



Peruvian children find safety

KIM BALKOVEC

The Children's Centre of Yanaoca, Peru

The Columban missionaries began their work in Peru in 1951 and continue working throughout the country today. While Peru is a beautiful country, rich in culture and history and was once the Centre of the Incan empire, over 44% of the population currently lives below the poverty line. Many of those living in dire poverty are children.

The parish of Santiago Apostol in Yanaoca has been staffed by Columban Fr Paul Prendergast since the late 1980's. The present pastor is Columban Fr Young-In Kim from Korea who is fluent in Spanish, as well as in Quechua, the language of the indigenous people of the area.

The Children's Centre of Yanaoca began with the initiative of a

few Columban benefactors and their concern for the survival of children during a couple of years of intense cold. This unusual weather phenomenon put the lives of children, elderly, farm animals and pets at risk.

The area of Yanaoca is very impoverished. It is a town of farmers and shepherds of goats and sheep. The average family lives off what the land produces and raise chickens, guinea pigs and pigeons for their own consumption. By selling some of their products, a family may earn \$40.00 to \$60.00 dollars a month.

With the assistance of generous benefactors, Fr Kim was able to adapt an existing building owned by the parish that had been vacant for five years into the new Children's Centre.

Fortunately the building was well constructed and structurally sound.

The program serves about 50 children. They are divided into three groups, according to their ages: five to six year olds, seven to nine and ten to eleven year olds.

Due to limits of space and of personnel available to care for the children and provide instruction, not all children can attend the Centre at the same time. The children must come in shifts. There is a waiting list for children that want to be in the program. The Centre is not just a place for children to play; it is a learning space where they can attain valuable skills for their future life. Children learn handcrafts, painting and music. They develop communication skills,

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learn more about family farming, and improve their dance repertoire.

Like parents the world over, the parents in Yanaoca want their children to be well fed, well-educated and able to carry on the important traditions of the area. Unfortunately, because they are subsistence workers, they are unable to help fund the project. It is with our deepest gratitude that we thank everyone who has helped the children of Yanaoca by providing them a safe place to realize their dreams.

Kim Balkovec is a development officer at St Columbans, Omaha, USA.

