

## Reflection on First Mission Trip to Piura, Peru

(Slide 1)

I'm Lisa Hunt, daughter of Deacon Lee. Last year I moved to Oklahoma after being on the East coast for 23 years. I had heard about Peru for nine years since my Dad started making his yearly journey. I knew it was very important to my Father. In the past I had considered going with my Dad in order to share something special with him. I thought it would really make him happy. But I just never made the time to actually do it.

When some big life changes brought me to Oklahoma, I thought, "Now is the time". I may never get this opportunity again. After I told my best friend since childhood, Meredith Kuntzsch, she asked if she could join us since she always wanted to go on a mission trip.

Well I thought, "Won't this be a fantastic experience to share with my Dad and best friend." And it certainly was! But it was not because I was with them - but because of what I experienced as soon as we got off the airplane in Piura. And I am so grateful to have been able to share it all with my Dad and Meredith. (Slide 2-airport)

When we landed in the tiny airport in Piura, I was catapulted into a different world – and even though I knew no Spanish, I realized the universal language of a smile and a hug would get me through the communication barrier. (Slide 3-girl)

I have never felt such a welcoming feeling as I did when I arrived at Santisimo Sacramento. Seeing the love and excitement on all the faces waiting to greet us was overwhelming. I thought it would feel strange but it was so incredible to have strangers come up and hug and kiss you. You cannot understand how this feels until you experience it for yourself. I felt the Holy Spirit all around me when we entered the parish and were surrounded by loving people who were so excited to greet us. I thought to myself – why are these people so happy to see ME? I'm just a regular person from the United States. But as time passed, I came to realize that the missionaries offer such hope to many people in Piura. (Slide 4)

The trip allowed me to see and do many things. We were able to do all of this with the help of some wonderful people from the parish who work with the missionaries. (Slide 5-Araceli) From blessing homes with my Dad, to bringing Communion to the sick, (Slides 6 & 7) building a home, making and delivering food packages, (Slides 8 & 9) visiting the girls' orphanage (Slide 10), and doing art projects with children. (Slide 11) And a fiesta on top of all that! The Peruvians know how to party!

My favorite was visiting the families and delivering food packages to them. I was shocked by the poverty! (Slides 12 & 13) But also shocked by the happiness I saw in the eyes of the families – especially the children. (Slides 14 & 15) Such beauty surrounded me. To see people who have so little be so joyful and full of love for God. I noticed each home had pictures of Jesus or Mary. Even if they had nothing else, they had their faith in God. I was able to meet the families that are sponsored by my parents, my brother, and

my sister. (Slide 16) They were so excited to meet us and show me their homes and photos! (Slide 17) After seeing how these people were being helped by us here in Oklahoma, I decided to inquire as to how to sponsor a family and see if I could meet one while I was visiting.

I am a single woman and don't make a lot of money. But after this trip, I knew I could help someone who needed me. I will never again complain that I am poor. I am rich by comparison and it makes me feel terrible to think otherwise. We take so much for granted in the United States. My eyes were opened to what it's like outside of America and to see how truly blessed we are.

I became inspired by the thought of helping a family and developing a relationship with them. I asked our wonderful liaison, Araceli, to help me locate a family in need. (Slide 18) I immediately felt a bond with Araceli and knew that her good heart would help me find someone. She told me about two families and asked me to visit a single woman with two children.

I made a special trip to visit Karina and her 9-year-old boy, Jairo, and 1-1/2-year-old girl, Asumi. (Slides 19 & 20) Karina welcomed us into her home. I looked into her eyes when we met and was struck by the sadness I saw there. She seemed to be in a very low place – seemed almost desperate. Araceli told me that Karina's husband had left her for another woman. I told her that I had a similar story and that I felt a connection with her. Karina told us it was her birthday and began to cry. I knew that God had brought me to her when I heard these things. I told her that I would help her and her children and she was overwhelmed with emotion! Her son just kept hugging me and had the biggest smile on his face! (Slides 21 & 22)

I was able to come back with Araceli to Karina's home and deliver her first food package. (Slide 23 – show pic of Jesus on wall) We talked more with Araceli translating for us. I told Karina that I was once very sad as well but that I was doing so much better and that things would get better for her also. I had given her a Bible and a cross necklace but wanted to offer so much more! I was wearing a favorite bracelet that had the word "hope" on it. I took it off and put it on her wrist and explained that I wanted to offer hope to her and her family.

We were able to see each other at Mass and at the parish a few times before I had to return home. Each time, the little boy, Jairo, would find me in the crowd and run to me. And each time, Karina's smile would come more frequently and appeared completely heartfelt. (Slide 24)

Saying good-bye was a very difficult thing to do. I found myself longing to stay in Peru. I was not ready to come home. There is so much to do and see and learn. I made friends with many of the staff at the parish and with the other missionaries on our trip. Father Joe is such an inspiration! (Slide 25) I wanted to continue the good works that he has put in motion.



The people of Peru become like family and they stay in your heart. It's something you must experience for yourself. I've learned so much and was changed by the experience in a profound way. (Slide 26) When I came home, I had a hard time processing everything and thought of Peru daily. I pray I will be able to return next year – to see all my new friends and do the good work that is continuing thanks to Father Joe and his amazing group at Santísimo Sacramento.