



Columban Sisters Worldwide Mission News

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LEAVING PERU

By Sr. Eileen Rabbitte

Columban Sister Eileen Rabbitte spent almost 40 years in Peru and now lives in the Columban Sisters' convent in Magheramore, Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

A late phone call can sometimes leave me feeling anxious, but recently the call was a very pleasant surprise. When I heard, "It's me, Luz Marina from Ica", my heart jumped. Luz Marina is one of the very special friends I had parted with when I returned to Ireland after a long missionary journey in Peru. It was so good to hear her and to hear about life in Ica, my home for so many years.

*This is another beginning,
but I know that whatever
the future may bring,
I will always hold the
Peruvian people in my heart.*

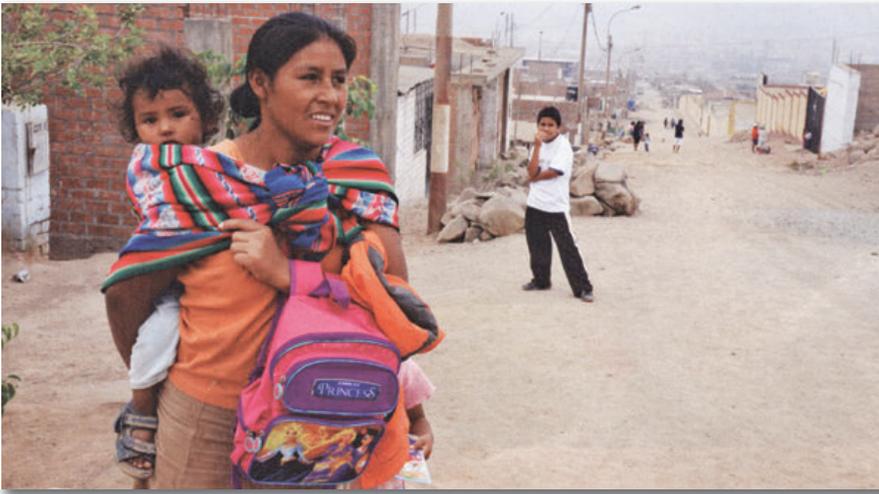
In spite of many thoughts of home in Ireland and the plans for family



One of the many Peruvian families assisted by the Columban Sisters.

reunions, the parting was painful and emotionally draining. While I had told my companions that the time had come for me to leave and that I felt at peace with my decision, I was not ready for the impact of what it meant to me and to the loving people I had encountered over my 40 plus years in Peru. "Why are you leaving us? You are still healthy. Stay with us."

So many more painful comments brought tears to my eyes from time to time. A trip up the Andes to Recuay where I had shared life with the people in the highlands of Peru in the 1980's, and the farewell celebrations there prepared me for the more immediate partings awaiting me in the desert town of San Martin, Ica in the south of Peru, my last mission in that beloved



A mother and her child on the outskirts of Lima, Peru.

country. They would say, “Madre, we are going to miss you.” Trying to keep back the tears and keep calm did not always work; how hard the parting of friends!

A community Mass celebrated by our bishop followed by a get together to send me off proved almost more than I could handle. The Spanish word “despedida” (goodbye) is a loaded one, especially if you are the one to be sent off. The whole world seemed to be there and now that we are in the age of technology I was not the only one with a camera, as was the case in the 1970’s. They all wanted a photo to remember. My heart overflowed with love and gratitude when people like Julia Rojas, who had never missed a night in the Bible meeting, approached with her beautiful family. As we posed together, I

recalled the last time we had a family picture taken with her was when her new post-earthquake house was being blessed. She has never forgotten the joy and wonder of her solid brick house which was one of the many we Columban Sisters were able to provide after the 2007 earthquake, thanks to the generosity of so many great benefactors overseas. So you see, there are many reasons to be overwhelmed with joy and gratitude and pain when a missionary comes to the moment of departure from a beloved and grateful people.

The process of leaving the familiar and facing the unfamiliar is no easy task. The unfamiliar being a completely changed culture in the Ireland I had left so many years ago. A Welcome Home Day for missionaries organized by the Irish Missionary Union (IMU) helped

me to realize that I am not slow, stupid or mad! Meeting 20 other returned missionaries, who like me had been overseas for 40 to 50 years, helped me to realize that I am just a normal returned exile needing time to adjust and fit into a whole new and radically changed Ireland. This is another beginning, but I know that whatever the future may bring, I will always hold the Peruvian people in my heart.

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The Missionary Sisters of St. Columban is a religious congregation of women dedicated to lives of prayer and service. They work among the poor, the sick and the elderly in their missions in Chile, China/Hong Kong, England, Ireland, Korea, Myanmar (Burma), Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Scotland and the United States, and are deeply grateful to all who support their worldwide missionary work.

For more information, visit www.columbansisters.org, call the Columban Sisters Mission Office at 716-934-4515, or email missionoffice@stcolumbanhome.org. Contributions can be made using the enclosed envelope or by contacting the Mission Office.