

RECIPE FOR RADICAL CHANGE

SIL and partners in Peru equip Quechuas to read—everything from guinea pig recipes to the Bible that feeds God’s flock.



As photojournalist Dave Crough and I walked through a small church courtyard in the town of Calca, Peru, we noticed something that would shock most Canadian families.

A Quechua woman held a lifeless guinea pig in one hand. With the other, she scraped off its hair.

This was a meal in the making, we later learned. In North America, guinea pigs are popular pets—cute and cuddly, good with kids and low maintenance. But for the Quechua people of Peru, *cuy* (coo-ee) is a delicacy, usually served hot with a side dish on special occasions.

Climbing the church’s steep wooden staircase, we entered a cheerless classroom where 10 men and two women sat huddled on wooden pews. Pastor Lorenzo Ccama, a literacy supervisor, led them in a morning devotional.

In these humble surroundings, it’s difficult to imagine that these poor, hardworking folks represent a small but growing army of volunteer literacy workers that is making a big difference for hundreds of Quechua people.

The literacy program is spearheaded by ATEK*, a Quechua organization that partners with SIL in a 10-year holistic project known as the South Peru Scripture Advance (see sidebar, p. 7).

*ATEK—A Quechua acronym for, “The association that shines the gospel to the Quechua-speaking world.”



At twilight, travellers on the road to Cusco may encounter young shepherds and their meandering herds of sheep, goats and llamas. Rural Quechuas like these are learning to read and write their own language through a Wycliffe Canada-sponsored literacy program in southern Peru.

ELICITING SMILES

Following the devotional, a lecture and a brief coffee break, the team worked on a classroom exercise under the tutelage of Irma Phelps, a veteran teacher and literacy specialist who has served with SIL's Peru Branch for 32 years.

Phelps' assignment elicited some smiles—each group had to come up with a detailed recipe for *cuy*.

"We are looking for ways students can get a little farther ahead in their reading skills, in their ability to interpret," Phelps explained after the session.

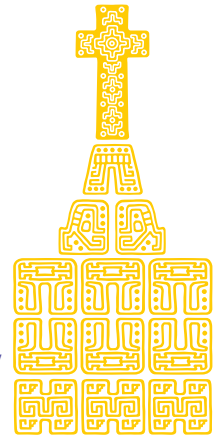
"One way is reading recipes, following instructions and learning new ways to make the typical foods they eat."

Part Quechua herself, Phelps is convinced that literacy is the perfect recipe for radical change—including church growth and improved living conditions—among the Quechua people.

Canadian Justin Hettinga, coordinator of SIL's literacy work for the South Peru project, estimates that less than 50 per cent of rural Quechuas can read basic Spanish. Mother tongue literacy may be as low as three per cent.

But the Saskatoon native, who came to Cusco in 2000 with his wife Tammy and their infant sons, Jesse and Caleb, says

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—Justin Hettinga



Irma Phelps (standing) directs a group exercise for literacy supervisors and teachers working with ATEK. Part Quechua herself, Phelps shares knowledge gained during more than three decades as a teacher and literacy specialist with SIL.





Literacy specialist Justin Hettinga chats with a literacy training workshop participant as the group takes a coffee break. Hettinga's role is to organize and plan sessions, like this one in the town of Calca. But growing friendships, formed inside and outside the classroom, are a key component to the literacy program's rapid growth.

A reader since 2004, literacy facilitator Albino Mamani is hopeful his son and others in his family will benefit from literacy and God's Word in their heart language.



interest in literacy is growing rapidly.

Hettinga estimates the ATEK team has trained about 150 teachers and 1,300 adult students so far.

“What really gets me excited,” says Hettinga, “is the phenomenal amount of hunger within the church, and even the

More on the Web ▶ To learn more about the communities outside the Hettingas serving in Peru with Tammy's parents, church, for the Scriptures.” visit <www.wycliffe.ca/wordalive/>.

For example, a few years ago SIL responded to a cry for help from people in charge of bilingual education in the region. The Catholic Archbishop of Cusco heartily supported their plea for religious education materials for schools that teach in both Quechua and Spanish.

Hettinga and Irma Phelps worked together to create Bible-story books. More than 30,000 copies were published and many schools are still using them.

PHASED-IN READING

In ATEK's literacy program, students are gradually introduced to Bible reading. Hettinga estimates that 1,500 adult students will have entered the four-phase program by the first quarter of 2006.

In phase one, new readers are introduced to letters and the idea that shapes on a piece of paper can have significance. In the second phase, they're taught to read Quechua.

Students then begin to read the Quechua Bible in phase three. Spanish letters are introduced because the Quechua Bible includes many Spanish “loan” words.

For those who persevere through the first three stages, the final level of achievement is literacy in Spanish.

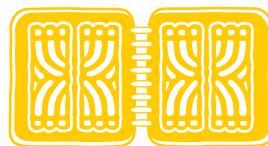
“In order to succeed in life—to work in the market, to read medicine bottles, to read a local newspaper—they need to be able to read Spanish,” says Hettinga.

Although Spanish has been the elite language in Peru for centuries, smaller language groups are beginning to value literacy in their mother tongue—an attitude Phelps applauds.

“Most of the children who go to Spanish-speaking schools don't succeed,” Phelps says. “The rate of failure is so great.

“But I am encouraging the adults, saying, ‘If you learn to read Quechua first, because that's the language you're familiar with, then the steps to learn Spanish are going to be easier.’”

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Salty Media

Imagine jostling for position to watch the *JESUS* film at your local church—on a nine-inch television screen.

In the highland villages of Peru's Cusco province, it's not unusual to see 150 or more Quechua people doing just that. Quechua volunteers haul the tiny sets, which include built-in VCRs, to remote villages.

The volunteers serve under ATEK, an indigenous partner organization with SIL in the South Peru Scripture Advance project. The gospel programs they present are helping stir up interest in the Quechua Bible.

"After they (Quechuas) have seen the video, there's a great interest in knowing more about the Scriptures," says SIL's vernacular media specialist, Marty Lange.

Formerly with JAARS (Wycliffe's partner for technical support), Lange now teaches courses like audiovisual Scripture promotion, in which Quechua volunteers learn how to use battery-powered TV sets and the portable

solar panels used to charge them (see photo, left).

In many cases, Lange works with Quechua men who have never seen such equipment.

"Eighty per cent of the students have never put a videotape in a machine before."

While the team aims to promote literacy and the use of Quechua Scriptures, Lange believes vernacular media plays a key role.

"Sometimes it's hard to motivate people to learn how to read. As we used to say at JAARS, 'You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. However, if you stuff his mouth full of salt, you can make him awfully thirsty!'

"Media is like the salt."

(For more about vernacular media's value in Peru, visit <www.wycliffe.ca/wordalive/>.)

TRAINING TRAINERS

Mother tongue literacy is key to ATEK's vision of promoting the use of Quechua Scriptures and other Bible-based materials. SIL provides consultants and trainers, like Phelps and Hettinga, to help equip local literacy supervisors with the skills they need.

"They're the ones who are really training the literacy teachers," says Hettinga. "They're the ones who go out and visit literacy classes and encourage the teachers."

One of those teachers is Albino Mamani, who lives near the town of Patacancha. Mamani and his family eke out a meagre living by growing potatoes, *haba* beans and other small crops on a gently sloping tract of land some 3,600 metres above sea level.

Mamani learned to read his language, Cusco Quechua, in 2004 through an ATEK literacy class. He's learned enough to teach others how to read and ATEK helps him hone his teaching skills through regular workshops. He now supervises several other literacy classes in his area.

The quiet farmer, married with six young children, is hopeful that mother tongue literacy will improve their lives. Perhaps God may even use them to write Quechua literature—which is almost non-existent so far.

Illiteracy has prevented most of the language's 1.5 million speakers from reading God's Word in their heart language. Literacy classes are helping change that, and so is a more readable version of the Cusco Quechua Bible.

At last April's Bible dedication, Quechuas bought more than 3,700 copies to share with their families and friends.

The heightened interest in God's Word is good news for the SIL team, but the time needed to reach their goals is limited. The South Peru project ends in 2010.

Until then, the team is taking every opportunity to train trainers in literacy, Bible translation, writing, church leadership and vernacular media (see related story, above).

When the final day comes, there will likely be many tears, testimonies and thanksgiving for all God has done.

And probably a large banquet, too, featuring plenty of *cuy*. 🍗



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God's work in southern Peru is not about programs; it's about equipping and encouraging Quechua believers as they love and serve their own people.