

January 2002 Update

What causes so many teens in cities such as St. Louis and Houston, and in cities and towns all over Honduras to join violent gangs? Why do kids in comfortable suburban communities smuggle guns into their high schools in order to shoot innocent classmates? And for what reason do young men and women join terrorist organizations such as Al Qaeda, willing to die for the cause? All three questions lead to an even greater one: What is missing in the lives of today's youth?

An article in the Jan. 14, 2002 issue of "People" magazine about Richard Reid, a terrorist who tried to set off a bomb in his shoe on an airline flight in December, gives one answer to these complex and troubling questions. According to a friend of the thwarted terrorist, he "was always in search for an identity."

Could that same search for identity in this lost and increasingly godless world be the reason why teens in Chicago will join a gang and teens in Saudi Arabia or England will join a terrorist cell? Would a teen-ager commit a violent act against innocent people in order to avoid living a purposeless and drifting life?

Frighteningly, it seems that the answer to this question is a tragic "yes."

In Honduras, juvenile violence is spinning out-of-control. This is especially true in the sprawling slums, where life can be short, mean and literally "every man for himself." Not a day goes by in which a picture of slaughtered teens is not splashed across the front pages of the Honduran newspapers. Buses and taxis are afraid to go into the slums for fear of being caught on gang turf. The Micah boys who live in these areas will sometimes go to visit their families, but will always escape their neighborhoods by three p.m. to avoid being caught after dark without sporting a "Mara Salvatrucha" or "18" gang tattoo.

But what else is there for kids in the slums? Education is not an option for most of them. And, not being literate, the only jobs they can get are hawking wares in the outdoor marketplace, where they are just as likely to get involved in gangs as in their own slums.

And their homes? If they have a father at home, more often than not he is drowning his own sense of powerlessness in a bottle of guaro, the local alcohol. Why stay at home, where they are likely to encounter only hunger, poverty and domestic abuse?

Gangs, at least, offer camaraderie, activity, and a kind of violent power over other people's lives that masks the powerlessness of their own.

Those kids who don't get involved in gangs often flee to the streets to avoid the dead-end life that the slums offer. But other teens look for different means of escape. That was the tragic case of a teen last month in the Micah Project neighborhood.

Misael is a slight, quiet 14 year-old. I've seen him riding his bike in our busy neighborhood on many occasions. Once, last October, when I ran in to him in one of the many home mini-markets (called "pulperias" in Spanish) in our neighborhood, I asked him what grade he was in. He replied that he had dropped out of school after the sixth grade, and when I asked him if he worked, he again replied negatively. Here was an intelligent and well-spoken boy with no goals, no dreams, and no options. In other words, a typical Tegucigalpa teenager.



(Above: Misael (blue hat) participates in youth group with the Micah boys.)

On New Years Eve, the day I returned from a week's trip to the U.S., two of the Micah boys signaled that they wanted to talk with me after Misael passed by our front door on his bike. They told me that four days earlier, his fifteen year-old brother had committed suicide by hanging himself in their shared bedroom.

How does a fourteen year-old deal with such a profound personal tragedy? I sent one of the boys to get Misael, and invited him into the Micah House. He was pale and hunched over as he took a seat in my office, his eyes hidden behind a baseball cap pulled low over his face. I told him how sorry I was for his loss and asked him if he wanted to talk. Although we hadn't talked apart from our brief interaction last October, he began to spill out his brother's story. He pulled out a CD case from the deep pocket of his carpenter pants. Instead of a CD, however, the case contained a ragged and well-worn newspaper report of his brother's death. He began to cry as I read it, saying that the newspaper article was all lies. I realized that I was probably the first person with whom he had talked about his brother's death. How many times had he read and re-read that article, alone in his grief?

When Misael was done crying, he got up to leave. I asked him to come to the Micah House as often as he liked. Over the next few days, he did just that. And, little by little, he began to see that our boys are very different from the average Tegucigalpa teenager. Far from viewing life as meaningless, the Micah boys understand God's deep love for them, and based on their unmovable identity as His children, they are seeing how He is and will continue using them to advance His kingdom.

As the days pass, I've seen Misael smile more-and-more. He seems comfortable, if somewhat awed, by the flurry of meaningful activity in the Micah House. After much prayer, I asked him to join our educational program. Last Wednesday, he started as a seventh grader in the Micah Institute!

Helping these boys understand God's love, and helping them discover the marvelous ways in which He will work in them and through them—this is truly the Micah Project's calling in this lost society. It is easy for me to get overwhelmed sometimes—so many kids being driven to the brink of destruction! That we could be a beacon of God's love and purpose to all of them!

At the same time, I've seen well-meaning organizations take on too many kids and programs, only to find themselves too swamped to be able to give each child the love and support that he or she truly needs. We invest so much love, energy and time into each Micah boy that I am confident that we are working with exactly the right number at this time in our ministry. As much as I would like to reach out to each one of the innumerable hurting children in this city, the Micah Project must rely on God's guidance to help us grow in a wise and healthy way.

And our ministry will grow this year! Next week, we will open our community library to kids in our neighborhoods and some street kids. Sure, we want them to be turned on to reading through our library. But even more importantly, how many of

them will find that same seed of hope that Misael found when first entering the Micah family? How many of them will have an interaction in our library that will turn the tide of meaninglessness in their lives?

We will also be supporting our first teenager with a college scholarship fund this year. As I mentioned in my last letter, Darwin Pavon, from our Villa Linda Miller project (www.villalindamiller.thinkhost.com), managed to graduate high school despite losing his home in a hurricane and his dad in a car wreck, all during his high school years. He will stay with us five days a week while he begins his studies in the National University in February. Our scholarship also provides enough to allow Darwin to help put food on the table for his widowed mother and six siblings.

This will also be an important year for our boys, several of whom will be turning seventeen or eighteen. We have formed a ministry committee among the boys to allow them to decide where and how they will do their outreach this year. We are preparing these boys to be Christian leaders in this fallen world; thus, they must begin to seek God's will for their personal ministry even now, at a young age. Just last Friday, the boys presented a powerful skit and song about the need for Christian unity at a prayer service sponsored by eight or nine Honduran churches from a variety of denominations. They were the only youth to participate in the service, and people literally swarmed up to them afterwards to tell them how touched they were by the boys' presentation.

Joining us in our ministry this year are Erin MacLean, Becca Hogan, and Lauri Deniakos, three talented young women from Chicago, St. Louis and Houston respectively. With so much support, I believe that God will use our boys this year to begin to push back the clouds of evil that threaten to destroy the youth of this city and country!

I hope that you will consider being a part of the Micah Project in this powerful year for our ministry. I know that almost a hundred of you will come to participate hand-in-hand in the Micah Project's ministry this year. For the rest of you, we very much need your prayers for the boys and for all those to whom we will minister this year. This truly is a battle between good and evil, and your prayers can provide us a strong foundation for this fight.

Also, we very much depend on your financial support for the Micah Project. We have current commitments for about 65% of our operational funds for the year 2002. Additionally, we are raising funds for our College scholarship endowment fund, which we hope to have available to support our boys when they begin to graduate from high school and begin college in the next three or four years.

The boys' ministry has already begun in 2002. Last week, Oscar came back to the house, excitedly sharing the news that two people accepted Christ through a group Bible study he attends. At the same time, Cristino was preparing Sunday school lessons, Danilo was helping some young children practice a dance to perform at their church, and Jarvin was writing a new skit about street kids. There is one thing that shines clearly in all of their eyes: hope! And it is hope that will turn teen violence into teen victory!

Please join us as we support these boys...agents of God's hope in this desperate city!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

February 2002 Update

It was on a six-month internship in Honduras in 1993 that I first developed a desire—a calling—to work with street kids. Seeing defenseless children thrust out of their homes and onto the streets, living to survive and surviving only by the least of margins, first broke my heart and then steeled it with a desire to serve these children.

Working in Honduras for several years now, I've had the opportunity to visit many institutions that work with children. I began to realize that every institution has to answer one basic question: "How can I help the most children possible without lowering the quality of care to each one?" Most often, an organization will take more children than it originally intended. Why? There are so many desperately poor children in Honduras who need help! Yet, just as often, I see organizations that struggle to truly meet the needs of each individual child, because their numbers have grown too fast and too far.

The Micah Project has made a difficult yet important decision. To concentrate on a few boys, to provide them a family environment in which they can grow into powerful and loving adults, to disciple them as they grow into leaders who will serve others with their talents and their lives—these are the deep tasks, which have been our focus for the twelve boys with whom we work.



(Above: the boys get ready to watch a soccer game with Roger!)

No, it is not easy to look a street kid in the face and tell him that we have no room for him right now in the Micah Project. It hurts, in fact. We would love nothing better than to take all the kids off the streets, give them a warm place to sleep and three

good meals each day. But if we are caring for fifty or sixty children, when will I have two hours to spend talking through life issues with Cristino? When will our volunteer have an afternoon to spend one-on-one with Noel, who so needs such a validating time?

When you meet our boys, you will understand the fruits of the family environment that we have created with them. They are not just learning social skills; nor are they simply learning how to form a disciplined daily routine. They are learning to make goals for their lives, to think through the decisions that they are faced with day-by-day and to delay gratification in order to achieve their ever-budding life goals.

More amazingly, they are not just learning; they are already beginning to teach! Whether it be through their work with street kids at a local crisis center, their evangelistic outreach to neighborhood teens, their work with our community library, or by teaching Sunday School and discipleship groups, our boys are already taking the fruits of God's Kingdom that have blossomed in their lives and using them to plant seeds throughout Honduras!

It is truly a blessing that so many of you, our supporters and prayer warriors, understand what we are trying to do with our family and stand beside us so faithfully. It is my hope that this Annual Report will help you to see the results of your support in 2001 and to learn about how God will grow our ministry in 2002! Also, our website (www.micahcentral.org) will continue to provide you with frequent updates throughout the year!

Thank you for continuing to partner in our effort to form Christian leaders here in Honduras!

~ Michael Miller

April 2002 Update

Young Darwin can be seen as a symbol for the last few months of the Micah Project. The watchword for these months could be “maturity,” both in the boys and in the project itself!

Darwin has definitely matured physically since he left six years of street life last August. Gaining at least thirty pounds and several inches, Darwin now looks every one of his fifteen years. He has also become quite the academic in the past couple of months. Last Thursday, Darwin finally learned the entire alphabet, thanks to the creativity and long-suffering patience of his teacher, my co-worker Erin MacLean. Darwin made sure that everyone knew of his victory over the alphabet, going from room-to-room during the school hours of our home-schooling project to show everyone the alphabet he had written out. That night, he forewent T.V., soccer and other free-time activities in order to write the alphabet over-and-over again until his 9:00 bed time. The next day, he was able to read the word “mariposa” (butterfly) without help!

But it was last month that our maturing Darwin made me “burstingly” proud. For the third year in a row, the high school and college groups from my home church, the Central Presbyterian Church of St. Louis, Missouri, came over their Spring Breaks to support the Micah Project. As is our custom, we spent some time on the streets ministering to the street kids. This year, instead of visiting Darwin on the streets as we had in the past, he was the one chosen to LEAD the group to minister to his friends still living on the street corners and in the alleyways.



Darwin was so proud to be the leader of the group. At times he walked a block ahead of the group, only to stop and wait anxiously for the group to catch up. Finally, he reached a corner where eight or nine street kids were inhaling glue in various states of consciousness. For years, this group of kids had been Darwin’s family—or as much of a family as a group of broken and lost kids could put together. Any time a group of Americans walks through the streets of Tegucigalpa, it is bound to draw attention, but this time, the kids gathered around Darwin. Is this “La Chancha?” they asked incredulously, using his street name—“Little Pig.” They spent several minutes looking over their friend, who seemed to have grown up over night. One of them lifted up Darwin’s shirt to make a comment about the meat on his bones!

Darwin helped to pass out some food to his friends. At the same time, he encouraged them to stop using drugs and to follow in his footsteps by leaving the streets. One of the boys, Juan, split apart from the group to talk to us alone. He lifted up his own shirt to show us a festering, infected stab wound on his chest. He told us about the juvenile gangs who roam the streets, often attacking the street kids. After a few minutes, he looked at Darwin and said, "Don't leave the Micah House. Don't ever come back to the streets." He said it sadly, a little longingly, but what courage and compassion it took him to say it to his longtime friend!

So far, Darwin has followed Juan's advice. He is already planning his party for his one year anniversary this August (he wants a party at the beach on Honduras' north coast!). Darwin is not the only Micah boy who is maturing, however. While they suffer through many of the adolescent "crises" as any normal teen would, we see them clearly moving toward an adulthood in which they will "stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured" (Colossians 4:12).

Sometimes, however, maturity comes at a price. One of my most important jobs is to convince the boys to stay in school, to focus on their goals and not waver to the right or left, although many of them are several years behind in school. Currently, we have three seventeen year-olds studying at a ninth grade level. Although they were in the fourth grade three years ago and have been able to advance at a faster pace in our home-schooling program, they will still be twenty or twenty-one years old when they graduate from high school and begin their higher education.



(Above: Erin MacLean chats with her pupil Oscar Izaguirre.)

Will they be able to delay gratification, to avoid the temptations of the world around them and to see their educational course through to the end?

Most of them most assuredly will. They have begun to form solid goals, and they realize how vital a good education is in order to achieve a life of service and leadership--a life dedicated to their Lord. Oh, but what a long wait, when adolescent passions and energy are urging them to run forward at full speed!

Last week, Noel weighed the options in his life, and he left the project, choosing instead the faster—yet illusionary—way to success. Nineteen year-old Noel was the most behind in classes, having just finished sixth grade last December, and having only learned how to read the year before. Add to that the fact that six years on the streets and on drugs, a much longer period than most of the boys, left Noel struggling both academically and emotionally. For that reason, we decided with Noel to enroll him in a technical school this year to learn carpentry. For a couple of months, he seemed to enjoy the technical school, and the sense of responsibility and maturity that it gave him. But, he also came home occasionally frustrated by how difficult some of the classes were for him.

Noel began to listen to the wrong people. They talked to him about ways to get-rich-quick in other countries—no education or preparation necessary. And one day last week, Noel left the Micah House to go to school, and never came back. After doing some investigative work, we found out that he and a couple of other young men from his school were headed out of the country.



(Above: Cristino, Michael and Noel)

It is hard for us to know that our love, encouragement, teaching, and support were not enough for Noel to stick with his path. But, as our oldest and farthest behind, he would have been 24 by the time he had graduated from high school. He did the math, and to him, it didn't add up.

The other Micah boys are very sad for Noel; they believe that he closed the door on a unique and blessed opportunity in his life. Thankfully, Noel's hasty departure seems to have made the other boys even more determined to continue striving towards their own goals and not fall into the same trap that he did.

Noel is the first boy who has left the Micah Project on his own volition. As difficult as that is, Noel's departure has helped us to mature as well. For it has reminded us that we can only raise these boys for the time that God has placed them in our lives; ultimately, it is up to them to follow the calling that God has placed on them, or, to follow their own path. Sometimes, their paths may not be as straight or as smooth as we would wish them to be. But, as a dear friend so gracefully put it when I wrote him about Noel, "thankfully, we have a God who does not despair of prodigals." We must pray that Noel is one prodigal who will one day find his way back home, and who will learn his lessons from life astray.

Noel's departure also came in a week of intense spiritual warfare for the Micah Project. It was a week in which the project itself was taking a step of maturity. As I wrote last week, the Micah Project hired Jeony Ordoñez to begin a ministry with the children and youth of Villa Linda Miller, the community that we founded for 165 families that lost their homes in Hurricane Mitch in 1998. You may recall that we felt that this ministry would participate in spiritual warfare. The alcoholism, abuse, and familial disintegration in Villa Linda Miller are signals that Satan has his claws deeply imbedded in this community. Thus, we had planned a prayer vigil for last Wednesday evening, to ask God's protection and blessing in this spiritual battle and in our new ministry at Villa Linda Miller.

The night before the prayer vigil, the Micah boys were playing soccer at their usual time and place. Halfway through the match, Danilo ran into another player and broke two of his fingers. Fifteen minutes later, as Danilo was headed to the emergency room, Harvin ran into another player and broke a finger on the same hand as Danilo, in the exact same place! After staying in the hospital to the wee hours of the morning, Jeony and the boys returned exhausted to the Micah Project to begin a day that would end with the prayer vigil at Villa Linda Miller. Since the boys play soccer every day without breaking bones (ok, MAYBE one broken bone a year!!!), we believe that this "coincidence" was Satan's way of trying to distract us from the mission at hand that night at Villa Linda Miller.

Despite that fact, the prayer vigil was an extremely powerful time. I will honestly tell you that it was the most intense and powerful time of prayer in which I have participated for many years. I believe that it was the perfect way to inaugurate our ministry in Villa Linda Miller. And, as one fruit of those prayers, we are already

working with over 150 children each week in programs that Jeony and our boys have initiated at Villa Linda Miller.

The day after the prayer vigil, however, is the day that Noel disappeared from the Micah Project.

I believe that the battle lines are clearly drawn. God has graciously used our work, and your prayers, to bless the lives of the Micah boys, and to begin blessing the people at Villa Linda Miller. Satan, however, would love nothing more than to distract us from this purpose. As the Micah Project and our ministries mature and reach more people, we will need your prayers ever more urgently, that we may “be strong in the Lord” and “take [our] stand against the devil’s schemes.” (From Ephesians 6:10-11).

It is my prayer that you will be blessed by the victories that your prayers are working in the lives of our boys and those to whom we minister, and that those setbacks and challenges that we encounter will urge you to keep praying!

Thank you for your willingness to pray and support the Micah Project’s ministry!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

Summer 2002 Update

David is the quiet one of the Micah Project. Though a bright and cheerful young man of seventeen, David's years on the streets have left a deep well of silence in him. Occasionally, you can still see in his eyes the pain that those tragic years caused him. You can tell by his look that he thinks often of his mom, a desperately poor woman who lives in a shack that teeters on the edge of a hillside slum, or of his brother, who has been in and out of jail because of his gang involvement. In a way, David's quiet character has an adult-like quality to it, having experienced the rough waters of life at so early an age. Yet, it also carries the aspect of a little boy who stills fears being left alone to fend for himself in a scary world, as he had to do at the age of six.



(Above: David (purple shirt) living on the streets.)

In our group of outgoing leaders, he is the one who is mostly likely to sit back and let others have the spotlight. His normal response to an advance of friendship or a started conversation is a nervous laugh and a little smile. If you can wade through David's silence, however, you will find a sweet and gentle spirit that is more profound than the world-conquering hubris of your typical teenager. But, you have to work hard in order to find that hidden place in David's life.

In the last couple of months, though, David has found a place where his gentle spirit can flourish. In the Micah Project's new ministry with the children and teenagers of Villa Linda Miller, David has begun to show a leadership ability that matches his personality perfectly!

David has been working with the kids since we began our ministry in Villa Linda Miller in April of this year. Villa Linda Miller is a new community for 165 families that lost their homes in hurricane Mitch in 1998. The boys and I met these families

immediately after the hurricane, when they were living in temporary shelters with absolutely nowhere to go. Because of the generosity of so many caring people, we were able to buy land in February of 1999 to help the families begin to rebuild their lives. The families worked hard to build their new community, and finally inaugurated it in November 2001 (see www.villalindamiller.thinkhost.com).

Early this year, we began to feel the burden to work with the children and teens of Villa Linda Miller. Alcoholism, abuse and infidelity are all too common problems, and in too many cases, it is the children that suffer the consequences. Additionally, many of the children and teens are not in school. In April, the Micah Project hired Johnny Ordoñez to help us begin a ministry among the families at Villa Linda Miller, in order to bring the love of Christ and a new hope to them.



(Above: David ministers to the children of Villa Linda Miller.)

Johnny is a superb influence on our boys, and he has mentored them to take the reigns of this new ministry. For the last three months, the boys and Johnny have gone out to Villa Linda Miller, which is about five miles outside of Tegucigalpa, in order to work with the children three afternoons a week. Each day, they do Bible lessons, songs, games, crafts and other dynamic activities with the children. The boys are responsible for teaching the classes and for all of the planning which is required!

It was then that David was assigned to work with the two-to-four year olds. Upon retrospect, it seems that this decision was God's way of using David's shy character in a new way. For, the quietness in David that makes him shy around adults is the

very same quality that makes him approachable to toddlers! His little charges truly love him. They come voluntarily every day for his class, either alone or with the help of older siblings. From what I have observed, they think of him more as a living jungle-gym rather than a teacher!

I asked David the other day what his favorite moment has been in his class. He said that it happened during his very first class with the youngsters. He had asked the kids to bow their heads so that he could pray at the beginning of his class. To his surprise, they began to repeat after him every sentence of the prayer! Although it seems like a simple thing, that one act drove home to him what a great responsibility God had given him in these children's lives.

David talks especially about a little girl named Rubelia. She is a child of a single mother, and she has begun to look to David as a father figure. David says how surprised and touched he is that she has so much confidence in him. The first week in June, we were out at Villa Linda Miller every day with a medical team that came from Houston to run a clinic for the families. It seems like every time I walked outside that week, Rubelia was demanding another piggy-back ride from David!

It warms my heart to see David's personality flowering in this new ministry, even as he begins to impact these young lives. It is also a lesson to me. We had always looked at David's shyness as something to improve upon. Yet, it was that very character trait that God used to allow David to build loving relationships with these children. This reminds me of what a blessing it is to me to be able to work with each one of our boys as individuals, as special and uniquely talented children of God. My goal is that the Micah Project would continue to offer each one of them opportunities to flourish in the path that God has planned for them!

While I have had three or four years to be able to get to know many of the boys, with our new boy, José, the process is just beginning! This 14 year-old came to us in April, after reaching the age-limit for the orphanage in which he lived. His story, as with the rest of our boys, is steeped in tragedy. His mom abandoned his alcoholic father several years ago, leaving José, as the oldest son, in charge of his four brothers and sisters. José left school in order to shine shoes on the streets, hoping to earn enough money to keep his family fed. Eventually, he had to flee his home with them to avoid alcohol-induced wrath, and he became his siblings' sole protector--on a street corner in Tegucigalpa.

Since January, Jose's younger siblings have lived in an orphanage in Tegucigalpa. He himself lived there for awhile, but as he reached adolescence, he had to find a new place to live. We were overjoyed at the prospect of accepting him into our family! He looks up to the older boys in the project, and they are a good influence on him. Right now, he is a sponge, soaking up the lessons that the other boys have learned through their years with us. When I think of how much the older boys have flourished in the years we have known them, I am excited to see what God has in store for José!

As a friend from the U.S. wrapped up his visit last month, he said "You know that these boys are treasures, don't you Michael?" My answer is a definite yes! To me, it is a great privilege to be able to witness the great flowering that David has had in his life recently, just as it is an honor to be able to be at the ground floor of a new work in José's life. I hope that you all feel blessed as well by what your prayers and support have wrought in the lives of these boys. And look how your support is being multiplied in so many lives! The boys teach over 80 children a week in their new ministry at Villa Linda Miller.

As I finish this report, I am looking at a picture of David with two of his little students at Villa Linda Miller (I've placed this picture on our website at www.micahcentral.org/David.html). Knowing David as I do, I can still see on his face in this picture the gentle and quiet spirit that will probably be a part of him for the rest of his life. But I see something new as well: a new ability to express his love and a new confidence in the talents that God has given him. This young man, who once was a scared little boy so afraid of being abandoned once again, is now a powerful and loving influence in the lives of many young ones. To me, that is the miracle of God's transforming love in David's life!

Thank you for being part of this transforming work!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

September 2002 Update

“Aren’t you afraid that the Micah boys will forget where they came from?” This is a question I am often asked by friends and supporters of the Micah Project. After all, the boys have a world of opportunities before them; there is no limit to what they can achieve in their lives after leaving the Micah Project as adults. Should we fear that they will forget their roots and all God has done to lift them out of their nightmarish childhoods? Is it possible that, knowing what it is like to go days at a time without food and shelter, they will focus their futures only on material gain in order to avoid living through such need again?

These are fair questions. Indeed, for young men who spent the first years of their lives fighting for survival, it would seem logical that they would use all of their education and career training to become as comfortable and secure as possible. Yet when I see the choices our boys are making in their lives, even now as teenagers, I am filled with hope that their future lives will truly be about servant-leadership, and not just about financial security.

One reason for this hope is that the boys are getting a taste of what a true joy it is to serve others. Seventeen year-old Danilo confessed this joy to me last night as we were chatting. Danilo serves at our new ministry at Villa Linda Miller and Villa Madrid five days a week in the afternoon. These two neighboring communities are home to over 300 families that lost their homes during Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Since May 2002, the Micah Project has served the children and teens of these communities. Danilo is in charge of the entire children’s ministry, meeting once a week with five volunteers to help them plan the Bible activities, crafts and games for the week. He also teaches the third-through-sixth graders. Much of his free time at the Micah house is spent planning for the children’s program!

A true testimony to his success is that his kids have fallen in love with “Professor Danilo!” In fact, Danilo is such a good teacher that it recently got him into trouble with the Villa Linda Miller children. When we began our ministry at Villa Madrid a couple months after launching it at Villa Linda Miller, Danilo began teaching in the new program, leaving his volunteers to take over the classes at Villa Linda Miller. When his kids heard about the change however, they threatened to go on strike until they got Professor Danilo back! He finally decided on a compromise, teaching at Villa Linda Miller one week and at Villa Madrid the next.

As we talked about his responsibilities last night, Danilo said that working with the children of these two communities is the beginning of his life’s ministry. He expressed amazement at the strength and confidence that God has given him in his work, and at how blessed he is to be used by God in these children’s lives.



(Above: Danilo works with his students in Villa Linda Miller)

As Danilo talked, it was I who was amazed. For such a young man, Danilo has learned a lesson that many of us never quite get: the pure joy that comes from serving others without asking for anything in return. Seeing his face light up as he talks about his ministry gives me the confidence that he is already well on the way to a life of service, a life that will model Christ's love to those who do not yet know it.

There are many examples in our boys lives that show that the lessons they are learning are not just staying within the four walls of the Micah Project. Oscar, for instance, is not directly involved in our ministry at Villa Linda Miller, since he practices five days a week on a national junior soccer team. He dreams of being a pro soccer player, and it is very likely that he will achieve it! Even though soccer takes most of his free time, he is still showing servant-leadership. Often, he invites his teammates to our bi-monthly youth groups at Villa Linda Miller. Last week, one of his teammates accepted Christ at the meeting! The cut-throat world of soccer in Honduras is not the easiest place to maintain one's testimony; yet, Oscar is showing what it means to be a light in the darkness on his soccer team.

Last Saturday, I received another assurance that the boys would not forget their past. Two Micah Project founders, Randy Mayfield and Neal Nielsen, came to Honduras for a few days to support us in our ministry. On Saturday, they joined us on home visits with six of our boys so that they could meet and pray with their families. As we climbed steep dirt tracks into some of the most dangerous neighborhoods of Tegucigalpa, we were able to see firsthand why the boys would choose living in the streets over their homes. Most of the homes we encountered were little more than wooden shacks. Magazine ads were pinned to the walls to cover holes in the rotting wood planks. While many of the homes had multiple

extended family members living in one room, conspicuously absent in the homes were fathers.

You might think that, after visiting these places, which are often filled with cruel memories, the boys would work even harder to escape them. On the contrary, after the visits, the boys did not talk about escaping their families as much as helping them. Micah boys Harvin and Darwin are a good example. Their tiny one-room home provides shelter for their mom, aunt, sister, brother-in-law and several children. Their aunt is pregnant yet alone, since her boyfriend was stabbed to death in a drunken brawl just outside their front door in early March. Harvin's mom is 44 but looks closer to 60; years of hardship have etched themselves into the lines on her face. One of Harvin's cousins no longer lives there; at the age of ten, he has already chosen the same path that Harvin and Darwin and is living on the streets. Yet, as we visited his family, Harvin didn't focus on the hopelessness. "Part of my goal in life is not just to transform my life," he told Randy and Neal, "it is to help transform my family as well." After we joined hands and prayed with them, Harvin prayed for his family as well, asking that Christ's love would enter and change their lives.



(Above: visiting Marvin Soto's family.)

That day of family visits was difficult; the poverty we saw was hard to comprehend. Yet, there were hopeful moments as well. We saw in the boys' eyes that they still loved their families, still pray for them, and still believe that God can transform them. No, the Micah boys will not forget where they came from, or live life simply to

escape the poverty in which they were raised. The boys are and will continue to be witnesses to God's transforming love in their families' lives.

One other conversation struck me at Harvin and Darwin's house that day. Their brother-in-law mentioned that he too grew up in an orphanage. In fact, one year, he won the award for the best-behaved boy in the orphanage. After leaving that project, however, things went bad for him as he moved back into his gang-infested neighborhood. Today, he barely scrapes by, sometimes making only a couple of dollars each day selling plastic containers on the street. Judging from his glassy eyes and Harvin's stories, he probably drinks away what little money he earns.

That is an all too common story: kids receive a shot at life at an orphanage or home, only to fall back into misery upon leaving because of a lack of support. At the Micah Project, we feel that we must continue to support our boys until they can make a successful transition into adulthood. Cutting the ties of support too soon will leave them adrift in a hard city where even kids from stable families struggle to make a living. Because of that, we are earnestly planning the next stage of our project: the Leadership House. This will be a place for young men aged 19-22 who want to continue their studies but will not be able to without support. It will be a place for our young men to make a deliberate and successful move towards independence.

In this city of 1.2 million, which has doubled in size in the last ten years, apartments are almost unheard of. A young person often finds himself in sub-standard living conditions—conditions that can be almost impossible for a serious student. To make matters more complicated, the National University does not offer student housing. The "Leadership House" will provide a residence for young men who are leaving projects such as Micah while they are completing their university studies. A residential director will help the young men make a successful transition into adulthood by providing such services as discipleship, tutoring, career counseling, personal budget management, and relationship counseling.

The goal of this new phase of the Micah Project is as follows:

"To prepare young men in the last stages of adolescence who lack familial support to become confident, competent servant-leaders who have the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and material means to transition successfully into Christian adulthood."

The Leadership House will allow the young men to move into independence while providing them with a supportive Christian community through these formative years. We hope to raise funds to purchase a facility by July 2003 in order to have the Leadership House operating by January 2004!

I will be bringing our five oldest boys to the United States with me this October: Marvin, David, Cristino, Olvin and Harvin. These boys are our first candidates for the Leadership House; three of them will be turning eighteen before

the end of this year! This trip will be a excellent chance for you to see how God is transforming these ex-street kids into Christian leaders!

We will be in Houston from October 3-10, in St. Louis, Missouri from October 10-23, and in Washington D.C. from the 23 to the 28th. If you live in or around St. Louis, your best bet to meet the boys will be at Randy Mayfield's concert on Friday, October 11th. Randy, vice-president of the Micah board of directors, will be debuting his new, missions-oriented album, "A Heart for the Nations." The boys will be singing and giving their testimonies at the concert. Please feel free to call Randy at the Central Presbyterian Church for more information about the concert at (314) 727-2777. Let me know if you are interested in meeting the boys at another time as well!

As our boys continue to grow, please pray that they would continue to listen to God's voice in the present as He prepares them for His work in the future.

We hope to see you in October!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

November 2002 Update

Three of the Micah Boys have turned eighteen! In September, Marvin was the first of our young men to turn 18. His biggest present was a driver's license! He has been tooling all over Tegucigalpa in my battered 1984 pick-up, doing errands for the Micah Project. Now I know why parents start going gray about this time period in their children's lives!

On the night of Marvin's birthday, we invited his grandmother and his father to dinner at a very nice restaurant in Tegucigalpa as a surprise for Marvin. As we ushered them into this posh restaurant, they looked around them in amazement. For their whole lives, Marvin's family has seen dinner as something that they may or may not have each day, depending on how hard the times are. But on Marvin's birthday, they celebrated a true feast!

Marvin's grandmother Coronada has wrinkles that testify to her 82 years, but she also has the brightest and liveliest eyes I have ever seen. She sat down in front of the finery at that restaurant, combing her hands through her silver hair, anxious to make sure she looked her best at this special occasion. During the meal, we asked her many questions about her life. For twenty-four years she has sold peanuts on the streets of Tegucigalpa. She sets up a wooden box on the sidewalk in front of a bank every morning at daybreak. She lays her little packets of peanuts and cashews in neat rows and sells them to the bustling pedestrians of the city all day long.

By selling bags of peanuts, she raised almost all of her grandkids and many of her grandnephews and nieces by herself. Even today, she has two or three young kids living in her tiny adobe house. Every day, she walks down the mountainside that she lives on in order to catch a bus into the city to her peanut-selling spot, and every night she climbs back up that same mountain to her home. These days, she has begun to slow down quite a bit. When I pass by her selling peanuts, I either find her reading the Bible or dosing on her little stool. But whenever she sees me passing by, she gets out of her chair, hugs me, and greets me as if I were the most important person in the world.

During our meal on Marvin's big night, he asked his grandmother about her life growing up. She told of a very hard life. She grew up in a tiny village, and she never once saw the city until the day she moved into it. With her husband's death, she became the sole provider for her extended family. She did her best to raise her grandkids, but there was a time when hunger and abuse from other members of their family forced them to the streets. Coronada's story is indeed a hard one. Yet, amazingly, she never focuses long on the tragedy! She told her stories with a joy and a spark that made the suffering fade into the background. How can a person with such a hard life find such joy in living? About halfway through our meal, Marvin leaned over to me and whispered, "This is the best birthday I have ever had." After dinner, we drove up to his grandmother's home (a very scary uphill drive!)

and shared a cake with the rest of Marvin's family. It began to rain as we sang to Marvin, and Coronada had to move the cake to avoid it getting wet from the rain coming through the holes in her ceiling.



(Above: Marvin and his grandma)

At eighteen, it is a miracle that Marvin is finally able to see some blessing in his history which has mostly been defined by tragedy. Just as his grandmother tenaciously holds on to hope despite a hard life, Marvin too is beginning to see the good in the difficult circumstances of his life. He even believes that the hardships of his childhood will be used by God as He uses Marvin to reach out to the downtrodden and poor in spirit of this world. Although Marvin eventually had to leave his home for the streets because of poverty and abuse, it is easy to see that his grandmother passed along her chispa--her spark--to him before they parted company!

We tried to celebrate Jarvin's and David's eighteenth birthdays grandly as well. We celebrated Jarvin's birthday on our October trip to the United States. He was able to celebrate his birthday three different times with people who have met him in Honduras and who love him as a son and brother. Being able to spend time in the States with so many people who love and pray for him was probably his favorite birthday gift! (For pictures and stories of our trip to the U.S., see www.micahcentral.org/ustrip.html). David's eighteenth birthday was last Sunday. We spent the day at the park, trying to teach the boys how to play American football!



(Above: The boys meet Michael W. Smith on a trip through Nashville!)

Our next eighteen year old will be Cristino in February, and Danilo will be crossing the line into adulthood in May. Our boys are proud to turn eighteen, but they have shown some fear as well. Since they lost years of schooling on the street, they have two or three years of high school left; they will graduate high school at the age of 21 or 22.

We are committed to supporting our boys until they can achieve the dreams that God has given them. At the same time, we recognize that our young men will need greater independence, more decision-making responsibilities, and a place where they can take those last important steps into adulthood. That is why, for the last year, we have been planning the Leadership Project. Next year, we will be purchasing a building which will serve as an independent-living facility for our older boys. In this way, the boys will have the space to make their own decisions, while still participating in Micah family life.

The Leadership House will have a residential director(s), as most college dorms do, to continue to mentor the boys during this transitional stage of their lives. We hope that the Leadership House will accomplish the following goals in our boys' lives:

1.) Provide a safe and healthy living environment for young adults, where they can experience independent living while at the same time receive support from a caring and guiding residential mentor(s).

2.) Provide maximum support to the young men in order that they may receive the education necessary to become servant-leaders in the career or ministry they choose.

3.) Assist the young men in making a smooth transition into Christian adulthood, including discipleship, job training, financial counseling, help on college studies, marriage or pre-marriage counseling, etc.

4.) Provide spaces where the Leadership house men can reach out to their non-Christian peers, including a library, computer center and good study environment.

The young men who live in the Leadership House will pass through three stages. In each stage, they will acquire more responsibility as well as more independence. By the end of the third stage, they will be able to make a smooth transition into an independent adult life. We have developed outcomes which we hope that the boys will display in their lives through their experience at the Leadership House. These outcomes refer to the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, professional, and material aspects of the lives of the young men. Below are some examples of these outcomes:

1.) Spiritual: The young men will choose to formulate habits of a growing spiritual life, such as prayer, devotional time, Bible study, church attendance, Christian fellowship, and service in an ever increasing desire for holiness.

2.) Intellectual: The young men will have a thirst for knowledge and a joy of learning, and will know how to obtain knowledge in order to deepen their understanding of God's general and special revelation, and thus, know Him better and serve Him with wisdom.

3.) Emotional: The young men will seek counseling, encouragement and support when making important life decisions or when life's burdens threaten to overwhelm them, and will learn to avoid self-destructive behaviors through the support of a loving Christian community.

4.) Material: The young men will learn how to manage their money in a God-pleasing way through such skills as formulating a personal budget and finding an appropriate balance between spending, saving and giving.

If you would like to know more about the Leadership House, I would be glad to send you a complete profile. It is our goal to have the Leadership House running by January 2004. We have identified six buildings near the current Micah House that are options for purchase to use as the Leadership House facility. In October, we began a capital funds campaign to raise the \$80,000 to purchase and rehab a facility.

It is our goal to purchase a facility by July 2003 in order to spend the last months of 2003 to get the building ready for the Leadership House.

We ask that you would prayerfully consider supporting the Leadership House building purchase. If you would like to donate to our Leadership House capital funds drive, you may write a check to "The Micah Project" with a note indicating that the funds are for the Leadership House. The check may be sent to the following address: Mr. Randy Mayfield, Micah Project Vice-President; 7700 Davis Dr.; Clayton, MO 63105. We understand that many of you donate generously to our operational budget; those funds support the daily activities of the Micah Project and are still much needed for 2003! Anything that you might be able to donate over-and-above those funds would be greatly appreciated for the Leadership House. All funds are tax-exempt according to our U.S. non-profit status.

So many of our boys have already developed a vision for serving our Lord in the future. We believe that He will use their time at the Leadership House to bring those visions into sharp focus these young men. It will be the launching pad for lives lived for Christ and His Kingdom.

Thank you for your support of these budding Kingdom-workers!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

Christmas 2002 Update

This past Sunday, the Micah boys and staff gathered around our kitchen table. It is our tradition to spend some time at a Sunday meal for reflection and community time. On this day, we lit a candle at each of the three tables in our little dining room. We then read the famous Christmas-time verse from Isaiah: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." We then reflected with our boys about the coming of that light...the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Being on the missions field, I must admit that sometimes the darkness of this world seems overwhelming. I recently read a news article which ranked Honduras in 78th place out of 80 countries in terms of economic viability. The United Nations Population Fund indicates that 72% of Hondurans live in poverty, and 3.5 million people live in extreme poverty. This poverty threatens to tear at the very soul of a society. There are an estimated 20,000 street children in Honduras; six percent of these children end up taking their own lives, unable to bear a violent and seemingly hopeless life.* This year, hundreds of teens and children have been killed in the gang violence that is turning poor neighborhoods into war zones. Just last week, one of our boys was walking on a downtown street when a group of armed men attacked an armored car. Our boy looked on as a female cop and a twelve year old boy were killed in the shootout that followed.

Sometimes, I dream about moving our project out onto some distant mountain, far removed from the terrors of city life. Yet if our boys are to be light-bearers in their society, they must be fully involved in it. And while we try to make the Micah Project and warm spot where the light of our Lord brings peace, our boys must face the darkness of this world head on. And, occasionally, they lose a battle with the darkness.

Recently, one of our boys did something that was extremely hurtful to himself and to the other boys. For many weeks, he let the darkness of his sin eat him up and drive him deeper and deeper into "the shadow of death." But what our boys are learning is that, once you have basked in the glorious light of our Savior, it is impossible to turn your back to it for long. Finally, this boy came to me and confessed all that he had done. He prayed that God would forgive his sin, and he received that forgiveness! We talked for many hours that day, and he was restored the joy of his salvation.

About a week later, the same boy said that he was ready to confess to the other boys in the Micah Project. His actions had created a tension in the project, and everyone felt the oppression of unspoken acts. Two days ago, we called all of the boys into my office in the Micah house. It is a small room, and the fourteen of us were tightly packed in. This boy began to confess what he had done. He told of how his actions had destroyed him on the inside, and how he understood their anger and

resentment against him. He said that the worst part of his actions was that he had hurt them as well. We reflected on sin, forgiveness and grace for a while and then, one by one, the boys hugged this boy and told him that they forgave him.

At that moment, you could almost see the light shine anew in this boy's life! Then, he did something that I have never before seen. He got on his knees before each boy, and he bent down and kissed their feet. One by one, he moved around the circle, humbling himself before each boy. It was the purest and most beautiful act of gratitude, humility and joy in forgiveness that I have ever seen in my life. While this boy did hurtful things, his confession was a gift to me and the boys that we will never forget for the rest of our lives. In an age in which it seems that it is "every man for himself," in which humans will go to great lengths to avoid saying "I'm sorry," this boy modeled for us the true meaning of grace.

For that is truly what Christmas is about...second chances. Our God became man and died a sinner's death so that we may throw our sins before him in utter assurance that he will say "you are forgiven." His sacrifice is our one road out of the shadow of death, the one road that leads to the Eternal Light of his Kingdom.



(Above: celebrating Christmas with the boys!)

In a way, the Micah Project is about second chances as well. The tragedy of abandonment and the horror of street life ingrained in our boys a darkness that, as I mentioned in the statistics, seems hopeless. Yet, in the three years that we have ministered to these boys, we have seen the bonds of darkness broken. What a joy it is to see them live in the Light!

Let me be frank, though. As with all of us, sometimes the darkness that surrounds our boys calls them back to itself. Sometimes, darkness seems easier, sometimes it seems more pleasurable, and sometimes, it seems downright unavoidable. Will they always be able to avoid this world's temptations? No! Will they always be able to come back to our Savior's light in repentance? Absolutely!

In our same Sunday dinner last week, we read one more Bible verse together. In Philippians, Paul asks us to seek purity, "so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life." Perhaps the most amazing thing about this season is that we realize that, broken and darkness-loving people that we are, Jesus allows us to reflect his light to this world.

I beg of you to join us in prayer for the boys of the Micah Project. Pray that the dark corners of their souls that were damaged in their childhoods would be purely cleansed by their Savior's light. Pray that they would resist the great temptations to jump back into the darkness. And pray that, day-by-day, their Lord's light would shine ever brighter in their lives.

May we all throw ourselves before our Savior's feet in joy in this season of Light!
Merry Christmas!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller