newsletter
TENLEY STUDY CENTER
VOLUME 20, NUMBER 3 SUMMER 2026

Dear Friends of Tenley

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Dear Friends of Tenley,

IT HAS BEEN ANOTHER REMARKABLE SUMMER AT TENLEY, with activities for young men at every level, from high school freshmen to college seniors. Looking back over the past few months, it is encouraging to see how many different ways we have been able to bring them together for friendship, formation, service, and leadership.

A great highlight of the summer was our service project in Peru. Fifteen rising juniors traveled to Laraos, high in the Andes at an elevation of about 12,000 feet, where they worked to repair and improve a small village church. The project was a great opportunity for the boys to experience the satisfaction of working together for something greater than themselves. You will be able to read much more about the experience in Sean Cooney's article in the following pages.

Our two academic programs in Pittsburgh, led by Ricky Ybarra and Will Schroeder, were also a great success. *High School and Beyond* brought together rising high school freshmen, while the *Practical Leadership Seminar* was designed for rising sophomores. Over the course of two weeks, the participants were challenged to think beyond the immediate horizon and to set ambitious goals for themselves, both academically and professionally.

In Pennsylvania, Mike Cheely led our Leadership Camp, bringing together more than 25 high school and college students who served as counselors. Several fathers also generously volunteered their time and stayed for the duration of the camp. Together, they helped make the camp a tremendous success for the nearly 100 younger boys who participated.

Our college summer activities were also very well attended. Anthony Hadford and Joe Sypal did a great job organizing and leading the weekly activities, giving college students a chance to continue their formation and friendship during the summer months. We will certainly miss both of them as they begin new chapters: Anthony has moved to Rome to study there, while Joe has moved to New York City as he beings his professional life after graduating this past May from the Catholic University of America. We are grateful for all they have done for Tenley and especially for the time and energy they gave to our college students.

As we look back on this summer, I am struck not only by how much has taken place, but by how many people have made it possible. The programs, trips, improvements to our facilities, and countless smaller moments of formation all depend on the generosity of our friends and benefactors. Your support gives us the freedom to offer young men experiences that challenge them, form them, and stay with them long after the summer is over. For this, we are sincerely grateful.

With appreciation,

Joe Cardenas
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TENLEY

Tenley Study Center is dedicated to the academic and character development of men of all ages. Its activities encourage them to see their studies, work and family responsibilities from the perspective of character growth and service to others. The spiritual dimension of Tenley's activities is entrusted to Opus Dei, a personal prelature of the Catholic Church.

Peru Service Project, 2026

BY SEAN COONEY, HEIGHTS 2028

IT WAS EXPENSIVE, IT WOULD TAKE UP two weeks of my precious summer, and we would be staying in the middle of nowhere. I thought I knew everything there was to know about this trip. We were going to fix up a church, teach kids English, hang out with friends, and eat Peruvian chicken. And that honestly just wasn't enough for me to make the commitment. However, all the people who had gone years earlier strongly recommended it. I didn't get it. What was so special about this trip? I eventually realized that because it was so hard to tell which was the better choice, either option would not be a huge mistake. So, I decided to go. I was gambling on this trip being worth it, although I didn't really see how.

I traveled to Peru with sixteen rising juniors led by Joe Cardenas. Fr. Diego was the chaplain. The two junior counselors were Michael Canady, who had just graduated from Notre Dame and Damien Quesnel, who is a rising freshman at the University of Maryland. When we arrived in Lima, we stayed that night under the hospitality of an Opus Dei school named Colegio Los Alamos. The next day we departed in two vans on a five-hour drive into the Andes mountains where we would stay for ten days.

The road followed a winding river that stretched out in the middle of a vast plain between two mountain ranges. We were introduced to the incredible beauty of Peru. The fresh, teal-colored river sparkled beneath a very blue sky, and the lush greenery along the river was surrounded on either side by steep dry mountains. We couldn't stop taking pictures!

I wasn't sure what to expect but was surprised when we arrived at Laraos. The village was situated on a high hill, surrounded on either side by mountains. Small figures in straw hats were harvesting the land around it.

When we entered the town square, Mr. Cardenas pointed out Santo Domingo, a long narrow barn with a watch tower next to it and said, "Okay guys, so right there is the church that we are working on." The walls were firmly made of stone but crudely fit together. Dominican missionaries had built this church over a hundred years ago and the only renovation since then was the aluminum roofing. The inside of the church was cool and dark with three intricately carved altars. Our task was to make this dilapidated church a place where people's minds could be elevated to Heaven. And we had ten days to do it.

Everyone worked hard and efficiently. We took out the pews and wiped them down. (We discovered an incredible amount of dirt as we swept the floor!) The next day we wiped down the altars and sanded the pews. Because we stopped working every day at 4:00 pm, we had plenty of free time to play soccer and volleyball with the younger local kids or to buy out the shops in the village. Fr. Diego offered daily Mass and meditations and provided frequent opportunities for confession.

One evening when we were playing soccer, a little boy in a blue sweater ran up to us. When he joined our game, he just kicked the ball away from all of us, laughing mischievously. After playing along with him for about an hour, it got dark outside and so we encouraged him to go home. But he simply followed

Sean Cooney

us back. No one was looking after him. He could hardly even talk in Spanish. This boy, Alejandro, was only four years old as we later learned. After we pretended to ignore him, he found his way to a little shop where his sister, who could not have been older than ten, was playing with her friends. In this small village was something that could not be found anywhere in the United States. There was no fear of strangers, as everyone knew each other and shared the same beliefs. Parents would let their kids as young as four years old simply roam around and hang out with anyone.

Throughout the week, the local school organized us to teach English in groups of three. I probably learned ten times as much Spanish as they did English in that class. The kids I taught were only a few years younger than me, but they were bubbling with excitement the whole time. All they wanted to do was ask questions about America. We were like celebrities to them. We found out that they had watched the live stream of us playing pick-up soccer against a village soccer team in a different village. Somehow, they knew all about American trends, celebrities, and sports. When we had finished the class, they asked us to watch them during their cultural dance class.

We made steady progress in refurbishing the church. Dividing into groups, we began painting it red, white, and blue. We had a wall painting group, a pew painting group, and I was part of the altar painting group. Fr. Diego took aside the most talented artists to revive the many mutilated statues. One of the villagers used a rope ladder to change the chandeliers in the ceiling.

The trip had a lot of activities packed in on the side. Besides playing organized competitive games and watching the U.S. in the World Cup, we also went on several hikes. The first hike was to a 15,000-foot-high overlook in the Andes mountains. We hiked around waterfalls and lakes and saw ancient Incan hieroglyphics. At the end of one hike, we celebrated Mass at the ruins of an Incan settlement on the side of a mountain overlooking the river miles below. The greatest hike was over the sky bridge. Composed of steel cables, it stretched a mile long from one mountain top to another and was a mile high.

As we walked calmly, single file across this metal swing dangling between two mountain tops, I remembered how at the beginning of this trip I was certain that I would not be able to walk across this bridge. But during the course of the trip, I lost my fear of heights. We had been driving daily along the dirt roads without any guard rails, zigzagging up and down mountains with only space for one car and with one-hundred-foot drops onto the road below. Lingering at the end of the line, I looked at the spec of the road that we had just driven on and birds flying below us. It felt great to be unafraid.

Suddenly I felt vibrations in the railings. I looked and saw the rest of the group stampeding towards me. As the cold wind rushed over my head, I heard the guys farthest up the bridge screaming at each other to move faster because they were stuck in single file. Then I heard a distant rumbling. Lightning! I half ran; half crawled with the speed of a guerilla back as fast as I could. When I got off the bridge, I watched everyone else waddle like ducks across a mile high metal bridge between two mountain peaks. When we all got back safely, we somehow found in ourselves the need to break out in laughter!

The church began to inspire reverence as we neared the end of our work. We placed the restored statues in their places on the freshly painted altars. The wall crew worked hard to finish painting the front of the church. Others detailed the altars gold while the rest of us scrubbed the floor with cold wet towels for hours. The new chandeliers lit up the fruit of our efforts and many of the villagers stopped by to praise our work.

When we finally finished working on Santo Domingo, we grabbed old pieces of wood remnants from the church, drove high into the mountains and built a bonfire. Telling jokes and stories, we lay down around the fire and stared up at the stars. I could see thousands of them including the Milky Way, even with a full moon and fire. After staring awhile, I could almost feel the earth turning underneath me.

On our last day in Laraos, Fr. Diego celebrated Mass in Santo Domingo with all the local kids and many of the older townspeople. Then we walked over to village inn and were treated to a feast. I didn't expect Carvel ice cream cake! But

(continues next page)

FROM THE DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

Dear friends,

WE ARE SO VERY PLEASED TO REPORT THAT THE LEARNING AND Mentoring campaign was a huge success and gifts are still coming in (and very gladly being accepted!). Many of the proposed renovation projects are underway including the new flooring for the living room, sitting room and downstairs. A special thank you to Mr. and Mrs. Messenger for spearheading the fundraising effort specifically for all the new flooring and carpets! The other improvement areas such as new furniture and fixtures will continue as we begin the new school year and in the next issue of the Tenley Newsletter we will aim to include a more complete campaign update and pictures.

Once again, thank you all so much for your continued support of the Tenley Study Center. Your prayers and financial generosity help make our center a true home where the young men who attend can continue to grow in faith, virtues and knowledge.

Our very best wishes to you and your family.

Phil Wehle
DIRECTOR, TENLEY ASSOCIATION

Denis Harper
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, TENLEY ASSOCIATION

I looked out the back window of the van as we drove back to the Lima airport. As we passed by the many simple mud brick houses with frayed metal sheets for roofs, I realized what they say you're supposed to realize. I realized how much I took for granted in the United States. Clothes lines, old motorcycles, and donkeys flew in and out of my sight. I saw a little girl in a pink dress knocking on the door of a rundown house. I now knew what poverty really was like. While I was ready to go home, the thoughts of genetically modified vegetables, hot showers, and TV did not have the appeal they used to. We were all under the same blue sky and somehow it looked much clearer and bluer in Peru.

We had a great experience. We hiked to incredible places, toured Lima, visited the tombs of St. Martin DePorres and St. Rose of Lima, bargained at the bargaining market, watched movies, and played organized games. But we also left something behind most memorable-a little village named Laraos with a little boy named Alejandro and a newly renovated Church of Santo Domingo. ★

my gut lurched when they served each of us a whole fish: skin, teeth, and fins. The cooks told us that they had caught the fish that morning. Then they gave us potatoes that looked like they had also just been pulled out of the ground and really did look like roots. However, against my impulses, I really enjoyed the food and found that fried trout was one of my favorite dishes. Feeding all twenty of us was no small affair for the village women, and they seemed very pleased with their work. For the rest of the afternoon, we played soccer and volleyball with the kids in the town square. Some of them tried to see us early the next morning before their school started. We bought Alejandro a transformer and said goodbye to him and his sister. It was a heartfelt goodbye.

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