

# WCA News



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## THE FACES OF COMPASSION

WCA Member Churches on the frontlines

### Expressing Compassion

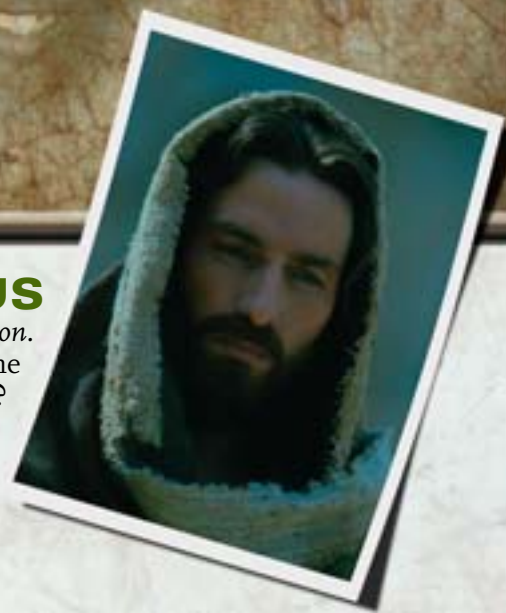
Five WCA Member Churches reach out to those in need ... and see God like never before.

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### PLUS

Mel Gibson's *Passion*.  
What's all the fuss about?

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What do a former Marine, a church youth group, and a 27-year American missionary in Latin America have in common? Together they laid the foundation for ORPHANetwork, an nonprofit organization connecting U.S. and international churches for ongoing mission opportunities with orphanages in third world countries.

# Birth of a Network of Compassion

In 1991 Vincent “Vinny” Rosini, a former Marine, traveled around the world looking for opportunities to change lives. “I went to Vera Cruz, Nicaragua because I wanted to see, first-hand, one of the poorest countries in the world. I quickly realized that the orphaned children there represented an incredible mission field,” said Rosini. Vera Cruz is a rural region of Nicaragua, about 30 minutes outside the country’s capital city of Managua.

Rosini, who served as youth director at Spring Branch Community Church, a WCA Member Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, began taking kids on short-term mission trips to the region in 1995.



# "Going on a short-term mission project changed

## A Father and Son's Story

Travis Simone was one of the first Spring Branch students who joined Rosini for a life-changing trip to Vera Cruz.

"When I went on my first trip, I was an American teenager living in an affluent area and I was used to having all of my needs, and most of my wants, met," said Simone.

"It was a shock to sleep 5-6 people to a room with mosquitoes chewing on me and the sound of rats running around in

the rafters overhead. Eating beans and rice for every meal made me realize that my way of life was an exception, not the reality, for most people." Over the next eight years, Simone made more than 20 subsequent trips to the region.

"Every time Travis would go on a trip he would give literally everything he brought with him to the kids at the orphanage. He came home with only the clothes on his back," said Rosini. "By the time he graduated from college, Travis was well-known on his campus for owning only one pair of shorts, a T-shirt, and flip-flops."

"Every Christian parent prays that their child will meet Christ and follow Him in a meaningful way,"

said Michael Simone, Travis' father and senior pastor of Spring Branch Community Church.

"When I saw Travis and his friends not only making repeated trips to Nicaragua, but coming home and making significant life changes because of their experience there, I knew I had to find out what was going on. It was time for me to go."

What was his experience? "It

was an amazing paradox. These orphaned children live in grinding poverty and yet there is still a tremendous feeling of

hope. I couldn't get my mind around how both despair and joy could co-exist. I came home knowing that Spring Branch had to do more."

## Creating Change, Casting Vision

When Simone returned he shared the story of what was happening in Nicaragua with his congregation. They responded by giving and going. Church members began giving regularly through Spring Branch's monthly community fund offering and opening their homes to orphans who came to the U.S. for medical care. Students, adults, and entire families began making short-term mission trips to the area.

The church developed a "Christmas Wish" program to provide the orphaned children with a rare opportunity to shop at their local marketplace for clothes and toys. Hundreds of people participated, eventually enabling Spring Branch to partner with other churches and local businesses to make Christmas special for more than 2,500 orphans in Nicaragua and the Ukraine.

As the mission grew, Simone realized that there was an enormous opportunity to share this life-changing experience with other churches.

"Our church has been blessed with abundant growth. I believe a large part of that is because we are committed to caring for the poor," said Simone. Since its inception in 1993, Spring Branch has grown from 100 members to a regular Sunday attendance of 1,400.

"Over and over, the Bible reminds us to care for the poor. I think God is telling us that it's not just about eradicating poverty but also simply loving people. How we treat the poor is a barometer of our intimacy with Christ," said Simone. "I saw first-hand how our church's experience in Nicaragua had changed and blessed us and I wanted to give other churches the same opportunity."

## The Dream Grows

Spring Branch spun off its mission program to establish ORPHANetwork as an inde-



*the way I see the future of our ministry."*  
Michael Simone, Senior Pastor, Spring Branch Community Church

pendent nonprofit organization in 2000. Its mission is to help impoverished and orphaned children fully realize their God-given potential. The organization's vision is a network of American churches and indigenous churches partnering to build and strengthen the capacity of orphanages in third world countries. Member churches are involved in meeting orphans' physical, spiritual, and emotional needs and creating real, lasting change in their communities through self-sufficiency and community development projects.

"We live in a global village," said Tim Adams, ORPHANetwork's executive director. "Part of being a global village is realizing that mission work can no longer be just the work of full-time missionaries. Everyday laypeople can, and want to be, meaningfully involved in overseas missions."

It doesn't surprise Adams that ORPHANetwork was essentially the outgrowth of a student ministry.

"Young adults, particularly the postmodern generation, don't just want to hear about a problem. They want to see it, experience it, and be a part of the solution," said Adams. "Son City birthed Willow Creek Community Church. Spring Branch's student ministry birthed ORPHANetwork. I believe that service ministries, particularly those that equip young adults to be the hands and feet of Christ to the poor, are potentially enormous growth engines for churches."

Previously, Adams served as youth pastor at WCA Member Church Cedar Run Community Church for eight years. "One of the most enjoyable, and yet hardest parts, of being a youth pastor was finding ways to get my kids involved in ongoing relationships with people they could serve outside of their family and friends. Our church's ministry philosophy was focused on relational evangelism, and I wanted that both for our domestic and international outreach. I wasn't interested in just running trips ... I wanted to create relationships."

### *Two Churches Working Together*

Relationships are at the heart of ORPHANetwork's mission. ORPHANetwork creates long-term relationships between stateside churches and indigenous churches to fulfill its mission.

ORPHANetwork's partner in Nicaragua is Cristiana Iglesia Verbo, a dynamic 300-member church in Managua. The story of ORPHANetwork's creation is inseparable from the history of Verbo Church's founder, Bob Trolese.

"My wife Myra and I came to Central America in 1976 to help with disaster relief after the '76 earthquake," Trolese said. "We fell in love with the people here. It has been tremendously difficult, but rewarding, work to plant churches and empower those churches to care for orphaned and impoverished children in their community."

Verbo Ministries has planted four churches in Nicaragua. Each church is involved in outreach ministry to local orphans and impoverished children. Orphanage staff is committed to holistic ministry, providing children with all they need to meet their physical, spiritual, and educational needs including improved nutrition, clothing,



adequate medical care, Christian-based schooling, and job training.

“We want to go beyond meeting these children’s basic needs to giving them everything they need to thrive as a child of God,” said Trolese. “The work we’re doing with American churches has the potential to provide a strong continuum of care for these children from the time they arrive as toddlers to when they graduate. And we’re going further to provide them with the education and skills they need to find a job so they can give back to, and build, their community.”

Indigenous and American churches support Verbo’s 90-acre training

center and farm, orphanages, a Christian school, medical clinics, and feeding centers. In Vera Cruz, Verbo is currently educating more than 300 children from orphanages and surrounding communities.

“Our partnership with American churches through ORPHANetwork is helping us lead impoverished and orphaned children to faith in Christ and equipping them to make a difference in their community and for the Kingdom of God,” said Trolese. “It’s exciting to see the lives that are being changed as we work together with American churches.”

## Power of Partnership

What started as a mission trip for a few teenagers quickly turned into two churches catching a vision for how the power of partnership between American churches and indigenous churches can change lives. And now, a network of churches has been born giving their members the adventure of a lifetime.

For more information on how ORPHANetwork can help establish a relationship between your church and orphanages overseas for ongoing mission opportunities, contact their offices at (757) 333-7200 or visit them online at [www.orphanetwork.net](http://www.orphanetwork.net).

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Tim Adams, ORPHANetwork  
Executive Director