



From the top left (clockwise): Janet Boldt works with children in a crafts program. Fred Stoesz visiting a neighbour. Randy Plett teaching teenage guys. Mary Thiessen, who for a number of years has poured much energy and commitment into World Impact.

A live-in witness to the inner city

by Gordon Nickel

"IF THE CHURCH of Jesus Christ simply moves out of the cities when things get too tough," says Mary Thiessen, "the cycle of sin will remain in the inner city."

Mary is one of several Canadian Mennonite Brethren who have found a place of service with World Impact, a Christian organization dedicated to building up the body of Christ in the inner city.

World Impact involves over 100 workers in a 24-hour-a-day "live-in" style ministry in eight American cities: Los Angeles, San Diego, Omaha, Wichita, Portland, St. Louis, Newark and Fresno.

Thirteen Canadian, and eight Ameri-

can Mennonite Brethren work with the group and most of these have been associated with Columbia Bible Institute, Clearbrook, B.C. or Tabor College, Hillsboro, Kansas in some way.

Working with World Impact demands a willingness to "pour out large amounts of time," writes Fred Stoesz, men's and married couples' director for Los Angeles. Living in the ghetto is a key principle in the group's work. The three major benefits of this approach, says Mary Thiessen, is that workers can identify totally with the inner-city people, can model the Christian life, and can be available whenever they are needed.

Mary Thiessen is from the Lakeview

Mennonite Brethren Church in Lethbridge, Alta., and has been the women's director in Los Angeles since 1972. Stoesz is from the Winkler (Man.) MB Church and is married to the former Jolene Klaassen of Hillsboro, Kansas. Randy and Connie (Nickel) Plett, from the Killarney Park MB Church in Vancouver, coordinate the ministry in south-central L.A. and run the L.A. camping programs.

Other workers in L.A. include Central Heights MB (Abbotsford, B.C.) members John Dyck and Kim Seebach.

The Portland, Oregon work is directed by Jim and Val (Berg) Parker of the Nutana MB Church in Saskatoon. Gail Giesbrecht and Gordon Klassen, both from Killarney Park MB, are also on staff in Portland. In Fresno, Calif., Janet Boldt of the Fairview MB Church, St. Catharines, Ont. is the women's director. Another Fairview member, Jerry Peters, works with WI in Wichita, Kansas. Scott McConaughy, married to the former Glenda Hooze of the Broadway MB Church in Chilliwack, B.C., is the St. Louis director.

World Impact's strategy is straightforward and strenuous. The first priority is evangelism, defined as "anything that reveals Christ's love to our neighbors." Evangelism includes the live-in ministry, Bible clubs, and emergency food and clothing distribution; the goal is for individuals to be convicted of sin, repent, and commit their lives to Christ.

Every person who accepts Christ enters into a follow-up relationship with a staff member to learn how to live the Christian life—in Bible study, prayer, memorizing Scripture, meditating on God's Word and worshipping God.

Making disciples is the foundation of the group's work. Young Christians are invited to enter a discipleship relationship, where they are trained how to teach others. Mary Thiessen says, "I pass on to my students in a one-to-one meeting (perhaps four hours a week) everything God has given me through my upbringing—my whole relationship with God."

The group's vision, says Mary, is to "develop a strong church in the city, and through this church a full-scale revival." Mary says that six of the girls who became Christians through the Bible clubs are now on full-time staff.

One of the group's greatest needs is more staff. "Each day we have to say no to people who want help. . . . We are presently in eight cities but we have serious invitations from 25 other cities." One of the requirements, however, may well turn some back: to be "willing to stay in the ghetto at least until you have reproduced your life in someone else so well that he can carry on the work you've begun."

Helping rebuild people and homes

by Elizabeth Esau and Carolyn Enns

Last September we left for a six-month term with Mennonite Disaster Service. A weekend of orientation helped prepare us for the many new experiences which were to come in the next few months. There were about 30 volunteers divided into four units: Majestic, Kentucky; Hamburg, Arkansas; Forkland, Alabama; and Jackson, Mississippi.

Our first two and a half months were spent in Forkland, which had been hit by a flood. The water level had been as high as three-quarters the height of the houses. These were all built above ground so, fortunately we had no messy basements to clean out. Our work was located in Green County, the poorest county in the United States. We helped people who were poor, of low income, handicapped and those who couldn't afford other help. They had to supply the money for the materials and we did the labor free of charge. The government gave grants to the flood victims according to how much damage had been done, and the money was used to buy materials for the repair of their homes. Since the population is about 80 percent black the majority of our work was done for them.

Most of the work consisted of replacing damaged walls, ceilings, and in some cases the whole house, including the siding. We also did painting, staining, flooring (laying linoleum and rugs), panelling, drywalling, insulation and a few roofing jobs. The two houses we rebuilt seemed like mansions to the flood victims, and they found it hard to move out of their old homes. We got to know the people quite well, as the majority of our jobs took about a month or more to complete. They always looked forward to our coming and really appreciated the work done for them; they were overwhelmed by our willingness to work and our caring attitude.

In Mobile, Alabama our work was done in connection with the effects wrought by Hurricane Frederic: strong winds of up to 145 m.p.h. and small tornadoes did a lot of damage to some of the already run-down homes. Again we were located in the black, poverty section of Mobile.

Both in Forkland and Mobile we had rotating volunteers from other states, such as Kansas, Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Florida, but mostly from Pennsylvania. Van-loads of 12 or more came down for a week at a time, so we got to meet a lot of interesting people. Our unit consisted of about six volunteers, plus the director and his wife.

We learned a lot of carpentry skills like framing, making foundations, putting up walls, gyprock and siding, painting and even wiring outlets. We spent most of our time roofing. Some roofs had been damaged by fallen trees, so we had to repair the holes and in some cases sheet the whole roof with plywood. We shingled all the way from a 4x12 to a 9x12 pitch. It sure was a good feeling to get down to the ground after a day on a steep roof.

We built a few new houses; one, beside the Gulf of Mexico, had to be built on 11-foot stilts. It was always a challenge to tear down old houses and we always managed to come across a lot of interesting creatures, like lizards, spiders, rats and cockroaches. The cockroaches were usually in colonies of 20 to 30, and there's nothing worse than having a roach crawl up you leg.

Through these last months we not only learned how to shingle a roof or build a house but the importance of listening; the frustrations of losing something through disaster; compassion for those in need; the tolerance of other cultures, lifestyles and religions; and the giving and taking of a practical joke.

The experiences that we have shared have given us a new outlook on life and have deepened our relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Our voluntary service in MDS has benefited our lives and has encouraged us to continue our service for the Lord.

There is a place in MDS for girls too, as Elisabeth Esau and Carolyn Enns of Elm Creek, Man., will testify.

