

Rev. Stephen Parelli & Jose Ortiz of Other Sheep in Peru
June 25 – July 8, 2013*
A Report

**Steve arrived in Lima on June 25, Jose arrived in Lima on June 29*

By Stephen Parelli, written Tuesday, July 9, 2013 in the VIP Lounge of the Lima, Peru, International Airport, while waiting for our flight to Caracas, Venezuela, which was delayed 10 and ½ hours

Jose and I are immensely overjoyed with the connections we have made during our Other Sheep visit to Peru, and to have especially observed the gay-affirming religious work that is in full operation in Lima by pro-LGBT clergy and lay-leaders.

Through public speaking (on three occasions), distribution of the book *The Children Are Free* in Spanish (approximately 110 copies distributed in Lima), general networking, open air “preaching,” casual person-to-person “witnessing,” and an amazing providential meeting, our days in Peru have literally left us amazed as to what has been accomplished.

Our time in Peru, as we experienced it, could be divided into three parts: (1) Our participation in the 5th Convention of the International Association of Sexually Diversified Families, June 25-June 30, (2) Our inter-action with pro-LGBT clergy in Lima, June 30 – July 3 and 8 - 9, and (3) Our personal vacation-time in Cusco and Machu Picchu, July 5 – 8.

(1) Our participation in the 5th Convention of the International Association of Sexually Diversified Families, June 25 – June 30

- In February of 2013, Steve and Jose were invited by the International Association of Sexually Diversified Families to present Steve’s paper on “Is There Really Such a Thing as Ex-gay?” as part of a panel discussion on reparative therapy and the “ex-gay” ministry.
 - On Saturday of the Convention (June 20), Jose (a fluent Spanish-speaker) presented the paper (also in Spanish), within the twenty minutes allotted him, in PowerPoint format.
 - Three other people participated in the panel, two from Peru, one from Chile
 - Approximately 30 people were present; the response was very positive
- Distribution of the book *The Children Are Free* (by Jeff Miner and John Tyler Connolly) at the Lima Convention (June 27 – 30) to/among convention attendees
 - Approximately 90-100 copies were distributed to individuals, one-on-one at the Convention
 - Books were not left at the table for general distribution
 - Jose and Steve gave books out individually as they met people, using the book to network and to introduce themselves and Other Sheep
 - On the final day of the Convention, the PFLAG director of San Diego (to Spanish speaking people) gave a personal testimony of how the English version of the book impacted her life and invited people to see Steve and Jose for a complimentary Spanish copy. The PFLAG director was literally thrilled to see the book in Spanish in that her PFLAG work is with Spanish-speaking people.

- As people have occasion to read the book, word is coming back to us (by email – a person in Panama, and by personal interaction – a pastor in Lima) as to how well the book speaks to its topic.
 - Attendees at the Convention were from 24 different countries, primarily Latin American countries, but also Spain and Italy
 - Steve and Jose did not keep a written record of who received the book, however, by memory we can report that copies of the book went to people from the following countries: Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, (Uruguay?) Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Spain, Italy and the USA (San Diego PFLAG; Executive Director of PFLAG – an English copy; a Washington DC Catholic Sister – an English copy; and a Westchester, NY, Spanish-speaking family).
 - Jose and Steve prepared and attached a flyer for each of the books noting two things: (1) that Other Sheep is looking for translators to volunteer their time in translating The Children Are Free into Portuguese; (2) that Other Sheep is looking to print and distribute the book in countries, and (3) the itinerary of Steve and Jose in Peru, Venezuela, Guatemala, and Colombia – the two months of their travel immediately following the Convention.
 - Translation into Portuguese: One mother attending the Convention spoke to Steve about her gay son who does translation work from English to Portuguese; as of this writing, she has put us in contact with him.
 - Nicaragua (an activist there who attended the Lima Convention) has presently sought permission to work with Other Sheep in the printing and distribution of the book in Nicaragua.
 - Three noteworthy politicians who were personally given a copy of the book:
 - The Mayor of Lima
 - A member of the Peruvian congress (who marched in the Gay Parade)
 - A member of the Mayor’s council of advisors (who attended the Lima, Convention)
- Networking at the Lima Convention – In the course of general networking at the Convention, the following significant connections were made:
 - Meeting individuals from countries we are yet to visit this summer (Venezuela, Guatemala, and Colombia – in that order)
 - A gay activist couple (bears) from Venezuela whom we met at the conference has arranged for us to speak to their group on the Bible and homosexuality while we are in Venezuela during our 5-day stay there (this will double are activities for Venezuela).
 - The PFLAG team (two straight colleagues) of Guatemala whom we met at the conference have arranged for us to speak on two separate occasions to their PFLAG adults on the Bible and homosexuality
 - By email, we have introduced Guatemala PFLAG to the gay Christian fellowship of Guatemala City. Guatemala PFLAG was not aware of the gay Christian fellowship (and vice versa). Steve and Jose will promote Guatemala PFLAG along with the gay Christian fellowship, while they are in Guatemala for five weeks doing general outreach work there
 - A team (of two straight female colleagues) of Colombia who have a gay-friendly radio station who invited to speak on their radio station; they have already booked a date for us.

- Individuals from various organizations: We had opportunity to introduce Other Sheep, or reintroduce Other Sheep to various organizations: PFLAG San Diego, the pro-LGBT Catholic Sister from Washington, DC (reintroduce), the Executive Director of PFLGA; the Executive Director of Out Games (2017); and organizations in Italy, Spain and Brazil, as well as individuals from Latin American countries unfamiliar with Other Sheep primarily because their emphasis is not in the area of religion.
 - It should be noted that while religion is not the emphasis of most organizations and individuals (as activists) represented at the convention, practically all individuals and organizations introduced to the book (The Children Are Free) and to Other Sheep (with its focus on religion and homophobia) were instantly drawn to resource as very, very necessary. Other Sheep's presence and focus on religion was eagerly welcomed by most.
- As mentioned above: A possible professional Portuguese translator; a Nicaraguan activist who wants to print and distribute The Children Are Free (Spanish version) in Nicaragua.

(2) Our inter-action with pro-LGBT clergy (and lay people) in Lima, June 29 – July 3 and 8 – 9

Clergy and lay-leaders we met and with whom we briefly worked; what was accomplished

- The distribution of the book The Children Are Free in Spanish among clergy and lay people
 - As we met clergy and (some of the) lay people, we gave copies of the book The Children Are Free, often giving clergy a few copies of the book knowing they would know how best to distribute the book.
- The “Ex-gay” and Reparative Therapy Panel Discussion of Saturday, June 29
 - One member of the panel, a evangelical theologian (Oscar Amat), who has, for some time, been in contact with John Donor our Other Sheep Coordinator for Latin America and Other Sheep co-founder.
- The Gay Pride Parade of Lima, Peru, Saturday, June 29
 - Jose and I were invited by the pastor (Juan Fonseca) of the Lima, Peru gay Christian fellowship (The Inclusive Ecumenical Christian Fellowship: The Way) to be a part of their segment in the Gay Pride Parade
 - We joined them before the start of the parade for their circle of prayer time, an event they used to demonstrate to the public (with TV coverage, I believe) their inclusive message
 - At this circle of prayer we met
 - The Catholic Priest (Guillermo Horna) who is a joint pastor with Juan Fonseca at The Way gay Christian fellowship.
 - An Anglican Priest (David Limo) who has sent emails introducing Other Sheep and our visit to Guatemala and Colombia to a Bishop based out of El Salvador and to and to a Bishop based in Colombia.
 - Later during the actual parade, we met a student of theology who has studied under Oscar Amat who has committed to helping Other Sheep in Peru.
- Two speaking engagements at the Lima Inclusive Ecumenical Christian Fellowship: The Way.
 - On Sunday evening, June 30, Steve preached at the Lima gay Christian fellowship
 - Steve's sermon title: “Why the Evangelical Church (and the Church at large) Must Listen to Her LGBT Children”
 - Approximately 30 people were in attendance

- Steve preached in English and Jose translated in Spanish
 - An openly-gay Peruvian evangelical Lutheran pastor was in attendance, Rev. Pablo Espinoza
 - Jose and Steve spent two nights in his home (Wednesday, July 3 and Monday, July 8)
 - Following the Sunday evening service, Steve and Jose with accompanied clergy members Juan, Guillermo, Pablo and lay people from the church to a restaurant for an evening meal together
 - On Tuesday evening, July 2, Jose presented Steve’s study “Is There Really Such a Thing as Ex-gay?” A smaller group than Sunday evening’s group were in attendance; discussion followed; Steve and Jose accompanied Pastor Juan and the lay people to diner following the event.
- Steve and Jose spoke with Oscar Amat (evangelical theologian), Juan Fonseca (pastor of the gay Christian fellowship) and Rev. Pablo Espinoza (an experienced Lutheran pastor in his early 60s who ministered on staff in the USA at Robert Shuler’s Crystal Cathedral) about the possibility of having an Other Sheep Coordinator in Peru. Amat recommended Espinoza who eagerly and graciously accepted (with the understanding that Steve will recommend him to the Other Sheep board asking for their approval, presenting Pablo’s CV and qualifications), and Juan supported.
 - Steve and Jose spent two brief evenings in the home of Rev. Espinoza discussing Pablo’s vision of Other Sheep in Peru.
- A Providential Meeting on Monday evening, July 8, at Lima airport, with Baptist seminary grad student Lianderson Miranda and his partner Eduardo Freitas of Brazil
 - On our flight from Cusco to Lima, returning from our vacation days/ trip to Machu Picchu, Steve and Jose made the observation to each other that so-and-so were obviously a gay couple (dotting on each other)
 - At baggage claim at the Lima airport, Jose introduced himself to the gay couple
 - In turn, we learned that Lianderson is, like Steve, of a Baptist tradition and theological education; that he had met Elder Diane Gardner (of Metropolitan Community Churches), and that he had leads a gay Christian once-every-six-months gathering in Brazil
 - The four of us, at baggage claim, agreed to meet that evening for dinner together
 - Rev. Pablo gladly joined us four for diner (in whose home Steve and Jose were spending the night)
 - Steve gave Lianderson a copy of the book The Children Are Free and discussed with him Other Sheep’s desire to see the book translated in Portuguese
 - Lianderson is an English teacher in Brazil

(3) Our personal vacation-time in Cusco and Machu Picchu, July 5 – 8

- Other Sheep open-air “preaching” in the plaza facing the San Francisco church in Cusco, Sunday, July 7.

Well, not exactly preaching in the traditional sense, but, yes, giving forth the message of inclusion, in a very think-out-of-the-box means, to a square filled with the Peruvian people of Cusco. What happened and how did it come about?

A traveling vocal/instrumental musician, singing and playing music through his amplification speaker, from the top of his van, drew the attention of a large crowd of people sitting in benches along the street park and standing in open spaces. The people were motionless to the

salsa music the traveling musician was playing, though intently listening to and watching the performer. I encouraged Jose to dance salsa in the street. He did and he was fantastic, as he is a natural. All eyes were upon him, including the eyes of the singing musician.

As we walked away after Jose's dancing, the musician called us to come to him over his loud speaker. In front of all the on-lookers we accepted his invitation. As he leaned over the top of his van, Jose introduced himself and then me as his husband. The musician was immediately enthralled and announced to the whole San Francisco square that the gentleman who danced before them was married to the man at his side. With that, I waved my hand to the onlookers. The musician gave spontaneous supporting remarks to the crowd about acceptance and inclusion, of accepting one another, diversity within society. The musician asked us to stay and listen to a love song he would sing in our honor.

Following the song, we thanked him and Jose told him further that Steve was a one-time Baptist minister, but now in this marriage-relationship with Jose, which the musician broadcasted to the people in the square. At that point, Steve and Jose walked down the street handing out Other Sheep business cards containing the website address and the emails of Steve and Jose to interested people who reached out with their hand for the contact information.

It was truly an unexpected moment of opportunity to demonstrate the message of inclusion before an impressive number of people in Cusco, an opportunity we saw and fortunately an opportunity the travelling musician performing from the top of his van, granted us.

- Casual "witnessing" to the work of Other Sheep during our vacation days in Cusco and Machu Picchu (and in Lima). Note: it is very easy to casually talk about Other Sheep during our travels as it is a natural, common point of conversation when meeting people, to talk about one's occupation or purpose of traveling (business?, pleasure?).
 - On the Sun Gate trail of Machu Picchu – fellow tourists
 - A meeting with five med students, a gay couple, and a straight woman at the mid-point plaza of the Sun Gate trail
 - Group pictures were taken; our business card was distributed; casual talked exchanged
 - One of the med students has already emailed, whose sister is a lesbian and activist in New Jersey
 - At the summit of Sun Gate trail
 - Italian family from New Jersey (Jose speaking Italian with the father)
 - Two Peruvians who help with taking our pictures
 - About 6 hotel guests in the Pueblo of Machu Picchu and at the Hotel of Cusco including one hotel staff: casual talk about Other Sheep, distribution of business cards
 - Fellow tourists in Cuzco who we met (in line for an event; while on tour for the tour of Cusco)
 - (In Lima, while meeting people in general, we distributed our Other Sheep business card and at times told our story at length, for example: to the tour agent who arranged our Cusco/Machu Picchu tour; to the taxi driver whom we used repeatedly for transport around Lima.)

- Other Sheep administrative work: While vacationing in Cusco, we dedicated time to (1) writing blogs about our time in Lima (Steve did this); and (2) staying in contact with people with whom we are working this summer (Jose did this)
- Overall personal observation regarding our touristic experience in Cusco and Machu Picchu: We were extremely saddened to witness that/how the Inca people and culture had been decimated, in large part, in the name of religion. Oppression in the name of what-ever god cannot be religion in the true sense of the word. The Apostle James says in the Epistle that bears his name: true religion is to care for the widows (and the less fortunate in general). How Western Christianity, or any world religion, has missed this again and again is tragic indeed.