

New World Outlook

Colombia: Care for the Displaced and Unsettled

The following is a transcript of a *New World Outlook* online audio slide show, "[Colombia: Care for the Displaced and Unsettled](#)." This interview was translated from the Spanish by Joyce Hill. For related articles see also the [September-October 2007 issue of the magazine](#).

Richard Lord: Can you share with me some of the problems that the children have in this area? I understand that they began when the military entered the area to take control from the guerillas. They detained the adults, especially the men, leaving the children totally abandoned. I understand that the ministry to these children by the Methodist Church in this area is very important. Can you give me more information and specificity about the problems the children are facing?

The Rev. Rocio Arenas: In the two years that we have been here, we have found the children, especially the adolescents, suffer from severe emotional problems. The children are filled with fear, they suffer emotional upheaval and they don't know who to trust. All of this is quite normal given the situation they have lived through. They suffered the trauma of the gun shots, the persecution and all of the violence that takes place when the military is trying to take control of an area. Many of them live in constant fear and emotional upheaval. Even though the military action occurred several years ago, they still continue to relive the situation. I know in many areas there are problems of prostitution and drug addiction as a way of living out their inability to conform to society's norms. Many of them are not from here originally. They migrated here to the city because of problems of security in their towns. They came to live in the hills on the outskirts of the city. They are totally out of their cultural tradition, but at the same time they don't want to remember it because they fled from a situation of persecution. They live in very poor and humble dwellings. Their living conditions are very precarious. And in addition they came to a city that is filled with violence and the same problems they left behind. As a result they don't trust anyone. They don't believe that they can live again with a sense of security. They don't know if they will have anything to eat tomorrow. Many of them are the rag pickers in the city dumps. The salvage paper, glass, or metal that they can sell in order to have a little bit of money. Some are lucky enough to be with their mothers or another adult who have factory jobs. But they have long working hours B some of them 8 or 10 or 12 hours per day so the children are alone all day. Many of them are going to school, but there are others who don't fit in and they get involved in anti-social activities. So the church began a special ministry with them and tried to get acquainted with them. A lay person from the church in another part of the city would come out to meet with them, and this was the beginning of the Methodist

Church in this sector of the city. As we began to get acquainted with them, some of them would talk with us, others no. In this area there are also many problems among the families, and the basic rights of the children are violated. Some of these children are living in precarious situations because of their own home situation. They suffer abuse by the fathers or step-fathers. So the church has an important pastoral task in offering them trust, encouragement, hope, and genuine love. But it is a slow process.

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Lord: Hello, can you tell me your name and how old you are?

Child: Victor -- and I am 11 years old.

Lord: What work do you do?

Victor: I recycle garbage.

Lord: Do you go to school?

Victor: I used to go. I finished third grade.

Lord: Tell me about your work.

Victor: I sort through the garbage to see what might be salvaged, things like cardboard, glass, metal. I also check to see if any balls have been thrown away that I might be able to salvage.

Lord: Do you work with a group?

Victor: No. I do it with my family. In groups people can fight over things. I collect what I can and to go to a place that will buy it and make things from it to sell.

Lord: How do you get to the resale place?

Victor: I have a cart that I load up to take it there to sell. They weigh it and pay me.

Lord: Good! So you get your cart, fill it up, take it to the place and bring your cart back. How much do you make doing this?

Victor: 5 or 6 thousand pesos.

(Translator: about 3 dollars according to Google conversion table.)

Lord: About how many kids work in the area where you do?

Victor: It's not just kids. The entire family works the area except my aunt. She quit because she didn't like it. My parents, two uncles, my cousins all work here.

Lord: But are there persons in addition to your own family?

Victor: Yes.

Lord: Are there a lot of children who do this, and how old are they?

Victor: There aren't any little kids. They are older, mostly adults. I know one is 28, another 30.

Lord: Have you seen any younger than yourself doing this kind of work?

Victor: No.

Lord: Do girls as well as boys work here?

Victor: No, only boys.

Lord: Do the other kids work with families, or are there some who do it by themselves. Maybe they don't have families and are street children?

Victor: They all have families and houses to live in.

Lord: When do you start work?

Victor: I come here about 5 o'clock and work until about 1 o'clock four days a week.

Lord: What would you like to do in the future?

Victor: I would like to be a doctor.

Lord: Do you want to have a family and children?

Victor: Yes, and I want a son and a daughter.

Lord: Do you have a girlfriend?

Victor: No.

Lord: OK, Thank you.

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William Walter Llanos: Some of these children whom you have seen in photos and who work in recycling garbage are beginning to use marijuana. They sleep here and about 2 in the morning they start sorting the garbage. It's the best time until midday. They sort through things and salvage what they can to sell. Unfortunately some of them spend their money on marijuana.

Lord: Does that include Victor?

William: Unfortunately yes, he began hanging out with other kids his age who are beginning to smoke marijuana. From what his family says, when they caught him smoking and punished him quite severely. They hope he has learned his lesson.

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