

ON THE LEVEL

"Our urban youth leaders have to let these youth know their daddy in heaven loves them."

-- Phil Abeyta

YOUTH VIOLENCE IN THE CITY

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GRIEVING, FORGIVING, GRAPPLING FOR ANSWERS

Taking Stock of Youth Violence Hitting Home

BY GERALD BELL AND PHIL ABEYTA

Phil Abeyta (Denver, 2003) is the uncle to the late Matthew Murray. Last December Phil's nephew became the focus of national news after a shooting spree left Matthew dead and his family wondering why this promising young man would take the lives of innocent others. In an interview, Phil recounts the days and weeks following this family tragedy that thrust he, his in-laws, spouse, children and church into an uninvited spotlight.

DENVER -- "Matthew, pick up the phone. This is dad." These words continue to replay in the memory of Rev. Phil Abeyta who stood with his extended family, Ronald and Loretta Murray, as they attempted to reach their son Matthew Murray by cell phone -- not knowing that the 24-year old had been dead for hours.

Sunday December 9, 2007, Phil, pastor of His Love Fellowship Church, was fully engaged in his normal pulpit duties. Word of a shooting that took place at Youth with a Mission (YWAM) prompted his congregation to pray. After the worship service, news of another shooting at New Life Church spun Phil's family into worry. "His mom was at church and said she felt that Matthew may have been involved," recalls Phil.

The startling story

According to reports, Matthew began early Sunday morning at the YWAM complex in Arvada, CO shooting four missionaries -- killing two of them. He then allegedly drove 65 miles to New Life Church in Colorado Springs carrying an automatic rifle, two hand guns and 1000 rounds of ammunition. There, he randomly fired shots outside in the parking lot and inside of the church. The shootings left three injured and two others dead. Within minutes, an armed church security guard took Matthew down in the hallway with multiple gunshot wounds.

"Our lives were turned upside down"

Ron and Loretta asked Phil to be the official spokesperson for the family. Agreeing to do so, he and the family immediately went to work on a press statement while continuing to pray. The family started receiving requests from the media and it wasn't long before "every media truck imaginable was outside their home," said Phil.

"Even major network morning shows were at the door." As the news reports began to swell, Phil said the family started feeling like the earth was closing in on them. "Within the next 24 hours the world had invaded our lives and it was like there was no place we could go," he said. "In two days we had



(continued on page 6)



HERE'S MY TAKE

THE SILENCE AFTER MOTHER'S "HELLO"

BY GERALD BELL

It's the phone call a mother prays she'll never receive. A call from an authority claiming, "Your son or daughter has been arrested, please come down to the police station." Or the call that asks, "How soon can you get to our emergency room your child is here being treated?" Far too many mothers have taken such calls. Sadly these come as a result of the bad choices of their youth or worse someone else's youth. The heartache and hardships youth violence brings to a family are like a personal "9/11" terrorist attack. Without notice, the peace in your home gets shattered by a violent enemy leaving you with the work of restoring the solace.

In this final issue for 2008 of *On the Level*, the theme of youth and gang related violence focuses on the harm it can have on one's personal life. (Previously, we looked at community and ministry impact.) When a youngster brings violence home, as a perpetrator or victim, its costs are rippling. The emotional, spiritual, relational and financial ramifications can seem so impossible to face – so much so that a mother feels all she can do is pray in tears, "Lord, I've done the best I know how. I've taken them to church, taught them right from wrong, and disciplined them when needed. Only you can help my child now."

Know anyone who's prayed this prayer? Or have you? Several mothers in our DVULI family are familiar with that prayer, as well as the costs that follow the unexpected phone call. Here's their take!

Marie Cole (Kansas City, 2008)
Mother of two sons

On June 29, 2008 around 1:00 a.m. we received a phone call from our son telling us he had been shot and was admitted to Truman Medical Hospital. Fear went all through my body and mind. I was speechless. My son Chris and a couple of friends went

to pick up one of the boy's cousins from a party. While standing outside the banquet hall's upper parking lot, random gun fire erupted. Chris was shot in his left leg crushing his shin bone; and one of his friends, Dion Wiley, was killed. Seeing our son in so much pain from the loss of his friend and in so much more pain from his injury was a very heavy burden for our family. We had to re-adjust our schedules for the next two months because Chris was not able to walk. Though I still had to work, I would sit at the hospital until visiting hours were over or I'd be awake all through the night giving him pain medicine and praying for him. It became very tiring and draining and cost us many sleepless nights. It was physically and spiritually challenging because Chris was having nightmares and calling out his friend Dion's name. We had to care for our 19 year old son as though he was a little baby again. We continue to pray that he will not return to those familiar friendships.

Cynthia Burton (San Diego, 1999)
Mother of two sons

On December 27, 2006 my youngest son, age 17, was arrested and charged with 14 felonies and 2 misdemeanors – this came five days after he had completed his high school course requirements. He was working full time while waiting to graduate in June 2007. If found guilty he was looking at 12 to 14 years jail time, and because of his age, the courts were also considering charging him as an adult and giving him an automatic 3 strikes! The end result was our son spent 36 days in Juvenile Hall and on February 1, 2008 was released to our custody with 6 months probation for 2 misdemeanors charges. Due to the incredible stress, our health was challenged and my son even developed high blood pressure. It took us away from our full time work, church and community obligations, and we relocated to a different part of the city. We'd spend hours researching juvenile law and parent/teen rights. To recover we gave more time to family prayer, refocused how we parented our juvenile/

adult son and we started to connect with gang members and their families in the community as part of our ministry. If my husband and I had not listened to the voice of God we would have gotten in the way of what He wanted to do in order to save my son from the hands of the enemy. It was the most devastating time in my parenting role... Thank God for answered prayers and second chances because I was losing my son to the streets of San Diego.

Virginia Ward (Boston, 1998)
Mother of two sons

I was at the church when my husband called to say our 16-year old son, Paul had been jumped by several youth. I said, "What? Where is he? Is he alive? Can I talk to him?" Paul got on the phone and said he was all right. It was on the school bus that he had an altercation with a girl who turned a teasing situation serious by involving her gang affiliated friends. Twenty youth attacked my son in a parking lot along his route home from school. His younger brother watched helplessly as this happened and Paul's friend ran off. A lady saw the fight and her screaming scared the gang away. She volunteered to drive Paul home. Although he was blessed to walk away with no sustained injuries, he was deeply bruised emotionally and spiritually. As his mother I was also emotional but had to trust God with my emotions because I wanted revenge. Fear and anger permeated our home as we wondered how could this happen? Paul is an excellent student athlete and leader, but he began to question if God was his protector. He wanted to start carrying a knife. Thankfully his father talked him out of that. Paul was afraid to take the school bus, so we were now driving him partially to school. We had three meetings with the families of the girl and one of the youth who jumped Paul. With a pastor facilitating and a police officer involved we reached satisfaction and agreed not to press charges. This was a painful process and a wake up call for us to daily cover our children with prayer. My son could have died.

BRIEF NEWS AND BREAKTHROUGHS

Jonathan Wynne (Detroit, 2004) was ordained as an Elder in the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) at New St. Paul Tabernacle COGIC in Detroit, Mich. "I am trusting that you will continue to pray for me that I would be all that God desires me to be," said Jon in an email statement. "It is my desire to have a profound impact on youth and families around the world, motivating and assisting them in becoming all that God has ordained for them to be..."



Henry Greenidge (Portland, 2003) Received the Irving C. Lambert Award, which honors excellence in urban ministry. The award which is administered by the Department of Church Growth and Evangelism of the Evangelical Covenant Church (ECC), was presented on June 25, 2008.

Anastasia (Baxter) & David E. Eurtion (Cleveland, 2007) exchanged nuptials September 13, 2008 at The Heritage Center in McKeesport, PA. "The wedding was beyond our expectations," said Anastasia. "We just felt completely engulfed in the love of our friends, family, and Christ. It was especially nice to have some of my new [DeVos] family there to celebrate with us." Gail Reese (Cleveland, 2007) offered a toast to the bride and groom from Ephesians 5.



WE REMEMBER

Max Torres (Houston, 2003)
DVULI Participant, City Coordinator, Reunion
Band Guitarist, Brother and Friend.
Oct. 23, 1955 -- Nov. 19, 2008
We'll miss you!



Leroy (Chicago South, 2007) & Eunice (Bello) Childress (Miami, 2007) were joined in holy matrimony on November 8, 2008 at First Presbyterian Church in Miami Springs, FL. The two met in April 2007 at the DeVos Initiative's First National Conference in Orlando, FL. This marks the first DVULI courtship that resulted in the exchange of marriage vows. "Woo Hoo!" Congratulations!



Hilda Guinn & Gregory Arsenault (Memphis, 2004) were united in marriage on October 25, 2008 at True Light Baptist Church in Memphis, TN. "It was a beautiful day with family and friends," says Hilda. "Gregory is an answer to prayers. God gave me more than what I prayed for in a husband...he's committed and refreshing and humble." Hilda's husband relocated from New York to join her in Memphis.

Billy Evans (Chicago South, 2007) is now a Post Secondary Coach for the Chicago Public Schools. In this capacity Billy serves as a career and college counselor at an inner city high school. He helps students prepare for college, assists them with scholarships and enrollment in the college they'd like to attend. Billy has found a way to incorporate the DVULI core values into this program to help increase the graduation rate of teenagers and particularly at risk males.



Eula and Enid Gaddis (Grand Rapids, 2006) gave birth to Ayric Seth on September 27, 2008 at 9:55 am. Their beautiful boy weighed in at 8 lbs 8 oz and measured 20 inches long. "I come from a long line of girl breeders," said Eula. "So having a boy came as a surprise to us...I am just happy to have a healthy son at home."

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2008 *HOLLAND, MI*



Wow! The Second National Conference (NC2) was awesome! The staff and coaches enjoyed seeing everyone again and hearing the updated stories of the different ministries and all that is going on in each other's lives...what a blessing!

Daily praise and worship, led by Gerald Bell and DVULI alumni, prepared attendees for the devotionals given by Ron Carter. The instructors for NC2 were Peter O'Donnell, Chana Edmond Verley (Grand Rapids, 2000), Khary Bridgewater (Boston, 2006), Ron Carter (Birmingham, 1999) and Gerald Bell (Kansas City, 2003).

Historically, Systems Thinking proves to be very challenging. Participants are challenged to rethink how to do ministry and how to view and better their lives. Several participants shared how difficult and trying NC2 was for them. For some, the content can be hard and scary. For other participants, reexamining their future is not an easy thing to do but just what they need. With the completion of each session, relief on many faces was evident as the fog began to clear. This excites both the instructors and DVULI staff.

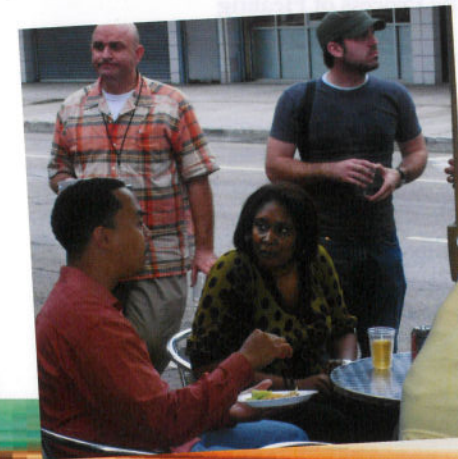
The final session on the Breakthrough Plan process revealed how going back and revisiting journals, personal mission statements and reflecting on key learning points can lead to healthy change in how we live and work. Participants working on their breakthrough plans should ponder these thoughts:

1. Work hard- using Systems Thinking, develop your vision and goals
2. Never give up- Urban work is hard but remember who we are and what God has called us to do
3. Learn to enjoy the climb- It's in the climb, not in reaching the top, that you are developed
4. Always be prepared- stick with your vision and goals, follow through, continue to be a learner
5. Do not be embarrassed to ask for help- that's what we're here for and remember to network
6. Utilize your mentor to the fullest- "Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many counselors bring success." Proverbs 15:22
7. Set Priorities- set goals and put a timetable on them and be accountable to someone
8. Be encouraged!- "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philipians 1:6 (NIV)

– RICK DIAZ

CCDA 2008 *MIAMI, FL*

This year's Christian Community Development Association Conference was held in Miami, Florida. They had about 2,300 people in attendance. The theme was Seeking the Peace of the City. Three DeVos alumni presented workshops on the core values of Accountability (Chris Jehle, Kansas City), Balance (Mayra Nolan, Los Angeles), and Leverage (Curt Gibson, Los Angeles). There were many inspirational speakers, excellent workshops, and lots of opportunities to connect with like-minded people in ministry from all around the country. DVULI hosted a gathering on Friday for alumni who were in attendance. About 100 people turned out for great food, hugs, and conversation. If you weren't able to come, plan on meeting us next year in Cincinnati, OH!



COVER STORY CONT.

Continued from front cover

only gotten two hours of sleep.” In an effort to manage the attention and the stress that accompanies, Phil said their family attempted to seclude themselves from reporters. That, however, did not stop the news from spreading as their names and faces were showing up on the major newswires.

All consuming grief

Faced with the task of helping family, congregation and friends come to terms with such a sordid event, Phil said, “We were consumed by the process of grief. There were so many in our family to comfort. Even my own kids were grieving.” He further adds, “We were feeling drained. I’ve never cried as much as I did during this tragedy.”

The deepest pain, he admits, was for the victims and their families. As a pastor who has been in hospitals with many families suffering from loss, Phil said it was impossible to not be deeply hurt over the lives lost in this senseless shooting. All the while grieving his own loss.

“This was a huge cost,” he exhales. “The first huge cost was the loss of lives. What it cost me and my family, pales in comparison to what its cost those who lost their loved ones innocently...

I can only imagine what they are going through.” He continues, “I have [ministered] in these death situations before and I have witnessed families lives tore up, but this time my heart was aching.”

Looming questions

As Matthew’s pastor and uncle, Phil was feeling some responsibility for what had

occurred. He found it easy to connect his roles in Matthew’s life to the impact the news of this misfortune was having on the church world nationally;

“Has fear entered into the most sacred realm?”

“Could I have done a better job pastoring Matthew?”

“Would he have called me?”

“Could I have intervened or been there?”

“Knowing what Matthew has done has changed the way church is done and I feel responsible for that,” he reasons.



With 14 years of leading a congregation under his belt, the tender hearted and gently spoken pastor began to further question whether he was fit for the call, fearing; “Who would want to associate with me? I lost my associate pastor for a season. I wondered if my church would excuse me and if the DeVos Initiative would no longer want me to represent them.”

The Process of Healing

After the funerals, meetings were arranged with the families. Phil described the meetings as an awesome time of prayer, loving and weeping together. “It was an incredible move of God,” he said. “We were apprehensive at first. But the crying and forgiveness in the room sent chills through us all.” The families all agreed to formal public forgiveness as

well as private times to grieve together. Phil meets with Ron and Loretta on a monthly basis for prayer and ongoing support. “Although I am standing with the family of the one who brought the pain, I want the world to know we were sorry and that we grieve for the families and their loss,” he said. “I am praying we can all get through this December...I will never forget this.”

Now 12 months later, Phil, who continues in his work as a Pastor as well as a DeVos Coach, said he feels “God’s power at work in his life.” The gestures and inquiries of support that poured in from as far as South Africa and throughout the nation, he said was a source of strength that helped he and his family tremendously. “I really appreciate the DVULI family. I know they were praying for us. We got calls and emails from around the country...thank you!”

In a final conversation, Phil urged urban workers to consider the words of his brother-in-law, “This is dad, pick up the phone.” He said those are the words our heavenly father is saying to the youth they are reaching. “I know the work is hard and it can be thankless and seem impossible,” Phil said. “But our urban youth leaders have to let these youth know their daddy in heaven loves them.”



Phil & Cathy Abeyta

BEFORE YOU GO

devos pilot training

BY EILEEN KOOREMAN

Over the last twelve years, a number of large individual youth ministries have approached the DeVos Initiative about the possibility of providing training for their urban leaders. There have been good reasons why we have chosen not to do so. Our mission, as prescribed by the DeVos family, is to provide leadership development to grass roots urban youth workers who often do not have opportunity or access to training for professional development. Large organizations usually have their own training, established ministry models, and structure that they provide or even require for staff and volunteers.

About a year and half ago we were approached by a group of leaders from City Life, the urban division of Youth for Christ. They made a persuasive argument that training a co-hort of leaders from City Life chapters in urban centers across the country would be strategic for their vision of holistic ministry with youth. They contended that at the same time, it would broaden the impact of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative nation-wide. The dialogue continued and grew to include the president of Youth for Christ, and several members of their executive team.

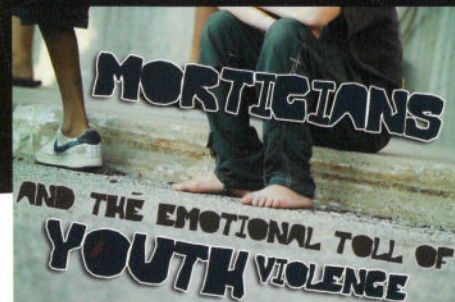


for youth for christ

We began to believe that the Holy Spirit was telling us it was the right time and the right organization and the right people to give something like this a try.

We are excited to announce that beginning with the 2009 class of the DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative, we will have a team of urban leaders from City Life go through the training with the five other cities for that year. They will hold their own 'local workshops' in a location convenient for their team and will attend the national conferences in Orlando and Michigan along with the other city groups. Two members of their executive team will be part of the 12 person co-hort. They will experience the training along with the City Life leaders and they will be exposed to the unique challenges of working with urban at-risk youth from within the context of an established non-urban ministry model.

There are lots of unanswered questions about outcomes and expectations for the DeVos training with staff from a single organization. We look forward to continued dialogue with Youth for Christ about the opportunities and challenges that this format presents for them as an international organization and for us as we continue to focus on youth leaders in local urban communities.



When's the last time you talked to your youth about the emotional impact of violence? Some of you may never have. For others it may have been some time ago. Whatever the case, I'd like to challenge you to sit them down and have a rap session. To facilitate your discussion, search the link below from National Public Radio and let them listen to the interview. Here are some suggested questions to engage them in constructive dialogue around a familiar subject from a unique angle:



npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=12525744

Suggested discussion questions:
 -Have you ever thought about how youth violence affects Morticians/Funeral Directors? Why or why not?
 -Which of the stories grabbed your attention? Why?
 -How do you explain the ease at which youth kill each other?
 -What hurts you most about youth killing each other?
 -From your perspective, what can be done to stop youth violence?

2009 CITY COORDINATORS

It's truly hard to believe we are entering our 12th year of training. Without fail, God has consistently demonstrated his faithfulness by helping us identify top notch City Coordinators. This year is no different. Having completed orientation, our new City Coordinators are now actively engaged in the recruiting and selection process. We are optimistic that the Lord will help them identify those youth workers He's prepared for this life-changing journey.



Marvin Jacobo
Youth for Christ

Luis Rengifo
Miami

Mary Rengifo
Miami

Clark Jones
Washington D.C.

Marva Richards
Cleveland

Roni James
New York City

Oscar Benavides
Dallas

MESSAGE BOARD

These people have updated contact information:

Address:

Anna Scott (Orlando 2000)
Mike Davis (Atlanta 2008)
Tom Lach (Chicago 2002)
Chris Negron (Chicago 2007)
Andra Burns (Atlanta 2008)
Michael Pearson (Atlanta 2008)
Archie and Melissa Collins (Atlanta 2008)
Gerald Bell (Kansas City 2003)
Anastasia Baxter- Eurton (Cleveland 2007)
Pete Contreras (San Diego 2008)
Tanya Trujillo (Denver 2005)

Email:

Shant'a Johnson (Denver 2003)
Curtis Ross (Kansas City 2008)
Benny Santiago (Indianapolis 2005)
Pete Contreras (San Diego 2008)
Michael Pearson (Atlanta 2008)

If you are interested in contacting any of these people, please visit the DeVos Urban Leadership website for updated contact information. devosurbanleadership.org.

FOURTH LOCAL WORKSHOP

Resource Networking
Phoenix, December 4-6
San Diego, January 15-17
Kansas City, Dec. 11-13
Atlanta, December 11-13
Minneapolis, December 4-6
Check website for locations and directions

MERRY CHRISTMAS &
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

*Rick, Eileen, Ron, Taylor, Liz,
Gerald and Ginny*

MAY 14-16, 2009 // LOS ANGELES
URBAN YOUTH WORKERS INSTITUTE 2009

UWYI09

As we celebrate the birth of our Savior, the DVULI staff send holiday blessings to all our participants, alumnus and their families.



DeVos URBAN LEADERSHIP STAFF

Rick Diaz
Program Director
rickdi@rdvcorp.com

Eileen Kooreman
Assistant Program
Director
eileenk@rdvcorp.com

Gerald Bell
Communications
Manager
geraldb@rdvcorp.com

Ron Carter
Resources and Training
Manager
ronc@rdvcorp.com

Liz Koster
Administrative
Assistant
lizk@rdvcorp.com

Taylor Voss
Communications
Assistant
taylorv@rdvcorp.com

Ginny Vander Hart
Foundations Director
virginia@rdvcorp.com

DeVos Urban Leadership Initiative
P.O. Box 230257, Grand Rapids, MI 49523-0257
Phone: 616-643-4700 Fax: 616-774-0116