

A Lenten Invitation: Joining Hands in Prayer



Marco's name has been changed for his protection, as well as his identity concealed in the photo. His parents allowed their son to speak, but asked that we not reveal his name, due to their fear of reprisals.

THE JOINING HANDS INITIATIVE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM CONNECTS U.S. PRESBYTERIES AND CONGREGATIONS WITH NETWORKS IN NINE COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD, WORKING TOGETHER TO END HUNGER AND TO CHANGE THE ROOT PROBLEMS THAT KEEP PEOPLE POOR. GROUPS OF CHURCHES IN 11 U.S. PRESBYTERIES ARE LINKED TO NETWORKS IN NINE COUNTRIES.

Marco's Dream

Lent is a time when God's people dream of the changes that God can bring to their lives. Marco dreams of becoming a doctor someday. The only problem is that almost all of the children tested in his hometown of La Oroya, Peru, have excessive blood lead levels. Marco's lead levels are five times higher than international health standards define as dangerous. Lead poisoning can cause learning problems, retarded growth, hyperactivity, kidney and liver disease and neurological problems that are the stuff of nightmares for parents everywhere.

With a population of 35,000, Marco's hometown is the site of a large multi-metal smelter owned by the Doe Run Company of St. Louis, MO. The smelter refines gold, silver, copper and other metals. Each day, the smelter emits almost 1,000 tons of toxic emissions over the town. When the company purchased the smelter in 1997, it promised to clean things up by January, 2007. But it hasn't done so, despite record profits in the last few years. And now people fear that the company will take its money and leave town without fulfilling its legal commitments.

In Peruvian communities, there is a saying that when people want to build something, like a school or a health clinic, everyone must contribute their "granito de arena" - a few grains of sand with which to make the bricks needed for the community's building. Even in the poorest communities, everyone contributes something. Marco wondered what he could offer to help his community in its struggle for cleaner air and healthier children. He asked that we share his dream with you, with his request that you pray for the thousands of children in La Oroya whose dream it is to lead a healthy life.

The Joining Hands Network of Peru, the Giddings-Lovejoy Presbytery, and other committed Presbyterians, together with Marco's family and many others in La Oroya, are working to draw attention to the town's children and provide their families and elected officials with the accurate scientific information they need to make informed choices. As we remember the price Christ paid to bring life-giving change in our lives, we invite you to pray with us that God will bring life-giving change to La Oroya's children very soon:

God of Life,

Together with Marco, we pray for cleaner air and healthier bodies for the thousands of children in La Oroya who suffer from lead poisoning. We know that healing can only come through the reduction of the smelter's toxic emissions and a concerted effort by local and national governments, the families, and the Doe Run company. Christ taught us that children are precious in God's eyes and we commit ourselves to work together with our partners in Peru to proclaim God's truth that La Oroya's children are worth more than gold.

*In Jesus' Name,
Amen.*

(Material supplied by the Rev. Hunter Farrell, a PC(USA) Mission Personnel and Joining Hands facilitator in Peru)

TO DONATE TO THE WORK OF THE JOINING HANDS INITIATIVE, VISIT THE WEBSITE AT WWW.PCUSA.ORG/JOININGHANDS/SUPPORT.HTM. DONATIONS MAY ALSO BE MAILED TO THE PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM, 100 WITHERSPOON ST., LOUISVILLE, KY 40202, ACCOUNT NUMBER E051608; OR TO THE ACCOUNT OF JOINING HANDS-PERU, H000105.