



## *A Letter from Jed and Jenny*

### **Out of Disaster, Hope Arises**

A weary nation fixed its eyes on the television as another mudslide swept through a small town on the outskirts of Lima. As the turbulent waters swiftly moved fallen trees and wooden planks of destroyed houses, a young woman poked her head up through the debris. "There's a person in there!" cried a bystander. And sure enough Evangelina Chamorro arose from the rapids of muck, clinging to whatever floating object she could reach as she stumbled her way towards the shore where neighbors pulled her to safety. From the chaos of disaster, a heroine arose to give hope and inspire a people.

[CLICK HERE](#) to see video of Evangelina's Rescue

For nearly three months, Peru has been pounded by unrelenting rains from the mountains down to the desert coast. As of the writing of this letter, dozens of mudslides and recurring flooded rivers have taken the lives of 78 people, destroyed over 10,000 homes, and left over 100,000 displaced and in need of immediate humanitarian assistance. However, accessing such populations in need has proved incredibly difficult, as thousands of miles of highway have been destroyed and nearly 200 bridges have been taken out. And to make matters worse, the disaster has not yet ended. The rains are expected to continue for at least another three weeks.



The Fortaleza River near the village of Empedrada shifted course during intense rains, taking with it eleven homes that once sat in this precise location. The only remaining sign of habitation is a broken drainage tube sticking out of the ground. *(Photo by Rusty Edmondson)*

As many who continue to wait for assistance live in growing despair, others who live near rivers' edges or steep mountain slopes live in fear at what might still come. And then there is the anger that is felt by so many – anger, because much of the damage, death and destruction could have been avoided. Perhaps now is not the right time (perhaps never!) to point fingers, but it is important to begin to understand the many causes of this disaster: the

tons of non-disposable trash dumped along the riverside that contribute to the flooding; the lack of effective or enforced zoning laws permitting families to build homes in at-risk areas; the absence of infrastructure to prevent rivers from passing their borders or to control flood zones; poorly built infrastructure – highways and bridges – due to corrupt practices and lack of regulatory oversight; and poverty. Extreme poverty. Those most impacted are those who are most impoverished – those who have no place else to go, no resources to turn to, no back-up plan. It is the materially poor who build their homes where no one else dares because they simply have no other option.

There is still one more overarching issue that we cannot deny: the torrential rains themselves. These rains are unprecedented because their genesis was unforeseen. While Peru anticipates and prepares for intense weather systems generated by the warming of the Pacific during El Nino cycles, the warm waters causing the current extreme weather conditions came from elsewhere and were unforeseen. In mid-January, it was learned that the waters off the coast were 5 degrees Celsius warmer than they typically are this time of year. A nation was caught off guard. The rains began. And, we were unprepared.

Conrado Olivera, director of our global partner Red Uniendo Manos Peru (Peru Joining Hands network), explained, "This is the effect of climate change. Peru is considered to be one of the three most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change. More extreme weather events like this will happen more frequently in years to come. While some may debate the cause of climate change and whether it can be mitigated (although I would argue strongly that it can be and the we must work to do so by changing our human behaviors and practices), what cannot be denied is that it is real. The climate is changing. Weather patterns are changing. Temperatures of air and water on average are rising. We must adapt. We cannot live always and only responding to disasters; we must learn to prepare for and even to prevent the disaster."

[CLICK HERE](#) to read news of **Presbyterians Mobilizing to Address Flooding in Peru**

Over these past weeks as the impact of the flooding has become more known, we have gathered with our fellow Peruvians to collect non-perishable food items, potable water, medical supplies, insect repellent, diapers, and materials for temporary housing. Likewise, we are working closely with our partner organizations and churches here in Peru to identify communities in greatest need for both immediate humanitarian aid and long-term rebuilding. We are also executing plans for immediate and long-term response with

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance supported by the many congregations and individuals like you who feel called to aid our sisters and brothers in this particular time of need. And to be certain, we have begun to devise plans for education and advocacy to address the causes of the disaster in order to adapt to new climate cycles and to be better prepared for the inevitable.



In the town of Paramonga, a few hours north of Lima, municipal workers organize donations arriving from the capital city. *(Photo by Rusty Edmondson)*

As I write those words of preparedness, I am reminded that this is the season of Lent – a time to prepare. But as followers of Christ, we do not simply prepare for the death of Good Friday, the disaster that awaits us – as inevitable as it may be. We also prepare for the new life of Easter. We prepare for the saving Grace that allows us to change our ways and live differently. We prepare to rise up like Evangelina, and to perhaps stumble forward, but into the arms of a welcoming and loving community. We prepare to be that community – to be the Body of Christ. We prepare to start anew.

To all of you who hold us and our partners in prayer, provide financial support for this ministry we share, and take action for a more just and loving world right where you are, we thank you, and we encourage you to please continue such support! And in this very difficult

moment here in Peru, we also ask you to consider an additional special gift through Presbyterian Disaster Assistance in support of our relief efforts in Peru.

In the name of the Risen Christ,

Jed and Jenny Koball

[CLICK HERE](#) to donate to Flood Relief in Peru

[CLICK HERE](#) to support Jed and Jenny's Ministry

# THANK YOU!

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