

# A Drop in the Bucket

## Reflections on San Jose, Costa Rica

- The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. Mark 14:7
- The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:40
- The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. Mark 12:10

The mission team from St. James' Episcopal Church that went to Costa Rica, August 6-13, 2006, was deeply moved by our experiences in assisting Christ for the City International and in meeting the man who runs a program to reach out to those in San Jose who are caught up in the web of substance abuse and poverty.

*His name is Ronald. At the age of 7, he was living on the streets, doing every kind of drug he could find. He ate out of trashcans, begged for scraps at restaurants, and begged for money for alcohol and more drugs. He slept anywhere and everywhere. Daily life was a war within himself to find enough food and shelter to survive and enough drugs to die—many times he tried to take enough to kill himself. But each morning he woke and the battle raged on. He wasn't alone, but those he knew were living the same life. Sometimes they worked as gangs willing to do anything to get food, money, and drugs.*

*Ronald lived this life for 15 years and then God came calling. Ronald was running the streets with a buddy trying to find girls. Ronald thought the prettiest girls went to church, so one night they went into a church to see. It turned out Ronald was right as he immediately spotted a pretty girl. It was then that he noticed who he was and that no one who looked like him should try to talk to someone who looked like her. So, Ronald decided to clean himself up, cut his hair, and go back. He did and to his surprise she actually talked with him. The power of love! It turned out she was the preacher's daughter and eventually she became Ronald's wife.*

*It couldn't have been easy, but somehow Ronald was transformed, married, and working at a social service agency. One day at work he heard a news report of a gang of teens that lived in an abandoned building. He also had seen a picture of the building in a story in the newspaper that morning, which had described a shooting that had taken place the previous night in front of the building. When he heard the news, Ronald was convicted to try and help. He went immediately to try and find the boys. He found the boarded-up, abandoned building with a tin flap of a door. He entered into a world of darkness, filth, and stench so horrible you wanted to vomit; but he didn't leave. Instead, he tried to walk through the building. He could hear people making noises, but could see almost nothing but a small path through the trash. Suddenly the teens dropped down on him from the rafters and began to beat him up. Ronald yelled, "I used to be one of you and I've come to meet you!" The teens stopped their pummeling and stared at Ronald. "You don't look anything like us," one of them said. Ronald replied, "I didn't say I am like you. I said I used to be like you. I've come to meet you, to see if you need any help, and to see if you'd like to go for some coffee."*

*That was the day that Ronald began his ministry to the drugged-out youth of San Jose, Costa Rica. He knew who they were, because he used to be one of them; he knew how they lived, because he had lived the same way for many years; and he knew what they needed, because he had wished for the same things. He promised help and food on a regular basis to those boys that jumped him and he delivered on his promise. Because he heard God's call and acted on it, lives began to be transformed. Seven of those boys became priests and Ronald's ministry grew and continues today as part of Christ for the City International (CFCI).*



**Young boys in the food line in the Guadalupe region of San Jose.**



**Typical shelters in the slums of San Jose.**

Those of us who went to Costa Rica had the privilege of meeting Ronald, hearing his testimony, and helping him and CFCI staff and volunteers distribute food to those he has committed to help. We drove into neighborhoods that sometimes were nothing more than shacks with tin roofs and dirt floors. But wherever we went there were people and many of them were children. They were hungry, dirty, and tired. They were dressed in whatever they could find that fit. When you see a teenage boy wearing pink women's slippers, you question what happened to reality. But that was the reality of this corner of our world.



**One of three feeding lines where we served rice, beans, salad, and juice.**

We helped serve food. We handed out several hundred plates of rice and beans. For many who got a plate, it would be their only hot meal of the week. It seemed like we were a drop in the bucket; something so little, for people who needed so much.



**The home of Jeannette, who weekly prepares food for 500 in her tiny kitchen, and where we ate lunch.**

But we learned that one drop is better than no drops. We learned that one person can truly make a difference. If it were not for Ronald, the people we helped feed might not have had a meal that week. Through the regular delivery of food, Ronald has been able to make a connection with many of those he feeds. He regularly scouts the city looking for pockets of those hooked on drugs who he can help and starts by bringing them food. He keeps coming back and builds relationships. Through his interventions many have escaped the drug/poverty cycle. We ate the same lunch we served in the home (many would call it a shack, but I assure you it is truly a home) of a wonderful woman who used to line up for a plate. Today she helps Ronald and his ministry by weekly cooking rice for 600 plates of food.

One estimate on the Internet is that it takes 60,000 drops to make a gallon. Jesus said that the poor would always be with us, but he didn't say how many there had to be. The reality of our world is that half of it lives in poverty. Ronald is proving—one drop at a time—that it is possible to make a difference. We should try to make a difference as well—everyday. There are many ways to help, from volunteering at Shepherd's Table or a food ministry, to going on mission trips, to giving money to organizations working with the poor. Had you stood on the food line with us, you too would be convinced that we can do more.

- Half the world — nearly three billion people — live on less than two dollars a day.
- The GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of the poorest 48 nations (i.e. a quarter of the world's countries) is less than the wealth of the world's three richest people combined.
- Nearly a billion people entered the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names.
- Less than one per cent of what the world spent every year on weapons was needed to put every child into school by the year 2000 and yet it didn't happen.
- 1 billion children live in poverty (1 in 2 children in the world). 640 million live without adequate shelter, 400 million have no access to safe water, 270 million have no access to health services. 10.6 million died in 2003 before they reached the age of 5.

Source: <http://www.globalissues.org/>