

NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY

CHILD SPONSORSHIP: A RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN TO IMPROVE A
CHILD SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM IN MAZATLAN, MEXICO

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ABSTRACT

As co-habitants on planet Earth with 7 billion others,¹ Christians have an ethical obligation to be aware of their world (Luke 10:25-37). After coming to know of the extreme poverty of our nearest neighbors in Latin America, I believe it is necessary to do something about it. This qualitative research project seeks to understand the roots of poverty in Mazatlan, Mexico, and proposes how a successful child sponsorship program can be constructed and improved in the city.

GO on the Mission (GO) is the organization associated with this research and their child sponsorship program. The sponsorship program was started in April 2010, and, while it has experienced growth, it is not as healthy or effective as it could be and thus has had high donor turnover.

Research preceded observation. This research looked at the importance of missions and child sponsorship programs, determined the traits of effective children's ministry, explored Latin American culture and traditions, and uncovered leadership principles both home and abroad.

After extensive study and investigation, observation was done to illuminate how the current system should best proceed. Five feeding centers in Mazatlan, Mexico, were studied as well as a local school and neighboring *colonias*.² This examination lasted for a total of three weeks in the respective locations.

After observations, interviews were conducted to unearth the current status of leaders in the feeding centers, current life change and effects on the sponsored

¹ "World Population Clock: 7 Billion People - Worldometers," Worldometers - Real Time World Statistics, World Population, accessed November 07, 2011, <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>.

² A colonia is a neighborhood, and Mazatlan is made up of just over 100 of them.

children, and more seasoned missionary approaches in the city. These interviews were with leaders and children at the respective feeding centers and revealed the current realities of the program to determine how it can grow most effectively in the future. Children discussed how the program has affected their lives and their families. The leaders were asked about future growth and training and their personal involvement.

The data collected helped determine the next steps for GO in their efforts to help heal the children of Mazatlan. The observations and interviews showed that leadership development was the most needed component and that the addition of job descriptions, job performance reviews, and leader training will drastically enhance the effectiveness of GO. The research has helped identify possible ulterior motives and common pitfalls in staff, illuminate how to effectively reach children and families, and bring understanding of cultural differences.

Leaders having the opportunity to see other child sponsorship programs as well as having clear expectations will boost donor confidence, bring structure to the program, and create more stable environments for the children. All of the data collected in the research, observation, and interviews has helped determine the next steps for GO on the Mission in their efforts to create resilience in the children of Mazatlan, Mexico.

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Introduction

When Christ Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth and lived out his mission, he did not spend his time solely with the healthy and wealthy. While that strategy would have been more comfortable and less provocative, passages such as Luke 7:36-50 and Mark 10:46-52 speak instead of Jesus' habit of spending time with beggars and prostitutes. Biblical scholars even say, "Jesus and the poor are inseparable."³

Middle-class American Christians can find it a challenge to follow Jesus' example in caring for the poor. It is easy to become complacent about poverty here in America because suffering is often not as visible. When people don't have cash to pay a bill, they use credit cards. When people need a car and cannot pay cash, they get a loan. Government programs ensure that people always have food, or at least a way to obtain a meal. This is not representative of the way most of the world lives; in fact, Richard Stearns, President of World Vision, writes, "One out of four children in developing countries is underweight, and some 350 to 400 million children are hungry. Worst, it is estimated that a child dies every five seconds from hunger-related causes."⁴ Surrounded by wealthy neighbors with children who have never known hunger, middle-class American Christians can only guess what it is like to experience this kind of poverty. Yet as followers of Christ and fellow citizens on this planet, we have been called to help heal this broken world. One of the clear commands from Christ is to help those who are hurting and stand up against

³ Ralph D. Winter et al., "State of the World's Need," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: a Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 592.

⁴ Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 134.

injustice.⁵ So how do we typically try to help? We give money to organizations we believe are helping. American Christians often seek out Christian organizations that reach out to the poor in hurting places throughout the world.

One of these hurting places is Mazatlan, Mexico, where there were more than 300 drug or gang related murders in 2010.⁶ In Mexico there is a stark difference between classes – much more so than in America – and the gap between the rich and the poor is only increasing.⁷ Children make up a large portion of the Mexican population, and they are nearly 50 percent of the impoverished people in Central America.⁸ Just walking through Mazatlan, one can sense that there is a depravity, hopelessness, and cycle of poverty that is rarely broken.

Statement of Problem

In April 2010, GO, a non-profit organization based in Silverdale, Washington,⁹ started a child sponsorship program with the goal of making a difference, one child at a time, in this city. Recently, I traveled to Mazatlan to see the program firsthand, and I observed that it was not fully reaching its organizational objectives. Children in the feeding centers and sponsorship program only receive one meal a day, only have access to clean water with breakfast (and occasionally dinner), have not received Bibles, and many of them are failing in school. Children stop coming to the

⁵ Verses such as Leviticus 19:15, Deuteronomy 10:18, Psalm 72:4, or Jeremiah 20:13 speak of God's heart for the poor and his hatred of injustice. He commands his followers to help said people in many passages, for example Matthew 25:31-46.

⁶ "What Are the Dangers of Mazatlán, Mexico?," USAToday.com, Travel Tips, accessed October 04, 2011, <http://traveltips.usatoday.com/dangers-mazatlán-mexico-100648.html>.

⁷ Donald E. Schulz and Edward J. Williams, *Mexico Faces the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 5.

⁸ *Providing Hope: Latin America ChildCare Life Stories*. (Springfield: MO: Latin America ChildCare, 2003), iii.

⁹ GO was started through newlife Church in Silverdale, WA as a non-profit whose focus would be on overseas missions and church planting. More information about GO is available at goonthemission.com. Please see Appendix 1 for the Child Sponsorship detail page.

feeding centers, and the organization diverts donor funds to another child without notifying the donor. Yet well-meaning American donors have been told that their financial gifts will enable one specific child to receive three meals a day, sufficient water, a Bible, and everything they need to succeed in school. The program has money, leaders, and goals, but several donors have recently been disillusioned by the discovery that their funds are not accomplishing all that they expected.¹⁰ Instead of recruiting more donors and expanding the program to meet the needs of more children, GO is struggling with maintaining donor confidence in the organization and the integrity of the leadership in Mazatlan.

They currently provide one meal and one glass of water to every participating child; the same amenities are given to those who are not yet sponsored. In total about 300 children participate in the Mazatlan feeding program, 70 of which are sponsored. The sponsored kids are not treated differently from the others in need of sponsors. The Mazatlan leadership feels that this is “fair” to all. However, this creates tension because sponsors who become aware of the program’s policy feel that they are not making a difference in a child’s life because their sponsored child is treated the same as all the unsponsored children.

Research Questions

This project will look to answer the following: first, how do we develop strong, trustworthy local leadership in the feeding and sponsorship program? How can we meet donor expectations about the use of funds received and, at the same time, create mechanisms that are both fiscally responsible and empower the agency

¹⁰ This has occurred by donors visiting their sponsored children to find out they: aren’t attending the feeding center any longer, do not have the specified materials, or are not succeeding in school.

at the local level? Finally, how do we take care of the children who are already sponsored and make sure their lives are truly improving?

Literature Review

Origins and Definitions

The first child sponsorship program originated with Eglantyne Jebb, an Oxford-educated professor and sociologist who founded the organization Save the Children in 1932.¹¹ Shortly afterward, Children International (started in 1936)¹² and Plan USA (started in 1937)¹³ began a similar program, and the idea spread rapidly. While sponsorship programs vary, the typical organization takes a sponsor from a more-developed nation and pairs him or her with a child in need of basic necessities (i.e. water, sanitation, education, and food). A feeding center is, just as its name implies, a location that serves food to those in need of nourishment.

The Importance of Mission and Child Sponsorship

The mission of Jesus, who lived it by example, is to tell others the good news of Christ. The good news of Christ is that Jesus brings forgiveness for all, and in him, there is restoration from the past and hope for the future.¹⁴ The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20¹⁵ offers a guideline for Christian living. The Great

¹¹ Save the Children, *History*, accessed October 6, 2011,

<http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpI4E/b.6229507/k.C571/History.htm>.

¹² Children International Child Sponsorship Charity: Fighting World Poverty and Helping Children in Need," Children International - Sponsor a Child Today!, *History*, accessed October 06, 2011, <http://www.children.org/about.asp>.

¹³ "Frequently Asked Questions," Plan International USA - Promising Futures, Community by Community, *History*, accessed October 06, 2011, <http://www.planusa.org/frequentlyaskedquestions>.

¹⁴ Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, *Called and Empowered: Pentecostal Perspectives on Global Mission* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 13. Matthew 9:35 and Luke 16:16

¹⁵ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

Commission does three things: it defines that we already have authority through Christ, it gives us increased authority to go and help others, and it mandates our involvement in the reaching of the world around us.¹⁶ Child sponsorship through a Christian organization (such as GO) should provide the physical necessities for a child but also brings teachings on spiritual formation thus fulfilling the Great Commission. This commission is the ending to Matthew's book, the culmination of what he believes to be the life and lessons of Jesus thus reinforcing the importance of this passage.¹⁷

The church has not always existed, but missions has existed from the time of Jesus to present, and missions gave birth to the church.¹⁸ The mandate to share the good news of Christ, by means both practical (food, clothing, shelter, etc.)¹⁹ and spiritual (finding forgiveness and eternal life), is found in the Bible.²⁰ Whether one is a beggar or billionaire, forgiveness is free and the hope of Christ is for all. God wants to bring relief and security to those who suffer from injustice.²¹

As Christians seek to spread the good news, or gospel, it can be easy to focus on helping people spiritually and neglect their physical needs. But often people understand the good news of Jesus best when Christians give selflessly and meet

Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

¹⁶ Edgar Krentz, "Missionary Matthew: Matthew 28:16-20 as Summary of the Gospel," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 31, no. 1 (2004): 25, accessed February 13, 2012, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials.

¹⁷ Krentz, 24.

¹⁸ Kirsteen Kim, "Mission Theology of the Church," *Academic Search Premier*, 2010, International Review Of Mission 99, no. 1: 39-55, accessed February 13, 2012, EBSCO.

¹⁹ Matthew 25:31-46

²⁰ Ralph D. Winter et al., "The Bible in World Evangelization," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: a Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 21.

²¹ Gary A. Haugen, *Good News about Injustice: a Witness of Courage in a Hurting World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 78. Psalms 12:5, Leviticus 19:15, and Proverbs 22:22-23 are a few scriptural backings for God hating injustice

practical needs. As one World Vision worker explains, “We are followers of Jesus Christ, and we are commanded to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are here to show you that Jesus loves you.”²² As Gordon Fee puts it, “Our gospel [good news] is not simply that of ‘saving souls’; it is rather, as with Jesus, the bringing of wholeness to broken people in every kind of distress.”²³ Or as Lingenfelter, in his book *Leading Cross-Culturally*, expresses, “A healing touch without the good news or the good news without a healing touch are both incomplete expressions of the vision that Christ gave us in the Gospels.”²⁴ There cannot be a gulf between helping people with their physical and practical needs and helping them with their spiritual needs:²⁵ they are two pieces of the same puzzle that fit together.

The importance of helping others is an unquestionable certainty, but how much importance should be placed on helping those outside one’s own family or even from a different culture? The Bible also deals with this tension because Jesus came to the Jews, yet now countless people in a multitude of nations, outside the Jewish race, are followers of Jesus.²⁶ Johannes Verkuyl, former Professor and Head of the Department of Missiology and Evangelism at Free University of Amsterdam, addresses this when he says, “God chose Israel with the intention that she would

²² Stearns, 71.

²³ Gordon D. Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 178.

²⁴ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 36.

²⁵ Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen, 17.

²⁶ John 10: 16. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.
Romans 1:16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

speak to the other nations.”²⁷ Christians today need to have the same mindset, knowing that Jesus is Savior and the hope of the entire world.²⁸ God’s love is for all people of all ethnicities and cultures. In order to answer the question of how much importance should be placed on helping others it is important to keep in mind the prompting of the Holy Spirit. As found in Acts 10, the Holy Spirit gives us power to witness and guides us.²⁹ Another resource that speaks to the importance of reaching outside of your culture and helping others is the story of the first recorded feeding center. Found in Acts chapter 6:1-7, it tells the story of the apostles setting up a feeding center for Jewish widows. These Jews were Hellenistic and not seen as “native” Jews. Yet this program was set up to help care for the needs of others, because Jesus cares about everyone regardless of race or religion.

One of the ways to help meet the needs of people both practically and spiritually is through child sponsorship. *Christianity Today* cites child sponsorship as an effective method to change a child’s life without relocating the child and/or spending thousands of dollars on adoption.³⁰ In the book, *Providing Hope: Latin America Childcare Life Stories*, there are numerous stories of lives changed through sponsorship programs. Some stories end in tragedy and some in jubilation, but sponsoring a child gives that child a second chance at a life. One such story is that of

²⁷ Johannes Verkuyl, “Biblical Foundation for Mission Mandate,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: a Reader*, by Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, Darrell R. Dorr, D. Bruce Graham, and Bruce A. Koch (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 42.

²⁸ J. Mack Stiles and Leeann Stiles, *Mack & Leeann’s Guide to Short-term Missions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 30.

²⁹ Acts 10:1-48. The Holy Spirit prompts Peter to reach out to the Gentiles and guides him to Cornelius’ house.

³⁰ “210 Million Reasons to Adopt.” *Christianity Today* 54, no. 4 (April 2010): 55. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, accessed February 17, 2012.

Yair.³¹ Yair was a third grade student in Mexico City who was sponsored and received the benefits of education, food and medical care. Yair died of leukemia, but before his death he found faith, joy, and hope in Christ and led his family to faith in Christ, too. In the midst of pain and suffering, courage and joy transcend the pain and give hope to many.

Child sponsorship seeks to replicate the evangelistic relationship that Jesus had with his disciples.³² The basis of child sponsorship is the power of a one-on-one relationship. A child benefits from sponsorship, not only physically but mentally and spiritually, and the sponsor benefits as well.³³ By giving of himself, the sponsor becomes open to God's blessings and grows his or her heart because, "where your money is your heart will be also."³⁴ When a sponsor expands his or her horizons and gets to know a child in a developing country, his or her life becomes enriched.

There are also some sources that address child sponsorship in a negative manner, criticizing unintended effects of such sponsorships. One blog encourages people to find other ways of giving because sponsoring a child can create dependency in the child and jealousy amongst friends and family.³⁵ Latin American culture places a high value on family but maintains an individualist mentality,³⁶ or a

³¹ *Providing Hope: Latin America ChildCare Life Stories*, 5.

³² Erica Bornstein, "Child Sponsorship, Evangelism, and Belonging in the Work of World Vision Zimbabwe," *American Ethnologist* 28, no. 3 (August 2001): 606, doi:10.1525/ae.2001.28.3.595.

³³ Bornstein, 606.

³⁴ Luke 12:34

³⁵ New Internationalist Magazine: First Stop for Global Justice, *Simply... Why You Should Not Sponsor A Child*. Accessed October 6, 2011. <http://www.newint.org/features/1989/04/05/simply/>.

³⁶ Ralph D. Winter et al., "Evangelization of Whole Families," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: a Reader* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 654.

mentality that looks to provide for oneself before the community as a whole.³⁷ Children often grow up sharing and giving out of the little that they have but only to members of their own families. While in Mazatlan recently, I attended a birthday party where the child was instructed not to let friends play with their new toy. Due to scarcity there is often a hoarding attitude.

While sponsorship may create jealousy, there is a stronger case for the idea that when a child is sponsored they do not just help one family member: they help them all.³⁸ One story that shows the power of sponsorship is that of Albert, who was sponsored while the rest of his family was not. While there are still feelings of jealousy and resentment, Albert was able to receive a great education and provide for his family. Moreover, he is now committed to helping others in his community.³⁹ So in this story, while there was jealousy, the greater good was changing the life of a child, a family, and a community. The greatest argument for the power of child sponsorship comes from observing a program; many who were opposed or apathetic to the power of sponsorship have been swayed in its favor by the observation of a program and the families affected by it.⁴⁰

In regard to creating dependency, this is a real threat whenever one engages in cross-cultural partnerships. Unknowingly, American churches can rob locals of

³⁷ Mary T. Lederleitner, *Cross-cultural Partnerships: Navigating the Complexities of Money and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 35.

³⁸ Ralph D. Winter et al., "Evangelization of Whole Families," 2009, 654.

³⁹ Samuel J. Voorhies, "Transformational Development," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: a Reader*, by Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, Darrell R. Dorr, D. Bruce. Graham, and Bruce A. Koch (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 600.

⁴⁰"LESS CHARITY, MORE JUSTICE." *Christianity Today* 53, no. 11 (November 2009): 34-35. Academic Search Premier, EBSCOhost, accessed February 17, 2012.

their dignity and their feelings of organizational ownership.⁴¹ It is very important to move slowly into a new culture and acclimate oneself with the societal implications of bringing funding into the region or to “begin as a learner”.⁴² Only through observation and local instruction can healthy cross-cultural partnerships be made.⁴³ In fact, many organizations have hurt rather than helped by not understanding the social implications of what will occur when a Western organization comes in and promises funding.⁴⁴ Westerners giving large financial gifts can undermine the giving of local organizations. Large gifts from overseas create the feeling that giving is unnecessary because “others with more money will come in and save us.”⁴⁵ If an affluent entity wants to help and not hurt in a less-affluent country they must build trust, be a learner of culture, and build the dignity and ownership of the less-affluent society.⁴⁶

Children's Ministry

Presenting the good news to children on a level that they understand is vitally important to the mission of Christ and to ending the cycle of poverty. Poverty is not just lack of money, but a lack of hope and resources.⁴⁷ True poverty exists when someone believes that he or she cannot escape the current situation and there

⁴¹ Glenn Schwartz, "Dependency," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: a Reader*, by Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, Darrell R. Dorr, D. Bruce. Graham, and Bruce A. Koch (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 657

⁴² Lingenfelter, 2009, 101.

⁴³ Lederleitner, 2010, 135.

⁴⁴ Lederleitner, 2010, 42 & 89.

⁴⁵ Lederleitner, 2010, 91.

⁴⁶ Schwartz, "Dependency," 2009, 657-659.

⁴⁷ Bryant L. Myers, "What Is Poverty Anyways?," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: a Reader*, by Ralph D. Winter, Steven C. Hawthorne, Darrell R. Dorr, D. Bruce. Graham, and Bruce A. Koch (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2009), 607-608.

is no future for him or her.⁴⁸ Studies show that when children receive adequate childcare and education in their primary years, it drastically increases their chances of finding adequate employment and helps them leave the poverty their families have always known.⁴⁹ Not only do these children escape poverty themselves, they also help their family along the way and end the cycle of poverty for their descendants. Meeting the needs of children in their formative years can be the most influential method of helping a community find hope and end the poverty mentality that entraps its members.⁵⁰

Children are incredibly susceptible to influence in their early years. In fact, one of the first things a child ever does is mirror his or her parents.⁵¹ As they progress through their life stages of faith,⁵² they need people pouring into them and showing them the love of Christ because a child flourishes in a loving environment.⁵³ In order for children to have their physical needs and also their spiritual needs met by a feeding center in Mazatlan, they must be part of a faith community. John Westerhoff claims that true spirituality cannot be taught but must be inspired within a faith community.⁵⁴ Reaching children is vitally important not only to Jesus' mission but also to ours, because children are far more likely to accept Jesus as

⁴⁸ Bryant L. Myers, "What Is Poverty Anyways?," 2009, 607-608.

⁴⁹ Deborah A. Phillips et al., "Child Care for Children in Poverty: Opportunity or Inequity?," *Child Development* 65, no. 2 (April 1994): 473-474, doi:10.2307/1131397.

⁵⁰ Phillips et al., 65.

⁵¹ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 130.

⁵² Fowler, in *Nurture that is Christian*, believes these stages to be: Primal Stage (infancy), Intuitive/Projective Faith (Early Childhood), and Mythical/Literal Faith (Childhood and beyond). He has other stages of faith that are beyond the age of 12 but for the sake of this paper the age group identified is 4-12 years old.

Jim Wilhoit and John Dettoni, *Nurture That Is Christian: Developmental Perspectives on Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 77.

⁵³ Stonehouse, 114.

⁵⁴ John H. Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2000), 23.

Savior and, therefore, to experience spiritual restoration, than as an adult.⁵⁵ Karyn Henley agrees by writing, “Children are more likely to express matter-of-fact faith in God than we adults who only believe in what we can experience with our five senses.”⁵⁶ Latin America is known for strong family ties; thus, “The phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America reflects the effectiveness of using families to evangelize families.”⁵⁷ If we reach children and produce real life change they will bring the gospel to their whole family, and “the soundest way for a man to come to Christ is in the setting of his own family.”⁵⁸ So feeding centers must produce these warm, loving, safe, faith inspiring communities in order to effectively reach and teach children.

Ministry in Latin America Culture

Mexico and the United States are neighbors, sisters on the same continent, yet there are stark social, economical, and psychic differences.⁵⁹ In Mexico it is estimated that 40 percent of laborers are in agriculture, despite the dry and infertile lands.⁶⁰ This is also a symbol that “we [Mexico] have not been able to undertake the revolutionary step...to improve our agricultural productivity and decrease the number of people who actually labor in agriculture in order to provide nonagricultural sectors with labor.”⁶¹ And Sinaloa (the state in which Mazatlan

⁵⁵ David Staal, *Leading Kids to Jesus: How to Have One-on-One Conversations about Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 20.

⁵⁶ Staal, 20.

Karyn Henley, *Child-Sensitive Teaching: Helping Children Grow a Living Faith in a Loving God* (Nashville, TN: Child Sensitive Communication, 2008), 42.

⁵⁷ Winter et al., “Evangelization of Whole Families,” 2009, 654.

⁵⁸ Winter et al., “Evangelization of Whole Families,” 2009, 654.

⁵⁹ Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Mexico Today* (Philadelphia: ISHI, 1982), pg. 3.

⁶⁰ Montgomery, 78.

⁶¹ Montgomery, 40.

resides) prides itself on being the center of food and agriculture in Mexico.⁶² This keeps incomes low and increases the physical difficulty of the average job, making it hard for the elderly or injured to find employment. But as Charles Wagly points out, “Latin American nations cannot continue with a large segment of their people neglected, impoverished, illiterate, and living in isolation inside their frontier.”

There has been a fight in creating a healthy democracy in Mexico. Several elections seem to be less than upstanding in their execution. This has caused the questioning of all government officials and caused more poverty and economic distress.⁶³ While there is incredible poverty, often the presence of need makes people willing to accept help. It is essential that this aid comes in the form of meeting both practical and spiritual needs because, as previously mentioned, poverty is more than the lack of things; it has physical, spiritual, material, social dimensions.⁶⁴

Children are valued in Mexico and Latin American culture.⁶⁵ Even if the family income is very limited, it is typical for a Mexican family to have several children. One of the reasons for this is that children often are seen as help for the family.⁶⁶ While public (or government) schools are free in Mexico, many children do

⁶² This information is located on the Sinaloa license plates when it says, “Líder Nacional en Alimentos”, which translates “National Leader in Produce”.

⁶³ United States, Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Country Profile: Mexico* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2008), 7-10, accessed February 13, 2012, <http://memory.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Mexico.pdf>.

⁶⁴ Samuel J. Voorhies, “Transformational Development,” 2009, 605.

⁶⁵ *Mexico Society and Culture Complete Report, Mexico Women in Culture, Business and Travel* (Petaluma, CA: World Trade Press, 2010) 9.

⁶⁶ Desiree L. Segura-April, *The Girl-Child in Latin America: A Case Study Analysis of Gender-sensitive theories and Practices Operating within Five Children's Mission Projects*, diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2006 (In Dissertations & Theses: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection), 6, accessed October 6, 2011, <Http://www.proquest.com>.

not attend because they instead perform menial tasks for their parents to produce a small amount of revenue for the family.⁶⁷ Due to the high priority placed on the young, one of the most effective ways to reach Latin American families is through their children.⁶⁸ Wherever ministry is happening, especially abroad, it is imperative that the foreigner approaches every subject with the idea of learning, not informing.⁶⁹ This is incredibly important when sharing the gospel; as Duane Elmer points out, it needs to be God's words left in people's minds, not our words.⁷⁰ Latin America is also a highly relational region, gift giving, large family/friend gatherings, and warm greetings are just a few customs in Mexico.⁷¹ A common greeting between women is a kiss on the cheek. When investing in cross-cultural ministry, it is very important to invest time into the relationship, and this is especially true in Mexico.⁷²

Leadership

Leadership is the most vital key to any organization; leadership determines the organization's performance.⁷³ The leader is the defining factor, "change the leader - change the organization."⁷⁴ According to Stetzer and Putman, great leaders possess the following qualities: calling, character, competency, comprehension,

⁶⁷ Segura-April, 28.

⁶⁸ Ralph D. Winter et al., "Evangelization of Whole Families," 2009, 654.

⁶⁹ Lederleitner, 2010, 75,79.

⁷⁰ Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Conflict: Building Relationships for Effective Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 137.

⁷¹ *Mexico Society and Culture Complete Report, Mexico Women in Culture, Business and Travel, 4.* Charles Wagley, *The Latin American Tradition; Essays on the Unity and the Diversity of Latin American Culture.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 60.

⁷² Sherwood G. Lingenfelter and Marvin Keene Mayers, *Ministering Cross-culturally: an Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 45.

⁷³ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders around You* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1995), 5.

⁷⁴ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader within You* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1993), 51.

commitment, courage, and discipleship.⁷⁵ So when growth is not happening and goals are not being met, look at the leader. When it comes to leading cross-culturally, another set of barriers can detract from leading well: cultural differences. In *Leading Cross-Culturally*, Lingenfelter says, “Leadership is how one lives within a structure, respecting the people, accepting their differences, and engaging them in ways that inspire trust and transform yet sustain relationships and structure.”⁷⁶ Understanding cultural differences and seeing how Christ is evident in the already present cultural norms is an important way to lead.

Often, as the leader, it is easy to bring your organization to a place where it is doing well but never progresses to greatness because problems are never addressed. “Yes, leadership is about vision. But leadership is equally about creating a climate where the truth is heard and brutal facts confronted.”⁷⁷ The best leaders are always changing, growing, and looking for what they can improve. Without change there can be no growth.⁷⁸ This does not mean each leader receives a “word from the Lord” and then takes his people in this unquestionable direction; great leaders lead like Jesus, through humility, learning and growing from those around them.⁷⁹ Leading change is incredibly difficult, but all growth requires change, so this is the very thing that the child sponsorship program in Mazatlan must undergo. According to John Maxwell, if the reasons for change are clearly communicated, the

⁷⁵ Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 74-75.

⁷⁶ Lingenfelter, 2009, 99.

⁷⁷ James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap--and Others Don't* (New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 2001), 74.

⁷⁸ Maxwell, 1993, 53.

⁷⁹ Collins, 76.

leader gives the extra commitment needed,⁸⁰ and the leader has taken time to develop trust, then change can occur in a healthy manner.⁸¹ Trust is a key component to leading cross-culturally and to leading change. It must be based on accepting differences, and trust must come from God and grow as a team works toward a common mission.⁸² “Leading cross-culturally is inspiring people who come from two or more cultural traditions to participate with you in building a community of trust, and then to follow you and be empowered by you to achieve a compelling vision of faith.”⁸³

Once the right leaders are in place and a basis of trust has been established, the local leaders must grow. “Grow a leader – Grow the organization.”⁸⁴ And with this growth will come increased feelings of ministry ownership.⁸⁵ If local leaders feel ownership, they will truly care about the futures of the children who attend. The partnering church must make sure to be a power-giver, not a power-hoarder.⁸⁶ Effective cross-cultural leaders need to be given authority to make decisions and understanding that relationships are more important than power or position.⁸⁷ “Instead of powering outcomes, the relational leader builds trust and influences followers through integrity of character and depth of relationship.”⁸⁸ Mentorship will be imperative in order for local leaders to have every chance to succeed so that

⁸⁰ “When a leader is dedicated to the equipping process, the whole level of performance within the organization rises dramatically.” Maxwell, 1995, 110.

⁸¹ Maxwell, 1993, 60-69.

⁸² Lingenfelter, 2009, 54.

⁸³ Lingenfelter, 2009, 117.

⁸⁴ Maxwell, 1995, 4.

⁸⁵ Maxwell, 1993, 129.

⁸⁶ Lingenfelter, 2009, 111.

⁸⁷ Lingenfelter, 2009, 111.

⁸⁸ Lingenfelter, 2009, 111.

they can develop a team to help care for the children.⁸⁹ “Leaders must be environmental change agents. They must create a climate in which potential leaders will thrive.”⁹⁰ There has been very little leadership development of the current leaders, and they have not been equipped with the tools to grow their current environments. It is much easier to recruit and release leaders rather than to properly equip them before releasing them to do the work of the Lord.⁹¹ Developing leaders takes time and resources. A mentor needs to lead by example, showing the mentee how to appropriately lead and care for children.⁹² In this way, new leaders will be set up for success and will have the greatest chance of accomplishing the organization’s goals.

Since leadership is the key to growth in an organization, the leaders within the feeding centers need to be evaluated. The best way to bring an organization from good to great is to “begin the transformation by first getting the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figure out where to drive it.”⁹³ Why are these leaders “on the bus”? Are their positions truly a good fit for their gifting? This vital question must be evaluated. Also, taking care of current leaders is very important, so discipleship and mentoring is a necessity.⁹⁴ Local leadership is

⁸⁹ Maxwell, 1993, 131.

⁹⁰ Maxwell, 1995, 17.

⁹¹ Lingenfelter, 2009, 128.

⁹² Maxwell, 1993, 132.

⁹³ Collins, 63.

⁹⁴ In order for a leader to feel equipped and not abandoned one must take time and develop them in relationship. “Organizational effectiveness is proportional to the strength of leadership.”

John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 8. “Leaders must be environmental change agents. They must create a climate in which potential leaders will thrive.” John C. Maxwell, 1995, 17.

the best way to create lasting change in the community.⁹⁵ These feeding center leaders live and work in the community they lead. Indigenous leaders are powerful because they do not have to strive to adapt or fit in to their community, they already do.⁹⁶ This adaptation of the gospel to the culture is called contextualization.

When we fail to contextualize, we run a much greater risk of establishing weak churches, whose members will turn to non-Christian syncretistic explanations, follow non-biblical lifestyles, and engage in magical rituals.⁹⁷

Contextualization⁹⁸ does not mean changing the gospel, but seeing where God is already working in a culture and bringing God's universal truth into it.⁹⁹ While living in the tension between syncretism and contextualization, a strong leader must embrace the tension and learn how to contextualize the gospel so that Christ is preached in every nation.

The idea behind indigenization is that a church should spring forth from the soil in which it was planted.¹⁰⁰ An indigenous church has leadership, expressions, forms, and functions that reflect its context,¹⁰¹ like Mazatlan's current feeding centers. The book *The Indigenous Church* addresses this truth:

Naturally we missionaries would like to see some seminary men join the work in North Anhwei; but experience has taught us that these people do not always turn out well.... Local men with a moderate amount of schooling have no such

⁹⁵ Melvin L. Hodges, *The Indigenous Church ; including The Indigenous Church and the Missionary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Pub. House, 2009), 64-65.

⁹⁶ Hodges, 18-20

⁹⁷ Whiteman, Darrell, 'Contextualization: The Theory, The Gap, The Challenge', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 21/1 (January 1997), 2-7.

⁹⁸ "Syncretism (as commonly understood) is a parameter of worldview, whereas contextualization is a parameter of enculturation.... From a missiological point of view, [syncretism is] symptom-atic of insufficient contextualization...Foreignization of church life leads to syncretistic subcultures and that this is inconsistent with God's program to redeem every ethnic group."

Brown, Rick. "Contextualization with Syncretization." *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2006).

⁹⁹ Stetzer and Putman, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Stetzer and Putman,, 93.

¹⁰¹ Stetzer and Putman, 91-92.

problem. Having been brought up in the district they are part of the local community, they are familiar with local customs, they speak the local dialect and they eat the local food. This gives stability to the work and stability gives permanency.¹⁰²

So, while keeping the indigenusness of the feeding centers, the organization needs to grow and improve the current leadership to more effectively reach the children of the *colonias*. As local and foreign members of the organization humbly come before Christ and each other, worship at the cross together, forgive and accept differences, and seek to submit and not seek power relationships, teamwork will flourish.¹⁰³

The literature reviewed is unanimously in favor of helping those in need, although the strategies differ slightly. The importance of missions and child sponsorship is that it gives children a way to exit the poverty mentality that they grew up in, giving them a chance to have a different life than that of their parents. Latin American culture is a warm and loving culture that places importance on children, so children are an excellent place for ministry to start. And while there are many cultural differences between the United States and Mexico, the love of Christ for others crosses cultural barriers. Overall, writers and researchers agree on the importance of empowering local leaders to invest in their own community in order to have impacting change. This is best done with strong local leadership, and it is best seen when there are strong, well communicated partnerships with donors in more affluent countries. Partnerships that stress the importance of local leadership

¹⁰² Hodges, 64-65.

¹⁰³ Lingenfelter, 2009, 170.

development among children's workers should be a major focus when looking for long-lasting change in Mexico.

Methodology

Method/Rationale

This research project is a qualitative study that seeks to answer the following questions: First, how do we develop strong, trustworthy local leadership in the feeding and sponsorship program? How can we meet donor expectations about the use of funds received but at the same time create mechanisms that are both fiscally responsible and empower the agency on a local level employ good stewardship principles? Finally, how do we take care of the children who are already sponsored and make sure their lives are truly improving?

The reasoning behind such research is the earlier stated problems of low donor confidence, proven by the dropping of sponsorships (especially by those who visited the field), lack of promised supplies and care to the children and the disengagement of leaders. These concerns were seen in the field during personal visits to the feeding centers. The need for more structured observation and interviews will help identify what changes are necessary.

The rationale for conducting qualitative research to answer these questions is that many of these questions are difficult to quantify or to assign number values. Rather than using statistical analysis, qualitative research seeks to know and understand, which is key when working with people and different situations.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 176.

Thus, a qualitative study seems most appropriate in this case. This has been accomplished in two stages: observation and personal interviews.

Observation

The first step when entering a new culture is to observe and reflect. Listening to bring understanding fosters good relationships and builds trust and partnership with local staff members and volunteers.¹⁰⁵ An open mind and a sensitive heart to what God is already doing in the local church and ministry is vital to success in changing or improving the ministry in Mazatlan. Spending time in the public schools, *colonias*, and feeding centers was the first step in the research of this project.

Despite many differences, there are also some similarities between public schools in the USA and Mexico. Government schools, similar to USA public schools, are free to the general public as long as parents can provide the necessary school supplies and a school uniform. Unfortunately, many of the more financially distraught families cannot meet the requirements for their child to attend free schooling. Another hurdle in the education of the low-income children of Mazatlan is values: a low-income family may be capable of accumulating the money to allow the children to attend school, but the parents may not view education as important and as a worthy expenditure. Children, who strive to take after their parents, tend to adopt the same values and do not attend school, or if they do, they do not apply themselves. The observation of successful teachers in Mazatlan classrooms provided practical techniques for illuminating the high importance of education and giving

¹⁰⁵Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christ Like Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 52.

these children respect for schooling.¹⁰⁶ For this project, one week of classroom observations of successful teachers¹⁰⁷ was conducted during the traditional school day (7:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) to study these methods. During this time, extensive field notes were taken to assist in understanding the events and cultural realities that were occurring. These notes have not been shared in order to maintain the privacy and integrity of the study, and have only been used for reflection. These observations were conducted in the *colonia* of Flores Magon, where there is a feeding center and the principal of the school is a Christian and a supporter of the current sponsorship program. This school is a traditional government school composed mostly of students from low-income households within the city limits of Mazatlan. Insights gained from school observations have been helpful in devising a plan to communicate the value of education to low-income children in Mazatlan. Instilling a desire for education could drastically boost the sponsored children's chances of success in school, giving them hope for the future, and helping end the cycle of poverty before reach adulthood. Successful teachers in Mazatlan's government schools have provided the first observation point for this project.

Another vital observation point has been in low-income homes and feeding centers in the *colonias*. Observation in the *colonias* has demonstrated how families interact and has yielded qualitative data about children who do not attend school and their families. The current child sponsorship program is found in five different

¹⁰⁶ Meade, *Examining the Structural Roots of Achievement Disparities in Guatemalan Primary Schools*, diss., New York University, 112, accessed October 25, 2011, [Http://www.proquest.com.firma.northwestu.edu](http://www.proquest.com.firma.northwestu.edu).

¹⁰⁷ Successful teachers are identified by a high number of children passing their classes and a low number of dropouts. These successful teachers were recommended by their principals who recognized consistent successes.

colonias that are thought to be the five most underprivileged areas. Observing the currently operating feeding centers has also been a vital part of the observation process. Watching how the leaders interact with the kids and how the kids respond has provided information on the leadership of the local ministry. Observation rather than interviews is an important research method for this objective because Latin Americans generally do not like to be perceived as criticizing a person in leadership, so the interviewees would be reluctant to share negative information, especially when that person receives money to distribute.¹⁰⁸ The feeding center observations lasted from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. for three consecutive mornings at five different feeding centers. This allowed limited interactions with the children and with leaders. To maintain privacy, no names or locations were recorded in the field notes and these notes have been taken with discretion as to not seem obtrusive or as an “informant” against those participating in the feeding center. Observation has also allowed evaluation of family dynamics of the local feeding center leadership.

Interviews

The second step in this qualitative research study was conducting interviews. Three sets of people have been interviewed: the sponsorship and feeding center leaders, two American Assemblies of God missionary families in Mazatlan, and two children from each feeding center. These interviews were held face-to-face. The feeding center leaders and children’s interviews were conducted through an interpreter. In order to provide the most accurate interpretation, a local Mexican translator was utilized. The translator had no prior experience in these specific

¹⁰⁸ Lederleitner, 2010, 45.

feeding centers, as to remove any prejudice toward or influence over the children or leaders. A prearranged list of questions (discussed below) was used on each interview subject, but informal dialogue was also used as part of the interview. Informal dialogue is important because it is expected in Mexican culture and because it allows the interviewee to better explain his or her intent and thoughts.¹⁰⁹

Interviewing the sponsorship and feeding center leaders provided the most data for analyzing the feeding centers and the sponsorship program. These leaders are involved in the sponsorship program on a day-to-day basis and see firsthand the program's successes and failures. One local sponsorship leader and liaison stated that she has no job description, no budget, and no fiscal accountability. The interview questions addressed communication and resources available to program staff. Questions also addressed the current financial situation and potential improvements to financial reporting. Without a financial reporting system, in cultures where fiscal reporting is not the norm, staff may not accumulate necessary data or generate financial reports.¹¹⁰ An effective system of internal control over financial reporting can reduce the risk of misappropriation of funds and provide accountability. We discussed staff objectives and the appropriate source for them.¹¹¹ Questions have been asked of the leaders of the five feeding centers as well as of local sponsorship leaders. These questions sought to find out about the leaders' original involvement, their current involvement (and that of their family), and where they would like to be in the future.

¹⁰⁹ Segura-April, 118.

¹¹⁰ Lederleitner, 2010, 113-115.

¹¹¹ This looks back to the leadership and mentoring portion of the literature review where we see that mentoring leaders and showing them by example how to succeed is the most beneficial process.

Leading a feeding center envelops a person's entire life; these leaders feed children five mornings a week, and some sites feed the children dinner as well. The feeding center meets in a leader's home and involves his or her entire family, as well as all of their personal belongings (cups, soap, tables, chairs, etc.). In spite of all the time and energy put forth by these leaders, they are not paid for their time, although the church does cover their housing costs (in most cases). Observation illuminated the dissatisfaction of the family members at the frequent presence of thirty children in their home and frustration over the feeding center not giving back to the family in the area of finances. Extensive notes have been taken during the interview process, but since voice recording is not common in Mexico, it was not used so as not to alarm the interviewees.¹¹²

The interviews with the missionaries in Mazatlan provided insight into the cultural differences and how to most effectively work within the Mexican culture. Participating parents have also been interviewed about their experiences in the community and church and provide insights about their children and their experiences in schools. These face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private room of a local coffee shop. A privacy policy was discussed and implemented so that no personal information is ever revealed to members of their church or to anyone in authority within the Assemblies of God. Questions were asked about their family, experiences, cultural norms of Mazatlan, and what advice they can give towards the current child sponsorship ministry.

¹¹² None of the interviewees' personal information will be disclosed, and no personal information has been or will be shared with other leaders.

The final interviews were with the children in the feeding centers. These interviews were important because they provide the most accurate feedback on the impact child sponsorship makes on children's lives. Two children from each feeding center were interviewed. Interviews were conducted away from the ears of the leaders and other children to avoid pressuring the children and to uphold the integrity of the interviews. At the five feeding centers ten children were selected for interviews. Five boys and five girls were selected, rotating between each gender. The selection included five children between the ages of six and nine and five children between the ages of nine and twelve. Of the two children from each feeding center who were interviewed, one was sponsored and one was in need of a sponsor. This made evident any differences that may exist between sponsored children and children without sponsors. In accordance with Mexican law and legal advice, consent was not needed for these interviews.

Limitations

The findings from this qualitative research project are specific to the feeding centers interviewed and observed. These findings will not necessarily be transferable to other feeding centers around the world, or even others inside Mexico. These findings will be particularized to the current local context. Yet they may benefit anyone who does work in Latin America or child sponsorship in a different setting.

Data and Analysis

Classroom Observation

Classroom observation lasted one week. I sat in three different teachers' classes who were deemed "successful" by the principal of the established school. The observation illuminated several things and brought clarity about the Mexican culture and family dynamics. During the week of government school observation, I saw that the conditions of a government school were far from what the United States would deem a suitable environment. While not having firsthand observation, it was mentioned that Mexican government (or public) schools allow the teachers to physically punish students. This negative affirmation did not seem as effective as the positive affirmation I saw in the classroom. The first teacher I observed brought in stickers for her children and would reward them for doing their homework or answering questions correctly in class. When asked later if the school provided these small prizes, I was informed that the teacher provides them herself. She held a clean and orderly classroom with very limited supplies and just one chalkboard. Since this was primary school (or elementary) the children stay with their teacher all day until it is time to go home. They do have music and English classes once a week where they learn the basics of both art forms. I had the privilege of sitting in on an English class and found out that I could not carry out an English conversation with the English teacher. The children learn basic phrases like "How are you?" and "My name is ____" but hardly anything more. I also observed a third teacher that had a reward system based on attendance rewarding children for their efforts to make it to class each day with extra points if they were on time.

One of the most interesting systems of accountability for the children was with the first and primary teacher I shadowed. She would start the day with all the children's names posted with a green circle next to their name. The goal was for the children to remain on green all day and not progress to yellow or red. These stoplight like dots were accountability for the children. If they disobeyed a rule the teacher would move the green circle and add the yellow one. If the child remained on green the whole day they received fifteen extra minutes of recess but, if they digressed to yellow or red they came in were allowed less recess. Also, if a child went a whole month without ever getting a red dot they got a 'Movie Friday', but if the child had received a red they would go do a menial task, such as picking garbage off the playground, while the other children enjoyed their free time.

The overall significance I found from the classroom observation was that children in poorer *colonias* need strict rules and strong positive reinforcement. They have had too much negative reinforcement in their lives for such tactics to make an impact. Teachers who are successful try to attain positive corrective measures.

Feeding Center Observation

Feeding Center observation revealed that there are no clear standards for feeding centers. One feeding center would start fifteen minutes late everyday, and every day the meal and amount of food was significantly different. Some days there was hardly enough food for each child, and others there was surplus for the children to take home to their families. The Bible time is what changed more drastically. At the first feeding center, they sang two children's worship songs and the leader told

an intriguing story from the Bible to the children. The second site would make the children read scripture out loud, three or four chapters, where they were clearly bored and talking amongst themselves just waiting for the reading to be over so they could eat. At the third center there was no Bible portion at all, but they did pray before they ate. The fourth and fifth centers were somewhere in the middle with a little Bible time where the children were rude and obviously not interested in what the leader was saying.

The overall significance was that there is a need for a higher level of training and standards set (i.e. Bible training, a set level of food received, and amount of clean water provided) so that children receive adequate care and are meeting the standards¹¹³ set by GO. A job description and leader training might accomplish these things.

Interviews

Administrator Interview

This Administrator is in charge of the entire program in Mexico. She oversees all the leaders and making sure all the children received promised care. The overall interview was uplifting. There are positive changes on the horizon. It was remarkable that she has never had a job description or a job evaluation from her supervisor who comes down twice a year. She has also never seen another sponsorship program in action. In fact, the first time she had ever heard about child sponsorship was when she was being asked to run the new program. She is wired money once every three months and has never been asked for a budget, been given

¹¹³ Children to receive three meals a day, sufficient water, a Bible, and everything they need to succeed in school.

a budget, or been asked for receipts for her purchases. She works on average around twenty hours a week and is compensated 5 USD per child per month.¹¹⁴ She is working on bringing more structure to the program by adding an attendance sheet that they leaders while use every morning.

Feeding Center Leader 1

This particular lady would inspire the hardest hearted person. About five years ago she owned her home and lived there with her son and daughter-in-law. Her home had no roof, and a team of people came down from Washington State and put a roof on her home. Afterwards her pastor asked her if she would sponsor a feeding center and feed children every morning if they provided the food. She agreed and has been feeding the children in her neighborhood ever since. Her daughter-in-law likes having company and, while she does not accompany her mother-in-law to church, she respects her beliefs. The leader's son is a different story; he does not like the children coming over in the mornings, but he can stand it. He gets angry when they come over in the evenings for help or advice. Since there are no churches in this *colonia*, this leader occupies the only "pastor" role around and the whole community comes to her for help. She has seen many deaths and much pain. She continued on to tell me about the recent deaths of two boys who attended her feeding center everyday, knew all the Bible stories and loved participating but got caught up in selling drugs and have now passed away.

¹¹⁴ This is a very good wage in Mexico

Feeding Center Leader 2

This leader started leading a feeding center after he got out of prison, and the church gave him and his family a home. He was in prison for three years (for reasons I did not ask) and while in prison got connected to a prison ministry through the same church that sponsors the feeding centers. He had a complete life change and started following God. While in prison, he read the entire Bible three times and went through a discipleship training school. When he got out he jumped right into serving in the church and running a feeding center to feed the children in his community. His family loves the center and the change that has taken place in his life. It has brought his family closer together than ever before. The finances are very tight (I offered to do his wife's hair when they were going out on a date, and she did not even own a mirror to look in after I finished it), but God always provides.

Feeding Center Leader 3

This man also started running a center shortly after being released from prison. In the same fashion, the church gifted him and his family with a home after he had a complete life change and offered to use the home as a feeding center. This leader is passionate about children, and he is a gifted teacher. He was the second person to start a feeding center, and he sees it as his church. His family is completely supportive, and his daughter just got a sponsor through the program.

Feeding Center Leader 4

The last feeding center leader became a leader when a church from Washington State came down to build a house and she said she would take the house and run the feeding center. Her parents and her husband originally lived in

the house together. Her husband left her about a year ago when they found out that their only daughter has serious health issues. Running the center has primarily fallen on her parents who sometimes do not put their whole heart into it, and things fall between the cracks. They were recently reprimanded by the Administrator when a sponsor came down to meet their sponsored child, and the leader's parents, who were running the center that day, told the sponsor they had no idea who that child was. As you can imagine, that did not make the sponsor very happy and did not reflect well on the program. Apparently, the child stopped coming months ago because their parents got a divorce and had to move. Obviously, owning a home is important, but the most important thing to the leader right now is her daughter, so the feeding center has been put on the back burner. Her parents do not typically teach a Bible story or even know all the children's names, they are just trying to keep their house by feeding the children.

Missionary Family 1

The first family I talked to moved to Mazatlan because they had felt God calling them to ministry in Latin America for some time. God opened up the door for them to drive through Mexico, and their heart landed in Mazatlan. Mazatlan is known for its beaches, which are beautiful, but there is also extreme poverty, and this family saw the beauty of the two intertwining and felt God called them to live and start a church in this city. Their main goal is to train up local leaders to reach their community. Other than the two missionary families, there are very few Americans who attend their church, and they always speak Spanish on stage (rather than have an interpreter). The children had a hard time adjusting when they first

moved here, but now they like it and never want to leave. As far as advice, raising up local leaders and understanding that things in Mexico happen at a slower pace is very important. A person can get extremely frustrated at the pace or just relax and give into it. At some point when training a leader, you need to step back and let them take the reins. This means letting them fail: you cannot always rescue them. The Mexican culture has a different idea of what is it to be organized and on time. Effective missionaries will let this go, remembering that the goal to bring the good news and not a schedule to these people.

Missionary Family 2

This family was very close to Family 1, and they asked them to be part of this new adventure God was taking them on. After lots of prayerful consideration, they moved their belongings and two young children down to Mazatlan. They primarily work behind the scenes and are the ones who handle the money. There are blurrier lines in the Mexican culture about the ethical use of money. Mexican leadership tends to believe as long as the money is being used for good there is no problem. The key is to be clear with expectations before a discrepancy happens and then even after it does to assume the best when you ask about it. Understanding that you are in a different culture gives a little more leeway with leftover funds to be reallocated to other programs or people within reason. As far as working within feeding centers or parachurch ministries, the most frustrating thing will always be the organization of the program, not fluctuating hours, vague standards, and unclear health codes. But the most rewarding part is that the people have the right heart and work so very hard without quitting.

Child 1 Girl 9-12 Sponsored

This girl was told she had a sponsor about six months ago and has seen very little change in her life since the sponsorship started. She did not even know what sponsorship was, and there has been no different treatment between her and her younger sister who is not sponsored. She shrugged and said she liked school but seemed completely uninterested in school and the Bible story at the feeding center.

Child 2 Boy 5-8 Un-sponsored

This boy did not know what sponsorship was or that any children were sponsored. It sounded like a good idea to him that he would have “another family” from the United States. He hopes one day he and his older brother will have sponsors. He enjoys school, and his favorite subject is sports (or P. E.) where he plays soccer.

Child 3 Girl 5-8 Sponsored

This girl knew she was sponsored and even met her sponsor last summer when a team came down from Washington. She also received a birthday present from her sponsor. One of the YWAM staff in the city brought it to her on her birthday. She loves school and loves the Bible. She wants to be a nurse when she grows up.

Child 4 Boy 9-12 Sponsored

This boy knew he was sponsored but had not seen or heard from his sponsor since. He does not feel like his life is any different since being sponsored because he came to the feeding center before the sponsorship started. He thinks school is boring but wants to graduate.

Child 5 Girl 9-12 Sponsored

This young girl loves helping around the feeding center and is waiting for the day she will get to meet her sponsor. She has written her sponsor two letters but has never received one in return. She thinks school is okay and likes seeing all her friends there. She lives with her aunt and uncle and cousins. I asked where her parents were and she was not sure.

Child 6 Boy 5-8 Un-sponsored

This fun-loving boy is newer to the feeding centers and loves it when they have games or coloring he gets to do. Sometimes reading the Bible can be boring, but he still likes coming. He likes school and loves sports time (or recess). He typically gets up, goes to the feeding center, goes to school, goes home, plays with friends, and helps around the house.

Child 7 Girl 5-8 Un-sponsored

This young girl is the oldest of three in her family and takes care of her younger siblings. She makes sure they all make it to the feeding center and then go to school afterwards. She said sometimes it is very hard to take care of them, and when she grows up she wants to have her own home.

Child 8 Boy 9-12 Sponsored

This boy has an undiagnosed special need, and he is the happiest boy around. He lives with his grandparents and loves going to the feeding center and going to school. When he grows up with wants to be a professional baseball player and play for the Venados (the semi-pro team in Mazatlan). He has never met his sponsor, and he likes his life more now that he is sponsored.

Child 9 Girl 9-12 Sponsored

This girl, with an attitude, had no idea what child sponsorship was or that she was sponsored. She said that it would be cool if she got free stuff, but she is almost old enough to move away from this *colonia* anyways. She does not like school, but she does go most days because her parents get mad at her if she does not attend.

Child 10 Boy 5-8 Un-sponsored

This boy comes every day and brings his two younger siblings both of whom have sponsors. It does not really bother him that they have sponsors and he does not because he does not really see a difference, and if they were to get something extra they would all share it as a family.¹¹⁵ When he grows up he wants to be a teacher.

Implications

This study provided data on the current state of the feeding centers and sponsorship program, and gave insight into how to proceed in the future. The observations illuminated the current realities of the program and the culture. The interviews provided information on local leaders' perspectives and on the views of participating parents and children. Since local leadership is the backbone to any overseas mission, this information will be vital to the growth and maturing of the program.¹¹⁶ Feedback from the leaders can be used to improve the program; this will bring about a feeling of "ownership" so that the local leaders feel inspired to invest and grow the ministry without outside help.¹¹⁷ These findings may also be

¹¹⁵ Proving the theory in Ralph D. Winter et al., "Evangelization of Whole Families," 2009, 654.

¹¹⁶ Hodges, 64-65.

¹¹⁷ Maxwell, 1993, 129.

instructive and helpful to other ministries in Mazatlan and other feeding centers worldwide. While all the research conducted pertains to this area, it is still applicable to other areas and other ministries. This study may aid others in setting up and growing feeding centers in other places. All of the data identified, researched, and evaluated will aid in determining the next steps for GO on the Mission in their efforts to minister to the children of Mazatlan, Mexico.

The program faces a number of challenges. Some of the leaders are less than enthusiastic about leading a center and so the level of care they provide for the children is not as high as desired. Children in the feeding centers and sponsorship program only receive one meal a day, only have access to clean water with breakfast (and occasionally dinner), some have not received Bibles, and in many cases are failing in school. There is not a high importance placed on going to school, and the level of respect for the leaders in the feeding centers is extremely low. The children run around and do not pay attention during the Bible story. The children speak disrespectfully to the leader and appear to be just waiting for the end when the food is distributed; the feeding center leaders utilize none of the positive reinforcements used by successful teachers in the community. Also, the Administrator does not provide any sort of leadership training or routine checkup system to help the leaders improve their leadership skills and improve their centers.

The Administrator has never had a job performance review and does not fully see where she is falling short. Because of the unclear expectations placed on the Administrator and the feeding center leaders, children stop coming to the feeding centers and the organization uses donor funds for other purposes without

notifying the donor. The principle of “Grow a leader – Grow the organization” is not being effectively employed.¹¹⁸

Interviews conducted with the missionary families made it quite clear that it is very true in this setting that “leadership is how one lives within a structure, respecting the people, accepting their differences, and engaging them in ways that inspire trust and transform yet sustain relationships and structure.”¹¹⁹ Their main recommendation was “do not fight the culture but accept it and acclimate to it.” The teachers provided much needed insights, and the children showed what the program looks like from the ground level. These challenges are both inspiring and daunting. It is motivating and stimulating to see the level of impact the program has made and distressing to realize where it is falling short.

While the program does have leaders, children, and donors, its size is decreasing instead of increasing due to the lack of leadership training and clear expectations. Instead of recruiting more donors and expanding the program to meet the needs of more children, GO is struggling with maintaining donor confidence in the organization and the integrity of the leadership in Mazatlan.

Recommendations

While the program has many great assets and is assisting in life changes, it can also be improved in many areas. The quickest and largest change is with clear expectations set on feeding center leaders and the Administrator and job performance reviews at all levels of the organization. If each leader were to be given a job description and a job performance review, this could drastically increase the

¹¹⁸ Maxwell, 1995, 4.

¹¹⁹ Lingenfelter, 2009, 99.

successfulness of the program by bringing clarity and higher standards of care.¹²⁰ These may also expose leaders who are not competent or able to lead a center. Therefore, written job descriptions and job performance reviews should be conducted. The Administrator agreed with this statement: if she were to be given accurate feedback then growth would be made more accessible. The next thing that needs to occur is adequate training for leaders. The feeding center leaders mentioned in the methodology lacked training or clear performance expectations. Also, training these leaders to use some of the methods already being effectively implemented in the classrooms of Mazatlan will greatly improve their effectiveness of their programs. Possible training by these teachers of the feeding center leaders would benefit the leaders and the organization.

As revealed through the interview, the Administrator has never seen a working child sponsorship training program. This leader should observe an established organization's program (i.e. World Vision or Compassion International). In addition, she should be given a budget and taught how to use one with clear expectations of what should be the results of the money given.¹²¹

The implementation of these improvements would vastly increase the program's effectiveness and sustainability, bringing moral authority to the organization and clarity to the donors. The training of leaders is the most effective way to insure that the lives of the children are truly improving. Keeping the lines of communication open between the leaders and the Administrator will greatly improve the program's effectiveness.

¹²⁰ Please see the attached job description samples in Appendix 2 and 3

¹²¹ Please see sample budget attached in Appendix 7.

Conclusion

This thesis has addressed the current realities of a child sponsorship program in Mazatlan, Mexico, and made recommendations to enhance it. This was accomplished through looking at literature on the importance of missions and child sponsorship, children's ministries, leadership studies, and Latin American culture. A study was conducted that would take a sampling of teachers, feeding center leaders, missionaries, and children both in interviews and observation to gain a better understanding of the program's current state and recommendations for the future.

After reviewing the data, recommendations were made that would bring more structure and training to the program. These include: leader training, job descriptions, job performance reviews, the observation of successful children's leaders, and the use of a budget for funding tracking. With a few small but vital changes, GO's child sponsorship program could increase donor confidence and communication, improve effectiveness, and elevate financial support. These enhancements would create a better future for the children of Mazatlan and GO's child sponsorship program.

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APPENDIX 1: GO on the Mission's Child Sponsorship Document

GO ON THE MISSION

Child Sponsorship

Who: Sponsor One Child Age 5-15

Where: Mazatlan (other sites in future)

What The Kid Gets:

- Breakfast 5 Days A Week
- A Bible
- A School Uniform (Required to receive free education)
- Clean Water

What the Sponsor will receive:

- A Photo
- A Brief Bio of the Child
 - Name (Say hello to Jose Martinez Ramos.)
 - Age (Jose is seven. He was born April 22, 2002.)
 - Parents (Jose lives with his mother Juanita and 2 brothers.)
 - Siblings (Jose has 2 brothers; Paco is five and Juan is three.)
 - Interests (Jose likes to play futbol and tag.)
 - Favorites Team (Jose's favorite futbol team is Real Madrid.)
 - Favorite Color (Jose's favorite color is red.)
 - Favorite Kind of Toy (Jose's favorite toy is a toy car.)
- What do you do for fun?
- Do you go to school? What are your favorite subjects?
- What would you like to do when you get older?
- What do you do to help at home?

- Two Letters Per Year

When will the letters be received: Fall (after school begins) Spring (school end)

Cost: \$35/mo.

- \$27/ per child will be sent to Mazatlan [Administrator]
- \$5/ per child will remain at GO to admin the program
- \$5/ per child will remain with [Administrator]
- \$3/ per child for wire and bank draft fees from sponsors

Sponsorship Program

How will letters work: [Administrator] will receive a template for a letter. Child will write.

-[Administrator] and team will translate letter on template and send to GO Hub.

How will funds be transferred: Funds will be wired to [Administrator] quarterly.

Funds will be sent for new and existing children once Three(3) months of funds have been collects.

Scheduled wires transfer from US to Mexico:

February 15

May 15

August 15

November 15

Potential Vision Trips:

These trips will be used to allow sponsors and potential sponsors to visit children in the feeding centers.

January 14-21, 2011

March 31 – April 8, 2011

June 23 – July 1, 2011

Each team member visiting a feeding center should be personally introduced to a child. Tell the visitor the child's name and that they are available to be sponsored. Try to have visiting team members interact with children at least 3 times during one week. When possible ask the children to serve or talk to sponsors. Teach children how to build relationships.

Goal: 100 children sponsored by April 1, 2011 and 250 children sponsored by Dec. 31, 2011. We need to prepare profiles for many potential sponsors. 500? 1000?

APPENDIX 2: Proposed Job Description for the Child Sponsorship Mazatlan

Administrator

GO On the Mission: Mazatlan Child Sponsorship Administrator Job Description

Objective: To oversee and facilitate a healthy child sponsorship program in the feeding centers of Mazatlan, Mexico

Responsibilities:

- Keep updated profiles on all the children in the sponsorship program and children waiting for sponsors
- Make sure children receive a welcome packet within 2 weeks of becoming sponsored and their Bible and shoes within 1 month of becoming sponsored
- Spend and account for given funds on: Bibles, food, clean water, and school supplies
- Facilitate the sending and receiving of sponsor letters. Interpreting letters so that the sponsors and children can read each other's letters
- Facilitate yearly photos and child updates
- Invest in and mentor current feeding center leaders, making sure they are being disciple, avoiding burn out, and are loving and caring for children
- Facilitate attendance sheets at the feeding centers and follow up with the leaders when children have dropped off

APPENDIX 3: Proposed Job Description for the Feeding Center Leaders

GO on The Mission: Feeding Center Leader Job Description

Objective: lead an effective feeding center and children's ministry by meeting children's physical and spiritual needs

Responsibilities:

- Every morning prepare breakfast for the children
- Prepare an exciting and engaging Bible lesson for the children to receive every morning
- Keep the attendance sheet and alert the Admin if a sponsored child drops off
- Help distribute sponsor gifts and letter as well as helping children write their sponsors in return
- Strive to know every child, their home situation, and where they are at spiritually
- Pastor the children and care for their spiritual needs, praying for them by name regularly
- Attend a monthly meeting with the child sponsorship admin to grow and update the program

**APPENDIX 4: Interview Questions for the Feeding Center Leaders and
Administrator**

**Questions for Feeding Center and Sponsorship Leaders
Preguntas Para la Alimentación de los Líderes del Centro y el Patrocinio**

How and when did you start leading a feeding center?
¿Cómo y cuándo empezaste a liderar un centro de alimentación?

How is leading the center going?
¿Cómo como es el liderar en centro?

Do the others in your family enjoy helping at the feeding center?
¿algún otro miembro de tu familia disfruta ayudando en el centro de alimentación?

What is the most enjoyable part of running the feeding center? What is the hardest?
If you could stop doing any part of the feeding center what would it be?
¿Cuál es la parte más agradable de manejar el centro de alimentación? ¿Qué es lo más difícil? Si pudieras dejar de hacer alguna parte o actividad del centro de alimentación ¿qué sería?

Do you feel like God has called you to children's ministry? Or do you want to make sure the needs of these children are met?
¿Sientes que Dios te ha llamado al cuidado de los niños? ¿O es que quieres asegurarte que las necesidades de estos niños se cumplan?

How can we continue to grow the leadership of the feeding centers?
¿Cómo podemos seguir creciendo el desarrollo de los centros de desayuno?

Do you ever see any of the sponsorship money? How is it used?
¿Usted ve que el dinero que se patrocina es usado correcto? ¿Cómo se utiliza?

Do you feel like the children who come to your feeding center's lives are improving?
¿Sientes que los niños que vienen a la vida de su centro de alimentación están mejorando?

APPENDIX 5: Interview Questions for Missionaries in Mazatlan

Missionary Family Interview

What have you seen as most challenging about ministry in Mazatlan?

What has been more successful?

Why did you pick Mazatlan, Mexico?

Do you have experience in feeding center or child sponsorship and tell me about how it worked?

Do you have any strategies for empowering and training local leaders?

Can you tell me about the Mexican culture and how they handle money?

How can we further empower or local leaders?

How can we maintain accountability with the sponsorship dollars and see that money go further?

Do you have any insight that you feel like would help me in my future ministry in the city?

APPENDIX 6: Interview Questions for Children in the Feeding Centers

Child Interview

What is your name? How old are you?
¿como te llamas? ¿Cuántos años tienes?

Tell me about your family, brothers sisters? Who do you live with? Do you like living at home?

Háblame de tu familia, hermanas hermanos? ¿Con quién vives? ¿Te gusta vivir en tu casa?

Tell me about your school. Do you like it? Do you like learning? Are you doing well in your classes?

Háblame de tu escuela. ¿Te gusta? ¿Te gusta aprender? ¿Vas bien en tus clases?

How long have you been sponsored?

¿Cuánto tiempo has sido patrocinado?

What have you liked the best about having a sponsor? Has anything in your life changed since you have been sponsored? What does your family think about your being sponsored?

¿Qué es lo que más te ha gustado de tener un patrocinador? Su vida ha cambiado desde que ha sido patrocinado? ¿Qué piensa tu familia acerca de que estas patrocinado?

What does your average day look like?

¿qué es lo que ases en un dia normal?

* Bolded questions are for sponsored children only

Las preguntas en negro solo son para los niños patrocinados.

APPENDIX 7: Proposed Simple Sample Budget

Sample Simple Budget

	Budget Amount	Actual Amount	Difference
Total received			
Total spent			
Admin Cost			
Food expenses			
Bibles expenses			
School expenses			
Water expenses			
Other			
Other			