

Listen to the Children Crying

Charisma takes a closer look at the desperate lives of the world's street children-and how you can help them.

Jesus stands high over Rio de Janeiro, His arms spread wide. His famous statue atop Corcovado mountain could be welcoming the thousands of tourists who travel to the "Marvelous City" from around the world for her beaches, nightlife and renowned Carnival.

Or He might be celebrating the growth of His church, hailing the thousands who have become Christians in the last decade or recognizing how the revival that has swept through South America has changed the spiritual landscape of Brazil.

But He is probably despairing over His little ones who live on the streets and die in the gutters in the shadows of Rio's clubs and churches. Little ones such as the eight children ages 10 to 17 who were gunned down by a group of military policemen in front of the city's Candelaria Cathedral in July 1993.

The infamous massacre sparked international outrage—along with government promises that such brutal treatment of the estimated 7 million children on the streets of Brazil would no longer be tolerated. But according to a report two years ago by the Jubilee Campaign, a British-based Christian human-rights group, the murders continue unabated.

Among the incidents the group has documented since Candelaria:

Six teen-agers were lined up and shot in the back of the head by security guards after trying to get on a bus without paying.

Two children were killed after being thrown from a high footbridge onto a railway line by a gang of drug bandits hired to shoo away troublesome street kids from stores.

An 8-year-old boy who had resorted to petty theft from passengers was beaten to death in the carriage of a train.

At least five children were killed with poisoned food by a shopkeeper who was fed up with the nuisance they caused.

The killers are simply a little more discreet these days, Jubilee says. Instead of leaving their victims in public view as a warning, they dispose of their bodies quietly. A military policeman told researchers of killing a 13-year-old boy and dumping his body on a rubbish heap to be eaten by pigs.

Lucia Ines, who helped found a street-children project on the outskirts of Rio and has received death threats herself for speaking out against the violence, says the murders were ignored by politicians and the media "because they don't want to give the country an ugly image abroad."

"We have to sell a beautiful Brazil," she says. "If you show a country that kills its children, a country of violence, nobody will want to invest their money here."

A Global Problem

Brazil isn't alone in murdering its undesirables. Similar killings have been documented in Colombia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, India and the Philippines, to name a few. There are dark rumors, too, of street kids disappearing and being harvested for their organs.

Shocking as they are, these deaths are only the most chilling extreme of the abuse of millions of runaway and abandoned children around the world. From San Francisco to St. Petersburg, Russia; from Manila, Philippines, to Chennai, India; children fleeing crushing poverty or broken homes face violence, rape, injury and disease as they hustle a living on city streets. With few marketable skills, the only thing many street kids have to barter with is their bodies.

That's the case with the prepubescent girls who charge less than \$3 a turn for unprotected sex in one of the cheap bars in El Belen, Mexico, according to Bruce Harris, director of the Casa Alianza homes for homeless youth in Latin America. Five percent of the boys and girls his teams have contact with are HIV-positive and age 14 on average, he told a United Nations hearing last year. He said the harrowing cases he documented were just "the tip of an iceberg of abuse and sexual exploitation."

According to one U.N. report there are as many as 100 million children and teen-agers living, working or roaming in the streets and at risk. And the numbers are not limited to the developing world.

More and more homeless children are appearing on the streets

of cities in the former Soviet Union and in the West. Each year in the United States, up to

1 million youth are reported abandoned or missing from home.

These street children largely have been overlooked—not just by the world but also by the church. Patrick McDonald witnessed this in a literal way as a missionary a decade ago in a Colombian city that was enjoying revival.

“There was massive church growth, and everybody was really excited about Jesus,” he recalls. “But people would step over the street kids on the way out of church.”

Something was wrong, he decided, and he traveled to almost 20 coun

tries to find answers. The result was the Viva Network, an Oxford, England-based movement that links churches and groups working with at-risk children around the world and champions more and better ministry to the world’s discarded and disregarded young.

In an effort to bring the issue to the forefront of Christians internationally, the group is taking part this month in the largest-ever Global March for Jesus. When an anticipated 15 million people take to the streets in 150 countries on June 10, they will be challenged to think specifically of the needs of the young ones who may be making a home near where they are walking. The event, called Millennium Child, will feature special prayers for street children and collections for groups working with them.

“The new millennium is a time of hope and looking forward, and

yet this world is a hostile place for many children,” said March for Jesus co-founder Gerald Coates, a British house-church leader. “The predicament of such children is a barometer for the state of humanity at the brink of a new millennium.”

Like modern-day Oliver Twists, the youngsters who sleep in derelict buildings and abandoned cars or on top of bus shelters and in sewers are looking for more—more than neglect, exploitation and abuse. But most of them do not face the happy ending enjoyed by the fictional character of the Charles Dickens novel about the boy who ran away from the workhouse to the streets of London.

They all share something with their fictional predecessor—the need for justice. And it doesn’t come easily in Rio. Although Jubilee says official records claim 8,000 murdered children and teen-agers in the city during the last 10 years—with the real figure believed to be considerably higher—only six people went to trial during that same time on related charges.

In Dickens’ tale, Twist’s father was a wealthy businessman, and villains Fagin and Bill Sykes were trying to deny the boy his rightful inheritance. A century-and-a-half later, millions of latter-day Twists are being denied their rightful inheritance—of nurture and nourishment, help and hope, a family and a future.

“We have a responsibility to children that are vulnerable to abuse,” says Ann Buwalda, director of the Fairfax, Virginia, arm of Jubilee. “Scripture talks about it being better to have a noose tied around your neck than you harm one of these little ones.”

An insular American church, she observes, is not particularly aware of or interested in the global issue of street children. In fact, Christian organizations in the United States actually have opposed a United Nations attempt to protect street kids.

Introduced in the late 1980s, the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child that noted street children as being among those who live under “especially difficult circumstances” was the most swiftly ratified human rights convention in history. Last year, looking back on 10 years of the convention, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) said that it had “spurred positive” changes in many countries—such as legislation protecting children from sexual exploitation in the Philippines.

Only two of the 193 countries recognized by the United Nations have failed to endorse the convention—Somalia, which doesn’t have a functioning government, and the United States, where opposition to the convention’s adoption was led by conservative and religious groups such as Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council.

They argued that the apparently well-meaning attempt to protect children at risk in extreme situations by creating a “bill of children’s rights” could become a Trojan horse that would undermine parental rights and responsibilities, such as discipline and religious instruction, back home.

McDonald agrees that the convention strays into “potentially dangerous” areas, and that “governments are there to serve families, not the other way round.” But he believes “the antagonism toward [it] has been extremely overstated.”

“People are so skeptical about it because it’s to do with the U.N., but the convention has done a lot of good things around the world in forcing governments to take children seriously,” he said.

Lawyer Ken Germer didn’t know much about the plight of street children, and wasn’t even particularly interested, when a missionary came to his Fairfax, Virginia, church to talk about her work with kids on the streets of Belo Horizonte, Brazil. But he believed God was calling him to volunteer a summer at the project, a rehabilitation program outside the city. He was shocked to learn about the death squads, and moved by how the children would emerge from their streetwise, wary shells after they were away from danger.

“They started to become silly again—laughing for almost no reason, just because they were happy,” he says. “Once they can stop worrying about starving to death, being beaten up or freezing, they are able to indulge in the luxuries of childhood: daydreaming, make-believe, flying kites.”

Germer has since returned twice to Brazil to work with the program and recognizes that the children are “impossibly complex people” because of their experiences.

“They can’t forget all the adult lessons they were forced into on the streets,” he notes.

Those lessons include sleeping with their shoes under their heads and spare change in their mouths so it isn’t stolen. They also include inhaling solvents—the kids are called resistoleros in parts of Latin America because of their chronic abuse of the adhesive Resistol, which they use to

dampen hunger pangs and to give them courage for fighting or stealing. Suspicious of adults, they also become adept at begging and manipulating, and they are not above taking advantage of well-meaning but naive Christians.

British missionary Duncan Dyason recalls a group of Guatemalan street kids telling him how they “prayed the sinner’s prayer” every time church groups visited. They said they did so “because after the prayer you got a hug and a chocolate bar.”

A Discarded Generation

Christian programs may often lack in professionalism and resources when compared with secular projects, McDonald admits, but they tap into something that gives them far greater potential—the love and power of God.

“Only through the Christian message will you move children from being the victims of social conditions into being agents of change themselves, when they realize they are sons and daughters of the living God. That is the message of hope, which is more valuable than all the technology you can provide,” he says.

Exemplifying love and hope is no quick fix, though. It takes more than giving some food, a change of clothes and a quick prayer to turn a life around.

It is, in fact, high investment, low return, says Gary Haynes, an American missionary to Brazil for more than 20 years and a founder of several street-kid programs. Though the kids may look heartbreakingly needy in photographs, they can be dangerous up close, he says.

"The problem is, these kids are often violent. Once the boys get to 11 or 12 or so they shoot people, they beat people up and steal," Haynes says. "So often the response is, instead of saying, 'We have a problem,' it's, 'Let's exterminate them.'"

Such killings rarely draw the media in Brazil. "Another dead poor person isn't news here," he explains grimly.

Old before their time, many street kids are profoundly disturbed by their experiences—emotionally and spiritually.

"This work is spiritual," says Sarah de Carvalho, a British former film and TV producer who with her Brazilian husband runs the project Ken Germer visited. "Only He can deliver these kids from the curses and the demonic strongholds, [and] take

the streets from their hearts and heal them on the inside. You can give them counseling, a home, love, but there is something a lot bigger. You need the Holy Spirit's power."

She sees a spiritual battle going on. "You go out and see an 11-year-old boy, and he's filthy. He's using crack and having sex with a girl who is 12, and it's hard to comprehend.

"I believe there is a spiritual element to it all—the Bible says that Satan is out to destroy," she says. "I believe he is out to do all he can to destroy the image of God, and what better way than through children?"

Haynes also sees a spiritual dimension: "There's an atmosphere, or a feeling, when you go into one of these slum areas. You can feel it."

The street-kids problem is “a lot more than just human frailty or weakness,” he adds. “There are definitely spiritual forces of darkness controlling areas.”

In addition to prayer, de Carvalho’s Happy Child Mission offers education and job training, with a fish farm and carpentry classes. The program is partly funded by local authorities. Indeed secular agencies are recognizing that the church is a major resource in tackling such a massive problem, McDonald says.

Viva has identified 25,000 local church and ministry groups working with children at risk in 192 countries in everything from orphanages to day-care programs. But only about 250 of those groups target the “hard-core” street kids.

Johan Lukasse leads one of them. The Dutch ex-teacher and his wife, Jeannette, have directed a program in Belo Horizonte for more than 15 years. Along the way the couple have adopted two handicapped children alongside their own three and introduced innovative programs to try to reach the street kids.

One is the roller-hockey team at their discipleship house. The fast-moving, physical sport appeals to the boys, but it also teaches them discipline, self-control and team work. The team has played in and won local competitions.

The Lukasses also run a home for street children with AIDS—some of whom were born to parents little older than children themselves. They started the place after realizing that local hospitals wouldn’t admit street kids with AIDS. One teen died in the back of an ambulance after being shuttled

from one uncooperative hospital to another.

While some Brazilian churches are addressing the challenges they find on their own doorsteps, many are still not, Lukasse says.

“They tend to be oriented to themselves,” he says. “There’s a lot of prosperity teaching in Brazil right now, so you have the church wanting to be blessed. That draws the focus away from being salt and light in the world.”

If the church fails to meet the kids when they arrive on the streets, the mafia will, laments Phyllis Kilbourn, founder of Rainbows of Hope. Based in Fort Mill, South Carolina, the group has about 120 staff working with children in crisis in 16 countries.

“The mafia uses them to carry drugs, in prostitution—whatever,” Kilbourn says. “Our children are given to us as God’s best gift, and we have taken care of material things better than them. Something is wrong.”

Kilbourn is one of several leaders who are advocating a greater focus on children—street children in particular—by missionary organizations that have largely ignored them. The advocates talk of turning attention to the “4/14 Window”—so named for the age group—as well as the unreached peoples of the geographically named 10/40 Window.

“There has been a real sense of awakening through many mission groups who previously wouldn’t touch kids with a barge pole,” McDonald says.

The fresh sensitivity stems from a new awareness of how deeply God values children. "There is a rationale for a real sense that if we ignore children we are in trouble—because we are ignoring God," McDonald explains.

Doug Nichols agrees. A former missionary to the Philippines, he now directs the work of Action International in Mountlake Terrace, Washington, and travels widely to speak about street children, urging Christians to get involved.

"God made a child to be cared for," he says simply. "My grandchild doesn't worry about what she is going to eat. My grandson doesn't worry if I will beat him or rape him or slap him. He is secure in the love of his parents and his grandparents. That's the way God planned it to be."

While visiting the streets with missionaries in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Nichols asked a group of homeless boys when they had cried last. One told him it had been when his friend had left him—after several years together of fending for themselves.

One morning as they ate some bread, the friend heard his mother calling him. She had been searching for him every week since he disappeared.

The boy told Nichols: "He ran into the arms of his mother, and she took him by the hand, and they walked away. I saw my best friend walking out of my life, and I began to cry because I wished my mother would find me."

Nichols reflects: "Maybe his mother will never find him, but we can find him and care for him and love him. The book of James says pure religion is this—to care for the orphans and

the widows who are in distress.”

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Children (Nelson Word). You can order it for \$ including postage by calling (888) WCN-NEWS or writing World Christian News, P.O. Box 26479, Colorado Springs, CO 80936.

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Rescuing Brazil's Street Kids from Death

Street kids are finding a brighter future—and safety from brutal death squads—at Lois and Marcondes Marques' Christian school.

Lois Marques has firsthand knowledge of the Brazilian death squads that offer a brutal solution to the problem of the country's teeming gangs of street kids. They offered the ministry leader their services in the tourist beach city of Fortaleza where she runs a pioneering program with her husband, Marcondes, that aims to keep at-risk youngsters from swelling the city's 35,000 street kid population.

The couple was having problems at the bakery they had established to provide job skills and income to some of the low-income families in the area. The business was a favorite target for robberies—and Lois had already been through one with a gun pointed at her head.

"We had bread and cash, two things they really liked," she says. The couple called the police, asking for help.

"We were talking to a captain and saying, 'Isn't there something you can do about this?'" Lois says. "And he said, 'This problem could be eliminated, permanently.' Just like that. We knew what he meant.

"We said, 'We don't want to go that way.' But that's the way it happens."

Murders do still happen in the city, she says. More commonly the street kids are "persuaded" to move away from the tourist parts of

Fortaleza, which is trying to promote itself as a vacation spot for foreign travelers.

"More and more of them are being shipped to the slum communities. The authorities say they are getting them into school and all this, but those who are living there know better," she says.

The Marqueses, however, are getting kids into school—before they end up in the streets. After almost a decade of caring for some of the kids on the streets, the couple—who met while working at a drug rehabilitation ministry in Virginia—was discouraged by the small results they were seeing.

"We were rescuing 20 or 30 from the streets, but another 300 were going to the streets. We were really brokenhearted," she recalls. They decided that with other ministries around to continue the street work, they would try to develop something

that would address the problem at its source.

The result was Channel to Brazil for Christ's "University of Life," a school program that keeps youngsters off the streets and away from temptation and teaches them skills that offer a brighter future. Currently, 200 are enrolled, ages 7 to 16, with a considerable waiting list.

Students attend chapel services, as well as drama, music and computer classes. The majority make a commitment to Christ through the influence of the staff.

"We see our position as training the leaders of tomorrow," Lois says.

To avoid charges of paternalism, the school charges a monthly attendance fee of \$1 per student. "The kids brag they are in a private school, because they have to pay for it," she laughs. Many church members ignore the street-kid problem because they are overwhelmed by its scale and are struggling to get by themselves, she observes. But some Christians are facing the issue.

"We have a lot come to help," she says. "They begin to see that these kids are really beautiful and have so much potential."

Showing Mercy to San Francisco's Gay Teen Prostitutes

Kerri Patterson leads a ministry reaching male runaways who sell sex in the city's infamous Tenderloin area.

They came to the city of peace and love and found neither. Now they make do with brief periods of drug-induced well-being, purchased with their own bodies in bartered moments of pseudo affection.

A generation after San Francisco established itself as the hippie capital of the world, young people still come in search of some vague dream. Polk Street is a rude awakening.

This neighborhood in the infamous Tenderloin district is where the most desperate of San Francisco's young runaways end up—hustling tricks as male prostitutes to pay for drugs, food or a night in one of the area's many cheap, rundown hotels. Most of them are 17 or older, but Kerri Patterson has known them as young as 14.

"A lot of them haven't really come to terms with what they're doing," she says after three years working among the group. "I remember one guy who hated himself for what he was doing, but he also realized that in some perverse way it was meeting a need in his life."

Many come from difficult home situations, with an absent or abusive father. Others have had a Christian upbringing, throwing out what they see as petty legalism for freedom and adventure—or leaving because their parents could not accept that their son was gay.

"Polk Street is like the end of the line. It's the fastest way to make money, and they feel like they are in control of their lives. But they really are not. Most of them never think of the future. They are thinking ahead only as far as the next meal or drugs," Patterson says.

Speed and heroin are the preferred drugs, for their availability and affect. Overdosing is only one danger. AIDS is a threat both from used needles and sex. Sometimes clients beat the young men for added pleasure.

Patterson leads a Youth With A Mission team that visits Polk Street regularly with jugs of hot chocolate and homemade goodies, catching the men between nighttime tricks.

"Usually, the first few times we talk we don't bring up God at all, because a lot of them have heard so much of the Word, but they haven't seen it acted out," she says. "We want them to see our lives."

They refer contacts to other agencies in the city that can offer specialized help, and invite people to a weekly Bible study where there is also food, a shower and a safe bed for the night. The team has recently opened up a community home for those serious about wanting to make a new start.

"We want them to learn to get addicted to Jesus instead of the drugs," says Patterson, who is 28. "There's a lot of misunderstanding of who God actually is—that He is angry and distant, not gracious and compassionate.

"But the Bible says that it is God's kindness that leads us to repentance. It's the lies of the enemy that keep these people bound."

Patterson sees beyond the perversion, finding something priceless in those offering sex for sale: "They are like God's hidden jewels. I believe they will blow the world away once they grab hold of God, and that He will use them in amazing

ways.”

Rescuing Exploited Children In the Philippines

At Camp Jabez outside Manila, Jeff Anderson has created a lifeline for desperate kids.

To tourists, the jeepneys of Manila are a photo must. To Danilo, the brightly decorated, cannibalized jeeps that clog the Philippine capital's streets and choke the air with fumes are the closest thing he knows to home. For the last five years he has spent his nights sleeping in different parked vehicles around the city.

Danilo is just one of the hundreds of homeless and hopeless young people Jeff Anderson has met in more than a dozen years on the streets of the chaotic Asian city. There are said to be as many as 100,000 street kids across the greater Manila area. Some have come from the country's poor, rural provinces—only to find that things are not much better in the big city. Others have drifted away from one of the city's countless slum communities.

Through Action International Ministries, Anderson works with volunteers from local churches to run summer camps that get the youngsters away from the streets for a few days. At Camp Jabez, set on 40 acres outside Manila, the kids are offered beds, sports, activities, Bible teaching and “lots of food.”

The hope is that when they return to the streets they not only will know more about Christ, but also will have established

some sort of relationship with a volunteer from a church in their area. But Anderson knows that real change can be a long time coming. "This is a long-haul ministry," he says.

Practical help is important, but not enough in itself. "Working with street kids is more than just giving clothes, good food and first aid, and telling them about Jesus," he says. "These kids are involved in drugs, witchcraft, prostitution, crime. There's real spiritual warfare that takes place."

Spiritist practices abound in the Philippines, with everyday acceptance of mediums, faith healers and seances—sometimes intertwined with Catholicism. "These kids know who are the spiritual people in their neighborhoods. When you go on an outreach you need to know what the spiritual strongholds are in the area."

There is more than just spiritual danger, though.

"We understand that the kids are controlled by syndicates," Anderson says. "[And] sometimes we are up against police and authorities that are not all that honest. You just have to be alert." Even so, he knows one local church member who was stabbed to death as he waited for his wife one night.

Anderson was working with troubled youth in his home town of Minneapolis when he first heard someone preach about the needs of street kids in the Philippines. He knew it was "a call from God."

In addition to the usual perils of drugs, disease and violence, the Manila street kids can be prey to another

particular danger—the sex industry. Manila is known as one of the Asian cities specializing in underage partners for visiting “sex tourists,” and though authorities have cracked down to some extent in recent years, Anderson says that has only dispersed the scene and sent it “underground” from the once-infamous Ermita red-light district.

During the years he has seen more Filipino churches getting involved in ministry to the needy young ones, but it wasn't always that way.

Says Anderson: “I had one pastor tell me one time, ‘Why reach the street kids—because they don't tithe.’

“I said, ‘That's true, but what does the Bible say about working with the poor and the vulnerable?’

“We reach these kids because they are in God's heart.”

Love for Outcast Kids in India

Freddy and Daisy Paul's center in Chennai embraces hated street kids with food, medicine and work skills.

Raja was 8 years old when he got lost on the way home. That was six years ago, and he still hasn't found his way back. He remembers what the place looks like, but he doesn't know the address. He wants to see his family again.

Now a teen-ager, he's one of an estimated 150,000 children surviving on the streets of Chennai (formerly Madras)—an Indian city of 8 million people and even more gods—by doing

odd jobs and sleeping where they can.

They may earn a few rupees as rag pickers, sifting through the rotting garbage for items that can be recycled, or as helpers in one of the many street-side businesses. Some are used as virtual slave labor.

They risk infection and industrial accidents in the makeshift workshops. Diseases like tuberculosis, typhoid, malaria and jaundice are rampant. Prostitution spawns AIDS and venereal disease.

In a country where millions eke out a desperate existence—many literally making their homes on the sidewalks of some of the choked, chaotic urban centers—people like Raja can easily be overlooked. “Because many of them are so dirty they are treated as less than human. People don’t want anything to do with them,” says Freddy Paul, a former street-gang member who with his wife, Daisy, leads a Youth With A Mission (YWAM) team working with street kids in the city center.

Daisy started reaching out to street kids after a personal encounter with a youngster begging for money. She had dismissed the incident as just one of many children scrambling for change. “But when I reached home, God started speaking to me,” Daisy remembers. “He said: ‘I love them. Do you love them and care for them? Will you carry My love and caring heart and tell them that there is a hope and a future for them?’”

The YWAM workers visit favorite haunts—train stations, bus stops, subways—to befriend the kids. They take time to get to know them before offering further help. “Only when trust is built will they be willing to get help from us,” the Pauls

say. "They are suspicious of strangers because there are so many people trying to take advantage of them all the time."

That includes those in authority. The kids often complain that local police abuse them, either by extorting from them what little money they have to overlook their presence or by rounding them up on mere suspicion of wrongdoing.

The Pauls run a drop-in center, where the young visitors can get food and medical attention and learn valuable work skills. Then there is a full-time shelter for those who want to leave the streets. The workers try to reunite the youngsters with their families when that is possible—they are currently trying to help Raja trace his family.

"Most of them are from broken families, so they run," the Pauls say. "They are emotionally damaged. When they come to us we start praying with them and counsel them, and listen to their problems with the help of the Holy Spirit. We ask the Lord to intervene."

Taking Hope to The 'Sewer Kids' Of Russia

Bob and Esther McCauley's Project Hope searches out St. Petersburg's throwaway kids—no matter where they live.

Most visitors to St. Petersburg visit the magnificent Hermitage Museum to find Russia's treasures. Bob and Esther McCauley look in the sewers.

Not far from the home of some of the country's greatest works of art, the grandparents from Kokomo, Indiana, find youngsters huddling for warmth next to the city's warm underground pipes.

Local officials estimate that some 30,000 children fend for themselves on the streets of the country's cultural capital, where exhibited riches contrast sharply with the everyday poverty that still grips the nation a decade after the fall of communism.

"Many of them have homes, but their parents are alcoholics or prostitutes, and they aren't welcome there or don't want to be there," Bob says. "Some are sent out to beg and only allowed home again when they have enough money to buy food."

Glue sniffing is rampant. Girls often are drawn into prostitution. Boys get caught up in running errands for the mafia. Scores of them end up in jail, where the conditions are even worse than on the streets.

Workers with the Project Hope ministry, which the McCauleys operate for Worldwide Evangelization for Christ (WEC) International, befriend and care for youngsters on the street and visit the prisons. They take the kids on outings, provide them with food and clothing, and help with their schooling.

And they pray. "Spiritual warfare is very important," says Bob, a General Motors senior project engineer who took early retirement to help start the ministry two years ago. "Without prayer, and God moving and blessing and doing things in a real supernatural way with these kids, we are not going to see the results we need and want."

"We try to do everything we can physically to help them, but prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit working in their lives is essential."

Members of Oakford Community Church in Oakford, Indiana, the McCauleys became involved in the ministry through Esther's visit to St. Petersburg with a shipment of relief supplies. She was taken to the sewers where she met a group of children ages 8 to 14 living under the streets.

Shaken by what she saw, Esther and her guides prayed through tears after they climbed out of the ground.

"One of the little girls came out of the sewer and asked: 'What is the matter? Why are you crying?'" Esther recalls. "We told her we were praying and crying because we cared about her. She looked up and said, 'Nobody ever cared about me before.'"

The 60-something couple, some of whose 10 grandchildren are the same ages as those they see living in such desperate conditions, say they wish others in their situation—with time, health and means to support themselves—would give their later years to similar kinds of ministry.

"We both know God wants us there. We could go to Florida and stay in the sun, but that's not what God wants, and we want to be obedient," Bob says. "Hey, why not burn out for Jesus?"

Some 30,000 children live on the streets of St. Petersburg.