

## If You Build It, They Will Come -- The Story of Padre Luis Cordero

Padre Cordero was enjoying his final minutes of solitude as he finished his lunch at a high-class restaurant in the most affluent suburb of Lima. As he reflected on his afternoon commitments, he was interrupted from his ponderings by a raggedy boy who had been lurking in the entrance way of the restaurant and had finally mustered the nerve to approach his table. No, the brownish boy was not selling sweets or cigarettes. He asked a simple question: "Sir, if you are not going to eat the rest of that lettuce on your plate, do you mind if I do?" His heart-strings plucked by the boy's obvious need, as well as his child-like faith to ask, Padre Cordero immediately took the boy through the line, inviting him to take whatever he liked on to his tray. Ignoring the looks of disapproval from the waiters in attendance, he led the boy to his own table. But instead of sitting down and diving into the feast before him, the boy instead ran quickly out of the restaurant. Dismayed by the urchin's erratic behavior, the kindly Cordero waited to see how things would develop. The boy reappeared a few minutes later, this time with two bedraggled boys trailing sheepishly behind him -- he had wanted to share his good fortune with his friends. As they ate, the boys explained that they came from very poor families that lived in the dusty shanty-towns on the outskirts of Lima that had sprung up over the years as families flocked from the mountain villages and Amazon regions to the big city in search of employment. The boys tried to help their families survive by washing the cars in the parking lot, in hopes of getting a tip when the owners came out. Face to face with such need, Jesus spoke to Luis Cordero's heart. His life would never be the same after that day.

The vision that Cordero received from the Lord was to set up a center for boys -- a place where they could escape the rigors of life that weighed too heavily on them at such a tender young age. The problem was, he had nothing to start with -- no property, no buildings, no money. It was at this point Luis Cordero became who we shall call the "Peruvian George Mueller" [Note: George Mueller (1805-1898), Biography excerpt: "Three weeks after their marriage, [George and wife Mary] decided to depend upon God alone to provide their needs. They carried it to the extent that they would not give definite answers to inquiries as to whether or not they were in need of money at any particular moment. At the time of need, there would always seem to be funds available from some source... No matter how pressing was the need, George simply renewed his prayers, and either money or food always came in time to save the situation." See: <http://www.uvm.edu/~sbross/biography/muller.txt>]

In answer to his prayers, the mayor of a Lima suburb offered Cordero a 5,000 m2 plot of municipal land on which to build. As word spread, generous sponsors began to offer building materials, and due to a series of miracles, a school and other buildings for the children were soon built. Not everything, however, went according to plan. Being in a rather affluent area, some of the neighbors whose land bordered Cordero's soon began to complain about the scruffy, rag-tag children who were filtering down into their neighborhood from the poverty stricken areas. They filed a petition with the municipality, and the Padre was forced to build a high wall around the property, with a 3 meter "no man's land" between the wall and neighboring property. Cordero did not want his refuge for the boys to become a fortress, but he soon realized that the wall would be for their benefit, as it would protect the boys from the outside world, and give them an increased feeling of freedom to be themselves as they studied and played. To complete the wall, he would need 23,000 bricks. A friendly factory owner offered him 1,000 bricks, a start to be sure, but where would he get the rest? At that moment, an irate customer stormed into the office, expressing his discontent with an order of bricks he had just received, and insisting that they all be returned. The number of bricks -- 23,000!

The miracle of the Roncalli Institute began in 1987 and continues today with Padre Cordero (now 80 years old) still overseeing the day-to-day operations. Roncalli is living proof of God's power to supply in answer to fervent intercessory prayers.



Only a few of the hundreds of poor boys who come each Saturday to the Roncalli Institute to learn and play!



Anna, in a meeting with Padre Cordero (left), discussing how we would best be able to help the boys.