

## **The Shoe Shine Boy**

As the businessman left the church he was greeted by a host of small children peddling their wares and services. That is the norm in underdeveloped countries like Ecuador, where children regularly sell candy and flowers or perform services to support their family. The kind, church-going businessman agreed to let an 8-year boy shine his shoes. The asking price was 25 cents, but in his mind, the businessman thought he would pay the youngster double. It was to be his good deed for the day. Then the thought came to him, “I wonder if the boy is hungry.” The boy said he was hungry, so the businessman took Juan to a nearby bakery for bread and yogurt. They talked as the boy quickly consumed his meal. Oscar asked Juan if he would like to go to a church service. Juan readily agreed, and after the service, he asked Oscar about the book in his hand. “It is my Bible” said Oscar. “Would you like a children’s Bible of your own?” Juan immediately said “yes” so they made plans to meet for breakfast and church the following week. That next week not only did Juan show up but three other boys.



Our temptation is to give money to people in need and think we are doing a good deed. While it may feed someone for the moment, it can cause dependence on handouts to sustain their way of life. Juan needed a *relationship* with someone who cared, and who could help the boy start a relationship with God. Realizing the need was much more than a 25 cent shoeshine, the relationship became the catalyst for the Pan de Vida ministry in Quito, Ecuador. Pan de Vida would become a ministry that empowers the poor through job skills training, medical care, learning about Christ, as well as providing food, clothing and school supplies. The name Pan de Vida means “bread of life.” Jesus *is* the bread of life, and people with Christ in their life will never go hungry. Instead of being an enabler of dependency, the ministry helps improve a person’s self-esteem and self-worth, and to become independent. For example, graduates of the sewing job training program receive a sewing machine of their own. Then they will have the capability to make clothes for their family and sell articles they make to support their family. That is quite different than just handing a person money and thinking we have done a good deed.

Mission teams visiting Pan de Vida have established personal relationships with the beneficiaries there. A local church mission team member purchased a computer for a young man she met in Ecuador. Now, the young man is studying accounting in college – quite a change from selling candy in the streets. Contributions from the same church paid for a surgery that saved the life of a mother in Ecuador. She now is back at work and supporting her family. Money given to the ministry is invested in people to help them rise above their situations. As people graduate from the program they can now turn their attention to the next person in need. Graduates often return as volunteers to help others.

“Poverty is a state of heart and mind,” said Oscar Aguirre. “People are impoverished if they don’t have love and hope in their lives.” As you look for ways to best utilize your charitable support look for causes that empower people to develop a career, to be able to work in support of their family or to improve their health. Seek causes that create an environment of hope. Look for faith-based ministries that combine the strength of many to accomplish great purposes. We don’t need to be heroes; we already have a hero in Jesus Christ. Be in partnership with Jesus Christ, follow his lead, and help others to have a future.

The ministry all started when God placed an 8-year old boy in the path of a man with a heart for helping people. Instead of shining shoes to feed his family for a day the new relationship with Oscar created a ministry to help people for a lifetime.

**Question:** Which would make you feel better – giving food for a day or hope for the future, and why?

**Scripture:** *Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty (John 6:35).*

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father. There are many people with needs in this world. We realize, Lord, that the best way we can help others is to share your love with everyone, but to do it in a way that helps them to grow in their own self-worth and faith in you. Amen.