HOLDING OUT HOPE
On June 12, Pope Francis concluded his trip to South America with a visit to a slum in Paraguay. There, the pope described his vision of the Catholic Church as a place of welcome for “the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner, the leper, and the paralytic.” In saying this, he offered hope to the downtrodden in a nominally Catholic society that has long been characterized by political corruption, extreme poverty, and social inequity.

CALLING FOR CHANGE
Micah and the other Old Testament prophets often sounded a similar call. Israel and Judah were nations claiming to live by God’s word. But the claims did not match reality. They had allowed corruption and injustice to become endemic. Hope had been stolen from the poor and powerless, and the national and religious leaders showed no concern for the situation.

1. Compare the pope’s vision of the church’s role to Micah’s description of God’s requirements for his people.
2. Should the pope’s challenge to the Latin American church be of any interest to Christians in the United States? Why or why not?
3. Compare and contrast churches’ treatment of the weakest in society with attitudes prevalent in Micah’s day.
4. What reasons do American Christians sometimes give for lack of concern for society’s outcasts? How might Micah counter those arguments if he were here today?
5. How can our church better fulfill the requirements of God as listed by Micah?

—Charles R. Boatman

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