

Peru



The Republic of Peru is located in western South America. It shares borders with Ecuador, Columbia, Brazil, Bolivia, and Chile. Peru covers an area that is slightly smaller than Alaska, the largest U.S. state. Its population is about 40 times the size of that state's! The capital city of Peru is Lima.



A little one in Peru who is happy for the help of missionaries!

Most people who live in Peru—Peruvians—are Catholic (about 81%); those who do not identify themselves as Catholic mainly belong to different Protestant denominations, so are Christian. Very few Peruvians identify

themselves as having no religion at all. The Christian faith was introduced by missionaries when the Spanish arrived to colonize Peru in the 16th century.

Peru's culture has been formed by a mix of ethnicities over a period of many hundreds of years. Indigenous tribes, like the Quechua (say **Keh**-chew-uh) trace their roots back for thousands of years. Their language is the second most spoken one in Peru after Spanish. Spanish colonists mixed with the native Quechua and later, with arrivals from Africa and Europe to create the music, literature and way of life we call modern Peruvian.

Although education is free and compulsory in Peru, many children drop out early to go to work to help support their families. It is estimated that 25-35% of Peruvian children aged 6-14 work every day, many in hazardous jobs, like mining or construction.

Although over three-quarters of all houses have running water, it is not necessarily drinkable.

MCA in Peru

While most people in the city (about 75%) have access to indoor plumbing, many people who live in the rural areas do not. Because the children have to drink dirty water, they are exposed to many water borne diseases. When they become ill, there is little medical care.



The capital city of Lima accounts for about a third of all of Peru's population. Many of the residents are living in shanty towns built on mountains of sand that surround the city. The locals refer to them as "invasions". People from the mountains and the jungle areas of the country come to Lima looking for better education for the children and better employment opportunities for themselves and find that there is nowhere to live. So, they take over empty areas, building their own little neighborhoods of shacks. They work hard Monday through Saturday in the city at their low paying jobs and on Sundays spend their time doing "community work" - for instance, making paths that they hope will one day turn into real roads. This leaves many young children alone, unattended for long periods of time.

Missionaries like Fr. John O'Leary are there to make sure that the children are cared for. *Padre Juan's* parish of San Salvador is made up of three *capillas*—small chapels—

where the children come weekly for their religious education.

At the Chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, about 80 first graders attend classes as part of a Family Faith Formation program. After the first year, they are baptized if they were not as infants. At the end of year two, they receive First Holy Communion.

Many families are too poor to buy their children special white outfits for the sacrament so the parish provides them with white robes to borrow for the day. The children put them on to symbolize their purity and equality before God.



Religious Education students receive their First Holy Communion with help from a missionary!

Last year, members of the Missionary Childhood Association from around the world sacrificed so that \$151,500 could be sent to help the children of Peru. These funds supported feeding programs, religious education materials, schools for native children and day care centers.

Missionary Childhood Association

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