

# Reaching the lost and the poor



Assemblies of God World Missions has a storied history of reaching out to the poor and suffering. Since the founding of the Fellowship in 1914, meeting spiritual and physical needs has been a priority for national churches and AGWM missionaries.

Even missionaries whose primary ministry was evangelism and church planting actively demonstrated the compassion of Jesus. Many did not publicize their compassion work for fear of being connected to the Social Gospel, which advocated a tangible response to social problems without presenting the gospel.

As a missionary kid growing up in East Africa, I remember Missionary Morris Williams preaching in villages and carrying dental tools so he could pull abscessed teeth.

My father, missionary Wesley Hurst, started 35 schools in African villages to teach children to read and write.

Missionaries Anna Tomaseck and Harry Waggoner started an orphanage and leper home in India, respectively. Lillian Trasher founded an orphanage in Egypt. Mark and Huldah Buntain established a feeding program and later a hospital in Calcutta, India. In China missionary Marie Stephany rescued abandoned babies and raised them in her home. L.M. and Ava Anglin established an orphanage in China in 1916 that is still operating today. Florence Steidel founded New Hope Town Leper Colony in Liberia, West Africa.

There are countless examples of missionaries — whose stories have never been told — who reached out to the poor. They provided health-care, food, shelter, an education and more.

One of the most notable examples of meeting physical and spiritual needs is the work established by AGWM Executive Director John Bueno and his wife, Lois. They were honored by the government of El Salvador for their efforts as missionaries and pastors to educate hundreds of thousands of children in that nation. The

award, “Noble Friends of El Salvador,” is similar to the Congressional Gold Medal bestowed on Billy Graham in 1996. John and Lois were the first noncitizens to receive the award, which has only been presented to seven individuals in El Salvador’s history.

The Buenos arrived in El Salvador in 1961 to pastor a struggling church in San Salvador, the capital. Shortly after their arrival, John’s heart became burdened for the nation’s children. As he drove from his house to the church each day, he passed street kids selling newspapers, shining shoes and even begging.

At midnight, John was driving home and came to an intersection where a young boy was selling newspapers. The boy only had three copies left, but he couldn’t return home with unsold newspapers. John asked himself, *Who is going to buy a newspaper at midnight?* Concerned for the boy, John bought all three copies.

That experience sparked something in John’s heart to reach out to the street children of El Salvador with the love and message of Christ. God gave him a vision for feeding and educating them.

That was the beginning of what would become the largest private school system in the world. It includes 39 schools and has served more than 700,000 students in its 43 years of operation.

Four words — reaching, planting, training and touching — describe the pillars of Assemblies of God missions throughout the world. They are not four separate objectives, but an integrated, comprehensive, God-given plan of evangelizing, establishing churches, training national church leaders, and demonstrating Christ’s compassion to poor and suffering people.

The Buenos’ ministry in El Salvador exemplified all four areas. Their heart for the poor and how they translated that heart of compassion



El Salvador recognized John and Lois Bueno for their work among impoverished children and their families.

into action is an example for future missionaries.

I visited El Salvador in 2005, and had the opportunity to interview people whose lives were transformed through their ministry. Some of these testimonies have been included in this special edition of *Today’s Pentecostal Evangel*.

The Jerusalem church leaders exhorted the apostle Paul to “remember the poor” (Galatians 2:10). Perhaps in Paul’s passionate and lucid defense of his ministry, he focused so much on evangelism and establishing the Church that he failed to mention ministry to the poor. We



can’t know for sure, but the church leaders obviously said what they did for a reason.

The same exhortation is relevant to us today. In a society where most of us live with an abundance of possessions and comfort, it’s easy to forget the poor and suffering. May this issue be a

reminder to all of us to serve Christ by extending a helping hand to men, women and children in need. **tpe**

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