

# Ministry's Outreach Brings Hope To Women in Poverty

Twenty-four-year-old Esperanza Martinez walks the sweltering streets of Managua, darting in and out of traffic, selling drinks. To provide her family with one meal each day, she must earn \$1 to \$1.50.

"But I'm not going to make it today," she explains as she takes a bag of water from her clear plastic sack and gives it to a passing driver, "because it's already 5 p.m."



This afternoon there are few sales and only the sounds of honking horns. By night, the mother of three will return to those same streets to sell newspapers.

Just outside the city, Candida Lopez lives in a rusted tin shack with her four children.

"Oh, it's better than when we first moved in," she tells us, noticing our shocked looks at the holes in the corroded sheets of metal. The rain comes in through cracks in the roof and falls on a dirt floor. The mother of four quickly covers the cracked wooden-frame beds with a sheet of black plastic.

"I don't want the mats to get wet," she explains. They are made of cardboard.

Francisca Enrique Gutierrez, 47,

lives within walking distance of Candida, but can offer little comfort to her longtime neighbor. We enter her home also made from weathered metal sheets. Francisca has already spent the greater part of the day gathering stones to secure the sides of her disheveled shack and now, the mother of 12, hangs washing on a line of rusted barbed wire stretched across the inside of the house. Tomorrow, she will wash and iron for some people in the more affluent districts of the city. This could earn her a much-needed dollar, but not enough to feed her entire family.

"Some days if we're lucky we eat two meals of rice and beans. Today, we'll eat once," Francisca says, now stoking the fire in her smoke-filled house. "I keep going for the sake of my children," she tells us. And, she believes that one day God will take her out of this situation. "I think it will happen but I don't know how."

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Even as we venture into the marketplace, the stories of people in need are endless. Nicaragua's largest market — all 32 acres — can't support the majority of its sellers sufficiently to feed their families.

Socorro has 13 children. Each



day she gets up at 2:30 a.m. in order to prepare for her long day away from home, selling fruit at the market. She washes the children's clothes, gathers some firewood, and looks for scraps of food. She then washes the fruit — grapefruits, mangoes, and avocados — and wheels them in a small wooden barrow to the marketplace. Although Socorro stays at the market place until 6 p.m., there are few customers. She doesn't even make enough money "to survive today." Tired and weary, she tidies up her corner and goes home to bed. Her last hope — "that the market will provide enough to keep her family" — is fading.

These are the typical stories of women throughout Latin America. Each day thousands of mothers take to the streets to sell their wares in order to help feed their children. Each day thousands of mothers return home at dusk, empty-handed.

## *Building a New Life*

"Just as one little boy gave his five loaves of bread and two fish so that five thousand could eat, Jesus still multiplies what we give in his name. Our God does a lot with small sacrifices," explains Food For The Poor's president, Robin Mahfood. "Our organization is working hard to give women a chance for a better



## *How to Help:*

Readers interested in making a tax-deductible donation for this important work should send their gifts to: Food For the Poor, Dept. 25587, 550 SW 12th Avenue, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442.