

Short-Term Missions: Experiences and Perspectives from Callao, Peru

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The Christian and Missionary Alliance (CMA) Church of the Constitutional Province of Callao, the first port in Peru, was founded in 1981 as the result of the “Lima al Encuentro con Dios” [Lima Meets God] movement. Arising from the Holy Spirit’s direction in 1973, the movement has a strong emphasis on evangelism and discipleship. Sixty churches currently participate in this program.

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Presenters at the International Conference on Short-Term Mission
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In 1989, the CMA Church of Callao and Grace Church in Eden Prairie, Minnesota established a relationship as “partner churches.” That this relationship continues to be very edifying, harmonious, and missional for both churches is evidenced through the many short mission trips that Grace Church has made to the Church of Callao.

The first trips were carried out with very small groups and with an emphasis on material help such as painting or building church classrooms. In more recent years (1999, 2001, and 2005), the trips involved larger groups with a greater emphasis on evangelism and discipleship.

It is a great blessing to experience the multiform grace of God as we observe two churches with different cultures, distant social positions, and different languages, but one in Christ, coming together to work shoulder to shoulder in the extension of the Kingdom of God.

Below I will examine one short-term missionary trip of Grace Church to the CMA Church of Callao. From July 24-

31, 2005, almost 200 brothers and sisters from the United States and close to 500 brothers and sisters of Callao participated in this experience.

Description of the Short-Term Missions Trip

Preparation

Trip preparation began one year prior. When the Church of Callao found out that Grace Church was going to come to Peru, a series of individual and joint planning meetings (at least five joint meetings) took place to prepare for and organize the trip. In these meetings we tackled essential topics such as:

1. Objectives, Goals, and Strategies

In the first planning meeting we shared the basic goals we longed to achieve. Under the Lord's guidance, the Church of Callao named the effort, "Callao Festival 2005." We hoped the encounter would be a time for celebration and spiritual joy. By making a great evangelistic effort through sowing the seed of the Word of God through music, theater, art, and preaching the gospel, we hoped to have a great harvest of lives that would pass from condemnation to salvation. The Church of Callao established what we called the "200/23 Vision," which was a framework for preaching about Jesus Christ, making disciples committed to him, and establishing churches to the end of the earth, thus achieving:

200 thousand decisions of faith reached in the next 20 years until the year 2,023

200 churches and/or missionaries established in the next 20 years until the year 2,023.

Therefore, we established the following:

Objective: Carry out a great evangelistic effort in Callao in order to achieve a great harvest of saved lives and retain the greatest number possible in churches.

Goals: (1) Reach 4,000 decisions of faith; (2) Retain 20% of the decisions of faith (20% of the decision cards from adolescents and adults that we could follow-up) in the church; (3) Begin a fourth worship service; (4) Plant 2 new churches.

Strategies: (1) Personal evangelism; (2) Evangelism through the arts: theatre, puppets, magic tricks, music, dance, juggling, etc.; (3) Evangelism through ministries of compassion: free medical campaign and “A Different Day” (an evangelistic event aimed at disabled persons and their families); (4) Evangelism in public institutions: prisons, hospitals, orphanages, etc.; (5) Open-air evangelism: parks, plazas, streets, etc.; (6) Evangelism through movies; and (7) Evangelism in the church.

2. The “Fishing Bait”

The question arose, “How would we attract a vast amount of people to hear the gospel?” In July, and particularly during the celebration of Peru’s Independence Day, families from Callao and Lima often attend the circus. Therefore, the Callao Festival 2005 would include the “Grace Circus” where we would have clowns, puppets, magic tricks, juggling, etc., all with an evangelistic message.

3. The Promotion Visit to Grace Church

My wife Carmen and I were invited to the Missionary of Grace Church in November, 2004, in the United States, to promote the Callao Festival and encourage the brothers and sisters from that church to participate in it.

4. Logistics

Lodging: It was important to find a place large enough to house nearly 200 people and with enough space for their coordination and information meetings. The Sheraton Hotel provided all these requirements at a very affordable price.

Meals: Breakfast and dinner would be provided at the hotel. Lunch would be provided at the church. We had to coordinate with a grocery store to provide all the ingredients to be used.

Transportation: A large fleet of buses was needed to move more than 500 people over 5 days. In addition, trucks were needed for moving sound equipment, chairs, food, etc.

Communication: The key leaders would need radios or telephones to locate each other and coordinate regarding pertinent decisions.

Interpreters: We needed to hire seventy interpreters to help the Grace visitors in evangelism and counseling as well



Feeding short-term mission groups like this one requires a great deal of preparation and coordination

as to aid the fellowship between the participants from both churches.

Counseling and advertising materials: Counseling material for children and adults, posters, and banners were prepared. With the understanding that people generally value an event more if it requires an entrance ticket, we made tickets for each presentation in the church. However, even though the tickets were free, some people that did not belong to the church sold them.

5. Responsibilities Regarding Expenses

We understood that the participants from Grace Church would be responsible for their lodging and meal expenses, but they also generously paid for the lunch and transportation expenses of the Church of Callao participants. They gave a small offering for the interpreters, for rental of communication equipment, and for the counseling and advertising materials. We assumed the costs of the reception, signs, training, cleaning, and sound equipment for the church as well as for the open-air events. We also assumed the cost of the thank you gifts for each Grace participant and the expenses for the new believers' reception. We felt that each *sol* and dollar invested would become a soul won for Christ. Thousands of dollars were spent. Each church calculated its expenses, and God provided beyond our imaginations.

6. Schedule of Activities

The schedule developed as we obtained the different permissions required to operate this event. However, the agenda was also based on the number of participants and ministries we recruited along the way both at Grace Church and the Church of Callao. God, who is always good, provided us with enough personnel and resources to hold many simultaneous activities at public institutions and parks.

7. Evangelism Training

We designed a seminar called “Equipping Ourselves to Serve in the Festival” to train all the Callao participants on four fundamental subjects: (1) Obedience in the Christian life; (2) Evangelism methods; (3) Post-natal spiritual care; and (4) Serving with a purpose.

8. The “Jeremiah 33:3 Project”

Knowing that when we evangelize we automatically enter into a spiritual struggle, both churches committed to pray in an intense, fervent prayer chain for thirty-three days: morning, afternoon, and night. We prayed for harmony, protection, and, above all, for the harvest to be plentiful.

9. The Formation of Ministry Groups and their Leadership

It was important to establish work teams with their respective leaders. We had five evangelistic teams to carry out five simultaneous open-air events in the afternoons and five simultaneous movie showings at night. We also had a team for programs for children and people with disabilities or different abilities; a prayer team that prayed twelve hours a day supporting all the daily activities; a statistics team; and teams for cooking, counseling, security, communication, and church presentations.

Development of the Callao Festival 2005

The Callao Festival 2005 took place from Monday, July 25, to Friday, July 29. The activities began at 9:00 a.m. and ended after 9:00 p.m. On the final day we finished close to 11:30 p.m., when the last presentation at the church ended.

For the Church of Callao, the Festival began on Friday, July 22, since on that day the first group from Grace Church arrived. The Church of Callao prepared a welcome surprise

at the airport. An extraordinary security team watched over the luggage while we welcomed the visiting team with Peruvian folkloric dances, which impressed them very much and brought us closer together. We did the same on Saturday, July 23, when the second group arrived. A total of 197 people from the Grace Church arrived and between 500 and 600 brothers and sisters from the Church of Callao participated.

The morning of Sunday, July 24, we had our two regular worship services. Simultaneously, the children, with the participation of Grace Church, put on “Childrenfest,” an evangelistic presentation for friends of the Sunday school children. At the evening “Dedication Service,” we prayed to the Lord to help us work side by side and have a great harvest for his glory. It was a very emotional night. The Lord’s army was on its knees with no distinction of social position, race, or language; we were prepared to put forth all our effort with one heart and soul to bring a harvest for the Kingdom of Heaven. Our motto says, “Our commitment is to populate the heavens and depopulate hell.”



Open-air events attract large crowds to STM events.

Over the next five days we carried out close to seventy evangelistic presentations in the mornings, afternoons, and evenings. In the mornings we focused on evangelistic presentations at public institutions such as prisons. We visited Sarita Colonia in Callao, the women's prison of Santa Mónica in Chorrillos, and the Maximum Security Prison, where none of us had ever entered before. Women are imprisoned for acts of terrorism there. We visited hospitals such as Daniel A. Carrión in Callao, the Children's Hospital in downtown Lima, and the Rehabilitation Hospital in Callao. Furthermore, we had a presentation at the Bellavista City Hall with the mayor, Juan Sotomayor, in attendance. The mayor of Callao, Dr. Alex Kouri, also visited our church where we shared the gospel message with him.

In the afternoons, we held five simultaneous open-air events. For these events we had five teams made up of people from Callao and Grace with their respective ministries such as music, drama, puppets, theatre, and the special presentations of the Flom family, who are magicians, and Justin Kelm, who is the unicycle World Champion. These teams would take turns performing in parks on different days. I must emphasize that in the afternoons, besides the presentations, it was inspiring and challenging to see our brothers and sisters carry out aggressive personal evangelism. After one presentation at the Ovalo of Avenida Saenz Peña, in the center of Callao, today the Plaza Casanave, seventy decisions of faith were made. Our brothers and sisters then approached those who remained seated in the amphitheater, and the harvest was doubled! Praise God!

At night we had a double focus: in the church and simultaneously in five places where in the afternoon we showed the "Jesus" film. Each night the church was

completely full. Our church can comfortably seat 800 people. Yet every night, there were more than a thousand people, including children. On Tuesday, July 26, we held a concert aimed exclusively at young people. Beginning Wednesday, July 27, we offered two presentations of the “Grace Circus,” which we called “Chiquicirco”



(“little circus”), designed specifically for children accompanied by a parent. On Thursday, July 28, we tailored two circus presentations as “Family Circus” events for everyone. On Friday, July 29, we planned three presentations throughout the afternoon and evening but ended up having to offer two additional presentations because of the number of

people that waited in line on the street! In each presentation more than two hundred people made decisions of faith. Right next to our church there is a patio that doubles as both a soccer field and a parking lot on Sundays. We used this space for counseling and for filling out decision cards for people who responded to the message.

On the last day we offered five presentations. We formed a “Christian Parade” where we all went out into the streets. The children decorated their bikes and the young people waved flags from different nations and posters proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd, Prince of Peace, the Light of the World, etc. We hired a trailer to transport all the musicians and singers to lead the worship. Some brothers

and sisters drove their cars behind this trailer. With prior permission and a traffic police escort, we walked along the four blocks of downtown Callao. We sang, proclaimed Jesus Christ as Lord, and invited people to the presentations which we called “El Gran Estelar” (The Great Debut). It was impressive: US Americans and Peruvians working shoulder to shoulder to spread and exalt the Word of God.

On top of all this, there were three other very exciting activities. On Monday afternoon, we carried out “A Different Day.” This presentation was specifically aimed at people with disabilities or different abilities: children with Downs Syndrome or other mental challenges and their relatives. The relatives were comforted and instructed on how to deal with their family member’s disability as we simply shared God’s love with them. Between 150 and 200 children with disabilities attended. The Bellavista City Hall graciously supplied us with an awning for the presentation. This event was also made possible by the help of two organizations that work with people with disabilities: “Corazones Unidos” (“United Hearts”) and “Manos” (“Hands”). The following day, we took the same presentation to the orphanage “Hogar San Antonio” of the National Holistic Program of Family Welfare. They house more than 100 abandoned children, of which almost 40% have some kind of disability and in some cases very severe disabilities. The hugs given to the children were instruments of God’s love flowing to each child.

Beginning early Wednesday morning, we carried out a free medical campaign with more than twenty specialties. The doctors from Grace Church had donated hearing aids. My heart went out to one man who told me that for many years he only knew how to pronounce the letter “A.” When I asked why, he answered that when people spoke to him, he would just answer “ah”, “ah”, “ah.” He could not hear a

thing. Now he could hear everything! As Psalm 126.5, 6 says, “Those who sow in tears will reap in songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”

What a privilege to be part of the story that God wrote those days!

I have described our observable, quantifiable experience. There was great physical, emotional, and spiritual effort, but it does not compare with the joy of witnessing everything that the Lord did. What a privilege to be part of the story that God wrote those days! We are very grateful to God for using us so that his name would be known and glorified. After these five days, the Lord who saves gave us a harvest of 5,268 decisions of faith. Glory to God!

After the Callao Festival 2005

For the Church of Callao the Festival was not over yet. On Saturday, July 30, we prepared a farewell surprise for our partner church Grace Church. It was a celebration of gratitude to God and to all these brothers and sisters who were completely devoted to working side by side with us, in spite of the fact that some of them were sick due to the water or food and others were exhausted. Leviticus 7.12 references presenting a cake to the Lord as a thank offering. Since we are “literalists,” we gave our US brothers and sisters a gratitude cake, in addition to a silver pin with the flags from both countries.

The following afternoon the believers from the Church of Callao waited with bated breath for the reception for new believers who had made a decision for Christ at the Festival. The Lord continued to surprise us: 600 new believers attended the reception, and that same night, 26 more people

made their decision for Christ! It was truly a great spiritual celebration.

On Tuesday, August 2, at 7 p.m., close to 100 new believers gathered at the church, and we began three courses on Fundamental Truths. On Sunday, we opened two more classes for those who could not attend on Tuesdays. Every Sunday in August we made massive visits to these new believers. Again each Tuesday we gave a reception for new believers and started new courses for them. We held three more receptions at the church and one sponsored by home groups in the areas where the open-air events were held. In addition, on the first Sunday of September we began the fourth worship service. Months later we rented a building on Avenida La Alameda in Gambeta and planted a daughter church. God heard our prayers and provided far more than we asked for!

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Evaluation of the Short-Term Mission Trip

A. It was a great blessing! To see God saving children, young people, adults, men, and women is an incomparable blessing. I have no words to describe how wonderful, extraordinary, and incredible it was to live each one of those days. There is nothing as marvelous, nothing that can fill your heart with so much joy, as seeing people accept Christ after they have realized their own need. God covered Callao with a spiritual atmosphere where you could feel the people's hunger to hear his Word.

I want to share two testimonies in particular: A poor woman had only one *sol* in her pockets, and she asked a

taxi driver to take her to the church in Callao. Apparently she had heard of our event from a brochure or another advertisement. The taxi driver responded that he could not provide his services for that amount, but the woman

There were places we could not carry out follow-up due to obvious limitations such as the decisions of faith in the prisons, hospitals, orphanages, and even among children.

insisted. The driver finally accepted and took her to the church. The first thing the woman did was look for a pastor, and one of our pastors asked how he could help her. "I want to receive Christ in my heart; I want him to forgive me for all my sins!" she replied.

Then one man, who works as a diver collecting shellfish from the bottom of the sea, attended one of the Festival presentations in the church and accepted Christ. He went home and told his wife with such firmness and conviction, "I belong to Christ now, and you have to follow me." She and all their children accepted Christ, and now her brothers, sisters, and parents have become Christians. The next year, this couple served in the 2006 Festival.

B. We reached almost 100% of our goals. God gave us far more than what we asked for. We counted 5,294 decisions of faith made during the Festival. Between 300 and 400 of these stayed in our church. We rounded this number up to make a 20% retention rate given that there were places we could not carry out follow-up due to obvious limitations such as the decisions of faith in the prisons, hospitals, orphanages, and even among children. In the end we tallied 1,500 to 1,700 cards indicating decisions of faith from adolescents and adults with whom we needed to follow up.

Church attendance grew from 1200 (before July) to 1550, and we baptized 85 people between August and December. Due to the growth, we began a fourth worship service and planted a new daughter church with its own meeting space and leadership.

C. Working side by side was good. Although we had some minor coordination issues due to lack of communication, we were able to overcome them by speaking with the leadership. We learned to work as a team to complement each others' ministries. Members from the visiting church generally carried out the presentations, that is, the drama, music, or magic tricks, and we were in charge of the evangelistic invitations. If there were any gaps, we immediately tried to work it out together. We coordinated each program or activity in a harmonious manner. When impasses came up, we easily overcame them. At all times



Mime is a common STM evangelistic event.

we tried to stay united. It is important to stress here that our prayer has always been and remains, "Lord, send out workers into your harvest for the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." Grace Church is an answer to our prayers since we lacked the hands for such a big harvest.

Besides, we realize that each one gives, as did Peter and John, what he or she has on hand. One person may have material resources and the willingness to evangelize, while another is infected with an aggressive evangelizing passion and is blessed to receive the resources that will enable him or her to do a better job. This Festival permitted us to discover that we have at least ten true evangelists for open-air events and very good theater and security teams.



The work of a short-term mission trip interpreter centers both on translation and on being part of the team not a mere observer

D. It turned into a big problem that the interpreters were an isolated group. The vast majority of the interpreters, almost 90%,

were from other churches. The responsibility of finding and contracting interpreters fell on Grace Church since they needed to ensure the effective participation of their people. However, with a few exceptions, the work of many of the interpreters was disconnected from the spirit of the Festival. Without prior preparation, they just showed up the Saturday before the Festival and received instructions on what to do. The work of a short-term mission trip interpreter centers not only on simple translation from English to Spanish or vice versa but also on being part of the team, not a mere

observer. The most serious problem we had to deal with in the entire Festival was the interpreters' passiveness and socializing that distracted and slowed down the work.

E. We made a big impact on the community. If there is one thing we can emphasize, it is that this Festival made a bigger impact on the community of Callao than we had ever imagined. The Church of Callao became more well-known, not only for its location but also for the services it provides the community and the Christian values we proclaim and practice. The mayor, Alexander Kouri, witnessed our service and values when he stepped onto the premises of the Church of Callao. At that very moment we were all working with children, the doctors were assisting patients, brothers and sisters were serving in the kitchen, etc. God put in the heart of this man, days after the Festival, the desire to invite us to the Solemn Assembly of the Municipality of the Constitutional Province of Callao to celebrate Callao's anniversary. There we received two medals of honor for our work on behalf of the community. God honored us publicly. May the glory be to him!

F. We did not water down the message. We thank God for keeping us alert about the types of evangelistic messages and invitations we needed to provide. We focused on not reducing the requirements of the gospel. We preached about the sin that separates us from God, the redeeming work of Christ on the cross, and the need for repentance and faith in him for salvation. Even at the circus presentations, Justin and the Flom family gave testimony of these truths and did not permit showy entertainment to be predominant. We trusted that God is the one who saves and that he would be in charge of bringing into his church those who needed to be saved. And he did so. Hallelujah!

G. The impact on the people from Grace Church was substantial. Many of those who visited Peru for the first time and participated in a missionary trip of such magnitude were greatly impacted by the Lord. They were so amazed to see that people came to Christ as they shared their faith with others. For some it was their first time speaking about Christ in a personal manner. This experience gave them courage to continue doing so the entire trip. Their hearts were further sensitized as they witnessed the harsh realities of life in Callao as well as the very evident spiritual hunger. Some received the call of God to serve him full time. And they all became evangelists and promoters for future trips to Callao.

Recommendations for a Short-Term Missions Trip

A. The interpreters must be trained at the host church. This way the interpreters can be infected with enthusiasm and understand everything that the effort will involve. Training and involvement may prevent them from becoming an isolated or elite group that, instead of being a bridge, becomes an obstacle. They should be part of the entire team.

B. It is important for the host church to develop the agenda. At the same time, those who come to work side by side with the host church should be able to contribute to the goals and objectives that the host church has already established. Thus they avoid being turned away from what God called them to do. Such cooperation means new resources can be taken advantage of to obtain the host church's objectives and goals more rapidly while strengthening its ministries. The visiting church will also be more confident knowing the work has been planned and organized. This structure will inspire trust to see results.

C. The evangelistic message should not lower the requirements of the gospel. It is far too easy to present a cheap, watered-down version of the gospel when giving the evangelistic presentation after entertaining people. We need to carefully plan each evangelistic invitation no matter where it takes place, even more so when we present it within a circus or entertainment framework.

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D. The host church should help the visiting church understand its culture. Many of the visitors make a great effort to try to leave parts of their own culture behind when they come. We need to learn to value their efforts and help them as they try to adapt to our culture. We also must inform them about anything that could present a risk to them.

E. Both churches must make a movement out of the encounter rather than viewing it simply as an event. One of the things we have learned is that when the church finishes an event it can grow weak and become vulnerable. It is essential to remember that after seeing the glory of God we can succumb to sin in the same way the Israelites did in Leviticus 9.23-10.3. But if we are conscious of furthering the task, we can maintain our momentum by continuing to go out to preach the gospel and by continuing to prepare ourselves to better help new believers. In other words, we maintain the burning flame of passion for those who are lost. For this reason, the Church of Callao understands that each day is a new challenge to continue to share about the great love of God. In response, the church has challenged

itself to carry out a Festival each year. Grace Church wants to visit every three years to work together.

The “Lima al Encuentro con Dios” [Lima Meets God] movement gave us principles for a constant, aggressive, and pertinent evangelism, systematic discipleship, fervent and united prayer, and a concentration of resources that help us to remember that everything we do for the Lord must be kept in motion so that it does not become a monument. All I have left to say is to echo the Psalmist: “The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psalm 118.23).



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