

**Penetrating the lives of kids;
Ministry reaches out to street children in Venezuela**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg
LAM News Service

Caracas, Venezuela (LAMNS)—
For missionaries Greg and Christina
Burch, seeing street kid's lives
transformed is at the heart of their
ministry.

"I believe that the kingdom of God
is much larger than planting
churches," explains Greg who is a
missionary with the Latin America
Mission. "I think that God wants to
penetrate the lives of kids on the
streets and asks us as believers to
involve ourselves with working for
the poor."



Greg and Christina are doing just that by serving in Caracas, Venezuela, with Niños de la Luz (Children of the Light) foundation, rescuing homeless boys from the streets and prison cells.

Joining a group of volunteers who visit a juvenile detention facility, Greg spends time talking with one boy who has shown an interest in tutoring and possibly turning his life around.

"A lot of kids go through the detention center," Greg explains. "Many of them are picked up on the streets and delivered here by the police. We come here and do activities with the kids and that gives us the opportunity to evaluate them and see how they would do in a home situation."

Many of those who want to turn their lives around are accepted into a foundation-run residential center, called "The Lighthouse Ranch" located 25 miles outside of the city. There they receive food and lodging, are counseled and encouraged to further their education.

"Most of the residents are in school now," Greg says. "Our tutor works with them so that can enter a private or public school or attend classes at a technical institute."

The majority of the boys stay at the home until they are 18 years old. "It's a home for them, similar to the situation where most of us grew up, with parents who love the kids," Greg says. Some continue with the center as leaders after they graduate from school.

Greg tells of one boy, Carlos, whose life was transformed after accepting Jesus Christ as his savior through the ministry. "The first time I saw him he was fairly clean, not as dirty as a lot of the kids are," Greg remembers. "His story was similar to that of many others. He got into fights with his stepfather so had been living on the streets for a month."

"We began to work with him and invited him to our activity days that we have in the parks. After a period of a month or two we took him out to the ranch."

“While he was out there he chose to accept Christ and it changed his life quite a bit. God began working in his life and he wanted to be baptized. So we arranged that through a local church.”

“His Mom showed up that day. She worshipped saints and idols and witches. But, she came to Christ the same day he was baptized. She came to Christ through her son coming to Christ basically because we showed up and God used the ministry.”

Greg, who was raised in Mission Viejo, California, and attended Multnomah Bible College in Portland, Oregon, and Fuller Theological Seminary, says that as much as possible his ministry works through local Venezuelan churches. “But, there is no way that many of the boys would be



accepted in our local churches,” he says. For that reason he explains, “We believe that God wants us to reach them on the streets where they are at in their hopeless situations and transform them into people who will change their society.”

The Niños de la Luz project is growing and looking to add more projects and facilities to meet the growing problem of street children in Caracas.

“We are interested in building more homes at the ranch,” Greg says. “In addition, we need people to serve as substitute parents for the kids and others in the city who would be missionaries to the kids on the street, waking them up in the morning with a hot Arepa pastry and sharing Jesus with them.”

While a short-term missionary will soon be helping with construction, Greg says that The Lighthouse Farm needs funds to purchase construction supplies.

Greg, along with his wife, Christina, who grew up in Vienna, Austria, Gladstone and Oregon City, Oregon, and attended Whitworth College in Spokane, Washington, are also working to mobilize members of Venezuelan churches to help with their efforts. “For too long we North Americans came to Latin America and did a lot of the work without encouraging Latins to get involved in the work themselves,” Greg says. “We need to be part of that movement to get people involved in God’s kingdom work.”

For now, they see what they are doing as a ‘kingdom thing.’ “God is at work in the local church and also on the streets,” Greg affirms.

Latin America Mission works in partnership with churches and Christian agencies throughout Latin America and supports missionaries and projects in many Latin countries as well as in Spain. LAM is seeking to place new missionaries throughout the region. The U.S. headquarters can be reached at Latin America Mission, Box 52-7900, Miami, FL 33152, by e-mail at info@lam.org, or by calling 1-800-275-8410. The mission’s web site may be found at <http://www.lam.org>. LAM’s Canadian office is at 3075 Ridgeway Drive, Unit 14, Mississauga, ON L5L 5M6.

Related web sites:

Children of the Light foundation http://www.ninosdelaluz.org/index_eng.html

Latin America Mission <http://www.lam.org>

Viva Network www.viva.org

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