When a five year dialogue with Newmont Mining did not sufficiently address shareholder concerns, in 2007, ICCR members filed a resolution asking the company to research and resolve community opposition to its projects. The board accepted the challenge and agreed to undertake a study of the company’s relationship with local communities near its mining operations. The resulting 2009 report, the Community Relationships Review (CRR), based on more than 250 interviews in Nevada, Peru, Ghana and New Zealand and input from a variety of stakeholders including NGOs and ICCR members, provided Newmont with numerous recommendations on a wide range of environmental and human rights issues.

Unfortunately, the company’s relationship with its stakeholders in the city of Cajamarca, Peru continues to be fraught with problems, and in July of this year, clashes between local community members and the police at Minas Conga became violent and five protesters were killed. Directly following that incident, Newmont commissioned a study of stakeholder perceptions in Cajamarca city and learned that the company’s inability to listen effectively to the community was cited as the primary source of conflict. Newmont released the findings last month in a report titled “Listening to the City of Cajamarca.”

But believing it was important to hear from local stakeholders first-hand, in mid-November a delegation of four ICCR members, Sr. Pat Daly of the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment, Rev. Séamus Finn of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Julie Tanner of Christian Brothers Investment Services and Pat Zerega of Mercy Investment Services traveled to Peru to meet with government officials, company representatives, faith organizations, local and national NGOs and, importantly, members of the communities surrounding the mines.

We are the universe, conscious of ourselves. We are the universe, reflecting on ourselves. We have cosmic consciousness.

- Welcome message at ICCR meeting with Cajamarca community members
Finn, who coordinates the extractives initiative at ICCR, said, “The extensive footprint of the Yanacocha and Conga mines, only 24 kilometers apart, is both a significant source of employment and development in the region and a potentially disruptive intrusion into the lives of the people in the area. Celendín community members voiced concerns about many mining impacts including the lack of access to traditionally unfenced open land, the immediate and long term impact on both the supply and quality of water, increased use of roads and infrastructure and impacts on basic services like transportation and energy. These issues have direct bearing on the quality of life and livelihoods of people living in the area and Newmont has a responsibility to address them.”

Regarding their meetings with government groups and NGOs working with the community, Zerega said, “We went to hear all types of voices – the decision makers and those impacted by the decisions – to make sure they were actively listening to one another. Mining agencies in the capital must find creative ways to listen to the voices of the citizens in regions most impacted by their decisions. All government agencies we met with are hopeful for a brighter future and envision a day when the country’s natural resources will benefit all the people of Peru equally. NGOs are a good broker for these discussions as they have a long history with communities in the area and a good understanding of their struggles but also see the broader systemic picture for the country as well.”

Said Julie Tanner, who leads the ICCR engagement with Newmont, “We intend to continue to dialogue and monitor Newmont’s action plan to strengthen its programs, policies and procedures. Maintaining productive relationships with stakeholders requires disciplined listening. Newmont must proactively engage with a wider variety of stakeholders to not only understand their perspectives but to rebuild trust with the people of Cajamarca and to ensure that their rights are respected. By making public the results of their ‘listening study’ they have taken an important first step.”

Sr. Patricia Daly spoke of the group’s meetings with Bishop José Carmelo Martínez Lázaro and members of the Celendín community, “As their welcoming message articulated so beautifully, the people of the Cajamarca region are mindful of both their dependence on the region’s resources and their responsibility to protect them. The Bishop spoke to the many ways that the government and company have failed to share in this responsibility, but also voiced hope that, if they learn from their mistakes, all could prosper.”