

**Buckner Peru
10th Anniversary Celebration
Remarks**

**Dr. Albert L. Reyes
President/CEO
Buckner International**

Claudia, Dexton and dear friends. It is an honor for me to be here tonight as we celebrate 10 years of serving the most vulnerable children and families in Peru. There is much to celebrate as we look back through these 10 years. And there is much to anticipate as we look forward. I am personally and deeply grateful to each of you – our Buckner staff, our volunteers, and others we are blessed to work alongside.

I have spent this past week seeing the programs and services of Buckner Peru and I am excited to return to the United States and share the wonderful work you are doing. What you are doing here has eternal worth and value, as you serve these children and families. The excellence with which you serve surpasses all expectations and deserves of our thanks.

As I have seen your programs and observed this wonderful staff, I am most grateful for what I have seen this week in the lives being transformed. To spend time with the girls in the transition program; to visit children in foster and kinship care; and to witness the transformation of families at the Buckner Family Hope Center from hopelessness to hope has been an

unforgettable experience for me. Beyond the programs and services, and even more important than our incredible staff, is the hope you are giving to those you serve.

There is a story from the pages of Buckner's history that comes to mind this week. The story is about our founder, Dr. R.C. Buckner. It seems that Father Buckner, as he was called, would often travel to distant churches on weekends to preach and tell about the work of Buckner Orphans Home, which he founded. Each Sunday evening as he would return to Dallas, Texas, from one of his trips, children from the orphanage would ride in horse-drawn wagons to the train station to greet his return.

On one particular occasion, those orphans were joined by a dear friend of Dr. Buckner's who wanted to observe this homecoming. The friend watched as the train rolled into the station in Dallas, steam billowing from the engine as it came to a stop. In a few moments, R.C. Buckner stepped down from the train onto the platform, where he was immediately engulfed by little children, hugging him and pulling at him.

As he waded through the children, Father Buckner noticed one little girl sitting by herself on the corner of the platform. Her name was Mary. She was the sole survivor of a horrible fire that had destroyed her home

and killed her parents and siblings. And though she survived the fire, it left her face badly burned and scarred.

Dr. Buckner walked over to Mary and bending down, he asked her why she did not greet him and welcome him like the other children. “Oh Papa Buckner, I could not hug you like the other children, I am so ugly and scarred.” At that moment, R.C. Buckner sat down next to Mary and lifted her into his lap as he tenderly and gently kissed her scarred face.

R.C. Buckner started Buckner Orphans Home in 1879. Today we are Buckner International. For 138 years, our mission has been to care for “the least of these” – those scarred by life and pushed aside by the world. When Dr. Buckner died in 1919 at the age of 86, he was buried in the only piece of land he still owned, his grave plot. Often, when I need inspiration, I visit his grave. There, written on his tombstone are words which remind me why we are here tonight. “Not one orphan child, but all orphan children.”

Whether they are in Texas or Peru, our calling as an organization is to serve children and their families. It is a mission we have fulfilled for 138 years in Texas and now 10 years in Peru. We have not wavered and we have not faltered from this calling. We have and we will remain steadfast in our commitment to those we serve, for when we cease serving, we cease altogether. We have and will remain innovative and willing to adapt to meet

the current needs of the children and families serve. Here in Peru, you were the first country in which Buckner works to launch foster care as a legal alternative to institutional care. The transition program for girls is meeting a desperate need to help these young ladies move to independence. And the Buckner Family Hope Centers are addressing the root causes of dysfunctional families living in poverty by empowering them to move toward self-sufficiency and become healthy families.

Because of you, Buckner Peru, hope is shining brightly into the lives of hundreds of children and families.