

Mission Appeal August 28/29, 2021 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

All Saints Parish, 285 Main St. Charlestown, NH 03603

Good afternoon (morning) St. Peter's (St. Catherine's). I am delighted to be here with you on this summer weekend.

I thank the Diocese of Manchester's Missionary Cooperation Plan for inviting my Congregation to make this appeal. And thank you, Fr. Fr. Loughnane, for your warm welcome so that I could worship with you and reflect on the missionary vocation of all of us Christians, but in particular to speak of the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet in Peru and to ask for your generous financial support.

I come among you as your sister who tries to be faithful to her missionary vocation...a vocation that is yours, as well. Our Baptism calls each of us to be missionaries and to spread the Good News. Today's second reading from the Letter to James exhorts us to be "Doers of the word and not hearers only." And in the Gospel we hear Jesus saying, "Hear me all of you and understand." We are all called to share in the ministry of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

In the 1990's I ministered for 7 years among the people of Peru, who although they live in abject poverty and might be illiterate, taught me so much about trust in God and how to survive when all odds are against you.

I remember so vividly how early every morning I would stand in line in the bakery in our barrio and see barefoot children or elderly women buy 2 or 3 rolls and maybe a tea bag or two or a packet of coffee for their family's breakfast. Or I'd see them come to the clinica and buy two or three pills for their child with a fever and a cough. It is for people like these that I appeal to your generosity.

Let me tell you about our missionary activity in Peru...about how we have tried for 59 years to be doers of the word and care for orphan, widows and all manner of poor, hurting people in Peru. Since 1962, sisters from our provinces of Los Angeles, St. Paul, St. Louis and my own Albany have carried on Jesus' ministry of presence, education, health care, catechesis and social services in Peru. We have lived in tiny farming communities high up in the cold mountains of the Altiplano, in the steamy jungle villages of the Amazon, in the sprawling slums of the big cities of Lima and Arequipa. We have established clinics, breakfast programs, day care centers, schools, workshops, little farms, after school libraries. We have worked in prisons and orphanages. We've also cared for the spiritual needs of the people. We've prepared thousands for the sacraments, hosted hundreds of bible studies and developed formation programs for those who would become pastoral leaders of their communities where the priest comes infrequently.

During this last year and a half, the coronavirus pandemic's effects have been felt acutely in areas where our sisters have long been serving, areas already contending with widespread poverty. In Lima and other Peruvian cities, the people generally live

and work in very close quarters and use crowded public transportation, all of which contribute to the spread of the virus. To reduce transmission the government has enforced periods of quarantine, strict curfews and limits on leaving home, which are enforced by the military and police. These restrictions make it difficult for people to earn money in order to provide food for their families. In 2020 people of Canto Chico, where our sisters have lived and ministered for many years, began flying white flags outside their homes to indicate that the family has nothing to eat. So, our sisters adapted their ministry to address these urgent needs. Since the families and the children could not enter the convent, the sisters went to them.

Like the first sisters of St. Joseph who in 1650 in Le Puy France, “divided the city”, spreading out into the community to identify the needs, during the pandemic Sister Yolanda Arribasplata “divided the hills” near the convent and found groups of neighbors who had no food. She then helped groups come together to establish “ollas communes” or “common pots” of food so that everyone would have at least one meal a day and no one would be left hungry. When the “olla comun” began about a year and half ago, in April 2020, approximately 60-70 people shared the common pot. Today the sisters are helping approximately 680 people who are participating in eight “ollas communes”.

Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic the community house in Canto Chico provided a daily after-school program to help the neighborhood children with their homework. It has now become a food distribution center. Thanks to generous donations the sisters can provide food for those in need.

Flexibility is now key. One day the sisters received a donation 35 live chickens delivered to their Canto Chico house. It made for an interesting day, but they found a way to convert their kitchen into a chicken coop and neighborhood families gratefully received an unexpected gift of a live chicken. The sisters continue to find new needs to meet.

They are often asked to assist with medical expenses, and sadly with funeral expenses. Thanks to donations from people like you, the sisters have been able to help many families with these expenses. More people are dying because there is not an adequate supply of medicinal oxygen in Peru. Because of a lack of hospital beds or because families want to do so, they care for their loved ones at home. Thus, they have to provide their own oxygen. Our sisters were very involved with a project to build an oxygen plant that cost about \$100,000 dollars to be built. The lack of oxygen throughout the country is such that family members wait in line for several days and nights to have an oxygen tank refilled.

An empty tank for oxygen costs between 5000-6000 soles (\$1400-1700) and then it costs approximately 500 soles (\$143 dollars) each time it is refilled. And remember that the basic income for a month of work is \$930 soles.

A year ago, these same sisters in Canto Chico opened their home to Hanna and her 9-year-old daughter Betty, refugees from Ethiopia who have survived a harrowing journey involving traffickers, homelessness and infection with COVID-19. They are awaiting immigration processes which have been placed on hold during the pandemic.

A few months ago, Sisters Ruth Matos and Mariana Leininger started a new ministry in Carapongo, an hour away from the center of Lima. Sister Ruth, a psychologist, opened an office to provide mental health services. Sister Mariana is working with the Carapongo Home Associations to help families develop seed projects that generate income to support themselves.

Over these last 59 years our sisters have been like Jesus and the apostles, itinerants moving from town to town preaching the Word, planting seeds and then moving on, leaving the mission in the hands of the native Peruvians. But one place where our sisters have not moved on is the city of Tacna. For 28 years they have been the directors and teachers in a Fe y Alegría School. That's a Jesuit system of schools to address the needs of the massive numbers of children unable to attend school because of dire poverty. This Jesuit philosophy gathers street children and enables them and their parents to literally build a school. San Jose School in Tacna began with children seated on cinderblocks in "rooms" separated by straw mats. Year after year another grade was added. Today it is a reputable school of 13 grades with well over a thousand students.

All of this is possible because of the generosity of people like you here at St. Peter's and St. Catherine's Parish. Of course, I ask your prayers for our sisters but I ask, too, for your generous financial support in the second collection. In a recent newsletter our sisters in Peru reminded us that the approximate cost of a couple of family pizza dinners here in the U.S. would send a family to their school in Tacna for one whole year. Whatever you can give will be greatly appreciated, and...your donation will come back to you a hundredfold. That's not my promise. It is God's.

Thank you for listening to this glimpse of our work in Peru. Together may we all grow in that missionary spirit of living in solidarity with people who are poor and who know what the Cross is in their lives. At our baptism we were signed with the Cross and chosen to bring hope and healing to the world. What a privilege is ours! The Gospels tell us that when Jesus saw a vast crowd his heart was moved with pity for them for, they were like sheep without a shepherd. We cannot claim to be followers of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, unless we continue his work of tending the hurting flocks with our abundance. Thank you for your generosity.

I leave you with the words of St. Teresa of Calcutta: "*Charity begins today. Today somebody is suffering, today somebody is hungry. Our work is for today: yesterday has gone, tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today to make Jesus known, loved, served, fed, clothed, and sheltered. Do not wait for tomorrow!*"