

Operacion San Andres brings hope to children in Peru

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An Operacion San Andres mission team poses with residents of Lima, Peru.

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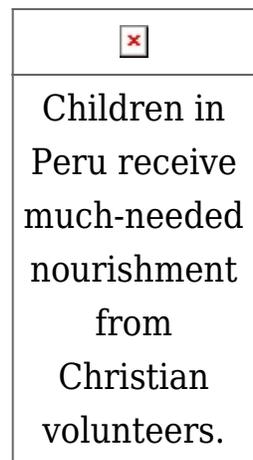
LIMA, Peru-South Main Baptist Church in Houston and Buckner Orphan Care International are offering help and hope to homeless orphans and other rejected children in Lima, Peru.

About 700,000 children ages 4 to 12 live on the streets of Lima with no

supervision. Some of their parents died in civil war. Other parents sent their children out of the house to fend for themselves because they could not afford to keep them.

Some children were cast out when their mothers took on new lovers who did not want them around. These children are called “social orphans.”

It all adds up to children who lack food, clothing and shelter, but most of all, they hunger for love.



Lima's poverty is not new information for Houston cardiologist Luis Campos. He grew up in Lima, and at age 16 wrote a story for his school newspaper describing life in the shantytowns that surround the inner city.

Campos left Peru as a young man, traveling to Scotland to study medicine. Since completing medical school, he has lived in the United States, and he has been a member of South Main Baptist Church more than 30 years.

Campos and his wife, Ruth, have been involved in medical missions since shortly after he completed his training as a physician.

The medical ministry to Peru took shape as a part of the overall missions strategy of South Main Baptist Church, called Operacion San Andres to honor the Apostle Andrew, who carried the word of God to others.

The ministry to Peru works well with the church's overall missions emphasis, Pastor Steve Wells said.

The church seeks to have every member involved in a hands-on ministry project.

The ministry's ongoing efforts include a partnership with Bread of Life, which focuses on meeting the physical needs of about 60 children in Collique, one of the towns on Lima's outskirts. At this point, the ministry is not able to give them a place to live, but it makes sure they have food, vitamins, clothing and the opportunity to learn about Christ.

More than 40 percent of the children in Peru have growth retardation due to malnutrition, Campos said.

Operacion San Andres has purchased a building in Collique. Plans call for the building to be the site of programs that will help educate and disciple children, Campos said. A program to teach mothers parenting, domestic and job skills also is part of the plan.

Buckner Orphan Care International supplies shoes not only for the 60 children involved in Bread of Life, but also for many more. Since Operacion San Andres and Buckner have similar interests in caring for impoverished children, the partnership has proved mutually beneficial, Campos noted.

The group effort began in 2003, when Buckner agreed to direct several hundred of the thousands of pairs of shoes the church collected to the children of Peru.

Leslie Chace, director of Buckner's international program for Latin America, also grew up in Lima, where her father was an American businessman.

A Buckner-sponsored group of 32 people, including seven from South Main

Baptist Church, will leave Sept. 10 to deliver shoes to hundreds of orphans. The group also will lead Vacation Bible School activities for children.

Participants will meet with government officials to elevate the level of trust so the government will be more willing to share the needs of orphan children in the nation.

“This is just a wonderful opportunity for us to help some really needy kids,” Chace said. She noted the group will take shoes both to orphanages and to the street children Operacion San Andres focuses on.

Campos finds his church's efforts to support the Peruvian ministry deeply gratifying.

“This has been a wonderful experience for me in many ways,” Campos said. “But one of the greatest of those is that not only is South Main such a missions-minded church, but it also is my faith community, and it has been such an encouragement to me to continue to find God's will in this and where he will lead.”

Operacion San Andres has been a good thing for the church, too, Wells added.

“The Peru trip is becoming a real focus for us. I just am convinced that we have an opportunity to do something really wonderful in Lima, and that if we don't do it, no one else will,” he said.

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