

Ministry teams had come but fizzled out at the first sign of danger. Jones had no place to run.

God's gang

By **EDWARD PEECHER**

Today's children are missing out on their childhood. The family is disintegrating, forcing them to grow up unnurtured. Gang violence, child abuse, teenage pregnancy, addictions, and school dropouts are pressures they face.

At New Heritage Christian Center in Chicago, Illinois, we are responding to this challenge. We have adapted the Royal Rangers program to our urban setting and are taking Royal Rangers to the streets.

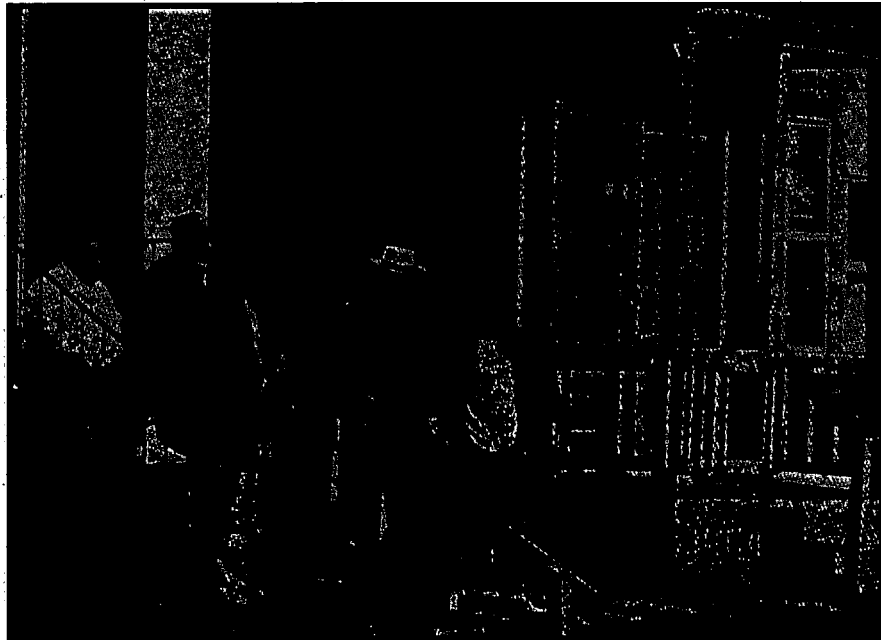
Mario Jones, senior commander of our church outpost, feels the church should recruit boys on the streets as the gangs do. This has led him to Chicago's public schools—the same place the gangs do their recruiting.

At Rider Elementary, Commander Jones and his team conducted a 6-week summer outreach program. Some 65 boys from the neighborhood participated. This was done with the blessings of the school principal and local school council, but not with the blessing of the Gangster Disciples, a "Folks" street gang who claim the turf.

One evening the commanders, who stood with uniforms on talking with some boys, were accosted by a Gangster Disciple. He wanted to

know what flag they were flying and what their colors meant.

Commander Jones told the young man he was flying the flag of the Lord Jesus Christ.



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The young man left but returned with several gang members. Shots rang out. One young man, who was not from our church, was wounded in the leg.

The next day Commander Jones and his men marched around the school yard and prayed with urgency. To them terminating their commitment prematurely would be a disaster. They had told the neighborhood boys that a 6-week program would be held.

Commander Jones recalled as a boy growing up in that neighborhood that several ministry teams had come but had fizzled out at the first sign of danger. The difference was

that Jones had no place to run; this was his neighborhood.

Rider Elementary is 3 blocks from his home.

At the final meeting our boys, dressed in Royal Rangers uniform, paraded onto the school playground. There Royal Rangers and teens from the streets held hands in a circle and prayed. At the conclusion of the 6 weeks, 40 boys had given their

hearts to the Lord Jesus Christ, along with several moms, brothers, sisters, and neighbors. Our commanders have been invited by the principal to do another summer program.

Royal Rangers is a viable tool in the inner city; our committed commanders have proven so both on the streets and in the church. ▣

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