

Ministering to the Least of These

Story and photographs by Ed Compean

“Church Without Walls”

at CC Managua

Dean Peters, from Calvary Chapel Merritt Island, ministers to those living amidst garbage in Nicaragua.

Ten-year-old Jose Luis lives in a simple tarp shelter atop a hill of trash in a city dump known as La Churreca. He doesn't know where his parents are and lives by scavenging food or scrap metal that he can sell.

While vultures circle over Luis's head, he holds a bottle of tainted water in his filthy hands. He is wearing a Dallas Cowboys t-shirt. The garment, like his water, food, and shelter, is scavenged from the dump.



Pastor Dean Peters prays with one of his parishioners.



Pastor Dean Peters of CC Managua hands out some spare change and tracts to street children in Managua. His church van serves as the base for Church Without Walls. Many people have come to recognize the van because the pastor blasts Scripture and music through a loudspeaker mounted on the roof.

"I've always been here," said Luis of his abode, which is soot covered from the constant burning of rubbish and animal carcasses. He is proud of his piece of prime real estate. Luis explains that he will move the shelter only if rubbish dumping moves to other parts of the dump. "It is home, and I get everything I need here," Luis added.

According to Pastor Dean Peters of CC Managua, there is one important thing that Luis lacks—salvation. Being a leader of a fledgling gang operating in and around the dump, Luis has been targeted by Pastor Dean for that gift he doesn't need to scavenge for. It is for people like Luis that Pastor Dean has established a ministry called Church Without Walls. It is a place of worship, preaching, and teaching for those who cannot or will not enter a traditional church.

On New Year's Eve, 1993, Dean got saved at CC Merritt Island. His life was radically transformed through Bible teaching and involvement with missionaries. In November of 1998, Dean journeyed to Nicaragua. He helped provide relief following Hurricane Mitch and desired to establish an orphanage. It was a calling to work with children and youth that brought about CC Managua.

"Looking back," said Pastor Dean, "I had it backwards. There should first be a solid church built on the truth of the Word and filled with strong Christians. Then an orphanage can be a natural offshoot."

Malcolm Wild, senior pastor of CC Merritt Island, visited Managua in the fall of 1999. Dean had agreed with Pastor Malcolm that there should be a Calvary Chapel in Managua, but he wondered who would plant it. At the end of the visit, Pastor Malcolm challenged Dean by telling him, "There needs to be a Calvary Chapel in Managua and you need to seek the Lord's will in prayer about being that pastor."

"It all became clear after my pastor visited," Dean said.

A few months later, in March of 2000, Howard Davies, missions pastor from CC Merritt Island, attended the first service that was held in the newly acquired building, which was purchased with donated funds. The building, located in one of the poorest areas of the city, also has apartment space for a few church workers. The sanctuary was expanded twice in the first six months due to the growing body.



CC Managua's sign hangs outside the church.

Pastor Howard relates, "Being in Managua was an unforgettable experience. In those few short days, we saw how many obstacles were swept aside as we sought the Lord in prayer. We believe that the Lord will add daily to His church."

Church Without Walls has a service in La Churreca every Saturday and whenever Pastor Dean decides to stop the church van. On top of the van sits a large loud-speaker into which he plugs his electric guitar for some impromptu worship. He preaches and then invites those listening to receive the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Church Without Walls is one of many ways CC Managua reaches out to the group that Matthew chapter 25 calls the "least of these." The Church Without Walls is located in one of Managua's worst neighborhoods, and it is not uncommon to have the poor, prostitutes, and gang members come to the church to worship,

seek help, or just check it out. Pastor Dean reminds the American missionaries and Nicaraguan church workers that though they are called to help and minister to the "least of these," salvation is what matters most.

CC Managua has opened a bakery as a way to support the

ministry and provide vocational training and discipling for those who have made a commitment to Jesus. Giovanni Gomez, 18, is a former gang member who lives at the church and has gone back to school. He rises every morning at 4 a.m. to bake breads and pastries to sell for the church. Pastor Dean allows him to keep a percentage of the sales. He finishes his duties by the start of the daily 6 a.m. prayer meeting and devotional. Besides Giovanni and Pastor Dean, the meeting typically includes



A young glue sniffer watches as Pastor Dean Peters sets up a tarp at La Churreca.



Jose Luis, 10, lives in a simple tarp shelter atop a hill of trash in a Central American city dump known as La Churreca. He does not know where his parents are and lives by scavenging for food and scrap metal that he can sell.

children heading to school and locals who come to start their day focused on God.

Among those often attending is Jimmy Trejo, 16, a tough-looking youth that CC Managua is discipling. According to Pastor Dean, "Jimmy first came to this church with a stick so that he could beat up one of the parishioners."

Of the incident six months earlier, Trejo relates, "It was my first time in a church. I heard Dean preach the Gospel and one week later I was saved." According to Pastor Dean, Trejo has struggled and had many trials but his walk has also shown much fruit. "Without Calvary Chapel I was a loser, a bad boy, and a drunk. I was involved with gangs, but my heart has changed," said Trejo.

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On a recent Wednesday morning after a prayer meeting, there was a loud crash on a table in the church meeting hall. Missionary Christina Eisenman came out of the living quarters to find two crack-addicted prostitutes who had come into the church after a night's work and collapsed on the table. Grabbing her Bible, Eisenman went to the kitchen to get two plates of food and fed the women both breakfast and God's Word. As neighborhood children played and sang praise songs at one end of the room, Eisenman continued to minister to the women. The fruit from Eisenman's efforts came that evening at the Wednesday service when she was able to greet and sit next to one of the women. "Praise God they asked for me. There is no other resource for them," said Eisenman.



A man at La Churreca butchers a vulture that he found. Nothing goes to waste here.



Opposite: Vultures circle over an area of La Churreca where scavengers dig through the trash for food or other usable items.



Missionary Christina Eisenman prays for some crack-addicted prostitutes.



A prostitute shows up at the door of CC Managua after a night of work. This is the only place where she can go and not get robbed, abused, or worse.



Jimmy Trejo, 16, prays as he is treated for a head wound that is still healing from his former days of violence.

Eisenman's ministry to the prostitutes is not the only sanctuary CC Managua provides. Pastor Dean and the church workers provide 150-200 meals a day for locals. Many children come to the church daily for the 6 a.m. prayer meeting and stay until 9 p.m.

There have been gang fights in front of the church, and more than once violence has been threatened against its workers. Yet, it is Pastor Dean's desire to make the church a light in the neighborhood and a place where the Gospel shines not only to make believers, but to disciple them.

Pastor Dean espouses this belief in his personal life as well. This 44-year-old former car salesman married a Nicaraguan woman in September. According to Dean, "We've been told that we will be the only married couple in our neighborhood."

Pastor Dean and Wikknelia take their role seriously as Godly examples to the youth at the church. "We may be the only example of a husband and wife bound in the love of Christ that these young people see," said Pastor Dean.

Several teams from CC Merritt Island and CC Melbourne have come to work on the church building in addition to holding evangelical outreaches to the community. CC Merritt Island sends groups every several months and sponsors missionaries to assist for long periods of time. Calvary Chapels from Southern California have also come to help.

La Churrecca smells of burning and rancid trash, decomposing animals, and human waste. The scavengers, who fight each other and the vultures over this third-world city's castoffs, make La Churrecca appear like a scene from an apocalyptic movie.

During a recent outreach, Scott Yonker could only compare the misery he witnessed in La Churrecca with the Biblical accounts of Gehenna, a place associated with weeping, gnashing of teeth, and burning bodies.

"I did not actually see any burning bodies or hear any gnashing of teeth, but I did see a lot of suffering and pestilence," said Yonker. Yonker was one of a group from CC Ventura and CC Camarillo that took part in an outreach

and church service for nearly 2,500 people living in Managua's dump.

A few people from the dump responded to an invitation to receive Jesus. One woman wept heavily as she repented of her sins and asked Jesus into her heart.

sadness," said Pastor Dean. He warned the group of ministers from Ventura County, "You never leave here feeling good. But we need to remember that we are called to make disciples, not just believers." ☞

As the group of short-term missionaries got into the van to leave La Churrecca, Pastor Dean and Wikknelia told the team that the dump is an exhausting ministry but the work has only just begun.

"The dump physically and emotionally exhausts the teams, missionaries, and nationals. It wipes us out and is spiritually oppressive. I always come away with



Dean teaches Bible study on the radio.



Cynthia Carolina (left) and missionary Christina Eisenman cool off during an afternoon thunderstorm.



At a party for perfect church attendance, John Ingalls from CC Merritt Island helps Valeska



Children play outside CC Managua at dusk.



Ezekiel Jose holds his well-worn Bible.

CONTACT
www.calvarychapel.com/merrittisland/missions/managua.htm
or for further information call
CC Merritt Island at
321-453-6779



Sonja Veronica, center, is baptized by John Ingalls (left), a missionary from CC Merritt Island, and Pastor Dean Peters.



Dean drives through the Managua night in the church van looking for those in need of help.