

History Highlights



“I Will Not Leave You as Orphans”

Since Von’s ministry in Mexico began with a visit to an orphanage, we couldn’t have a complete history of Spectrum without considering orphanages. The term orphanage is a misnomer, as historically most of the children have had at least one living parent. In the U.S. some of these kids would have been in foster care. Some parents have had difficulty managing their children or have needed supervision for them while they are working. Orphanages have also provided a safe place for children who have been living alone on the streets, as long as they could learn to live under structure and authority. Some parents have brought their children home during vacations or weekends for a visit. Some have promised to, and then have broken that promise, and some parents haven’t engaged with their children at all.

The care that orphanages have provided has varied widely. Some orphanages have offered opportunities beyond what the kids would have received at home, such as regular nutritious meals and attending high school. However, some orphanages were infamous for their abuse – physical or sexual abuse, neglect, or the children being kept looking “poor” to maximize donations from the groups who visited. In fact, the traditional items in Spectrum’s food line – chiles, onions, tomatoes, potatoes, and carrots – are some of the things that the kids at those

orphanages craved yet only received on occasion. In the early 1990s the Mexican government began to pay more attention to the management of orphanages and gave a single government agency that oversight. Some orphanages closed their doors rather than face closer scrutiny of their finances and management.

Over the years Von and then Spectrum have worked with orphanages at different points on this range of care. While quality orphanages are a joy to support and are a blessing to all, the needs of the kids in the poorly managed orphanages are undoubtedly greater. All Spectrum directors and staff have needed wisdom in this area. Do we become involved with these other orphanages? If so, how? How do we assure that the money that our donors have provided goes to the needs of the children and not someone's pocket? Are we condoning the poor management if we continue to help them? There are no answers that are universally right.

No matter the quality of the orphanage, when we visit, we want to show the kids that we care about them. It is hard for them to be separated from their families regardless of the reasons. We want to share about Jesus, who says, "I will not leave you as orphans," and tell them about the Father, who loves all of them.

