

## Restoring relationships within a divided community: A case study of the work of La Florida Assemblies of God Church, Peru



A community meeting held in the La Florida church

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### Summary

This case focuses on the community of La Florida, near Moyobamba in Peru. It exemplifies the ways a local church can act as a force for change within the community. La Florida Assemblies of God Church successfully brought together a divided community to act on key development issues.

### Background

La Florida, close to the high-jungle city of Moyobamba, Peru, is a small but needy semi-rural community that in the past has been largely overlooked by local government. La Florida used to be a strongly divided community. The local governor and the municipal agent were in a state of constant confrontation, reaching the point of threatening each other physically. Whenever they met, they never wasted the opportunity to attack and put each other down verbally. Also, the community had become clearly stratified geographically into three sectors that showed little interest in each other's concerns or desire to work together to solve common needs. This situation made it impossible to bring people together to devise commonly-agreed development plans to improve the well-being of the community.

### Response

Pastor Francisco and other leaders from La Florida Assemblies of God Church received training in Integral Mission from Peace and Hope, a Christian advocacy and human rights organisation. This awakened a desire to do something about this chronic situation. The church decided that they would bring the conflicting authorities together, serving as a bridge so that the different parties could listen to each other in the neutral space of the church. From this moment on, relationships started to improve, starting with increased tolerance and eventually reaching an agreement to work together.

With considerable trepidation, the church organised a community assembly, and proposed that this was a time to overcome personal differences, to work together for the good of the community, and

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to start planning joint initiatives. The proposal was well received. Having facilitated an agreement the church then assisted in conducting a series of meetings with all the key actors present. The result was a commonly-agreed seven-year development plan for the community. With accompaniment from Peace and Hope, the church for the first time made contact with the Municipality of Nueva Cajamarca and secured a commitment of resources to help finance the plan.

### Impact

Pastor Francisco comments on how the church and community feel about the developments: "We feel proud to be the first small town in the district to develop a plan of this sort. This year we hope to gain support for building a bridge, and to work together to build a children's recreation area, a fence around the school and to improve local roads."

La Florida church is committed to helping with the implementation of the plan. The church monitors the actors and makes sure commitments are fulfilled. Through this process, the church members themselves have been transformed, growing in vision and compassion, serving their local community. Equally, the initiative has served to restore the faith of the local community in their authorities. The community has been closely involved in the planning process and see new and useful projects emerging.

The La Florida church has gained the admiration of authorities and community alike for its active peace-maker role:

- "Before the church got involved, there was a lot of disunity and conflict in La Florida. The church has had a key role in overcoming barriers and bringing citizens together, and this is producing lots of good fruit." *Máximo García, Municipal Agent*
- "We just wish other churches had such good leaders, who would also take part in our local assemblies and work hard for the good of our district." *German Cárdenas, Community member*

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