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Dear

I first have to apologize for not writing to you earlier, but I want to thank you for your donation that helped make it possible for me to take a short-term mission trip to Costa Rica in March. The trip meant a lot to me.

It is said that there are two sure-fire ways to create conflict in a family or group. One is to travel together, and the second is to undertake a remodeling project. Our group did both at the same time, and it was interesting to see how well our group worked together under the circumstances.

About half the team members were from the Grand Island Evangelical Free church, but I didn't know them very well. One I had never met before. There were also had three members from the Washington DC area, one from Chicago, and one from Arizona, all of whom I had never met before the trip.

The trip was labeled as a 'vision trip' to learn about Casa Viva, a ministry in Costa Rica that helps place orphans and abused children into Christian foster homes. This interested me immediately because 7 of my 24 years as a Grand Island police officer have been spent as a school resource officer at Grand Island Senior High, where one of my responsibilities was investigating child abuse cases. Although these can be very difficult cases, it was at times gratifying to help protect children who were being abused, which at times involved removing children from the abusive home to place them in foster care.

This is one reason I was immediately interested in getting to know a ministry that serves orphans. Another reason is that I have discovered in recent years is how much God has to say about serving orphans and widows in both the Old and New Testaments. It feels like scales have fallen from my eyes to let me see this truth of Scripture. There are 42 references to orphans and 55 references to widows in the Old Testament. I have learned that God is very concerned about people who are unable to care for themselves.

Although Costa Rica has a very stable government and high standard of living among Central American countries, there are still cases of abandonment and abuse, just as there are in the United States.

Casa Viva has formed partnerships with several local churches in Costa Rica to recruit families to accept foster children. It's the only ministry in Central America that places children in foster care rather than orphanages. It was started by a concerned man named Philip Aspergren, who worked in orphanages for ten years in the Dominican Republic before starting this ministry. His goal is for this ministry to someday be completely run by native Costa Ricans. He's looking at starting another ministry to Peru when this happens.

Orphanages have been discontinued in the US, but are still common in Spanish-speaking countries and in Russia. Children from orphanages frequently can suffer from attachment disorder, which is a psychological disorder that develops when a young infant doesn't properly bond with a care giver. It affects the physical development and growth of the brain. The frequently over-worked staff often doesn't have the time necessary to form such bonds.

This is what our trip consisted of and what our team did on the trip. We arrived late Saturday March 6<sup>th</sup> and attended a church in Grecia, Costa Rica Sunday. This church is one of the partners with Casa Viva to recruit suitable families. Monday we began a remodeling project for a local family from the Grecia church. The family had been approved to receive an infant child, but child protective services said that the child had to have a separate bedroom. So we built a wall dividing the children's bedroom in half.

On Tuesday we visited a ministry that daily feeds children in an extremely poor neighborhood just outside San Jose. We repaired and built benches for the children to eat from. It was personally moving for me to see children eating from a bench that I had just finished repairing. After we had served lunch, we then walked through the neighborhood and visited a small tent city where squatters are trying to take possession of plots of ground. Later in the afternoon we visited the Casa Viva headquarters and met the director and staff. They are quite a professional group. I had a personal interest in visiting with the staff social worker, since I have an MS in counseling and have worked in placing children in foster care.

On Wednesday we returned to the family in Grecia to complete the wall in the bedroom. We didn't quite finish it, but we came very close to completing it. The construction days were rigorous, but I was amazed how a group of people who had only met just a few days before could work together under such circumstances.

The father of this family, whose name was Diógenes, was so moved by our labor, that he asked about participating in similar projects in the future to help other families.

On Thursday we had a chance to do some sight seeing as a team, and on Friday, March 12<sup>th</sup> we (reluctantly) left.

The impact of this trip on me personally was profound. I've become more involved in the ministry of my local church, by giving, teaching and being a contract therapist. I plan to continue an association with Casa Viva, and would encourage you to research it and consider becoming involved with it as well.

Thanks again for your financial support that helped make the trip possible.

Doug