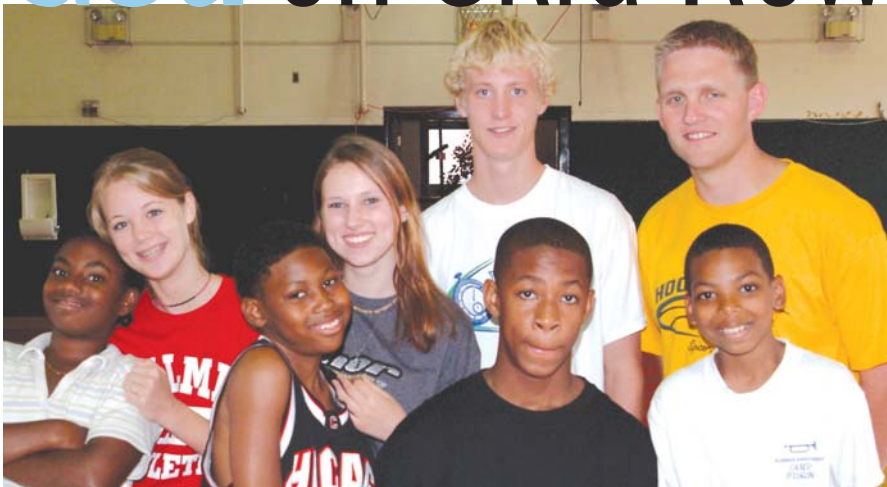


God on Skid Row



CSM participants get challenged to a basketball game by students from Circle-Rock Prep School, a Christian school in the heart of Chicago



CSM participants in Chicago help children work on craft projects at Casa Central, the largest Hispanic social service agency in Illinois



A CSM participant tutors a student at Circle-Rock Prep School

For many teenagers (and adults) who grow up in middle- and upper-class America, grasping the concept that poverty exists in our backyard is sometimes difficult.

We glimpse what's happening in our cities on the news every night. But words like *homeless, gangs, hunger, or murder* are mostly just attached to statistics. To picture a face and know the individual stories behind the statistics is impossible—unless we are willing to open our eyes to what's happening right next door.

The Center for Student Missions (CSM) dares to do just that—to expose groups through short-term mission trips in nine urban centers in North America. The concept is simple. There is hurt in the city; we are called to be Jesus' hands and feet; we meet those needs in practical ways with the love of Christ.

At present CSM works in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Nashville, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Toronto, and Washington, D.C. Each city has at least one full-time employee living

and working in that specific community. Their presence is key in cultivating relationships with the ministries CSM partners with. When short-term groups come to serve, they are partnered with these community-based ministries to provide the manpower they desperately need.

SEEING WITH GOD'S EYES

Serving in Los Angeles with CSM opened my eyes and challenged my worldview in countless ways. I will never forget my first prayer tour, a unique experience CSM provides each visiting group. The tour involves driving around the city the group will be serving in. The CSM City Host (an employee appointed to each group) explains the specific challenges each city faces and shares how participants can be praying for it. With van windows rolled down, group members are able to experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the city—to see the city just as God does.

As we drove that first night, our City Host challenged us to look at Los Angeles

with a renewed vision. The host began to explain the contrasts we might see (such as rich versus poor, different cultures, and so on).

Having grown up in a suburb outside of Hartford, Connecticut, it was mind-boggling to see a “third-world city” in our first-world nation. In Skid Row, a 10-block-by-10-block area known to have 10,000 homeless people, we drove up streets lined with tents, cardboard boxes, and blankets on the cold, hard sidewalk. Two blocks from swanky shops and towering buildings we passed sweatshops, where undocumented immigrants worked long hours in small, crowded rooms for meager wages.

Across the street was 9th Street School—an elementary school originally built as a temporary solution to the increasing population of children in that area. Its portable classrooms are now a permanent structure for kids who live on Skid Row. Hundreds of youngsters are dropped off in the early morning hours and picked up in the evening by parents



Students from Circle-Rock Prep School in Chicago and CSM participants gather together one last time after enjoying the day together.

who work in the factories. Teachers work against all odds—learning disabilities, gangs, drug use by parents, and all kinds of abuse—try to maintain contact with parents or guardians who don't speak English or have a phone.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS


There was one moment for me, standing at night on a sidewalk on Skid Row, looking at the concrete playground and the sweatshops, when I realized that God is at work in the city. It's so easy for us as humans to see the dark, the negative, the hurt and pain. But the Lord is there and He is hope!

He is working through the after-school program that provides a snack, homework help, and Bible lessons for the kids of 9th Street School. He is giving strength to the workers at the shelters that provide temporary housing and rehabilitation. He offers freedom to the crack addict and the prostitute. He calls them His children and tells us to embrace them as our brothers and sisters.

Before I went to the city, it was easy

for me to choose to be blind—my world hadn't been shaken yet. I had not yet met Pastor Greg who shepherds a congregation in the heart of gang territory. Nor had I met Sister Luz who has dedicated her life to preaching the Good News and giving away food and clothing to her poverty-stricken neighbors. I had not realized that these people were not born saints, but made the conscious decision to follow Christ, no matter what the cost.

One weekend in Los Angeles with CSM taught me that I am responsible for what I now know, that I am to care for my neighbor and imitate the love that God has for His children—especially for those who the world has rejected and cast aside.

“He has showed you, O man, what is good. / And what does the LORD require of you? / To act justly and to love mercy / and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8, NIV). 

SARAH SOTELO has been a part of the CSM administrative team since October 2005. She and her husband, Karlos, live in Vista, California, where they serve young people in their church, and love eating authentic tacos and traveling.



About Center for Student Ministries

CSM was founded in 1988 as a short-term mission organization to “provide students with an effective urban ministry experience that transforms lives, influences local churches, and honors Christ.” They currently work in nine cities in North America and have provided urban ministry opportunities to 95,000 participants. For more information visit csm.org or call 949-248-8200.



Deck the Halls! Dollars for your Group!

If your goal is a **highly effective, no risk way** to raise money, team up with Sherwood Forest Farms for your holiday evergreen fundraiser. We provide everything you need to succeed, from full-color brochures to the highest quality Pacific Northwest evergreens— all *unconditionally guaranteed* for freshness.



Free information packet:
1-800-767-7778
www.sherwoodforestfarms.com