

The History of Ciudad de Los Ninos Orphanage Mazatlan, Sinaloa, Mexico

The orphanage Ciudad de los Ninos, whose English translation means "The City of Children," was founded on October 18, 1970 by Padre Lucas Carvajal Lopez.

The orphanage is located just outside Mazatlan to the north along the west side of the old, two-lane highway to Culiacan, which is the capitol of the state of Sinaloa.

Fr. Carvajal also founded the religious order that the nuns who now tend to the orphaned children belong to, "The Institute of Missionary Sisters of the Christ Child," on January 29, 1968.

One of the nuns who tend to the needs of the children, Sister Belia, has devoted the majority of her life to the needs of Ciudad de los Ninos since its inception.

Prior to becoming a nun, Sister Belia, along with other Catholic ladies in Mazatlan, frequently visited the prison located just outside Mazatlan to minister to the women incarcerated there.

The ladies were shocked to find there were babies and small children belonging to the female prisoners who were living at the prison with their mothers. The ladies knew this was no place for children to be raised.

About this same time, Sister Belia began to realize the Lord was calling her to devote her life to God's service – at the same time Fr. Carvajal founded the Missionary Sisters of the Christ Child.

Along with Sister Ophelia, another nun who joined the order when it was founded, Sister Belia continues to serve the children of the orphanage to this day.

Cuidad de los Ninos began as "Casa de Ninos" or, "The Children's Home" in 1968, in a small rented home for \$250 pesos (\$25.00 U.S. dollars) per month. It was located in Mazatlan's adjoining suburb, Colonia Benito Juarez, where there were, Sister Belia recalls, "many difficulties and sacrifices." They soon had 24 children to care for.

When the bishop offered them the partially built facility at their current location, they moved in, even though at that time, it only had a roof and outer walls.

On October 18, 1970, "La Ciudad de los Ninos de Mazatlan, A.C." was officially founded. Their creed is, "To provide protection for orphans, the needy, the homeless, the abandoned and the poor."

Today, Sister Belia is the orphanage director and Sister Ophelia is the assistant director.

Padre Lucas Carvajal Lopez died in 1985. There has never been a resident priest assigned to replace him. Each day, however, a priest from the seminary in Mazatlan comes to say mass. The day-to-day operation of Ciudad is the responsibility of Sister Belia, Sister Ophelia, and 10 other nuns. The other nuns are: Sister Josephina, Sister Lucia, Sister Maricella, Sister Yolanda, Sister Rosalia, Sister Vincenta, Sister Maria, Sister Cleotilde, Sister Teresa and Sister Ramona, making a total of 12 nuns.

There is no Mother Superior (head nun) at the orphanage. Instead, all the nuns are "sisters," with each assuming equal responsibility to take care of the children, including cleaning, laundry, ironing, cooking and taking care of the children in every way from bathing them to teaching them religious and moral instruction.

These good deeds provided to the children each day may be why the children refer to each of the nuns as "Madre." The older youngsters (teens) also help the nuns take care of the younger children and their needs.

Ciudad de los Ninos is a large facility with a maximum capacity of 90 children. Presently, there are 35 children/young people who live at the orphanage.

This total changes often as new children arrive and older children (usually 18 years of age) leave.

There are 13 girls, ages 4 to 27; and 16 boys, whose ages range from 3 to 30. In the case of the older ones, they have physical and/or mental challenges and for this reason, they are permitted to live at the orphanage beyond the typical 18-year period. As an example, the 30-year old man is deaf, somewhat mentally challenged and will probably always reside at Ciudad de los Ninos, as it is the only home he has ever known. He helps with the grounds maintenance. Several residents have been there since shortly after birth and they are allowed to stay until they have completed their school studies or in many instances, until they marry, which is not long after graduation.

The youngsters attend the following schools: kindergarten: Colegio Remington; grade school: Ninos Heroes; junior high: Federal #1; high school: Universidad Autonimo de Sinaloa.

The 35 children have only a Spartan amount of food to eat each week and it is not consistent nor is it always nourishing. They receive some non-perishable food from the Catholic Church (mostly beans, rice and cooking oil). They also receive two small cases of tuna each month from MazAtun, one of Mazatlan's tuna companies.

In order of importance and need, the orphanage needs assistance with: food – first and foremost; then school supplies, school shoes, school uniforms, facility maintenance, utilities, and transportation expenses to get the children to-and-from school.

They receive no assistance from the Mexican social service agency, nor from the government. There is a committee of Mexican women who organize a fundraiser each year. Last year they raffled a car from an anonymous donor. The money raised was deposited into a bank account for Ciudad's use during the year. The only other monetary assistance they received were varying amounts of donations from a weekly bingo game played by tourists, which is not presently occurring.

Sister Belia says in addition to desperately needing nourishing food for the children each week, they don't have anyone purchasing required school supplies, school shoes and school uniforms for them. She said that when the school year approaches, they always trust in "the Devine Providence" to provide for them.

In January 2006, the Tres Islas Orphanage Fund, recognized by the U.S. IRS as a charitable, not-for-profit organization that feeds, clothes and educates children in three Mazatlan orphanages (Orfanatorio Mazatlan, Hogar San Pablo and the Salvation Army Orphanage) was asked by Mazatlan residents if the Fund could please begin to feed the children at Ciudad de los Ninos, as well.

Based on experience gained feeding the other three orphanages in Mazatlan each week, it takes \$130.00 a week to provide nourishing food for an orphanage of 25 – 35 children. Nourishing food is defined as high-protein such as chicken, fish and lean meat; fresh vegetables and fresh fruit – not processed nor canned, whole grains including whole wheat bread and brown rice.

At \$130.00 per week x 52 weeks per year, it costs \$6,760.00 to feed the entire orphanage per year. This equates to \$3.71 per week to feed each child, \$16.09 per month to feed each child, or, \$193.14 per year to feed each child.

Clearly, the most important need for the children is the food.

Beyond the need for food, based on what is provided for the children in the three orphanages the Tres Islas Orphanage Fund now serves, these are the estimates for school items for the 35 children in Ciudad de los Ninos:

School supplies: (Notebooks, pens, pencils, school books, paper, lined regular and accounting grid) \$350.00 for the year for all the 35 children combined.

School shoes twice per year (total is for all the shoes): \$700.00 for the year for all the 35 children combined.

School uniforms: \$300.00 for the year for the 35 children combined.

School backpacks: \$275.00 for the year for the 35 children combined.

Total school supplies, shoes, uniforms and backpacks for one year: \$1,625.00 for the 35 children combined.

This equates to \$46.43 per child per year for their educational needs.

Total food and school supplies for the orphanage for one year: \$8,385.00.

This equates to \$239.57 per child per year.

On behalf of the 35 children in the orphanage Ciudad de los Ninos, we humbly ask for your assistance to please first, help feed them and second, to help educate them.

Your donations may be sent to:

Tres Islas Orphanage Fund
3717 Monroe Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82001

In exchange for your donation(s) you'll receive a receipt for your taxes and an annual report in the fall, detailing how all donations have helped the children in the orphanages throughout the year.

Donors are always welcome to visit the orphanages and participate in the annual Tres Islas Orphanage Fund activities at the orphanages.

Each May, the Fund's donors come together for a week during which time they perform much-needed repairs and upgrades (painting, sealing roofs before the monsoon rain season arrives, landscaping, etc.) at the orphanages.

The third week of each December is when Fund donors are invited to come and spend time with the children they help throughout the year by participating in the Christmas celebrations at each of the orphanages, including the traditional Christmas dinners and old-fashioned gift giving under each of the orphanage's Christmas trees.

If you have questions or would like to learn more how you may help, please phone the Tres Islas Orphanage Fund toll-free at: 1-888-459-8463 or email the fund at: email@orphanagefunds.org

Thank you, and may God bless you in advance for the assistance you may provide these wonderful children.