

Peruvian Churches Acquire “Linking Social Capital” Through STM Partnerships¹

Robert J. Priest

A few weeks before the presidential runoff in Peru in June of 2006, a private meeting was held between presidential candidate Alan Garcia and sixty evangelical pastors. The pastors complained that “while Peru proclaims religious freedom, in fact the Catholic church is privileged and *evangélicos* discriminated against. Protestant church properties are taxed. Catholic properties are not and even receive government subsidies. Catholic priests have full access to hospitals and jails. Protestant pastors cannot even

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visit their own parishioners in the hospital. Only the Catholic church has full presidential access—exemplified in the annual Catholic *Te Deum* service where the Cardinal delivers a charge to the president.” Alan Garcia reportedly expressed great sympathy and a willingness to work for change.

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On July 28, Peru’s independence day, outgoing president Toledo attended the *Te Deum*, just before Alan Garcia was sworn in as the new president. Alan Garcia, on the other hand, as his second public act as president (July 30), instead attended a worship service at an Iglesia Alianza Cristiana y Misionera [a Christian and Missionary Alliance Church]—a service intended specifically as a Protestant version of a *Te Deum*, with an evangelical pastor, Miguel Bardales, delivering the charge. Protestant Christianity is currently a key part of the changing religious landscape of Lima.

Prior to the mid-1970s, Protestant churches in Lima were few, small, lower class, and worshipped in small buildings on side streets (in marked contrast to large imposing Catholic churches on central streets and plazas). There were few Protestants but many career Protestant foreign missionaries. For example, the Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA) had dozens of full-time missionaries from the United States and Canada in Peru. But a turning point was reached in the 1970s with a major evangelistic campaign (Lima al encuentro con Dios) led by the C&MA. An interesting mix of factors came together. Peruvian Protestant Christians mobilized for evangelism. A major donor from the United States (R. G. LeTourneau) agreed to buy properties in high-visibility,

prominent parts of Lima (such as Avenida Arequipa or Avenida Brasil) and to pay for the construction of large church buildings (Palomino 1990). Argentinean pastors were brought to Lima to spearhead these churches—pastors whose accents and identities associated them with middle and upper-middle classes. Soon the C&MA (or rather La Iglesia Alianza Cristiana y Misionera) had large churches of several hundred to several thousand middle and upper-middle class members, worshiping in large buildings on central streets.

The C&MA simply became a part of wider changes, where today there are several thousand Protestant congregations in Lima. In a survey I conducted last year of 551 pastors in Lima and its environs, conducted with the assistance of pastor Luis Cornejo, it was found that 65% of these pastors serve congregations which are less than 20 years old. According to the pastors, foreign missionaries played a role in founding over a third (36%) of the congregations founded prior to 1985, but less than one sixth (15%) of those founded in the last ten years. Nearly a quarter (23%) of these pastors serve congregations with more than 125 in attendance on a given Sunday, and about 4.5% serve congregations with more than 500 in average attendance. Roughly 72% of the pastors of these congregations self-identify as Pentecostal or Neo-Pentecostal. Several hundred Peruvian theological students can be found in the various Protestant seminaries and Bible Institutes in Lima. Today there is great energy and vitality among Protestant churches in Lima. And today the dozens

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of foreign C&MA missionaries are completely gone. The C&MA no longer considers Peru a “mission field.” Similar retrenchment of foreign career missionaries in Lima has occurred with most Protestant denominations or agencies, contributing to a loss of connectedness with resource-rich churches in other parts of the world. This connectedness is now established through new patterns of global mission. Today, a central role of career missionaries in Lima involves helping connect Peruvian churches with visiting short-term mission (STM) groups.

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During the summers of 2005 and 2006 I had numerous opportunities to visit Lima’s Jorge Chavez International Airport. On each occasion I hung out a few hours to observe arrivals and departures. Invariably there were STM groups, identifiable by T-shirts, groups ranging in size from 5 or 6 up to 50 or 60, and on one notable occasion, a group of 198 from a mega-church in Minneapolis coming to partner with a large C&MA congregation of 2000 members in Callao. There were Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Nazarenes, Seventh Day Adventists, Methodists, Pentecostals, Mennonites—but, apart from a stray Catholic joining an otherwise Protestant group—I personally encountered no Catholic short-term mission groups in Peru. During my three months in Peru I saw STM groups of many sorts—high school youth groups with their youth pastors, groups of university students with Intervarsity Christian Fellowship, groups of adult professionals, and mixed family groupings. I encountered STM groups from England, Scotland, Germany, Korea, Canada, and the United States. There were STM groups from Korean-American and Chinese-

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American congregations. There was even one STM group of Paraguayan Mennonites (see the article in this issue by Martín Eitzen). On one evening I met a group from a Korean congregation in Spain arriving to meet a group of Korean-American Christians to jointly participate in a collaborative project. Some groups were there to join a sister congregation in an evangelistic outreach activity. Some were there to do construction or medical work. Others came to serve in an orphanage or to work with homeless street children. There were drama groups, music groups, sports groups (soccer, surfing, and sky diving), groups which taught English or gave cooking classes. Some came to learn how they could lobby for justice (related to issues of free trade or to lead poisoning in La Oroya—see article in this issue by Farrell), others to help indigenous artisans market their goods in the global economy, and yet others to provide inexpensive wheelchairs for the handicapped.

Virtually all of the published research related to short-term missions focuses on the perspectives of the short-term missionaries themselves and on the outcomes in the lives of those who travel (Barnett et. al. 2005, Beers 2001, Bramadat 2000, Friesen 2005, Johnstone 2006, Lau 2006, Linhart 2005, Linhart 2006, Priest et. al. 2006, Radecke 2006, Terry 2004, Tuttle 2000, Ver Beek 2006, Walling et. al. 2006) with very



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little research exploring the experiences and perspectives of those in the receiving communities (but see Birth 2006, Livermore 2004, Montgomery 1993, Ver Beek 2006, Zehner 2006). When I initially became interested in researching STM, I assumed that STM groups were inflicting themselves on others who did not want them. But I soon discovered that a majority of these groups interfaced with local churches and other indigenous organizations that were often strongly invested in the collaborative projects which these STM made possible. In a sample survey of 551 Protestant pastors in Lima, a majority (58%) reported that their congregation had hosted a visiting group of short-term missionaries from abroad during their current pastorate. And these pastors were overwhelmingly positive about the collaborative relations. As I have begun to research the Peruvian side of the encounter with visiting STM groups, it is the desire for *linking social capital* which seems to me to be key.

In *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam focuses on the importance of social capital (social connectedness) to the good society, and says that, historically, faith communities were “the single most important repository of social capital in America,” with half of all philanthropy and volunteering linked to such faith communities (2003, 66). Putnam contrasts two types of social capital, *bonding* vs. *bridging*. *Bonding* social capital involves social connections among those who are demographically similar. It focuses inward, “reinforcing

exclusive identities and homogeneous groups" (22); it creates strong in-group loyalties and easily "creates strong out-group antagonism" (23). By contrast, "other networks are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages" (22). *Bridging* social capital establishes relations across cultural and ethnic divides. And certainly, traveling short-term mission groups often bond with their fellow church members in the group, and often bond across ethnic and national divides.

But it is a third kind of social capital I wish to focus on here. Other scholars, such as Woolcock (1999), focus attention on *linking* social capital (or what Robert Wuthnow [2002] calls *status-bridging* social capital: vertical connections across marked differentials of wealth, status, and power). These scholars stress that people who are economically and socially subordinate may have lots of social connectedness to others who are similarly subordinate but that unless there are social and moral connections upwards to those with resources and power, the benefits of social capital are limited. I believe that an analysis of short-term missions as a part of global social connectedness can be fruitfully explored in terms of *bonding*, *bridging*, and *linking* social capital. In this short article, I focus on *linking social capital*, something that Peruvian *evangélicos* seek through partnerships with short-term mission groups from abroad.

Resource Sharing

The primary reason STM groups travel from the US to Peru (rather than vice-versa) is economic, not religious. These groups are not bringing a Christian faith which currently is present in the US or Europe but absent in Peru. Rather, these groups travel from materially wealthy Christian

communities to partner with Christian communities which are often numerically and spiritually as vigorous as their own, but which are, by comparison, materially poor. Only 9% of Protestant pastors receive pastoral incomes of over \$550 a month, and 41% of Protestant pastors receive less than \$125 a month—an income often similar to that of their parishioners. Peruvian *evangélicos* are part of lower, lower-middle, and middle classes which—compared with Protestant church members in Europe, Korea, or North America—live under incredible economic constraints. The cost of living in Lima is not low. It is difficult to provide healthy diets, health care, or education for one's own children, and difficult to pay for expensive church buildings, seminary education, or musical equipment on an income of \$150 to \$250 a month. A typical North American or European STM member traveling to Peru and serving for two weeks will expend \$1800 on expenses related to this voluntary service, roughly equal to the average (median) annual salary of Peruvian pastors in Lima. That is, these short-term mission groups build social connections between Christian communities across marked differentials of wealth.

One function, then, of these short-term mission trips is to create links between Christians with material resources and those with less. One common pattern, for example, is for visiting groups to participate in the construction of a church building—and to bring finances for this. The visiting group may or may not include professional builders, but it will bring resources. For example, I observed one group of Peruvian churches last summer that arranged with visiting church youth teams from the United States to help them build their *templos*. Each team lived in the church facilities and helped with construction and outreach. Here was the breakdown of the finances for each team (not including the cost of travel to Peru):

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US Short-Term Group	Size of Group	Male	Female	Food & Lodging	Local Transport	Sightseeing	Ministry Contribution/ Construction
Group #1	15	6	9	\$3900	\$375	\$375	\$4275
Group #2	20	10	10	\$5200	\$500	\$500	\$5700
Group #3	21			\$5460	\$525	\$525	\$5985
Group #4	33	13	20	\$8580	\$825	\$825	\$9400
Cost for Each Short-Term Missionary				[\$260]	[\$25]	[\$25]	[\$285]

Each North American high school student asked grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbors, and other church members for help. Their parents paid part of it. Each person then raised money for his or her own costs, plus enough to contribute \$285 to church construction. A smaller group of 15 left \$4275 for the Peruvian church. A larger group of 33 left \$9400. The church which received this group of 33 is located on a key plaza, with a building now valued at over a million dollars, built over the years through the collaborative aid of 28 visiting short-term mission teams. This example is simply one way in which resource-sharing occurs. All over Lima one can find church sound systems or music sets provided by visiting short-term mission groups. Visiting short-term missionaries often decide to help provide more sustained sponsorship of orphans or seminary students. There are, of course, major challenges associated with such resource sharing, challenges related to issues of stewardship and power (see the article in this issue by Rodrigo Maslucán, for example). In any case, many visiting STM groups do not provide much in the way of material resources but are nonetheless desired for a different reason.

Open Doors

Evangelical churches sustain and propagate themselves through active evangelism. But within a historically dominant Catholic order, *evangélicos* often find doors closed to them, literally and metaphorically. One Peruvian pastor explained, “If I knock on another Peruvian’s door, they will see me, and turn me away. But if I knock with you, a *gringo*, standing next to me, they will greet us with a smile, open the door, serve us coffee—and listen attentively to what we say.” When Peruvian *evangélicos* join collaboratively with *gringos* from abroad, they often find that high schools, English language schools, University classrooms, jails, and hospitals which normally limit access to *evangélicos* open their doors wide.

As I interviewed a Peruvian leader of an indigenous mission, he described the efforts of his group of Peruvian missionaries to evangelize Huaca (a pseudonym), a town of several thousand. The town priest was strongly opposed to

their presence, as was the mayor. But when this Peruvian mission connected with a medical mission team from Kentucky (comprised of Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists) and approached the mayor of Huaca offering to bring in a dentist, ophthalmologist, gynecologist, etc., the mayor welcomed them with open arms. The Peruvian missionaries who accompanied them began a church through that event.



A US American short-temer teaching an English outreach class in Peru

My interviewee informed me that this medical team was now back again a year later and invited me to visit for a couple days. I went and found 47 medical short-termers from Kentucky partnering with 60 Peruvian missionaries. Except for the Catholic church, all other buildings on the town square (mostly government offices) were filled with medical teams. At each point of service, a Peruvian missionary provided "spiritual counsel" in the long line before the medical care. I roved around town trying to find anyone critical of what was happening but was unable to find anyone to voice anything but appreciation. I was told by a Catholic that the priest was not happy but was staying away. She herself liked what was happening and what she had heard. I asked the US American medical doctor leading the team if this town did not have dentists or doctors. He answered, "No, people would have to go to Lima." But when I asked Peruvians, they immediately pointed out a government medical post a quarter mile away with dentist, doctors, and a gynecologist (although no ophthalmologist). I walked over and interviewed a doctor (general practitioner) and the gynecologist, both of whom had plenty of time on their hands. All the patients were in the town plaza being cared for by US American doctors. Even they did not verbalize unhappiness at this state of affairs. Their government salary was unaffected. The visiting team provided medicine, hundreds of free eye-glasses, and did pay for hotel and food for the 60 Peruvian missionaries who gathered for this outreach event, but otherwise provided no funds. The prior year they left \$2000 at the end of their time, which the Peruvian missionaries used to rent a small run-down house (roughly 20 feet by 30) on the town plaza where seven of their single missionaries (four women and three men) had lived during the last year under the direction of their leader, Marta, as they established their church in

town. These Peruvian missionaries clearly lived with great poverty but were well organized, energetic, and confident. As Marta spoke to me of her hopes for Huaca, she grinned, pointed to the large Catholic church overlooking the plaza, and said only half jokingly, "Someday, maybe even that building will belong to us."

Peruvians working with visiting STM groups will often say that they use the visitors as *carnada*, "bait" or an *anzuelo*, a "hook," to pull people in. STM teams teach English, do drama, provide medical care, teach tennis, or sing songs; their antics often provide a means for Peruvian *evangélicos* to establish connections or open doors for service and witness. I spent three days observing one group of 198 short-term missionaries from a church in Minneapolis—a church with an 18-year partnership with a congregation in Callao, a poor part of Lima. For one week the two congregations collaborated on multiple projects. They put on an evangelistic circus (with the "world champion" unicyclist and a family of magicians from the visiting church) and had a large parade to the town plaza (stretching for blocks). The mayor of Callao attended. The police provided escorts. Joint teams of Peruvians and Americans visited jails and hospitals. A team of doctors from the Minneapolis church (including a medical school provost and medical school faculty members) entered into formal cooperative projects with Peruvian medical school faculty in Lima, implanting pacemakers, etc.

The North American team spent over \$400,000 on travel, hotel, and other expenses for this one-week set of activities. Little of this money was transferred directly to Peruvians involved in joint ministry. But this Peruvian church, made up of lower and lower-middle class members, was able to attract several thousand newcomers to visit their church

during that week and was able to build social connections with police, the mayor, medical personnel, gate-keepers at hospitals and jails—all by virtue of *linking social capital* with North Americans, connections across marked differentials of status, wealth, and power. (For a fuller analysis of this partnership by the pastor of the Peruvian congregation, see the article in this issue by Joaquín Alegre Villón.)

The center of Christianity today, in terms of both numbers and vitality, has shifted south into Africa and Latin America. But the center of material wealth and power remains in North America, Europe, and parts of Asia. Short-term mission groups play a key role in bringing Christians from resource-rich portions of the world into collaborative projects of ministry and service with Christians living faithfully under conditions of great economic and social constraint. When short-term mission trips are underpinned by humble service, sacrificial stewardship, respectful partnership, and wise leadership they potentially make important contributions to the global church.

Short-term mission groups play a key role in bringing Christians from resource-rich portions of the world into collaborative projects of ministry and service with Christians living faithfully under conditions of great economic and social constraint.

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