



Empowering Each Other
To Serve The Destitute Elderly
in the Developing World

March 2011

Michael's House is a grassroots organization that is a registered 501 (c) (3) international non-profit charity, whose mission is to aid the elderly poor who have fallen through the cracks. We provide a community day center, hot meals, hygiene facilities, supplies for handicrafts, basic medical care, overnight shelter for the infirmed, pensions, eye glasses, surgeries, working farms with crops and animals, and funds for special projects. Currently, we are in Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Thailand.



Recently, our founder, Michael Craig, and Michael Taylor, a board member, visited our site in Addis Ababa to witness and assess our work to date. The following letter and photos are what Michael Craig would like to share with you.



LETTER FROM ADDIS ABABA

Today is January 19, and through the confusion of calendars it is oddly enough Christmas Day 2007! There are no guests here at Michael's House as all the roads are blocked for processions. Yesterday we gave extra food to help the old get through today.

On my way I dropped by Ann's Shelter where the 30 residents were safely sharing their meager breakfast of coffee and sweet bread in the cool courtyard. Two of the men at the shelter are dying and the residents were taking turns caring for them. The group was somber and sad. Two of the women were crying. Ityane, Terfa's wife, was wetting the men's brows and saying soft and consoling words to them. They are too sick to move to Mother Theresa's. These residents have blended as a real caring family knowing that in their time they too will be taken care of. At the back of the house three of the men were preparing coffins.

1/19/2011 morning

On my way here to Michael's House, I had to walk through the squalid lanes of what seems like a never-ending shantytown. In the face of such calamitous poverty, the mind can play tricks on one. When you see how horribly people live, and still how easily they die, it's difficult at times to believe that one is walking through human beings with names and the same feelings and fears as us. It's hard to believe that 40% of the worlds' poor, 1.5 billion live in fetid places like this. There is no sewage, and human and animal excrement is everywhere and as the sun gets stronger its appalling smell blends with the ubiquitous smell of coffee and charcoal. The smell is pungent beyond belief. People urinate and defecate wherever they can, avoiding where they did it yesterday. Flies are everywhere. They seem to be the only life that flourishes. They hoard on open wounds, on mucus draining from children's noses or old peoples' caked eyes. They find ever- ready incubation places on the paltry uncovered food. People are so used to them that they barely swat them away. On my walk, several rats slinked along in and out through the makeshift houses, through children playing and naked babies crawling on the ground. Even the emaciated dogs knew better than to attack these big rats. It's from these filthy warrens of miles of corrugated iron and cardboard, that we rescue our destitute elderly.

There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread. ~Mahatma Gandhi



1/19/2011 afternoon

Back here at Michael's House, the place is eerily quiet. It is spotlessly clean with a smell of disinfectant and polish. It was scrubbed clean last evening, as it is every night. Everything is ship shape! Even the exotic flowers that bloomed after last night's brief rain are waiting to greet our guests. It's just me and the cat, who takes his patrol duty against the vermin seriously. He has no name. He's just called "Our Cat". He belongs to everyone. As I walk the empty rooms, I can't help but feel happy about our work and perhaps tinge of fear as to what would happen if we could no longer afford this place? The people who come here, most of them now for several years, have become so dependent on our services. They are so proud and secure to have a place of their own. We are truly blessed to have such wonderful benefactors who keep this place and Ann's Shelter going. This surely is a little corner of heaven compared to outside the compound. I cannot stress how important our work is here. Even though we might forget them at times, every day of their lives they pray in thanksgiving for us, for you and your families.

I wonder how the elderly are doing on the streets? Hopefully they are safe? I'm sure many of them are thinking of long ago, in another time and place when they had sons and daughters coming home for this holiday, filling their homes with joy and laughter. All they can do is remember. There are no families. They have no living children -just ghosts!

Yesterday we went in Nevin's Van and bought wood for the fire, a couple of crates of Fanta and Coca Cola and a sweet bread as big as the wheel of a truck. We will celebrate Christmas tomorrow. Everyone is so excited.

They will be here bright and early in the morning. The weavers will no doubt spend a few hours making cloth to sell. Others will attend to their hygiene and perhaps wash clothes while some others will wait at the clinic to get their medicines or share a medical concern. The blind and the crippled will gather round and talk among themselves. There are few able-bodied people among the guests but those who are, are busy themselves with sweeping the yard and setting out the stools for the meal. Our meal will be joyful, as all meals are here, and everyone will eat their fill and also fill little packages for their evening meal and some to share with other street people. In their nothingness they themselves become agents of charity to the less fortunate.

Currently at Michael's House in Addis we provide meals for 100-150 people a day. Each person, brings home a packaged meal for their evening meal. Most of them also bring a little food to their friends who live on the street. So in reality we provide almost 450 meals a day or almost 3000 a week. This is no small feat and it is all because of you.



1/19/2011 evening

Our guests are beautiful people and each in his or own way is a character. It's hard to imagine that not too long ago they were just undifferentiated bundles of rags and cardboard huddled against walls on the street, about as individual as flies or rats! Unsightly trash! But here they have blossomed. They make the house a home! They have grown healthier, and they can laugh, dance and sing which they do with little encouragement. Even the beautiful but feeble woman with HIV/Aids who walked two hundred kilometers to come here, pathetically claps and in her laconic eyes she trusts her inevitable future. We will take care of her! As in any group of people, one can easily be drawn to the "characters."

We have poets galore, a science professor who teaches riddles, several singers and even story-tellers who mesmerize the crowd every day with stories from the ancient past. There is this charmingly feisty woman who originally came to Michael's House dehydrated and lacking the strength to walk, who now takes the initiative to lead the women in singing and dancing. After the mea, she invariably gets up and leads the women in a conga dance through the rooms. The men delight in this! She was a school-teacher. She hasn't lost her skill! Indeed it's a house full of joy and laughter.

I am always amazed when I realize that for a brief time each day these people have the ability to leave their misery behind and through song and dance become once again young, carefree and in love. I always see them as children who in another time were kissed, hugged by parents, and felt the joy of passion and sensuality. They are transported to a different time and age when life was full of companionship, joy and hope. Yes we provide food, medicine etc., but also we provide a journey to the past in the security of the present moment.

I close the door and leave "Our Cat" in charge! Tomorrow is a big day.

Michael Craig, founder

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Philippe Blesson of Vimoutieres, France for his contribution (in French) to the web page. Because of his help, our French- speaking friends, can now follow the progress of Michael's House.



Be sure to check out our special St Patrick's Day enclosure included in this newsletter. And recycle this newsletter... pass it forward to friend!



Pictures from the recent visit to Addis Ababa



Report from Uganda: Dr. Maura reports that everyone is in good health. Since most of this letter was focused on Ethiopia, we will update you on our work from Tanzania, and Thailand in our next newsletter.

Once again this year we will have the Annual Hawkins Electric Golf Tournament at Blue Mash to raise funds for Michael's House. Last year's event was a great success and a lot of fun so watch for news on our web site as the spring gets closer!



Your continued support makes it all possible and secures one daily meal for the elderly poor. They have come to depend on the love and generosity from those of us more fortunate on the other side of the world. We cannot let them down!

**Donate on the web or make checks payable to: Michael's House Inc, Post Office Box 856
Burtonsville, Maryland, 20866**

Visit us on the web at www.michaels-house.org