

## Faith In Action – LIMA EMERGENCY APPEAL

I recently saw an article in the UK national newspaper, the Guardian, in which the Archbishop of Lima had said a Mass in the Cathedral during which the congregation was made up of the photos of thousands of Peruvians who had all died in the Covid epidemic! You can see the article here

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/15/peru-archbishop-fills-church-with-portraits-of-covid-19-victims>

I immediately emailed Father Ed O'Connell whose mission to the poor of Lima, especially the San Benito township, is supported via our parish mission "Faith In Action". Father Ed is well known to some people in our parish, to the staff of our parish primary school, Saint Joseph's, and of course to Father Bill. Father Ed has been in Lima for more than 40 years and has devoted his life to the people there. He has created the "Warmi Huasi" (Women's House) charity to support the people of San Benito. Here is a link to a recent Columban Father's article from Ireland on Fr. Ed's work with Warmi Huasi <https://columbans.ie/warmi-huasi-establishing-a-safety-net/>

Fr. Ed replied to my email very quickly and his response, verbatim, is here in italics. After the email is the document that he attached to it. You will realise that their situation is desperate. Please help Father Ed to support these poor people by making a donation to this emergency appeal. Please send cheques made payable to "St. Joseph's Church Epsom" or leave an envelope with cash in the parish office or push it under the door if locked. Please mark your donation for "Faith in Action – Lima" and your name.

Here is Fr. Ed's email.....

*Dear Kevin,*

*Good to hear from you. Yes, a number of the photos in the cathedral were of parishioners who have died of the covid19.*

*The President and his cabinet have tried there best but are running out of ways forward. The virus is not under control and is spreading like wildfire, in a spot test at 5 bus stops on the main bus line into Lima, 20% of the passengers on the over crowded bus were carrying the virus!*

*The people have had to go back to work, with 70% in the informal sector, if you don't work you don't eat. The people did their best for 10 weeks but now we are in the fourteenth week and with no savings left, the streets are now full, with hte people trying to do something to bring food home.*

*There is going to be massive unemployment and the modern version of soup kitchens have already started up. See my updated summary.*

*Having said that, we do what we can by phone by skype and zoom, in virtual meetings planning and re-planning as the situation continually changes. The Warmi Huasi team work with the parents and with the adolescents to help the younger*

*children in their school work, a virtual program from the Education Department, but many children need extra help. We have given out the books from the reading clubs so that children have something to read at home. We have started a story telling competition and will soon be working on their social skills.*

*At the same time we have been helping out the poorest families, 60 of them, with a "bono", a sum of money, we have done it three times now. Also two communal kitchens have started up and we are helping them out with bio-security materials and an amount of money so that there are vegetables and either fish or chicken in the meals and not just potatoes, rice and fideos.*

*Take care and warmest regards to family and all in the parish, some of whom you will be meeting before long, if you are allowed in to pray!*

*Blessings, Ed.*

And here is the document that Fr. Ed attached to the email.....

The lockdown in Peru is due to end on the 30th June and the curfew in Lima is from 9pm to 4am every day. There is an increase in the number of people allowed back to work, about 70% of the workforce, though not all are back, and families have to stay at home. It is an attempt to contain the rise in cases but as social distancing is only partially practiced, it is an uphill battle. I prefer to use the word "physical" than "social" distancing, as the latter only serves to isolate us even more.

The total number of people with coronavirus in Peru is 244,388 of that 156,327 (64%) are in Lima and the port of Callao, with the number of people infected continuing to rise around the country, especially in the northern coastal cities of Chiclayo, Trujillo and Piura and in the Jungle, where sadly it is affecting the tribal people of the Amazon. Probably the real numbers are much higher than the official figures! 7,461 deaths have been recorded from covid19 in Peru, again Lima and Callao with 3,896 (52%). However, there has been a rise of nearly 10,000 in the number of deaths registered in April and a similar rise in May, compared to previous years! You can draw your own conclusion about the real number of people who have died!

The lesson to draw from the percentages is that Lima has better health facilities but even they, the public hospitals, are overrun now. The private clinics who attend covid19, not all do, are charging enormous amounts of money. The small number of deaths, if they are correct, to the number of people affected, is low relative to European countries, probably because the elderly are mostly with their families and better protected than in a nursing or retirement home.

Last week a friend, for family reasons, travelled north along the Pan American Highway, a desert coast road, some 800 kms, to Chepen near Chiclayo. All along the highway, both ways, he witnessed hundreds and hundreds of people walking north. Peruvians on the way back home and Venezuelans with an even longer walk ahead. Men, women, adolescents and even young children and babies. They could stay in Lima no longer, they had nothing, and now as they walk towards home, they are totally dependent on the generosity of those they meet!

I accompany Manuel Duato Special Needs School, a Columban project, where the teachers are in virtual contact with the parents and, through the parents, work with nearly 400 children. Because most of our children are severely mentally challenged, the content makes sure the students have a routine in their day: re-inforce the hand washing, physical distancing, taking exercise and practicing basic life skills. We have helped 44 families of the school, who have little to no income and are desperate. We have helped twice, with s/100 (£24) each time.

I also accompany the Warmi Huasi project, in San Benito, a township on the northern side of Lima in the district of Carabayllo, and in the Province of Paucar de Sara Sara, high up in the Andes mountains in the department of Ayacucho. In both places we help children with their homework, like the homework clubs but at a distance, and we have distributed the books of the reading clubs, so children can read at home.

In both places we have prepared materials for the parents to re-inforce the children and adolescents' social skills and to remind them of the steps to protect themselves from the virus. In Pausa, Ayacucho, we have a radio program, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for the near 4,000 children and adolescents and their parents. Some of the content is communicated in quechua, their local language. The team have also help by sending a stronger wifi system to Pausa so children and adolescents can pick up an improved signal and be able to participate in the "virtual" schooling.

In San Benito, there are families with no money, as there has been no work for the past thirteen weeks due to the lockdown. 60 of these families fall outside of help offered by the Government, and are desperate. We have helped the first group of 20 families, the most needy, with two amounts of s/50, whilst the second and third group, each of 20 families, have received s/50. Now we have distributed to all 60 families s/100 this time. It is all a drop in the ocean but to those who receive, it means everything!

In San Benito, we are helping two communal kitchens with masks and gloves and foodstocks. Between them they serve 95 rations reaching 40 families, multiply that by an average of 5 per family, and you have 200 people. As and from July, the Government will be promoting communal breakfast and lunch programs, in anticipation of mass unemployment.

A friend who lives in the district of Independencia where I first worked in the 70's, wrote this message "there are many people suffering, with nothing left. In the township of Villa Chilca they have begun to put out white flags, which means they have no food, and between friends and neighbours others are helping them!"

In San Benito there are a number of cases of covid19, including families whose children take part in the Warmi Huasi activities. We have helped them with medicines and food stocks and thankfully they are on the mend. The Province of Paucar de Sara Sara has also a number of cases, from people who moved back from Lima.

I presently live in our Centre House of the Columbans, where I am the House Manager. All 11 of us have been in lockdown, now heading into our fourteenth week.

Some were caught by the travel restriction. 6 of us are in the vulnerable category, so we have to be extra careful and probably won't be going out until September at the earliest! We are getting along well and in our Masses and afternoon reflections we offer our prayers for all whom we know and work alongside. So feel included!

As one missionary said a long time ago about Peru, many a sad moment but never a dull one! Take care and many blessings, Ed.