



## HOLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION

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Dear Friend,

It is with great joy that I revisit the places where your support has helped us make a difference. Not only do I rediscover the work of missionaries serving God through their service to children in greatest need, but also I discover new regions and realities. During 2016, children across Canada have been learning about children living in the Amazonian region of Peru, through the free educational materials provided by the Holy Childhood Association. Let me share with you how our Church is serving them and becoming part of their story.

The Sisters of St. Joseph established an educational service for girls with the support of Catholics worldwide. **The Faith and Joy School called 'Misión Chiriaco' is located in the north-eastern region of Peru, in the province of Bagua, Imaza district.** In 1968, the sisters crossed the river answering the call of God and that of local leaders from the Awajún, the second most numerous tribe in the Peruvian Amazon.

The clans' chiefs called for the opening of a girls' school, as the boys were already attending one run by Jesuit missionaries in the region. Traditionally women's education was not a priority in many rural communities and even urban areas struggled to provide education for girls. However, the Awajún chiefs saw the value of education for their daughters' future.

Most of the children at Misión Chiriaco come from families living in conditions of extreme poverty. Their livelihood depends on their natural resources, fishing from the Marañón river, hunting or the meager production from small scale farming. The children travel long distances to the closest centers of education, with some walking 2 to 3 days to get to Misión Chiriaco. Consequently, **the school offers them holistic educational services that include lodging, food and a healthy loving community in which to live.**

The school opened with only 9 girls. Today, 400 girls are enrolled every year into Secondary School and due to the limited capacity of the nearest Primary School an additional 100 boys receive primary education. In a harmonious environment boys and girls learn, work and live together. With a very organized schedule children study in two-wall classes which provide the feeling of being outdoors. **'As a teacher you are present to guide them but you leave them to find their own answers,'** says Sr. Elvira, director of the centre.

The school operates throughout two terms, March to July and August to December. In the interim the children return to their family homes. The sisters pay special attention to their emotional health, as they spend a long time away from their families. The teachers are also locals who know the culture and language and instill in them a great sense of identity and belonging.



## This Christmas help missionaries provide faith-filled education and support to children!

The values observed in the school are many: austerity, creativity and utilizing all available resources for improving living and learning conditions. Cultural practices are a focus for the school in their efforts to keep alive the autonomous nature of the Awajun . The children have their tasks and complete them independently. Equality is a key in their educational process, developing an awareness of the limitations that gender biased societies impose in girls. **Most importantly a joyful and faith-filled spirit.**

On the other side of the river, where the school is located is a native community called Wachapea, which has allowed the sisters to settle in their territory. The sisters have been integrated into their community, the women and leaders have invited the sisters to sit at the main table at the assemblies and they are consulted on important decisions for the Wachapean people. The learning has been mutual, for both the sisters and the community. The sisters say, '***This town has called us. When you are part of a community's life, you give your whole self in the good times and in the bad times.***'

Sister Elvira continually worries about their future in the region and agrees that the only way they can continue with their calling is by Divine Providence. '***If God wants us to be here, He will help us in one way or another!***'

Your support from Canada not only helps the sisters to provide lodging and food to the young girls and children of the Awajún, but also ensures they can respond with medical assistance for the children, provide uniforms, books and school materials as well as teacher support.

**Please respond generously to this our Christmas Appeal.** Your support will reach children not only in Peru but many other children living in rural areas and in great need of a faith-filled education.

Wishing you and your loved ones a blessed Advent and joyful Christmas season.

With gratitude and prayers,

*Alex Osei*

Rev. Father Alex Osei, C.S.Sp.  
National Director

**Thank You!**

