

# Bolivia



Officially known as the Plurinational State of Bolivia, our featured country this month is landlocked and located in west-central South America. Its capital city, La Paz, is not the country's largest city. People who live in Bolivia are called Bolivians—most are ethnically Amerindians, making Bolivia home to the largest proportion of indigenous people in the Americas.



Plateau farmlands surrounded by Bolivia's mountains

Although most Bolivians speak Spanish, the constitution of the country designates thirty-six official languages, most of them indigenous languages.

Most people who live in Bolivia are Catholic (about 76%); of those who identify themselves as Catholic, only about 34% actively practice their faith. The Christian faith was introduced by missionaries in the 16th century who arrived with the Spanish colonizers.

Bolivia's lack of clean water and basic sanitation leads to many health problems. According to the World Health organization, the majority of the population has no health insurance or access to healthcare. Proper nutrition is a constant struggle for the average Bolivian. Experts estimate that seven percent of Bolivian children under the age of five and twenty-three percent of the entire population suffer from malnutrition.

Although education is free and compulsory in Bolivia, the quality of that education is not the same as U.S. standards. By some estimates, a student graduating from high school after thirteen years has about the same reading, writing, and mathematic skills as an American fourth grader. Girls and children living in rural areas are the least likely to be literate or finish primary school.

## MCA in Bolivia

Working to help the family survive is very often the responsibility of all the members, including the smallest child, until they are old enough for school.



In the city, this can mean helping out at your parents small stall that they rent in the marketplace. These five foot by five foot squares give the family an area to showcase the goods that they produce with their God-given talents to a steady stream of potential buyers. Dad may be welding or soldering while Mom weaves or sews. This leaves the oldest little one, sometime only a four- or five-year-old, to look after toddlers. Their playground is the noisy, crowded market where the ground can be covered with trash, broken glass, and the leavings of the builders and craftspeople. They dodge the sparks of the welders and the sharp tools of the carpenters as they run to fetch water or do other small tasks in between play time.

The Sisters of the Beatitudes in La Guardia, in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, run a large Catholic school for students. The children can start as young as nursery school and finish high school at the same location. These students are provided a

wonderful education and are only asked to pay for transportation to get there. To help fund this school, the Sisters of the Beatitudes run an educational textbook company, employing graphic designers and printers. In this way, the Sisters are able to help whole families—employing parents while preparing the children for a strong future. The Sisters' school follows the same multi-session schedule as all Bolivian schools—children attend classes in three sessions between 7 AM and 7 PM—while providing a far superior educational experience.

The textbooks produced by the workers are sold all over South America and are used in hundreds of schools, for a variety of ages.



Preschoolers enjoy snack time at school.

Last year, members of the Missionary Childhood Association from around the world sacrificed so that \$60,800.00 could be sent to help the children of Bolivia. Bolivian MCA members prayed and sacrificed \$13,895.26 so that other children in the missions could share in the blessings of our Catholic faith.

**Missionary Childhood Association**

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