

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

More than 16,000 homes and going strong For 20 years, charity builds "miracles" for the poor



In the First World, buying a home typically requires a lot of steps. You shop for a neighborhood, a house, a real estate agent, an interest rate, a mortgage lender.

But for a poor person in the Third World, acquiring a home is much simpler. You patch together whatever "building materials" you can scavenge — strips of metal, sheets of plastic, tree branches, cardboard, even wooden crates and knocked-over street signs — into four walls and a roof you pray will provide protection from the elements and won't collapse on your family.

You build your "house" on land that doesn't belong to you, land you worry constantly you and your family will be kicked off of. You store the little food you have as high up as you can, to make it harder for ever-invading rats and insects to eat it. You rejoice on the days that rain doesn't turn your floor into a muddy bog.

And you dream of a real home — one with solid walls that it would take more than a well-placed kick to topple, a roof that keeps your children dry, and a clean, dry floor. But most days, it's a struggle to find some food and send the children to school, much less to afford a decent house... so you pray to God for a miracle.

Since 1982, international Christian charity Food For The Poor has been building miracles for poor families and the glory of God: sturdy, basic homes made of wood or concrete. During the past 20 years, the charity has built more than 16,000 homes for those in desperate need of adequate shelter.

The typical "Food For The Poor house" is a one- to three-room structure that ranges

from 144 to 240 square feet. It has a cement floor, a metal roof and a solid door that locks. The cost, \$2,000, is far lower than the down payment on a typical home in the United States.

"The homes we build aren't large or fancy, but for the families who receive them, they are like wonderful mansions," says Robin Mahfood, Food For The Poor president.

"We who have houses can never truly understand what's it like to live in the shacks the poor spend their lives in," he said. "We don't give it a second thought when it rains or worry about our food being eaten by rats.

"People who live in these wretched conditions worry all the time. They don't sleep well. Often, family members must take turns sleeping because there is nowhere for them to lie down," Mahfood continued. "Whatever little food and possessions they have are often stolen. Parents worry about their children growing up safely.

"It's a terrible, unsettled life. When a poor family gets a decent house, they can stop worrying and start living," he said.

Luz Marina worries a lot less now. The Nicaraguan mother and her three young children had been living under a single sheet of black plastic next to a garbage dump and a slaughterhouse. They were so poor they couldn't even afford a mattress — they slept on top of a bed frame.

Food For The Poor heard about their plight and quickly built them a new house in a safe location. It was an answer to Luz's impassioned prayers for help.

"The poor praise God for these little homes. And we praise God for our donors, who truly take seriously Jesus' command to serve the poor," Mahfood said. "They have made it possible for Food For The Poor to serve Christ in the poor with more than \$1 billion in aid."



A family's prayers answered: Luz Marina, 31, and children Orlando, 10, Gerald, 7, and Lestor, 2, lived under plastic next to a garbage dump before donors of Food For The Poor built them this home.

Priest: "Would I survive if I were them?"

Father Burchell McPherson, pastor of Pope Pius X church in Kingston, Jamaica, has worked to help the destitute for nearly two decades. His parish is located in one of the poorest slums in the capitol. But he never gets used to seeing the living conditions most of his flock live in.

"I would hear children playing outside my church at night. I asked them, 'Why are you here?' They told me it was not their time to sleep. 'There is no dignity, no space, no privacy,' Father Burchell says of the dirt-floor shacks.

Space is so limited that many families, like those of the children who would play outside his parish at night, are forced to take turns sleeping. "I see how they live and I question myself — would I be able to survive?" he said.

"I see them on Sunday and you would think they have no problems at all," Father Burchell continued. "They are joyful. Their attitude seems to be, 'Why should I let problems bring me down?'"

"Most of the time, I learn from them," he said.

For destitute families, receiving a house, even a simple one, is a life-changing event, says Fr. Burchell. "It strengthens their faith — not just in the organization that gives it to them, but in God, who provides for them," he declared.

"I see how they live and I question myself — would I be able to survive?"

Father Burchell McPherson, pastor, Pope Pius X Catholic Church, Kingston, Jamaica

Father Burchell has been working with Food For The Poor for 16 years. The charity has built several large housing communities in his parish, housing hundreds of his flock.

One such community, Bell Rock, is a three-phase development that replaced housing built 50 years ago — decrepit housing intended to be only temporary. The two-story rotting buildings were so dilapidated, the inhabitants — all poor squatters — were frequently falling through floors. Several, including a small boy and an elderly woman, were seriously injured.

But Food For The Poor's help is far more than material, Father Burchell says. "They bring a message of hope, something that many people lack these days," he says.

"Food For The Poor shows the poor that there is light at the end of the road. They help people be strong and to realize someone cares, and that there is a future for them."

"They truly do take the command of Jesus Christ seriously: 'As often as you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me,'" he said.

Homeless since birth:

The only home 5-month-old Ombretta Isaacs has ever known is this crumbling, rat-infested abandoned building in inner-city Kingston, Jamaica. Her family moved there in August 2001 after fire destroyed their shack.



HOW TO HELP

If you would like to help us build a home for a poor family in need, please contact: Food For the Poor, Inc., Dept. # 30111, 550 SW 12th Avenue, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442 954-427-2222 ext 6703. Visit us at our website www.foodforthe poor.org/jamaica