

THE NAZARENE CONNECTION:

CELEBRATING OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH COMPASSION INTERNATIONAL



Church of the Nazarene
Stewart and Compassion
International President
Wally Erickson

Year after year, Wally Erickson, president of Compassion International, invests more than \$2 million in Nazarene children around the world. Last year, Nazarene children in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, the Philippines, Los Angeles, Arizona, and Haiti were the objects of 171 Compassion International projects. More than 14,000 Nazarene kids received the benefit of \$2,071,288 of Compassion, Inc., funds. Bolivia alone was recipient of \$769,000 in support of 64 projects for Nazarene children and youth.

Typically, the monies go to support Nazarene schools, Nazarene student centers and what Compassion International calls Family Helper Projects.

THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE JUNE 1993 ISSUE OF THE HERALD OF HOLINESS AND IS REPRINTED BY PERMISSION OF THE NAZARENE PUBLISHING HOUSE.

*His is a world with children,
compassion, and Christ
at the hub.*

WALLY'S WORLD

BY WESLEY TRACY

Photos provided by Richard H. Heeren



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YES! I'd like to be a part of the Nazarene Connection with Compassion International through sponsorship of a needy child or a specific project that helps at-risk children.

- If possible, I'd prefer a child or project associated with the Church of the Nazarene.
- I'd prefer a child or project simply where the need is greatest. Please send me a no-obligation sponsorship information kit about the following (check one):
- Overseas child sponsorship (\$24 monthly)
- U.S. child scholarship support (\$48 monthly)
- U.S. project support (\$24 monthly)
- I've decided I'd like to begin sponsoring now. Enclosed please find my first monthly payment of \$24 \$48 to Compassion International. Please send my sponsorship information to the address below.

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Wally explains, "We are not a relief agency. We do not plant churches to compete with missionary churches. We support, we don't compete."

"We designed our ministry," Wally says, "to serve children who are already in touch with or can be reached by evangelical churches and schools. We only work with evangelicals—those who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ as the answer to our human predicament."

"Further," Wally explains, "we only work in affilia-

tion with congregations—we never develop competing institutions. We don't compete with or replace General Budget giving. We try to fill needs that the General Budget usually is not designed to meet."

Wally's World Is a World of Children

The mission statement of Wally's organization says that its purpose is "extending love and compassion, by ministering to needy children, releasing them from the bondage of poverty and enabling them to become fulfilled adults by nurturing such children through support, education, training, and guidance to be Christian in faith and deed; be responsible members of their families, churches, and communities; [who are able to] support themselves and share with others in need; and, maintain their physical well being."

Wally has always been interested in ministering to children and young people. As a youngster, he became involved in scouting. As a teenager, he spent every summer working in Boy Scout camps.

Wally still loves scouting. "I have all the highest ranks in scouting," Wally told me when I visited his of-

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fice in Colorado Springs. "I'm an Eagle Scout with 45 merit badges. I have the highest rank in Sea Scouting, and in Explorer Scouting."

Most of his adult ministry has been dedicated to children. After graduating from Olivet Nazarene College (ONU), he went to Nazarene Theological Seminary. During his seminary years, he planted a Nazarene church in Butler, Missouri.

The church at Butler got started with kids. As Wally and Mary were moving into a house in Butler, three boys noticed them carrying in scouting gear—tents, packs, and canoe paddles, etc. The boys said to Wally, "Boy, you must really like to camp."

"I love camping," Wally replied. "By the way, boys, do you go to Sunday School anywhere?"

"No," they echoed.

"I'll make you a deal. You be here Saturday morning, each of you, with two matches, two slices of bread, two eggs, two slices of bacon, a number 10 tin can, and a knife. Nothing else. We'll go out into the woods and have a real camper's breakfast. Your part of the deal is that you go to Sunday School with me the next day."

To make a long story short, one year later, the Butler Church of the Nazarene was organized. "I think we had about 28 charter members," Wally said, "all of them aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents, and siblings of those three boys I took camping."



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Wally and Mary Erickson with one of their sponsored teens in Indonesia (above).

Wally with a Compassion sponsored Korean girl (left).

Wally went on to pastor Nazarene churches in Archdale, North Carolina, Winamac, Indiana, and, at age 33, pastored the largest church on the Northwest Indiana District, First Church of the Nazarene, Hammond, Indiana.

But Wally could not get away from a burden to minister to needy children. "I discovered that kids sitting on the back pew turned me off when I preached. But when I took those same kids and put them in a camping situation, they listened with all their hearts," Wally said. "I had some wonderful conversions and heartwarming successes in that kind of ministry. Frankly, Wesley, as a pastor, it seemed like I spent most of my time pouring glue into the congregation to keep things from falling apart. That wasn't my spiritual gift, but working with children and young people in informal settings was. I said to myself, 'That's what I want to do.'"

So in 1967, Wally teamed up with a small operation in Chicago called Compassion, which worked with Ko-

rean children in need. Wally and Mary worked for four and a half years in Korea. They then returned to the U.S. for a short time before Wally pioneered Compassion International's work in Latin America.

After all these years, Wally still believes that children should be the primary target of humanitarian and evangelical ministries. "Many adults have already made decisions that will affect them negatively, they will have to ask for grace just to endure or survive," Wally said. "But kids are still formative, pliable, they are still open. They are innocent, their faith is simple. Working with them you can redeem a whole life."

"I tell you, Wesley, it's a lot better to work on the preventative side than on the *curing* side of human problems."

Wally believes that many churches and missionaries have done things upside down and backwards. They think they have to win wage earning adults so the church can pay its way. Wally thinks this is a dramatic mistake. "All humanity is exactly the same," Wally says. "People everywhere are exactly, exactly the same at one point. And that is that if you take an interest in their children, you have the attention of mom and dad. A famous book says 'A little child shall lead them.' I'm telling you it works all over the world—Africa, Asia, Haiti, Korea."

Wally's World Is a World of Compassion

You are not around Rev. W. H. Erickson very long until you know that you are in the presence of a tenderhearted, deeply spiritual Christian who loves God—and children. I wouldn't be surprised if his favorite song is "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world."

As Dr. Don Miller, a Compassion International staff member told me, "Wally is a beautiful guy who will

never stand up and wave his own flag. In a quiet, godly, disciplined way, he's made a real difference in my life. And, he has made a difference in Compassion—his compassion is what fuels Compassion."

Wally joined Compassion, a tiny organization, in 1967. In 1974, he was made vice president, and in 1975 Wally became president. The ministry has grown steadily under Wally's gifted administration. Compassion International now has 411 employees worldwide, plus several hundred volunteers. The 1993 budget is \$50 million. Since 1958, some \$350 million has been channeled to some 1.5 million children in some 32 countries of the world.

Compassion does not build its own churches or schools, rather, it works with existing churches, schools, and other evangelical institutions assisting them in ministering to children and youth. Their principal methods include supporting church schools, student centers, child sponsorship, and Family Helper Projects.

Many Nazarene children benefit from Family Helper Projects. These are cash grants given to poor families who want to send their children to school. Many Nazarenes are being educated through this ministry. For example, 37 Nazarene families in Bolivia (as of January 1992) are in Compassion's Family Helper Projects.

When I asked about a typical Compassion operation, Don Miller and Wally Erickson told me about Kibera. Kibera is one of the largest and foulest slums in all of Africa. It lies just a short distance from the bustling and tourist-filled shops of Nairobi, Kenya.

Most Kibera residents live in one or two-room mud huts with tin roofs. A few pit toilets are scattered around the area, but to walk to school or go to the store, children have to jump over several open sewage ditches. Water is scarce and has to be purchased at four cents a pail. There is no electricity, and at night the light from kerosene lanterns filtering through the smoke of thousands of charcoal fires creates an eerie, smoggy glow.

In the middle of this sprawling sea of humanity is the Kibera Church of God. In 1987, the church was struggling. The Sunday School averaged 25, and some 100 adults attended church services. The pastor had a vision for reaching the people, but lay leadership and expertise were lacking. In November of 1987, the Kibera church formed a partnership with Compassion.

The joint Compassion/Kibera church program had several key elements.

1. The Saturday Bible Club

They wanted to address first the spiritual needs of the children. A Saturday Bible Club was begun with lots of incentives for regular attendance. Bible memory, singing, drama, and solid Bible studies and stories gave the children lots of opportunities to learn about Christ. Parents were invited to some functions for them as well, and it wasn't long before many children invited Jesus into their hearts.

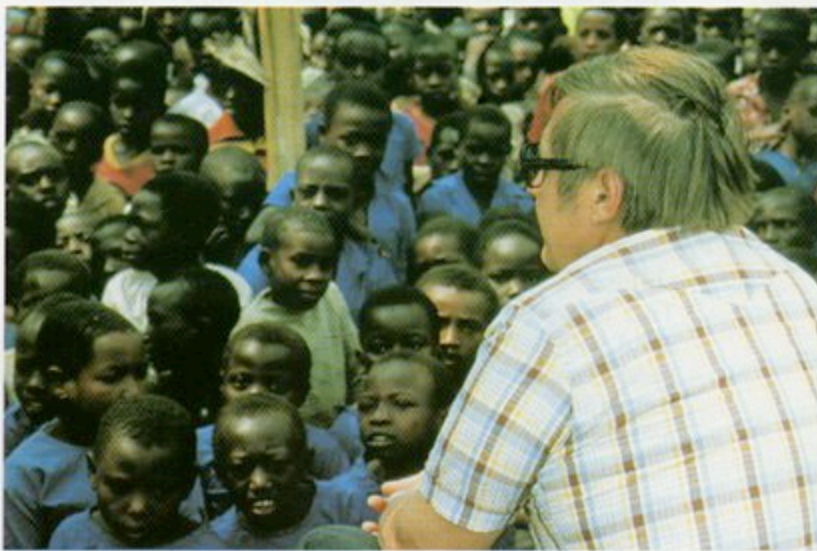
2. Help with School Work

The next priority was to be sure the children were in school and that they had the help they needed to stay in school and progress. Help with clothing, books, supplies, and other essentials—yes, even lanterns—got them started and made home study possible after hours. Crowded classrooms and poorly trained teachers meant that most children really had to struggle to pass year-end exams—extra help with homework was a must. Volunteers began tutoring as a regular part of the program; soon regular reports were developed explaining any special educational needs and progress of all Compassion-sponsored children.

3. Health Monitoring

It was also important to maintain the children's health. A Church of God missionary nurse helped out early on to screen all the children, arrange treatment for those with problems, and begin regular health checkups and health training. And even though the project couldn't provide food for the children during the week, they felt it was important to provide a nourishing hot

"At that point, people all over the world are exactly the same—I mean exactly the same."



In Zaire, Wally speaks to a group of children enrolled in a Compassion partnership program.

lunch for the children on Saturdays. The mothers signed up on a rotation basis to help out with the cooking, and the program was underway.

4. Parents' Meetings

The Church began communicating to the parents through regular parents' meetings, and gave them an opportunity to give suggestions as to how the program could be improved. Activities and learning opportunities were prioritized with their input. Many parents began to participate regularly. They were very instrumental in articulating the problems and suggesting possible solutions, as well as participating regularly in cooking, in



Wally Erickson with a Boy Scout troop sponsored by Compassion in Bandung, Indonesia (above).

Dr. Phyllis Perkins of Nazarene Bible College presents a plaque to Wally Erickson on behalf of the Board of General Superintendents of the Church of the Nazarene. The plaque reads: The Board of General Superintendents of the International Church of the Nazarene expresses its deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation to Rev. Wallace H. Erickson, President of Compassion International, for his tremendous support of and partnership with the Church of the Nazarene in serving needy children throughout the world (upper right).

Wally Erickson visits with two boys sponsored by Compassion in Thailand (right).



the community cleanup campaign, and in various other activities.

5. Home Visits

Personal visits by volunteers and church staff to the children's homes became a part of the program, too. This helped in developing case history files on each child with particulars about his or her home, individual needs, school grades, Saturday attendance, and other information.

6. Learning Opportunities

Supplementary programs were arranged during the week, focusing on tutoring and Christian education. The results were impressive: In 1988, nine sponsored children placed number 1, 2, or 3 in their classes. By 1992, 65 of the program children placed 1, 2, or 3.

In addition to formal schooling, programs were also developed for nonformal education. Children visited places like agricultural farms, the animal orphanage, manufacturing industries, and made a trip to the coast to visit sister projects, compete in football, volleyball, and other sports.

Hands-on training in safety, accident prevention, first aid, as well as information regarding hazards around the village, helped cut down on minor injuries. Some older children have participated in sewing and tailoring classes, cooking, rabbit raising, and other useful skills. And, children's homes have been equipped with blankets, mosquito nets, mattresses, towels, wash basins, and other things to make their lives more clean and safe.

7. Church Growth and Sound Development

Vacation Bible Schools were conducted during school vacations, Bibles were distributed to all children, and a small religious library was established. A children's choir was established with drums and flutes and other instruments purchased with Compassion funds. Bible drama, memory verses, and community witnessing became a regular part of the program. Children were becoming disciples and, not surprisingly, the church began to grow. Presently, 176 children are registered in the Compassion program at the church, and more than 200 regularly participate in various activities supported or spun-off by the program.

While the emphasis at Kibera has been on ministering to the children, adults have always been included. Church membership has mushroomed to nearly 700, and more than 300 children now regularly participate in the Sunday School. Church records show that 120 of these children and 46 other Compassion-sponsored children have come to Christ since the child development program began in 1987.

There is not space and time enough to tell all the stories that Wally and Don passed on to me. Suffice it to say that in 1992 precisely 14,018 Nazarene children around the world got Compassion support similar to that of the Kibera project.

Compassion is doing more work these days in North America. Dr. Ron Benefiel and Los Angeles First Church of the Nazarene are currently in partnership with Compassion to minister on the "mean streets" of L.A. Compassion makes a monthly contribution to the street kids ministry of Benefiel and Jeff Carr. Compassion also donated \$10,000 toward a street ministries van. The ministry is succeeding. Even as you read this, eight young people from the riot torn streets of Los Angeles are finishing their first year at a Nazarene college. "Working together, Dr. Benefiel, Compassion, and another agency selected eight young high school graduates," Wally Erickson said, "and we have provided a scholarship grant for them to go to a Christian college. All but one went to Northwest Nazarene College, I think. NNC provided some sort of matching scholarship."

Wally's World Is a World of Service to Christ

Wally's world is a world of children, a world of compassion, and a world that has Christ at the hub.

As a young man, Wally once tried his hand at selling insurance. He was a bell ringing success. He was headed

for the "Rookie of the Year" award and toward the "millionaires round table." What if Wally had stayed in the insurance business? He could have spent his life buying sports cars, fur coats, and palatial homes.

But something happened. Wally was raised in Illinois by good parents, but they were not church people. Two of his uncles, however, were Nazarene preachers. They encouraged his parents to send Wally to Olivet Nazarene College. "Two weeks after I arrived, the fall revival came along," Wally said. "I went to the altar—and I was wonderfully converted. I mean it was a life changing experience! I mean a 180 degree turn. Talk about a 'new creature in Christ Jesus'—it happened to me."

And, to borrow a line from poet Robert Frost, "that has made all the difference." It made all the difference in Wally's world, all the difference to 1.5 million of the world's needy children.

In September of 1993, Wally Erickson, 65, retires as president of Compassion International. We stood in the parking lot at his office. I was about to get into my rented car. I said to Wally, "It must be good to step into retirement knowing that you have done some good in the world."

Wally's eyes teared up, "It is, Wesley, it is. But it would have been a lot different except for the grace of Christ."

"The standards of the church were not difficult for me to embrace. They were already my standards of moral conduct."

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Make The Connection Count: Be A Sponsor

The overwhelming majority of Compassion's efforts with the Church of the Nazarene is funded by people like you: individuals and families who make a connection with a child or project through sponsorship. A sponsor is a special friend to connect with. Through regular support, sponsors help meet children's present needs so they can have a better future. You could choose to sponsor a child overseas. Your commitment of \$24 monthly will give a child access to life-changing benefits like education, health care, and perhaps even job skills development. Most important, your sponsored child will hear the Gospel continually through regular Christian training. You can correspond with your child, and even send funds for small gifts at Christmas and on birthdays. If you've been burdened for at-risk children in the U.S., perhaps you'll take action by providing monthly \$48 scholarship support for a needy child in the U.S. to attend a Christian school. Again, you'll be able to correspond with that child while you provide encouragement and funds that will make a loving Christian environment within reach for a child who needs a setting apart from public school. Maybe you feel called to support the staff and work of a local church-based Christian ministry focused on urban or Native American children. Your \$24 monthly support will put you in touch with those frontline workers. You'll receive regular reports on how the center and its staff are impacting the lives of children in the name of Jesus through strategic activities like Bible studies, supervised recreation, and tutoring. You can even request that your support be directed to a Nazarene-related project or child, thus furthering the effect of Church of the Nazarene mission efforts. Celebrate the Nazarene-Compassion connection with us! Fill out the coupon for more information today.

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