it truly changed my life for the better!!

--Izzy Malliet (12 grader at Memorial High School)

While I knew ahead of our trip that the pollution in the area around La Oroya was terrible, nothing could have prepared me for what I saw. It reminded me of what I experienced in the Chicago/Gary area in the 60's, but it had been allowed to continue for another 50 years longer, and was therefore 50 years worse. The mountains are white, not with snow, but with acid rain. The river is dead. The smelter is supposedly only running at 10%, yet the air still caused my eyes to become an irritated red, and gave me a morning cough, in just the few days we were there.



Our time of work and companionship in La Oroya was wonderful, and I would do it again in a heartbeat, but I couldn't help feeling as we left that I was relieved to be leaving the environment. However, in the same moment, I was aware that while we were able to leave, the people of La Oroya couldn't. This is their home. Through no fault of their own, but the greed and indifference of the government and the companies that run the industries, their circumstances are dire, and they cannot leave.

Thanks to Jed Koball and Presbyterian World Mission, Filomena Tomaira Pacsi, and Red Uniendos Manos Peru, at least the people of LaOroya know they are not alone. We will walk with them.

--Jennifer Morgan

The teenagers we met in La Oroya were in many ways like any teenager we've ever known, or even much like who we used to be. Some were shy and either giggly or quiet, some were outgoing and wanted to be close to the Gringo teens and show how much English they knew.

It was when we all presented on environmental topics that I was impressed the most by the Peruvian teens. While they were poised and confident, the most impressive part was what

they said and shared. These are high-school-aged kids who are growing up in one of the most polluted places on earth; this is their home. One of the objectives of their group is to learn about the trash and toxicity of the air, soil and water in their town. But this group goes further; they take what they have learned and are educating parents (their own and their friends' parents), friends, community leaders and visitors. And they are proposing solutions and solving problems specific to their community.

One of the nearby towns has a week-long festival during the last week of August every year. Teens Valeria and Zeyda are tired of the piles of trash left throughout the town in the wake of the festival and have proposed the simple solution of extra trash cans, especially in the center of town, during the festival time.



They presented several different issues, not all environmental, that they saw as the most pressing for their particular community and then always had ideas for solutions or at least a step toward a solution. Their optimism and energy was refreshing and encouraging.

Thank you God for young people everywhere.

--Chris Turner

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This past week was a dream come true. A prayer answered. Hope realized. After 8 years, we finally took a group back to La Oroya for a week of accompaniment and service with our partners. Eight years ago, the last time we took a group there, we were run out of town - labeled as outside agitators - with rocks thrown at us and other violent acts. As we left town that day, our partners said to me, "no one will ever visit us here again, will they?" Since then, we have taken folks to visit for a few hours, but we had not dared to have a group stay for more than a day at a time. Nonetheless, it remained a dream/hope/prayer of mine to develop

the right experience with the right group of people at the right time in order to facilitate a time of learning, sharing and serving together with our friends in La Oroya because I know just how much they value our presence and vice versa.

After years of strengthening our partnership with the Conservation Committee of Villa El Sol on the outskirts of La Oroya proper, and a newly forged relationship with the Network of Youth Environmentalists in the region, all we needed was a pastor/leader with the courage, commitment and trust to accept our partners' invitation to walk alongside them for a week. I am so grateful for Rev. Charlie Berthoud and the Covenant Presbyterian Church of Madison, Wisconsin for welcoming this opportunity. And, I am so humbled to be able to work with our partners Red Uniendo Manos Peru and Filomena Tomaira Pacsi who helped coordinate all of this.

This past week, we learned about the systemic root causes (political, economic, cultural, global, race-related, and more) that make La Oroya one of the most contaminated places on the face of the Earth. We bore witness to the pollution and its impacts. We named our own personal connection to the issue and our responsibility to respond, no matter where we are. And, we got down on our hands and knees, in the poisoned soil, to care for the land that once sustained the people as we slowly work to recuperate it - removing its toxins, adapting it to climate change, and restoring its capacity to produce food.

For twenty years now, with the support of Presbyterian Hunger Program, we have been walking with the people of La Oroya in advocating for political change locally, nationally and globally to remediate the problems and bring health to the people. That important work continues and is making progress each day. With thanks to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance we were able to secure a grant earlier this year to support the hands on work of our partners on the ground. And with thanks to Presbyterian World Mission, we are bringing more folks from the U.S. into this partnership.



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If there is one important lesson I have learned from our partners over the years it is this: our co-existence on this planet is deeply connected to our relationship with the Earth.

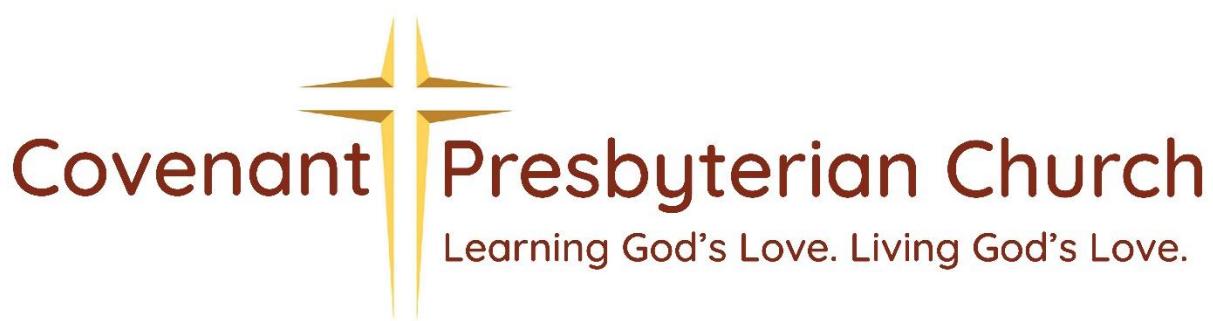
To work for justice, peace and reconciliation (against poverty, against white supremacy, against all forms of violence) we must work to restore our relationship with the Earth; and to work to restore our relationship with the Earth, we must fight poverty, white supremacy and all forms of violence in the world. And, if we are to address the roots of such problems, then we must humble ourselves and get down on our knees to tend to the very roots of the Earth that sustain us and feed us and hold this planet together.



I believe we did that this past week, and I believe that those who participated in this experience are more committed than ever to carry the work forward. I feel grateful, joyful, hopeful...

--Rev. Jed Koball (Presbyterian Mission Co-Worker in Peru)

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