

## History



Compassion's work has grown from modest beginnings in South Korea in 1952 when American evangelist Rev. Everett Swanson felt compelled to help 35 children orphaned by the Korean conflict.

Today we have a worldwide ministry where more than 1.2 million children are now reaping the benefits of one man's clear, God-given vision.

Our founder was inspired by Matthew 15:32 where Jesus says, "I have compassion for these people...I do not want to send them away hungry" [NIV].

At Compassion we serve the spiritual, physical, social and educational needs of a child. We achieve this through four programs: the Child Sponsorship Program, the Child Survival Program, the Leadership Development Program and Complementary Interventions.

### 1952

Evangelist Everett Swanson travels to South Korea to preach the gospel to the troops in the Republic of Korea army. During his visit he encounters children orphaned by the war. Rev. Swanson is challenged by a missionary friend: "You have seen the tremendous needs and unparalleled opportunities of this land. What do you intend to do about it?"

Two checks are presented to Rev. Swanson (\$50 and \$1,000) upon his return to America to help the orphans of Korea. "This was conclusive proof to me that God was in it," Swanson said.

Miriam Swanson, Everett's wife, and family friends, Dr. Gus and Helen Hemwall, encourage, support and work with Rev. Swanson in his efforts to help Korean orphans. Dr. Hemwall provides medical supplies and significant financial resources as Everett launches his overseas ministry.

### 1953

Rev. Swanson begins to incorporate his experience in Korea into his revival meetings. Christians donate funds to purchase rice and fuel for the

Korean children.

### **1954**

Special sponsorship programs are developed so that individuals, families or churches can help support orphans for a few dollars a month.

Sponsorship money provides Biblical lessons, food, clothing, shelter and medical aid on a regular basis for the children of Korea.

### **1956**

A nonprofit corporation, the Everett Swanson Evangelistic Association, is launched to handle the funds and attend to the day-to-day business of ministering to orphans in South Korea.

The board of directors consists of:

- Rev. Everett Swanson, president
- Mrs. Miriam Swanson, vice president
- Gus A. Hemwall, M.D., secretary and treasurer

### **1960**

Rev. Swanson visits South Korea in January and sees that children are inadequately dressed for the winter weather. "Operation Long Underwear," a special drive to provide a complete winter outfit — shoes, socks, heavy underwear and school uniform — begins. More than 6,000 children are clothed the following winter.

### **1961**

By September, the Everett Swanson Evangelistic Association supports 108 orphanages and homes in South Korea.

### **1963**

Inspired by Jesus' words in Matthew 15:32 of "I have compassion on the multitude. I will not send them away hungry," as well as Swanson's growing uneasiness with seeing his own name represent a growing ministry, Swanson changes the name of Everett Swanson Evangelical Association to Compassion, Incorporated.

Compassion of Canada, Ltd., is formed and Bob and Janet Forsyth open their home to house the first Canadian office. Today, headquartered in London, Ontario, 22,000 sponsorships are coordinated through Compassion of Canada, Ltd.

#### **1964**

An honorary Doctor of Laws degree is bestowed on Rev. Swanson by Kon Kuk University in Seoul.

In the fall, Miriam Swanson spearheads the first of four U.S. tours. A handful of Korean orphans travel to more than 80 U.S. cities. In churches, they sing, recite scripture and pantomime native folk songs. As a result, many new sponsors and supporters join Compassion's ministry.

#### **1965**

In November, 113 sponsors and friends of Compassion go on the First Compassion Orient Tour and visit Compassion's orphanages and projects in South Korea. Dr. Gus and Helen Hemwall host the three-week excursion throughout Asia. The first trip is so successful that Miriam Swanson hosts six others through the years.

On November 15, Dr. Everett Swanson dies, 13 years after pioneering Compassion's ministry.

#### **1966**

After several months of prayer, the board selects Rev. Henry L. Harvey as president of Compassion and appoints Miriam Swanson, Everett's widow, to serve as vice president. The chairman of the board is Dr. Gus Hemwall; Elmer Olson is the treasurer and David Swanson serves as secretary.

Miriam Swanson plays a prominent role as a sponsor relations representative. She corresponds with and talks to sponsors who have questions or comments about the ministry.

Rev. Harvey's education and experience in business give him management expertise. His 13 years as a missionary in India give him a deep understanding of fieldwork. During his eight-year tenure, Compassion begins projects in 17 new countries.

A memorial fund is established for Everett Swanson. Contributions to the fund are used to construct a building for Compassion's offices in Seoul, Korea. Arthur N. Knudsen, a Compassion sponsor, goes to Korea and devotes a week of his own time to develop plans for the Everett Swanson Memorial Building.

In April, Miriam Swanson attends the ground-breaking ceremony for the office building and digs the first shovelful of earth

### **1967**

The Everett Swanson Memorial Building is dedicated in May. Ninety three sponsors and friends of Compassion from the United States are among those on hand for the dedication.

### **1968**

Compassion begins its international growth and establishes the Family Helper Plan in four countries: India, Indonesia, Haiti and Singapore. The effort is spearheaded by Edward Kimball, who joins Compassion in 1965 and serves as business manager in Korea and as field director in South Asia. Mr. Kimball travels thousands of miles to set up programs that are still followed in many countries today.

### **1970**

Special Care Centers are organized to treat children with physical handicaps and medical illness, offering relief through surgery, training, physical therapy, adequate nourishment and special equipment.

### **1972**

Compassion begins work in the United States Native American field.

### **1974**

Reverend Wallace (Wally) Erickson, a pastor who spent four years in South Korea for Compassion before returning to the States, is named the first field director of South and Central America. In October, the board appoints him executive vice president.

Reverend Henry Harvey retires as president.

School projects are set up to assist children who otherwise would not have the chance to receive an education. These projects pay for teachers' salaries, books, supplies, school uniforms, medical care and, in many instances, a hot, nutritious meal each school day.

### **1975**

In June, Wally Erickson becomes Compassion's third president. He served the organization for eight years prior to that. Born in Bloomington, Illinois, Wally spent his boyhood in the Midwest and attended universities in Illinois and Missouri for his undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. An honorary Doctor of Humanities degree was awarded to him by Keimyung Christian College in Taegu, Korea, in the mid-1970s. During Wally's term as president, the number of sponsored children climbs from 25,000 to more than 180,000.

TEAR Fund, a Christian relief agency in Great Britain, becomes affiliated with Compassion for child sponsorship.

### **1978**

Australian sponsors help create Compassion Limited of Australia, headquartered in Newcastle. Currently, more than 27,000 children are sponsored through the Australia partnership.

### **1980**

Compassion moves its headquarters to Colorado Springs, Colorado.

In December, Compassion introduces the Non-Formal Education (NFE) program. NFE includes educational activities and training outside of formal school to help children help themselves.

### **1983**

Hunger/Health funds are established to supplement and assist other Compassion programs in providing nutrition and health-related activities.

### **1984**

The Compassion Fund is introduced to provide extraordinary medical and education assistance to Compassion-sponsored children.

Compassion sets up the Un-sponsored Children's Fund to help provide support to newly registered children waiting for a sponsor.

## **1986**

Tear Fund New Zealand becomes a cooperating country partner with Compassion.

## **1990**

Bibles for All Kids is organized to provide Bibles for all Compassion-assisted children and supports Compassion's goal of giving each child the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel.

In April, Service d'Entraide et de Liaison (SEL) of France becomes affiliated with Compassion. More than 4,000 children are currently sponsored in France.

Both Miriam Swanson and Dr. Gus Hemwall are named Director Emeritus by Compassion's board on September 21. Each served in that capacity until their deaths.

## **1991**

The Overseas Scholarship Grant Program is organized to financially support older children who have completed their formal education and would like to continue in secondary school, vocational training or university.

## **1992**

Compassion International celebrates 40 years of ministry and begins work in the United States with American inner-city and rural youth, as well as Native American children.

## **1993**

More than 180,000 children are sponsored in more than 2,000 project sites in 21 countries. Approximately 25,000 other children are registered in Compassion's programs and await sponsors.

- Compassion leaves Korea after 40 successful years of ministry.
- Compassion begins work in Ethiopia.

- Rev. Wallace Erickson retires from Compassion after serving as president for 18 years, and Dr. Wesley Stafford assumes the presidency.

Dr. Stafford spent 15 years with Compassion both overseas and at headquarters before becoming president and CEO. Wess grew up in Africa's Ivory Coast and shared his missionary parents' commitment to the poor. After college, he served as a Haiti representative for six international relief agencies, including Compassion. Living internationally helped him become fluent in several languages. Undergraduate and post-graduate degrees from Moody, Biola University and Wheaton College prepared him for a life of Christian ministry.

#### **1994**

Compassion initiates relief efforts in Rwanda following civil war that leaves more than 140,000 children "unattended" nationwide.

Miriam Swanson Westerberg, Director Emeritus and Everett Swanson's widow, passed away on February 4.

#### **1995**

Compassion resumes child development work in Rwanda.

#### **1996**

The Netherlands joins Australia, Canada, France, Great Britain and New Zealand as Compassion Partner Countries.

Over 200,000 children are now sponsored through Compassion's worldwide ministry.

The Leadership Development Program (LDP) enrolls its first class of students in the Philippines.

Compassion launches its inaugural Web site.

#### **1997**

The LDP was launched in Haiti and Guatemala.

#### **1998**

Over 250,000 children are now sponsored through Compassion's worldwide ministry.

Dr. Gus Hemwall, ministry pioneer and Director Emeritus, died November 22.

### **1999**

Compassion begins child development work in Tanzania.

Compassion UK opens in the United Kingdom.

### **2000**

Compassion holds its inaugural Leadership Development Program International Congress in the Philippines, celebrating the graduation of the first LDP students.

### **2001**

Over 400,000 children are now assisted in 21 countries around the globe.

Compassion's International Ministry Center relocates to northern Colorado Springs.

[Italy](#) becomes a Compassion partner country.

### **2002**

Compassion celebrates 50 years of child development ministry!

Compassion expands its child sponsorship program into Nicaragua, bringing the total number of assisted countries to 22.

### **2003**

Over 500,000 children are now assisted in more than 20 countries.

Compassion Suisse opens in Switzerland.

In December, Compassion begins its child development program in Bangladesh.

### **2004**

South Korea becomes a partner country.

Compassion begins its child sponsorship program in Burkina Faso.

## **2005**

Compassion begins its child sponsorship program in Ghana.

## **2006**

Compassion assists more than 800,000 children in 24 countries.

## **2007**

Compassion assists more than 900,000 children in 24 countries.

Compassion expands Leadership Development Program into Honduras.

Compassion Deutschland (Germany) becomes a partner country

## **2008**

Compassion celebrates its 1 millionth registered child in February

## **2013**

Dr. Wess Stafford retires from his 21-year tenure as President and Chief Executive Officer of Compassion International, and Santiago "Jimmy" Mellado assumes the presidency.

Born in El Salvador and raised in seven different countries, Jimmy has experienced firsthand the powerful impact thriving local churches can have on their communities, especially in under-resourced environments. Prior to joining Compassion in June of 2013, Jimmy served 20 years as the president of the Willow Creek Association (WCA) – a global ministry completely dedicated to helping local churches thrive. In 1995, Jimmy teamed up with Bill Hybels to launch and host The Global Leadership Summit. The Summit is an annual not-for-profit event created to address the dire need for excellent leadership training in local churches and other people-centered organizations around the world. Jimmy's educational background includes graduating cum laude with a Mechanical Engineering degree from Southern Methodist University (SMU) in Dallas, Texas and a Master of Business Administration from the Harvard Business School.