



Columban Sisters Worldwide Mission News

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BREAKING THE BONDS OF POVERTY: MAKING EDUCATION A PRIORITY

By Sister Young Mi Cho

*Columban Sister Young Mi Cho
lives and works in Peru.*

As a Columban Sister, I am grateful to live and work in the parish of Cristo Liberador in Peru. This is one of 12 parishes which comprise the district of San Juan de Lurigancho in the eastern part of Lima in the foothills of the Andes. It is the most populated district in all Latin America with a population of more than one million people.

Most of the people who live here have come as migrants from other parts of Peru over the past 25 to 30 years. The parish of Cristo Liberador has a population of approximately 130,000 people. The blessing that I have seen over the years is that the living conditions for some of the people have improved greatly. However, there are still many thousands of people living in the *cerros* (hills) in precarious dwellings that do not yet have running water or other basic services.

The Columban Sisters have started a number of projects to help educate the migrant population in both these areas. One of these projects



Children at the Columban Sisters preschool program in Lima, Peru.

is a small preschool for children between the ages of three and five years old with additional space that is used to teach children with special needs. Many of the mothers living in this area are single, very young and have had little or no education.

The Sisters saw this project as a way of walking alongside the families spiritually, while teaching the children vital life skills that would give them more choices in life and make way for a better future. We also wanted to work with children who have mental and physical

challenges because, as in most areas where we serve, there are no means to educate these special little people.

My own background is in Montessori and special education which has proved to be of great service to all the children. Currently in the school there are 80 children who come daily from 8:30 am until 3:30 pm. We provide a loving and caring environment, as well as breakfast, dinner and a snack before they leave in the afternoon. This schedule gives the mothers an opportunity to work, as many do, in the local

market because they are often the sole provider for their family.

Three years ago, a little girl named Sandra came to our school. Sandra had severe hearing loss resulting in her inability to speak or communicate because she had no educational opportunities. Her disability almost caused a serious car accident in the marketplace because she was unable to communicate with anyone. Sandra's mother, a widow with three children who sold pieces of charcoal in the market, asked me with tears in her eyes if I could take Sandra into our school.



A group of students at work on their lessons.



Columban Sister Young Mi Cho with a student.

Sandra stayed with us for three years and we worked with her in an inclusive educational setting. There she gained the skills she needed to communicate with others, allowing her to eventually attend the local school. We were amazed and delighted by her progress as she became a beautiful, caring and confident child, an example to other children in her class. Sandra now attends the local elementary school where the director of school says, "When I see Sandra blossoming in our school and playing with the other children, I see the value of an inclusive education." The Columban Sisters strive to

continually improve the quality of life through their outreach programs by bringing hope to the hopeless, restoring dignity to the family, and preparing teachers so that they are equipped to handle both traditional and nontraditional classroom situations.



Sister Young Mi Cho and students celebrate a special day.

The Columban Sisters are very grateful to you, our donors, for your continued partnership that gives us the opportunities to work with these women and children in Peru, as well as the other countries where we are privileged to serve. **Together we are making a difference in the lives of others!**

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