

In 1976 TOGETHER, formerly as South American Missionary Evangelism (S.A.M.E.) and later as Covenant Children, began through Dr. Arthur (Buddy) VanVranken when he visited Bogota, Colombia. Together's founder, Dr. Arthur VanVranken writes,..

"My wife Peggy dreamed of having a large family. After 4 beautiful children and many miscarriages the prospect of more children was bleak until we heard Pastor Walter Schott share about his trip to Bogota, Colombia, where he saw abandoned children with no help or hope for survival. The number of street children in Colombia at that time were considered an international problem. After I heard about the volumes of homeless children in Colombia, even though I am not a religious person, somehow, I heard God tell me to go and do something!

When I arrived in Bogota I saw first-hand, hungry and destitute children who were eating garbage to stay alive. At night children were seen heaped in piles to keep warm from the damp 50 degree temperatures. I cried myself to sleep after seeing the life of children who lived on the streets of Bogota. Because I came to help, I tried to connect with the Colombian officials assigned as child protection entities, but never got past the secretaries as no one was bilingual to help interpret for me.

Just before I was about to leave Colombia, I visited Clinica Emanuel where I met Annie Noble, a RN from Sweden who worked at the clinic. After she accepted my box of donated medical supplies she gave me a tour of the hospital which I was not accustomed to. In Bogota, semi-private rooms meant that patients shared their bed with another sick person.

When Annie asked why I was in Colombia I told her my story. She said, 'I don't know why you were not welcomed with open arms as we have many, many children who are homeless.' She immediately called ICBF, the Colombian social services and minutes later, Annie and I were on our way to a local orphanage.

I first entered the room for infants where two babies were found in each crib. The babies were under-nourished, had birth defects from German Measles (they had no access to vaccinations) and most had a cough. With no heating or blankets available the babies often died because of the humid cold nights in Bogota. In this orphanage the babies were crying unlike anything I had ever heard.

As I walked through the room of infants, just like in Peggy's dream, when I looked first saw Nancy I instantly knew she was our daughter. At the moment Nancy and I looked at one another she was a part of our family. When I told Annie which baby was my child, Anne said, 'Are you sure? She is sick.' I told Annie about the dream that Peggy had and about how when I saw Nancy I knew she was our daughter.

After examining Nancy I saw that she needed immediate help. The signs of malnutrition were extreme. Her dark hair already had blonde streaks in it. Her extended belly looked like she had parasites (she had 3 different types). Her chest rattled with congestion. Her baby teeth had rotted down to the gum-line. Together these issues were life-threatening so Annie offered to send Nancy to an orphanage in a warmer climate where she could receive one-one treatment until the adoption was approved.

When I returned to North Dakota, I told everyone that I knew about the miracles that had unfolded for us to adopt our Nancy. My story reminded me of the saying, 'How do you feed a hungry world? You start with one!'

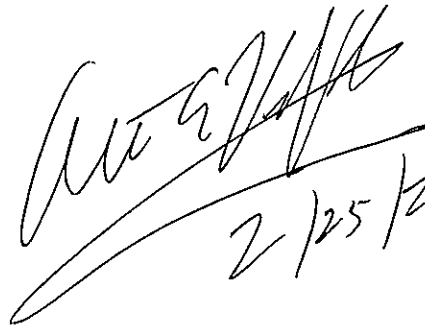
We were ecstatic about what God was doing to bring Nancy to our family and we passionately pursued getting others involved. Soon after, Rev. Carl and Melba Perry joined our efforts. We established Together (formerly known as South American Missionary Evangelism, S.A.M.E. and later as Covenant Children) by forming a Board of Directors and obtained our tax-exemption and corporate status.

The news of what we were doing spread as we shared our story and vision. Our adoption of Nancy was not easy, because at that time foreign adoption in North Dakota was new. We learned much through our first-hand experience which led to the development of the foreign adoption program which paved the way for many more people to adopt. Now over 40 years later, our Colombian daughter Nancy, and nearly 400 other children, have been adopted through Together.

Words are not enough to give a tribute to Peggy, the loving mother of our children and Carl and Melba Perry. I am grateful for these co-founders who have all since gone on to heaven.

I am grateful to have been apart of how God has brought families together!

Dr. Arthur VanVranken  
Co-Founder



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