

RELIGION

Peru mission opens heart to true value of love, friendship

Heart's Home is a Catholic volunteer program that consists of a humble home with four to five volunteers placed in a poor neighborhood.

I first made the decision to go on a mission with Heart's Home because I had the desire to serve those less fortunate than me, to understand the cry of the poor, and to share the love I have received all my life, with lonely children.

What I didn't anticipate, however, was how the simple reality of my mission would completely challenge and ultimately open my heart to the true value of love and friendship.

I live in a neighborhood of Lima known as Barrios Altos, where theft, hunger, poverty, filth, drugs and violence are an everyday fact of life.

I, myself, have been robbed twice. Daily, I witness the pain of starvation on the faces of children and the homeless. I visit families who live in one-room homes.

I am friends with local drug



MEGAN McINNIS



Foreign Correspondence features are occasional articles written by people who are living, working or studying abroad who have a direct connection to the Mother Lode. If you know of someone who is living, working or studying abroad who would like to write about their experience for The Union Democrat, call 588-4580 or e-mail: editor@uniondemocrat.com

dealers and thieves. Our house has no hot water, no television and no washing machine. Five of us share one bathroom. And despite what might seem like a host of material inconveniences, there have been moments in my mission in which I have never felt so rich. I have discovered that the source of joy in my life comes from loving and giving of myself.

Heart's Home proposes a mission of compassion, and its simplicity is difficult to grasp in light of our complex world today. It is hard for some people to really understand my mission because I

don't actually "do" anything, but rather am constantly available to the people and our friends in Barrios Altos. We play with the children in the street, attend to anyone who knocks on our door, and visit families in the afternoon. Within our community we lead a life of prayer that helps us to honestly embrace our personal realities and those that we are confronted with on a daily basis.

It is not easy to listen to the



COURTESY PHOTOS

MEGAN MCINNIS (LEFT) STANDS with her father (at right) and a new friend, Juan, she met while living in Peru. Juan sells garbage bags in front of a nearby market place. McInnis hugs another friend, Elena.

cries of our friends, to the endless and seemingly impossible problems, to accompany and watch the sick suffer due to a lack of medical treatment, or to try to understand, help, and love the children whose violent home-life negatively affects their behavior.

But what makes all the difference, what doesn't solve problems but consoles hearts and converts the unbearable into livable, is the presence of a friend, someone who loves you and holds your hand.

A nun wrote a beautiful song that says, "Quien ha encontrado un amigo, ha encontrado un tesoro." Translation: He who has found a friend, has found his treasure, and it is absolutely true.

As a very simple but perfect example, I made a friend here named Juan, who sells garbage bags in front of the nearby marketplace. In January, I used to pass by and kindly say, "hola

Sénior, como estas?" (Hi sir, how are you)?

As the months passed, we started to have small conversations about life and his work. By May our acquaintance had grown into a beautiful friendship.

Now when I pass by, I say, "Hola Juancito, que tal, como esta tu hija, estas trabajando mucho?" (Hi Juancito, how are you, how is your daughter, are you working a lot?) He, in return, asks about my family and all the happenings in Punto Corazon (Heart's Home).

Without fail, right before I walk away, Juan asks me to keep him in my prayers, because as a friend, he knows I care about him and feels comfortable to ask for help.

This simple act of humility and trust always touches my heart, and reminds me of the true meaning of friendship. I have discovered here that a pure and compassionate friendship is one in which I offer my life to others, and that this

gives meaning to my own life.

When I think about coming home and reuniting with my friends and family, I am filled with sorrow to leave all the people who have touched my heart here, yet excited to be surrounded by those who have always been so important in my life, and who first taught me about this treasure of love and friendship. I believe that we will all discover at some point that there is nothing more important in this world than love.

I have learned that love dictates all that we do. I am grateful for my friends in Peru who taught me this by so freely and honestly loving me, and I will always love them and keep them in my thoughts because of this.

Megan McInnis, is a 2002 Sonora High School graduate and a University of San Diego graduate. She has been in Peru for a year and will return to Sonora in December.