

Commentary

Seen it all!

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

LAM News Service

Sometimes I think I have seen it all, then the Lord puts something in my path that makes me just shake my head in amazement.

I thought I had seen the worst when I came to know Martha Carina six years ago. She lived in Quito, Ecuador's worst squatter settlement, in a wooden shack precariously balanced on a rock high on the mountainside overlooking the city. The first time I visited her house the family had only wooden platforms but no mattresses on which to sleep. They had few blankets, no food, little clothing.

Today, thanks to the generosity of a few contributors, working through the child-sponsorship agency Children International, Martha Carina and her family live in a simple, but to them, palatial cement-block house on the same site, but more firmly anchored to the ground. They eat simple meals and Martha certainly looks better. I saw her just a few months ago and was pleased that she is healthy, growing, and lives near a newly forming evangelical church.

Then I walked the streets of Mexico City one day four years ago, visiting street children. One group, junior high age, proudly showed us their hole under a viaduct where they lived in unspeakable filth. As we talked, some wandered away or turned their head to take a sniff of glue while others just breathed it in unashamedly in front of us.

We joined them and some missionaries of the Latin America Mission for a meal on the worn grass near where they lived. They heard a Bible story and were encouraged yet again to accept Jesus Christ as their savior and turn their lives around. It takes many Bible stories and a good deal of prayer to reach such difficult youth.

Not too long ago, I joined a group of Christian lay people on a cold, rainy night in Quito as they worked with street children living in the city's sprawling Carolina Park. They too are ministering through food, clothing, Bible stories and love. The children shivered as a cold wind blew down the street chilling all of us to the bone. But what startled me here was to learn that there are two-year old children living in the park, some with their mothers, others depending on a band of other two to four year olds to protect and nurture them. I guess people dump off children in the park in the same way they abandon pets when they no longer want them.

Yes, I thought I had seen it all--until I walked on a municipal garbage dump in Mexico City. We had to close the car windows to keep the flies out, the stench was nauseating, blowing plastic bags circled in the air like vultures. In the midst of all that stinking, festering garbage and the rabid dogs were people, God's people, raking, sorting, and living in that trash. Families with children earning five dollars a day for 15 hours of work, seven days a week. They were surrounded by cardboard and plywood shacks in which they live along with disease, and the ever-constant smell.

Yet, on that dump, home to 3,000 people and, a pastor told me, one of Mexico City's smaller dumps out of dozens, Christians from the Assemblies of God are ministering, sharing the word, bringing people to know the Lord. Most of the people who live there come from troubled backgrounds in other towns and cities, I was told. And, many of them, once they come to know Jesus Christ, pick up and return home to new lives.

Indeed, the Gospel brings hope and new life to children in squatter communities, street kids and garbage dump dwellers. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Corinthians 5:17 NIV).

Amidst the pain and suffering, the aimlessness and lostness, people of God are reaching out in the name of Christ to bring that hope and to transform their lives. I praise God that He has given us the opportunity to see His work in Latin America.

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