

# Venezuela



The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is a country on the northern coast of South America. It covers an area roughly twice the size of the state of California; its population is about three-quarters the size. Venezuela is one of the most urbanized countries in all of South America—almost 93% of its people live in the northern cities. About three quarters of them live within 100 kilometers (62 miles) of the coast line.



Many in the northwest part of Venezuela still live in houses on stilts on the water, inspiring the country's name: *Little Venice*.

Most people who live in Venezuela are nominally Catholic (about 92%); most of the other 8% either belong to a Protestant

denomination or follow no religion at all. The Christian faith was introduced by missionaries in the 16th century when the country was colonized by Spain.

When Christopher Columbus first saw the coast of Venezuela, he was so sure that he had found Paradise on Earth that in a letter to his patrons, Ferdinand and Isabella, he named it Land of Grace. Later, mapmaker Amerigo Vespucci would travel along the country's lakes, rivers and lagoons and see the houses built on stilts and think of Venice, Italy. He would name the country Little Venice on his maps—in Spanish, Venezuela.

Education is free in Venezuela; most people (91%) attend primary school. Attendance drops off sharply after that however—only about 65% of Venezuelan children go on to high school. This of course means even fewer qualify for college, creating a lack of professionals in society. Many of the country's doctors, nurses, and petroleum engineers come from foreign countries.

## MCA in Venezuela

While most people in Venezuela have access to running water in their homes, it is not potable (clean to drink). All tap water must be boiled to use for cooking or drinking.

Although Venezuela holds elections for its president, the most recent ones have followed a more socialist ideology. Many businesses, especially the booming oil industry, have been taken over by the government with the promise that all profits would benefit everyone. Although in place for many years now, this way of government has yet to bear fruit for the average person; at this time, there are food shortages and rationing of the necessities of life such as milk, flour and toilet paper.

Father Jose Romero is the Archdiocesan Director for the Pontifical Mission Societies, including Missionary Childhood Association in Maracaibo, Venezuela. He is also the pastor of San Jose parish in that city.

The children of San Jose parish receive their religious education through their membership in Missionary Childhood. Every Sunday, they come together with their classmates to learn the basics of the Catholic faith, always with an eye towards being missionaries; as they learn their faith, they are sharing it—with their friends and their families. They also take part in the yearly sacrificial programs of MCA, offering

what they can so that other children around the world can learn about Jesus and His great love for them. After their classes, they attend Mass together to strengthen their faith through the Eucharist.

Recently, the students had the opportunity to really put their missionary skills into action! The city of Maracaibo hosted the *Congreso Americano Misionero*—a pan-American conference for mission-minded delegates from every country in North and South America. The families of San Jose parish hosted the delegations from Puerto Rico and Chile for the week long event, opening their



Missionary Childhood members read the Intercessory Prayers at their parish Mass. Behind them is the National Mission Director of Chile and their pastor at San Jose Parish and Mission Director of Maracaibo, Fr. Jose Romero.

homes to people they had never met, sharing their rationed food and their abundance of faith.

Last year, the Missionary Childhood members of Venezuela sacrificed \$44,000 for the General Fund and received \$13,400 for medical, nutritional and faith formation programs in their own country.

**Missionary Childhood Association**

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