

## Peruvian Journal

By Sister Kathleen Neely

“Welcome, Ursulines, to your San Miguel!”

So read one of the welcome signs that awaited us as we entered San Miguel, Cajamarca, Peru, Tuesday morning, December 2, 2008. Ursulines and Associates were met with cheers and yes, even fireworks. Sisters Yuli and Kathy with Associate Gladys Agurto, arrived in San Miguel where we served for twenty years (1987-2007) for our first visit since our departure a year ago.

The present pastor, Padre Juan Ruíz, lent us the new parish house during our stay. He, the new Sisters, (“Catechists of María” from Mexico and Peru) and many different families shared their tables with us each day.

A few days later, Carol Reamer (Ursuline, Toledo, Ohio), and Vilma Tello (Associate, Callao) joined us as well. We all participated in the Associates’ annual retreat on December 4<sup>th</sup> and it was wonderful to see how they all planned it together working in commissions throughout the day. Our former Ursuline, Ana María Barbarán, helped with the theme of “Women’s Spirituality”.

We shared breakfast one morning with the new community of Sisters in our former home, noticing that the lovely roses that Sister Lee Kirchner planted are blooming beautifully. The Sisters also have a vegetable and herb garden as we once had.

Another morning we visited Padre “Paco” Bobbio in Llapa, where we once worked, touring the new community center, one of his and the town’s proud projects.

The young women of the “Angeline Community” were not to be left out. They planned a simple Christmas celebration at the home of one of this small community. We all shared what is happening in our lives, after a reflective prayer ritual.

The rural catechists came on Sunday, December 7<sup>th</sup>, to the community center, where we greeted each other warmly with lots of laughter from special events remembered together. After a short prayer, we listened to each one, as he or she talked about the difficulties and the joys of serving as ministers of the Word in their respective towns. It is a constant joy to us to observe first hand their commitment to living Gospel Values personally, with their families and in their communities.

I cannot write about our visit without mentioning a brave young man called Marcelo. Marcelo is blind from a tragic accident caused by a bull on his farm at a young age. He walked with his mother down the mountain from his town of Llallahuar and along the rough road to San Miguel. He brought us a gift of dried corn from his home. I asked them about his teenage sister, Violeta, and he made another trip two days later, accompanied by her. Families such as these are lasting friends and valiant souls.

Ending our visit with “a touch of gold”, as the Peruvians say here, the evening before we left, three young friends, Jaime, Modesto and Jesús, accompanied us up the hill to their farm. It had rained, so the way was muddy as well as steep. But with their help and with flashlights we arrived in laughter. They quickly pulled out two old wooden doors to sit on. They immediately built a campfire in the center and placed a large kettle on the fire, filling it with water they brought in a large plastic bottle. Soon we were sipping cups of hot chocolate, as panetones (Christmas breads) appeared from “nowhere”. We celebrated Christmas with this small, special group of friends, as we sang songs, and watched the stars. (We could even name some of the Constellations, such as Orion. Orion’s “belt” here is called “The Three Marys”.)

One of the special gifts of this visit was to receive four new Ursuline Associates into the Associate Program. All eighteen Associates renewed their commitment. With 22 Ursuline Associates and the Angeline Community, the charism of Saint Angela is being lived and shared generously, especially in their spirit of Hospitality.

We thank our God of Life and our Ursuline Community that we were indeed given this gift of being with, once again, some of the sisters and brothers of our global family.