

Raquel Falk
Coprodeli
Callao, Peru
Summer 2011

For eight weeks, I served as a music intern or *cooperante* for the Coprodeli Foundation in the city of Callao, a district of Lima. Coprodeli runs many Catholic schools throughout Peru. I taught in six of these schools – three in Callao and three in Pachacutec, a slum about an hour away from Coprodeli's main office. The choir teacher, Carlos, for all Coprodeli schools around Lima taught in a new school each day, so I acted as his assistant, traveling with him and accompanying him to his classes. During the morning, we taught fourth grade and high school freshmen. After lunch, we directed the choir *taller* or workshop. In addition to this, I independently taught four English classes on Wednesdays – first grade through fourth grade.

Roxana Cancino, the education director for Coprodeli, clearly outlined my goals when I arrived in Peru. My primary task was to assist Carlos in preparing a Polyphonic Choir of Coprodeli for two masses at the end of July: the anniversary mass for San Francisco Solano (a Pachacutec school) and the anniversary mass for Padre Miguel (founder and president of Coprodeli). The *cancionero* or mass program was already created when I arrived, so we were in charge of teaching the pre-selected music. Although we taught hundreds of students each week, we had to choose only ten students from each school to make up the final choir.

My personal contributions to the Coprodeli mission were small, but I do believe the entire experience was valuable for everyone in the end. As a member of liturgical choirs since the fourth grade, I was able to help refine the choral skills of the Coprodeli choir. I was welcomed as a full member of the teaching staff, and my opinions about the music and the logistics surrounding the final masses were taken into account. On a more obvious level, I served as the resident native English speaker in the schools. Both students and teachers alike used me as

a resource for grammar and pronunciation. One of my intangible contributions was my ability to be a role model for the students. Through our conversations at recess and at weekend rehearsals, I learned that the students were always watching me and were filled with many questions. I believe I was able to share some of America, some of Notre Dame, and some of my life with them.

In typical service-experience fashion, I definitely feel as if I learned more than I was able to share. Being able to learn so much about the Coprodeli foundation opened my eyes to the world of grassroots organizations. The Coprodeli history is inspiring (I recommend any future intern to learn about it), and the whole organization showed me how much hope there is for the developing world. This experience was also my first exposure to extreme poverty. Teaching children without access to the basic necessities that many take for granted in the developed world revealed unbelievable injustices, which I had never considered. Furthermore, I learned so much about Peruvian life and culture. As a musician and Great Books student, I was able to connect with my new Peruvian friends through the arts. Our exchanges of songs and literature definitely enriched my experience.

Another key component of my time in Peru was my living situation. I lived in *La Hospedería*, a dormitory-type complex above the Coprodeli office. Among my housemates were two Colombians, four Spaniards, and two Americans. We all came home from work every day around six o'clock in the evening. At that time, we came together as a community. We had group dinners, watched movies, and frequently stayed up late listening to music and just talking. On the weekends, we took trips to different places around Peru. Trips could be as simple as a stroll around downtown Lima or as intense as a two-day trek at 3200 meters above sea level. At the end of my time at Coprodeli, we had formed a supportive and uplifting community that was hard

to leave. I still talk with my friends from Coprodeli, and I imagine that we will continue our friendships.

After the final masses, I grasped that helping to direct liturgical music was far from my primary goal. Miscommunication and confusion were frequent visitors over my eight weeks (and according to many Peruvian friends, these are not so foreign to life there in general), so the masses were far from perfect. Nevertheless, seeing the happiness of the students after presenting their work to the Coprodeli community was beyond worth it. Teaching them for eight weeks was not easy – not for Carlos, not for the students, and not for me. The students had to work hard to pay attention and to continue to practice even if they would have rather done otherwise. Carlos and I had to work hard to maintain our energy and cheerful attitudes through it all, which was a very demanding task. But we persevered and created something together. And it was truly beautiful.