

Seeds of friendship

St. John's parish and school have an impact in Peru

By Linda Thomas



First lady of Peru Maria del Pilar Nores Bodereau de Garcia met students on May 21 at St. John school in Seattle which has a well-established relationship with a school and parish in Peru.

The similarities between children in South America and students in Seattle are more important than the differences, according to the first lady of Peru who recently visited St. John School.

Children in Peru like to play and they learn to be good people by sharing and cooperating, said First Lady Maria del Pilar Nores Bodereau de Garcia. She spoke to students during an assembly celebrating St. John's well-established relationship with a school and parish in Peru.

St. John the Evangelist Parish has been helping parishioners at San Miguel in Ilave since 1999. St. John School has a connection with La Inmaculada School and orphanage in Puno. Both communities are in Peru, a South American country with a poverty level between 50 and 80 percent.

An economist, Garcia was born in Argentina and became a Peruvian citizen when she married Alan Garcia. She was first lady of Peru from 1985 to 1990. Her husband became president again in 2006.

The first lady met with two foundations in Seattle – the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and Agros International – to generate support for her initiative called Sembrando, which means “sowing” or “seeding.” She wants “lift Peruvian children out of sickness and poverty.”

“Kids in Peru don’t care what they have as long as they have food,” said Melissa Dean, a St. John seventh grader who went to Peru in April. Her mother, Michelle Dean, also went on the parish mission trip. She said potatoes and cheese are the main source of nutrition.

The Deans noticed that children and parents in Peru have the same needs as families in Seattle.

“All of our needs and what we want out of life are the same,” Michelle said. “We all want food and shelter for our family, education for our children, and for them to be happy.”

Education is also lacking in Peru. Six percent of the country’s men and 17 percent of the women are illiterate. Most schools don’t have books and some classrooms don’t even have teachers. Peru, along with other parts of South America, has a shortage of educators.

“Sometimes the teachers can’t make it to school. It was strange seeing students sit in class with no teacher,” said Melissa. “It made me appreciate St. John’s even more.”

Two communities in Peru appreciate St. John’s too. Over the past decade the Seattle parish and school provided books for a library and raised money to pay for a new roof on the church in Ilave.

Paul Kelley, the Spanish teacher at St. John School, said the link between Seattle and the remote communities in Peru is an important one for his students. “Any chance a student has to see the reality of the third world is eye opening for their life and enriching to their faith.” Kelley said.

Peru’s first lady praised the bond between Seattle and her country during the May 21 assembly at St. John’s.

A prepared question for Garcia was, “What are your impressions of Seattle?” She said it is clear that the people of Seattle are very aware of the needs of others and responsive to those needs. Children here have a lot of opportunities to become educated and responsible adults, she said. The first lady wants children in Peru to have similar prospects.