hurricane mitch
1,000 days after
Anjelica in 1998.
Her life then—and now.
I GREW UP IN THE 1950S ON A STEADY DIET of movies and TV shows featuring cowboys and Indians. I always rooted for “the good guys,” the cowboys, as they valiantly fought “the bad guys,” the Indians. There were no shades of gray, only black and white, as the good guys defended helpless settlers and fought for American sovereignty over the land. The bad guys were lawless and godless in their savage attacks on helpless men, women, and children.

I never really thought twice about this view of American history until my college years, when I read Burly My Heart at Wounded Knee by Dee Alexander Brown. In this account, Native Americans had flourished for centuries before the arrival of European colonists, who helped themselves to the land with little or no regard for the rights of the people already living there. Many tribes sought peaceful coexistence with the settlers, but the treaties they signed were broken as new demands for land and expansion arose. While tribes indeed committed violent acts, they were often provoked by the colonists’ actions. We know that this story ultimately ended in the near extinction of Native Americans as they were forced onto reservations, their lands stolen, their homes and herds destroyed.

Recently, I had a similar adjustment to my belief system when I met a remarkable community of Christians living in another land. These people are suffering great persecution. They must fight for American sovereignty over the land. Their land can be confiscated, their homes bulldozed without warning or compensation. They are denied even the most basic human rights—not because they are Christian, but because they are Palestinian.

“I grew up in the 1950s on a steady diet of movies and TV shows featuring cowboys and Indians. I always rooted for ‘the good guys,’ the cowboys, as they valiantly fought ‘the bad guys,’ the Indians. There were no shades of gray, only black and white, as the good guys defended helpless settlers and fought for American sovereignty over the land. The bad guys were lawless and godless in their savage attacks on helpless men, women, and children.

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I was shocked by what I saw as I traveled to Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank a few months ago with 12 pastors from the United States (read their reflections on pages 26–29). We worshipped with Palestinian believers and even stayed in their homes, listening to their stories of suffering and injustice. They asked: “Why don’t our Christian brothers and sisters in America care about us?” I found this hard to answer. I said, “Most do not know that these things are happening, or that Palestinian Christians are suffering. Most of us support Israel without question because of past atrocities against Jews and because of our interpretation of biblical prophecies about Israel.”

Although only a small percentage of Palestinians are Christians, they help us see that human rights abuses are wrong, no matter who—Christian or Muslim—is injured by them. The United States has denounced such abuses in other contexts, such as South African apartheid and the persecution of Mus- lims in Kosovo, but the Palestinians’ plight has been consistently overlooked. We must not look the other way when our friends violate basic human rights, letting the ends justify the means.

Let me state clearly that neither side in this immensely complex situation is without fault. Both parties have committed unthinkable atrocities over the past 30 years. I do not claim to know the solution to this exceedingly tragic situation, but I have learned that there is another side to this modern-day story of “good guys and bad guys.” My heart was broken by what I saw in Israel, not because I favor the Palestinian cause over that of the Israelis, but because I am to love all my neighbors—especially the downtrodden—regardless of race, reli- gion, or politics. Let us pray for a solution to this conflict—a moral solution, not just a political one—that sees both parties living together peacefully in this sacred land.
How does World Vision share Christian faith?

CHRISTIAN WITNESS is key to every World Vision program. We are an interdenominational outreach of Christians concerned about people’s physical and spiritual well-being. God’s love is the inspiring force behind our efforts throughout the world.

Christian witness is more than what we say. It is the essence of who we are: our attitudes, thoughts, and actions. World Vision staff desire to model Christ-like behavior at all times, so that people will be drawn to place their personal faith in Jesus. Being spiritually equipped prepares our staff to share the gospel in their communities. We encourage our staff through opportunities for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship with other Christians. We aim to use language and methods that are truthful, God-honoring, and unifying. We communicate our faith in ways that are sensitive and appropriate for the cultural context in which we work.

World Vision’s projects often are in nations that do not allow the open expression of Christian faith. “The fact that we cannot speak publicly does not render God speechless,” explains Bryant Myers, World Vision International vice president of mission. Eduardo Gumbua, a World Vision health officer in Mozambique, says, “I have heard people that we assist say there is a difference between World Vision health care, a Muslim asked: ‘Why are you training Muslims? Muslims wouldn’t train Christians.’ This is a question to which the gospel is the answer,” notes Bryant.

Many countries do allow us to openly share the Good News. In Guatemala, one project provides a day care center for 110 children whose parents live and work in a garbage dump. Every day the children receive a balanced diet and clean clothing, and learn about Jesus’ unconditional love.

In Ethiopia, a father of a World Vision-sponsored girl gradually became interested in Christianity through his interaction with World Vision workers. He asked if they could give him a Bible. “The Bible teaches me about God and the Holy Spirit, I love Jesus and I wanted to learn more about him,” he said.

Innovative programs such as Just For Kids are another way World Vision shares the gospel. “The goal is to reach children with the message of Christ’s love in a fun-filled way,” said BolaBasinor, a Just For Kids team member in Lebanon.

After presenting a Christian musical drama to children, the team distributed kits containing Bible stories, colored pencils, a pencil sharpener, a coloring book, and a tape of Arabic Christian music and stories. “Now I understand that Jesus is the only way to God,” said recipient Giuseppe Kabboushi.

Where possible, World Vision supports local churches through training programs that equip pastors and church leaders to be more effective in their communities. These programs include providing Bibles and other Christian materials to believers, prayer initiatives, pastors’ conferences, and training in peace-building and reconciliation.

Through mutual acceptance and respect, World Vision continues to establish good relations in the communities we assist, enabling us to offer powerful witness to Christ through ministry efforts.

Cheers for Chonda
I attended Chonda Pierce’s concert in Charlotte this spring. While her show was fabulous, the truly meaningful part for me was her endorsement of World Vision. I have been sponsoring a girl in Thailand for eight years. I stood up when Chonda asked people to stand who knew about World Vision.

I just got my magazine [Summer 2001] with Chonda’s article, “Handy-Waving Mission Work.” Thanks to Chonda for encouraging more than 4,000 new sponsors per her concerts. Keep up the good work!

Joanie Hunt, Charlotte, N.C.

A Perfect Match
In February, people in India and El Salvador suffered loss due to earthquakes. At the same time, we suffered the loss of my mother. It seems a perfect match that some of the money from the sale of Mother’s house would go to build a new home for a family in either India or El Salvador. We know that as you minister to the physical needs of the people, you are sharing God’s love with them.

Clyde and Kathy Stickney, West Lebanon, N.H.
Violent South African township.

Gqaza faced down many challenges to achieve security and success in a poor, poverty-stricken area.

Every gate Mdeliseni makes bears his company sign.”Most of my income kept Mdeleni and his older brother, Vusumuzi, fed, clothed, and in school.

He spent months looking for another job, but no one would hire a blind black man. Finally, all he could do was peddle cigarettes.

Mdeliseni says, “I remember going the whole day without food. I couldn’t concentrate in school. I would fall asleep because I never had anything to eat at lunchtime.”

Often unable to pay school fees, both boys went to school intermittently. Amos and Legina grew sick with worry about their boys’ future. The area was rife with rival gang fighting and violence.

Mdeliseni hopes to establish a center in Mpumalanga to train and motivate more people like Sthembiso. “I get tired of hearing, ‘No one will give me a job.’ We need to be entrepreneurial,” he says. “If everyone could just think about creating jobs for themselves and others, we wouldn’t have such a huge unemployment problem.”

Leaving work aside, Mdeleni sits with Mandisa, stroking the girl’s head as she wriggles with laughter. “Sponsorship helped me get where I am today. I never lost that feeling that there was hope of anything better,” adds Mdeliseni, lingering in the doorway. “I remember the Reverend coming to our house. He gave me a Bible and told me that God loved me.”

“Before this, I wasn’t working,” says employee Sthembiso Zuma. “Now I’m making money and keeping busy.”

“Amos’ company shut down under sanctions pressure. Today, the company has a steady stream of orders for gates and burglar bars—good news for Mdeliseni and his team.

“Before this, I wasn’t working,” says employee Sthembiso Zuma. “Now I’m making money and keeping busy.”

“One of my children to become engineers,” says Mdeleni. “I want them to be self-employed and to be able to create their own futures.”

In other words, to be like their dad. Mdeleni owns M & G Gates and Fences, a welding business that thrives on the demand for security gates in his high-crime township. He employs six welders and fitters as he walks into the kitchen to fetch a glass of water.

By his success, he also thanks World Vision. “Because of sponsorship, I could get a welding machine, weld equipment, M & G Gates and Fences was born.

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hurricane mitch  1,000 days after

Thousands of homes have been rebuilt.

Seeds are in the ground.

Schools used for homeless shelters serve as busy classrooms again.

But when the rains come, the children sob, the mothers fret, and the fathers wonder if it is happening again.

One thousand days after Hurricane Mitch, nothing is the same.

BY KARI COSTANZA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JON WARREN
The hurricane zeroed in on Honduras, moving on a slow and murderous westward path from the north coast through the central mountains, finally reaching Guatemala on Oct. 31.

Mitch killed more than 5,000 people in Honduras. In hours, the storm wiped out decades of economic development. Three thousand people died in Nicaragua, most of the victims of a mudslide that obliterated two villages. Guatemala and El Salvador lost hundreds.

A thousand days after Hurricane Mitch, Central America remains marked by its menace, especially Honduras. The memories of Mitch are still vivid and painful. Setbacks from the storm continue to batter the country’s economy and psyche. Those setbacks have created new problems—and new opportunities. For World Vision Honduras, Mitch became a chance to implement a new vision for the country, centering on its most treasured resource: the family.

“Mitch changed our vision for the future,” says José Luis Figueroa, World Vision’s manager of organizational development. “Before Mitch, we focused on being the best we could be. Now our focus is on the family. We want to change people’s lives and hearts with Christian transformation at the center and economic development as a major element. Changing systems and schools as well. In many cases, says World Vision Honduras’ Milagro de Castro, hopes to help Honduras. Along the way we hope to make them feel that being a Christian is not just being faithful—but showing our love and commitment to others.”

One thousand days after Hurricane Mitch, there is a storm of activity in Honduras, spearheaded by organizations like World Vision, designed to move families permanently toward a more stable future.

“It will take time,” José Luis says, “but we’re on the path to get there. We feel lucky to be on that path.”

**The capital. José Luis would get home at 6 the next morning, I was so eager to get to work.”**

Sponsorship staff conducted an exhaustive child count, organizing community volunteers to find every sponsored child and assess his or her condition. Because of the damaged roads and social upheaval, the count took several months to complete. Seven of the 38,000 sponsored children had died during the storm. Staff telephoned sponsors immediately with the sad news.

Medical brigades led by Romauldo Rodriguez crisscrossed Honduras for three months, taking medical supplies and health care to the most vulnerable populations. (Read more about Romauldo on page 15J.)

Nearly 50,000 people joined in a food-for-work program in the countryside, receiving corn, rice, beans, cooking oil, and fish in exchange for repairing roads and rebuilding homes. With the generous donations that poured in, World Vision built 5,500 new homes, and new water systems and schools as well. “In many cases,” says World Vision Honduras’ Dr. Edmundo Orsono, “people actually ended up in better living conditions than they had pre-Mitch.”

World Vision provided seeds, tools, and fertilizers for farmers left with nothing. Staff also gave families baby chicks or piglets to raise for food or profit. Some families received goats, as their milk supplies extra nutrition for undernourished children.

Staff counseled and comforted hurricane victims at storm shelters. Providing spiritual and emotional support during a crisis is an essential part of World Vision’s Christian witness.

**A quiet morning in Limón de la Cerca, in southern Honduras. World Vision built 35 new houses here.**

**After the storm.**

The staff emerged from months of stress and turmoil stronger and focused. Since Mitch, World Vision Honduras has grown in size and technical expertise. Before the hurricane, 50 staff worked with a $4.5 million budget. Today, the budget has doubled, with 80 new staff. Child sponsorship has increased from 38,000 children before Mitch to 45,000 after the hurricane. Nearly 400 staff serve families in World Vision’s 23 project areas. One staff member smiles, “Mitch has left us over-worked and over-stressed.” It’s no wonder.

One thousand days after Hurricane Mitch:

- Up to 40 percent of the population still has no access to quality medicine.
- People are flooding into the cities, further burdening municipal health-care systems and social services already stretched to their limits. “They’re looking for jobs, education, and health care,” says Dr. Edmundo Orsono.

- Agriculture, responsible for the majority of exports, is making a slow comeback. Seventy percent of Mitch’s damage affected the agricultural sector, as the hurricane ripped topsoil, crops, and even entire farms from the ground.
- An economic recession looms. Gas prices rise every other week, increasing the cost of doing business. As much as 80 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, up 10 percent since Mitch.
- Many are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Depression is said to affect 30 percent of the entire population.
- The complex relationship between a spattering economy, a nationwide depression, and deep-rooted poverty is leading to a new, dangerous urban phenomenon: violent, organized gangs. Fifteen years ago, the word for gangs—maras—was not even in Hondurans’ common vocabulary. Now, fear of gangs has some people afraid to leave their homes at night. World Vision’s Ernesto Galvez, coordinator of community organization, says a recent study of gang members in Tegucigalpa found that 70 percent come from broken homes.

**Family comes first.**

It is in this new Honduras that World Vision conducts full-scale operations to revitalize communities and reconnect families. In two urban centers, World Vision worked with a group from Harvard University on Youth in Action, a project aimed at helping teens stay off drugs, keep out of gangs, and avoid pregnancies.

Families have basic needs, too. In rural areas, World Vision supports stability by strongly encouraging parents to buy silos to store surplus crops. Women learn to increase food security by planting home gardens.

The new family focus is at the heart of every action World Vision takes in Honduras. José Luis says, “We have to change longtime practices, to help people understand why their children die, why dirt floors are bad, why an open fire for cooking inside a house makes a child cough, and why keeping farm animals inside is not good.”

World Vision Honduras is mobilizing a network of partners—the government, churches, and motivated community members—to tackle deep-rooted national problems that the storm made more difficult to solve. It is mainly through the church that World Vision’s national director, Milagros de Castro, hopes to make significant inroads into poverty. “The challenge we share with other non-governmental organizations,” Milagro says, “is how to motivate the church to help Honduras. Along the way we hope to make them feel that being a Christian is not just being faithful—but showing our love and commitment to others.”

**How you helped.**

World Vision donors’ response to Hurricane Mitch was astonishing. You reached out with donations, prayer, telephone calls, and supportive e-mails. At headquarters, cars lined up in the parking lot to leave checks and specially requested hygiene items for Central America. More than 60,000 people directly contacted World Vision’s United States donors gave $24 million in cash and gifts-in-kind to aid the victims of Hurricane Mitch—every dollar, a gift of love.
in 1998 are faring—1,000 days after Hurricane Mitch. When she heard that World Vision photographer Jon Warren was on his way to La Barranca, 100 miles south of Tegucigalpa, Angelica squealed, “I’m going to show him my doll!” She ran to retrieve it from her new home, built by World Vision.

Jon met Angelica in November 1998 while on assignment for a special Hurricane Mitch issue of World Vision Today. Like most in La Barranca, Angelica’s family had lost everything. They were hungry and homeless. Angelica had terrible diarrhea. “The first help came from World Vision,” says Angelica’s mother, Maria. Today, Angelica attends a World Vision-built kindergarten.

In the next few pages, see how other families documented by World Vision Today in 1998 are faring—1,000 days after Hurricane Mitch.

Mario Castillo Osorno

Few stories touch hearts like that of 8-year-old Mario Castillo Osorno, who happened to step outside minutes before a mudslide sent a car-sized boulder crashing down the mountainside, crushing his house and all inside. Mario clung to a small tree all night with a river of water rushing underneath him. He was still screaming when rescuers found him the next morning. His father, mother, and one sister were dead.

Today, Mario lives with his grandmother, Paula, and his grandfather, Segundo, in La Picota, a small village outside Choluteca. Mario’s brother, Julio Cesá, 10, also survived; he had been staying with his grandparents the night of the hurricane. So did Mario’s other sister, Juana Paula, 3, the miracle child found in her dead mother’s arms. “Mario’s mother had two fingers sticking out of the mud as if to say, ‘Here I am,’” explains Segundo tearfully. They dug with shovels to get to the body, then carefully with their hands as they got closer. It looked as though Juana Paula had died while feeding at her mother’s breast. Then, Segundo says, rescuers threw water on the two bodies, and “it was as if God blew breath on her.”

Juana Paula has grown into an independent child whom her grandfather describes as “very tough,” but she carries her teddy bear—a gift from World Vision President Rich Stearns in 1998—everywhere. Segundo says Julio Cesar is doing well, too. “We have to keep him busy with chores or he could be very naughty. He has changed,” the boy’s grandfather adds. “He prays the Lord’s Prayer every night without anyone even asking.”

And Mario? “He’s a different boy,” Segundo says. “He forgets easily. I send him to put the donkey in the pen, and he forgets the rope. I send him to get wood, and he comes back with something else. He got ‘air in his brain’ during Mitch.”

Mario is repeating first grade. According to his teacher, Diana del Carmen Herrera, “He’s a good student who misses too much school.” He’s not alone. Before Mitch, children went to school daily. Now, basic issues such as food, water, and sickness keep them away.

“World Vision has not let us suffer,” Segundo says. Staff built a new bedroom for the children, complete with three new beds. They re-cemented the floor of the house. Segundo has received agricultural training and has learned about terracing and fertilizers. He purchased a silo through the World Vision co-op in which he stores surplus crops.

Sponsorship enables the older children to go to school, after which they play soccer with friends or collect water for cooking and cleaning. Every night, Mario tells Julio Cesar the heartbreaking story of their mother. And Julio Cesar prays.

In his school notebook, Mario (left) draws the same house over and over, with a mountain behind it and a river flowing in the foreground. “No one lives in this house,” he says.

Rudy Joel López

Rudy López, 9, has eyes that are impossible to forget: sea-green, black-rimmed, and sparkling with mischief. His mother, María Anastasia López, sees the world through the same arresting eyes, hers unblinking and tranquil. Rudy is one of 16 children María cares for alone. Four years ago, her husband, Secundino, died of a heart attack while working in the fields. A few months later, Hurricane Mitch compounded the tragedy, overwhelming the new widow, who had just given birth to a girl, Eilyn.

Today, Eilyn is almost 3, and doesn’t venture far from her mother. The child’s eyes follow María as she sits for a moment in their new home in La Barranca, a community south of Tegucigalpa, completely rebuilt with help from World Vision. Like most of the people here, she lost everything in the storm, almost losing Rudy as well. María tells the story from the comfort of the hammock, Eilyn pressing up against her, caressing her neck. “It took three trips to get all the kids out of the house because there were so many. Rudy almost drowned. He was being taken to safety by his brother, and he ran away,” she says.

For months afterward, four families crowded into María’s mother’s house until their new home was completed. She remembers one of those first trying days—before the World Vision relief airlifts began—when seven children had to share one egg. She coped, she says, because “God gave me strength.” She is grateful to World Vision for her new house and the food and supplies that enabled them to survive. Seven of María’s children, including Rudy, are sponsored, and like all sponsored children, they get regular medical and dental checkups. Those checkups are particularly critical for María’s son Luis Enrique, 7, who has epilepsy.

As for Rudy, he’s spending another year in first grade. The mischievous twinkle in those sea-green eyes sometimes plays out in behavior that lands him in the classroom corner. Still, his confidence seems unfazed. Hands in his pockets, Rudy swaggers through the new La Barranca, his brilliant eyes taking it all in.

Francisco and Bella

Victoria Alvarado

Francisco Alvarado’s crops ran up a steep hill, reaching into the blue skies of San Miguelito, in southern Honduras. It is peaceful here; the only sound is the wind moving through the leaves and...
Since the tragedy, Francisco (far right) says, “All I can do is stand on my feet, walk straight ahead, and keep going forward.” Bella and baby Angie (pictured left).

an occasional rooster crowing. On this plot, Francisco, 44, grows corn, sorghum, sweet potatoes, yuca, and squash to feed his family. It is a five-minute walk to the farm, a journey Francisco takes, he says, “against my will.” Three of his children died here during Mitch, crushed by the same soil he now cultivates. Tender bean plants fill a square plot where their home used to stand. The foundation of their home used to stand. The foundation pokes through the dirt.

Their troubles had just begun. Five days after the storm, Leocadio was out at night, with a flashlight to guide him. A friend on horseback approached. Blinded by the light, the horse ran over Leocadio, putting him in the hospital with a broken hip that has never quite healed. Meanwhile, María and Adis stayed in a kindergarten classroom converted into a shelter. “Lots of people were there,” remembers Adis. “World Vision brought us water, food, blankets, medicine, and even toys.” A more permanent solution was needed for El Divisadero, and World Vision staff knew that meant moving a 300-member community a safe distance from its vulnerable location by the river. They advised community leaders to make a list and prioritize the families in need of a new home. For Leocadio and María, this was a “mountain I could not climb.”

In 1998, Romauldo Rodriguez was the medical student who drove a big yellow school bus packed with doctors and nurses to fight diseases after Hurricane Mitch. World Vision Honduras Health Director Dr. Edmund Osorno hand-picked him for the high-stress, high-impact position leading the medical brigades. It took a special kind of person to inspire fellow students to volunteer for three months on the road, sleeping in buses, crossing dangerous rivers, and battling diseases. “They were heroes,” Dr. Osorno says. “They went because they wanted to go, not because they were pressed. They got no money, no awards. In other countries, heroes get medals. These doctors got a nice dinner.” Romauldo, now 34, says many brigade volunteers came away with changed hearts. “Mitch was a great experience for them,” he says. Many, now doctors, volunteer or work at organizations like World Vision. For Romauldo, Mitch “only confirmed my vocation.”

Since the hurricane, Romauldo has married and has a 1-year-old daughter, Gaby. He’ll start an 11-month residency in November and then serve a required year of social service. After that, he’s free to practice medicine anywhere. For Romauldo, anywhere can be only one place. Back home in Intibuca, a small community in western Honduras, Romauldo will start a clinic, serving the poorest of the poor as its surgeons. “I have to do this,” he says. “This is my dream.”

Romauldo says, “World Vision has been a school for me. I was living in poverty when they taught me to find answers for my community.”

In the next issue: NICARAGUA: 1,000 DAYS AFTER HURRICANE MITCH. World Vision is ministering in an area where a mudslide wiped out two communities, killing 2,500 residents. Find out what it means to be “First in and last out”—and why that commitment is so important to the people of Nicaragua.

One thousand days after Mitch, Adis (right) can smile again. She loves everything about her school, especially music class.
It is a Saturday morning, 1,000 days ago. The World Vision Honduras office is flooded. Phone lines are dead. Electricity is out. The toilets won’t flush. In the damp and the dark, staff members begin an assault on the chaos left behind by Hurricane Mitch. At the eye of the storm: Milagro de Castro, the new national director of World Vision Honduras.

José Luis Figerot, manager of organizational development, remembers the scene: “Milagro was one of the first ones here. Volunteers started coming in to ask what they could do. We sent a radio message asking people to bring food or clothing to the World Vision office. Bags, boxes, bread began arriving.” It was the greatest challenge for World Vision Honduras. And no one felt it more than Milagro de Castro.

Milagro started with World Vision in 1982 as a secretary. It was the greatest challenge for World Vision Honduras. And no one felt it more than Milagro de Castro.

Milagro was a miracle. Now she serves in a place where nothing short of a miracle will do.

By Kari Costanza

Hurricane Mitch. At the eye of the storm: Milagro de Castro, the new national director of World Vision Honduras.

José Luis Figerot, manager of organizational development, remembers the scene: “Milagro was one of the first ones here. Volunteers started coming in to ask what they could do. We sent a radio message asking people to bring food or clothing to the World Vision office. Bags, boxes, bread began arriving.” It was the greatest challenge for World Vision Honduras. And no one felt it more than Milagro de Castro.

Milagro started with World Vision in 1982 as a secretary. Over the next 16 years, she worked her way to the position of national director—the head of World Vision Honduras. She had taken office just 47 days before Hurricane Mitch. Now she was in charge of pandemonium.

José Luis witnessed the moment things changed. It was the first week, and everyone had his own ideas for what to do. “I saw Milagro just click and come to life,” he remembers. “She said, ‘Hold it. That’s not what we’re going to do.’ She grabbed a marker, went to the board, and started devising a plan. Once that happened, everything started rotating around her. That was the key point. She didn’t go with the old mind set. In Honduras, we used to do as much as we could with the resources we had. She said, ‘We’re going to do what we need to do—no matter what it costs.’ We believed in her, and we made that happen.”

Other World Vision staff agree. “She is an inspiration to everyone,” says Jessica Cruz. “Everyone respects her direction. And she’s a team player. She doesn’t do anything by herself.” “She is a leader who carried us,” says Fanny Velásquez, sponsorship coordinator. “It was hard to see what happened here. Sometimes she cried. But she was courageous.”

It still takes courage to live in post-Mitch Honduras. Earlier this year, a carjacker followed Milagro home. She saw him following in her rearview mirror and began honking frantically when she reached her driveway. The noise alerted her 11-year-old son, who ran to get his father. With a shotgun aimed at her head, Milagro kept honking. Her husband came running and the carjacker fired at him, narrowly missing. Milagro saw her chance and jumped from the car, threw her keys at the attacker, and hid behind a parked car. The carjacker opened fire on her too. When neighbors appeared, alerted by the honking and gunfire, the carjacker fled. It was only by the grace of God, she says, that no one was hurt.

Milagro is a courageous leader, but above all, she is a team leader. Her eyes well with tears when she speaks of the hard-working people who surround her. What she loves most about her job is seeing the results of World Vision’s work in Honduras. “I love being in the field, watching a community inaugurate a new home. I love sharing with the people who will live there, finding out where they come from. I hear stories filled with anguish. I see a lot of tears. But there is so much joy.”

She was her parents’ joy when she was born 46 years ago in Choluteca, in southern Honduras. Her mother had almost given up on having children, thinking she was barren. When a baby boy was born, they called her Milagro, the Spanish word for miracle.

Her father, who died several years ago, raised her as he would a son. “I talked to a psychologist who said that a lot of men who want to have a boy and end up with a girl raise them as men. It didn’t happen with me,” she explains. “I want to have a boy and end up with a girl raise them as men. It didn’t happen with me.”

Milagro lives with her sister in Tegucigalpa while studying for her bachelor’s degree in business administration. When her sister began talking about becoming a Christian, “I laughed at her,” she admits. “I thought she was crazy.” Then their uncle, a pastor, shared the gospel with Milagro. This time she listened.

Now, Milagro lives out her faith, putting God first in everything.

Milagro juggled a university teaching career while working at a company that exported kitchen utensils all over Central America. There, a young man named Hubener Castro began telling co-workers that he was going to marry her. Milagro’s response: “No way.” When the “party animal” became a Christian, Milagro began to take Hubener’s proposal seriously, one day saying, “Yes.”

The two make a powerful team. “I am where I am because of the support of my husband,” Milagro says. “When I was getting my master’s degree, my family barely saw me at home. Now I travel so much that Hubener has to be Mom and Dad. He cleans, cooks, and takes care of the house.”

He does something even more essential—he prays. “Hubener is the pastor of our family. He prays in the morning and at night, looking after our spiritual well-being.”

On weekends, Milagro is a full-throttle mom. “I share time with my kids,” she explains. “We eat out, we go places outside the city, we go to church. We like to be together as a family.”

They won’t be together much longer. Claudia, 17, a recent high-school grad, plans to work in computer engineering in Canada after college. Nadia, age 14, dreams of practicing medicine in Australia. Son Hubener, 13, loves the idea of aeronautical engineering and going to school in Miami.

While distance may soon divide them, this family is bound by love and respect, with God at the center. “Mom always finds a way to treat people right,” Nadia says. “I want to be just like her—just not so busy.”

words of faith they lived by

For Milagro de Castro, Isaiah 29:9 was especially meaningful during Hurricane Mitch. “In an instant, I, the Lord Almighty, will come against them with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and storm and consuming fire.”

Remualdo Rodriguez drew strength from Luke 7:22: “Then He told John’s disciples,/ ‘Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor!’”

Maria Pastrana in El Divasadero chanted to Psalms 133:1: “How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when brothers live together in harmony!”
For the Christian, it isn’t safe to play it safe,” former World Vision President Stan Mooneyham once said. “Jesus Christ calls us down into the arena where the hot breath of danger hits you full in the face, where the nerves tingle and the blood races, where the adrenaline surges because the game is no longer ‘let’s pretend.’” For more than four decades, World Vision staff has entered the heady arena of natural disasters, human-made crises, and wars to bring life-saving aid in Christ’s name. What’s changed isn’t why we do it, but how.

Through prayer, experience, and growing expertise, World Vision’s response to global emergencies has advanced over the years. Today’s relief operation is marked by preparedness, sophisticated use of technology, coordination of staff worldwide, and rapid, focused aid—the right goods and programs at the right time. We didn’t get there overnight. See how trends and tools have advanced.

**THEN**
- Reactive: Respond when a crisis hits the news.
- Expatriate staff rush to the scene.
- Response time: one to three weeks.

**NOW**
- Strategic: Early warning systems improve preparedness for crisis.
- Global network of staff support local teams on the ground.
- Response time: 24 to 72 hours.
motivating teens to action

H

ow can we get today's teens more involved in serving those in need? Joan Williamson, a full-time youth minister for more than 15 years, has plenty of ideas. She has motivated Christian youth in Minnesota and Washington state to live out their faith through local service activities, mission trips, or by simply reaching out to neglected classmates. This year, as director of Christian education for St. Michael’s Church in Snohomish, Wash., she organized a 30 Hour Famine event for 10 local churches.

Q: Do teens serve because they have to, or because they want to?
A: Service has become a popular fad. Everybody has to volunteer to graduate from high school. Those hours look good on college applications or on résumés. I think the excitement of volunteerism happened in the 1990s, and now kids are getting burned out. The challenge is to help them understand that service is an extension of our relationship with Christ: We are motivated because of a deep love and passion for him—and hopefully we will become more like God. Service is the fruit of that relationship. One who does not serve, as the apostle James says, has a dead faith.

Q: Are teens afraid to come face-to-face with people in need?
A: It’s easier for them to love the home- less or the poor in Mexico—you can go to a soup kitchen, or collect clothes and drop them off. The greater challenge is, “Can I love those people at school whom nobody loves? How about that person who eats lunch alone every day? Can I sit with her and engage her in a conversation? When somebody’s getting bullied, can I step in and help that person?” My encouragement to the kids is: If you can serve at home, you can serve anywhere.

Q: How has World Vision helped you reach out to teens?
A: In the early 1990s, a local church [in Edina, Minn.] was doing World Vision’s 30 Hour Famine. I talked to their youth minister, and it sounded so good, I thought, “Next year we’re going to do that.” That first year, we had six kids, but it was an incredible 30 hours. I was sold on it right away because it’s such a strong educational package—not just about head stuff, but also heart stuff.

Q: Why is the 30 Hour Famine a good tool for reaching teens?
A: It’s 30 hours of intense reflection, a time to think about the needs of the broader world and how we’re called as people with gifts to help others. The kids begin to put it together that there are needs out there, and that in the United States we have amazing resources. We shouldn’t feel guilty about that; rather, we should find out how God wants us to use our resources to help others. In return, we’re blessed.

Q: Which activities have been especially motivational for the kids?
A: Going door-to-door to collect food [for food banks] has been powerful. We don’t leave notes out a week before saying we’re going to do this. It’s almost as if the kids are begging. Sometimes they’re turned down, and sometimes people give what they have, but it isn’t very much, like an opened jar of peanut butter. The stories they come back with…they love it.

We also send kids out for about an hour and tell them, “Figure out how to serve someone.” When we get back together, we talk about what they did. One kid in Minnesota wrote in the snow, “Jesus loves you,” and people in cars on the freeway saw it and waved and honked. Others carried bags of groceries for people or shoveled snow. Those are neat experiences for the kids because they can see how, day-to-day, they can bless somebody.

Q: How do you encourage their enthusiasm, the rest of the year?
A: Always I’m encouraging them—they say bawping on them—to relate to kids who are not accepted. Or, if there’s an elderly person in the community who has become ill and can’t take care of his or her home, we’ll go in on every other week to help. Things like that.

Q: How does service help teens grow?
A: They realize they have the power to make a difference in both large and small ways and that it comes through God. They walk away knowing that their gifts are gifts for the community. Many kids encourage their friends to join them in service. And quite a few have thought about working in the mission field. While planning for college, they look for studies that would be helpful, like civil engineering or medicine.

Q: What’s your greatest challenge in working with kids?
A: Knowing that change and growth in kids takes time. Sometimes you want to see it happen more quickly, but you know that God will work in them over time, and that will bring change. Romans 8:28 says, “In all things God works for the good of those who love him.” He brings the good out of the junk.

Q: And what’s the best part?
A: Hanging out with the kids and seeing God alive in their lives. Because of that, my own faith has increased.

By Jane Sutton-Redner | Photographs by Todd Bartel

By Jane Sutton-Redner | Photographs by Todd Bartel

WORLD VISION’S 30 HOUR FAMINE

What is it? Young people pledge to go without food for 30 hours to raise awareness for world hunger and raise funds to alleviate the problem. During the 30 hours, groups engage in activities and community-service projects that give them a sense of poverty overseas and here at home. Last year, more than 600,000 young people across the United States raised more than $8 million for World Vision projects serving needy families.

When is it? The next national event is Feb. 22-23, 2002, but you can do it anytime.

How to sign up: Call toll-free (800) 7-FAMINE or visit www.30hourfamine.org. World Vision provides everything you need—free—to hold a meaningful and successful event that will change lives within your group and around the world.
The Storehouse, a World Vision ministry in Chicago, removes obstacles between people in disadvantaged neighborhoods and the products they need to build up their communities.

**Building Up Chicago**

The Storehouse—a nonprofit building supply warehouse for low-income communities.

**Story and Photographs by Amber L. Anderson**

When Kim and Phil Jackson first stepped inside the door of their new home in Lawndale, on Chicago's west side, they found themselves standing in a waist-high pile of trash. The building had survived three fires, water damage, and five years of abandonment. But this didn’t keep the Jacksons from seeing its potential. They purchased the home through Lawndale Christian Development Corporation, a ministry serving this disadvantaged neighborhood, and began the renovation process.

After five months of intensive work, elbow grease, and donated products from The Storehouse, the place was transformed. The couple and their three children moved from their cramped rental apartment into the first home that Phil, a youth pastor, and Kim, a community development worker, have ever owned. “This is a dream that has become a reality,” says Kim. “I tell everybody about The Storehouse.”

Part of World Vision’s ministry in Chicago, The Storehouse is a nonprofit program that collects donated building materials from manufacturers and distributes them to qualifying agencies, churches, and families like the Jacksons who live in low-income neighborhoods. Members of The Storehouse can visit World Vision's 40,000-square-foot warehouse and select the materials they need to repair or renovate their homes and community centers. All Storehouse materials are available for a nominal handling fee—usually one-third to one-fifth the retail value of the product.

The Jacksons’ home features new windows, skylights, plumbing fixtures, wall trim, light fixtures, and a bathtub from The Storehouse. “We found so many good buys,” Kim says. Raising their three children on their limited salaries, Phil and Kim could not have afforded such quality products otherwise. In its six-year history, The Storehouse has distributed nearly $10 million in building materials to help rebuild Chicago’s communities. Extra products such as sinks, toilets, paint, and tile formerly taken space in a manufacturer's warehouse or destined for landfill, are now being used to make homes and community centers safer and more functional.

Improving structures can go a long way toward improving people’s opportunities. Read on to see how others have used materials from The Storehouse to enhance their visions for a stronger Chicago.

**Colorful Kids’ Space**

Silence is hard to come by at McCann's Day Care, which serves primarily low-income families on the south side. With 60 children under the age of 6 playing in two large rooms, the children’s voices are matched in vibrancy only by the colorful alphabet posters and construction-paper kites hanging from ceilings and walls. The walls are covered with vivid paint from The Storehouse. The floor tile, bathroom fixtures, and other items also come from The Storehouse.

Director Yvonne McCann started the center 25 years ago with her mother. “There were years where I didn’t get paid,” she admits. “There are still some shaky times.” But their hard work has paid off. “Parents come back and tell us that their kids are doing well,” says Yvonne. “That’s what makes this work so great.”

Now the McCanns are extending their work by partnering with community member Stella Howard to build a new resource center. Yvonne’s friend since high school, Stella sent her three children through McCann’s Day Care and volunteered there part-time for more than a decade. Stella, who also works for a non-profit agency that assists small businesses, came up with the idea of turning an uninhabited, three-flat building into an assisted-living home for senior citizens and an infant day-care center.

Although funding has been hard to come by, the tight budget for building renovations is supplemented with quality products from The Storehouse. The project is closer to completion, thanks to new kitchen cabinets for the senior home provided through The Storehouse.

**Neighbors Helping Neighbors**

Because of her limited budget and poor health, Laverne Davis could not repair the damages to her rental property. Without repairs, the building was uninhabitable, with falling plaster and faulty wiring making it too hazardous to continue renting. An elderly woman on a fixed budget, Laverne needed the rent income each month to pay her bills.

A neighbor, Albert Melton Jr., noticed Laverne’s situation and volunteered to oversee the repairs, using materials from The Storehouse to make the project more affordable. They purchased plumbing supplies and ceramic tile for the bathrooms, paint for the interior walls, and carpeting for 10 rooms and two hallways. “At a store, this much carpet would have cost $2,500,” Albert says. At The Storehouse, the handling fee for the carpet was one-fifth that amount. “The Storehouse has helped me stretch dollars way beyond what we could have attempted.”

Albert is glad to help Laverne. “She’s like a mother to me, and I want her to have a lot of the good things I can give to my own mother,” he says.

Thanks to Albert’s help and products from The Storehouse, the building is entirely renovated, and Laverne rents the three apartments to families needing low-income housing. In some of Chicago’s most challenging neighborhoods, people like Albert, Stella, the McCanns, and the Jacksons are quietly helping each other and working for the good of the community. The Storehouse and other World Vision ministries exist to support these selfless servants.

For more information on The Storehouse and other World Vision ministries in Chicago, please call (800) 279-6209.
C R I S I S  U P D A T E S

MONGOLIA
World Vision was the only organization to distribute food and fuel to 17,900 people placed under quarantine following an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in Mongolia’s capital, Ulaanbaatar, and three remote provinces last spring. The country’s agriculture-based economy could not withstand the wholesale slaughter of livestock—the solution to foot-and-mouth outbreaks in Europe—so officials fought the disease with vaccinations and quarantines. People could not leave the affected areas for weeks, cutting them off from families, schools, and social services. The few shops within the quarantine areas inflated their food prices up to 200 percent.

World Vision supplied emergency food rations and coal to families who were already poor before the quarantine. One relief shipment to the remote northeastern province of Dornod required a treacherous, three-day, 400-mile journey across isolated steppes and muddy roads.

One beneficiary thanked World Vision by quoting a Mongolian proverb. “The true character of a person is revealed in hard times,” he said. “This situation is showing the people of Mongolia World Vision’s true character. You are showing us the quality of your organization by bringing us the help we need in times of trouble.”

EARTHQUAKE UPDATES
In El Salvador, just ahead of summer rains, World Vision provided shelter for people left homeless by February’s earthquakes. Working with a local agency, World Vision helped construct transitional, wood-and-tin houses for 3,000 people in Tacuba, one of the worst-affected communities. “I am very grateful. We were sleeping practically in the street,” said recipient Adilia Garcia. By summer’s end, World Vision also completed construction on 130 permanent homes in Tacuba.

World Vision responded to southern Peru’s 7.9-magnitude earthquake in June. Staff provided blankets, hygiene kits, and other emergency supplies for families in hard-hit areas, including Mosquegas, in southernmost Peru, where 80 percent of the houses were flattened.

Building back to normal in El Salvador.

World Vision’s relief distributions encouraged Mongolian families who were cut off from food and supplies.

CHILDREN LOG ON TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES
World Vision hopes to help sponsored children span the “digital divide” through computer training. Programs in several countries equip young people with skills that will help them compete in a technology-driven world.

Forgers of Hope, World Vision’s computer school in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, offers a six-week course in Windows Executive programs. Sponsored children can sign up for a discounted fee. Forgers of Hope also provides spiritual guidance through Bible lessons, prayer, and instructors’ testimonies. “In addition to computer basics, [students] also learn how to respect each other, how to dress for a work environment, and how to relate to God,” said director José Cabrera.

One hundred sponsored youth in Sri Lanka recently earned diplomas in computer studies through a World Vision computer training institute in the Hambantota district. Since 1998, the institute has provided rural youth and adults unprecedented access to information technology skills. An additional facility now serves Anamaduwa.

In South Africa, World Vision just opened a computer training center in Mpohu, a region with high unemployment and few opportunities for high school graduates. “The computers will help children catch up with their peers in advantaged communities,” said District Mayor Sakhumzi Somyo. “The Internet is so vital because it is a window to the world.”

SPONSORSHIP

EARTHQUAKE UPDATES

World Vision is committed to working with children and communities who have been affected by the recent earthquakes in El Salvador.

A two-week relief distribution program was launched in March 2001 to assist families devastated by the earthquakes. The program provided food, clothing, and other essential items to those affected.

In addition to its immediate response efforts, World Vision is working with local partners to provide long-term assistance and support. This includes assistance with rebuilding homes and providing psychological support to affected families.

World Vision has a long history of responding to natural disasters and providing relief to affected communities. Our expertise and experience enable us to provide effective and timely assistance.

We are committed to helping those in need, and we rely on the support of our sponsors to make this possible.

World Vision’s response to the earthquakes in El Salvador is just one example of our commitment to working with communities affected by disasters.

Thank you for your support and for helping us make a difference in the lives of those affected by the earthquakes.

Sincerely,

World Vision Staff
In March, a group of American pastors traveled with World Vision President Rich Stearns to Israel. Many returned from the pilgrimage heartbroken but with an intensified desire to advocate and pray for peace for all people in the Holy Land.

You can go to the Holy Land and never see what I saw last March. I’ve done it. This time was different because I met Palestinians and heard and saw disturbing things that rarely, if ever, make the headlines in the United States. It was a hard trip, because I’ve always been pro-Israel. I still am. I believe Israel has the right to exist in peace and security. But so do the Palestinians.

I’ve traveled four times to Senegal, West Africa, and I’ve witnessed grinding poverty. But this trip affected me more deeply than any developing-world travel I’ve undertaken before. Material poverty is bad enough, but there was also a poverty of freedom among Palestinians, leading to frustration and sometimes despair. The stories of the great suffering among common people got me in a half nelson and wouldn’t let me go. I saw Jesus everywhere.

American Christians should care about the Palestinians because many are our brothers and sisters in Christ. But the geographic cradle of Christianity has become a deathtrap, and Palestinian Christians are fleeing for their lives. In 1980 there were 25,000 Christians in Jerusalem alone; now only 5,000 remain.

We should also care because Palestinians are among the poorest of the poor. Some Christians might protest that the majority are Muslim. Even still, are they not our responsibility? “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you something to drink, naked and clothe you, sick or in prison and visit you?” “When you did it to the least of these…”

—Heidi Husted, Columbia Presbyterian Church, Vancouver, Wash.

I went to the Holy Land looking for a good dose of holy goose-pimples. I got my dose … it just came differently than I expected.

On Sunday I worshiped with Palestinian Christians in Aboud, in the West Bank. They sang, preached, and prayed in Arabic. The church was packed. I lis-
Why World Vision promotes justice

BY SERGE DUSZ

In fact, Jesus made a point of associating with people who were uncum, unclean, and discriminated against. He consistently upbraided the moral police of his day—the Pharisees—for their hypocrisy and false piety. He attacked his society for all its exclusions and religious discrimination. And he did so in the context of embracing the shalom (right relationships) vision of the Old Testament.

World Vision is all about justice. If justice prevailed in the world there would be far less suffering and humanity would not be needed. Politically, justice is neither liberal nor conservative, neither Democrat nor Republican. Justice is doing what is right for people—rich or poor, black or white, Israeli or Palestinian, Serb or Kosovo—in the eyes of God. All people have common worth and dignity because they are creatures of the same God who loves them equally.

Seeking justice amid conflict often requires bringing people together—a main thrust of World Vision's peacebuilding work for more than a decade. In Bosnia, World Vision has brought people from various ethnic groups together to rebuild homes, schools, and medical facilities. In Kosovo, our staff works with Muslim, Catholic, and Orthodox religious leaders to help create trust and restore right relationships between people through aid and reconciliation programs. In southern Sudan, World Vision's ministry contributed to public reconciliation between warring tribes, the Dinka and Nuer. And in the West Bank and Gaza, World Vision perseveres in working with the suffering and in rebuilding trust and understanding between Palestinian and Israeli.

World Vision promotes justice because God is just. The Old Testament prophet Micah perhaps put it best when he said: “What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

Serge Duss, a World Vision's director of public policy and government relations in Washington, D.C.

The biggest attitude change for me came from meeting Palestinian people and hearing their stories. After listening to men, women, boys, and girls who live in Jerusalem, in West Bank villages, and in Gaza, I no longer hear the word “Palestinian” and think of violent terrorists, but rather good and decent people with hopes and dreams like my own. Because I spent time in their homes with their families, I count several as real friends. Many I met are Christians, so I also count them as brothers and sisters in Christ. Because I saw a systematic pattern of injustice and violence at work against them, I began to understand their frustration and anger.

As I walked down the Mount of Olives, along the route Jesus might have taken, I was reminded of how Jesus went over the city of Jerusalem and said, “If you had only recognized the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes” (Luke 19:41-44). Whatever our opinion of Israel, the Palestinians, and the current crisis, surely we are called to pray that people there and here recognize and practice the things that make for peace.

—Bob Sanders, Lake Grove Presbyterian Church, Lake Oswego, Ore.

I came away from the Middle East with the simple realization that the Palestinians want exactly the same thing the Jews wanted before Israel was founded in 1948: “the right to life, liberty, and security of person, and the right to nationality” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, United Nations, 1948). The tragedy is that Israel—and here we must distinguish between the state of Israel and the Jewish people—refuses to recognize the desire of another people. In 1948, the displaced and wandering Palestinian replaced the displaced and wandering Jew.

As Christians, our history with Jews, our “elder brothers in faith,” is not admirable, and as Americans, we’re terri- fied that if we say anything against the state of Israel, we’ll be called anti-Semitic. So we’re afraid to talk about it. But we shouldn’t be. Recognizing and deploiting the human rights violations of the Israeli government against the Palestinian people does not call into question the rights of the Jewish people or the right of the state of Israel to exist. Likewise, recognizing and deploiting the Palestinian violence does not call into question the Palestinian people’s rights or the right of the state of Palestine to exist. Discussing these things is crucial to the spiritual and social health of Israel. Justice and peace are crucial to the lasting existence of a Jewish homeland.

—Milind Sovjal, All Angels Episcopal Church, New York, NY

I will never forget the words of a Palestin- ian man in his early 30s at the Aida refugee camp. As we stood on a rooftop overlooking Israeli gun placements in the valley below and settlements on the hills above, he said, “I know that God gave this land to the Jews. The Egyptians [pre- Exodus] were not good neighbors. But God put [the Jews] here because we would have been good neighbors.” Those are words of peace!—Bill Mugford, High Point Church, Madison, Wis.

Editors’ note: We realize that the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is a controversial topic for many of our readers who have strongly held beliefs about the destiny of the Holy Land. Many Christians do not agree on the political, historical, and religious issues at stake. We invite you to share your views on peace in the Middle East with us. Please send e-mail to WVToday@worldvision.org; letters to World Vision Today, P.O. Box 9716, Federal Way, WA 98063-9716.

Resources

Middle East, General
• Beliefnet: www.beliefnet.com/features/middle_east.html
• Washington Post online: www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/world/issues/medeastpeace

Middle East in the Peace
• Churches for Middle East Peace (C4MEP): www.c4mep.org
• Foundation for Middle East Peace: www.fmedp.org
• Jewish Peace Fellowship: www.jewishpeace.org

Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding: campus.northpark.edu/centers/middle_east/australian_ami

Anaxus for Argamoddia: A Call to Partnership for Middle Eastern and Western Christians by Donald E. Wagner; Herald Press, 1995

Blood brothers by Eliau Chacour; Chosen Books, 1984

Justice
• International Justice Mission: www.ijm.org
AS A FORMER LITERATURE PROFESSOR, I AM deeply fascinated with stories. We find stories all around us, in books, movies, ads, and music videos—each with a little angle on the way things are. Our lives are all unfolding stories, aren’t they? Our new university admissions book is titled, “What will be your life story?” I like that question. Each life story is so intricately beautiful, so profoundly unique, shaped by many different things and many different people.

Our postmodern culture tells us that our stories are not connected to anything. Your story and mine are so separate that we merely bump into each other with no apparent pattern. There is no master-story, no meta-narrative, no big story holding us all together. But let me tell you what my theology is here. The theologian Ellen Charry provides some helpful language. She says that God wants all of his children to flourish, and we are offered an extraordinary opportunity to participate in the grand story of that flourishing.

As I look around the world today, it is clear that not all of God’s children are flourishing, not even here in the United States. This brings grief to the heart of God. Let me draw on an old, old story: Moses and the burning bush. It begins with God’s people groaning in confinement and barrenness. That’s the way most Bible stories begin. God’s children are not flourishing. We wait in suspense. What’s going to happen? Will God come through? Will he remember his promises? Will he rescue his children?

We find Moses out on the fringes of civilization, tending his father-in-law’s sheep. Remember that he grew up in the Egyptian courts of power, wealth, and influence. He was highly educated. What a deal for a young man of such promise—banished out there on the side of a mountain, surely brooding on the mistakes of his past, bitter about this exile.

And then something startling happens. Something always does in Bible stories. An ordinary bush bursts into flame, right there on the mountain. I think of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who believes that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like the shining from shook foil.” Moses runs to see this extraordinary bush. Thank God he was curious. Thank God he was alert, attentive, observant—a real lifelong learner.

God speaks to him out of that ordinary/extraordinary bush, and his story is forever rewritten. “Moses, I have a plan for you,” God says. “Go rescue my children. Bring them light and hope. Bring them food. Bring them a vision for a ‘land flowing with milk and honey.’ Bring them a notion that things can be different. Bring them justice. Tell my people that I remember them.”

Then Moses says something familiar to us all: “But, God, I am not gifted enough. I don’t have enough faith in myself. I don’t even really know who you are. I simply can’t make the case for a culture of life when the world is screaming death, darkness, and chaos. It all seems too big.”

God then makes an amazing promise: “I will go with you, Moses.” But here’s the catch: We will only know if this promise is true when we choose to step out and bring God’s flourishing love to a hurting world. We have to do something with our gifts. Only then can God go with us.

This is our task, as people of the big story: Christians are called to engage the culture and change the world. Our job is to align ourselves with God’s big story.

What will be your life story? As World Vision donors, you already recognize that God’s children are not flourishing. As you step out to help, you align your stories with the really big story, so that all of God’s children all over the world will know his flourishing love and grace. And remember: God will go with us as we take this step. This is a really big story indeed.
Bless her heart. Please.

She needs help . . . she needs hope . . . she needs you.

You already do so much as a child sponsor to bring hope and joy to the heart of a child. And your sacrifice is making a life-changing difference in your sponsored child’s life. But the reality is that we still have many children waiting—longing—for the compassion and support of a committed sponsor.

On behalf of these little ones, I ask that you consider sharing God’s love with one more girl or boy.

For just $26 a month—less than $1 a day—you can bless another child’s heart with things like clean water, improved health, and new educational opportunities. Won’t you open up your heart today?

Rich Stearns,
President

Yes! I want to bless another child’s heart.

I would like to sponsor a □ boy □ girl living in:

□ Africa □ Asia □ Latin America □ Middle East □ where the needs are greatest.

Note: To personally select a child who needs a sponsor, go to www.worldvision.org.

Personal Information

Name____________________________________________________________________________
Address__________________________________________________________________________
City___________________________________________ State ________ ZIP _________________
Telephone ( ____ ) ______________________________ Email _____________________________

Payment Options

□ Easy Payment Option: Charge my monthly sponsorship gifts to my credit card:
   □ Visa □ MasterCard □ American Express □ Discover

________________________________  _______  __________________________________
Card No. Exp. Date  Signature (required)

□ Enclosed is my first monthly gift of $26 to help another needy child and his or her community.
   (Please make your check payable to World Vision.)

□ Bill me later.

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