How It All Began

The Marion Zirkle Children’s Foundation began in January 1997 to minister to children spiritually and physically. The 36 year war that ended in Dec. of 1996 left about 300,000 children homeless and over half of these children live in the streets because they have nowhere safe to go.

They exist by stealing their food or eating out of the market place from the garbage left over from the vendors. They sleep wherever they can find a place to stretch out. There is no way that we could take care of these many children but we have, with the help of you, our partners, brought hope, love, and most of all, Jesus, to thousands.

Guatemala has a population of around 11 million people---54% are children under 18 years of age. Out in the rural areas, 71% live in extreme poverty. Recently, we learned that 55.9% of Guatemalans survive with less than $2.00 per day and out of that percentage 15.7% with less than $1.00 per day.

It brings sadness to our hearts to know that 1 ½ million children between the ages of 8-17 have to work so that their family can eat. We have been privileged to help thousands of families with food and clothing through donations that we have received. Every year we treat several thousand children medically and pull hundreds of teeth. At least three times, we have brought in a team of doctors and nurses that have performed the cleft mouth operation.

We have a small house on our campus in Guatemala that we have used for an orphanage for over 15 years. We took a family of six that were abandoned by their mother and the father was not able to care for them. Their ages ranged from 3 years of age through 12 and now that three year old is 19 and works for the ministry. The others have grown and are living their lives in other places. Three years ago, we took another family of five, abandoned, and were living in one room with a dirt floor. The oldest girl was being mother and father to them.

The Foundation also helps pay one half of a monthly rent for a family of 8. This young mother lost her husband in the war. We helped put the oldest child through school and now we are helping the second child with paying his monthly tuition, and buying school clothes and supplies.

During the month of December, we do a Christmas outreach called “Operation Shoebox”.

We go into areas where the majority of parents can give very little to nothing for Christmas. If they have to decide between food or a toy, they buy food. You, our partners, help us bless between 15-30,000 children yearly through Operation Shoebox. This is a box the size of what shoes would fit in. Items are put into this box depending on the age of the child and whether it is a boy or girl.

All items can be bought at the dollar store. For instance, an 8 year old boy would be delighted to receive a truck or car, pack of marbles, a coloring book and a box of crayons, a toothbrush, pencils, a pair of socks, and some candy. It would bring a big smile to a 13 year old girl to receive a stuffed animal, hair items, a billfold, brush and comb, pencils, a pair of socks, and some candy. These children do not need expensive items to make them happy but are truly satisfied with the items that they receive.