



HOW PAUL'S MISSION HAS CHANGED LIVES

About ten years ago, Paul Messer arrived in Birchip, where he displayed his skills as a builder and as a footballer with the Birchip-Watchem Football Club. He had also been on a mission half-a-world away from the football field and in 2010 he inspired the Parish of St Mary's and the Birchip community to donate \$12,000 to continue his volunteer work in the village of Los Lamos in Peru.

At a Lay Led Liturgy, Paul showed the parishioners a film from his time working as a volunteer carpenter in the village of Los Lamos and talked about the plans he had to return to build a school to educate the children in Los Lamos.

Paul's father, Eric, recently wrote to the Parishioners of St Mary's to provide an update to the generous contributors on the impact and power that this initial donation has made. Eric wanted to make it clear the update was not a request for further donations as the school is doing well. They have other people involved now and along with ongoing help from Anglesea residents, the school continues to thrive and play an important part in the development of children in the area, which has been even more important in these times of pandemic.



Las Lomas is about an hour from Lima, in Peru, South America. The population was 9,450 and they had no running water or sewerage. The families were provided with a forty-four gallon drum of water per week, which had to be used for drinking, cooking and cleaning. The water was separated into three lots so it could be reused. For example, water used in cooking was then used for bathing.

Together with a team of volunteers from Anglesea, Paul had spent a summer in Los Lomas building houses. At the time, Paul said it cost around \$250 to \$300 dollars to build a six metre by four metre fully enclosed and roofed dwelling. While Paul was in Los Lomas, he noted that most of the children could not afford to go to school, even though it only costs \$600 Australian a year to educate a child at university.

The school has now been built, and Eric Messer has received an update on the amazing changes that have occurred on "The Hill" where the school was built. The school put the village of Los Lomas on the map and it has had a huge impact on the lives of the children of Los Lomas. Since the school was built the local council provided water to the area and a bus service that is hugely helpful in allowing locals to get to the larger towns where they could find employment.

Local children spend three years at the school, which qualifies them for junior school. "We are very excited that three of the children who started in the school we built have been offered scholarships in private schools," said Eric. Education in Peru is seen as a real privilege and so this initial three years of education that the children are receiving is vital and very much valued.

The amazing women of "The Hill", who are the backbone of the community, also use the school building. They use it as a meeting place, a venue for classes such as cooking classes and a refuge when needed.

"We send you our thanks and the ongoing thanks and gratitude of the Peruvian people in that area," said Eric. "It was your Birchip money that kicked this process off, and your donations combined with donations from some of your generous farmers and from the people of Anglesea which have changed lives on the other side of the world. We send you best wishes and hope that you are all safe and well. God bless you all".

Article by Simone Christie and courtesy of the Buloke Times

Top: Eric and Paul Messer working on the school when it was being built in 2016

Below: Los Lomas, where the school was built on the edge of the Atacama Desert. You can see the blue water drums outside each house.

