

# PURE RELIGION

## A Christmas in Peru

They were abandoned or abused, these 550 children, sometimes handed over by grieving parents too poor to take care of them, sometimes left without a home after the death of those who cared for them. The Catholic nuns and volunteers at the Perez Aranibar Orphanage in San Miguel, Peru did their best to care for the children, but there was barely enough for food and clothing, let alone for Christmas presents. These children would have to be satisfied with only their daily bread on Christmas day.

That was their plight on the day George and Darlene Wheeler of Bountiful, Utah, visited them for the first time. Elder and Sister Wheeler were serving as welfare missionaries in Peru, caring for the hungry, the poor, and the disconsolate.

As Christmas approached, someone mentioned an orphanage in San Miguel that had great needs. The Wheelers decided to visit the orphanage to see if there was anything the Church could do to help. “Oh, yes,” the director of the orphanage said. “It would be so wonderful for these children to have a toy on Christmas. We have nothing as yet, but we have asked several organizations, and we are optimistic they will help.”

The Wheelers explained that since this was a last-minute request, they had limited funds, but they could probably supply at least one toy for each of the children. However, they wondered if there might be other, more urgent needs. “We would be so grateful for the toys,” the director replied, “but we have had an epidemic of ringworm and impetigo. What we need more than anything else is medicine. If there must be a choice between the two, would you bring us medicine to treat the children?”

The Wheelers hearts were heavy—they knew the medicine would require all of their available funds. Eventually, the Wheelers acquired the

needed medicine, and the day arrived for the scheduled delivery. Before they went to the orphanage, however, they made another stop. They had arranged to deliver several hundred toys to the mayor of one of the nearby towns. Several members from the Lima Perú Maranga Stake planned on meeting them there and, together, they would hand the toys out to the children.

But when they arrived, they noticed the children didn’t seem to be in need at all, and the mayor insisted that the Wheelers and the other members of the Church leave. He wanted to hand the toys out in his name for his own political purposes. “Either I hand out the toys myself, or you can take them somewhere else,” he said. So, they did.

Later, when the Wheelers arrived at the orphanage, they found the children in the plaza singing Christmas carols. They had arrived just as their Christmas program was about to begin. “We can’t tell you how much this medicine will mean to these children,” said the director.

“We are pleased to bring it to you,” Elder Wheeler replied. “But it seems we have a problem—we have a truckload of toys, and we don’t know what to do with them. You wouldn’t by chance know of anyone that could use them?” Tears flooded the director’s eyes. Although she had asked several organizations for help, none had responded. She had spent many hours praying for a miracle.

Elder and Sister Wheeler introduced the youth and Relief Society sisters of the Maranga Stake—each one of them dressed in an orange T-shirt with the words, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” emblazoned upon it. Afterwards, there in the plaza of the Perez Aranibar Orphanage, they joyfully placed a toy in the hands of each of the 550 orphan children.

