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## A THEOLOGY OF COMPASSION: ENCOURAGING LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY TO CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

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A THEOLOGY OF COMPASSION:  
ENCOURAGING LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY TO CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

PRESENTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
IN THE BARNETT COLLEGE OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY  
AT SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

ALLEN GRIFFIN

SPRING 2020

## DISSERTATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE

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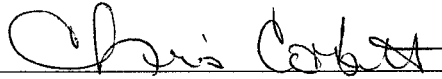
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*under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee and approved by all members of the Committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Divinity in the Barnett College of Ministry and Theology at Southeastern University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry.*

Date


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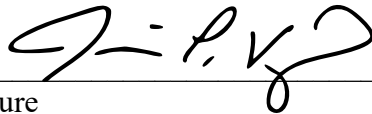
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## ABSTRACT

Compassionate care within the local community of a church is of vital essence to a thriving church ministry. For centuries church leaders have endeavored to make an impact in the lives of the people living in their vicinity through outreach efforts. The compassion of the local church is needed in the area of children in foster care. Through the analysis of two church programs focused on serving the spiritual, educational and social needs of teens in the foster care system, this dissertation will examine how to assist local churches in establishing a program to serve the children in their local foster care system. The research of this project utilizes a theological study of biblical mandates and principles, a study of current literature, as well as surveys and interviews of the pastors, volunteer leaders, and church program volunteers of two churches to answer the question: How does a compassion organization best replicate itself within the ministry of today's Christian Church? This study maintains its focus upon establishing ministry to serve the children in the foster care system with an eye toward the population of children within the foster care system who have not nor will be adopted. With large numbers of children within the ranks of the foster care system, it is incumbent upon the church of Jesus Christ to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit to serve the need of those who are at-risk and unable to care for themselves. Should the church heed the word of God to love our neighbor as ourselves, compassion will emerge from its ranks. This project will inform the reader in methods to establish effective compassion to one of society's most vulnerable generations.

### *Dedication*

In honor of Addison Terrell, I would like to dedicate this project to the countless children within the Foster care system. These precious young people have often suffered without the compassionate care they deserve. Your voices will be heard. May the Church of Jesus Christ awaken to serve all children at risk.

### *Acknowledgment*

I would like to thank the following contributors to my life and work: My wife, Hashmareen for her tireless support and devotion. Without your help, I would not have accomplished this goal of educational advancement. My sons, Israel and Isaiah for being amazing men of God who were willing to share their Dad with his educational process. My Mother Florence, for being my biggest supporter, cheerleader and prayer intercessor. George and Dagma Daniel for incredible generosity and caring for me and my dream. My brothers and families, Herbert (Ellainia, Porsche, and Alexandria) for being excellent in all you do, Jimmie (Rene, Anthony, John, and Arianna) for loving and caring with both hands and feet!, and Johnny (Rhonda and Jamie) for speaking life and “real-talk” when I needed it. My sisters and families, Anthea (Kevin) for being hilarious and wise while constantly reminding me that I could succeed and helping me to do so. Your kindness and generosity will never be forgotten. Shevanthi (Dr. Sasha), for being great examples of continuing education, and Roshini (Joe, Kalyani and Narun) for loving the real me and including me in everything. The McAnulty family for generously feeding and housing me during my master’s degree and Doctoral program engagements. To my best friends: Shawn Hennessy (Sonny) for incessant encouragement and for continually asking me, “...are you a doctor yet?” Ha! J Toro (Cory) for standing by me while I worked through the process “out-loud” without ever complaining or rushing to do something else. Dr. David Crosby (Rebekah) for challenging me to exceed the standard in life, marriage, and writing. Pastors Jim and Dawn Raley for feeding my soul as spiritual authority and promoting/living in holiness as shepherds. Lisa Villalongo for your tireless research and creative assistance. Treasa Edmond for major editing and mentoring me through the writing process.

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Dr. Chris Corbett: You held me to a high standard and challenged me to think outside of religious interests to the physical and emotional state of children. You knew just what to say and when. I would have been aimless without your careful guidance. Thank you for your patience.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THE PROJECT INTRODUCED

For centuries, church leaders have endeavored to positively impact the spiritual life of their attendees and community. Church-based organizations have established outreach programs that are embraced by millions today, including those focused upon feeding the hungry, producing clean water, and facilitating recovery from substance abuse. Churches around the globe participate in compassion ministries, from the Los Angeles Dream Center to Teen Challenge International. Many compassion-focused organizations can trace their roots to the influence and resource of a local church body. The Church at large has followed Jesus' mandate to serve the needs of the less fortunate in society. The words of Christ in Luke 10:25-37 speak to the leadership and constituents of the local church, encouraging them to remain aware and active in service to the needs of the community:

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper.

‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”<sup>1</sup>

Scripture points to God’s great valuation of care for those in less fortunate situations than the believer. The need for compassionate care for children in the foster care system should be considered an important part of the outreach investment from God’s people.

Jesus informs the experts in the Law regarding an accurate reading of the Law of Moses. In order to love our neighbor, we must identify our neighbor. Jesus specifically identifies a person who has been attacked, robbed, and left for dead. The injustice of the attack and the adverse responses of spiritual people are poignant reminders of God’s desire for Christians to make a difference. Jesus also teaches His listeners to care for others outside of their faith, race, and common interests. Similarly, the people of God are to care for those in our community who have been harmed by the injustices of this world.

The children in the foster care system have endured difficulties one can easily describe as unjust. By no fault of their own, they have been removed from unfit, abusive, or poor homes, and they require the kindness of strangers to survive. Jesus calls these strangers neighbors. His clear description of caring should be enough motivation for a major social impact upon the need of children within the foster care system. However, a deficit in participation exists with regard to meeting the needs of students in the foster care system. According to current statistics:

The number of children in foster care increased during the 1990s, from 400,000 in 1990 to 567,000 in 1999, before dropping to a historic low of 397,122 in 2012. Since then, the number has increased, to 442,995 in 2017. Similarly, the rate of children living in foster care increased from 6.2 per 1,000 children in 1990, to 7.9 in 1999, before decreasing to 5.4

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

around 2012—the lowest figure in two decades. By 2017, the rate had increased to 6.0 per 1,000.<sup>2</sup>

With the numbers of children in foster care consistently hovering in the hundreds of thousands in the United States, the hope of a forever home for these children appears grim. According to the New Jersey child placement website, the numbers are dismal. “Statistics and data available in our annual reports reveal some disheartening facts: for children in out-of-home placement the prospect of growing up in a permanent home becomes increasingly slim with each passing year and nearly negligible five years after the child’s removal from the home.”<sup>3</sup> Concern for the children that enter foster care without ever finding a forever home mounts as the numbers are compiled and many enter adulthood directly from foster care. “Of the children waiting in foster care, 30,000 age out every year, without families.”<sup>4</sup> Orphaned children in the foster care system are more likely to be adopted when they are relatively healthy and quite young. The odds of a teenager within the foster care system being adopted is seven hundred percent less likely than that of a child under the age of eight. Students who come of age in foster care have a particularly harrowing experience. According to the National Foster Youth Initiative, the reality experienced by children in foster care today is dire:

- Over 80 percent of women who are sex-trafficked come out of the foster care system.

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<sup>2</sup> Children’s Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. “Overview.” Child Welfare Information Gateway, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=foster-care>

<sup>3</sup> New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council, “Children Aging Out of Foster Care.” New Jersey Child Placement Advisory Council, last modified 2016, accessed July 23, 2017, <http://www.njcpac.org/aging-out/>

<sup>4</sup> Show Hope, “4 Statistics You Should Know About the Orphan Crisis,” Show Hope, last modified March 24, 2014, accessed July 23, 2017, <https://showhope.org/2014/03/24/4-statistics/>

- 60 percent of teens in foster care who age out are homeless, imprisoned, or dead within a year.
- High School dropout rates of teens in foster care are twice that of single/dual parent homes.
- One out of every two kids who age out of the system will develop substance dependence.
- About one in four kids who age out of the system will not graduate from high school or be able to pass their GED.
- Only one out of every two kids in foster care who age out of the system will have some form of gainful employment by the age of twenty-four.
- Seven out of ten girls who age out of the foster care system will become pregnant before the age of twenty-one.
- There is less than a 3 percent chance for children who have aged out of foster care to earn a college degree at any point in their lives.<sup>5</sup>

These statistics and research studies show the need for compassionate care toward the foster child. The reality they expose calls for swift and decisive action from the local church.

While some churches are involved in the alleviation of this growing concern, much more involvement is needed as the battle is far from over. Johnny Carr and Laura Captari point out that the struggles of vulnerable children in today's society is more than a physical and social need, it is a war that is being waged in the spirit. According to Carr

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<sup>5</sup> National Foster Youth Initiative, "51 Useful Aging Out of Foster Care Statistics," NYFI, last modified May 26, 2017, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/>

and Captari, “When we realize that spiritual warfare is at the heart of the orphan crisis, it brings prayer to a whole new level. It is desperately needed and extremely important.”<sup>6</sup>

With prayer there must be an awareness or an awakening to the problem.

J. Wesley Furlong believes the greatest problem in the Church of Jesus Christ meeting the need of orphaned children is a lack of information. He states, “One of the greatest barriers hindering churches from making a significant impact in their communities is a lack of knowledge.”<sup>7</sup> Furlong does not simply focus on the information of the statistics but asserts the need of the local church body to gain the appropriate praxis of how to serve said need. While training is necessary, who is coming to the training? Who is coming to save the day?

Samuel Perry unearthed a surprising revelation regarding the statistics purported by many within the compassion sphere of the Church. While many in the church community have endeavored to assist the needs of foster children and even adopt kids, the statistical numbers of children in care have not changed. Perry points out:

Evangelical leaders have the unfortunate habit of overestimating the religious commitment of the average American churchgoer, even in their own pews. (Those needing a good dose of reality should consider what percentage of evangelical churchgoers actually tithe or share their faith.) Leaders also overestimate the extent to which the average evangelical congregation is interested in directing energy or resources toward activities that do not directly benefit the congregation itself.<sup>8</sup>

Perry’s writing inspired further research on how best to bring enlightenment with regard to compassionate outreach toward the unadopted in the church community. While

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<sup>6</sup> Johnny Carr and Laura Captari, *Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans Beyond Adopting* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publish Group, 2013), 196.

<sup>7</sup> J. Wesley Furlong, *Smart Compassion: How to Stop Doing Outreach and Start Making Change* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017), loc. 137, Kindle.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel L. Perry, *Growing God's Family: The Global Orphan Care Movement and the Limits of Evangelical Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 208.

pointing at a problem causes others to awaken, showing solutions and best practices allows others to grow and incorporate successful measures to help the plight of the children who are orphans or in foster care.

The goal of this dissertation is to best answer the question: How does a compassion organization best replicate itself within the ministry of today's Christian Church? The question is answered through this project and the resulting compassionate care seminar to assist the local church in establishing a compassion program similar to my existing Excellerate program.

### **Relation of Project to Student's Ministry**

I was awakened to caring for orphans while in high school. I am the youngest of five children. My parents have three children by birth, and two via adoption. My adopted siblings were brought into our home before I was born, and only my eldest brother can remember life before they were part of our family. In 1988, my parents decided to open our home to the world of foster care. For the next several years, we hosted twenty-six different foster kids. One foster brother, Addison Terrell, stood out dramatically. Addison made friends quickly and was instantly loved. He was humble, kind, and so generous that he would often go without so others could have what they wanted. During the two years "Addo" was with us, he was a great help and wonderful addition to our family. Addison had many remarkable qualities, the most admirable of which was his extreme compassion. So extreme, in fact, it would eventually cost him dearly.

Addo never knew his biological father, and his birth mother overdosed on drugs and died when he was a child. He had a biological brother who was getting into trouble and Addo kept telling us that he wanted to save his brother from the streets. Addo was the

first in his family to graduate high school, and after graduation he decided to leave our home and go looking for his wayward brother. My mother told Addo that he could stay with my family indefinitely, and that she and my father would help him through college. My parents also offered his brother a home with us, if Addo could convince him.

Addison found his biological brother and a whole lot of trouble to go with it. His brother committed an armed robbery and was facing a ten-year prison sentence. Addison told his brother that he would confess to the crime if his brother agreed to go live with my parents and change his ways. His misguided brother eagerly accepted the offer. Addison Terrell walked into a police station in Roseville, Michigan and confessed as the one who committed the crime. His brother was released, and Addison spent ten years in Jackson state prison. The brother never found his way to my parent's home; making excuse after excuse until he and Addison were eventually estranged. Addo's brother was killed in a violent confrontation at a city park two years later. By the time Addison was released from prison, my parents were living with me in Daytona Beach, Florida. He would often come spend time with us in Daytona. By the grace of God, the time Addison spent in prison did not destroy him. He told us of the transformational power of God in the prison chapels and Bible studies. He talked about learning a trade and growing in his giftings to succeed in the real world. Addison worked two jobs to get an apartment and was a volunteer at his local church. His gentleness and humility endeared people to him, but when they heard about his prison record, they would keep him at arms-length.

Again, my parents asked Addison to move down to Florida to live among his family, but he was in love with a girl who needed him to endure her own set of obstacles. He told us he was constantly witnessing to the young lady he was dating. What Addison

did not tell us was that she was living with him and was a drug addict, prone to violence. One Sunday afternoon, Addison called to tell us he was leaving her and was moving to Florida to live with us. We were so excited! My children looked forward to seeing Uncle Addo again.

He never came. Several days and then weeks went by with no call or messages from Addison. We finally got his neighbor on the phone and she told us Addison had been shot by someone who knew his girlfriend. We called hospitals and the police department, but no one knew anything. We later discovered Addison was listed as a “John Doe” in the morgue. No one came to claim his body, and an official crime report was never filed. Addison had become a statistic. Another dead body on the already burdened conscience of the city of Detroit. Addison’s compassion for unworthy causes was a huge source of pain for him. He was barely able to take care of himself, but his heart for others drove him into difficult and debilitating consequences. His senseless death called out to my compassion. I couldn’t allow his death to go unnoticed and forgotten like many in our society.

God gave me a dream to reach the foster kids forgotten by many. I launched the Excellerate Youth Development Program, a ministry to reach aged-out foster teens with practical hope. Part of my ministerial inspiration was Addison Terrell, a man who understood compassion but did not know how to use it to truly assist others. Eugene Cho claims the inspiration of effective ministry has its foundation in the locale of its inspiration. He writes, “All issues have their form in a community of history, context, and culture. If we miss these things, we are simply not doing our jobs well. We’re not caring



well, listening well, and not setting up ourselves well for mutual relationship.”<sup>9</sup> The answer is in embracing the culture to discover and rediscover the healing properties required.

I am an itinerant evangelist with an abiding desire to help the unadopted, modern-day orphan live in victory. This generation of foster teens benefits greatly from discipleship, education, and mentoring. Hashmareen (my wife) and I founded Excellerate, Inc. in 2012 to help youth in foster care succeed. Excellerate was launched with the affirmation of my lead pastor, Jim Raley, at Calvary Christian Center in Ormond Beach, Florida. We offer sixteen weeks of life skills training, mentorship, and spiritual enrichment. Each student is assigned a minimum of one mentor. Mentorship in the Excellerate program is a lifelong commitment. The students and mentors meet regularly during and after the classroom semester. Through the program, teens and mentors forge relationships to endure.

Excellerate classes meet on Sunday and Wednesday for two hours, and we require the youth to attend church worship services. The students volunteer in the church and in other community compassion organizations such as the humane society and homeless shelters. When each student completes the required coursework, reaches their eighteenth birthday, graduates from high school or GED fulfillment, and attends college or works a full-time job, Excellerate presents that student with a well-running used car. Excellerate has trained over 120 students and given away over 80 cars to deserving young adults.

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<sup>9</sup> Eugene Cho, *Overrated: Are We More in Love with the Idea of Changing the World Than Actually Changing the World?* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2014), loc. 1872, Kindle.

### Effectiveness in the Excellerate Program

Within the scope of the Excellerate program, effectiveness is measurable through social, educational, and spiritual dimensions. Each program should achieve a measure of effectiveness in the following areas.

#### *Life Skills*

It is vital not to underappreciate the value of the instruction that comes from resident parenting in a forever home. Many of the daily teachings and input that kids receive are sadly missing in this generation of foster children. Most state agencies recommend nine to ten hours of life skills training for the enrichment of our teens. The Excellerate program provides nearly ninety hours of life skills development, assured by the principles of immersion training through residential proximity in the homes of extended family placements and foster parents. The Excellerate life skills component includes time management, study skills, organizational leadership, how to be a good follower, and problem solving.

As each student develops a life plan, they are motivated to manage self differently in order to achieve their desired life goals. Attention to details and critical thinking skills are enhanced through the implementation of this evidence-based curriculum. Managing the conflicts that arise during the pursuit of personal goals allows the student to build up a resistance to destructive reactionary patterns and rebound from negative mental states to a productive state. Measurables include a high school diploma, full time or part time employment, college attendance and career planning and implementation.

### *Professionalism:*

Excellerate wants to help young adults become young professionals. The program teaches students about the business world and how to make themselves attractive to potential employers. The program incorporates first impressions, resume building, and formal presentation. Excellerate recognizes the importance of instructing young adults regarding what employers are desiring in their team and how each student can best exemplify those qualities. Professionalism draws on the value of image and self-esteem to shape the development of each student's public identity. The many pitfalls of online social identity are addressed within this section of instruction and interaction. Role playing allows the students to experience the stressful tension of interviews and negative workplace interactions that threaten to derail careers among young employees. Measurables include consistency in the workplace, career advancement, and the student becoming an influencer of positive workplace environment.

### *Financial Responsibility*

Earning a livable wage is not enough. Excellerate students have to be stewards of what they earn. Excellerate utilizes Dave Ramsey's *Financial Peace University* to prepare students for the financial world and possible difficulties. *Financial Peace University* teaches the importance of budgeting, getting out of debt, building credit, and money management. The ability to thrive in the financial market instead of just staying afloat is often the difference between some success and total victory. Measurables include establishing a personal financial plan, positive decisions regarding credit, the acquisition and maintenance of the automobile gifted to each student, and independent living housing established.

### *Social Skills*

Building relationships is a crucial part of life and can sometimes be a challenge.

Excellerate incorporates *Success for Teens: Real Teens Talk About Using The Slight Edge* to help develop effective social habits. These habits will help build social growth, positive self-evaluation, and self-improvement in everyday life. The managing of conflict and inner peace are critical lessons that speak to the true success of social development. Many students encountered in the foster care system are surrounded by case workers and social service agencies. Spending time among people who are only in their lives for the purpose of mentoring and caring on a personal level is a new experience for the students. Students will grow in their ability to address stressful situations with proper conflict management skills. Outbursts are managed and aggression is minimized as each student is mentored from the process of learning through experience to learning from others' experiences. Students learn how to maintain long-term relationships. Measurables include mentoring relationships enjoy consistent investment from both parties, critical decision-making skills improve, friends are chosen with significant consideration, and positive interpersonal character assessment.

### *Spiritual Growth*

A valuable portion of each students' life journey should include spiritual enrichment.

Therefore, Excellerate endeavors to teach the principles of the Bible in a culturally relevant and inclusive manner. Excellerate, as a faith-based program, is non-sectarian, serving among many denominations and fellowships for the betterment of both program and pupil. Each student is required to attend church twice a week along with their

classroom sessions. Connecting the students to the local youth ministry allows for normalcy as students are engaged spiritually alongside other teenagers in community. Measurables include a salvation commitment, obedience through water baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, growth through assumption of spiritual disciplines, public witness of Christ, and church congregational engagement.

### *Volunteerism*

Each student in the Excellerate program is required to volunteer in the church and in the community. Students have served homeless shelters, animal shelters, local businesses, neighborhood clean-up programs, community outreaches to impoverished communities, church production teams, church greeters, special event volunteers, and fundraising efforts to benefit world missions' organizations. Through these efforts, the students learn of their immense value to the people around them in community. A process transforms their mentality from a needy person to one that is needed in community. Measurables include students continuing to volunteer in community and students showing concern for a cause that is greater than themselves and endeavoring to serve that cause.

### Best Practices in Compassionate Care

While operating the program, a lack of foster child ministry in other churches was noted. The hope was nearly every church engaged would launch an effort into the ministry of orphaned children. However, that did not happen. An immediate thought persisted that church leaders and community leaders may lack the training to consider the vast need within the compassion effort toward children in foster care. Within the sphere of foster compassion, there are many examples of those doing exemplary work into the

lives of teens in the foster care system. There are also organizations whose focus is to prepare others for the work of serving these hurting masses.

Best practices in the realm of compassionate yet informed care for children in foster care usually begins with the training materials provided to the leadership for the students. Within the Excellerate program, we utilize the state mandated, evidence-based curriculum as the baseline and include additional topics for further personal growth in the lives of the students. Within the “Arise Life Skills” training materials, over forty lessons speak to the personal and social aspects of life each child is experiencing. Arise offers free lessons directly to students and facilitates lesson plans for organizations that endeavor to mentor and instruct students who need guidance. The Excellerate program utilizes aspects of Arise curriculum and *Success for Teens: Real Teens Talk About Using The Slight Edge* to build foundations for student living. Some examples of best practices in the area of teen/foster teen development include:

- “Arise Life Skills Development”: An evidence-based life skills training for leaders and students. Cognitive behavior/skills curriculum that engages disconnected youth and presses them into activities that enhance their abilities to improve their lives.<sup>10</sup>
- Phased In: A residential program in North Texas with two facilities that provide all the social and educational needs of the unadopted teens in the foster care system while teaching life skills and spiritual enrichment in a faith-based environment.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> More information available at <https://at-riskyouth.org/>

<sup>11</sup> More information available at <http://phasedin.org/>

- 4 Kids of South Florida: An expansive program that connects children in foster care to hundreds of networked and trained foster parents, on campus facilities for students without access to foster homes, and a therapeutic approach to serving children that is celebrated by the state of Florida. EPIC: Emotional, Physical, Intellectual, and Character based needs are served by leaders who have been instructed through the process of training, therapy, and epic camp. Each stage of this program is evidence based and promotes healing in children and parents at-risk.<sup>12</sup>
- “Empowered to Connect”: Training programming that informs caregivers in the methods necessary to care for children who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. Caring for the children who have experienced such harm requires wisdom and insight that comes from well-informed instruction. Empowered to Connect utilizes the Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) created by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross at the TCU Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development.<sup>13</sup>

Because of my extensive travel in itinerant ministry, the Excellerate program has been shared in more than fifty unique churches annually. In the eight years since the Excellerate foster-teen program begun, affiliate programs have been launched in other locations, and while I am overjoyed about these sister-programs and the impact they are having in their communities, there is much to be done.

There are many who believe the Church is making headway into the problems facing foster children today. However, as Perry states there is no statistical evidence that

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<sup>12</sup> More information available at <https://www.4kids.us/home>

<sup>13</sup> More information available at <https://empoweredtoconnect.org/>

supports such a notion and, “there is no available evidence that adoption or fostering by evangelical families has increased at the national or state-level since 2000. In fact, there is no reliable evidence that evangelicals in particular, or Christians in general, are more likely to adopt or foster children than other Americans.”<sup>14</sup> Olivia Core asks a pertinent question that I answer within this project and successive seminar: “How can the church fulfill the physical and spiritual needs of foster youth who are preparing to age out of state care and take on the responsibilities of adulthood?”<sup>15</sup> Excellerate is one of the ways the Church can minister to the need of the modern-day orphan.

### Vocabulary

Many of these terms are universal but need to be further defined for the purpose of clarity.

- Compassion. In regard to compassion ministry, I am referring to the compassion shown to the less fortunate in a scriptural context and today’s Church praxis. J. Wesley Furlong gives an accurate definition, “Compassion means ‘to suffer with.’ Its Latin origin combines the preposition *com* (with) and *pati* (to suffer). In English, passion means ‘to suffer.’ It may be surprising to read that the word passion has anything to do with suffering.”<sup>16</sup> Since suffering is a part of compassion, it is only natural to assume the practice of compassion requires focus and a geographic presence. Furlong goes on to say, “Compassion is up close (proximity), on level ground (solidarity), and deeply connected to the other’s

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<sup>14</sup> Perry, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Olivia T. Core, “Fostering a Generation: Discovering the Church’s Theological Obligation to the American Orphan” (master’s thesis, Southeastern University, 2014), abstract.

<sup>16</sup> J. Wesley Furlong, *Smart Compassion: How to Stop Doing Outreach and Start Making Change* (Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2017), loc. 283, Kindle.



perspective and feelings (emotional connectedness), with a perspective that is always oriented toward truth and life.”<sup>17</sup> Service to the need of the orphan is more than an interest or emotion. Amelia Tam brings clarity to the function of care, stating, “Orphan care is Bible-specific language many Christians use to describe the ministry caring for and serving children who have no one else. Secular groups usually refer to these children as vulnerable, at-risk, or simply foster children, after parental rights have been revoked or suspended.”<sup>18</sup> The terms applied by these groups will be utilized in this study as they often best represent the identity of the children and the circumstances upon which they’ve been placed.

- Foster children, at-risk youth, and the orphan. These three terms do not describe the same people within a strict reading of definitions. Each is nuanced in the application of identity. Not all children placed in the foster care system are orphans. Most have parents who are alive but do not have the ability to care for their children. Many children are in the foster care system for a short time, while arrangements are made for their placement with extended family or while rehabilitated home, finance, or capability goals are met. It is important to note children in foster care are the focus of this study and therefore will be referred to as children or teens in foster care throughout this project. During the historic days of child-rearing in the first testament of the Bible, children were a part of the daily function of productive, crop-growing home collective. To have children was to

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<sup>17</sup> Furlong, loc. 303.

<sup>18</sup> Amelia Tam, “From the Father’s Heart to our Hands: Christian Responsibility in the U.S. Foster System” (master’s thesis, Southeastern University, 2017), 3.

have a future workforce.<sup>19</sup> Not having young additions to every home was a tragic community and familial situation. To lose parental units was a reversal of fortune, destructively impacting legacy. Joanie Gruber helps the reader grasp the complexity of the terminology within her writing regarding the orphan: “Orphan (Noun): A person, especially a minor, both or (rarely) one of whose parents have died. A child without living parents. A young animal with no mother Etymology: From Ancient Greek (polytonic-ancient Greek phonology) *orfanos* = without parents, fatherless.”<sup>20</sup> While it used to be common to only refer to children who have no parents alive, in the modern context, children in foster care are those who have lost access to their progenitors in various ways, by no fault of their own. Gruber explains, “In the United States, the term orphan is rarely used, except to describe those children whose parents have both passed away or for use in official government documents. When describing the population of children in U.S. government care, the term “foster children” is used even when these children are living in group homes or institutions, rather than in traditional foster homes.”<sup>21</sup> These children are the foci of our compassion and service.

### **Limitations to the Project**

In this project, I will research the impact of the training received by two Excellerate programs to ascertain the best practice for creating a seminar to teach churches how to establish an Excellerate program in their locale. Since the case study will include two

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<sup>19</sup> Naomi Steinberg, *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield S3 7QB: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015), 123.

<sup>20</sup> Joanie Gruber, “Orphan Care in The Early Church: A Heritage to Recapture,” (presented paper, North American Association of Christians in Social Work Convention, Pittsburg, PA, October 21, 2011), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Gruber, 6.

Assembly of God churches and the founding program is located within the leadership of an Assembly of God church, this program will be limited to the experiences within the Assemblies of God fellowship. This research will focus on the responses of the leadership and volunteers in two programs in South Carolina. The research will not include other states or locations. Responses from the original location in Ormond Beach, Florida will give a baseline of volunteer response. The lead pastors and as well as the local directors from each locale have agreed to join in the research via surveys and interviews. The volunteers of each ministry have also agreed to complete an anonymous survey to further assess the need of program training.

The programs I am researching are in a different state than the original flagship location of Ormond Beach, Florida. Both are in the state of South Carolina. The first is in Beaufort, South Carolina. The pastors of the church are Jamie and Kim Gardner and the program directors are Mike and Tammy Johnson. The second church is in Fort Mill, South Carolina, led by Pastors Ed and Kristi Frost. The director is Missy Wright.

Lead pastors Jamie and Kim Gardner from the Excellerate Lowcountry location in Beaufort, South Carolina, will be surveyed during the first month of research in November 2019 after the start of classes. The first group of students will commence on January 25, 2020, and they will be interviewed midway through the first class on February 15, 2020. Mike and Tammy Johnson are serving as the Excellerate Lowcountry directors and will also be surveyed during the first month of research in November 2019, after the start of classes with the first group of students on January 25, 2020, and they will be interviewed midway through the first class on February 15, 2020. The volunteers of this location will participate in an anonymous survey on February 15, 2020.

Lead pastors Ed and Kristy Frost from the Excellerate Fort Mill location in Fort Mill, South Carolina (Charlotte, North Carolina) will be surveyed during the first month of research in November 2019, after the start of classes with the first group of students on January 25, 2020, and then interviewed at the midpoint of the first class on February 15, 2020. Missy Wright is serving as the Excellerate Fort Mill director and will also be surveyed during the first month of research in November 2019, after the start of classes with the first group of students on January 25, 2020, and she will be interviewed midway through the first class on February 15, 2020. The volunteers of this location will engage an anonymous survey on February 15, 2020.

This study will not address the support of international or United States adoption programs, nor the many aspects of state government intricacies that impact each compassion organism. Jo Daugherty Bailey discusses the orphan care systems of six nations and looks at how the systems could be improved in her book, *Orphan Care: A Comparative View*.<sup>22</sup> In a review of that book, *Social Service Review* points out Bailey's emphasis on international perspectives, because "... orphans may be particularly affected by the regions in which they live, in terms of government institutions but also by traditions of community care."<sup>23</sup> While these intricacies are important, they are addressed in the research of the two instances studied. The focus of this research will remain on serving the need of the unadopted teen children in the community of the local churches mentioned since that is also the current focus of the Excellerate program.

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<sup>22</sup> Jo Daugherty Bailey, *Orphan Care: A Comparative View* (Sterling, VA: Kumarian Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> "Orphan Care: A Comparative View," *Social Service Review* 87, no. 1 (March 2013): 212.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The first goal of completing this project is to discover the motivational processes that best assist church leaders in the implementation of compassionate programming toward the need of children in their community. Facts often leave the information generation with emotional alarm, but without direction and praxis. Through the completion of this project, direction and praxis is the substance of the action steps needed to produce change in the local church community.

The second goal of completing this project is to gain a grasp on the biblical teaching, cultural implications, and scriptural mandates proposed through a successful analyzation of the biblical narrative. What does the Bible say about the church's responsibility to children in foster care? Examples from scripture establish a precedent for the biblical mandate of orphan care within the praxis of every local church. Utilizing examples from the word of God will uncover the blessings and difficulties that rest upon they who serve or reject the orphan in their community.

The third goal of this project is to glean instruction from current literature regarding the plight, response, and implementation necessary to care for the child in the foster care system. The research process will seek to find organizations serving the needs of the children and find the link to the local church. The literature engaged will also help establish the motivation necessary for such work. During the research process, I will unpack the narrative that guided the authors of that literature on their respective journeys to serve the needs of these vulnerable children. This narrative will assist the construction of a seminar that will enlighten and enrich the intellect and inspire the spirit of leaders who have yet to grow their outreach to impact foster children in their community.

The fourth goal of this project is the production of a training seminar that will encourage, inform, and instruct the leadership and volunteers from local churches in effective strategies and principles to reach the unadopted foster students in their communities. This seminar will communicate the biblical foundations found in this research and will establish a baseline of biblical backing for the implementation of the practical approach of compassion ministry. This biblical foundation, along with data gathered from the launch of two independent programs in the state of South Carolina will provide a clear path for the development of the training seminar. The seminar will be an initial foray into the vast world that is foster care compassion. The hope is the seminar will inspire many to step into compassionate care for the orphan and make a difference.

### **Conclusion**

The Church has reached a critical juncture of compassion at this point in our history. The Assemblies of God has yet to establish a position nationally or internationally that speaks to the biblical and social ramifications of service to the orphan, widow, or sojourner. Through the biblical research within this project, the study of current literature, and the analysis of the research project, a way forward will become clear. The vehicle for this way forward is a seminar that will bring the wisdom and insights to incite ministry and community leaders toward compassionate action on behalf of our nations orphan population. Thus, this project will inspire generations to serve the needs of mistreated and disenfranchised young people. The blessings of God will be bestowed upon this Pentecostal movement of churches as it forward marches with open arms of love toward the hurting orphans in the community.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROJECT IN PERSPECTIVE

#### **Biblical and Theological Stance on Orphan Care**

Care for children who have been made orphans is a consistent theme throughout biblical writing. Scripture often declares the protection, fiscal provision, and the physical needs of orphans (children in need) are to be met by righteous persons. Thereby caring for children in need is a responsibility of the people of God. A plan existed within the familial and governmental structures of biblical history to care for the plight of these children. This chapter will share the many biblical principles of their care, from the purposeful naming and identification of the child in need in society to the community of care established to meet their needs. In addition, the examination of current literature will show the perspectives and principles taught in today's culture of compassion toward children in foster care. The scriptures and the principles found in current literature provide a solid path for God's people as we move forward together as His Church to serve these children in their time of need.

Bob Houlihan approaches compassion ministry through the lens of Scripture. He describes a case for care built through centuries of biblical authorship. According to Houlihan, "Almost four hundred biblical passages are demonstrating God's concern for orphans, widows, prisoners, the homeless, the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the disabled. If God is so concerned about these segments of society, it is incumbent upon the followers of Christ to see how compassion ministries fit into the plan of God for the

redemption of mankind.”<sup>1</sup> This is a direct call to the Church and to all followers of Jesus to ensure there is a working and effective plan in place to care for children and others in need.

Scripture provides the local church with a strong foundation on which to build compassion ministries. Numerous examples exist in Scripture to guide local church communities as they accept and institute the biblical mandate to take care of vulnerable people groups, especially children in need. God clearly sees the troubles of the afflicted (Ps. 10:14) and He uses His people to serve those needs. People within the church community have the opportunity to serve the immediate and continuing needs of children in vulnerable situations by instituting emergency measures, as well as programs that will encourage them to achieve positive change in their lives.

Building on these measures is the call to care for fatherless children in their times of distress (James 1:27). Society does this with emergency foster care, food programs, respite care, and intervention for families in crisis. Large gaps exist in these systems, however, and needs are going unmet. The local church can step into these gaps and provide much needed care for these children. Excellerate, a program for teens in the foster care system, endeavors to meet the need of the child who is coming of age in the system. This is a time when many of these children fall through the cracks. Church-based compassion programs like Excellerate are able to provide mentorship, discipleship, life skills, and tangible support to these children.

Advocacy is another element of compassion ministry clearly outlined in Scripture. The local church needs to defend these children (Is. 1:17) and prevent the withholding of

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Houlihan, “Leading Pastors and Local Churches in Compassion Ministries,” (DMin diss., Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, 2016), 60-61.



justice from them (Deut. 27:19). In biblical times, children had no voice. They were helpless, and if they had no one to advocate for them, they were susceptible to slavery, abuse, and starvation. Examples of injustice are witnessed in the stories of the widow with two sons and Elisha (2 Kings 4:1-7), the widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8), and even in Moses' story (Ex. 1:22-2:10). These stories are discussed in-depth later in this chapter. Today, the local church must be willing to stand as the advocate. Church members can serve as Guardian Ad Litem, which is a program where volunteers accompany children to court appointments, take them to doctor's appointments, and serve as the primary contact between the court and the child. Guardian Ad Litem is a vital role of advocacy in the lives of these children.

One of the problems often discussed about the foster care system is foster parents who take custody of children primarily for the funds they are provided for that child's care. Not only is this selfish, it is in practice stealing from the children. Those funds are intended to offset the costs of caring for the child and provide needed supplies and clothing. While this is an exception rather than the rule, it is a persistent issue. Scripture specifically addresses these issues. Proverbs 23:10-11 speaks to the issue of stealing from children in need, and Exodus 22:21-23 focuses on what happens to those who take advantage of vulnerable children. By encouraging church members to participate in foster care, the church can help relieve the stress on an overburdened system, which will offer fewer opportunities for this type of theft to occur. The church cannot afford to leave the care for vulnerable children to others. The church must inject itself into the community of care for the children in the foster care system.

Many would believe adoption is the only answer to the status of children in foster care. However, most children in foster care are not eligible for adoption, and each still require compassion. Few would contend Scripture ignores or speaks light of caring for all children in need. John M. Yeats' description of the care prescribed by biblical authors seems to point to a praxis other than adoption. The care of the child is to be an operation of a wide scope, not solely a forever-family placement. Much like the complex approaches used to serve the needs of children in the case of state social service agencies, the biblically historic manner of care was also diverse. As Yates says, "So, when we consider adoption in the Old Testament, we are not referring to adoption in the sense that we typically understand the term today. Rather, adoption is understood in the broad terms of orphan care."<sup>2</sup> Yates goes on to summarize, what orphan care looks like in Scripture.:

1. Orphan care is commanded by God for the entire community of faith.
2. Orphan care is designed to protect the rights of orphans in the hereditary transfer of land.
3. A curse followed those who did not take up the cause of the orphan and oppressed.
4. In the definition of evil found in the condemnations of the prophets that were recited against Israel and the surrounding nations, lack of care for orphans almost always appears.
5. God hears the prayers of orphans.
6. God promises to be the defender and father of orphans.<sup>3</sup>

Scripture also describes what happens to those who decline to care for the children. The punishments delineated in Scripture for those who reject the commands of God and harm the orphan are covered later in the chapter, but it is important to note at this point that to bring harm is the farthest notion from care, and the narrative of Scripture points to going above and beyond acceptance in society to active compassion. Houlihan

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<sup>2</sup> John M. Yeats, "The Biblical Model of Adoption," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 49, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 68.

<sup>3</sup> Yeats: 68-69.

attributes this active compassion to Israel's covenant relationship with God. As part of that relationship, the people were "to have a special concern for hired servants, strangers, widows, and orphans."<sup>4</sup> As Houlihan states, "God requires His people to treat the poor, orphans, and widows as He treats them. This means that His people were to be advocates of justice for those disenfranchised by society."<sup>5</sup> Thus, the nature of advocacy concerning the plight of the child is proactive and urgent. The child was not to be an afterthought within the biblical and cultural history of Israel.

Biblical literature speaks to the requirement to care for children in need, but also illustrates the value, inspiration, and purpose of and for those children. If the precepts of caring were only words spoken by God to the hearts of prophets, they would be more than enough. According to information from orphan care organizations Show Hope, Orphan Care Resources, and Lifesong, the scriptures include case studies from the lives of orphans whom God chose to do great things. These men and women are heralded through history as some of the greatest heroes the world has ever known. Moses, Esther, and Jesus were uniquely considered children who were at-risk in their time. To be orphaned within their culture meant the child was without his or her earthly father. The father was the mainstay of the household, and without the influence and protection of the father, children and widows were at great risk.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Houlihan, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Houlihan, 83.

<sup>6</sup> Joanie Gruber, "Orphan Care in The Early Church: A Heritage to Recapture," (presented paper, North American Association of Christians in Social Work Convention, Pittsburg, PA, October 21, 2011), 5.

## **Widows and Orphans**

Many of the scriptures addressing the needs of children also address the needs of widows. While the terminology regarding widows and orphans thrusts them together within the dictates of Scriptural mandate, their needs are very different, and one does not preclude the other. The vulnerable widow of historic biblical culture was unable to provide for herself as effectively as men who were widowers.

Regarding physical functions and societal acceptance, the widow had to face a patriarchal society far removed from modern equality and empowerment movements. Should a widow never remarry, her road through life could be horrific and possibly tragic. In contrast, single mothers in today's society face struggles with a lack of employment, livable wages, and poverty, yet are afforded more opportunities for success and fulfillment. While the compassion system of welfare offers assistance to those in need, it is not wholistic. The church must embrace the vulnerable women in the care of the state welfare system, and many churches offer compassion ministries to single mothers.

At-risk individuals throughout Scripture were impacted by the assistance of great leaders. Each of the following stories shows God's provision to the women who are widowed in the Bible. Women who often had fatherless children. These children subsequently fall into the biblical demographic of an orphan, or a child in need.

### **The Widow with Two Sons and Elisha**

In 2 Kings 4:1-7, a widow whose deceased husband was formerly of the company of prophets comes to Elisha with a desperate need. The woman's former husband was a good, God-fearing man; however, he had a debt that could not be paid. The creditor was

coming to take her two sons away to serve as indentured servants. With the hope of her future provision resting upon the boys, the woman was desperate and asked Elisha for help. She had no other recourse. Yael Shemesh points out the finer points of her position, stating, “Her appeal is a cry for help by a person in distress, not a request for protection under the law: the widow has no legal grounds to sue the creditor, who is acting according to the law, even if not mercifully.”<sup>7</sup> While she had no legal recourse, she did have access to one of God’s prophets, and Elisha, “like the Lord Himself, hears the cry of the poor indebted widow and delivers her and her orphan children.”<sup>8</sup> Elisha, acting on the Lord’s behalf, told the woman to use the jars and containers she had in her home and even told her to borrow containers from her neighbors (v. 3). She and her sons, at Elisha’s instruction, began to pour oil into the jars and the oil miraculously never stopped flowing until every jar was filled (v. 6). When she returned to tell Elisha, he told her to sell the oil and pay off her debts, and she and her sons could then live off the rest (v. 7). Provision for the dire need of a widow was provided by God. Even though the debt was legitimate, and the results just, mercy was the Lord’s response to the widow’s cry.

### The Widow of Zarephath

In 1 Kings 17:8-24, while Elijah was running from King Ahab and Queen Jezebel, God sent him to a town called Zarephath, where He said he would provide for Elijah’s needs through a widow. It was apparent when Elijah approached the widow and asked her for help that she was unaware of God’s plan (v. 12). John Marten speaks to the idea the widow was unaware she was a part of a miracle of God's provision: “The prophet Elijah

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<sup>7</sup> Yael Shemesh, “Elisha and the Miraculous Jug of Oil (2 Kgs 4:1-7).” *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*. Volume 8 (2008): 7.

<sup>8</sup> Shemesh, 10.

demonstrates God's concern for those economically oppressed when he goes to see the widow of Zarephath, a single mother, and asks for water and bread. The request seems thoughtless initially, for the widow has only a little food for her and her son, and it is about to run out."<sup>9</sup> Regardless of the widows' intense need, she agreed to provide a cake of bread for the prophet first, then provide for herself and her starving child.

As she served Elijah, he told her the provision of oil and meal in her home would not cease until after the time of the famine was over and God sent rain upon the land (vv. 14-16). The oil and meal lasted the years of famine, providing sustenance for the widow, her son, and Elijah. Later, the widows' son took ill and died. When the widow brought the boy to Elijah, the prophet immediately took the boy up to his room and prayed, stretched himself on the child, and the child was healed (vv. 19-22). This widow and her son received provision and healing by the hand of God's man. In the widow's mind, it was one thing to provide food that Elijah would also partake, but the healing of her son was a selfless act that she described only a man of God would perform (v. 24). God showed this widow that her value was not based on what she did for Elijah, but on how He cares for her as His creation.

#### Naomi and Ruth

In the first chapter of Ruth, Elimelech and his wife Naomi brought their two sons to Moab with them to settle during a terrible famine. Both sons married women from the newly settled region. As sojourners (aliens) to that location, all they had was each other, but soon Elimelech died (1:3). Ten years later, the two sons died as well, leaving two

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<sup>9</sup> John W. Martens, "Widows and Scribes." *America* 213, no. 13 (November 2, 2015): 38.

more widows in their wake: Orpah and Ruth (1:5). Upon discovery that Judah was recovering from the famine, the women prepared to return to Naomi's homeland.

Before they returned to Judah, Naomi gave the young widows a chance to return to their parent's homes, telling them there was more to be gained for them if they went to their homes in Moab. While Orpah took the opportunity afforded and returned to Moab to live among her family and village, Ruth declared her faithful allegiance to the family she had committed to serving as bride, and now widow. Stephen Davey speaks of the commitment made by Ruth to Naomi as being outstanding. A widow serving a widow is blessed by God. In fact, "Ruth possesses nothing. ... She has committed herself to an older widow rather than search for a new husband. There is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel."<sup>10</sup> Even though she has nothing, she chooses a life of almost guaranteed poverty and accepts every aspect of Naomi's life as her own, even stating "The God of Israel is now her God."<sup>11</sup> Her allegiance bound her to Naomi's God, the God of Israel, while Orpah returned to the false gods of her fathers in Moab (1:6-18).

Because of Ruth's insistence upon faithfulness to her mother in law and her obedience to serve Naomi's commands, Ruth was redeemed through marriage by her husband's closest living relative, a wealthy and kind man named Boaz (4:9-13). Ruth made hard decisions for her families' survival with simple obedience. That obedience and her marriage to Boaz led to her role as part of the lineage of salvation. Her marriage aligned Ruth with the lineage of the king of Israel and that of Jesus Christ (4:13-21). In

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Davey, *Ruth: Commentary on the Old Testament*, Wisdom Commentary (Apex, NC: Charity House Publishers, 2013) loc. 680. Kindle.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

the economy of God's Kingdom, a widow serving another widow is rewarded with unspeakable and unfathomable blessings.

### Tamar

Genesis 38 contains the story of the wife of Er, the firstborn son of Judah, who was widowed when God was displeased with her husband and put him to death (v. 7). Judah commanded his second-born son, Onan, to fulfill the familial duty to Tamar and produce a son through her womb (v. 8). Onan did not want his elder brothers' widow to have a son at his expense, so he "spilled his semen on the ground" and the Lord put him to death as well (v. 10). David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss emphasize Tamar is a righteous woman although her husband and Onan were evil, pointing out, "In Genesis, Tamar is treated with respect."<sup>12</sup> Tamar is put in a difficult situation because of her husband and brother in law's sins against the laws God had established for the Jews. She is vindicated in the actions of God by destroying two sinful men. God was displeased with Tamar's first husband's sinful ways and he was destroyed. The value of provision for a widow was demonstrated when Onan refused to give Tamar a child and God struck him dead as well. The familial structure of providing for widows was approved and supported by God Himself in this case. Terrible punishment came from the mistreatment of a widow and the provision of her needs. God cares for the future of the widow, assuring all their needs are met.

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<sup>12</sup> David J. Zucker and Moshe Reiss. "Righting and Rewriting Genesis 38: Tamar and Judah in the Pseudepigrapha," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 4 (2015): 195.



### Anna the Prophetess

Anna, whose story is told in Luke 2, is described as being a prophetess and very aged. She was only married seven years when her husband passed away. Anna remained single the rest of her days, living 84 years as a widow. She lived on the temple grounds and spent her days praying and fasting (v. 36). While Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph about their Messiah Son, Anna also spoke over the miraculous Child, worshipping the Lord, telling everyone about the Redeemer now in their midst. Sarah Harris discusses the value the scripture places on the words of this widowed prophet. According to Harris, “She is an established prophetess in the Jerusalem temple who speaks repeatedly to those gathered and, as a female prophet of YHWH, she stands in a small but clear progression of women that God has used to lead and guide the people.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, “She is an eschatological preacher who, coupled with Simeon, demonstrates the inclusive and radical nature of the coming kingdom; she is the first of the witnesses who speak the word of God to the people.”<sup>14</sup> Because of her devotion to the Lord, she was privy to the knowledge of the Messiah’s identity and purpose (v. 37). She used her platform to share the joyous news of the newborn King of kings. Anna’s purpose in life was not depleted because she was a widow. She figured into the story of Jesus’ emergence as a servant of God (v. 38). God values those who have tragically been widowed. He equips them to be powerful voices in His Kingdom.

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<sup>13</sup> Sarah Harris, “Letting (H)Anna Speak: An Intertextual Reading of the New Testament Prophetess (Luke 2.36-38).” *Feminist Theology* 27, no. 1 (2018): 60-61.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

### The Widow with Coins

In Luke 21:1-4, Jesus is sitting in the tabernacle by the treasury, observing those who are bringing their offerings to the temple. While the rich were giving great gifts of finance to the treasury, Jesus took note of a widow who put in two small copper coins. The gift of the woman was small in the eyes of society, but not in the eyes of the Son of God.

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon talks about the emphasis on the virtues of women of every level discussed in Mark, and the power of this woman's influence on Jesus' teaching of the disciples.<sup>15</sup> This story, and others, demonstrate Jesus' great value for the widow.

Using her actions as an example, Jesus uprooted the conventional wisdom about the value of the gifts presented to God at the temple treasury (v. 1). He told His disciples the widow placed more in the treasury than any of the others because she did not give out of her abundance as the wealthy were able to do. She had given all she possessed in spite of her need of provision (v. 2). Her generosity was a lesson Jesus chose to share with those He was teaching. Jesus valued the heart of a widow over the providence that came from other's abundance (vv. 3-4).

### The Widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-16)

While Jesus was heading a city called Nain (Luke 7: 11-16), a funeral procession marched by as He drew near the gate of the city. The man who died was the only son of a widow. The family must have been greatly loved, for a large crowd was passing by Jesus (v. 11-12). Jesus appears to be on a mission to bless this widow in distress. He had compassion as He told the woman not to cry, and He touched the open coffin and told the

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<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1991): 12

dead man to rise. The man came back to life and began to speak to the people (v. 13-15). The people of that town were amazed and declared the scene as a divine visitation (v. 16). According to Malbon, this “story clearly demonstrates Jesus’ concern for women, especially widows.”<sup>16</sup> Jesus took pity on a widow even as He had somewhere else to go. He stopped what He was doing to minister to her and raise her son from the dead. Jesus knew the woman’s primary means of provision came from her one and only son’s work. With her son’s death, the widow was facing poverty and possible starvation. Instead she received a visitation from Jesus and the restoration of her earthly provider from the holy Provider.

#### Widow and the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8)

Jesus tells His disciples a parable about persistence in prayer in Luke 18. In His story, a dishonest and godless judge held a position in a town, and he cared little for his people. A widow in the town kept coming to him for a plea of justice against her foe. The widow came back time after time pleading her case before the judge (v. 3). The judge decided to give the woman what she wanted to keep her from coming back again, as she was wearing on his patience (v. 5). The judge is moved from indifference to care through the persistent attempts of the widow to attain justice.<sup>17</sup> Jesus uses this story to tell His disciples that even though the judge in the story was evil, he relented for the cause of the widow. Jesus wants His disciples to know that God loves them and will protect them, taking up their cause (v. 7). Persistence in prayer has results when God is in it, greater than that of evil humanity. Jesus used the plight of the person of low status in society to

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid: 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid: 21.

declare that the love of His Father will protect and care for all of humanity, regardless of status.

### Summary

Each of these stories shows the value God places on vulnerable people. It would, however, be an error to read these stories and assume the writer is only addressing the value and character of the widows. The fatherless children of these widows received great blessings from God through the intervention of His servants. Because the people of God followed His promptings and His laws, the children were protected, provided for, and treated fairly.

### God's Divine Leading

Three major characters from Scripture demonstrate God's divine leading and purpose in the life of children who were in dire circumstances: Moses, Esther, and Jesus. Moses was given up by his mother to save his life. Esther lost her parents and was raised by her uncle. Jesus faced the trials of a child conceived out of the bounds of marriage. In each case, God not only provided for the child, He raised them to a renowned position of importance and used them to save His people.

### Moses

The Egyptian Pharaoh was concerned his nation was being overpopulated by the Jewish people they had conquered and subjugated. Therefore, Pharaoh made a decree that whenever a Hebrew boy was born, the people had to kill the child by throwing him into the Nile river (Ex. 1:22). Moses was born to a Hebrew woman from the tribe of Levi, who knew she would be unable to hide a baby during the bleak time of infanticide by the

Pharaoh. To obey the decree and save the baby boy, she placed her baby into a basket and cast it into the river (Ex. 2:1-4). Theodore Epp believed Moses parents turning him over to the Lord and the river was a critical step in the transportation of the deliverer into his God-given destiny.<sup>18</sup> The little crying infant was discovered by Pharaoh's daughter and saved from annihilation. Later, the child was adopted by his rescuer and named Moses (Ex. 2:5-10). Further in scripture, it is clear Moses did not allow himself to be considered an Egyptian (Heb. 11:24), maintaining his connection to his people and the birth parents who were at one time paid to feed and care for him (Ex. 2:7-10).

As an adult, Moses would become the leader of all the people of Israel. He would liberate and lead the nation out of Egypt to the land promised them by God. There was no one greater than he in the land. God chose to use a boy saved from death to save His people. Kenneth Numfor Ngwa believes the adoption story of Moses was critical to the process of Israel's deliverance, and "There are three narrative movements in this birth-exposure-adoption story"<sup>19</sup> which highlight the importance of the adoption in Moses' life narrative. As Ngwa states, the adoption story sets "the stage for Moses as a grown man to begin inhabiting his dual representations in the public space."<sup>20</sup> Ngwa brings further alignment between Moses' story and that of Jesus and His earthly and heavenly families. While Moses brought a separation of the Jews from their captors, Jesus brought the separation of the Jews from their sins.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Theodore H. Epp, *MOSES: 2 Volumes in 1*, (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel Press, 2016), 219.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Numfor Ngwa, "Ethnicity, Adoption, and Exodus: A Socio-Rhetorical Reading of Exodus 2:1-10." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 38, no. 2 (December 2013): 176.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

## Esther

Esther was orphaned after both her parents died and she was subsequently adopted by her uncle Mordecai. She and her new family were carried into exile from Jerusalem with the rest of the Israeli people by Nebuchadnezzar (Esther 2:5-7). When Queen Vashti disobeyed and dishonored King Xerxes, he deposed her and began a search for a new queen (1:10-21). Many young ladies were prepared and brought to Xerxes, but Esther caught his eye and won his heart (2:15-18). Charles Swindoll discusses the power of God's narrative intersecting the suffering of an orphan with deliverance and victory for the nation of Israel. God used an orphan story to frame protection for a nation. According to Swindoll, "Here was a little girl who must have cried her heart out at the death of her parents, bereft and orphaned, yet who years later would become key to the very survival of her people, the Jews."<sup>22</sup> An orphan girl became a queen. A position with power, but also danger, as illustrated by Vashti's exile.

Esther's uncle, Mordecai, becomes the catalyst for the rest of the story. He, who adopted Esther and showed her the importance of personal sacrifice and faith in the Lord, found an enemy in Haman, one of the king's trusted officials. Haman created an edict by way of the king to murder all Jews in the nation. Mordecai and Esther fasted, prayed, and sought the audience of the king to stop the plot and save the people of Israel (3:1-15). King Xerxes, moved by Esther's personal sacrifice and Mordecai's devotion to his people, decided to kill Haman instead of the Jews and decreed the Jews to have the right to defend against and destroy their enemies (7:1-9:19). The Jewish people were saved

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<sup>22</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997), loc. 322, Kindle.

from destruction as God orchestrated their deliverance through a formerly orphaned child.

### Jesus

Jesus was born of a virgin. (Luke 1:26-38). Since Joseph had never known Mary sexually, he could not tell people that Jesus was his blood. Mary and Joseph lived in an honor/dishonor culture. It was of high dishonor that Jesus was not born to His adopted father Joseph. Because of this insult, it makes sense that Jesus was missing after the Passover event in Jerusalem. None of Joseph's family members would have felt a familial bond with Jesus. They would not have missed Him when He was not among them on the long journey home. Few would have cared enough to notice the imperfect and embarrassing son was missing.

When Mary and Joseph returned to Jerusalem and finally find the Son of God, Jesus reminds His mother that He must be about His Father's business. Jesus was not reinforcing that Joseph was not His father by birth, He was affirming His birthright as the firstborn over all creation to redeem humanity through His life of perfection and selfless act of sacrifice (2:41-52).

The announcement of Jesus' sonship by His heavenly Father at His baptism by John should have modified Jesus' status among His community. That day was a vindication of Jesus' mother and adopted father, as God Himself announced the identity of His beloved son to all in the vicinity (3:21-22). NT Wright states a clear case is made for the Redeemer's entry into the "Good News" gospel as Jesus is proclaimed by His

Father in Heaven, launching Jesus into the ministry of reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> However, when Jesus returned home to His community, the people didn't receive Him as the Son of God (Matt. 13:54-58). They claimed He was the son of Mary and Joseph. The people of Jesus' hometown were offended by Him.

While Jesus was dying on the cross on Golgotha, He took a moment to speak to His mother and a disciple standing nearby. Even during this shameful death of public disgrace, Jesus takes time to care for His mother. He tells His beloved John to care for His widowed mother. John took care of Mary, bringing her into his home as if she was his own (John 19:25-27). By Jesus' declaration, one of Christs' final acts on the cross brings comfort, protection, and family covering to a widow.

### **God as a Compassionate Caregiver**

Scripture demonstrates God's love for the orphan, widow, and alien as a compassionate caregiver. God's love would not allow Him to command His people to care for a people group and not compassionately care Himself. Through the biblical stories, the narrative of the scriptures points to God's providence for those who are less fortunate. Jason Johnson speaks of the sensitivity God possesses to feel the pain of the child in need, harkening to the experiences of Jesus as a child. Johnson says, "A consistent theme woven throughout the narrative of the Bible is that what particularly pains the heart of God must uniquely pain ours, and what subsequently drives His actions must passionately drive ours."<sup>24</sup> He goes on to issue a call to the Church, stating, "We the Church—the rescued, adopted,

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<sup>23</sup> N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 91.

<sup>24</sup> Jason Johnson, "Orphan Care Ministry: When Your Pastor Doesn't Get It," last modified 2014, accessed February 22, 2019, <http://jasonjohnsonblog.com/blog/orphan-care-ministry-when-your-pastor-doesnt-get-it#.XIbDz1NKhQI>



accepted and eternally loved ones of God—are called to ‘give justice to the weak and fatherless’ (Psalm 82:3) and to ‘correct oppression and bring justice to the fatherless’ (Isaiah 1:16-17).”<sup>25</sup> Bob Goff reminds the reader of Jesus’ proximity to all people during the time of their greatest need. “I learned that faith isn’t about knowing all of the right stuff or obeying a list of rules. It’s something more, something more costly because it involves being present and making a sacrifice.”<sup>26</sup> God bringing healing to a people group bereft of care is the essence of the gospel. Robert D. Lupton discusses the balance of God’s mercy and justice in biblical history as our model for modernity. He writes, “Mercy without justice degenerates into dependency and entitlement, preserving the power of the giver over the recipient. Justice without mercy is cold and impersonal, more concerned about rights than relationships.”<sup>27</sup> God’s word demonstrates God’s love for the outsider and His inclusion of the child in need and the orphan in grand plans for the advancement of civilizations.

### **Identifying People in Need in Scripture**

For the Church of today to understand its part in ministry to the less fortunate, there must be an identifying of those whom Scripture deems as worthy of compassionate care and focused attention. While people in every segment of society have needs and face difficulties, there is a distinction between a general need and a person of need. To require finance or tools is a need; to be without family and home is an identity of a person of need. The Jewish culture in biblical times focused goodwill on persons of need.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bob Goff, *Love Does* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 8.

<sup>27</sup> Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (And How to Reverse It)* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2012), 41.

According to John M. Yeats, the Hebrew people perceived little difference between the need of the widow and that of the orphan, and in “Hebrew Scriptures, almost every instance of the term ‘orphan’ (*yatom*) or ‘fatherless’ is paired with that of the widow (*almonah*).”<sup>28</sup> The two terms are almost always linked.

Israeli civilization in Scripture was a community of farming and land subsistence. Each member of the family was responsible for areas of production that provided a service to the collective. Samuel L. Adams says, “attachment to a secure household offered the best opportunity for economic viability” and “those who lacked such a membership faced dangerous circumstances.”<sup>29</sup> He continues with his description of those who face this circumstance, stating, “It is no coincidence that the three categories of persons needing the most special protection in the Hebrew Bible are widows, orphans, and resident aliens.”<sup>30</sup> They needed the special protection because they lacked the land, income, and resources they needed to survive.

It is easy to imagine the low value placed upon those who lost their ability to provide service to the farm/family business in an adequate manner. “The widow and the orphan occupied similar ‘placeless places’ in Israelite society.... The orphan, similarly, was a minor child in a household where all the adult members had died. The risks to anyone who was an orphan or a widow should be apparent.”<sup>31</sup> The alien or sojourner was not similar to the widow or orphan by circumstance, but they were not locals or known by the community.

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<sup>28</sup> Yeats, 66.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel L. Adams, “The Justice Imperative in Scripture,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 69, no. 4 (2015): 403-404.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid: 403-404.

<sup>31</sup> Rolf A. Jacobson, “The Lord Is a God of Justice: The Prophetic Insistence on Justice in Social Context,” *Word and World* 30, no. 2 (2010): 128.

Most of the community had been there for generations and relationships existed because of proximity and commercial dealings. For an outsider to join the ranks and be considered a community partner required a lengthy period of trust-building. In the meantime, the alien could starve or be forced into servitude for lack of assistance. As Rolf Jacobson states, “In a kinship-based society, a sojourner was a person who was not a member of any tribe, clan, or ‘father’s house.’ Such people had no supporting social structure that could provide identity, a social safety net, or a job (because each household was its economic unit).”<sup>32</sup> Some of these aliens were people who converted to the faith after witnessing the prominence and provenience of God upon the Jews (Esther 8:17).

How would these new community members become established? According to Samuel Adams, a resident alien (*gēr*) “becomes a convert to the sacred traditions involving YHWH. The status of such an individual lies somewhere between a foreigner and an Israelite, but the importance of such a person attaching to a secure household appears throughout the biblical laws (e.g., Exodus 20:10).”<sup>33</sup> The Word of God through the prophets called the people to be mindful of the resident aliens’ need for partnership and goodwill from the people of God.

Wayne Gordon reminds us today that even though our modern society has established social programs within government, Christ’s Church still has a responsibility of compassionate care. He states, “If you have not already, I’m sure that sometime soon you will have the opportunity to reach out to a foreign traveler—someone who has come a long way and who feels alone and possibly afraid most of the time. These are people Christ calls us to love. They are our neighbors, whom we are to love as we love

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.: 128.

<sup>33</sup> Adams: 404.

ourselves.”<sup>34</sup> When people treat those who have immigrated or been ostracized within our naturalized culture with the love and compassion God demands, they begin to walk into the blessing of His covenant.

### **Wrath and Value in the Economy of God’s Kingdom**

The value God places on the orphan, widow and alien can be grasped by the intense judgment and proclaimed wrath promoted through scripture toward those who mistreat or ignore them. Considering the intense and vehement declaration of God’s wrath toward the tormenter of these people, the care of the disenfranchised people should be paramount. According to Jacobson, forgetting the orphan was just as bad as attacking them.<sup>35</sup> There was only one proper manner to serve these often-disregarded souls, and that is inclusion and investment. Jacobson writes, “The sojourner, the widow, and the orphan were the people who did not have a household or a clan that would be their social safety net. In short, they were the most vulnerable people in a kinship-based society.... The duty that society owed to these ... was hospitality.”<sup>36</sup> The hospitality defined through the Old Testament praxis of compassion to the orphan was care accommodated with dignity.

Giving provisions to the widow as a means of meeting immediate struggles was a great blessing in biblical times, but to work with a widow and commercially trade with her was a productive path toward their independence and success. Allowing a newcomer to partner in a field of crops or loaning them land access to plant crops gave aliens the

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<sup>34</sup> Wayne Gordon, *Who is My Neighbor?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. 2011), 64.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobson: 128.

<sup>36</sup> Jacobson: 128-129.

power to remain productive in the community. Gordon brings this point to the forefront when describing compassion as detailed in scripture:

In the Old Testament, empowerment is an important aspect of God's care for the poor. In Deuteronomy 24 and Leviticus 19, God instituted the gleaning system. The farmers harvested their crops but were only allowed to go through the field one time. What was left behind or dropped on the ground was available for any widow, alien, orphan or poor person to come and harvest. Thus, this program was one that empowered people.<sup>37</sup>

Even the proposal of spiritual maturity and spiritual health is described within the language of the New Testament as care for this endangered demographic. Toby Ziglar looks at the deeper meaning of the word *threskos* (religious) as it is used in Scripture (James 1:27). He says the word "is a rare adjective, occurring only here in the New Testament. The noun *threskeia* appears twice in this section and refers to one's devotion to God."<sup>38</sup> As Ziglar states, "James calls for a devotion to God that is pure and unstained, suggesting that the community's devotion has been defiled by their improper speech. How, then, does one maintain the proper relationship with God? James gives two suggestions: (1) care for orphans and widows, and (2) keep oneself unstained by the world."<sup>39</sup> The care of children in need was not a type of compassion that should take place behind closed doors or in secret. As Gordon and Ziglar show, compassion ministry must be a community-wide, public effort.

Blessings and declarations were made as the people of God poured blessings into the lives of the orphan. Kindness was expressed openly in the community praxis.

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<sup>37</sup> Gordon, 203.

<sup>38</sup> Toby Ziglar, "When Words Get in the Way of True Religion James 1: 19-27," *Review & Expositor* 100 (2003): 274.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

According to Yeats, the kindnesses poured upon the orphan afforded the giver something: an opportunity to call upon the Lord for a family blessing. He looks at it as a command:

Not only was it commanded that the community should protect the rights of the orphans, but the populace was taxed to support the needs of those who fell under this category. In Deuteronomy 26:12-13, the nation of Israel was commanded to take up a tithe of their income specifically for the needs of the widows, orphans, Levites, and aliens in the nation. The givers of the tithe were required to make a declaration before God that they not only had brought the tithe to support those God commanded but that they had kept all of God's commands. After the gift, the people requested His blessing on the entire household of faith (14-15).<sup>40</sup>

Joanie Gruber illustrates the historic writings of early theologians and the premise of adoption within orphan care, but even as the societies looked down upon the status of said children, God's word was in judgment against those that despised the orphan. Gruber instructs from the Apostolic Constitutions: a compilation of eight treatises from early Christian literature that provided authoritative apostolic directives on moral conduct. Gruber quotes, "When any Christian becomes an orphan, whether it be a young man or a maid, it is good that someone of the brethren who is without a child should take the young man, and esteem him in the place of a son."<sup>41</sup> The passage from the Constitutions continues, "But if anyone that walks in the way of man-pleasing is rich, and therefore is ashamed of orphans, the Father of orphans and Judge of widows will make provision for the orphans."<sup>42</sup> This once again indicates a mandate to provide for the children in foster care.

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<sup>40</sup> Yeats, 68.

<sup>41</sup> Joanie Gruber, "Orphan Care in The Early Church: A Heritage to Recapture," (Paper presented at the North American Association of Christians in Social Work Convention 2011: Pittsburg, PA, 2011), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Gruber, 5.

Gruber goes further to explain what this mandate means, using Exodus to show a proclamation of judgment upon they who cause the orphan to reach a point of desperation:

Beyond the command to avoid exploitation of the widows and orphans comes an understanding that these individuals are so precious to God that he will personally judge those who fail to account for their needs. The learned principles continue in Exodus 22:23-24: “If you do exploit them and they cry out to me I will surely help them. My anger will blaze forth against you, and I will kill you with the sword. Your wives will become widows and your children will become fatherless.” This rather harsh pronouncement demonstrates a couple of key items that need to be considered. First, based on verse 23, we may discern that the widows and orphans have direct access to God. He hears their cries and appeals for help and promises swift action. Second, avoiding upholding justice for the widow and orphan secures judgment—even death—upon those who look the other way. In the prophets, this becomes one of the burning indictments against the rulers of the house of Israel as they avoided caring for the needs of the widow and orphan.<sup>43</sup>

These are more than mere corrections in the wisdom of God’s word. These are clear dictates which, if rejected, will result in utter destruction. The modern Church has appropriated the concepts of compassion, but does it know the consequence of a lack of care for the widow, orphan, and alien? What form is this compassionate act supposed to take? The unit of the relationship as prescribed in the Word of God has always been family.

### **Family of Inclusion**

The story of Jesus Christ in the New Testament introduces a new family organism that would change the landscape of humanity’s family values. Jesus introduced His disciples to the kingdom of God and then the family of God. During a lecture series at Southeastern University, Leonard Sweet spoke of the dysfunction of the honor/dishonor

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<sup>43</sup> Yeats, 67.

culture as well as the deadly perspectives of the people among Joseph's family. The men within his family would have felt an obligation to kill Mary because of her perceived unfaithfulness (becoming pregnant with another man's child while betrothed to Joseph).<sup>44</sup> This means a larger portion of Jesus' birth family likely rejected Him.

Jesus first called the disciples to Himself and they were glad to call themselves His disciples/students/servants. In John 15:14-15, Jesus called the disciples more than mere servants, He called them His friends. In Matthew 12:46-50, Jesus made an identity addition to his friend-disciples when He called them His family. In John 19:25-27, when Jesus was near death on the cross, Jesus tasks one of His new family-member disciples with the honor and responsibility of caring for His mother. Jesus declared His disciple was His mother's son. Jesus wanted His followers to become a family within the community. Because of the work of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Jesus' desire was quickly fulfilled while the Church was born. In Acts 4:33-35 it is written, "And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need." According to Adams, "The emphasis in this passage is on shared responsibility and fellowship (*koinōnia*). The Greek word for 'in common' (*koina*) comes from the same root as *koinōnia* and underscores the justice imperative in Acts."<sup>45</sup> The kindness shared among the people of the New Testament Church was a testimony of the power of the Holy Spirit transforming the culture of that day.

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<sup>44</sup> Leonard Sweet, Classroom Lecture, Southeastern Assemblies of God University, Clearwater, FL, February 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Adams, 413.)



The new family of God immediately worked to fix the problem of poverty and lack within their sphere of influence. This form of unity drew God-fearing Jews into a relational space of inclusion and care. They were activated in their faith to serve one another and become dependent upon each other. As Robert Lupton states, “Being needed is the ultimate affirmation of human worth.”<sup>46</sup> When worth is established at home, it is natural to want the blessings to proceed to others. However, some housekeeping needed to take place in the church when it came to the provision of the Hellenistic Jews and benevolence. According to Amelia Tam, “... many Christians are eager to travel to engage the Great Commission in a foreign country but there exists a general wariness and unwillingness to bring the Great Commission into their own homes.”<sup>47</sup> The disciples quickly settled the matter of compassion leadership to move forward with the preaching of the gospel. As the church of Acts functioned in the vacuum of spiritual solidarity, so can the Church of today bring order to the many organizations who care for the less fortunate.

### **Biblical and Theological Summary**

The biblical research demonstrates four insights of note and importance to the project. These insights can be used to encourage participation in compassionate service to the needs of children in foster care. One of the insights noted is God’s continued warnings to the people of Israel regarding the mistreatment or neglect of less fortunate persons in their society. Starting during the time of Moses and the giving of the Law, God addressed

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<sup>46</sup> Robert D. Lupton, *Charity Detox: What Charity Would Look Like If We Cared About Results* (New York: Harper One, 2016), 16.

<sup>47</sup> Amelia Tam, “From the Father’s Heart to our Hands: Christian Responsibility in the U.S. Foster System” *Selected Honors Theses* 73 (2017), 25.

the proper treatment of women who were widowed and children who were made fatherless. “Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless” (Ex. 22:22-24). Such strong language demonstrates God’s compassion for women and children who lost their husbands and fathers. The prophet Isaiah is commanded by God to prophesy so the people of Israel will act upon the commands of God to serve the needs of vulnerable people groups and those hindered by aggressors. “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Isa. 1:17). These scriptures leave little room for debate regarding God’s desire for His people to care for those in desperate need. However, the instructions of the Lord concerning the care and treatment of the afflicted go beyond commands. The scriptures also demonstrate God’s wrath and judgment coming upon those who disobeyed the command or went as far as humiliating or harming the widow or orphan. “Do not move an ancient boundary stone or encroach on the fields of the fatherless, for their Defender is strong; he will take up their case against you” (Prov. 23:10-11). Within the context of ill-treatment toward the vulnerable, Scripture indicates the wrath of God is brought to bear upon those who transgress these destitute women and children.

Another insight in the biblical literature is the narrative of God’s miraculous providence in the stories of women who were widowed and their children who were orphaned (2 Kings 4). Elisha hears the cry of one of the wives of the company of prophets—her husband has died and left the family in dire circumstances financially. Because of her deceased husbands’ debt, the woman would have to endure the pain of

losing her two sons as slaves to the creditor. Elisha asks what the woman has in her home. The woman replies she has only a small jar of olive oil. Elisha tells her to borrow as many jars as she can secure from neighbors and friends and to go into her home, shut the door, and start pouring oil from her small jar into all the other jars (v. 3).

Miraculously, the oil never stopped flowing from the small jar until all the jars in her possession are filled with oil (v. 6). When she told Elisha what happened, “he said, ‘Go sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left’” (v. 7). Not only was the debt paid by the sale of the oil, but there was enough money left for the woman and her sons to live. God provided for a woman and her children in dire circumstances by the miraculous activity of the power of God and the prophet.

The third insight in biblical literature is God’s promise of assistance made to those who are widowed and orphaned. Among the many promises of God throughout Scripture, one is that He will care for the widow and orphan through protection, provision, and guidance. “But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless” (Ps. 10:14). The words of the psalmist continue the admonition regarding the working of God on behalf of the fatherless in subsequent verses. “The Lord is King forever and ever; the nations will perish from His land. You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror” (v. 16-18).

The fourth insight is how the continuity of care for the less fortunate demonstrated in the Old Testament is continued in the instruction of Jesus and His disciples in the New Testament and was then implemented by the New Testament church.

Jesus' teaching about the good Samaritan when an expert in the Law stood up to test Him (Luke 10:25-37) is a mandate for each of His followers to step in and serve those in need. A man traveling on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho is attacked by robbers; beaten and left for dead (v. 30). While a priest and a Levite walked by and did not assist the man, a Samaritan man took pity on the victimized traveler (v. 33). The Samaritan came near, bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then put the man on his donkey and brought the traveler to an inn and took care of him (v. 34). The next day, the Samaritan paid the innkeeper in advance for the abused stranger to be cared for while he continued his trip, promising, "'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have'" (v. 35). Jesus equated loving one's neighbor, no matter their differences, as part of the rules that lead to eternal life (vv. 25-29; 36-37). These rules apply to all of humanity. According to Richard Bauckham:

From this perspective we may venture a conclusion as to the distinctiveness of the approach to Halakhah which the parable advocates. In its implication as to what the priest should have done it probably adopts one Jewish view of the time. But it may be more distinctive in treating as the overriding law, not the obligation to bury a dead body, nor the obligation in all circumstances to save life, neither of which are as such commandments of the written Torah, but rather the commandment to love the neighbour (sic), which is both biblical and much broader in scope.<sup>48</sup>

The law taught by Moses was in effect subject to the law of love.

After the upper room encounter on the day of Pentecost, many important activities ensued, not the least of which was the establishment of fellowship among the followers the Jesus' teachings in their local context (Acts 2: 42-47). The people who were devoted to the apostle's teachings and the fellowship of believers ate together, prayed together,

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Bauckham, "The Scrupulous Priest and the Good Samaritan: Jesus' Parabolic Interpretation of the Law Of Moses." *New Testament Studies* 44, no. 4 (1998): 484.

and even combined their wealth to provide for those who did not have such abundance (vv. 44-45). One of the first administrative acts of the apostles was to assign an apostle to oversee a just distribution of food to the Hellenistic Jews who were being neglected.

James, the brother of Jesus, writes to Christians regarding obedience to the leading of the Lord in every instance of their lives. James closes out the first chapter of his letter stating, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (v. 1:27). The consistent theme of compassionate care upon those who have endured tragedy is evident in the writers of the New Testament as in the Old Testament.

### **Current Literature**

Scripture provides a solid foundation for any local church to embrace and immediately implement compassion services to children in need. Biblical mandates are supported by studies and statistics in current literature. Modern authors speak to the plight of children in foster care extensively. While their perspectives are founded on the principles of scripture, much is also presented that points the reader toward the influence of historic government structures on the care of the orphan. The condition of leadership within the government has a decided effect on the administration of compassion in a community.

Current literature points to a historic problem coinciding with the issues at work today. Nicholas Wolterstorff believes the Old Testament prophets’ accounts of the mistreatment of orphans is a direct result of the oppressive policies of the corrupted governance. He says, “the orphans are preyed on by iniquitous decrees and oppressive

statues.”<sup>49</sup> Because of this, a change was needed at the highest level of leadership in the Jewish community. However, the findings of many points to the corruption that emanates from every segment of society visualized and addressed by the prophets in scripture. Tarah Van de Wiele contends the law was applied to both government and the people, thus alleviating the discussion of ultimate responsibility as resting solely upon the governing elite. Van de Wiele writes, “One is hard-pressed to find a prohibition or an act of God in the Old Testament that is not harmonious with a law system assuming the right order.”<sup>50</sup> The unifying of responsibility between governing bodies and community members do not, however, alleviate the burden remaining with the church.

Bob Smietana points to the need for foster care and states much of the problem lies within the governance of the church.<sup>51</sup> He believes the leadership of the church is silent on the plight of orphans and children in need. Thus the greatest restrictions upon the application of care within the community are not secular governance, but rather church governance.<sup>52</sup> The leadership of our local churches must take up the identity of voice for the voiceless. Smietana provides some disturbing statistics to affirm his opinions:

- Fourteen percent of churchgoers say church leaders have encouraged families to consider adoption.
- Twelve percent say church leaders encouraged them to become involved in foster care.
- Eight percent say church leaders raised funds for families that are adopting.
- Six percent say church leaders provided training for foster parents.

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<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 73.

<sup>50</sup> Tarah Van de Wiele, “What Rights Get Wrong about Justice for Orphans: An Old Testament Challenge to a Modern Ideology,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 29, no. 1 (2015): 77.

<sup>51</sup> Bob Smietana, “Adoption, FosterCare, Commonplace in Churches,” LifeWay, last modified January 24, 2018, accessed March 21, 2019, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2018/01/24/adoption-foster-care-commonplace-inchurches>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Overall, about half (45 percent) of churchgoers say their church has had no involvement with or conversation about foster care and adoption. Leaders at smaller congregations are less likely to encourage families to consider adoption (8 percent) or foster care (8 percent), to raise funds for adoptive families (5 percent) or to provide training for foster parents (2 percent). Leaders at larger congregations are more likely to encourage families to consider adoption (23 percent) or foster care (20 percent) and to raise funds for adoptive families (15 percent) or provide training for foster parents (13 percent) than smaller congregations. White (15 percent) and Hispanic (22 percent) churchgoers are more like to say their church's leaders encouraged families to consider adoption. African American churchgoers are less likely (6 percent). Adoption and foster care are most commonly mentioned among nondenominational churchgoers. Twenty-nine percent say their church's leaders encourage families to adopt. Twenty-six percent say their church's leaders encouraged families to provide foster care. Fourteen percent say church leaders raised money for adoptive families. Twelve percent provided training for foster parents."<sup>53</sup>

With such a small number of church leaders speaking to the problem and proactively attempting to serve the needs of children at risk in their community, it is no wonder the problem of lack in compassionate ministry for these children exists.

The children of the foster care system today must strive to succeed without the immediate impact of family care. Their need during critical times of development exceeds that of most in society. The formative years of their lives are wrought with an experience of abandonment and trauma. The impact of religious teaching and church fellowship has a direct impact on children in foster care and is influential in their emotional development. According to Cotton and his fellow researchers:

Given that social cohesion and harmony are fundamental tenets of a number of spiritual and religious belief systems, it is possible that participation with prosocial peers and models in the religious context might impact aggressive behavioral tendencies. Rather than spiritual beliefs having importance in impacting outcomes, the application of

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

beliefs within the context of social relationships are potentially a key factor affecting functioning for maltreated youth.<sup>54</sup>

As these authors researched the impact of church community reaching out to vulnerable children in foster care, they discovered a transformative shift. Kalani P. Makanui, Yo Jackson, and Stephanie Gusler state, “Those who endorsed more strongly held spiritual views engaged in less risky sexual activity, fewer instances of violent behavior, had a lower risk for substance use, evidenced fewer symptoms of depression, and even demonstrated a decreased risk of suicide compared to adolescents who endorsed low levels of spirituality.”<sup>55</sup> Spiritual enrichment has been lauded as a benefit to individual care. The church should absorb these observations and apply them to their praxis. The care of teens in foster care by the church community leads to a better life.

Ministers are not speaking to the need of the widow, orphan, and alien. Nancy Duff believes the problem lies in a lack of biblical focus within the preaching of the Word of God. She writes, “It seems that distilling all commandments to one that requires us to love God would have been sufficient. But there is hardly a pause before Jesus establishes the second great commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>56</sup> The omission when it comes to compassion ministry to children in need of a family is telling. Some believe a proper theology points the preacher to the mandate of caring for orphans and this theology is an adoption directive as demonstrated by the relationship of Father God and His Son Jesus as our adoptive parents and sibling. Tony Merida discusses this

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<sup>54</sup> Sian Cotton, Kathy Zebracki, Susan L. Rosenthal, Joel Tsevat, and Dennis Drotar. “Religion/Spirituality and Adolescent Health Outcomes: A Review.” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38 (2006), 478.

<sup>55</sup> Kalani P. Makanui, Yo Jackson, and Stephanie Gusler. “Spirituality and Its Relation to Mental Health Outcomes: An Examination of Youth in Foster Care.” *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 11, no. 3 (August 2019): 204.

<sup>56</sup> Nancy J. Duff, “The Second Great Commandment,” *Journal for Preachers* 34, no. 4 (2011): 18.



concept within the process of the adoption and assimilation of his new child into the family. As he tells the story of Caleb's adoption and the work and paperwork required, he says God also became part of the process. According to Merida,

These days were also filled with a multiplicity of conversations with our translator about the gospel. We explained to her how God, in His inexpressibly holy love, sent His Son to live the life we could not live and die the death we deserve to die so that everyone who trusts in Him can be reconciled to God as His child. We shared how, by God's grace, we had been adopted into His family, to know Him as Father and enjoy Him as a friend. We told her that this was the motivation behind our wanting to adopt Caleb. Adoption was an expression in our lives of the gospel in our hearts.<sup>57</sup>

God is present in caring for these children even today, showing Himself in the minutest of details.

Dan Cruver believes that with the reconciliation a new identity is formed. An identity that chooses to do things differently and compassionate care begins to evolve. Cruver states, "Mobilizing Christians who are unsure of God's delight in them to care for orphans over the long haul or to serve orphans (James 1:27) with unflappable confidence and joy is nearly impossible."<sup>58</sup> All hope is not lost, however. Cruver goes on to state: "As Scripture makes clear, Jesus had been sent to fulfill the Father's mission to redeem humanity and renew creation—which includes the removal of the word 'orphan' from the human vocabulary. The Gospel writers tell us that the Father's Son went forward with the mission of His Father in the strength and knowledge of His Father's delight."<sup>59</sup> Cruver and the Together for Adoption organization communicate the new mind of foster care as

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<sup>57</sup> Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2011), loc. 182, Kindle.

<sup>58</sup> Dan Cruver, "Adoption Is Bigger than You Think," *The Journal of Discipleship & Family Ministry* 4, no. 1 (September 2013): 72–73.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

a conscious transformation through understanding the adoption of humanity through salvation. This revelation is part experience and part research, as each person lives in divine relationship and studies the eternal Word of God. Cruver believes the teaching of humanity's place in eternal and familial significant emanates from the wisdom of Paul in the book of Romans.<sup>60</sup> The transformation from death to life leads to the revelation of the orphan to adoption. Because of this adoption in the spirit, humanity's response should be the adoption of orphans in the natural, with supernatural results.

### **Adoption as a Salvation Mandate**

A form of vertical adoption, that of God adopting us as His children, might serve as a prelude to humanity horizontally adopting/caring for orphan children. Daniel Bennett speaks of humans being imitators of God's actions of love through adoption and foster care. As Bennet states, "The restoration of our relationship with God through adoption provides us a theological lens through which to understand human adoptions. By looking at God's adoption of us, we can learn how we are to respond to the needs of the orphan ... and our care of orphans should emulate the care our loving heavenly Father has shown us."<sup>61</sup> The principles esteemed by Bennett and other authors have been the source of practical theological reflection by many foster and adoption organizations, including the Christian Alliance for Orphans.

Marcia Bunge agrees with the posture of vertical and horizontal adoption, adding historical context. She points out, "The Bible is a rich resource for reflection on adoption. In different ways, both Moses and Jesus are portrayed as adopted children. In some

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Daniel J. Bennett, *A Passion for the Fatherless: Developing a God-Centered Ministry to Orphans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014), 68.

psalms, when the king is enthroned in glory the text suggests that God is the adoptive parent of the human sovereign.”<sup>62</sup> The concept of our heavenly adoption is not a debate with these authors. Few would disagree with the perception of Paul’s teachings of salvation theology through Romans. The debate begins when the vertical spiritual adoption is extended to humanity’s efforts with children.

A theological narrative deifying a persons’ kind response to children in need is dangerous when it invokes an identity shift away from the simplicity of caring for the less fortunate. The danger comes when the caring individual(s), instead of being perceived as persons with a desire to serve others, become misrepresented as god-like entities. Instead of acknowledging God’s power in the situation, the individual becomes the source of adoration. This unnecessarily glorifies humanity. The fall-out of such a perception is one of perceived calling or visionary inspiration. It should be enough for a person to desire something that is good and simply achieve the desired result of that good deed. Whether the person desires to feed, clothe, share their home, or adopt a child, meeting the immediate and long-term needs of another does not require a spiritual license. Helping others is a requirement of the gospel teaching to “love others as we love ourselves.” Immediate action is called for, and the mandate has already been given.

Sheryl Ryan quotes Dan Cruver, president of Together for Adoption, a ministry that hosts an annual conference and provides resources for churches with orphan care ministries, who writes, “Our confusion comes when we look at human adoption and end up focusing on the fact that a child needs parents. God focuses on the fact that a lost person needs saving ... The ultimate purpose of human adoption by Christians is to save

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<sup>62</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 375.

the souls of children.”<sup>63</sup> Ryan feels thinking of oneself as a partner in salvation by the virtue of adoption is not appropriate to scripture. This deification problem is rooted in the focus of humanity’s involvement in the salvation experience. As Ryan states, “A main theological problem with the vertical and horizontal adoption parallel is its uncritical casting of Christian adoptive parents as messiah figures and the United States church as analogous with heaven.”<sup>64</sup> Ryan worries this will foster an “ends-justifies-the-means approach to adoption” and “ethical abuses in intercountry adoption” will be ignored.<sup>65</sup> Samuel Perry warns against the assigning of a calling to help children in foster care when the foundational influences upon the adoptive hosts is need. Many of the adoptive parents only became so when they were unable to conceive. The assigning of a term to the decision toward adoption causes those who are seeking adoption for the mere purpose of adding to their family to feel lost. The potential new family must then wait for a calling or a word from God to proceed. Perry speaks to these instances as a failure in the orphan care movement.<sup>66</sup>

While statistically uncommon, the majority of reported abuses are more prevalent in international adoptions, which are not the focus of this study but do stain the landscape of adoption as a whole. Kyu Seop Kim combats the idea of humanity emulating God’s spiritual adoption with the complexities of Paul’s nomenclature and the incompatibility with a physical experience concerning adoption. He states, “Therefore, it should be noted that Paul’s adoption metaphor was unusual, because the metaphor alludes to adopting

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<sup>63</sup> Sheryl J. Ryan, “A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing? A Missiologistical Examination of the United States Evangelical Adoption and Orphan Care Movement,” *Missiology: An International Review* 42, no. 4 (2013): 417.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid: 416-417.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel L. Perry, *Growing God’s Family: The Global Orphan Care Movement and the Limits of Evangelical Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 138.

slaves in the presence of a legitimate heir, and this metaphor functions to stress God's unusual and extraordinary favour (sic.) and love to the believers in Romans 8:15. Grace in Paul's letters is also interpreted as divine benefaction."<sup>67</sup> According to Kim, attributing divine characteristics to human efforts is a theological miss. Kim asserts that the adoption promoted in Paul's writing in Romans is a focus upon a change of status from slaves to children of God, confirmed in the teaching that without remission, humanity is a slave to sin. The adoption is not the remission of sin or the salvation, but merely a product of redemption as God brings what was once close to Him back into His divine presence.<sup>68</sup>

Ryan concludes his opposition to the horizontal/vertical adoption theological stance by stating, "The emphasis that horizontal adoption places on the adoptive parents as rescuing saviors may reinforce a sense of unworthiness in the children or lead to an ends-justify-the-means approach of ignoring ethical considerations."<sup>69</sup> Alternate approaches to a proper foster/adoption compassion are found in simpler alignment within scripture to do good and love your neighbor. As Yeats writes,

This kind of special spiritual right-of-passage is a hinderance to potential adoptive parents and they who have a desire to care for the less fortunate. The calling is in Scripture, there's less need for *individual revelation*, although desirous, an American first-world concept. Doing the right thing in the community shouldn't be a calling. Recognize that adoption is a calling. Not every Christian will adopt nor should every Christian adopt. That being said, every Christian can and should help in some way.<sup>70</sup>

James Lupton believes to do good in the community gives room for identity and solidarity and, "Purposeful work is what establishes one's place in society."<sup>71</sup> Caring for

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<sup>67</sup> Kyu Seop Kim, "Another Look at Adoption in Romans 8:15 in Light of Roman Social Practices and Legal Rules," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 44, no. 3 (August 2014): 142-143.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ryan: 419.

<sup>70</sup> Yeats, 76.

<sup>71</sup> Lupton, Detox, 32.

children in foster care comes from the godly desire to do good and the influence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of every individual.

### **The Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit is the abiding influence that convicts each person regarding sin and righteousness (John 16:8) and leads God's people to be gospel witnesses (Acts 1:7). The first administrative task of the New Testament Church after the empowerment of Pentecost was to re-align the compassion efforts for uniformity and ensure that justice was served. The New Testament Church started with the facilitation of having all things in common. After a time, the practice of the love feast was appropriated among the ranks of those who wanted to serve needs but did not have a community of communion.

Charles Buck defines the concept, as, "feasts of charity among the ancient Christians, when liberal contributions were made by the rich to the poor."<sup>72</sup> The activities of the New Testament Church are evidence that a dramatic culture shift took place in the minds and hearts of the body of Christ in the Roman republic and elsewhere.

A transforming power overwhelmed the mindsets and cultural norms of that time to establish a compassion zone. That power is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians and is described by Roger Stronstad,

Instructing the church at Corinth, Paul writes, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12:13) According to this metaphor, Spirit baptism is the spiritual transformation which puts the believer "in Christ," and which is the effect of receiving the gift of the Spirit. Therefore, according to Paul, the metaphor signifies

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<sup>72</sup> Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary* (Philadelphia: W.W. Woodward, 1810), 16.

initiation and incorporation; that is, in fact, the means of entry into the body of Christ.<sup>73</sup>

Stronstad believes as each person is baptized in the Holy Spirit, unity and inclusion are evident. When one is baptized in the Holy Spirit, the needs of many are introduced to the recipient. A burden for others is attained as a bonus of the Spirit's empowerment. The act of compassion through the love of God is part of the same empowering Spirit of God present at Spirit baptism.

### **Blessings and Curses**

While not to be the sole motivating factor for engaging in compassionate service, blessings are attributed to those who serve the needs of the widow, orphan, and alien in Scripture. Current literary figures point to the principles of compassion in Scripture and illustrate how the commands were organized and then implemented. Van de Weile draws on the historic activities of the Jewish people to discern the mentality of the people within the community. The Jews lived with the mentality of community caretaker first implemented in the Garden of Eden.<sup>74</sup> Van de Weile says the third-year tithe mandated in Deuteronomy 14 continued in their local community of care for orphans and others in need.<sup>75</sup> This tithe was an offering to the Lord through the care of the orphans, and as a result of the offering "God would bless those who tithed."<sup>76</sup> The blessings of God are multi-faceted and promised to those who obey the directive to care for the widow, orphan, and alien.

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<sup>73</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke: Trajectories from the Old Testament to Luke-Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 390.

<sup>74</sup> Van de Weile, 79.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Daniel Bennett believes the mindset of compassion is a barometer of the spiritual climate within each person. He tells his reader, “If you have no desire to care for the orphan, you have a profound spiritual problem. Let me be frank, in a loving way. If you hear the plight of the fatherless and you tell them, in James’ words, ‘be warmed and filled,’ without doing anything, there are some tough questions you need to ask yourself about your passion to see God’s grace exalted.”<sup>77</sup> David Platt’s writing makes it ever apparent that God’s justice includes rewarding those who serve the less fortunate in society and punishing those who neglect and abuse them. As Platt states:

When you read the Bible, you see over and over God’s passion to demonstrate his power and love in the life of the orphan. “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow” (Deuteronomy 10: 17-18). “A father to the fatherless; a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling” (Psalm 68: 5, NIV). In the initial giving of his law, God commands his people, “You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child” (Exodus 22: 22). Then continually throughout their history, God exhorts his people, “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isaiah 1: 17).<sup>78</sup>

Could the modern Church’s lack of compassionate care for the orphan be bringing a curse or judgment? Are certain churches under a curse for not speaking out and serving these vulnerable people groups? An intense study of current literature makes a case for a negative conclusion.

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<sup>77</sup> Bennett, 65.

<sup>78</sup> David Platt, *Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture in a World of Poverty, Same-sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Abortion, Persecution, Orphans, and Pornography* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 83.



## Community Organizing Care

Leading secular proponents of The Commission of Children At Risk coined the terms “enduring connectedness” and “meaningful connectedness” to coincide with the influence and prevalence of a church within the impact of authoritative communities.<sup>79</sup> This authoritative community is filled with leadership models and practices that influence and care for most vulnerable children. The churches included were clearinghouses of productive thought and positive action. Through the models used, “Youth ... learned the skills, traditions, and customs of the community through their relationships with the adults. ... Today, it is clear that the most effective local communities have reclaimed their youth and assumed primary responsibility for their upbringing.”<sup>80</sup> The authoritative community leadership celebrated by the commission “impacts the nature of a child and impacts significantly the way a child receives instruction that promotes continued growth.”<sup>81</sup> Thus the church engaged in an authoritative community promotes significant contributions to personal and societal growth. When these growth characteristics are fostered, the community flourishes. Noel Castellanos believes the answer to a community in chaos is in the incarnate Church connecting and caring for the community. The Church must be in the effort for the betterment of the poor, demonstration of compassion, confronting injustice, and presenting the gospel to all those within the community.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, Dartmouth Medical School, and YMCA of the USA, 2003), 21.

<sup>80</sup> John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), loc. 501, Kindle.

<sup>81</sup> The Commission on Children at Risk, 64.

<sup>82</sup> Noel Castellanos, *Where The Cross Meets the Street: What Happens to the Neighborhood When God Is at the Center* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 158.

Bob Houlihan believes encouragement toward the person interested in pouring life into the compassionate care of the needy is vital to meet the ominous need. In his opinion, the Church should be activated to powerful spiritual ministry when confronted with such an immense need.<sup>83</sup> It must take a stance of facilitator and compassion organizer. According to Houlihan, “The Church can no longer neglect its place in the world and the power of the Kingdom to overthrow poverty, disease, war, and violence, as tragedies affect the marginalized people of society. It is God’s will that these people have an opportunity to enjoy His blessings.”<sup>84</sup> The Lord desires all of His children to walk in the goodness and blessing that comes from a relationship with an extraordinary Creator.

The answer to the need of the orphan is within the community of care provided by the Church. This care cannot come from individual effort alone. The power of the community is more than laudable, it is formidable. To hear the voice of God and act upon what was spoken is only magnified when many others attend to the voice alongside. James Boyce states, “Ignatius saw the direct correlation between the confession that Jesus came in the flesh and the concern of his early Christian community for the poor among them.”<sup>85</sup> What started with Jesus continued in the New Testament Church. Boyce continued, “In the same way, the writer of James implies that the gifts of God that impart wisdom to the Christian community are evident and exercised in a community that has been reminded of its identity in the implanted Word of Christ among them, and then is empowered for love and service in the world.”<sup>86</sup> Since the answer to the need of the less

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<sup>83</sup> Houlihan, 33.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> James L. Boyce, “A Mirror of Identity: Implanted Word and Pure Religion in James 1:17-27,” *Word and World* 35, no. 3 (2015): 220-221.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

fortunate is the church in community engagement, the plan for restoration of the child in care must be to reacquaint the child with the community in an endearing fashion.

Removing the child in foster care from the community to places of institutionalized care will not allow for the normalcy that is much needed in the life of the child. Philip Darke and Keith McFarland warn against such action:

Consequently, we cannot create orphanages or orphan care communities that isolate the children from their local communities to protect them or for any other reason. If we fail to connect and integrate orphaned and vulnerable children with their local community or otherwise create a subculture where they aren't involved with or don't feel a part of their local community, we will reinforce their orphan mentality (i.e., stigma of being a "second-class" citizen) and set them up for failure later in life.<sup>87</sup>

The community is the answer, and the answer must be metered with inclusion and empowerment. However, the Church is not exempt from the spiritual and physical costs attributed to effective compassion outreach. Cruver believes it is crucial to have an understanding that relationship with the Trinity through communion does not negate the pain and tragedy Christians face. "Through adoption, we do participate daily in the mutual knowing of the Father and the Son. But our participation in God's triune love does not negate our participation in the suffering that the mission of God involves."<sup>88</sup> Knowing the blessings of God rest upon those who serve the need of these children is not to say there will be no struggles in the lives of the worker. There is always a battle line drawn at the place of restoration. The vast majority in the church would prefer a more comfortable ministry that allows for a lifestyle of leisure or a career that does not require one to bring work home. However, the engagement of all persons is best instituted in

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<sup>87</sup> Philip Darke and Keith McFarland, *In Pursuit of Orphan Excellence: My Kids, Your Kids, Our Kids* (Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2014), loc. 1290.

<sup>88</sup> Cruver, loc. 1151.

relationship. When loving people is perceived as a job instead of a lifestyle, one could get the distasteful idea that the orphan is a task instead of a child of God and spiritual kin.

To address the community of care without addressing government interest would be remiss. Communities include the leaders and social agencies of each state. Often these agencies are actively serving needs the rest of the community has selfishly ignored. In a radical change from the New Testament Church model, the Church is the newcomer to the many needs government and social programs have been silently serving for generations. Perry speaks against a mentality of competition between compassion ministries and our governing agencies. When an existing system of compassion is evaluated, it is easy to find the problems. Serving the needs requires a refocus on the mindset of the church to align with those motivated to help. According to Perry, the key is to “create a ‘culture’ in their congregation in which each believer recognizes the connection between the gospel and serving orphans.”<sup>89</sup> The term pietistic idealism alludes to the primary focus of today’s church being spiritual discipleship and evangelism.<sup>90</sup> With such a focus at the forefront of Christian thought, it becomes too easy to allow the compassion arm of the church to grow weak and ineffective. Leadership, instead of preparing to equip congregations for outreach, become out of touch with the harsh realities outside the church doors. Leaders lose sight of those who live in desperation and consider their needs to be the responsibility of others.

The struggles faced when implementing a compassion regimen within the community are enhanced in a church culture that promotes individualism over the sacrificial and communistic mentalities demonstrated in the New Testament Church. As

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<sup>89</sup> Perry, 160.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Perry states, “Yet it is often the case that the very congregations that encouraged their sacrificial activism ... are unwilling to restructure to accommodate these adoptive and foster families.”<sup>91</sup> Without the Church operating among a community of care, church subcultures will consistently draw their constituents away from the needs prevalent in the majority conscience. The power of the Church can be best implemented in coincidence with various community agencies for growth and change. Darke and McFarland contend, “Home, church, and school stand as the three greatest pillars of spiritual formation, and any excellence-driven orphan care community must work together with these pillars to help children establish their identity as children of God.”<sup>92</sup> For the Church to embrace the methods of care within culture, the needy must be identified and studied. A path forward begins with clarity of the compassion destination.

### **The Forgotten Foster Child**

Many within the church culture lack the knowledge required to identify the person of need in their community. When someone is asked to describe an orphan or adoption in conversation, the average American immediately looks for a mental image to place within the framework of their understanding. Without fail, the mind reaches for the image of a child, perhaps a dirty child from another country. This child is one to three years old and is crying, desperate to be held and loved. They are dirty and starving, but with a bath, some clean clothes, and a meal, they would make someone a perfect baby. The reality and needs of the child in foster care extend much further than a shower and food. Although these necessities make for a better life, the additions these children require adds

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 171

<sup>92</sup> Darke and McFarland, loc. 3531.

much to the list: mental health care, medications, counseling, nutritional intervention, and much more.



Figure 2.1. Maslow's hierarchy.<sup>93</sup>

Maslow's hierarchy of being illustrates that the process leading to self-actualization becomes restricted when unfulfilled needs exist in the lower functions of personal growth. Once a person experiences the fulfilment of basic physiological needs like air, water, food and shelter, the next stage becomes engaged. Through the struggles of poverty, parental drug use, and transience, the youth in foster care have a difficult time moving beyond the base level of need. Their development is hindered with inconsistency and impermanence. Safety needs include personal security, employment, and general health.<sup>94</sup> Abuse, mental health issues, and a lack of control over their situation further arrests the progression of the youth in foster care to higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy.

Getting to the point where the young people are looking forward to friends and relationships is a struggle at best. Children experience loss when they make friendships

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<sup>93</sup> Jamie L. Vernon, "The Path to Self-Actualization," *American Scientist* 104, no. 3 (May 2016): 130.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

and the foster system uproots and redeposits the children in different communities, schools, and neighborhoods. If safety is no longer a concern, Maslow's hierarchy states love and belonging are addressed through friendship, intimacy, family, and a sense of connection.<sup>95</sup> This level is a goal much of humanity strives to achieve, however it is difficult to do so without examples and models of such activity. Lack of consistency is a hindrance these children face daily. Without the normalcy of family dynamics, the institution of foster care fails to encourage them to seek long term commitment in relationships. Students in foster care are given new case workers, therapists, doctors, teachers, and foster parents on a regular basis. Their outlook on relationships consists of a beginning and an end.

To rise above the level of love and move on to esteem means achieving and demonstrating self-esteem, respect, status, and freedom.<sup>96</sup> The final level is self-actualization, where the person reaches a point in life where they are maximizing their potential for themselves and others.<sup>97</sup> While not impossible, without intervention in the lives of children in foster care, few will ever reach beyond the first three levels of Maslow's hierarchy. Who will help them achieve a higher level? How can they move beyond the trauma hindering their progression? With God's help, the community of faith can serve the community of state care and bring healing—physical, mental and spiritual—to these children. Without assistance from others, the children cannot rise above the expanse of their need to the higher levels of personal development.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

There are, however, exceptions to the many rules and philosophies. While Mother Theresa and Albert Einstein were subjects of Maslow's study, they overcame tragedies and personal needs to accomplish great things, reaching the height of their own self-actualization.<sup>98</sup> With few exceptions, like Mother Theresa and Einstein, the over-achieving nature of a small segment of humanity is not the rule of society. The lives of children in the foster care system align with the principles of Maslow's pyramid of self-actualization. Children in foster care are consistently restricted in their ability to proceed to the levels of esteem and self-actualization as they are persistently concerned about their personal well-being, home or facility placement, and disconnection from friends and family. According to Maslow, the effects of such upheaval has a consistent impact upon their ability to grow toward a life of self-actualization.<sup>99</sup>

Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development are also seen in the lives of children in foster care. Erikson's stages of a child's psychosocial development include time periods where the child's many stages are triggered through a "crisis" of experiences.<sup>100</sup> Whether the crisis is one of simple restrictive responsibilities requiring personal growth or one of negative impacts, the response of the child leans toward maladaptive (a more positive response) or malignant (a more negative response) tendencies.<sup>101</sup> According to these responses, the child will grow in the character qualities of hope, will, purpose, confidence, fidelity, care, love and wisdom or retreat in these same areas of life through psychosocial degradation.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Zelda Gillian Knight, "A Proposed Model of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy Linked to Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development." *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy* 24, 5 (2017): 1049.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1050.



The eight stages demonstrate the interactions of experience and the resulting development of the children mentally and emotionally. During the early stages of infancy, children adapt to external stimuli to trust or mistrust. The adaptive strength of positive experiences produces a virtue of hope within the child. When the experience is negative, the mistrust leads the child into despair, and they begin to withdraw from relationships. This negative progression is often experienced by children in the foster care system who have experienced negative stimuli such as abuse, neglect, poverty, and abandonment.<sup>103</sup>

Because of these experiences, children in foster care have difficulty trusting throughout their lives, starting with case workers and foster parents and then in the eventual withdrawing from employers and friends. Their world of trust is diminished by the experiences of childhood. The next two stages of early childhood and play age reinforce autonomy and initiative versus shame, doubt and guilt. External influences at this age can direct children toward autonomy and the reward of doing the right thing. It is during this stage that many parents bring discipline to a higher level and children first experience consequences. Because of the nature of social work in regard to correction and discipline, children in foster care are required to do less and are held accountable for less. This lack of responsibility and consequences limits the child's ability to develop proper shame and disappointment when a goal or purpose is not achieved. As this mental state continues to languish through compulsive actions and a loss of inhibition, the pioneering, risk taking part of the child is diminished.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, "The Adolescent Brain, Executive Summary," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, last modified January 1, 2011, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/the-adolescent-brain/>

The Casey Foundation calls this period the “use it or lose it” period of brain development.<sup>105</sup> This emotional state exists for teenagers in the foster care system who lack the capacity to completely fill out a two page registration form for fear they would make a mistake and, as a result, experience rejection. Applying for college, jobs, financial aid, or a loan become debilitating experiences for the young person who grew up with this complex trauma in their formative years.

During the school age stage of development, children can exhibit industriousness or inferiority. Life experiences lead to an expected virtue of competency in the child. When the experiences of the child lead to dystonic tendencies, inferiority comes to the forefront instead.<sup>106</sup> Youth in the foster care system experience the feeling of inferiority when they spend time with youth who are not state wards in public and private functions. Because of this inferiority mind state, they demonstrate an inability to lead in what seems to be simple constructs of social environments, from classroom discussions to sports endeavors. The mental state of the traumatized foster child presses a mold of a person in the background, showing someone who goes along with the collective desire. It is important to note the large population of young adults who aged out of the foster care system and became homeless. They are emotionally unequipped to ask for help, intimidated by the very programs provided to help them.

During the adolescence stage, identity cohesion works against role confusion. While fidelity is the adaptive strength of managing this stage, repudiation occurs in the lives of those who do not experience and respond with healthy developmental growth.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Unmet promises are made to caregivers, biological and foster parents, friends, employers, and friends. Becoming untrustworthy may be the last thing these students wish to happen; however, they have experienced trauma during this or multiple stages of their lives that leads them to a life of unfulfilled expectations.

Many more students in foster care fail to graduate high school and never attend college than the national average. Young adulthood is the stage where humans contend with intimacy versus isolation. Will this person open their lives to others and community? Will they form productive relationships? The virtue of this stage is love. The maladaptive tendency of this stage is promiscuity and the malignant tendency is exclusivity.<sup>108</sup> The tendency toward promiscuity is visible in high teen pregnancy and divorce rates among youth formerly in the foster care system. The youth in foster care want the virtues of love and are willing to go to extraordinary measures to attain it.

Since the children in the care of the foster care system are assimilated at varying times of life, there are also varying degrees of impact and emotional function within individual children. Blanket policies and programs have a lesser effect upon children in settings that have little to no knowledge of the severity of experiences endured. Since foster parents are not included in the mental health therapy of each child, they are not utilized as a part of the mental healing and are unaware of the emotional needs of the youth. Children perceived by others as maintaining high social function are received with wide acceptance, while those who demonstrate malignant tendencies are rejected since foster placements often believe them to be too much to handle. Children who have consistently experienced the abusive environs of neglect, abuse, upheaval, and rejection

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

will perceive life through lenses that lend to a malignant tendency in their psychosocial development. An intense need for compassionate care is mandated because of the vulnerability of the age and mental development of the children in foster care.

The number of children who have experienced trauma before entering the foster care system are greatly exceeded by those who experience additional trauma through the activity of the foster care system.<sup>109</sup> Researchers discovered as children in foster care drift through multiple homes and facility placements, the children had great difficulty trusting others, struggled to build and maintain relationships, and experienced intense feelings of rejection.<sup>110</sup> Casey Family Programs conducted a three-year study on female children who aged out of the foster care system and concluded the youth who had come of age and processed out of the system tested to higher scores in mental health disorders than youth in the general population.<sup>111</sup> These disorders are a reality for the children during and after state care. As they matriculate through adolescence, their emotional health is impacted to a degree requiring therapy and medication. These medications are attributed to children in foster care at a much higher rate than that of the rest of the United States population.<sup>112</sup>

It becomes difficult for the youth to feel as if they fit in the various environments they encounter since they are constantly guests and rarely members of communities. Because of the added pressure of an emotional connection with their foster parents and siblings, the child in foster care often retreats into a dissociative state that precludes

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<sup>109</sup> Rebecca Mathew, "Childhood Trauma Factors Associated with Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms in Female Former Foster Youth," (PhD diss., Alliant International University, San Diego, CA, 2014), 5-7.

<sup>110</sup> Y. A. Unrau, J. R. Seita, and K. S. Putney, "Former foster youth remember multiple placement moves: A journey of loss and hope," *Children and Youth Services Review* 30, no. 11 (2008), 1259.

<sup>111</sup> Peter J. Pecora, et al., "Assessing the Effects of Foster Care: Early Results from the Casey National Alumni Study," Casey Family Programs, last modified November 2, 2003, <https://www.casey.org/national-alumni-study/>

<sup>112</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

intimacy with well-meaning hosts and therapists.<sup>113</sup> Without the needed emotional connection, many hosts further reject the children by requesting another child placement.

The students in the Excellerate program average twelve to twenty foster placements over the span of their state care. This repeated violation of their ability to establish permanency leads to further damage known as PTSD and complex PTSD. Former foster youth have six to fifteen percent higher rates of PTSD than American veterans of wars, and five hundred percent more than the general population.<sup>114</sup> Complex PTSD stems from individuals experiencing trauma in a repetitive state. First studied in 1988 by Judith Herman of Harvard University, many occurrences of traumatic experiences lead to symptoms of long-term trauma, including:

- Consciousness: Includes forgetting traumatic events, reliving traumatic events, or having episodes in which one feels detached from one's mental processes or body (dissociation).
- Self-Perception: May include helplessness, shame, guilt, stigma, and a sense of being completely different from other human beings.
- Distorted Perceptions of the Perpetrator: Examples include attributing total power to the perpetrator, becoming preoccupied with the relationship to the perpetrator, or preoccupied with revenge.
- Relations with Others: Examples include isolation, distrust, or a repeated search for a rescuer.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Pecora, et al.

- One's System of Meanings: May include a loss of sustaining faith or a sense of hopelessness and despair.<sup>115</sup>

Each of the complex PTSD symptoms children in foster care exhibit could easily be blamed for the number of children aging out of the foster care system without placement in permanent residence or adopted into forever homes. However, the students within the foster care system often exhibit a multiplicity of these symptoms, and at varying times in their lives. Each requires therapeutic care not commonly required or noted in the lives of children in a permanent biological home arrangement. The difficulty perceived by the potential foster parent influences many students to act as if there are no issues. However, it is not long before the true emotional state of the child is demonstrated and soon the placement is rescinded. The perpetuation of rejection and repeated trauma is a vicious cycle leading to continual despair of youth in foster care.

### **Trauma and the Mind of Children in Foster Care**

Regardless of the reasoning behind the removal of a child from the birth family, a dramatic mental degradation becomes evident. When young children experience trauma through inconsistencies in living arrangements, abuse, neglect, and rejection, their brains experience a slowing of growth in physical and emotional health. Since the cerebral cortex of the brain is in development through adolescence, traumatic situations slow the maturing of the brain, causing the capacities to manage physical and emotional engagement to become severely limited. Adolescents are supposed to begin to rely less on the emotional center of the brain, called the limbic system, in order to make decisions

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<sup>115</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997), 118-122.

and rely on the frontal lobes, the source of judgment and impulse control.<sup>116</sup> In this state, the mapping of the brain between action and reaction are governed by emotion and less by cognitive reasoning.

Because of the hinderance to utilize the center of judgement, the child loses vital connections that are built between emotion and reaction. Recovery of vital function of self-regulation is possible, however the student will lag behind others who do not possess this restriction in their emotional health and maturity. The research team of Ranjan Debnath, Alva Tang, Charles H. Zeanah, Charles A. Nelson, and Nathan A. Fox discovered children as old as 16 whose biological upbringing was disrupted while placed in institutionalized care reverted in brain function to that of an infant.<sup>117</sup> When these same children were placed into long term foster care placement, the brain function shifted rather rapidly to that of strong positive activity including theta as well as alpha and beta transmissions. As long as the children were in transitional living quarters/institutionalized care like group homes or orphanages, the brain activity lead to mostly theta transmissions. Such transmissions without equal or precise alpha and beta activity are associated with ADHD, disruptive behavior disorders, psychosocial risk factors and other learning disorders.<sup>118</sup>

The mind of the child placed in foster care is in flux. The need of that child to find permanency and consistency are vital to the progress of their mental health and educational growth. It is this group of vulnerable children who are in need of the

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<sup>116</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 20.

<sup>117</sup> Ranjan Debnath, Alva Tang, Charles H. Zeanah, Charles A. Nelson, and Nathan A. Fox, "The Long-Term Effects of Institutional Rearing, Foster Care Intervention and Disruptions in Care on Brain Electrical Activity in Adolescence," *Developmental Science*, 23 (1) (2020), 7.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

constancy of compassionate care from the local church. There must be a consistent relational element in the lives of these children to produce normalcy and permanence. Relationships within the community of the church can add to the positive youth development services of the state institutions.<sup>119</sup> Through robust relationships within the community of faith, and that of adequate therapeutic services, children will regain resilience and come to the place of high and low brain function required to succeed in many physical and mental processes of growth.

The difficulties encountered by these children extends to how they perceive themselves and others. Trust becomes an issue for the child who has endured complex traumatic experiences. Their mind cannot distinguish the persons they are in relationship with from those who they should not trust in relationship. This status has been described as toxic stress. Because of these realities, they experienced increased stress, an inability to regulate emotions without outside support, excessive help-seeking, dependency and social isolation.<sup>120</sup> The traumatized state of the children informs the actions of the adolescent along the way to adulthood.

When a child experiences trauma, one of the first responses of the brain is to release adrenalin. Adrenalin promotes the body's fight or flight reflex in an effort to improve reflexes and activity for the host, if needed. When the body does not require adrenalin levels for activity, the resulting level of adrenalin produces stress. When stress is present, cortisol released. Cortisol is the stress hormone released into the brain when traumatic experiences occur. The impact of repeated trauma in the mind of a child effects the cortisol levels in their brain. Because of the effects of stress, researchers have noted

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<sup>119</sup> Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, 3.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 26.



an increase in cardiovascular, immune, endocrine, and central nervous system disorders in people that have experienced trauma as a child.<sup>121</sup>

According to Simsek et al.'s article in *the Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, sexual abuse at a young age produces the most severe cases of physical consequences. Along with other physical problems, the victim of child abuse or child trauma also experiences oxidative stress and DNA damage to their brain. Since this damage mostly impacts the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex of the brain, the functions of these lobes are inhibited.<sup>122</sup> Damage to the hippocampus effects the limbic system where short term and long-term memory are based, so the impact of stress and trauma on the life of a child in foster care actually has an effect on their memory. This memory loss impacts their performance in school by reducing their ability to remember what is taught.

The prefrontal cortex is also impacted by the repeated infusions of cortisol and lessening dopamine and noradrenaline hormones through repeated traumatic stress events. According to Carboni and Carta, the prefrontal cortex is the locus of cognitive processes, regulation of emotions, working memory and executive functions.<sup>123</sup> Since executive functions include sustained attention, it is no surprise more children in foster care are diagnosed with ADD and ADHD than children outside of state care.<sup>124</sup> The abilities of the youth in foster care to learn and be educated are hampered by the traumas experienced during their years in care. The more intensive the trauma, the more intensive

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<sup>121</sup> Şeref Şimşek, İbrahim Kaplan, Cem Uysal, Tuğba Yüksel, and Rümeyza Alaca, "The Levels of Cortisol, Oxidative Stress, and DNA Damage in the Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Preliminary Study," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse: Research, Treatment, & Program Innovations for Victims, Survivors, & Offenders* 25, no. 2 (February 2016): 175.

<sup>122</sup> Şimşek, et al., 176.

<sup>123</sup> Lorenzo Lograsso and Giovanni Morretti, *Prefrontal Cortex: Roles, Interventions and Traumas* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated, 2009), 76.

<sup>124</sup> Niranjana S. Karnik, "Foster Children and ADHD: Anger, Violence, and Institutional Power." *Journal of Medical Humanities* 21, no. 4 (2000):199-200.

the impact upon the various functions of the brain. Children growing up in the foster care system are highly susceptible to depression and suicide at a young age and as they grow older. The statistics of their plight bear these facts to light as 63 percent of youth suicides are by these vulnerable children.<sup>125</sup>

The proximity of children in foster care is nearer to the average person than is often realized. They are in public schools, private institutions, church services, coffee bars, malls, and the marketplace. These people do not have descriptive attributes that allow for easy identification within social structures, and their various needs are also near impossible to identify without training. The incredible multiplicity of needs increases with the age of the child in care. Typically, the more time has passed, the more pain has been experienced by these children. When a child is removed from an unfit home environment, more bonding has occurred within the birth family, making unity with a second, third, or eighteenth foster/adoptive family more difficult. For this and many reasons, the teenage child in foster care is often left out of adoption consideration.

According to the statistics Perry shares, the teenager in foster care is a forgotten generation: “From 2000 to 2014, the percentage of children adopted from foster care at ages 1–5 increased, while the percentages of foster children adopted at ages 6–15 declined.”<sup>126</sup> The odds of a child in foster care beyond thirteen being adopted are astronomically unlikely (not just compared to the younger children). These precious children have the dubious displeasure of being ignored by many as undesirable. Proponents of adoption are doing their best to communicate the need, but new eyes and minds are hard to come by.

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<sup>125</sup> Darke and McFarland, loc. 1050.

<sup>126</sup> Perry, 39.

Many of the adoption and compassion organization conferences are stagnant or declining in attendance. Morton describes the difficulty is in “knowing orphans, not because they are *unknowable* but because they are *unknown*. They are voiceless. They are out of sight and out of mind. At worst, orphans are treated as a social blight or, at best they are ignored by the mainstream, of society.”<sup>127</sup> While this tragic invisibility cloak covers them from the vision and praxis of church and society, they are dying.

Darke and McFarland share that children of fatherless homes account for:

- 63 percent of youth suicides
- 71 percent of pregnant teens
- 90 percent of all homeless and runaway children
- 70 percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions
- 85 percent of all youth who exhibit behavior disorders
- 80 percent of rapists motivated with displaced anger
- 71 percent of all high school dropouts
- 75 percent of all adolescents in chemical abuse centers
- 85 percent of all youths in prison<sup>128</sup>

The statistics do not end there. According to Darke and McFarland, “children from fatherless homes are nearly three times as likely to be struggling in school or to have repeated a grade. They are five times more likely to be poor, thirty-three times more likely to be seriously abused (requiring medical attention), and seventy-three times more likely to be killed.”<sup>129</sup> It is easy to ignore these children because they are closer to

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<sup>127</sup> Rick Morton, *Know Orphans: Mobilizing the Church for Global Orphanology* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2014), 711.

<sup>128</sup> Darke and McFarland, loc. 1050.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

adulthood and are perceived as being able to care for themselves. Many who attempt to engage the struggles of this generation of orphans are intimidated and discouraged by the immensity of the need. The uninitiated who explore the concept of ministry to these children are crippled by a simplistic plan of action. They cannot imagine orphan children's need for anything more than relationships, food, love, and Jesus. However, the teenage child in foster care has even greater needs than the young children imagined within the confines of compassionate care.

### **The Needs of a Child in Foster Care:**

Many of the youngest kids in foster care are unaware of the dreadful things that have happened around them and to them. As a product of their age, they are functional on a rudimentary level. There are caring individuals from various agencies who do their best to protect each child from the damaging realities of their existence. Unfortunately, the statistics show that many kids in foster care age out of the system with little hope for a productive future. According to the National Foster Youth Institute:

- More than 23,000 children will age out of the US foster care system every year.
- After reaching the age of 18, 20 percent of the children who were in foster care will become instantly homeless.
- Only one out of every two kids in foster care who age out of the system will have some form of gainful employment by the age of twenty-four.
- There is less than a 3% chance for children who have aged out of foster care to earn a college degree at any point in their life.
- Seven out of ten girls who age out of the foster care system will become pregnant before the age of 21.

- The percentage of children who age out of the foster care system and still suffer from the direct effects of PTSD: 25 percent.
- Tens of thousands of children in the foster care system were taken away from their parents after extreme abuse.
- 8% of the total child population of the United States is represented by reports of abuse that are given to authorities in the United States annually.
- In 2015, more than 20,000 young people—whom states failed to reunite with their families or placed in permanent homes.<sup>130</sup>

As these children mature and come of age in the system of care, the secrets are not so secret anymore. They discover the truth through personal experience or by the asking of many questions while they are wards of the state. The pain multiplies in those moments. Self-worth is often established when one considers who cares for you and who cares about you.

To live in an existence where every caretaker is a paid player in your life story is a dark thought for each child in foster care. According to Mieke Denuwelaere and Piet Bracke, “The availability of a supportive caretaker is a source of comfort and security for the child and hence reduces anxiety. Insecure attachments contribute to the development of a negative internal working model of the self and enhance the development of depressive symptoms.”<sup>131</sup> The supportive caretakers they are discussing could potentially be members from local church congregations. People who are willing to engage the

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<sup>130</sup> National Foster Youth Initiative, “51 Useful Aging Out of Foster Care Statistics,” NFYI, last modified May 2017, accessed February 8, 2019, <https://www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/>

<sup>131</sup> Mieke Denuwelaere and Piet Bracke, “Support and Conflict in the Foster Family and Children's Well-Being: A Comparison Between Foster and Birth Children,” *Family Relations* 56, no. 1 (2007): 76-77.

hearts and minds of hurting kids with the love and patience necessary to serve them. It is not nearly as easy as adopting an infant from a mother who sacrificially and lovingly chooses adoption to abortion.

The acquisition of a contrite heart is what it means to serve the orphan with smart compassion. As Johnny Carr and Laura Captari state, “You will have to humble yourself to enter these children’s pain. This may be the hardest area for many of us. We are limited in how much of the hurt we can remove. Sometimes all we can do is hold our child tight, catch the tears as they fall, and cry out to God to heal.”<sup>132</sup> Many potential adopters and foster parents are frightened at the thought of a potentially damaged kid. They cannot imagine facing the physical, emotional, and physiological needs of a child in foster care. John McKnight and Peter Block address the consumer mentality when they write about the prospect of adoption from a capitalistic perspective. They call the lonely people of the community to come from behind their doors and fences to embrace one another in compassionate care. McKnight and Block believe, “The greatest tragedy of the consumer life is that its practitioners do not see that the local community is abundant with the relationships that are the principal resource for rescuing themselves and their families from the failure, dependency, and isolation that are the results of a life as a consumer and client.”<sup>133</sup> If we cannot convince the people of our local congregations to look deeper than infants and toddlers to serve all the children in foster care, the pain will continue.

According to Jennifer Toth, very few children in foster care have healthy families of their own and have a much higher risk of a future divorce. Many former children who

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<sup>132</sup> Johnny Carr and Laura Captari, *Orphan Justice: How to Care for Orphans Beyond Adopting* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publish Group, 2013), 194.

<sup>133</sup> Mc Knight and Block, loc. 445.

were in foster care eventually lose their children to the child welfare system.<sup>134</sup> The perpetuation of the problem is damaged hearts, depressed minds, and broken families. There is a remnant of church leaders and volunteers who are moved by the need and attending to the challenge. Excellerate is reaching the teenage orphan in Central Florida, and now other churches want to do the same.

### **Current Literature Summary**

Current literature research demonstrates three insights of note and importance to the project as a whole. The first is the perspective that the need of children in foster care is great and largely unmet, even though there are many programs and entities charged to aid this group of children. Many of the authors and research from current literature shared national statistics that reveal a disparity in foster care engagement from communities in the United States. The numbers of children in care without foster parents and eligible children who do not receive a forever home are unchanged over the past fifteen years and show a slight increase rather than decline.<sup>135</sup> Samuel Perry illuminated a fallacy permeating the Christian cultural scene regarding church involvement in the world of foster care and adoption. Research heavyweights like Barna Group have promoted evidence that claims Christians are twice as likely to adopt and more likely to foster children or consider fostering, but the national statistics fail to bear that claim as truth.<sup>136</sup> According to Perry, “There is no reliable evidence that evangelicals in particular, or Christians in general, are more likely to adopt or foster children than other Americans.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Jennifer Toth, *Orphans of the Living: Stories of America's Children in Foster Care* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 309-310.

<sup>135</sup> Children's Bureau.

<sup>136</sup> Perry, 35.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 36.

The second insight noted in the literature research was the widely pronounced statement that a community of care and influence surrounding the children is vital to encourage these children to thrive. Noel Castellanos and Bob Lupton established examples of community engagement in the form of a community-focused church congregation and a community center with groceries and a coffee lounge. Each subscribed to the philosophy of community engagement for the common good of all people, including those who are less fortunate. They state, “To have compassion toward humans is not to pity them for their misfortune or situation, but to acknowledge the connection we have to their pain. It means coming alongside them to temporarily ease their pain and suffering in a manner that does not take away their dignity, knowing that one day they may do the same for us.”<sup>138</sup> McKnight and Block speak toward a model of connectedness within a community that gives the children in community identity and value. They eschew an emote prevalent within foster care program critics that devalues children through monetization of their care. According to McKnight and Block, social connection is vital for these children, and, “localities with very little social connection consistently reflect negative lives for their children.”<sup>139</sup> They go on to state, “We see around us, at every level of income, the costs of trying to pay for someone else to rear our children. We see it in gangs, mall-centered children, and negative behavior that grows because the local community has not surrounded and guided the young.”<sup>140</sup>

The community solution is not solely Christian as it is wholistic and affirmative. Research revealed an increasing valuation for parties from all walks of life as important

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<sup>138</sup> Castellanos, 116-117.

<sup>139</sup> Mc Knight & Block, loc. 505.

<sup>140</sup> Mc Knight and Block, loc. 505.



to a full experience in community involvement. As Merold Westphal states, “If God can use Balaam’s ass to help him see the error of his ways (Num. 22) ... then surely God can use Christians from other traditions to help us better hear, understand, and embody Scripture—if we have the humility to let them, to listen and to learn from them.”<sup>141</sup> Community, within church walls and a connection with the members of the larger community, is vital.

The third insight is the promotion of the concept that today’s church leaders and members must respond to the need of vulnerable children in their communities. While motivations abound, many authors point to the blessings of God for obedience to love those who are less fortunate in the community. Robert Morris focuses on the spiritual growth of the individual who lives a generous life toward all of humanity, pointing out, “... selfishness is poison to the Christian. Nothing is more opposed to the Spirit of Jesus and the heart of God. And nothing propels a believer into maturity and effectiveness in God’s kingdom faster than learning to be unselfish.”<sup>142</sup> Darke and McFarland promote the congruence and congregation of home, church, and school for the betterment of all. Without this tri-unity, there is an inherent misstep in the application of compassion. Darke and McFarland posit, “Home, church, and school stand as the three greatest pillars of spiritual formation, and any excellence-driven orphan care community must work together with these pillars to help children establish their identity as children of God.”<sup>143</sup> Houlihan places a large portion of responsibility for the cause of children in foster care solely on the shoulders of Christians in churches, pointing out, “The Church can no

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<sup>141</sup> Merold Westphal, *Whose Community? Which Interpretation?: Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 139.

<sup>142</sup> Morris, 171.

<sup>143</sup> Darke and McFarland, loc. 3531.

longer neglect its place in the world and the power of the Kingdom to overthrow poverty, disease, war, and violence, as tragedies affect the marginalized people of society. It is God's will that these people have an opportunity to enjoy His blessings."<sup>144</sup> With increasing clarity, it is relevant and important to bring the church to task for a lack of action on behalf of the needs of children in foster care. Sentiment abounds within the communities of the United States; however, feeling is not caring for children. Feeling must not be the sum of the activity the churches of Jesus Christ are known for within the dynamic needs of the children in unfortunate circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

The research presented in this chapter has molded the perspective of this project by addressing biblical work that speaks to compassion for the orphan. There is a biblical mandate for the care of fatherless children. God, as a compassionate caregiver, has actively demonstrated loving activity toward orphaned children the Church must emulate. Scripture defines and illustrates the widow, orphan, and alien as persons in need who are to be cared for by the people of God. There is little distinction between the widow and orphan, they are simply people of need, and subsequently must be served. The alien is a sojourner who lives among a new community group of God's people and must be included in community care as their needs dictate. Compassion for these people groups is addressed in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament prophets wrote about the structure of financial provision within the worship at the temple. The giving allowed for the sums of money collected for tithe to be designated at strategic times for the benefit of the widow, orphan, and alien. Jesus demonstrates a new spiritual Kingdom and family

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<sup>144</sup> Houlihan, 33.

in the New Testament, leading to the formation of a modern church that held possessions in common for the betterment of the community and fulfilled the needs of the less fortunate.

Current literature speaks to the basis of compassionate care for orphans with some disagreements regarding the theology behind the human experience. While few, if any theologians disagree with the prevailing considerations of Paul's discussion of adoption into the family of God in Romans, some take exception to the extension of vertical adoption principles to horizontal human adoption and compassionate care. Proponents of adoption as part of the salvation metaphor would argue the mandate from scripture is such that we as believers in Christ have been adopted, and thus we should also bring people to Christ, including adopting to make disciples of Christ. Others would assert including human adoption into an earthly family would lean toward humanity claiming a deified status, leading to abuses of status and government.

The power of the Holy Spirit is at work in the believer to draw each out of selfish individual expression and to a place of community care. Blessings are the result of the Holy Spirit's influence and the subsequent obedience of the follower of God. Curses and judgment are pronounced against those who neglect to take up the cause and those who abuse the less fortunate. The community in Christ is but one facet of the 360 degrees of care necessary to serve the orphan. Churches must be engaged in culture within the community and not retreat to their various subcultures while throwing stones at the seeming failed attempts by community organizers to serve the needs of children in foster care. Through the power of the Holy Spirit of God, the forgotten orphan is placed at the forefront of Church vision. The blessings and curses evidenced within the writing of

various scholars and biblical authors cause one to wonder if the current status of individual churches might reside in God's judgment because of a lack of compassionate care.

The identification of the forgotten orphan brought new clarity to the work of this project, as the teenage foster child and their need was discussed. The needs of these youth and the pain they have experienced places them in a precarious position and perpetuates the cycle, bringing pain to future generations if they are left to fend for themselves. The pain of the child in foster care is multi-faceted. Complex-trauma impacts brain function of vulnerable children as well as mental/emotional development, leaving these children demonstratively impeded. Living in a continual adrenalin boosted state negatively affects the ability of youth in Foster care to process small conflicts as such, enflaming their emotional state as young adults. As these young people come of age in foster care, the church can extend a hand within the community to make an impact in their lives. According to Michael Howell-Moroney, "As intergovernmental human service delivery systems continue to expand their reliance on secular and faith-based non-governmental actors, faith-based institutions will also continue to grow in importance as key components of study for public administration."<sup>145</sup> This impact will not only assist the many physical and emotional needs, but also the spiritual condition of each child, since salvation may not be the goal of the states served but it is the goal of the church.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Michael Howell-Moroney, "Faith-Based Partnerships and Foster Parent Satisfaction," *Journal of Health & Human Services Administration* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 247.

<sup>146</sup> Michael Howell-Moroney, "Fostering Capacity: The Role of Faith-Based Congregations in the Child Welfare System in the United States," *International Journal of Public Administration* 32, no. 1 (January 13, 2009): 33.

The question remains: What should a church do to serve the need of foster teens in the community? The answer is care. Care for the community, care for the church, care for the children who are in foster care. Mark De Ymaz challenges the church to reach out as if all the issues of culture and the ills of a sinful society rested upon them, “a church that seeks to be the community remains daily in touch with the needs of the community and the problems of its people, and sees them as her own.”<sup>147</sup> The project research included in the following chapter will study two churches’ response to the need of foster teens in the community. The leadership and volunteers of Praise Assembly of God in Beaufort, South Carolina and Real Life Church in Fort Mill, South Carolina have decided to take on the need of foster teens and serve them with compassion. In the next chapter, the project will study the manner in which these programs were launched, and the training implemented. Through careful analysis the induction of these programs will be duplicated elsewhere.

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<sup>147</sup> Mark DeYmaz, *Disruption: Repurposing the Church to Redeem the Community* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2017), 63.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE PROJECT NARRATIVE & FIELD WORK

#### **Introduction**

Extending compassionate service to the community is a historic precept emphasized over centuries, yet many in the local church context lack the impetus exhibited by modern social organizations within local government. It appears the mantle of leadership in the area of compassion has been surrendered to secular and government organizations. The value and goals of secular culture, and the work these organizations undertake, are not wrong. Culture can be transformed for the sake of service to the kingdom of God.

Compassionate service to the needs within the community need not rest solely at the feet of the Church. However, the Church must address the clear directives within Scripture to account for the state of the orphan and other members of society who are in need. Malachi speaks to the importance of considering the need of orphans as a litmus test of one's status in God's judgement (Mal. 3:1-5). A directive to care for the orphan, widow, and the sojourner exists within the writings many ministers utilize as a standard for a biblical position for tithe and offering in the local church. Malachi 3:5 tells of the coming Messiah who will judge all and administer justice: "'So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,' says the Lord Almighty.'" The church must take these needs into account and remember the words of

the Lord. The praxis of the local church must align with the inspired words of God and fulfill the desires and commands to both advocate and care for these three groups.

The intent from the inception of this study has been to ascertain the motivations for and hinderances to the establishment of effective compassionate care for the teenagers in foster care within the praxis of the local church. The literary and biblical research uncovered the commands, values, principles, implementation, and judgement that comes from service to the needs of this group. As these ideals are integrated into the instruction of church leadership and the volunteer base within a local congregation, a manner of progression toward action can be established. Beth Grant calls the church to hear the cries of the less fortunate when she declares, “Jesus-like compassion is not anemic, pale, and nonconfrontational. It’s bold, necessarily courageous, and disruptively life-changing.”<sup>1</sup> With implementation of biblical and literary concepts, the local church will ascend to the compassionate care God desires His Church to give the community.

The research presented in this project provides a thorough analysis of the indicators that exist for local church leadership in the establishment of effective compassion to teenage foster children. A qualitative analysis found in this chapter analyzed the efforts of two churches in the process of launching programs of compassionate care toward teens who are aging out of the foster care system. As a result of the biblical and literary research and this analysis, a seminar was formulated to speak to church leadership within the United States about establishing compassion ministry to the teenage orphans in their community.

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<sup>1</sup> Beth Grant, *Courageous Compassion: Confronting Social Injustice God's Way* (Springfield, MO: My Healthy Church, 2014), 274.

### **Project Focus**

For over eight years, compassion ministry has been an integral and part of the Excelerate program at Calvary Christian Center in Ormond Beach, Florida. Evangelistic itineration has provided the opportunity to share this researcher's convictions and experiences with church leaders internationally. These interactions with church leaders have revealed compassion efforts that were ill-conceived as well as those that were successful in accomplishing their mission. While sharing the impact of the local praxis of Excelerate, many churches have expressed interest in establishing their own viable compassionate program for orphans and teens in the foster system.

Few churches extended themselves beyond interest to actively engaging the community for the sake of children. An interest in what motivates and discourages these churches from advancing to action led to further research into the establishment of compassion within the local church and prompted the development of this project. The research for this project discovered best practices for assisting local churches in the establishment of compassion to the orphans in their community.

This research project was conceived with the notion of informing the leadership of the local churches regarding the mandates and practices of establishing compassion to the children in foster care in their communities. However, it became readily apparent additional information was needed to further understand the motivations and discouragement to the process. Without an adequate evaluation of the influences within the process, there would not be an effective means of communicating compassionate activity. By implementing the qualitative research method, compiled data allowed for the construct of a seminar that speaks to the issues within the establishment of compassionate



care from the perspective of the local pastor, volunteer leadership, and volunteers within the structure of the proposed program. The research engaged two independent churches in South Carolina who launched their respective programs within the last year. These two locations have unique needs and influences. Such diversity adds value to the effort to educate future interested leadership. This resource will speak volumes to leadership on multiple levels, allowing for a positive experience developing and implementing a compassionate program in the local church praxis.

### **Research Method**

This project utilized qualitative research. Qualitative research allowed for the engagement of the subjects with an eye toward the aggregation of information in an analytical framework, informing the resulting seminar to assist church leaders in establishing effective compassion organizations to orphans in their communities.<sup>2</sup> Utilizing the qualitative method also allowed for an approach with the subjects of the project through a subjective process of interviews and surveys to better ascertain the emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects of the local program launch effectiveness. If the statistics of a quantitative analysis point to the effectiveness of method alone, the personal impact of the activity surrounding the launch of the Excellerate program could be ignored.

Swinton and Mowat speak about the social impacts of qualitative research and the value of addressing issues quantitative study does not uncover. They state:

Qualitative research is a process of careful, rigorous enquiry into aspects of the social world. It produces formal statements or conceptual frameworks that provide new ways of understanding the world, and

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 209.

therefore comprises knowledge that is practically useful for those who work with issues around learning and adjustment to the pressures and demands of the social world.<sup>3</sup>

For this research the qualitative method was used to gather data regarding the positive and negative influences each new Excellerate program faces. Through the analysis of the data from this qualitative study, a path forward was discovered through a thorough study of the data to develop a teaching seminar speaking to a best practice for the launch of effective compassion organizations to the orphan in the local church community.

The surveys and interviews created for this project probed the experiences of the leaders directly responsible for the emerging program. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln allude to the impact of the knowledge within the persons being interviewed as critical to effective study. Listening to the interview and analyzing data from its natural state is vital to proper qualitative method research. According to Denzin and Lincoln, “Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.”<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this project, the surveys were administered to the local church pastors and the volunteer leadership of the respective Excellerate programs.

The pastors and volunteer leaders were also interviewed to ascertain how the interactions between the pastor, leaders, volunteers, and community relate to the effective establishment of the Excellerate compassion ministry in their praxis. The leaders were

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<sup>3</sup> Swinton and Mowat, loc. 636.

<sup>4</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Third ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005), 3-4.

asked to speak from their experience of launching their compassion program regarding their motivating factors and discouraging factors. The factors surrounding the launch of these two independent programs informed conclusions regarding what is needed to inspire and prepare future compassionate program leadership. Through these qualitative engagements, the researcher discovered the influences unique to the two locations, as well as those that are more universal, spanning both location and demographics. Because of the schedule of the implementation of the project, as well as the nature of qualitative research, respondent validation was able to be engaged, “whereby a researcher takes conclusions back to the participants in the study and asks quite simply, do you agree with my conclusions? Do they make sense based on your own experiences?”<sup>5</sup> Respondent validation ensures the project results are valid and removes doubt regarding the conclusions drawn in a description of the project research.

The two churches selected for this study endeavored to launch a similar program to the program successfully launched at Calvary Christian Center. The program each church provides serves the social, spiritual, and physical needs of the unadopted teens in the foster care system. Both churches have chosen to perform the activity of the program because they wanted to emulate the model established in the original program. The sampling of these two churches allowed the researcher to receive data as it relates specifically to the needs of each program launch with limited disparity between the activity of each location in praxis.

## **Research Development**

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<sup>5</sup> Paul D. Leedy and Jeanine Ellis Ormond, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (University of Northern Colorado. Pearson Education, 2016), 88.

## Overview

The research for this project included three surveys. The first survey was distributed to the church leaders and the local Excelerate volunteer leaders most responsible for program launch and facilitation of the program, respectively. The purpose of this survey was to uncover the motivations and purposes behind the launch of the Excelerate program in each church praxis. The questions allowed the leaders to speak toward their understanding of biblical and social motivating factors regarding the institution of a compassion program toward orphans. The second survey administered to the same church leaders and the local church Excelerate volunteer leaders later in the research timeline was to ascertain the continued influences each leader was experiencing. The analysis of the responses to the second survey reinforced the continued need for training and/or motivation. The third survey was administered to the volunteers within the local church Excelerate program. This survey gathered data regarding the perceived training and preparation needs of the volunteer base. The volunteer survey allowed for a larger data sampling for aggregation within the framework of the seminar to assist leaders in churches while they prepare themselves and others for the task of launching effective compassion to foster children in their community. Sensing discusses establishing effective qualitative interview questions, saying, “Most often, open-ended and informal questions are used in qualitative interviews and questionnaires.”<sup>6</sup> He goes on to describe fourteen types of questions for qualitative research: Grand Tour, Guided Tour, Descriptive, Task, Hypothetical, Quotation, Ideal Position, Knowledge, Interpretive, Behavior, Opinion, Feeling, Sensory, and Background or Demographic.<sup>7</sup> These question

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<sup>6</sup> Sensing, 86.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 86-88.

types served as a model for the interviews and surveys conducted in the course of this research. The data gathered from the surveys was analyzed to determine possible trends and areas of need within the preparation and facilitation of future programs.

### Participating Churches

The two churches within this project were introduced to the Excellerate program through the efforts of the researcher during evangelistic meetings held with the respective congregations. After hearing of the program, each congregation embraced the concepts and endeavored to launch a similar effort in their praxis.

The first church surveyed was Praise Assembly, located in Beaufort, South Carolina. Jamie and Kim Gardner have been lead pastors at Praise for 14 years. When the Gardner's began serving Praise Assembly, church attendance was a very homogenous, Caucasian congregation of 300 persons per weekend. Today, the church serves a 2,000-person multicultural and multiracial congregation. The Gardner's lead a staff of three additional pastors, four department directors, and three church ministry team leaders. They lead as a couple, so both are included in the surveys and interviews. The volunteer leaders for the Excellerate program at Praise Assembly are Mike and Tammy Johnson. The Johnsons have attended Praise Assembly for eight years. They have served in various volunteer functions over the years, but this program is now their sole ministry focus. The Johnsons lead the Excellerate program together and each was surveyed independently.

The second church surveyed was Real Life Church, located in the Charlotte North Carolina suburb of Fort Mill, South Carolina. Lead pastors Ed and Kristy Frost have led Real Life for four years. When the Frosts assumed leadership of Real Life, church attendance was declining with a congregation of thirty-five people with an average age of

seventy. The church now serves nearly 100 attendees with a healthier diversity of age and ethnicity. Real Life features a vibrant and outreach-focused congregation in one of the fastest growing communities in America. The Frosts lead a staff of two additional pastors, five department directors, and two church ministry team leaders. The Frosts lead as a couple, and both are included in the surveys and interviews. The volunteer leader for the Excellerate program at Real Life Church is Missy Wright. Missy has been attending Real Life Church for two years and serving as Excellerate director is her sole ministry focus.

### Surveys and Interviews

Three surveys were created for the research project. The first two were utilized for the lead pastors and volunteer directors of the Excellerate programs. The third survey was sent to the volunteer leaders for each congregations' Excellerate program. The complete list of survey questions as well as the informed consent statement were submitted and approved by the IRB before proceeding. Before the surveys were administered, each participant completed an informed consent form (appendix A). A copy of each survey is located in the appendices (see appendices B and C). In order to effectively establish a seminar of best practices, the aggregation of data in survey form was accompanied by interviews of the lead pastors and volunteer Excellerate leadership. Various moments of small talk where the interviewer allowed the interviewee to speak in general about the experience of running the program were also considered in the results. These unscripted moments had the potential to impact the research depending on the dispensation of the leader. The interviewer attempted to remain balanced in the process of inquiry to avoid skewing the questions for positive responses. The interviews were recorded and

transcribed for inclusion in the dissertation project research appendices. The answers to interview questions, survey data, and the biblical and literature research, were then used to develop a seminar to assist church leaders and volunteer leaders in the establishing of effective compassion to foster children.

### **The Seminar**

The final stage of the project was the creation of a seminar that will be presented to various levels of church leadership to assist them in the launching of effective compassionate ministry to orphans in their communities. The flagship Excellerate program established by the researcher serves as a physical example of a sustained effort into service toward the foster teens in Volusia county, Florida. The seminar will serve as a tool for inspiration, theological reflection, and practical application of the steps needed for a church leader to establish a compassion program like Excellerate in their community. The seminar will be broken into two forty-five-minute sessions, to avoid mental oversaturation during a first glance at a new concept. The leader will also be equipped with written resources that will inform the attendee with statistical analysis and practical action steps to begin the journey of launching an Excellerate compassion program. These resources will be made available to all leaders through dissemination portals on the Excellerate Youth website.<sup>8</sup> Leaders will be able to log on to the portal to access this tool and download the data for their private use at any time.

### **Execution of the Project**

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<sup>8</sup> See [excellerateyouth.org](http://excellerateyouth.org) for more information about the program.

The surveys were administered to each respondent using SurveyMonkey. A reminder email was sent to each recipient four days after the initial contact was made. Emails thanking the participants were sent after the fulfillment of each survey was acquired. The entirety of the list of questions was not asked at each of the three survey periods. Table 3.1 shows the questions asked at each stage of the program, as the leader became more acquainted with the program and process.

Table 3.1: Questions asked during each stage of research.

Research Stage	Questions Asked
Survey One	1-6, 11, 14, 20
Survey Two	4-9, 11
Interview	All Questions

After the surveys of the church/program leadership were received and analyzed, interviews are scheduled to gain additional information during an informal narrative that would support/deny the assumptions and direction of the proposed seminar. The list of questions asked in the interviews is available in appendix A. The list of survey questions for the volunteers within the two local Excellerate programs is available in appendix B. Data from the surveys, along with the answers from the interviews were reviewed for alignment/discrepancies with each other, assumptions within the researcher's perspective regarding the training of the leader, and the biblical and literary research study.

### Survey Results

The survey results were key to the crafting of the seminar, as that data was most concrete and showed what is valued and desired in a practical rather than a theoretical manner. The results from the surveys were divided into subgroups for analysis (pastors, volunteer leaders, and volunteer workers). The researcher compared their responses through cross-



tabulation and filtering the data, then compared data to interview correspondence to discover important values within each group. In order to reach a triangulation of research, the data was processed with three different people groups speaking to the establishing of an Excellerate program from their unique perspectives.<sup>9</sup> The leadership data was then compared to the responses from the volunteers to discover alignment and disconnected philosophies/practices that should be addressed in the seminar.

### **Seminar Development**

The development of the seminar notes, the conclusive product of this project, were based equally on the data collected from surveys, interviews, biblical, and current literature reviews. The author looked for themes within the project research: best practices consistent throughout the research, the values of the pastors and volunteer leaders within their praxis, and the needs expressed by the volunteers. These themes weighed heavily over the content of the seminar.

### **Results of the Research**

All the pastors and volunteer leaders participated in the project. Seven volunteers participated from Praise Assembly, however there were no volunteers at the time of the writing of this report from Real Life Church. The program from Fort Mill had not yet begun their classes with students, as they had re-established their launch date for the Fall of 2020. The goal was to have at least seven volunteer respondents to contrast the seven leadership respondents and that goal was achieved. With an appropriate volume of respondents, the seminar was concretely influenced by the project interviews and

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<sup>9</sup> Sensing, 72.

surveys, although the desire was to have respondents from both programs aid in this project.<sup>10</sup>

### Pastor Survey

Four pastors completed the pastor surveys. Each one was assigned a number upon completion of the survey's for identification purposes (designated P1, P2, P3, and P4). There was 100 percent participation in this group, which was to be expected in this small sample survey. Each pastor answered sixteen questions. Each question specifically targeted the leader's motivations and preparation to establish the Excellerate orphan teen outreach program. A brief overview of the respondent's answers will be provided here, the researcher will be focusing on responses most relevant to the current research.

#### *Survey One*

The first survey contained nine questions for the pastors. The first question asked was, "What is the biblical mandate behind the activity of orphan care?" The answers from the pastors were similar, with all of them pointing to the scripture in the book of James that speaks of pure religion being orphan and widow care. Their responses alluded to a grasp of the valuation placed upon the widow and orphan in the scriptures. A valuable part of the future seminar will be establishing the theological/biblical approach to help the listener gather a mandate.

The second and third questions focused on preparation: "How have you been prepared by God for this assignment?" and "How have you been prepared by your education for this assignment?" These questions helped establish a baseline of personal

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<sup>10</sup> Sensing, 83.

and professional preparation leading into establishing the Excellerate program. P1 noted the experience ministering with young people and the power of the Holy Spirit as impactful in preparation. This statement aligns well with the theological insights gleaned in chapter two. P2 sensed a divine calling to reach students in foster care but had little to no training in the area of care. This response and the results of the rest of the research make it apparent training is of vital importance and is sorely lacking for these leaders who want to make an impact in the lives of children who are orphans. P3 felt a divine mandate through prayer. This respondent believed they were waiting on the right opportunity to serve the need in the community. Through the training and experience gathered through serving in foster care and adopting two children, P3 was prepared to do community orphan care.

The fourth question began an inquest into the value of previous preparation: “How effective has the training you have received from Excellerate leadership been for your preparation for this assignment?” All respondents spoke favorably of the training received. Because the training received prior to the establishment of this project were informal sessions of questions and answers, respondents appreciated the stories from the experience of the founding flagship program as motivation and preparation for the many facets of orphan outreach. The inclusion of these stories will assist seminar effectiveness.

Questions five and six are similar requests with unique perspectives. Five asks, “What questions remain in your preparation for this assignment?” to ascertain the felt need of the individual in preparation. Question six asks about the need of program training in regard to future presentations. One pastor questioned if the leadership team was fully prepared to reach the emotional and spiritual needs of the orphaned children. P2

desired part of training to include creative ways of fundraising for the program. P3 spoke of concerns regarding church partnership with state agencies and whether they would align or struggle against one another. When responding to question six, only one respondent had a suggestion: to include a second phase of training to further connect students to the local church. While this was not the aim of the question originally, it was noted for value. The other two pastors felt the program training they received needed no additions.

Question seven probed the motivations behind the pastor's involvement in orphan care. P1 stated their motivation was the progression of attention toward the need of orphans in a "movement" and the experiences of the respondent with local teens. P2 simply said "God," while P3 told of the journey of adoption and the desire for orphan outreach marking the ministries of their leadership in the past. Question eight asked how many volunteers were present in the Excellerate program to date, the program in Beaufort had eighteen, and the program in Fort Mill had six. Question nine asked, "How would the pastor judge success or failure of the program?" P1 felt it was too early to establish a measure to make a success or failure determination, while P2 and P3 both stated successes would be indicated by a connection to the church for both the growth of the students and growth in the lives of the people in the congregation.

### *Survey Two*

Several weeks passed between survey one and survey two. Some questions from survey one are repeated to gather more data, since the program leadership was either closer to their official launch or had already launched their Excellerate programs. The second survey focused on the pastor's replies to questions ten through sixteen. The first question

on this second survey, question ten, asked, “How effective has the training you have received from Excellerate leadership been for your preparation for this assignment?” All three pastors believed the training was effective through all the variables of location and governmental partnerships.

Questions eleven through thirteen asked, “What questions remain in your preparation for this assignment?”, “What would you like to add to the Excellerate training plan?”, and “What would you like to omit from the Excellerate training program?” Again, the theme of governmental partnerships emerged. Another suggestion was the inclusion of branding materials/t-shirts to distinguish those who had completed their training. None of the respondents wanted a removal of any part of the training they received.

Question fourteen began a shift in the survey from questions about the respective programs in the leaders’ care to helping other churches establish their own compassion outreach to orphans. “What should other church leaders know about serving foster kids?” P3 indicated the teaching of the mandate from Scripture, the presence of Christ in the church being needed in the lives of children, and the church becoming a family to those without families. P2 felt church leaders needed to know how to associate with the children in a relevant manner and allow the Holy Spirit to bring transformation to them.

Question fifteen asked if the pastors knew of any church leaders serving orphans in their local communities. All three pastors mention they are aware of two or three. Question sixteen probed the influences that caused the pastors to involve themselves in orphan care. All pastors maintained the answers given in the first survey. Holy Spirit

inspiration, biblical mandate, and a “calling to care.” The pastors’ responses to these surveys were invaluable in the development of the seminar.

### Volunteer Leader Survey

Three leaders completed the leader surveys. Each one was assigned a number upon completion of the surveys for identification purposes. (L1, L2, and L3) There was 100 percent participation in this group. Each leader answered sixteen questions. Each question targeted the volunteer leader’s motivations and preparation to assist the launch of the Excellerate teenage child foster care outreach program at their church. A brief overview of the answers will be provided here, with a more concise synopsis within chapter four. The focus is on responses most relevant to the current research in this section.

#### *Survey One*

As with the pastors, nine questions were asked on the first survey. Question one asked, “What is the biblical mandate behind the activity of orphan care?” Each of the respondents quoted a variation of the scriptural teaching from James 1:27. It was apparent each of the leaders are well-aware of the biblical precedent of orphan care. Questions two and three asked, “How have you been prepared by God for this assignment?” and “How have you been prepared by your education for this assignment?” Two of the three respondents had experience working with foster children in the past. L2 shared about a specific experience of teaching Sunday school to middle school children as experience with young people for two years.

Question four probed the influence of the leadership training the leaders received, asking “How effective has the training you have received from Excellerate leadership

been for your preparation for this assignment?” Each respondent felt confident in the leadership training they received. L2 stated their comfort with the concept of having access to the founder and co-founder of the program as a benefit for any future training needs.

Questions five and six were partner questions in the framework of this project. The questions ask if the leader had a question that was not answered prior, and what might be needed for future/present training. “What questions remain in your preparation for this assignment?” and “What would you like to add to the Excellerate training plan?” L1 had nothing to add for question five, but for question six asked that the Excellerate lesson plans for each class be reviewed individually for the leaders and volunteers. L2 stated the need for training in the arena of fundraising, grant writing, and connecting with the Department of Social Services for the state of South Carolina. They were having problems getting responses from the state agency. L2 also requested step-by-step training on teaching the weekly class curriculum. While the training in the curriculum would not be a specific part of a seminar that gains interest toward the launch of new programs, it will be implemented in future endeavors.

Question seven asked, “What influenced you to get involved in orphan care?” All volunteer leaders felt a motivating call by God through their personal experiences. L3 worked in group homes within the foster care system of the community. L2 shared how the experience of teaching junior high school students awakened them to the need of kids in the community. L2 also visited the flagship program in Daytona Beach and communicated with students who attended that program. L2 writes, “Then we started reading and looking at the National numbers for kids aging out. How can we as children

of God sit back and do nothing?” It appears the influence to serve the orphan is part of the journey of ministry which each of these volunteers is traveling.

The volunteer leaders’ answers to question eight were nearly identical to the pastors. Question nine asked, “How would you judge success and failure as the leader of this organization?” L1 and L3 stated it was too early to tell, while L2 believed students developing a relationship with God and personal achievement would be a success. L2 also stated a failure would be for leaders to fail to “... practice what we preach and let God shine through us.”

### *Survey Two*

As with the pastors, several weeks transpired between the first and second surveys to the volunteer leaders. Each survey had unique and similar questions. The researcher was looking for changes in opinion or unique perspectives that came from progress toward the goal of Excellerate program launch or program implementation. The first question on the second survey, question ten, asked, “How effective has the training you have received from Excellerate leadership been for your preparation for this assignment?” While all respondents gave positive remarks, L1 stated, “... still some questions came up once we started organizing the program.” The questions to which L1 alludes were discovered in the answers to question eleven: “What questions remain in your preparation for this assignment?” L1 shared the need for instruction on non-profit business: filing, taxes, bookkeeping, and paperwork. L2 lamented the lack of local funding and desired training on fundraising for the program. These two areas of training will be vital for future leaders as these are areas of discouragement for the volunteer leaders.



Question twelve asked if the leaders would like to add something to the Excellerate training materials. The only critical response came from L1, who requested training to form a non-profit, class sign-in form templates, fundraising training, and a list of dos and don'ts for leaders/volunteers dealing with foster teens. L2 offered the suggestion to continue telling leaders who start an outreach to foster teens to "start small" as it was "the best advice so far" in launching their program effectively.

Question fourteen asks the volunteer leader, "What should other church leaders know about serving foster kids?" Each leader had a unique perspective regarding this question. L1 stated, "this is about loving people" and "remember what you signed up for (when you sign up as a volunteer) because the kids are counting on them." The importance of commitment loomed large over this for L1 as well as L3, who shares the "importance and consistency and being dependable" as a virtue that church leaders need to possess when serving foster teens. L2 was quick to point out the inclusion of the foster teens served in the program will become like family to future leaders and making room emotionally and physically for these new family members is a priority.

L1 and L3 had no knowledge of other churches and leaders reaching foster children in their respective community while responding to question fifteen. L2 definitively stated "zero" regarding church leaders in her purview who were actively serving the foster children in the community. Question sixteen asked, "What influenced you to get involved in orphan care?" L1 felt the orphan is a group of people overlooked by some and ignored by others. L2 said, "we love helping others," and shared the love and attention afforded the students under their leadership was already producing results. L3 shared their experience of serving children in foster care and adoptive situations. L3

states, “I have worked with the system and see the need.” Those who become geographically closer to the children of their community can visualize the struggles that are inherent in their system of care. Pressing the proverbial nose of leadership to the windowpane of orphan need is an important element to the seminar construction.

### Volunteer Survey

Twenty-two volunteers completed the volunteer survey. Each one was assigned a number upon completion of the survey for identification purposes (V1, V1, V3, etc.). To maintain respondent privacy and to acquire transparency from the respondents, this survey was administered with anonymous participation. Since one of the Excellerate programs was still proceeding toward a pending launch date, responses were gathered from the volunteers of the Excellerate location at Ormond Beach to bolster the respondent numbers and gain additional data for the research assignment. Without the data provided by the Calvary Christian Center location, the respondent count would have been only five respondents. A more robust reporting was gained through the inclusion of additional volunteer opinions.

For the volunteer survey, questions one through three asked personal questions about the volunteer leaders to gain a baseline of information about volunteer likes and dislikes while serving the program, as well as the duration of their spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study. All questions from this survey are located in the appendices (appendix E). The author looked for a correlation between the amount of time each respondent stated was spent in spiritual disciplines and the responses to favorite and least favorite aspects of serving the program.

Question four required the respondents to answer with their level of agreement regarding the statement, “I feel most effective in my role as volunteer in Excellerate.” A majority of the respondents felt effective in their role, with seventeen out of twenty-two strongly agreeing and eight agreeing with the statement.

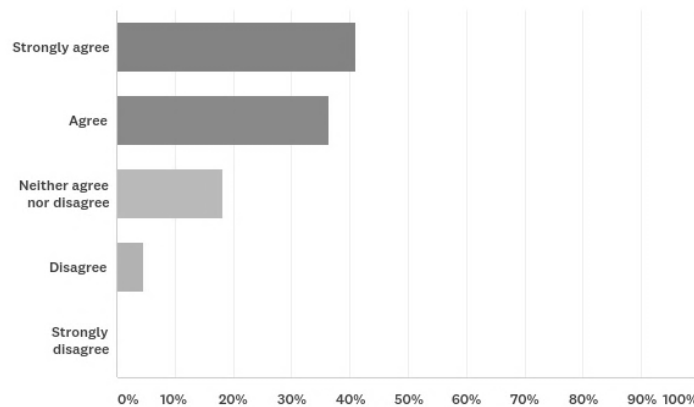


Figure 3.1: Volunteer responses to question four.

With such a positive response regarding effectiveness, the following five questions probed the difficulties each volunteer felt they were experiencing while serving the program. The ideas presented should provide valuable content for the teaching seminar regarding volunteer development.

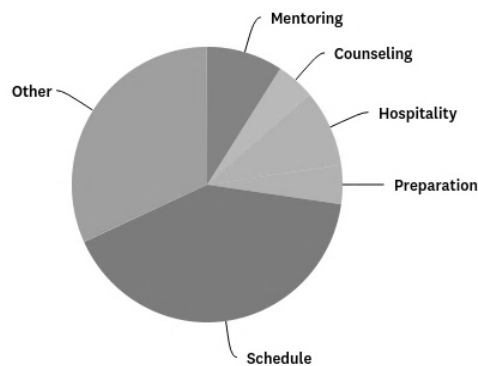


Figure 3.2: Difficulties faced by volunteers.

It was surprising to discover the volunteers stated the most difficult part of their job was schedule and other since classroom preparation usually required the most amount of time and hospitality required menial labor. Nine of the twenty-two volunteers stated scheduling as the most difficult part of volunteering in the program. Since seven of twenty-two stated other as the most difficult part of volunteering, the next question became vital. Question six asked the respondents to describe the difficulty they were experiencing. A majority of those who marked other wrote of conflicts among students and volunteers or volunteers with other volunteers. Class disruptions by eager volunteers was also stated. One respondent discussed the need for more training to counsel foster teens regarding the difficulties they face, stating, “Many students go through really hard stuff and I wish I was trained to help them navigate through those hard times!” (V13).

Since additional volunteers were added to the list of respondents for the volunteer survey, there was a concern the more mature and seasoned volunteers from the founding program would affect the research. The veteran volunteers have received much more training than those who just began serving the program. However, question seven reveals nine of the twenty-two respondents have been volunteers for less than one year with another two volunteers serving between one and two years in the program. With 50 percent of the volunteers having less than 2 years volunteering within the program, more than an adequate sampling of experience and maturity was included in the research study.

Questions eight and nine asked, “Do you feel equipped for the task of leading students in Excelerate?” and “Do you feel spiritually equipped for the task of leading students in Excelerate?” A majority of the volunteers express “a lot” and “a great deal” of equipping was established with fifteen of twenty-two and eighteen of twenty-two

responding as such, respectively. It is of note that the average length of time each respondent shared as attending their host church was four years or more. Questions ten and eleven will be included in chapter four as the implementation of the data is produced into a seminar.

### Pastor Interview

As a follow up to the surveys, each of the pastors were interviewed by the researcher. The interviews were audio recorded and transcripts are available in the appendices (appendices G and H). The interviews were informal conversations, allowing the respondents to engage fully with open-ended answers to questions previously answered in written form. The goal was to hear the honest opinions and observations of the pastors. The author excluded any answers from the interviews that mirrored the answers from the online survey and highlighted statements that informed research with new data to ensure the seminar utilized the responses. Questions two, three, four, ten, and sixteen provided responses worth noting.

Question two asked the pastors, “How have you been prepared by God for this assignment?” P3 was quick to point out the adoption of their children and how the adoption prepared the couple to serve more children in the foster care system. While P1 and P2 have not adopted children, they express spiritual experiences leading teens as a portion of their preparation. They felt the Lord prepared them to lead people to reach more people through compassionate efforts by opening their eyes to the needs of the community. With their eyes opened to the needs surrounding them, P1 and P2 believe God awakened the people of their church to be active in making a difference.

Question three asked, “How has your education helped prepare you for the task of leading a program to reach children in foster care?” P1 and P2 both expressed appreciation for education. P1 felt their Bible college education helped expand their vision as a leader to experience a larger world around them. P2 shared how working as a teacher in public schools required an education that assisted the transition into youth ministry and then into ministering to children in foster care.

Question four asked, “How effective was the training you have received from Excellerate leadership been for your preparation for this assignment?” P3 and P4 spoke of the training in a positive manner, focusing their praise on the opportunity for the local volunteer leader to visit the founding program location in Ormond Beach. According to P1, “But I really was happy that [volunteer director] was able to go there because it was the best thing for her. Anyone who does this in the future, they should send at least one or two people to be able to walk (experience) it, not just read about it and hear about it.” P1 and P2 expressed the value of visiting the campus of the first Excellerate program as beneficial to future programs. P2 expressed interest in “shadowing the Excellerate team” to witness the spirit of the activities first-hand.

Question ten asked, “Why do others serve/not serve Foster Care/Orphans in their community?” P3 shared the perspective of a pastor contemplating launching an effort into compassion for foster children, and said, “There’s a fear that it will become too much of a burden on the church. Then that would be too hard. Plus, pastors don’t want to come across as a failure. So you don’t want to take on a program that, if it doesn’t work, it’s going to look like a failure.” P3 felt many leaders feel a heavy burden rests on their shoulders when a new program/outreach is initiated. The accumulation and training of

volunteers are major considerations in P4's estimation. P1 also states fear of failure as a major contributor to a lack of action on behalf of church leadership when it comes to serving children in foster care. As P1 stated, "They're consumed with keeping people satisfied, and I think that hinders folks."

Question sixteen asked, "Have you experienced growth in the lives of your volunteers through serving this program?" All pastors expressed a positive result within the leadership and spiritual growth in the lives of the volunteers and volunteer leaders of their respective programs. P1 shared how the difficulties of leading caused the volunteer leader to "lean-in" to the pastor's leadership and counsel. P3 discussed the obstacles that came the way of the volunteer leader and how this person had to work harder than ever to overcome. All four felt positive about the changes in the lives of the leaders and volunteers in their programs.

The final question of the P3 and P4 interview session was, "If you could start over, would you still launch this program?" P3 talked about the timing of the program launch being critical, and the feeling the program was launched at the right time. P4 surprised the researcher when responding to the question. P4 stated:

Yes, we would launch the program, because it's biblical. That's the bottom line. We don't say should we tithe or not. It's biblical, so we do. We don't say let's wait for the right timing to tithe. It's biblical, so we do it. I don't think there's a question of would we do it again. If the Bible tells us to do this, then yes, we'll do it. It may not always seem like it's the right time, but it always is if you're doing what God has told you to do.

P1 and P2 were asked a separate final question, "How would you measure failure in regard to your program?" P1 believed failure would be the student quitting the program because it was not meeting their needs or the church quitting on the student

because they were not properly equipped to love and support them. The answers to these questions added depth and validity to the survey answers.

### Volunteer Leader Interview

Each of the three volunteer leaders were also interviewed. The interviews were informal conversations, allowing the respondents to communicate with open-ended questions that had previously been answered in written form. The goal was to discuss the observations of the volunteer leaders with the clarity of their voice. The author will exclude any answers from the interviews that mirror the answers from the online survey and will highlight statements that inform the research with new data.

When responding to question three, “How have you been prepared by your education for this assignment?” all three respondents felt education did little to prepare them for the complexities of their current assignment. L1 spoke of ministerial experience as being the most vital part of preparation rather than the education received becoming a nurse. Question four asked, “How effective was the training you have received from Excellerate leadership been for your preparation for this assignment?” L1 felt the part of training that made it most effective was hearing the heart of the leader who launched the program. L1 believed the heart of the leader was inspirational as well as informational to the process. L3 also requested an opportunity to visit the founding program to learn more through observing the original example of the foster care program.

The researcher was surprised to hear none of the leaders interviewed were aware of a similar program in their vicinity or statewide that specifically serves the needs of the unadopted teens in the foster care system. Since each volunteer leader has direct communication with state and local fostering agencies, the lack of known assets to the



orphaned teens in the church communities was disturbing and more training in seeking out those resources may be needed.

Question ten asked, “Why do others serve/not serve Foster Care/Orphans in their community?” L1 pointed to a culture within churches that eschews difficulty:

A lot of times churches have a very negative attitude toward these children and feel like they're trouble, they don't want to get involved with the trouble aspect because of stories they've heard. If the child has a history of violence or been in and out of jail or these kinds of things, they just don't want to touch that. They feel it would cause them trouble. Maybe, it would be more trouble than it's worth, so to speak. Some just might be purely unaware of what they could do to make a difference.

L3 speaks of the ignorance of need and a misconception of requisite qualifications:

I think more people are apt not to help thinking, ‘Oh gosh, my life isn't that great. I don't have anything to offer.’ Everyone has something to offer to these kids. I don't care what your walk of life is, how you grew up. It's amazing the people that have come out of the woodwork that we didn't even realize their background.

L2 added, “But I just don't think people realize the need. This group home was right down the street from us for years and we never reached out or did anything.” These are valuable insights and add to the research significantly.

Question thirteen asked, “What difficulties have arisen since you started the Foster Care ministry at your church?” All three respondents mentioned conflicts among volunteers within the program. L1 also shared the impact of negativity among the church members. “A lot of people, like I said earlier, are afraid of these kids and they are afraid of things that may come up. And I have an understanding what these kids... The kids have issues, they're not going to come to us without issues, they have to learn, they have to

grow, they need the social skills that we're going to be teaching them, they're children.”

When probing the statement further, L1 shared the implementation of the program has been well-received within the local congregation, however it is often the negative statements that are remembered most.

The final question of the interview sessions was the same. “How would you judge success and failure as the leader of this organization?” L2 believes the measure of success will come in the long term, as the children grow up and live according to the concepts and biblical principles taught. L1 felt failure would mean giving up on the cause and the kids. L3 stated success is seeing the young person moving toward a brighter future because of Jesus and their new church family.

This research reflects the concerns within the conscience of church leadership and volunteers. Not only did the respondents discuss the training principles they admired, they shared the emotions and motivations that propelled them into action regarding the need of children coming of age in the foster care system. Nearly all respondents shared moments of fear in their interviews. Creating a seminar that utilizes a biblical perspective as well as information to remove the fear of unknown obstacles from the process will be helpful. In order for churches to improve the lives of children in the foster care system, an insightful teaching regarding the broad scope of organization to serve children must be developed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PROJECT EVALUATED

#### **Introduction**

The final portion of this methodology is the evaluation of the project as a whole. This evaluation will inspire future research and projects that add to the Excellerate program and the knowledge base of other spiritual and educational entities. The research from this project has been used to create a two-part seminar that will inform, inspire, and instruct church and community leaders to practical activities that support and serve children in the foster care system. Since the primary goal is instruction for leaders to serve the social, educational, and spiritual needs of the teenagers in the foster care system, care was taken to provide detailed information from the researcher's praxis. If the people of God are the light the world must see, they must know of and how to illuminate the existence of the precious teens in the foster care system.

#### **Research Application**

The goal of this research project was the creation of a seminar to inform, inspire, and instruct church and community leaders to begin to serve children in foster care with "smart compassion."<sup>1</sup> The aforementioned compassion is one that does not seek to recreate what exists in the marketplace for the betterment of children. Instead, the purpose is to partner with those programs and services that already exist and innovate

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<sup>1</sup> Lupton.

where necessary. By informing the leadership of churches and communities, it is the researcher's subsequent goal to begin a conversation that will result in local church action on a national scale. By sharing the stories and insights gleaned through this research project, the leaders who attend the seminar may be instructed by colleagues, volunteers, current authors, specialists, theologians, and testimonies. With a battery of biblical teaching, professional insights, research data, and informed voices, community and church leaders may better visualize the needs of the children in foster care and step forward to make a difference in those lives immediately and eternally.

### **Trends Discovered in the Survey Results**

The results from the surveys and interviews were divided into subgroups for analysis (Pastor, Volunteer Leader, and Volunteer). The division allowed for survey and interview responses to be compared through cross-tabulation and filtration to discover trends within each group. The trends discovered greatly informed the creation of the leadership seminar that is the result of this project.

The research shared in chapter three illuminates the initial trends revealed in the research, and those trends were reflected throughout the survey and interview results. In responding to question one, the respondents reflected on the biblical purpose behind orphan care. The pastors pointed to specific scriptures and two of three volunteer leaders paraphrased a biblical motivation, but few of the twenty-two volunteers could identify biblical narratives that supported their action. Most of the volunteer responses cited anecdotal "love" and "kindness" in their responses. It is clear the valuation from Scripture regarding care for the children in foster care must be addressed in the seminar for the leaders to teach their constituents.

The survey results from question three demonstrate the various levels of preparedness felt by the respondents after their initial training and while preparing to launch their respective Excellerate programs. The pastors all mentioned some form of training and life experiences that contributed to their readiness for the challenge of a new opportunity. The volunteer leaders expressed their readiness through educational opportunities, and the volunteers believed the training received in the beginning stage of their planning was all they needed at the time. Training will remain a vital part of the launch of compassionate programs to teens in the foster care system.

Question five for the pastors and volunteer leaders was open-ended and asked about any remaining and pertinent questions each group felt needed addressing. Both pastor and volunteer leaders expressed a desire to learn more about non-profit finances, fundraising, and lesson planning for classroom sessions. Interest in financial and administrative training have been included in the training seminar. Question twelve asked the pastors and volunteer leaders about possible additions to the training they had received, and three of the six asked for more knowledge to be shared about government agencies and how to partner for the cause of the children in the program.

Question five for the volunteers was a unique question used only for this group: “What are some of the difficulties you faced while serving with this program for children in foster care?” Interestingly, the volunteers spoke of scheduling and personality conflicts with other leaders more than any other topic. Because personality conflicts were not a possible answer on question five, it was further elaborated through the answers to question six as each respondent was asked to explain the source of their difficulty. It is apparent that volunteers endure many difficulties while managing themselves in service

to children in care, not unlike many workplace environs. This is a noteworthy and important issue to address within the seminar, as leaders must be ready to mitigate these difficulties if they want to maintain a strong volunteer presence.

Question ten was also unique for the volunteers, asking them how much training they felt they required to serve in the program. Eighty percent felt they needed ten or more hours per year (see image 4.1).

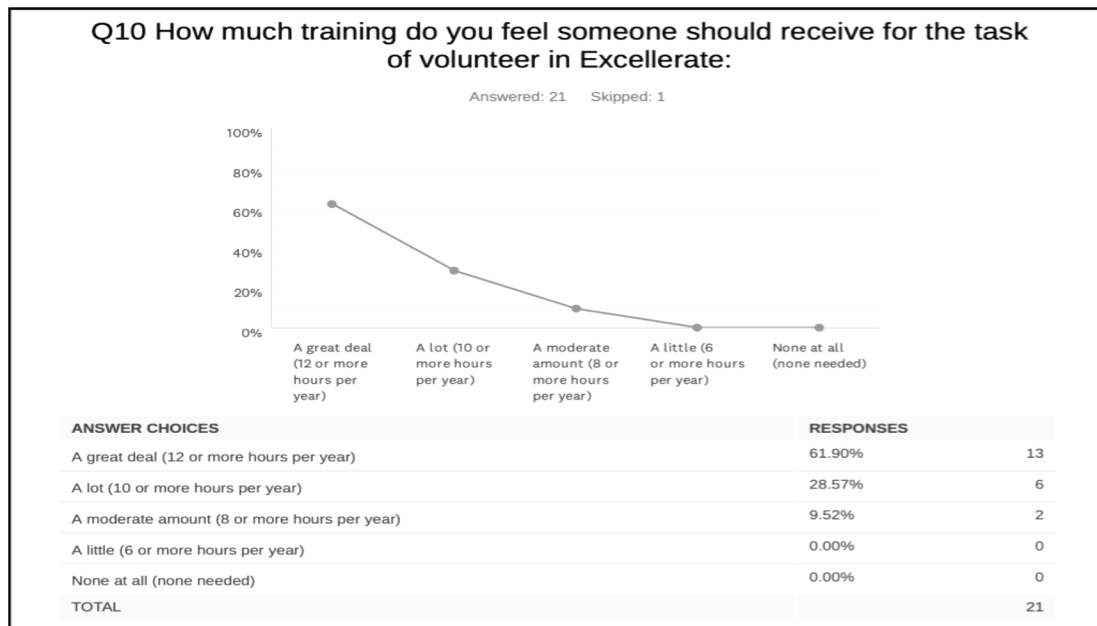


Figure 4.1: Volunteer Responses to question 10.

Question fourteen asked the pastors and volunteer leaders, “What do other leaders need to know when considering serving the children in foster care?” Nearly every response was of a spiritual nature regarding informing the potential leader attending the seminar of the great need and the biblical mandate to love and care for the less fortunate in our community. One leader stated, “This is about loving people, not about completing service hours for a group they are a member of or hours to complete a degree. Also, when people sign-up they need to remember when and what they signed up for because the kids are

counting on them” (VL 3). The volunteer leaders carried a sentiment of devotion to the task of serving the children that should motivate the volunteer beyond the simple obligation.

Question sixteen was asked of all the groups. “What was the primary influence on your involvement in a program for teens in foster care?” All four pastors spoke of the Lord as the influence, with one specifically stating the Holy Spirit. Two of the volunteer leaders spoke of different encounters where they felt the Lord led them through experiences that moved them from a place of consideration to action. One volunteer leader spoke of seeing a need and wanting to help. As one of the leaders stated, “It seemed like a group of people that were not on the radar and a people group that needs God's love and our love to get through some challenging situations” (VL2). During the formulation of the seminar, it is important to let the listeners know that seeing a need and fulfilling it is just as important and godly as a dynamic spiritual encounter. Being active in a community of care often requires open hands and open eyes. The volunteers also wrote of encounters with God (four volunteers), but most shared an experience of God communicating to their heart (fifteen volunteers). The majority of volunteers believe God spoke to them about doing something compassionate for another human, and they simply obeyed.

### **Trends Discovered in the Interviews**

The pastors and volunteer leaders were interviewed by the researcher in addition to taking two surveys. The questions and responses were recorded and transcribed by Rev software systems for analysis and cross-tabulation. Trends were discovered in the

interview sessions that offered important feedback, resulting in implementation for the leadership seminar.

One of the trends discovered in the interviews with the pastors and volunteer leaders group came to light during the question, “Why don’t people get involved in helping children in foster care?” The leaders and pastors recited a similar theme of misinformation or lack of knowledge regarding the plight of youth-at-risk. One expressed a lack of knowledge of the existence of the need altogether when they stated, “I did not even know there was an ‘aging out of foster care’ people group. I knew there were kids in foster care. I didn’t know how many, I didn’t realize that kids age out of foster care.” (VL3) As each leader and pastor shared their own experience of becoming aware of the need of the children in foster care in their community, one leader said, “But I just don’t think people realize the need. This group home was right down the street from us for years and we never reached out or did anything.” (VL2)

A second trend that permeated both groups was the existence of fear in the heart of those who consider helping children in foster care. Various fear scenarios were shared, from institutional risks to social impacts regarding the opinions of those who are valued. One of the social constructs was the concept of a social gospel, a concept much eschewed by the Pentecostal churches in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As one pastor stated, “I think some pastors may struggle with the idea of what does this have to do with the gospel? We have people that think it's not preaching, that that’s not ministry, and we have to see the bigger picture of that, that it is a ministry, it is filling the compassion ministry of the Lord. It’s meeting needs in Jesus’ name. It’s what Jesus did. He met real felt needs and he did it according to the kingdom.” (P3) Another fear disclosed was one of the



financial burdens placed upon those who started to serve children in the foster care system. The response from one pastor in particular highlights this trend: "... you think about of course the spiritual side, but honestly, I think about the money side too. That's the big question. Are we going to be able to get people to give? Are we going to be able to get funds from local organizations and businesses outside of the offering plate?" (P1)

Five of the seven leaders and pastors mentioned organizational leadership fears regarding inadequacy in the mind of the person who would desire to join an effort to help children at-risk. One leader cited a lack of education on the topic:

I think it's being uneducated about how these children... I'm trying to say this the right way. A lot of people, as I said earlier, are afraid of these kids and they are afraid of things that may come up. They feel it would cause them troubles. Maybe be more trouble than it's worth so to speak. Some just might be purely unaware of what they could do to make a difference.

Even though the pastors were not asked for solutions, two of the pastors spoke about the manner they would coach the people of their community in overcoming their fears. P3 began an admonishing session within the interview by saying, "They want to serve. They want to love people, and I would just encourage them to not let anything, fear of procuring vehicles or fear of not knowing what to do, to stop them from saying, 'Look, here's the need, here's the call of God, and you know what? The Bible calls us to be light.'" VL2 and VL3 combined efforts in sharing the admonishment they would give those who feared serving children out of the feeling of inadequacy:

It's not rocket science. All it is, is just coming straight from the heart and that's it and anybody can do it. Anybody that has a heart for kids can do it. It's nothing. There is no excuse not to help or that you're not qualified. I didn't plan this 10 years ago: Oh, I'm going to help with this foster care program and I got a train and have all these skills, no ... everyone can do this, everyone!

When asked what was necessary to the training or unnecessary to the training, P1 expressed the need for more hands-on or more interactive training sessions:

All the talk, nothing replaces hands-on, and I don't know how that could be added to it, but to have more of a... One thing, I'm a hands-on person. So, if there was some way... I'll tell you this. Not everybody could do it, but the fact that we were able to, and we also sent \*\*\*\*\*, who was going to be our leader. She's the director of this for our group. We were able to send her to you or your organization there in Ormond Beach for a week. That was the best training possible because she saw it first-hand. She walked with your workers. That is so much better.

An opportunity for more hands-on training will be made available and encouraged for future launches of this program. A recommendation for further hands-on training is included in the seminar.

When asking the leaders and pastors about their difficulties in launching their respective programs, six of the seven respondents mentioned the concerns they had regarding a partnership with local government and non-profit organizations. Since many of the children are in state-organized care and in group home care, navigating the various organizations seemed daunting to them. They shared fear of failure, knowing that without the proper partnerships with agencies related to foster care, they would have no access to the children they desired to serve with their program. One stated, "So, even though they're giving us these two kids, which I hope they see what happens with these two kids that there'll be more open. But I still think, they think that we're competing with them" (VL3). The leaders desire training about presenting the scope of the program and how it partners with agencies in their communities for the betterment of the children. Offering assistance to partner agencies is the essence of a community of care and requires careful consideration of the agencies each location engages. VL2 and VL3 discovered their concerns were alleviated when they met with other governmental agencies. "When we

met with DSS (The Department of Social Services), they want this program all over the place. They're like, 'are you only going to do this for the Buford area?' They're like, 'we need this in Charleston. We need this, all over the place. Can you guys start up another one somewhere else?' It's crazy!" (VL2 and VL3)

The tension between fear, uncertainty, and the motivation to act requires more than mere training. According to P1, motivation to act required the power of God at work in the person considering the task of helping children in foster care. P1 stated:

We just put in God's hands. The bottom line is, as a pastor, I can't make this program work. I can't do it, but God can. There are people in this area, not even living here yet, that is going to be part of Excellerate, and I haven't even met them yet. People, those people are going to come in and work and do this. I haven't even met those people yet, but that's the same thing as planting a church. There's going to be people that are going to be part of your church and board members one day, but you haven't even met them yet, but you go plant that church.

This response is supported by both the biblical and literature research.

When asked what each of the leaders and pastors would do to promote the message of reaching children in foster care among their colleagues, a trend of sharing stories of the students in the foster care system was discovered. As one pastor stated, "I think just showing them stories of success and telling them stories about the many needs out there and what people are going through in the foster care system." (P4) Three out of four pastors and all three leaders mentioned storytelling as a major influence on their involvement. L1 felt sharing stories made the plight of the children in the foster care system more relevant to the listeners:

Honestly, the things that I felt were the most influential thing were the stories and testimonies of children for a couple of different reasons. Number one, to present real-life scenarios to the people so that it can get in their heads and their hearts that this is a real thing. These are real circumstances because people that maybe have not worked so closely only have ideas and sometimes it doesn't seem real.

L1 also believed hearing the origins of the establishment of Excellerate from the founder of the program created buy-in. The passion regarding the program was evident in the founder's presentation, which resonated with L1:

I feel your heart came out to in the training and it resonated with my heart, which I feel the training and of itself was extremely efficient for laying the groundwork for the program. But more than anything I think it was helpful the way you presented it. I just feel a lot of your passions came out and honestly it was just motivational and then you're also very willing and open to answering questions.

Passion and motivation can be shared between the leaders and the volunteers.

A trend of volunteer growth in personal spiritual and community leadership permeated the interviews. All leaders and pastors expressed significant growth was witnessed in the volunteers and volunteer leaders in the programs they were leading. L3 shared a need for volunteer development in the training seminar: "There were a lot of people that said they wanted to help, but there's a smaller group that has followed through and they are awesome. A big success in their lives" (L3). P2 pointed out that the growth in leaders and volunteers was a byproduct of being accountable to serve the needs of children in foster care:

I also think that there is something about leading your people to invest in something like this, to invest in children that also spurs them to spiritual growth. Watching the effectiveness of that ministry will cause them to grow. We always know that serving causes us to be accountable and then we grow from that. So we're talking about being a blessing to foster kids, but I think sometimes we don't realize the blessing that that will bring to our church just in being part of something like that and the accountability that comes with that, and the spiritual growth that happens in our people because of that.

One unique statement shared by P2 regarding motivation to serve foster care aligns the motivation with a church precedent of tithing:

Why Do It? I just... yes, because it's biblical. That's the bottom line. We don't say should we tithe or not. It's biblical, so we do. We don't say let/s

wait for the right timing to tithe. It's biblical, so we do it. I don't think there's a question of would we do it again. If the Bible tells us to do this, then yes we'll do it. It may not always seem like it's the right time, but it always is if you're doing what God has told you to do.

The seminar presentation benefits from a complete and thorough response to the internal questions posed by P2, "Why do it?" As the seminar progresses in sessions, the listener must be able to answer that question for themselves.

### **Development of the Seminar**

The results from the interviews and surveys adequately indicated specific areas of the seminar that require strategic emphasis. It was determined that the best way to inform, inspire, and encourage action from the listeners would be to create a seminar that engages leaders from the volunteer leader level of involvement to the lead pastor level of leadership. The seminar could include a large volume of participants or a small gathering with a similar effect. After analyzing the trends and surveys from the pastors, leaders, and volunteers, the researcher created a two-part seminar format.

The first seminar informs the leaders regarding the needs of children in foster care, responding directly to that research trend. The session will include interactive role-playing segments to place the listener in the mental state of the children in foster care, by reading a story and sharing possible scenarios of real-life children in care. The first seminar session includes the following:

- Introduction to the world of foster care and children in foster care.
- Statistics surrounding the children in foster care.
- Commonly used vocabulary in the foster care community.
- Organizations that serve the children in foster care.

The first session also engages the biblical and literature that encourages support for the less fortunate in society with an emphasis on children at-risk.

- What the word of God says about serving the needs of our neighbor.
- How God spoke regarding helping the less fortunate in society.
- Who is responsible to serve the needs of the children in foster care?
- Ways Christians can help children in foster care.
- Books and resources to inform and learn more about helping children in foster care.

Finally, the first session will share testimonies from students of the various programs of Excellerate to motivate and encourage participation in helping children in foster care. The listeners would be invited to come to the second seminar session to hear the “How to” of serving the children in the foster care system from the praxis of the researcher.

The second seminar addresses the activity that helps children in foster care and assist the listener in the facilitation of similar activity in their praxis. The seminar begins with the researcher sharing the circumstances of the founding of the original Excellerate program in Ormond Beach, Florida. The author then delves into the many questions and problems leaders, pastors, and volunteers have experienced in their situations of ministry to children. The next topic discussed are the resolutions shared by these same proponents as they overcame to launch and continue to serve the children in foster care in their communities. The second session includes the following:

- Non-profit corporations and establishing your organization.
- Leadership and volunteer development.

- Fundraising and financial management.
- Partnerships in the community and your state government.
- The practical aspects of the Excellerate classroom.
- Books and resources to facilitate continued growth.
- Stories from the Excellerate program that encourages participation.
- Common questions and answers.

The development of the seminar notes, as well as the bibliographies and suggested reading for seminar participants, were gleaned from the biblical and literature review and the surveys and interviews from this project. Quotes from the various interviews will be utilized in the questions and answers portion of the seminar should an area deemed vital not to be addressed by the constituents. Adjustments will be made to the seminar as it is implemented in conferences and conventions locally and nationally.

### **Future Use of the Seminar**

This seminar was produced for the sole use of the researcher, who is the founder and president of Excellerate, Inc. In the future, the seminar will be modified to allow pastors and volunteer leaders to speak in conferences and conventions on behalf of their Excellerate program (or variant) to continue to share the message of caring for the children in foster care. Since Excellerate is not a franchise and shares its educational programming as open-source data, many church fellowships and denominations will be able to access the program to modify and implement their strategic vision to impact the children in foster care with compassion in their context.

### Summary

To facilitate the creation of the seminar, the limitations of this research study did not allow a thorough implementation of case studies within the program. While data was received from the local and state agencies in his jurisdiction, such measures were not possible within the context of the two programs: The program in Beaufort, South Carolina was six weeks into the sixteen-week program at the time of this writing, and the program in Fort Mill, South Carolina is in the interview stage with the children for the institution of their program this year. Without a completed class to interview, it would be difficult to give case studies or statistics solely on behalf of these two programs.

Through the analysis of the survey, interviews, biblical, and literature research it is evident there is a definite mandate in Scripture to serve the needs of the less fortunate in society, and that includes the children in foster care. Church and community leaders must be made aware of the significance of Scripture for the care of these children. The resources from this project and the principles of the Excellerate program are intended to be made available as a model for consideration.

At the inception of this project, a hypothesis of the outcome of the study included admonishments to serve children in foster care. However, there was no initial expectation that the response of the surveys and interviews would include the volume of communications regarding fear. For this seminar to be relevant, the researcher shifted focus to discovering what the leaders and pastors were doing to overcome the fears that debilitated former efforts to meet community needs. By answering the questions that fear induces with the word of God and the love described by Jesus in the story of the Good



Samaritan, a way forward was established to assist leaders in organizing and implementing care for the children in foster care.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE PROJECT CONCLUSIONS

The idea for this project began just before the classes for my doctoral program. While participating in my contextual engagement, I included the book *Growing God's Family: The Global Orphan Care Movement and the Limits of Evangelical Activism* by Samuel Perry and was inspired by the false sense of victory purported in care. I was particularly inspired by this passage:

I have shown in this chapter that—despite recent claims from critics about “an evangelical adoption boom,” stemming from ‘adoption fever’ among conservative Christians, or claims from evangelical advocates that ‘a growing number of Christian families are adopting’ or that ‘Christians are more than twice as likely [as Americans in general] to adopt a child’—there is, in fact, *no reliable evidence* that evangelicals are adopting or fostering more than they have in the past or that they are adopting or fostering more than they have in the past or that they are adopting or fostering in significantly greater numbers than other Americans.<sup>1</sup>

This project was inspired by the realities of the teenage child in foster care (like Addison, see chapter one) who is enduring immense difficulties while many in the church culture are misinformed regarding the impact faith communities are having in regard to children in foster care. Informing and encouraging leaders in both community and church to act upon the realities these children face with wisdom and deliberation is a transformative change the church needs to experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Perry, 61.

### **Lessons Learned from the Project**

The two programs included in this study were at different points of their organizational development. Both programs had proceeded from a position of inaction regarding the needs of children in foster care in their communities to active participation in a plan to serve the teen orphans in their community with mentoring, teaching, and discipleship. The program in Beaufort has already begun classroom sessions and shared anecdotes with the researcher regarding the students' public declaration of salvation and water baptism. The program in Fort Mill has engaged students in interviews and is currently planning a summer launch of classroom activity. Both programs have engaged their state and local agencies and have begun assisting the agencies in meeting immediate needs important to the continued care for the children in foster care.

During the project, two particular lessons informed the project and were informative to the researcher's praxis. The first lesson was the immense value God placed upon those who were considered the widow, orphan, and sojourner throughout scripture. Scripture declares God himself will take up the cause of these children who are at-risk and defend them violently, if necessary. While the wrath of God was evident in the Old Testament, the motivating factor of love prevails through the New Testament teaching of Jesus in the story the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Such vehement opposition of those who harm the orphan is one powerful notion, but the same wrath appears focused upon those who forget or ignore the need of the less fortunate (Prov. 23:10-11). Forgetting the value God has placed upon the lives of those society would deem needy is the cause of great angst in the prophecies of the Old Testament. Today, the people of God

are motivated to be the good neighbor that loves others as self. (Mark 12:30-31)

Compassion is a natural pursuit of those who love their neighbor.

The second lesson was the financial plan established within the culture of the Jewish people to fund service for the orphan, widow, and sojourner. To allocate funds from the periodic gifts of the tithe in the third year for the cause of the less fortunate is a roadmap to the value God placed upon these people (Deut. 26:12-15). With such an emphasis regarding the provision for orphans, widows, and sojourners, how could the Church of today preclude itself from service to these people? Care and compassion shown to the less fortunate is of concern to God and as such is a burden to be carried by His church.

The Church of today may well be facing a displeased Creator for our lack of interest in the areas of the community that has His attention. Even the New Testament Church brought in gifts from their excess of wealth to be shared with those who had less (Acts 4:32-35). They were willing to give to everyone who had a need and were an example to the people of their time and today's Church. Facilitating ministry that serves the needs of those living in dire circumstances is the responsibility of the Church. Jesus brought a fresh revelation of the mandate to serve all people, even those outside of the individual's culture and Christian traditions, when He shared the story of the Good Samaritan while explaining the two laws of love to an expert in the law (Luke 10:30-37). Religion can restrict the observance of compassion to outsiders, but love compels us to serve the less fortunate regardless of affiliation. It is this kind of love that Jesus promotes as leading to eternal life.

Within the literary study of this project, a theme of “the community of care” surfaced and challenged the researcher’s concept of church engagement. Many of the authors studied during the research of current literature pointed to a concept of community focus when it comes to serving the needs of the children in foster care and other community needs. Church leaders and members must be connected to their communities or the pain endured by so many in foster care will go unnoticed and unserved. Most congregations are simply uneducated on this topic:

I shared the information about kids in foster care sleeping in government buildings. I showed our congregation the specific ratio of the number of foster children to the number of licensed and active foster homes. I showed the foster care facility on a map and shared the stories of kids sleeping in social workers’ offices in a government building for that week alone. I then drew a ten-mile radius around the office building and asked, ‘How many churches do you think are inside this radius?’ There was a collective gasp in the room as little red dots suddenly lit up the map. Thirty-one churches within ten miles surrounded the building, and yet children facing unspeakable trauma were forced to sleep in offices.<sup>2</sup>

While it was the assumption of this evangelistic author that the solution to all community needs is Jesus and His Church, the reality is the community has solutions the local church can engage for community development. Those ideas will transform the mindsets of the needed as well as persons with great need. As Lupton shares, “Authentic relationships with those in need have a way of correcting the we-will-rescue-you mindset and replacing it with mutual admiration and respect.”<sup>3</sup> The answer within the literature contributed to a conversation regarding community engagement. While the religious non-profit organizations are presenting these concepts to the Church of today, the social

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<sup>2</sup> Furlong, loc. 212.

<sup>3</sup> Lupton, 190.

organizations at various state and local levels have been reaching out to churches for help for decades.

The surveys and interviews provided insight into the production of the leadership seminar. The surveys administered to the volunteers, volunteer leaders, and pastors asked questions to assist the researcher in uncovering the motivation, challenges, and questions that remained in the minds of the respondents as they endeavored to launch and lead programs to serve teens in the foster care system. The surveys showed the respondents were concerned about funding and the corporate structures of non-profit entities. A continued theme from the surveys to the interviews was that of raising financial support within the community and the local church for the program. It was evident each church and program volunteer felt the pressure of fundraising was a major hurdle in the effectiveness of providing the program to future locations/leaders. This portion of the training has been implemented in the seminar for clarity and better development of a strategy for each potential Excellerate program going forward.

Another important result from the interviews and surveys was the importance of the personal investments of time and time management within the program structure. Volunteer leaders and volunteer groups expressed concern with the amount of time invested in the leading and facilitation of the program. The need to share the time investment with the potential leaders and volunteers was mandated, along with a conceptual schedule to inform those involved about the amount of time required for such an investment. The inclusion of a sample schedule and program calendar has been implemented in the addendums to the seminar. While it would not be feasible to include such in the limited scope of the seminar, it was included in the addendum for reference

during the planning and preparation phase of implementation of a potential program pastor/leader/volunteer.

The presence of fear was a consistent theme in the interview portion of the research project. Fear of negative outcomes, and fear of negative impact upon the social/corporate structures of each church. The question of preparedness and the ability to adequately serve the needs of the children in foster care was preeminent among the leaders who had not yet entered into the service of the children. The fear of preparation diminished as the pastors/leaders/volunteers engaged the children in the program; however, answering the questions expressed by these interviews with the answers provided by the participants themselves would be considered reassuring and informative. The answers received add valuable insight to the participants in the seminar, allaying fears that isolate, causing a potential participant to doubt their ability or divine call to serve the need:

- “They want to serve. They want to love people, and I would just encourage them to not let anything, fear of vehicles or fear of not knowing what to do, stop them from saying, ‘Look, here’s the need, here’s the call of God, and you know what? The Bible calls us to be light’” (P3).
- “It’s not rocket science. All it is, is just coming straight from the heart and that’s it and anybody can do it. Anybody that has a heart for kids can do it. It’s nothing. There is no excuse not to help or that you’re not qualified. I didn’t plan this 10 years ago: Oh, I’m going to help with this foster care program and I got a train and have all these skills, no...everyone can do this, everyone!” (L2 and L3).

- “There were a lot of people that said they wanted to help, but there’s a smaller group that has followed through and they are awesome. A big success in their lives” (L3).

In agreement with what the research discovered in several of the literary sources, the pastors spoke to the desire for the people of their church to be involved in meeting the social, spiritual, and educational needs of the children in foster care. Desiring the volunteers of their churches to get involved with foster care, the pastors wished they would not wait for a divine call or a voice from heaven but would rather obey the leading of God through Scripture to simply do the right thing regarding serving their neighbors in need. “Why Do It? I just ... yes, because it’s biblical. That’s the bottom line ... If the Bible tells us to do this, then yes, we’ll do it. It may not always seem like it’s the right time, but it always is if you’re doing what God has told you to do” (P2). The question of purpose is answered in the seminar with the addition of quotes from people who are serving the children in foster care. Including these statements and admonishments brings value and clarity to the teaching.

### **Strengths of the Project**

Key factors contributed to the success of this project initiative. The researchers’ involvement in a compassion organization for the last ten years, as well as his experiences assisting churches in attempts to launch outreach to children in foster care, allowed for the hypothesis for the research project. The timing of two independent churches from the same state launching new programs allowed for appropriate research to determine the motivations, limiting factors, roadblocks, and questions each location was experiencing without needing comparison from unique state foster care systems or



initiatives. All the pastors and volunteer leaders engaged the research through surveys and interviews. Their willingness to participate was a boon to the research. The open and honest manner in which the interview questions were answered added great value to the content provided. The respondents shared from their praxis with the amicability necessary to prepare measures to communicate to others from similar levels of community and church leadership.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

Time and potential program launch prohibited the use of a greater sampling of programs for interviews and surveys. The project results might have garnered more data had the researcher been able to interview the programs after they had been in full operation for a year or more. This would also have allowed for the cross-referencing of their results with those beginning their programs. Since the researcher endeavors to assist leaders in communities with the launch of programs like the Excellerate program, it was necessary to focus the scope of the surveys and interviews upon candidates endeavoring to do so in the researchers' praxis. To include other organizations would have added a measure of complexity not desirable to this effort.

### **Considerations for Future Research**

Two concepts for future research were discovered during this research project. The first was research into the effectiveness of the existing Excellerate programs for the edification of the seminar and the promotion of the program altogether. Excellerate has an excellent reputation among the social/compassion programs of the state of Florida. Since each student has a file in the office of Excellerate Calvary, the researcher has access to the statistics of the program in this location:

- The High School graduation rate among the students in the Excellerate program is over 75 percent (in a total sampling of 80 students).
- The college acceptance and attendance rate of Excellerate students are more than double that of teens in foster care in our community who have not attended the program.
- The employment rate among the graduates of the Excellerate program in Ormond Beach is over 70 percent within months of completion of the training.
- Calvary Christian Center church is experiencing an average of seven new guest attendees for each student who attends Excellerate classes.
- Near 90 percent of Excellerate students say they have accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and 85 percent of them did so in the program.
- More than 60 percent are baptized in water and one-half of those baptized in water confirm themselves as baptized in the Holy Spirit.

These numbers are from local files, not published from research the magnitude of a dissertation. In coming years, I would like to research these statistics officially, adding numbers from new locations of the Excellerate program to bolster the concept, showing that this is not a unique circumstance.

The second concept that might be pursued in future research endeavors is that of a biblical/cultural study of the wrath of God upon people who mistreat and ignore the widow, orphan, and sojourner from the Old Testament. Since there is a politicized treatment of immigration reform, adoption vs. abortion, and the care for the single mother, I would like to study biblical mandates and the wrath denoted in Scripture. Is God truly angry with the people of the church in the United States who are not helping

the widow, orphan, and sojourner? Are we about to incur His wrath? How do the statements from the Old Testament relate to the new covenant in the New Testament? I believe a study of God's judgment upon those who harm or ignore these precious people, and identifying them fully, will bring great inspiration to many who have not considered them as part of the community Jesus calls our neighbor.

### **Impact Upon Researcher's Praxis**

This project produced benefits to the researcher's praxis in several ways. The researcher utilized a majority of the benefits in developing the seminar to train leaders, however, there were unintended personal benefits beyond that of the seminar. First, the researcher benefitted from the engagement and the application of chapters and readers. Hearing from others of the inspiration behind the projects brought increased value to the researcher's life and writing. The choice of terminology within the writing was challenged by the second reader (Samuel Perry). To speak of the children in foster care as orphans is to either demean them as objects or characterize them by their problem. The children at-risk in our communities are persons who deserve our respect and consideration. Although the researcher would never communicate these deleterious statements verbally, he had been using these terms without conscience in his writing. Because of the growth experienced through this correction, the researcher added more sensitive and respectful vocabulary to the seminar and also the leadership conversations with volunteers and pastors.

The second life change experienced in the researcher's praxis is both personal and professional. Humility. After reading the accounts of the lack of impact the Church has in the service of foster care and adoption in the United States, the researcher has been

motivated to make sure no one is deceived by the light-hearted musings of a contented congregation that the church is winning the war in any regard, let alone that of the children in our nation's foster care programs. They are still waiting for a response from Christ's Church. The Church has been silent in their ears. Because of this silence, the researcher has devoted himself to bringing an awakening to the people within his purview with creativity and research. Prior to this project, the researcher's mindset regarding the various needs within the lives of children in foster care were anecdotes of success. Often, the researcher would claim, "The church is winning!" with regard to the effort to serve the painful realities of the children in foster care. Stories of victorious teenage foster student transformations were shared in abundance with no thought to the consequences. The consequences for sharing only the positive improvements of a few programs in the vast sea of need are deceptive. Refusing to share the fact that the Church is failing at best and at worst contributing to the trauma children in foster care endure is the best way to be viewed as a hero. For the researcher to provide a sober evaluation of the horrific realities of the children in foster care and the failure of the local church to make any impact requires the humility of desperation. The author is forever changed by the discoveries within the research that points a finger directly at the Church and declares our deficiencies. When the researcher stopped making statements of certainty about the promised victory of eternity and focused instead upon the realities of today, it humbled and motivated by putting personal desperation on display. The children in foster care within our communities are tragically bereft of compassionate care. They will go without the love of God's people and will likely die without hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ

should we maintain our course of selfish pietism. The author has felt the call to shed all vestiges of composure for the sake of love, the love of my neighbor.

These changes are neither subtle nor sweet. To be reminded of the humanity of the persons the Church serves and the humility by which the Church must serve them is a painful one. The lessons learned are not merely for the benefit of the researcher but needed addressing internally before anyone else could be entreated. The researcher can and must do better in those regards.

### **Conclusion**

The initial challenge faced was discovering how to help church and community leaders reach children in the foster care system. In pursuing the answers, many questions were asked: What motivates leaders to serve children in foster care? What discourages leaders from serving children in foster care? What does Scripture say about serving children in foster care? What do writers of current literature say about serving children in the foster care system? While these questions were asked, a cynical theme arose in the researcher's mind: "These people who don't help children in foster care, just don't love as Jesus told us to love." A convenient and corrupted thought when one is examining the hearts and minds of those who have yet to consider that there are actual problems in the community of foster care. As one volunteer leader adequately put it, "I didn't even know there was a category of children in foster care called aged-out" (L3). The majority of persons polled through this project felt motivated by God to do something about the situation of children in foster care.

Until there was a communicator of the need, most were unaware there was a need. Similarly, unless there is a preacher, how will people know God as Savior? "How, then,

can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’” (Rom, 10:14-15). The good news is the churches in communities all over the United States can make an immediate and decisive impact for the good of those in care, and that news must be shared. The resolve received through this project has emboldened me, and that boldness will translate into more people educated about this need. The boldness comes from the wisdom of listening to others’ responses to the wounded neighbor laying alongside the road to Jericho (Luke 10:25-37).

The researcher also received insight into the fears of productivity, disunity, and misplaced function within the confines of the operation of the local church. Pastors and church volunteer leaders must be made aware of the possible struggles they will face when launching a new effort to serve the needs of the children in foster care. Equipping these leaders with the biblical and literary sources for robust conversation is a benefit to both seminar and community. The respondents all faced negativity of sorts from the church community when expressing their desire to serve the children or while preparing for implementation in their local church. Evident during the research was the need for church leaders to better communicate the needs of children in foster care with their parishioners. A lack of focus upon the people the Bible identifies as needing our support is unconscionable but happening: “Fourteen percent of churchgoers say church leaders have encouraged families to consider adoption. Twelve percent say church leaders encouraged them to become involved in foster care.”<sup>4</sup> Becoming aware of the need is the

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<sup>4</sup> Smietana.

first step, the second step is empowering the people within the congregation to do something that will serve with wisdom and community engagement. A mere flurry of activity will not get the job done. The people of the local church must engage with the leaders and existing programs to find a need and fulfill it.

During the execution of this project, the researcher endeavored to enlist insight from the Word of God, current literature, surveys, and interviews to form a seminar to speak to the leadership of churches and their constituents regarding the need for compassionate programming that will serve the social, educational, and spiritual needs of the teenagers in the foster care system. While the demographic of those in foster care is much wider than teenagers, the desire was to focus on the children who are least adopted, least placed in foster homes, and often placed in group home care. The decisions made by these children during their critical and formational years are of the utmost importance and the desire is to encourage churches to join the community of foster care to make their lives better.

It has been the researcher's focus to serve some of the many needs of children in foster care for the past ten years. To witness the life-change in the experience of the teens who are unadopted or adopted and rejected is remarkable. Every time the researcher teaches a class full of teens from foster care placements or group homes, the prevailing thought has been: "Who doesn't want to help these amazing kids?" The research is praying that all children in foster care will one day know that Jesus loves them because the people who call Jesus Christ Lord of their lives will awaken to the need and begin a journey in the community to make these children's lives better. It will happen, and the researcher will not stop praying and working until it does.

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## APPENDIX A

### Adult Consent Form

Southeastern University

**Project:** Foster Care Program Case Study

**Investigators:** Dr. Chris Corbett  
Allen Griffin M.A.

**Purpose:** This project seeks to ascertain the effectiveness of the training and preparation given two Foster care ministries within churches in South Carolina. The information gleaned will inform the co-investigator within an assessment of effectual preparedness protocol/seminars.

**Procedures:** Participants will be interviewed during the first month of research in November 2019 after the start of classes with the first group of students on January 25, 2020, and midway through the first class on February 15, 2020. Local directors will also be interviewed during the first month of research in November 2019. After the start of classes with the first group of students on January 25, 2020, and midway through the first class February 15, 2020.

These surveys will be utilized to assist the investigators in the general assessment of training materials presented you and the effectiveness of the materials impacting your local Foster care ministry context. From these surveys and interviews, a direction will be established for the formulation of a seminar to train future leaders in the establishment of effectual Foster care ministries.

The first two online surveys will require approximately 30 minutes to complete. The final survey and interview will require approximately 60 minutes to complete.

**Risks:** There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

**Benefits:** The benefit to this study is the direct influence of the dissertation of the co-investigator and the indirect influence of the training seminar created by the co-investigator to inform future church leaders regarding Foster care ministry within churches. If you are interested, we will send you a copy of the results of the study when we are finished.

**Confidentiality:** Personal identifiers of the program will not be collected. Only the investigators will be aware of the identity of the case study participants. Participant identity is not necessary for the effectiveness and production of the study. Each interview will be recorded for the sake of transcription. Each recording and transcription will be reserved on private password protected digital hard drive in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. All data will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for this study.

**Contacts:** You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study:

Institutional Review Board    [irb@seu.edu](mailto:irb@seu.edu)

Principal Investigator        Dr. Chris Corbett  
    1000 Longfellow Blvd  
    Lakeland, FL 33801  
    (651) 269-4809  
    [cacorbett@seu.edu](mailto:cacorbett@seu.edu)

Co-Investigator                Allen Griffin  
    149 Perfect Drive  
    Daytona Beach, FL 32124  
    (239) 850-3616  
    [algriffin1@seu.edu](mailto:algriffin1@seu.edu)

**Participant Rights:** I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time; without penalty.

**Consent Documentation:**

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements:

I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older and I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

---

Signature of Researcher

Date

## APPENDIX B

### Questions Used for Church Leader Interviews

1. What is the Biblical mandate behind the activity of orphan care?
2. How have you been prepared by God for this assignment?
3. How have you been prepared by your education for this assignment?
4. How effective was the training you have received from Excellerate leadership been for your preparation for this assignment?
5. What questions remain in your preparation for this assignment?
6. What would you like to add to the Excellerate training plan?
7. What would you like to omit from the Excellerate training preparation?
8. What should other church leaders know about serving Foster kids?
9. How many church leaders do you know that are currently serving orphans in their local context?
10. Why do others serve/not serve Foster Care/Orphans in their community?
11. What influenced you to get involved in Orphan Care?
12. What would help others get more involved in Orphan Care?
13. What difficulties have arisen since you started the Foster Care ministry at your church?
14. How many volunteers have joined the Foster Care ministry at your church?
15. Has this program been a success? In what manner?
16. Have you experienced growth in the lives of your volunteers through serving this program?
17. If you could start over, would you launch this program?



18. How has this program been received by the congregation as a whole?
19. What are the worst/best parts of leading this program?
20. How would you judge success and failure as the leader of this organization?

## APPENDIX C

**Transcript of Volunteer Leader Interviews – VL1 and VL2**

Interviewer:

All right. If, everybody can hear me?

VL2:

Yeah.

VL1:

Yep.

Interviewer:

I can hear you. Let's do this. Here we go with the first question.

Interviewer:

First question of this interview is what do you believe is the biblical mandate or the biblical purpose behind the activity of orphan care? What in the Bible points you towards orphan care?

VL2:

Well, I think it's similar to the widows and how you're supposed to take care of them, just like you should orphan children. I think it's the same mandate for both.

VL1:

This is kind of like what VL2 said. It's all right there. We're called to take care of the orphans.

Interviewer:

That's very good.

VL2:

[inaudible 00:07:11]

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. Then lets go to the next question. This is a personal question. How long have you attended your church?

VL2:

10, 15 years.

Interviewer:

It's funny because, [inaudible 00:07:39] I asked your pastor and he said the same thing. He said, "Oh man, 10 to 15 years." Exactly what he said. It's great. I love it.

VL1:

I've been going to Praise about eight years now and before that I went to a Baptist church back home for 10 years.

Interviewer:

Okay.

Interviewer:

Next question. How do you feel God has prepared you for what you're doing right now?

VL1:

That's a tough question because you got to look back 51 years. My whole life and everything I've been through my whole life and ups and downs, highs and lows. Despite all the wisdom you gain, after 50 something years and I think that gives you a lot of knowledge about some of the things I've been through is maybe some of the same things these kids are going through have been through.

VL1:

And for me that's more it, especially these first couple of kids, the more you talk to them, they're going to say some of the same stuff that we've all been through.

VL1:

And, there's just being there. I guess it's showing me love and these kids, the more you the last few weeks, the more you love them and the more they know their love, the more the brighter the smile gets, and the happier they get and their face lights up more and more every week.

VL2:

Yeah, and I think we, VL1 and I bring different things to the table. I think his background. He came from a broken family. He can relate. In that instance, I grew up in pretty much a Christian household. So I think we bring different things to the table as far as being able to help them too. And love on them.

Interviewer:

Excellent. Thank you very much. How do you feel that education may have played or may not have played into your preparation?

VL2:

No, I don't think education played into it. I think life experience.

VL1:

Life experiences more than anything.

VL2:

Not a very good life experience. Definitely.

VL1:

I think just having the heart for the kids is more than anything life experiences.

Interviewer:

Very good. I definitely want to come back to that after we're done with our interview. Cause I see alignment in that statement. Number four, how effective was the training you've received from Accelerate been for your preparation? I guess what I'd say to you is give us a score of one to ten. 10 being perfect, which that being God is perfect, number one being pretty bad, like the worst I've ever seen and then and rate us that way, rate that type of training that way. Number four would be how effective was your training rated a one to ten.

VL1:

I would say probably, eight. I mean I think the material is good and the material is really easy to follow and there's some good material. So far they seem to really enjoy it and it gets the point across to them. I'd say probably the biggest thing we struggle with is the fundraising part.

VL1:

And I know maybe some of the grants and stuff that might be available out there that we don't know about. But I think everything else is pretty much, I don't think you could prepare yourself for the first three or four weeks or the first month and it's a moving target from the beginning. I think the kids determine where you go.

Interviewer:

Okay. Yes Sir. What would you...

VL1:

[inaudible 00:12:13] I love that we have something to follow along, but you really have to see what kind of kids you have and what they bring to the table and how, questions they may ask and where it takes you. Yeah.

VL1:

I mean we're using people at the church from all different walks of life to teach every class in this and they can relate to everybody.

Interviewer:

Isn't it interesting how you'll be in a class and the teacher will go a direction or the guest will go a direction that you didn't see coming and then somehow it still accomplishes the purpose that what you might perceive and what you know through your experience walking with God that God has for that class.

VL1:

If I wrote down all the God moments and all the things God did, since we started thinking about doing this, I wish I wrote them all down because I think of them from time to time, we had a lady show up week before last on a Wednesday night. We didn't know who she was. We knew she was trying to get some [inaudible 00:13:25] volunteer hours for AmeriCorps, had no clue, never seen her at church before.

VL1:

She's claimed she went to the church, she signed up for classes.

Interviewer:

She took a background check.

VL1:

She wanted to know if she could bring her kids into the class cause she didn't have anybody to keep them. So finally we broke down one Wednesday night and we had agreed to let her teach the classes we were going to be there and she got somebody to keep her kids, thank God. But she showed up and she told the kids talking about circumstances and then she got to talking about circumstances. She told the kids she grew up in Louisville, Kentucky and her mama left her when she was like two or three.

VL2:

Two.

VL1:

And her daddy got custody of her. But he liked to run the streets. And chase women. So her grandmamma got custody of her.

VL2:

She ended up in foster care.

VL1:

Her grandmamma passed away when she was 15 and she was homeless, living with friends, of friends, of friends. Had started drugs and at the foster care they age out of foster care.

Interviewer:

Wow.

VL1:

Showed up... [Inaudible 00:14:21].

Interviewer:

She's got circumstances.

VL2:

She's amazing. Amazing. Became a Christian. She's, Oh my gosh. We said, can you please teach another class?

Interviewer:

That's amazing.

VL1:

She comes to us trying to get her volunteer hours for her AmeriCorps program.

VL2:

I know that's not the reason why she's doing this. You could [inaudible 00:14:45]

Interviewer:

God brought her to you.

VL2:

Oh yeah.

Interviewer:

Wow.

VL1:

It's been like that every week it's something.

Interviewer:

So here's a couple of questions. There are two in one that you, you've answered very well in your survey, but maybe you can expound it just a little bit. What would you add or what would you cut back on or omit from the training of this program? What do you feel needs to be added or what do you feel could be dialed back or deleted?

VL2:

Adding. Maybe seeing how a class is taught. Maybe a video of a little snippet of a class being taught. I'm trying to think what else. And just a little more specific on raising money and stuff. I feel like if we didn't have Pastor John doing the financial part and setting up a different account for Accelerate and we would have no clue how to do all that. I mean he does the whole financial end as far as setting up where the giving goes and stuff. I would be lost with all that stuff.

Interviewer:

I saw that in the survey and immediately it went into our notes about the nonprofit and the finances of the nonprofit as well as financial fundraising, slash grant writing as part of the presentation. Is there anything else that you want to add or omit?

VL1:

I know we're still early into it, so I'm sure we'll probably come up with something in the next 12 weeks. For right now. That was it.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Okay.

VL2:

I created, which I talked to that other girl that's starting that other one in South Carolina and.

Interviewer:

Missy White

VL2:

Yeah. She had been given a like an Excel sheet, like a spreadsheet of which I didn't realize was out there and I created one with each of the classes. Columns for people to sign up to teach, to help to do the food, it just seems easier. It's like a fill in the blank, just volunteer, here's, here's where we need you and where can you fit in?

Interviewer:

Okay. Forms for registration forms for teaching?

VL2:

For volunteer.

Interviewer:

Okay. Perfect. Thank you very much.

Interviewer:

Here's a couple of loaded questions. Do you know of any church leaders in your area that are serving orphans in their local congregations?

VL1:

We just found out from our two, we had come to spent the day with us Sunday, at the house. She told us that Capa, the Caplain kids went to some church here in Buford and I get, they had a karaoke night or something. So there is a little church here in Buford just taking the kids from the group home and having like a special blackout...

VL2:

They had a Valentine's night for all the kids at the group home. It sounds like they've been there before for other activities, but nothing formal like this.

VL1:

So, we might have a hot dog cookout, Smores cook out one night. She doesn't know it yet but were going to plan on it.

Interviewer:

Great. Let's see here. What should other church leaders like yourself know what's a couple of things you'd like them to know about serving these kids?

VL2:



Well wait a minute. First of all, they don't need to be, have any prerequisites or anything. I think more people are apt not to help thinking, "Oh gosh, my life isn't that great. I don't have anything to offer." Everyone has something to offer to these kids. I don't care what your walk of life is, how you grew up. It's amazing the people that have come out of the woodwork that we didn't even realize their background.

VL1:

I think Interviewer, as a group as a church, everybody who had volunteered the first Sunday, we all got in the room with me and Justin and we all told our life stories and give a little testimony about our life. And I think if people that are volunteering and helping, I'd say we're closer, that has brought everybody in that group, is at church, closer. And I think we learn more about each other through this process than we ever knew before. So I think it's actually got us all closer.

Interviewer:

Well that's good. And that's what everyone's looking for in the church is connectivity. So good.

VL1:

I don't know, before you started coming to praise and I still don't think the people in our church, they realize they're not involved in so, right. But I just don't think people realize the need. This group home was right down the street from us for years and we never reached out or did anything.

Interviewer:

So you think that is a majority of the reasons why many people don't get involved if they don't know?

VL2:

Yeah [inaudible 00:20:37]

VL1:

I don't think they know. You know, and it's sad to say, but, we've met with DSS and Buford and the leader at DSS and Buford was an old lady. And you ever seen that one, the green witch on the Wizard of Oz? Unfortunately, that's the way she come across. And I know they get stressed out, burned out. Because if I had to deal with families and stuff like that all the time, I could imagine the stress they're under and how burnout they get. But that's the impression we get.

VL2:

Yeah. I did not even know there was an "aging out of foster care" people group. I knew there were kids in foster care. I didn't know how many, I didn't realize that kids age out of foster care.

Interviewer:

Well, yes. That's great. Thank you very much for that.

VL1:

You can't explain everything that's happened and all that.

VL2:

Well, and the other thing that when we've met with DSS, they really want this all over the place. They're like, you only do this for Buford area. They're like, we need this in Charleston. We need this, all over the place. Can you guys start up another one somewhere else? It's crazy.

Interviewer:

It's a serious need. What problems have you had since you started serving this ministry? You might call them a text. Or whatever you want to call them.

VL2:

So we have one couple, one person leading each lesson and then we sit in on it or someone else sits in on it with us just to be another.

VL1:

[inaudible 00:22:47].

VL2:

Just to be another listener and feedback. And we have one couple, they did a great, great, great job with the topics that they tackled, but they were very formal. They were very serious. They told everyone ahead of time, please do not interrupt us because we feel like if the Holy Spirit moves on us, we don't want to be interrupted. And it offended another couple that is teaching another class so much that they said, we don't want them helping us on this future class. We don't like the way that they present it. So, that was one of the little obstacles that we had to tackle.

Interviewer:

That's interesting. Little personality conflict there.

VL1:

Yeah, exactly.

VL2:

Yeah, exactly.

Interviewer:

Great.

VL2:

And so, it bothered me that he was so, he's very type A and, but I could live with it and I don't think it affected their teaching to the kids. The kids don't realize.

Interviewer:

Yeah. This is Good. How do you feel this program has been received by the congregation as a whole?

VL1:

I think the ones that actually know about it and it has been brought up to the church a few times if we're doing it, but, and that was just brought up in a brief, Hey, we started Accelerate on Sunday morning and now it's come up. But for the ones that's involved in it and knows what's going on, I mean, they're all loving it. And then, once they had met the kids, I spent time with these two kids, they're....

VL2:

The volunteers.

VL1:

The volunteers, they're amazed at how awesome they are and what a difference they see it's making.

VL1:

But as the overall congregation of the church, I don't think people quite understand it yet. And I don't think they really know what's going on.

VL2:

We have a Sunday coming up, I think it sounds like we're supposed to talk about accelerate, give a little brief synopsis of what's going on. Cause since we started, we haven't had any contact with the congregation about this, which I think needs to happen in order for it. Again, for fundraising,

VL1:

We want to get on stage the first, or second service and just ask everybody in the church for \$30 a piece.

Interviewer:

There we go.

VL1:

[inaudible 00:25:38]

VL2:

We were discussing if we could have presented this like two weeks in, three weeks in and just said, Hey, let's say we have 400 members. If everyone, even the kids gave, I did the math, but to equal...

VL1:

\$30 to \$35 a piece out of 400 people would be done.

VL2:

Not even so yes, but it's [inaudible 00:26:03]

Interviewer:

Its amazing how the finances multiply.

VL2:

It's not that it's not out of reach.

VL1:

[inaudible 00:26:09].

VL2:

For the congregation to be able to support this, but it's got to be presented in a timely manner.

VL1:

There's a bigger...

VL2:

The further along you go, the more you have to come up with that.

VL1:

And I know y'all worked with [inaudible 00:26:20] I know y'all working with a group home down there maybe kind of like Cappa, but sometimes I feel like Cappa feels like we are competition for the funds they're getting from the community.

VL2:

I forgot about that.

Interviewer:

That's a good point. Yeah, that's a good point.

VL1:

Cause you know they're a nonprofit also. So, even though they're giving us these two kids, which I hope they see what happens with these two kids that there'll be more open. But I still think, they think that we're competition for them.

Interviewer:

That's good.

VL2:

I forgot about that. That's one. Another little issue we had to tackle too, because they live in a group home. There's lots of things you have to do, hoops you have to jump through in order to take them out. Just spontaneous and stuff. Everything's got to be planned. Except for some reason VL1 and I are able to just call them up on a whim and...

VL1:

[inaudible 00:27:23]

VL2:

I don't know how, but they let us come and get them whenever we feel like it. But everyone else, they've had to be fingerprinted, copy of your driver's license, but they haven't never done that with us.

VL1:

Mia sends a text three minutes after class Sunday are coming to get me today. Right?"

VL2:

And some of the other volunteers wanted to pick them up and they're like, well how did you get them on Sunday when you didn't plan ahead and tell the house? I said, I have no idea.

VL1:

But as far as the church, I don't think everybody in the congregation understands what we're, some know we're doing it, but I don't think they fully understand and I don't think they fully understand what financial commitment it's going to take as a church. But we didn't find out some things until like a week or two ago about the church finances, but we just found that out. I guess because God's what done it this far. He's done got us this far down the road and.

Interviewer:

Oh yes, [inaudible 00:28:33] and I and, and we will be there for you the whole way and we have a lot of things to share with you, that will help in that regard. But I do also think that you hit something there that we haven't addressed and that is the effective. I'm writing it down. The effective unity with other programs now unifying with other programs, not always easy and often.

VL1:

I think once we get past these first two kids in the first 16 weeks and you know me and them to see, they get their driver's license, which they don't have now. They get off to college and they're doing good. They'll see the benefits of the program and I don't think we'll get this and it's not really a backlash, it's just not open arms. It's half open arms.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Tentative. Yeah.

VL2:

I do think that these two kids are leaders in that home. And I already can tell that the group home leaders see them as they're being responsible, they're being leaders. The other kids are looking up to them. It's, it's crazy.

Interviewer:

And that's good.

VL1:

[inaudible 00:30:06] But these two kids, we didn't realize it till after the second week they're actually a couple, and they're dating. [inaudible 00:30:14] They were born in the same small town in Texas. The boy moved to North Georgia, spent most of his life in

North Georgia. She went with migrate camps and farm workers all over. She's been over the place. And they didn't meet each other till they get to the group home here in Buford.

Interviewer:

Wow.

VL2:

They came from the exact same city.

VL1:

The same town in Texas.

VL2:

In Texas. Crazy.

Interviewer:

That is amazing.

VL2:

I know.

Interviewer:

Wow. Well, I know that it's been an incredible adventure and I've asked you this question before, but I got to ask it as our final question. I've got to do it. How would you judge success and failure of this program?

VL1:

[inaudible 00:00:31:11].

VL2:

Say that again. How would you, what?

Interviewer:

How would you judge success and or failure of your program? What would you consider a fail? What would you consider a success?

VL2:

The success I think is just getting this group of volunteers together. I was a little nervous I think. And I think we really, there was a lot of people that said they wanted to help. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, but. There's a small group that have actually followed through and they are awesome. Big success.

Interviewer:

So maybe that is something we could address. Is that something you feel in a seminar would help? Is that we kind of address some of the situations you come up with in acquiring, developing, training, volunteer.

VL2:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Volunteer development.

VL2:

And maybe, let's see...

VL1:

I don't think you want it to be like a such, cause it is, every class is different because even though you have a curriculum in front of you, there're times come up when questions come up. And so as far as training a leader, I don't think you want it to be like A, B, C, D, E, F. It's just like preparing them for what questions might come up or let them understand that God's in control and that when you teach these classes, known to trust that. And I think failure word be for me, especially these two right here, it'd be that for the two kids to go through the whole program and not feel the love that the church and that we have for them. That would be a failure if they can't feel the love from us and love from the church and the love of God.

Interviewer:

Wow.

VL1:

And the success would be when they leave there that they'll still pick up the phone and call and say, even after 16 weeks are still wanting to come hang out at the house or they're still showing up to church every Sunday and Wednesday are still wanting to be part of church and the church family. And they feel that even though that Mia and Justin made the comment that Mia said that she was on drugs and she was a wreck and then she got the Caplain and Caplain kind of got her life straight and I explained to her Caplain was not going to be there forever and right now Cap was her family. But once she gets



out of the Caplain she's going to need a family and she's going in the church is like Caplain church family is going to be like Caplain to her.

VL2:

For her life.

VL1:

For her life. Success is that they feel that and they see that over the 16 week period and they start making those habits.

Interviewer:

Okay. Well I'm going to throw you a final curve ball and that is it. Is there anything that you feel someone first hearing about this type of ministry, that teenage foster students, is there anything you think they need to hear from your heart about starting or learning more?

VL2:

There is no excuse not to help or, that you're not qualified. I didn't plan this 10 years ago that, Oh, I'm going to help with this foster care program and I got a train and have all these skills. Everyone can do this, everyone.

VL1:

It's not rocket science. All it is, is just coming straight from the heart and that's it is and anybody can do it. And anybody that has a heart for kids. Can do it. It's nothing.

Interviewer:

Great.

VL1:

It's harder to be, you can't explain it until you get into it. I feel guilty because, and I was thinking about it all the time since we started [inaudible 00:35:46] this whole time and we'd done nothing. I just feel guilty because it took Interviewer Griffin coming all the way from Daytona Beach, Florida to tell me there's a Caplain home over here with some kids that need some help.

Interviewer:

I think you're right. And you're also seeing it a different way because in Christ eyes we're all the same church. And he goes, Hey, my member here just needs to let you know, just speak a word. And you've caught what the spirit was saying to you. It started churning in you before we even thought about launching a program at Praise because once that word goes out, the Holy Spirit starts to work on the people that he's calling to action. And...

VL1:

We had another moment this past Sunday. Mia and Justin was going to spend some time with daddy so he wasn't going back to Caplain. So Justin sent VL2 a text and had to go pick her up. So we had to go pick her up from the group home, bring her to the house and I was gonna sit down and watch the NASCAR race cause it's raining and there wasn't nothing else to do.

VL1:

And they got rained out. So, I got an Amazon Prime Video that I'd never watch, never pulled it up. And I stumbled across this movie. You ever seen this movie about Mercy Me? The man?

Interviewer:

Oh yeah.

VL1:

Well Mia is here, So we pulled out that movie out of the blue, didn't know what it was about, started watching it with Mia on Sunday.

VL2:

The one about I can only imagine. And...

VL1:

So we're sitting there watching the kids. We were watching the movie about it, wit a kid that's been abused about a boy that got abused.

VL2:

And he had no idea what the whole thing...

VL1:

Watched the whole thing with her. [inaudible 00:37:38].

Interviewer:

That's great.

VL2:

I said to VL1, how did you find this movie? He goes, I didn't even know what it was about. I had no clue. Lots of little God moments that are just crazy.

Interviewer:

Awesome.

VL1:

And see what all these people that hadn't got involved in this is missing out on?

VL2:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Oh, it's incredible.

VL2:

And then when Mia got back to the house that night, she texted me and thanked me for having her over. And I was thinking thank me? We just sat around and did nothing. And I'm the one that I felt like VL1 and I benefited from her. Thanking me, are you kidding me? I'm the one that feels blessed.

Interviewer:

I love it. This is good. I'm going to...

## APPENDIX D

### Transcript of Volunteer Leader Interviews – VL3

Interviewer:

Well we are now linked and let us begin with a word of prayer. Lord, thank you for VL3. Thank you for this vital information that she provides from her perspective of reaching students through her life. Father, I pray that what we accomplish today will be fruitful for the establishing of effective means of reaching children in foster care. Bless this time, I pray, in Jesus name amen.

VL3:

Amen.

Interviewer:

Awesome. Well let's start with question one. In your opinion, what is the biblical mandate behind the activity of orphan care?

VL3:

The biblical mandate is pretty plainly to take care of the orphans and the widows and being a believer of the Bible and believing that its infallible word of God. I think that if it is instructed for us to do that, then that is something very dear to God's heart and we are expected to do this.

Interviewer:

Thank you. How do you believe you've been prepared? How has God prepared you for your assignment in serving these type of children?

VL3:

Over the course of the years, God has placed me divinely in places where I have been exposed to orphans through group home setting. I'm a nurse, a pediatric nurse that has a opportunity to develop a health program for a residential group home, for abused and neglected kids, but also had a independent living program at the time. I worked very closely with these types of kids for about five years. And then I had the opportunity to work with therapeutic half day program for abused and neglected children and work with their families. I also was a foster mom and ended up adopting a daughter. Through the years just had a lot of interaction. And looking back I realized that God put me in these places to prepare me for what I'm getting ready to do with Excellence and who knows what else in the future.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. How long have you been at your church?

VL3:

I have been attending Real Life Church now for a little over two years.

Interviewer:

Excellent. How do you feel your past in education may or may not have helped you prepare for this assignment? Like high school, graduate school, college, any type of training with the state.

VL3:

I probably got a lot of education during my years at the group home. I had a lot of going in as the nurse and not directly related with the social part of it. I attended a lot of trainings, a lot of seminars, was required to have certain trainings to work with these children. I think that probably prepared me more than anything educational wise. Like I said, my degree was in nursing, I think that God put me in some different places, not the typical healthcare scenario, just so that I could have exposure and get some of that training for this kind of thing.

Interviewer:

Thank you. How effective was the training you've received from Excellerate, if leadership been for your preparation for this assignment?

VL3:

Will you ask that one more time for me please?

Interviewer:

No Problem. How effective do you believe the training you've received from Excellerate? How effective has it been for your preparation for this job?

VL3:

The training that I had when you came down to train as well as my personal training there and just the conversations and I would say the training was extremely helpful. Through this training and hearing it from you as the founder of the program. I think I got a better feel of your heart personally versus it just coming handed down from somebody who does the program.

VL3:

With you being the founder and having the heart for the program. I feel your heart came out to in the training and it really resonated with my heart, which I feel the training and of itself was extremely efficient for laying the groundwork for the program. But more than anything I think it was helpful the way you presented it. I just feel a lot of your own passions came out and honestly it was just motivational and then you're also very willing and open to answer questions. You didn't stay inside of any particular boxes. I don't know if you're supposed to do that, if that helps or hurts you. But you got outside of the box and were able to answer our questions very thoroughly and I don't know, you helped me get a really good picture, I think of your heart for the program and also helped me have my ideas as well for a program that would fit our scenarios here.

Interviewer:

Thank you. What questions remain in your mind as you're preparing to launch your program? What are the big questions that they may have been answered or they may have not been answered, but what were some of the major questions that you faced preparing for this program?

VL3:

Probably just, what was this going to look like with us and where we are currently at with our size church, which is much smaller, would we be able to get the support from the state that we needed? And from other organizations, questions of Lord, who will you send to help with teaching and I guess just the overall. They're kind of, I guess some of the biggies.

Interviewer:

I want to just add another question on to that. What would hinder you or anyone else in your opinion from joining in on efforts to serve a ministry like Excellerate?

VL3:

Really the only thing I could think of honestly, would be for someone who didn't have a heart or a vision and see it like I do or someone that's interested in the program. Some people don't have the same heart for certain things. There's certain areas of ministry other people are passionate about, but I'm not, I would just say somebody that does not have the heart for this group of this population. Outside of that, if you really have a heart to help these children and understand, that's probably one of the reasons maybe some people don't have a heart because they don't think about the predicament that these children are in and don't get inside of their shoes and think about what a very difficult, challenging thing it is for these kids. They don't quite understand that. They're just not worried about it. And, just don't consider it a need to pursue such a program.

Interviewer:

Absolutely. Thank you very much. What would you like, if you could add something or add multiple things to the plan that you have right now for Excellerate, what would you add to it in the training side or the preparation side?

VL3:

I do think it is going to be extremely important. The initial training with you, like I said, I feel it was absolutely, I don't know if necessary is the right word, but definitely needed to get a feel of the program and the true vision behind it. But I think we will have to get that it's very important after you leave to get on a personal level with your own people because each place, every individual is different and the people that end up signing up to get involved, especially with the mentoring piece, they're going to have different backgrounds, different strengths and weaknesses.

VL3:

And I think it'll be very important to be sure that you've met with and maybe had additional training on a more private level to be sure that everybody's on the same page to be sure everybody feels comfortable with what they're doing and that they feel they're where God wants them to be in the program. Also, to be sure that we all are working together with the

same goals and visions. I think it's important to have another secondary training before launching for those purposes.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. What would you cut, if you could, anything from the training that you've received, what would you eliminate or lessen?

VL3:

To be quite honest, I really don't know that I could really say anything because really all the aspects that were covered were very important in one way or another, they were important parts of the program. And I don't feel any particular point was overemphasized in any way. At the top of my head, I really can't think of anything that I would go back and say, "Oh, well he shouldn't have spent so much time on that or I that wasn't necessary."

Interviewer:

All right. What should other church leaders like you, know or hear about serving foster kids? Now let me qualify that statement. Let's say you were going to a conference. What would you like other church leaders to hear at that conference about serving foster kids?

VL3:

Honestly, the thing that I felt was the most influential thing were the stories and testimonies of children for a couple of different reasons. Number one, to present real life scenarios to the people so that it can get in their heads and their heart that this is a real thing. These are real circumstances because people that maybe have not worked so closely only have ideas and sometimes it doesn't seem real. Something they might think, "Oh that's not that bad or it's a maybe." But when you share with them a couple of stories of the kids and what they've been through and where they're at and the challenges they're facing. You've got kids that have been in and out of the foster home, the foster system here, there and yonder, bender relatives. And now all of a sudden, they're 18 or whatever, 19 and here they sit, they don't have a car, they can't get a job, maybe gotten pregnant, can't get childcare, whatever.

VL3:

And here they sit with no hope. The people that are listening may have lived a life where they've never had to think about these things so they don't think about the reality of the situation for these kids. I feel like presenting real life scenarios and then also encouraging them with testimony is very encouraging. I really loved all the testimonies that you shared because in my heart it made me realize what a difference I could make. And even if it was the life of one child that's major, one life change is worth all the effort. If you can help the child succeed and not end up as a statistic. And I think these kind of things are what would really hit home to anybody that was training.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. The next question is kind of a community question. Do you know of any church leaders in your area outside of your own church, that are currently serving orphans locally?

VL3:

The closest thing that I'm aware of in our community, which I think now is actually spreading to be a statewide thing is a community organization called Fostering the Family. But it more or less is not so much directly for the individual youth, but there are care groups, care communities that reach out and help the foster family. But, they do get involved through helping the families, the foster family, because they learn about different situations and then people can ask around and see if there's other resources, people find out the need that way and maybe can help. But I am not aware. I do know in the county there is a... Forgot the name of it, but there's referral sources for the youth. There is some place that offers some type of housing under certain circumstances, they have to go through a whole hoop of red tape but I'm not aware of any particular program like Excelerate.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. We are in question number 10. You're doing well. This is an interesting question. Why do you believe others serve or don't serve foster care orphans in their community? Churches specifically? I would probably stick with why they do not serve well. A better question since we've addressed it earlier.

VL3:

Well, I think that has a lot to do with the individual churches and the atmosphere and emphasis in the churches. Some churches are more outreach minded than others. And then I'll say certain churches, depending on the population of the church, tend to sway more towards certain ministries than others, and then perhaps some of them aren't aware of the needs. Maybe some of them feel there's too much that needs to be done or they just don't want to get involved with, quote, unquote. A lot of times churches have a very negative attitude towards these children and feel like they're trouble and don't want to get involved with the trouble aspect because stories they've heard, if the child has a history of violence or been in out of jail or these kinds of things, they just don't want to touch that. They feel it would cause them troubles. Maybe, be more trouble than it's worth so to speak. Some just might be purely unaware of what they could do to make a difference.

Interviewer:

Thank you. That's good. What do you feel was your greatest influence to get involved in this type of industry?

VL3:

My greatest influence would be my personal experiences with the children in the system, it's my own personal experiences. I have worked so closely with them. I have watched scenarios and just longed to help them and wish that I could help them and be there for them to help them know there's hope regardless of their situation and circumstances. And just that great passion to help.

Interviewer:

Perfect. What difficulties have you had since you started to serve in foster care at your church? Personal, professional, corporate?



VL3:

I would say a couple of things. First of all would be maybe potentially overcoming any negativity and "Oh, you've got to be careful this or that," and I understand them and processes and all of this, but sometimes I think people in goodwill meaning well, may not understand the heart of the ministry and that it does require some extra TLC above what would may seem normal to most people. Sometimes people will throw in a little negativity and try to put out the fire. You have to overcome that and just stay focused not to let that get you down. I would say that's probably the biggest thing, is just overcoming negativity that people may try to put in front of you. That's probably the best answer to that question.

Interviewer:

You feel people have a negative disposition, not everyone, but some people have a negative disposition. Would it be it's too much for you or others or what do you think is the source of that negativity?

VL3:

I think it's being uneducated about how these children ... I'm trying to say this the right way. A lot of people, like I said earlier, are afraid of these kids and they are afraid of things that may come up. And I have an understanding what these kids... The kids have issues, they're not going to come to us without issues, they have to learn, they have to grow, they need the social skills that we're going to be teaching them, they're children. And sometimes I think people that aren't familiar with that feel if they don't act like their own children, that they're going to be more difficult and just want to be sure that quote, unquote "Know what you're getting into" If that makes any sense.

Interviewer:

That makes sense. Totally. How do you feel your program has been received by the congregation as a whole so far?

VL3:

I've been very pleased. I think there are a lot of people excited about the program and a lot of people have recently stepped up and voiced that they would love to help in any way that they can. And certain people have signed up for certain areas and they're excited about it.

Interviewer:

Excellent. You're really getting through these questions. We only have two more.

VL3:

Staying focused.

Interviewer:

What are the worst and best parts of leading this program?

VL3:

The best part is just the anticipation, excitement of knowing that we can get personally involved with some of these kids and the thoughts of just making a difference. To me personally, like I said, if you do all of this and one child gets saved from the statistics. Totally incredibly worth it to me. And that to me is most exciting.

VL3:

The other thing that I look forward to is if we get through the first program, the first 16 weeks and there's a success story, I'll be super excited to be able to share that success story with others and hope that the word would spread and that other surrounding churches would want to get involved, that this would help us propel the whole mission of Excellerate. Just spread the word about the program and get out and, if there's several churches in the county doing this, it can just become a well known program and it would be a second nature thing, "Oh have you contacted one Excellerate program," and they become something that would branch out to be success on a much larger level for these children. And then you said the worst part of leading, is that what you asked me?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

VL3:

The worst part is definitely just the beginning trying to figure it all out. Just trying to worm in your way through the practical pieces. And I'm not talking about if you didn't guide us, but when you're really into it and it's the real scenario, your community, your county, your people, your church, you have to feel your way around. That's definitely been a challenge. It's not an awful thing. It's just part of the process and that's the not so fun part, is navigating things and then trying to figure out, because when you start as a cook [inaudible 00:28:36], how to make this work, how this, how that and then all these questions are coming and just kind of pray and let God lead you and he opens the doors and leads the way.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. There is a learning curve to this even with your incredible history with foster care it seems like every generation has new levels and stipulations within communities of how this is can be implemented, how any outreach to foster kids can be implemented and navigating that is absolutely something we need to be aware of and include in training. My last question doesn't have to be your last question, but it's my last question for you. When we're concluded with our interview, you'll be able to ask any questions you have because I know that you'd mentioned earlier you had some, we'll definitely do that. But my last question for this assignment is, how would you judge success and or failure as the leader of this organization?

VL3:

How I judge. Do you mean in reference to the program itself or just in general success and failure.

Interviewer:

In general, success and failure of the program itself. What would be a win for you? What do you think would be a fail?

VL3:

For me, a win would be continuing to move forward? Even when there may be some challenges involved, pushing through as God leads and seeing it come to fruition. Owning that class and meeting those first two kids and getting to know them and bringing them in and just making it happen would be a success. I think to me a failure would be if there was ever discouragement to the point of saying, "We can't do this," or failure to me would just mean giving up because of obstacles.

Interviewer:

Well, thank you so much.

VL3:

Sure.

Interviewer:

I'm going to disconnect our recording device. And then we can continue-

VL3:

Okay.

## APPENDIX E

### Survey Questions for Volunteers

- How long have you attended your church?
- What is your favorite aspect of serving Excelerate?
- What is your least favorite aspect of serving Excelerate?
- How long do you spend in Bible study and prayer each week?
- I feel most effective in my role as volunteer in Excelerate:
- What part of your role as servant leaders is most difficult?
- Briefly describe the difficulty you experience or previously experienced.
- How long have you worked as an Excelerate volunteer?
- Do you feel equipped for the task of leading students in Excelerate?
- Do you feel spiritually equipped for the task of volunteer in Excelerate?
- How much training do you feel someone should receive for the task of volunteer in Excelerate?

## APPENDIX F

### Survey Answers for Volunteers

#### What is your favorite aspect of serving Excellerate?

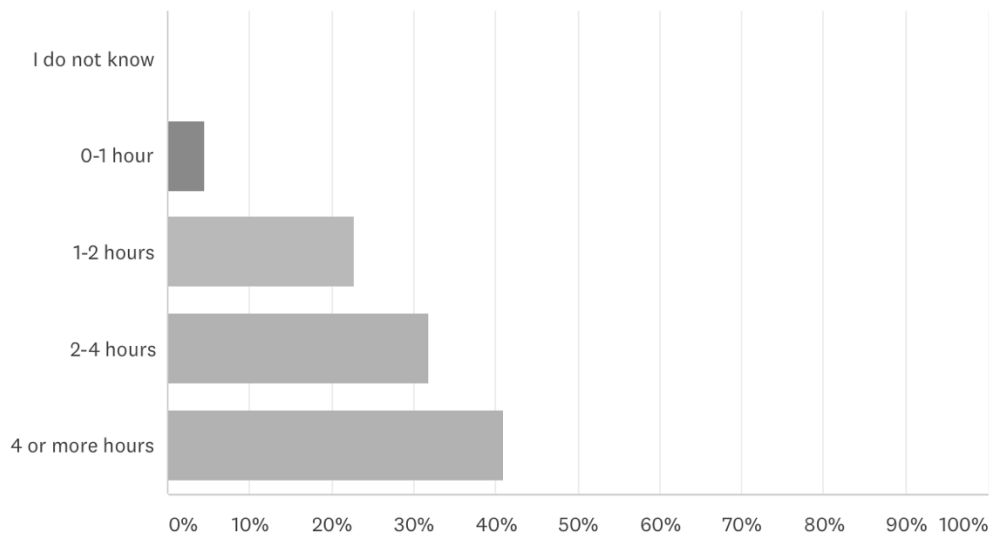
- My favorite aspect of the program is that it directly impacts the lives of the participating students with an emphasis on strengthening their walk with God.
- It gives these kids a real chance to succeed
- Giving back to those who need help the most.
- Leading the students into a paradigm shift when presenting intelligent design vs. impersonal random chance that must require greater faith. Also, it was a joy to lay out the plan of salvation.
- Serving with others, helping lead students to maturity
- Working with the kids
- Helping others and bringing hope to them
- Serving & Meeting each student where they are, while walking in LOVE.
- Being useful
- The cause and mission of the program. I love the family feel of the classroom.
- Relationship with students
- Spending time connecting with students in the classroom.
- The one on one connection with kids!
- Bringing All the kids to Jesus in Love Seeing smiles replaced where there was darkness for them to have dreams that were stolen from them
- Watching the transformation of each student from when they start to how they finish. A total life change.
- Making a difference in these kids lives
- When the student you're mentoring realize that you love them.
- Watching the growth of the students as they go through the program
- Seeing the kids changes, and community
- The mission of the organization
- Fund raising and watching the students interact, study, worship and change dramatically.
- Seeing the transformation in the kids. Going from broken to on fire for God!

#### What is your least favorite aspect of serving Excellerate?

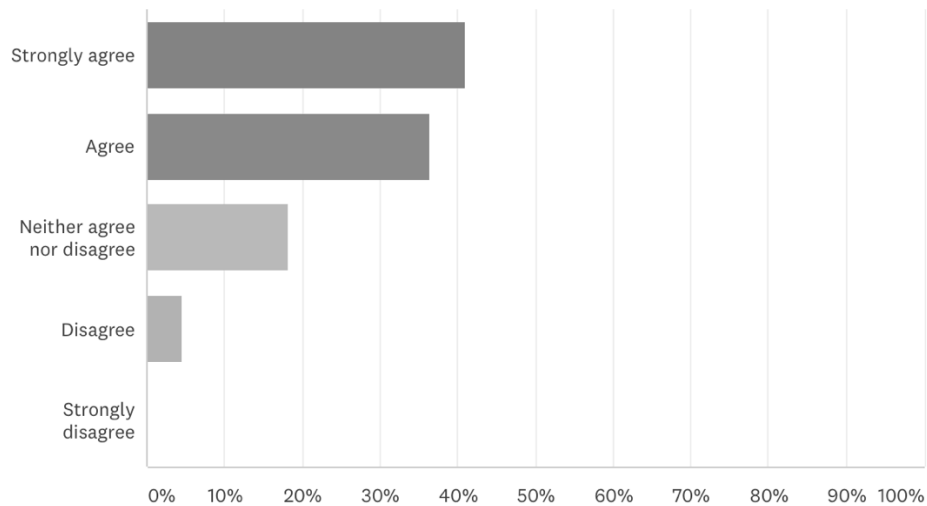
- Our favorite aspect is working with the foster children and making a difference
- Wish we could help more young people
- Hmmm.....That's a hard question. Our program just started so I don't know if I've experienced enough of it yet.

- In the Spiritual training, having other couples in the class who feel they should constantly contribute and then ramble on, thereby distracting from the lesson instead of silently interceding. Then, when privately asked to not contribute till the end and to intercede, they get their feelings hurt. The other couples need to trust those who are leading and realize that that time is not about them, but about the students. There needs to be co-operation. The student's attention span is only so long.
- Na
- Loved it all
- Nothing
- The inability to extend the program to lay a better foundation.
- Not always being able to attend.
- Inconsistency of curriculum and lack field trips. Disruptive classroom time. Tardiness during class.
- Dealing with legal restrictions
- Sometimes the classroom gets crazy loud and chaotic
- Lack of engagement from students
- Not being able to be used the way the Lord commanded me at times in the past
- Not able to spend more time with my student that I mentor. Mostly due to job schedule.
- Dealing with their transportation issues
- Not enough outside time with the students.
- High turnover rate in leaders creating a lack of stability
- Aa
- Not having the resources to help more kids
- Servant leaders and students are all rarely on time to activities.
- Not a lot of 1 on 1 with our mentees. I wish we could be more a part of their experience earlier in the class.

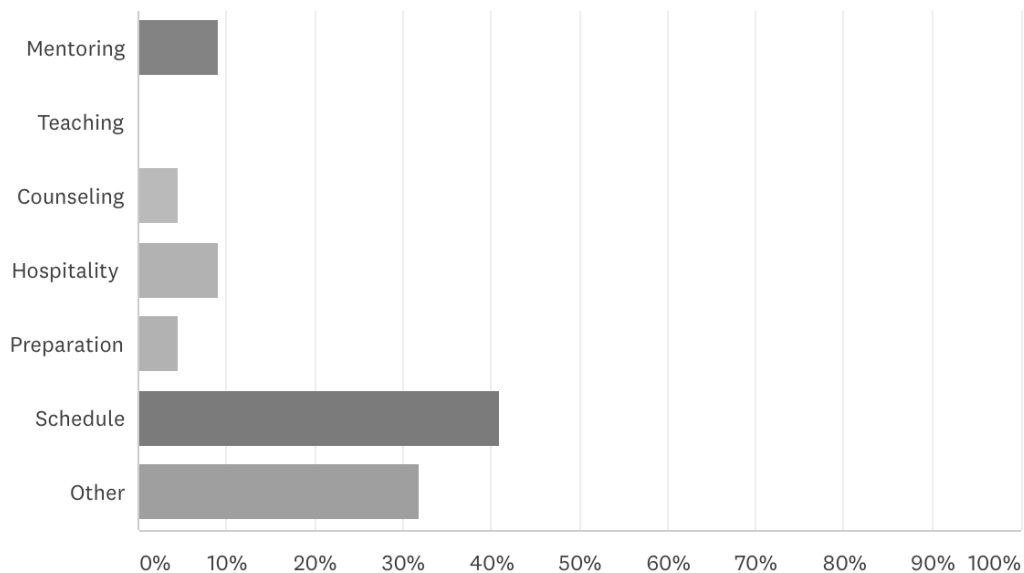
### How long do you spend in Bible study and prayer each week?



**I feel most effective in my role as volunteer in Excellerate:**



**What part of your role as volunteer is most difficult?**

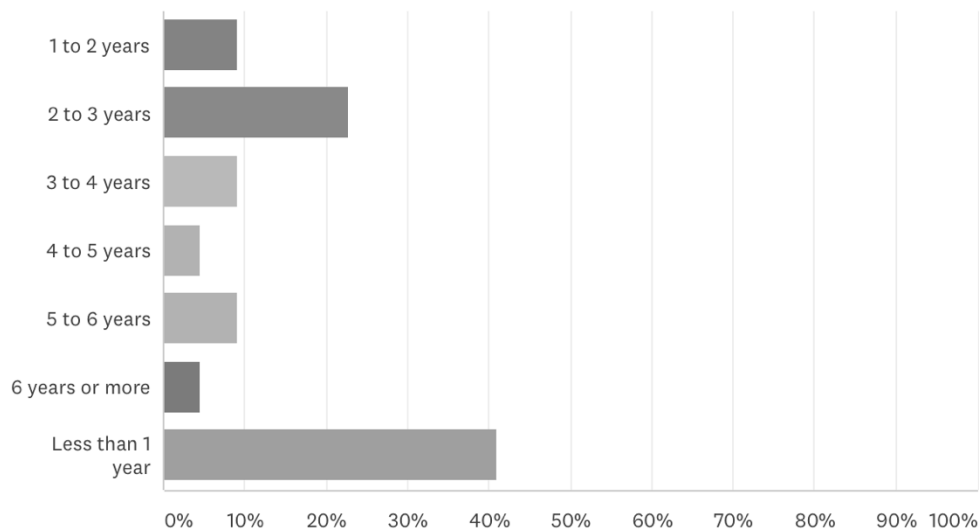


**Briefly describe the difficulty you experience or previously experienced.**

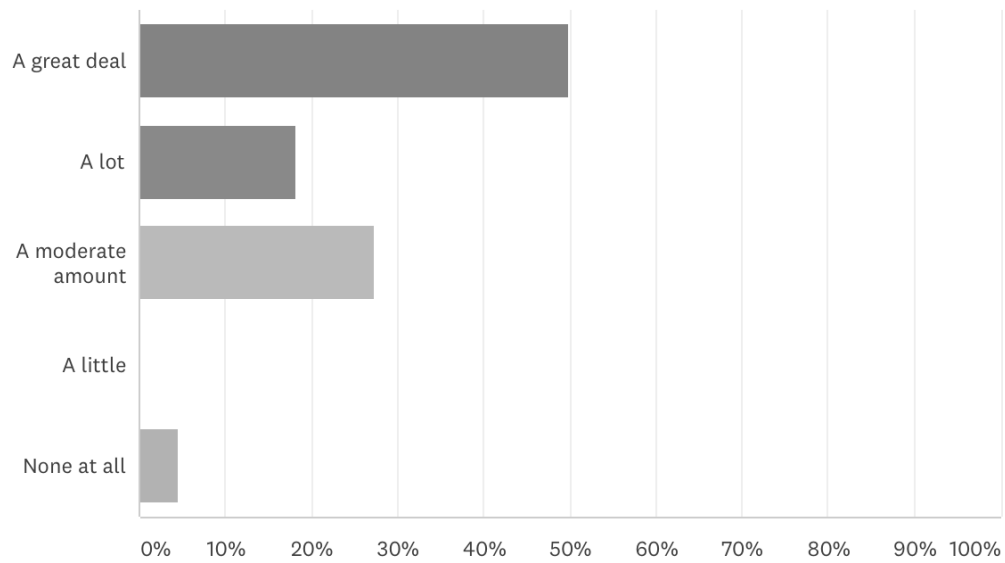
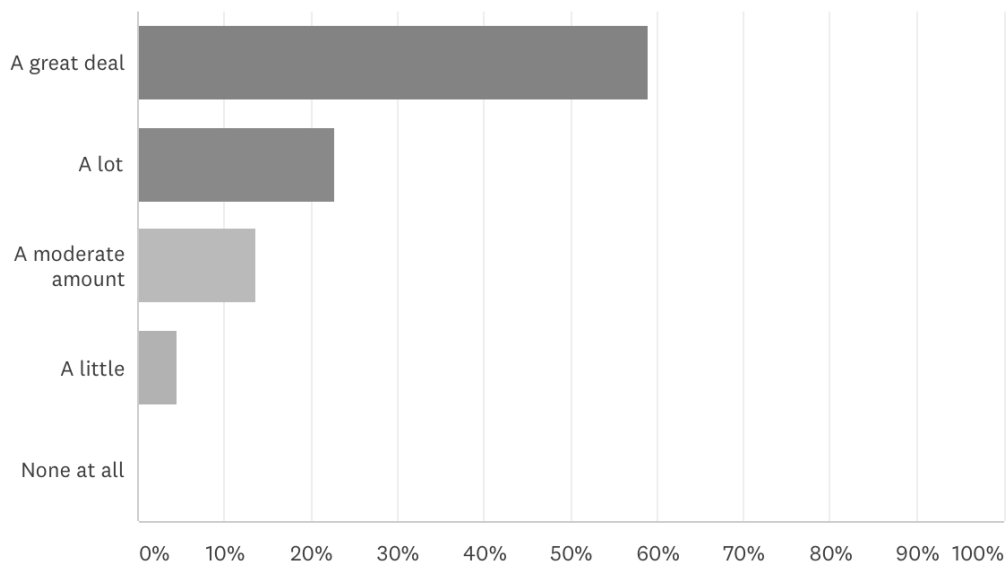
- I travel during the week so meeting during the week is difficult
- My work hours make it difficult to be more involved
- Just scheduling a time to serve... I'm very busy with my family and the church.
- No real difficulty at all as long as the other volunteers who sit in the class do not distract with constant interruptions. My wife and I know how to flow in the spirit together. We ask volunteers to share at the end.
- NA

- Child care
- My personal schedule and responsibilities don't allow me to do more
- The vision & mission of the founder wasn't reinforced throughout the leadership team.
- Work schedule
- A lot of distractions in the classroom in the past. But this recent class improved a lot.
- Preparing for class with snacks and drinks has not been my strength. I am not very good at hospitable things and I have had times when the students did not seem happy with the snacks or presentation of them that I prepared.
- It is hard to make it to classes because of work schedules.
- Many students go through really hard stuff and I wish I was trained to help them navigate through those hard times!
- My work schedule doesn't always allow for max time with students.
- Leaders
- I was a bit upset when one of our students was very disrespectful to Steve. It me nervous, as I come from a bit of a violent background
- With such a busy work schedule I found it hard to prepared certain class but because I've been leading for a little while i was able to retain and reference back to prior classes
- I love you man
- None
- Getting close to the students and recognizing their needs and fears.
- Distance between my mentee and I geographically and my busy schedule during the week

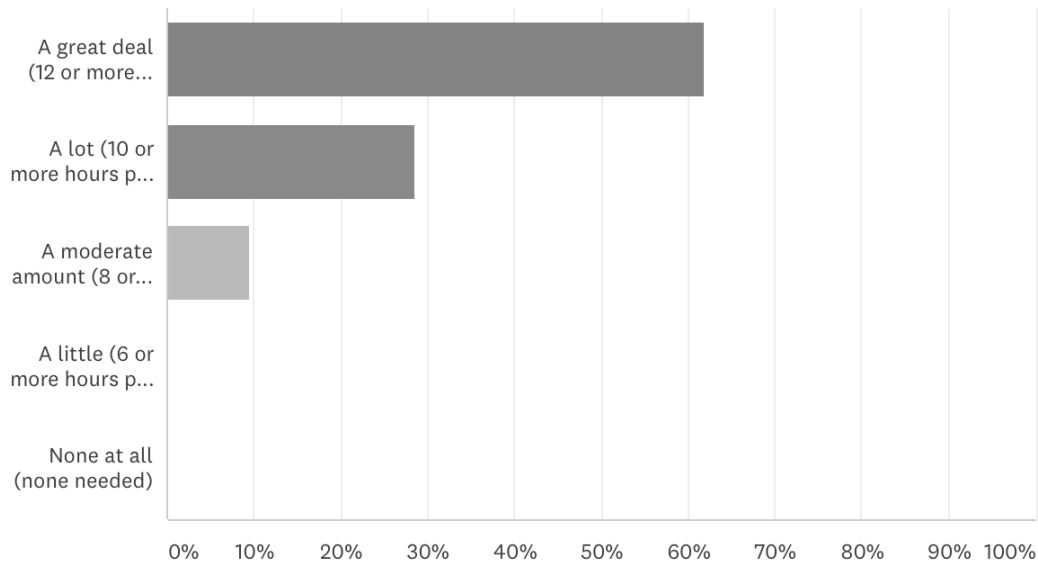
### How long have you worked as an Excellerate servant leader?





**Do you feel equipped for the task of leading students in Excellerate?****Do you feel spiritually equipped for the task of volunteer in Excellerate?**

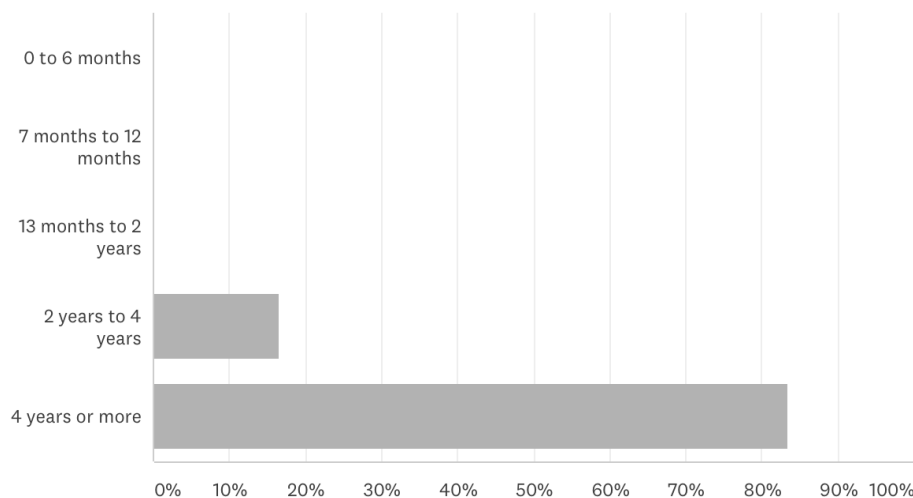
### How much training do you feel someone should receive for the task of volunteer in Excellerate?



### What has motivated you to serve foster teens?

- We adopted two children, one private and one through the foster system and we saw and heard first hand the challenges faced by these kids.
- My heart breaks for what most of these young people have gone through.
- Just my faith..."do unto the least of these"
- A heart for the orphan spirit to bring them into their identity
- Our family has considered fostering/adopting. Not sure of timing due to being a military family. We felt this would be a good way to get to know students.
- Felt lead to

### How long have you attended your church?



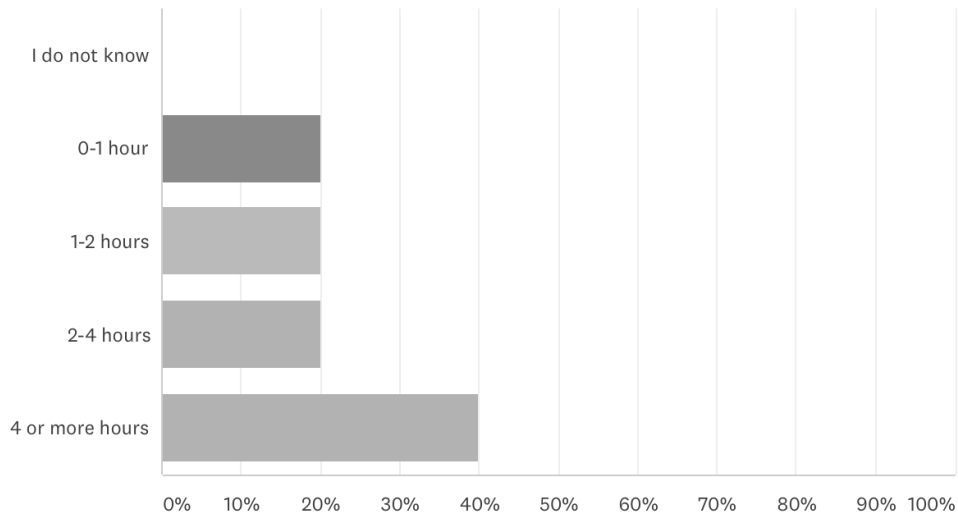
### What is your favorite aspect of serving Excellerate?

- Helping the Kids
- Seeing God move in the students and the volunteers
- The teamwork aspect... engaging in the same goal with like minded people
- Leading them to Christ and building their identity
- Serving others
- All

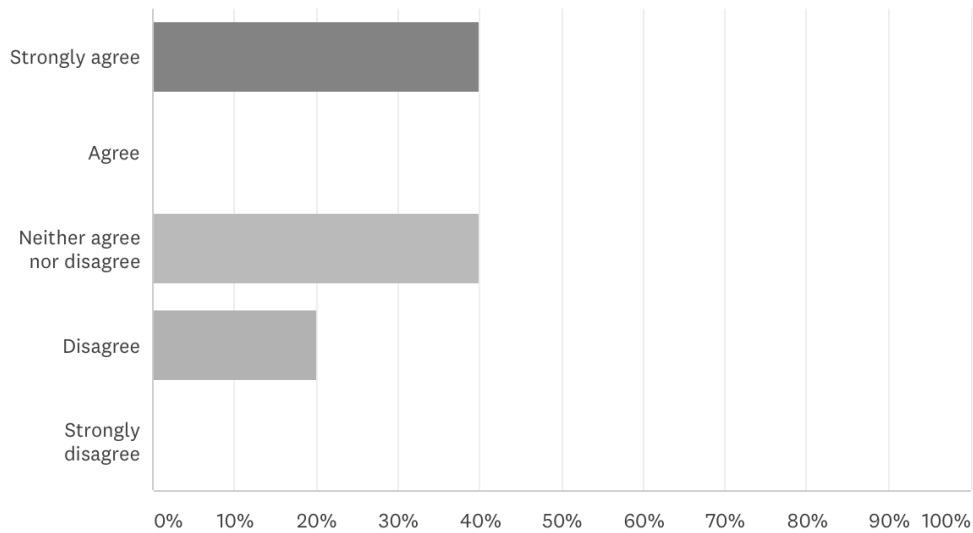
### What is your least favorite aspect of serving Excellerate?

- Doing this the first time I feel we are all really unprepared. But I am sure it will get easier over time
- Fundraising
- Interruptions and hurt feelings of other volunteers
- Love it

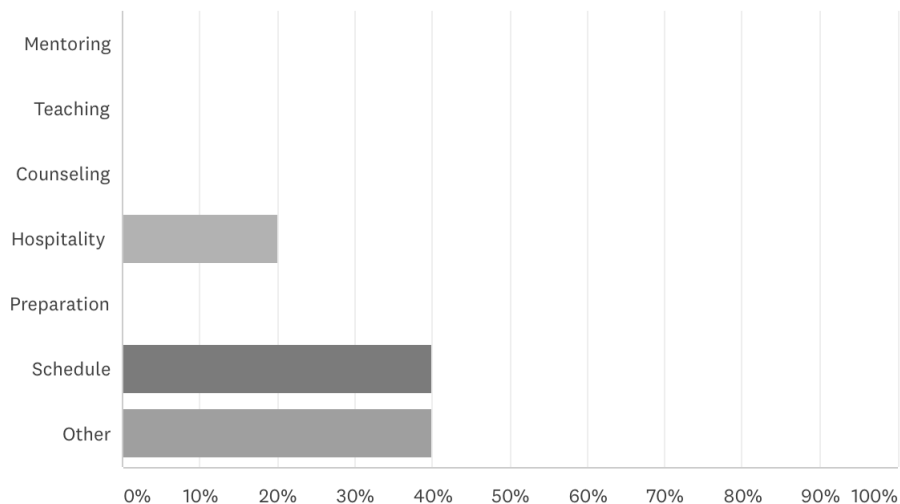
### How long do you spend in Bible study and prayer each week?



**I feel most effective in my role as servant leader in Excellerate:**



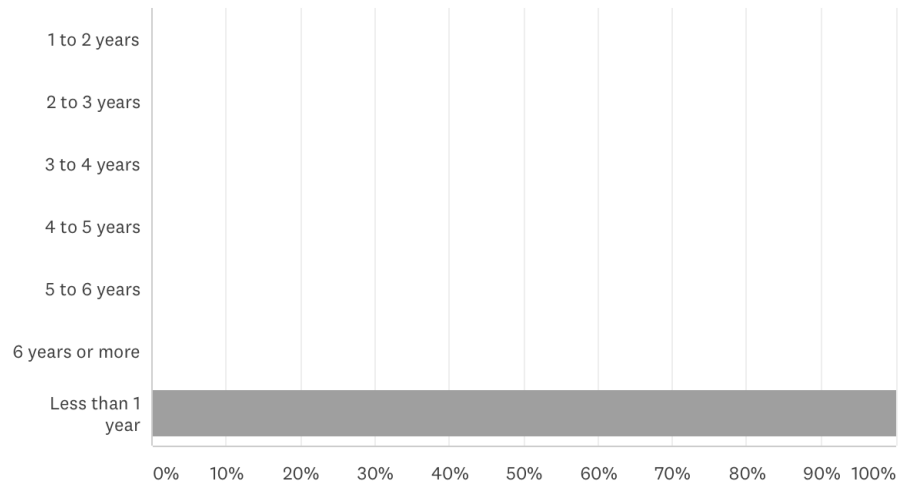
**What part of your role as servant leader is most difficult?**



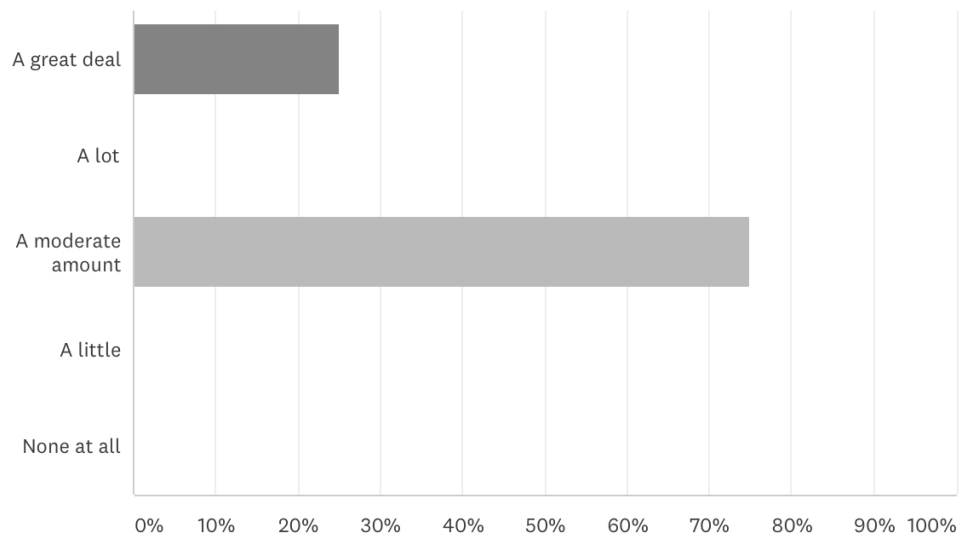
**Briefly describe the difficulty you experience or previously experienced.**

- It's our first time through so I don't have a lot of feedback yet, other than it would have been nice to have a train-the-trainer type model. We feel a little on our own other than the materials.
- My work schedule
- Identical questions in this survey

**How long have you worked as an Excellerate servant leader?**



**Do you feel equipped for the task of leading students in Excellerate?**



## APPENDIX G

### **Pastor Interview Transcript - P1 and P2**

Interviewer:

Thank you so much for joining on this call. I'm recording this. It'll be transcribed and placed in my appendix of my dissertation and then the material that I gain from our interview will be infused into my seminar that will assist church leadership in establishing compassion organizations in their own communities.

P1 & P2:

Got you.

Interviewer:

As Lord willing, it will set some leaders free from the feeling that they have to do it all on their own.

P1 & P2:

Absolutely, absolutely.

Interviewer:

That it's a community effort.

P1 & P2:

Good, good. I like it.

Interviewer:

So if you all are ready, we could begin.

P1 & P2:

Yes sir, we're ready.

P1 & P2:

Yes.

Interviewer:

All right, question one is a good warm-up question. How long have you been the lead pastor of your church?

P1 & P2:

We've been here 14 years. It'll be 14 years May the 30th. Actually Memorial weekend we came, 14 years ago. 14 years in May.

Interviewer:

Wow. What do you believe God has done to prepare you to reach children in the foster care system?

P1 & P2:

Well, honestly I think for us, what helped us kind of identify that has been something I've seen here as a pastor and I really didn't see it as much on a staff pastor, but as a pastor I began to see the principle, I think it was the old principle, Tommy Barnett, what's in your house. And I think what we saw was that not only we had a heart for students from our background in youth ministry, but we saw people in the house begin to step up for some passion and compassion ministries. We had orphan care, we had been involved in young people and people with special needs, and this was obviously one of the things that touched our hearts. Even before we did this here we saw that people had a dream to help kids that are aging out of foster care, and we felt that way in our heart too, that we wanted to be a part of that as lead pastors.

P1 & P2:

But we saw where the church kind of identified where they were at, but it was the identification for us and what God was doing in our community and in our church based on what he was doing in people. I felt the direction of the Lord in that.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. And Kim, whenever you feel like adding or if you feel like Jamie has adequately covered something, you can hold your peace, but whatever you want to add, go for it. This is a tandem interview. We want to hear from both leaders. So I'll ask you a great starting question. What do you feel the Bible says about serving the needs of the children at risk, children that are in desperate situations like in foster care?

P1 & P2:

Well, I know that the Bible specifically tells us to take care of orphans and widows and I know that these kids are not necessarily orphans, but some of them are and they need a place and I've always had a huge heart for orphans and kids in foster care. I actually wanted to take some kids in before. I know the Bible just says to take care of those people that can't. I mean, especially kids that can't help themselves, necessarily, we need to be there to take care of their needs and meet them where they are and show them the love of God.

Interviewer:

Thank you, excellent. How do either of you or both of you feel education has played into your willingness or ability to serve children in the foster care system, or the lack thereof? Do you feel like education has helped/ Do you feel like it hasn't? And then expand on that if you can.

P1 & P2:

I think education when it comes to our own general knowledge of who we are and where we've come from, I think in our personal background and education whether it be ministry and preparing for that through college or with Kim's background in teaching and going to college for that, I think it helped us to understand the world is bigger than ourselves and what we've experienced. I think that helped us grow in our own mind and our own perspective of the world.

P1 & P2:

I think what I tell people is I think some of the greatest days of my life were in college because I began to interact with people from everywhere and I realized life is just so much bigger than me and bigger than what I've experienced at that point.

P1 & P2:

One of the things that I would say as far as being educated about foster ministry and foster care and compassion is to realize the need. Because I think just like when you get around other people in a college setting, you get to see people's perspective in other areas, realizing the need. Unless you're face-to-face to it, sometimes ignorance is bliss. Out of sight, out of mind. But then being able to be educated about the foster care system, where students are, how they're struggling, and it has to motivate us to do something or to be an aid, come alongside somebody who's doing something, that kind of thing. So I do think it's helped us as far as our general education goes, and then also educating ourselves when it comes to foster ministry.

Interviewer:

Thank you, excellent. That really helps me. How effective was the training you received from the Accelerate leadership in assisting you in launching your program?

P1 & P2:

Well, I think it was effective because let me just say what I sense is, and this is my opinion, I think the training was helpful because it helped us realize kind of what we were getting into, realized kind of the runway. There's some things I didn't know. I feel like that it's probably like any other thing. Although I thought the training was helpful, I think follow-up training would be helpful because, let me tell you why.

P1 & P2:

Because I see that there are questions that arise that you don't ask because you've never done it before. I'm talking about us. We've never done some of these things and in the process of doing these things, questions arise. And I think being able to be prepared for some of the stuff we do and say, I think the interview process with the students that we had was very effective. Knowing what to do really helped. Honestly, knowing what to do when it comes to interview process, selection of students, knowing what to do as far as class goes, has helped us know. Because when you don't know, you just don't know and you're afraid. But it's given us knowledge to do those things.

P1 & P2:

What I would look at to say later what a great opportunity it is to have follow-up because it helps us answer some questions that arise during that season we didn't expect and some



questions have arisen from us just how to handle situations. How to minister to students, how to select leaders, and those things, I think, will help us in the future.

P1 & P2:

And something I'm so thankful for in this training is just the lesson plans that y'all give us because without a lesson plan, it would have been hard. Jamie and I taught yesterday on failures and if I'd not had the lesson plan, it kind of gave us a thing to go by as to how to approach it. Thank you for those.

Interviewer:

Our pleasure. We are committed to seeing these programs succeed and with a mom who's an educator, I understand the value of lesson plans. They can be powerful or they can be a nightmare.

P1 & P2:

It's all fantastic but it just gave us a guideline, so thank you so, so much.

Interviewer:

No problem. Here's another question about questions. After the training, what questions did you still have or do you still have that are yet to be answered in your leading this program and seeing it develop?

P1 & P2:

I think that the questions that I have and have had about it is we really, and I'll take it back to what Kim said, lesson plans helped us very much as far as lessons itself. I think the questions that I would have looking back is how we as a local church can present and incorporate our people into the lives of these students. My background is youth ministry. I didn't want to call people out, as far as students go, but at the same time we want to make sure our folks know them. And so knowing how do we present it to the church. How do we present these students to the church? How do we on purpose help our church embrace some of these students instead of... We do have a great team, but we want the whole church to be involved in this.

P1 & P2:

So for us, give us some tips of how to do that better. I think those are the questions I would have, because honestly what I told the students last night, and Kim was there and we were team teachers, I said, "Look, this isn't about a program to us. It's about our heart. We want you to know we love you and we believe God set you in this place and chose you to be a part, for us to love on you and be a part of your life."

P1 & P2:

So I want the heart of it to come through and I think that's the challenge for us, is to help our people realize that the heart of what we're doing is more important and as important as some of the structural things we do. So the question would be, for me, how do I help our church and our leaders embrace these students and as a church, embrace them? Really, to take them on as their own students.

Interviewer:

That's good. I have a question about the training. Is there anything in the training that you think is unnecessary that needs to be removed, or things that need to be added that might have been missed?

P1 & P2:

I mean, so far I think that a lot of the topics that we saw are right on, and I don't see anything that you could add or subtract from it.

P1 & P2:

I'll tell you what I would do, and since you mentioned it and it's something that we've talked about recently. I'll tell you one of the things I would do with the training which is a next level type thing, or a little bit addition, is I would require "some key leaders" or people that are really a part of it to come to an Accelerate in Ormond Beach. I think for them to sit there in a classroom and see how that operates, I think, would have helped us. Because I think that helps, and I think it's going to help us as far as this process goes what to do.

P1 & P2:

I know this is just rambling a bit. I come from a youth ministry background and so I kind of understand, but not everybody understands kind of everything. How it looks, what the feel is, how it's supposed to be carried out, and we want to be life-giving. And I think a good training thing would be have some of the folks that are going through training to actually be "required" to come to a Wednesday night or come to a Sunday morning Accelerate and see what it's like in a hands-on and observe and almost shadow for a night and bring that back to help us be successful in what we're doing.

Interviewer:

Absolutely. That is good. If you were standing in front of a group of church leaders, maybe at a regional or district minister's conference, what would you feel that other leaders should know about serving children in foster care in their community?

P1 & P2:

I think what I would let them know is just a couple things. I would let them know the need, of course, in their community and in terms of they need to look it up. And then I think I would let them know the call, of course, of the Lord for the local church. I also would let them know, I think I would encourage them to say, "Look." Your people, they have a heart. They want to serve. They want to love people, and I would just encourage them to not let anything, fear of vehicles or fear of not knowing what to do, stop them from saying, "Look, here's the need, here's the call of God, and you know what? The Bible calls us to be light."

P1 & P2:

I mean, my hope and desire is that we... In fact, I told the guys the day we met at a meeting at Starbucks with our staff. I said, "I want to do a Christmas party just like you guys do with these two students." Because I think it speaks to them. I think that I would encourage pastors and all those to kind of get out of, maybe a little bit tight, maybe a little more generous and lavish in

what we do. But I would encourage them to understand, too, that the world, the community sees this, and that it is about being light in darkness.

P1 & P2:

That's what I would do. So I would do the need, the call, and then the greater call, which is being hope, showing that we are hope to a hopeless world, but we believe God will use that to see more people come to Christ.

Interviewer:

Excellent, thank you very much. Are there any other church leaders, for instance, [inaudible 00:17:15] in your area, your region, that you know of that are doing or considering outreach to children in foster care?

P1 & P2:

I know of folks that... Yes. The answer's yes, I do. And actually, a couple guys that I know have actually gone to the level of some have adopted little ones in foster care or young people. Those have aged out. I haven't heard much about that but I do know that when it comes to foster care, yes, I do know other churches that are ministering by themselves, promoting foster care in their church and also by themselves, having foster children and adopting some of them.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. This is a tough question. Why do other churches fail or not or decide or not decide, but regardless, they fail to serve children in their community in foster care?

P1 & P2:

Fear. Fear that it's going to be too hard of a task, but that would be one thing.

P1 & P2:

And I think ignorance just in that not knowing some of the need. I think fear, not being in front of them. You know, sometimes pastors and churches are so concerned with what they're doing and what they have to do, consumed, not necessarily in a bad way. I'm not saying they're just consumed because they have an agenda. Or maybe they're consumed about paying their bills. They're consumed with meeting budget. They're consumed with keeping people satisfied, and I think that hinders folks.

P1 & P2:

I think another thing that hinders people, which is something that's going to sound weird to you, [Allen 00:19:10], maybe. I think some pastors may struggle with the idea of what does this have to do with the gospel? We have people that think it's not preaching, that that's not ministry, and we have to see the bigger picture of that, that it is ministry, it is filling the compassion ministry of the Lord. It's meeting needs in Jesus' name. It's what Jesus did. He met real felt needs and he did it according to the kingdom. So I think maybe some of that, too, can be some reluctance to people, not realizing how important it is when it comes to gospel ministry of the local church.

P1 & P2:

I think the number one reason, though, is the inward focus of churches. I think not just because we're all satisfied, but I think because we don't want to offend people, we don't want to challenge people, and I think we're concerned about paying our own bills and dealing with our own financial issues at the local church that it's hard for us to see beyond our own selves.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. What do you think could help others get involved and serve or begin outreach to children in the foster care system? Especially I'm focusing, of course, on teenagers in the foster care system who may come of age and never be adopted, or never be able to go back to their birth family. What would help churches and church leaders start an outreach to that demographic?

P1 & P2:

Go ahead, Kim. Kim's going to start this.

P1 & P2:

I think just showing them stories of success and showing them stories that there are so many needs out there and what people go through in the foster care system. Just kind of what you came and did at Praise. It gave us a heart for that, too. I mean, we had a heart for it before, but it just gave us even more of a heart for it, because you see stories. I mean, I know that stories, in my opinion, they help move me of just seeing how God changes lives when somebody reaches out to them.

Interviewer:

That's a very interesting... I was wanting to hear a little bit more about that, as I was thinking what you were saying sounds a lot like the traditional Assemblies of God missions service, where the missionaries come in and share the stories from the mission field. And not all of the stories were victorious, but because we know the word of God brings faith when we speak it and others hear it, I wonder if people hearing the stories of God's great victory in the lives of an adopted teen in the foster care system makes for a heart similarly to the mission emphasis in the Assemblies of God.

P1 & P2:

Yeah, I would say so. I mean, I would say so. I think hearing the stories and actually hearing the stories from students. Students that have gone through the process and had victory and have a story to tell about their lives, I think those are rich and do connect with people. And I think, as Leonard Sweet says that the future belongs to the storytellers. So I think these walking testimonies are not only they hear about a student, there's a student right there. He's a man now. Let's hear his story.

P1 & P2:

I mean, we know it connects. We, of course, not to go off, but I know Mike Johnson's gone to one of the places, to Bojangles, and asked the guy to help us with sponsor, provide food, and he looked at Mike and said, "Well, where was this when I was in foster care, because I aged out." This is the manager talking. He's a grown man now.

Interviewer:

Wow.

P1 & P2:

There are people that are out there and people that go through this process who are going to be able to be walking testimonies to say, "Here's what God did in my life." It reminds me, kind of piggyback on that, maybe it is, I would say it's very similar to a missions conference or even a teen challenge service. Meaning that here's where God has brought me from and here's my story.

Interviewer:

Wow, thank you for that. What difficulties do you see that have arisen or that you see coming as you lead and see this outreach to foster teens continue?

P1 & P2:

Well, I think that the difficulty, I'll tell you what my biggest concern was at the beginning was that we would have students who would be the students we would have, how we would find them. And I can tell you that that was dealt with in a good way by our local agencies and they dealt with it.

P1 & P2:

The biggest concern is that we help people and it's a continual thing as a leader, as a pastor, and as Accelerate leaders we have to continually tell people what we do, why we do it, what it's about. Not the old idea it's not two visions, but one vision. And so for us I think the biggest difficulty, or biggest concern I have, is that we continually put in front of people this is why we do this, this is the why behind the what. Because you have all kind of people that are hung up on the what. It's not the what that matters to us. I think it's the why. And so that's the difficulty that we continue.

P1 & P2:

We have that in the local church ministry, we have it in this. Always tell them the why behind the what, and I see that as being potential issues when you get sidetracked on just the program and the process and the rule. You know, "Hey, I wish I had a car," this kind of garbage. You get in there and you get in front of people this idea of what we are about and why we do what we do. Honestly, that needs to be communicated every, what, 28 days? I mean, honestly it probably needs to be communicated more than I've been communicating it, but it has to be in front of people.

Interviewer:

Thanks very much. Let me ask another question. For you as leaders, each of you, what would make this program a success, in your opinion?

P1 & P2:

The kids coming out of it knowing God and coming out of it, also headed to college or headed to a lifelong occupation that is going to make them successful.

P1 & P2:

I would add to that that it would also be, of course, we believe these students are already [inaudible 00:26:45] to receive the Lord and we're just trying to follow-up with that. But I think it would be yes, our success would be they're saved, they're moving forward with God, and that we would have our people who are excited about that and that we would endeavor to have a lifelong relationship with these students. And that would be something, I think.

P1 & P2:

So that's the students, we want to see success in the students. We also want to see the church embrace, excited, have a commitment to love these students as long as they're alive, that kind of thing. That's our heart.

Interviewer:

That's good. Thank you very much. How do you feel this program has been received by your church place assembly as a whole?

P1 & P2:

I think it's been received great. I think people are excited about it. I think newer people are not sure what it is so I have to keep talking about it. And in a couple weeks we're going to do kind of a real feature about it again. But people have embraced it, they're excited about it. They think it's important and I think it's been a good thing. They've received it well.

P1 & P2:

Definitely.

Interviewer:

Excellent. Have you experienced growth or seen growth in the lives of your leaders, volunteers, as they've been serving this program?

P1 & P2:

Yeah, absolutely, yes we have. I think one of the things that we've seen, and this is going to sound kind of a bittersweet thing, we've seen them grow spiritually, but we've also seen them grow as leaders. Because I think in leadership you have to address issues, and our issues haven't been students. Our issues have been some of the people that want to teach.

P1 & P2:

So as a leader, you learn that you have to address issues. You come up with a game plan. You're a problem solver. I've seen them grow in that because they've needed to grow in that. Then they've needed to be able to help address issues as they come along. So yes, I've seen them grow spiritually but I've seen them grow as leaders, too.

Interviewer:

Excellent. What are, in your opinion, the best and/or the worst parts of running a program like Accelerate, a program that reaches the teenagers in the foster care system?

P1 & P2:

I'm going to let Kim answer that at first because she's got to leave for a minute and so I'm going to let her answer that part and I'll come back and follow up, okay?

Interviewer:

Sure.

P1 & P2:

Repeat-

P1 & P2:

Could you repeat that one more time? I'm sorry.

Interviewer:

No problem. What would you say are some of the worst or the best parts of leading a program like Accelerate that reaches teenagers within the foster care system?

P1 & P2:

Well, the best part is just seeing kids reached and just being able to love on them and letting them see their life does not have to turn out on a terrible road. And we have hope for them and that's Jesus Christ, and just seeing them not following the path of the norm when somebody ages out of foster care.

P1 & P2:

And the worst part for us, like Jamie said, has just been a few of our workers just wanting to come and take over. But again, we're dealing with that. So that's my answer. I have to go and pick up [Kristen 00:30:45] from school.

P1 & P2:

I'm going to follow-up.

Interviewer:

Thank you so much for that, Kim. Thank you very much. Go ahead, pastor

P1 & P2:

I'm going to follow-up with what she said. I think that the best part of the program, honestly, the best part of what we do are the students. I think we got to do last night, do our part. I've met them and I've recognized them in church, but I think just being face to face and talking to students. I don't think you can get away from that being the most beautiful thing of it all. I think that's the most beautiful thing to the students. Their stories, their smiles, their jokes, their laughs, their sense of humor. I think that's the best part.

P1 & P2:

I think the hardest part is just organizationally. I think it's just the first time doing anything and learning, trial and error. Learning to swim by being thrown into the pool. It's just learning some of those things have been the most challenging part. And thankfully, our folks have stepped up and are processing and are hopefully taking notes and learning how to do certain... You know how it is. You do things after a while, they'll probably three years from now, five years from now do it like it's old hat. But now they're still learning and we're all learning to do these things the right way. So that's the challenging part.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. One final question. You're at the end of Jeopardy.

P1 & P2:

Final Jeopardy.

Interviewer:

What do you believe would be a failure in leading this program? I think you mentioned earlier what your success scenario would be, but what would be a failure scenario for you in regard to your program?

P1 & P2:

I think there are levels of failure. I hate to say it. I'm a pastor, so you know pastors. They're always looking for the one. So I see levels of failure. But I would say the biggest failure would be is the students would just not. They would quit. You know what I mean? Kind of going into it and they would just quit. That would be the biggest failure. Because you don't want to start it and it just not be something that they really would want to do, or something that appeals to where they are. And I think that would be a colossal failure in my mind, the students just, as they're doing this find that it's just not what they need, not what they thought it would be or whatever. I think that would be, to me, the big failure.

P1 & P2:

I think the other failure would be is that we would do this program and then we would just move on and not make it a part of our DNA and not make it a part of what we do consistently. For next year, do another one, that kind of thing. I think that would be, to me, a failure.

P1 & P2:

So I think it's several layers. I think, to put it nicely, failure would... are you there? Hello? Are you there, Allen? Hello? (silence) Hello?

Interviewer:

I actually lost you right at when I finished asking the question.

P1 & P2:

Well, I'll start over.

Interviewer:



What you believe a failure would be in leading this program for your congregation.

P1 & P2:

Right. I'll kind of repeat what I said earlier and then go to the final answer. I think as a pastor, I believe in levels of failure, levels of failure, and so I see certain things as big failures and not as good or whatever and it's because pastors do that. They look at stuff.

P1 & P2:

One of the things I would say, to me I would see as a failure, if the students that we had quit the program in the middle of the program. That they found out it wasn't something that they needed or didn't meet where they were, we weren't doing it well. That would be a failure to me.

P1 & P2:

The other part would be is if students did graduate and we got all excited and then they were just forgotten about. That as a church, we just moved on to our next thing, we never picked this back up again. That we didn't reach out to students. And so I think that would be a failure.

P1 & P2:

So I would say the failure, to me, would be them quitting or us quitting. See what I'm saying? I think that would be, in my mind, I would consider that a failure, because my heart would be that they would complete what we started and that we would complete it and continue making it a part of our DNA, who we are and what we do. So that's it. I would consider a failure would be quitting on their end or our end.

P1 & P2:

Hello?

Interviewer:

I'm still here.

P1 & P2:

I made sure you got it.

Interviewer:

That's it. That's it. That's really good. Really good. I appreciate this.

P1 & P2:

Absolutely.

Interviewer:

I'm going to end this recording.

## APPENDIX H

### **Pastor Interview Transcript – P3 and P4**

Interviewer:

Excellent. I have a series of questions, and feel free to elaborate. You don't have to be trite, but if you feel like you answered it succinctly, you don't have to continue. Here we go with P3. Number one, how long have you been at your church?

P3:

We have been there about four years.

Interviewer:

Excellent.

P3:

Feels like 10.

Interviewer:

Next question would be what do you think is the biblical mandate behind orphan care?

P3:

Well, I remember this question, and I looked up the scripture, but I'm not a walking Bible, but the mandate is to take care of the widows and the orphans.

Interviewer:

Yes.

P3:

Bible says that's what the church should do, because those are people who are missing families. They're missing that family unit, and so it's not our job just to ... You think of the widow, it's not our job just to help her with money. That's not really the main thing. It's to be there for her, and love her. Same thing with the orphan. It's to be there to be that family unit that is missing in their life. If you can help them with some financial things, you do. But you do that out of love.

P3:

I don't just give my kids money, but I want to teach them and set them up so that they can be successful. So, that's what the church should be helping with them. I even looked at with our

situation. P4 and I, we understand adoption better than most. We have two daughters who are adopted. That is the relationship Paul explains that we have with Christ, that we are adopted into the family of God. So if the church can also in an earth way adopt those that are in need ... but those that are in need have to also want help.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

P3:

You can't just go out and, well we're just going to take you over ... They've got to be ready. You know someone, you can preach and do what you want until you're blue in the face with some individuals, but until they're ready to accept Christ, they're not going to accept Him. So you've got to work with the ones who you can work with. That's why the Accelerate program, it's making kids who are ready for that and just as the title of it, you're accelerating them and giving them what they need. By the way, P4 is here.

P4:

I'm here.

Interviewer:

Oh yay, P4.

P3:

She's just been quiet, but she's here.

Interviewer:

You're our favorite ... Don't get it twisted. You're our favorite. We love P1, but behind every P1, there's a great P4 who should be in front, but anyway, here we go. Question number two. By the way, chirp in, chime in, join in. Anything that you want to add, just jump in there P4. Number two, how do you feel ... I think you already alluded to it, but how do you feel you've been prepared by God for this assignment, helping students?

P3:

Yeah, I alluded to the fact that we've adopted two children and we understand what that is. I think that's what the church's job is. How has God prepared us, and not just us but the church. We have a church, as you know, a very mission minded church. When you think of missions in a church, you think of world missions, but you can't be effective in the world if you're not effective in your own backyard. So this is an opportunity to do something that can be a blessing to our community. Who knows which one of these kids that goes through Accelerate can end up being a godly Christian leader for Fort Mill.

P3:

If the kid's already been studying, the kid's already had some drive, we're going to be able to help them have a moral compass and a godly world view instead of just a world view. How much more a help our community if we could add that and have them understand that in their lives?

So when we look at that, that is what I believe. We've been that. We reach our community, we reach our schools. We do outreach to our schools ever year around us. Anytime you get a change, we see a lot of things going on in our world that is headed the wrong direction. So if you want to get it back on track, you've got to get a hold of the kids and make sure that those kids aren't sucked into those wrong beliefs, and be able to help them have a good moral compass.

Interviewer:

Thank you.

P3:

Does that give you some quotable there?

Interviewer:

Absolutely. How effective do you believe the training, you and/or your team has received has been for the launch of your program?

P3:

It was good. It was the one day thing. I think it was an all day Saturday, but we did it. I was there. It's good understanding, but my only thing is nothing ... All the talk, nothing replaces hands on, and I don't know how that could be added to it, but to have more of a ... One thing, I'm a hands on person. So, if there was some way ... I'll tell you this. Not everybody could do it, but the fact that we were ... forget just the one day training, but we also sent VL3, who was going to be our leader. She's the director of this for our group. We were able to send her to you or to your organization there in Orlon Beach for a week. That was the best training possible because she saw it first hand. She walked with your workers. That is so much better.

P3:

You just can't send every single person through that, but the fact that you were open to have her come and just spend a week, not even open, you encouraged it. That, I think, was probably the best possible. I wish every single person [inaudible 00:08:03] do it, but it's just hard to get every single person there. But the one day training you did definitely gave everybody a very good vision. You definitely cast the vision of what it's about, and we had do's and don'ts. Of course, you gave us extra material to read. I don't know who all read it. That's always up to that individual. So you gave us all each a book, but that's up to you to read.

P3:

But I really was happy that VL3 was able to go there because that right there I think is the best thing there. Anyone who does this in the future, they should send at least one or two people to be able to walk it, not just read about it and hear about it.

Interviewer:

That's good. Thank you.

P3:

You're welcome.

Interviewer:

What questions do you have or do you think others might have that go into their preparations for Compassion outreach like this? What questions stayed with you for a while, before, during, and/or after training into the launch?

P3:

Well, one question is how much is it going to cost us.

Interviewer:

Yes.

P3:

In the past, yes, you think about of course the spiritual side. But honestly, I think about the money side too. That's a big question. Are we going to be able to get people to ... Are we going to be able to get the local? Is Moe's going to help us like they help you do food sometimes? Those are all questions that they also take ... you guys just step out and find out. The little bit of just stepping out and asking some things, we're finding out we might even get cars donated, which is the biggest [inaudible 00:10:13].

Interviewer:

Wow, that's the biggest expense.

P3:

So you have these questions, but some of the questions you can't answer. They are things that we just have to figure out, because every community is different and you've got to put some legs behind what your ... and get some answers. Those are questions we had. Another question is you have these kids, are we going to have a kid that's going to come in and end up being a problem? We don't really know, how do we deal with that? Because you're inviting something into your church. Your goal is to get them to a place where they are followers of Christ and disciples of Christ. But that's how it is every Sunday morning.

P3:

We invite the world into our church every Sunday morning, so you want people coming in who are lost, who are in need of a Savior, and that's the biggest thing. These kids are in need of a true life that only Christ provides. So another question is, I question all of it. I'm a pastor. I walk down the hallway and see everything every month on the wall. So I look at all of it and think about all of it. Think about who are we going to be able to get to teach, just the life courses. I've already got a local banker that has told me, you let me know when this starts. I want to come in and teach about finances to these kids.

Interviewer:

Great.

P3:

That bank is willing to help them when they have their accounts, the local bank South State Bank. They're willing to help these kids open up accounts. He said, we want to be able to do this for them. So those are cool things, and maybe that bank will end up doing scholarships as well.

Interviewer:

That's great.

P3:

Just little things like that. I guess the questions you have, it's not worry, but it's concern about how is this going to fall into place, how's this going to fall into place? That only happens with time. Those will get answered, but I know we cover it with prayer. It works itself out. It always works itself out.

Interviewer:

Thank you very much. Very good. What, if any, are some things you'd like to add or remove from the Accelerate training you've received?

P3:

For me personally, I probably should have ... Well, it wouldn't be good for VL3 and I to travel together. That wouldn't be good, but I should probably come down, even though ... I'm trying to be hands on. If it takes the pastor to make it work, I already have enough stuff that I've got to ... I need people that are going to be all in and be part of this, but I also need to know exactly ... I need to know all the details. I just need to know how it's going and how it should be going. I have ideas, but it's not what I would take away, but me personally, I probably should go down and spend a day or two with your people just so I have a hands on.

Interviewer:

Yeah.

P3:

As a pastor. Just so that I know, because my director is going to come to me and talk about things and ask about stuff, and how do I know? How do I answer things if I haven't actually put myself in that position to learn more? For the training, for everyone, I think it was good. I think going through ... You went through the booklet, you went through the main things to be aware of. I liked that you went through the kind of how to protect yourself in some ways too because these kids are worldly kids coming in and you've got to think about that.

P3:

I don't know. I wouldn't take ... I think what we did the Saturday, the whole day Saturday thing. I think you got in everything that's possible to get. So I don't think I would take it. One day might have seemed a little rough. That's the only think I would think. It was a lot of information all at, boom, one time. Maybe to do it in two days just so that-

Interviewer:

To spread it out.

P3:

Spread it out and spend a little more time on some things.

Interviewer:

Okay.

P3:

That's just a thought.

Interviewer:

Thank you. That's good. I'll be literally taking what you say and adding it to future training and stuff like that. So all of this stuff helps tremendously. If you were standing ... I'm going to give you a story problem. If you were standing in front of a group of church leaders, for instance a sectional district general council and your task was to tell them what they need to know in a nutshell about serving kids in foster care, serving in compassion outreach to kids in foster care, what are some of the things you and P4 would say to them?

P3:

I've got to think for a second. I would start off just with the Biblical mandate of this is something that we need to do. This is, again, our community. If we're going to be Jesus, or if you're going to be, Jesus went to the children. He said when people tried to take them away from, pull them away from, that they might be bothering, he made it very clear that kids were not bothering him and that anyone that would hurt these kids ... what is it, have a millstone tied around their neck and thrown into the sea. That's not a pretty picture if you've ever seen a millstone.

Interviewer:

No sir.

P3:

When you think of that and you think these are kids who have been hurt, these are kids who haven't been given chances very often. So this is our opportunity to do that and to change a life. I always, when I talk about Accelerate, I always bring up a video that Accelerate has with the young girl at the beginning of it. She's getting married. It starts with her getting married. She has nobody on her side of the chapel, and the groom's side is all packed with family and friends. Then it kind of goes back and reverses and shows where this girl, if she would have been in an Accelerate program, how she would have had a church family coming beside her and she was making friends, friends for life, and has now a church family.

P3:

Then we get to the wedding again and her side is standing room only compared to the groom's side because now she has a church family. She has people who love her and want to see what's best for her. I love that illustration. You can't watch that little video without crying every single time. I know it's coming, but I still tear up. It doesn't matter.

Interviewer:

So do we.

P3:

That video to me says it, because we are to be family. We have an opportunity, and if you'll do it ... What I would tell the church, [inaudible 00:19:14] your story is me talking to pastors. I'm in that position a lot of times, and one of the big things that we have there is, well what's that going to cost us. If you just do it, if God opens a door for you to do it, you do it and God will provide. You can't be so worried about that. You have to just trust God because, if you're helping one of these, He's going to help you help them.

P3:

So there's also a thing I tell pastors you just got to have a little bit of faith and just be the church to these people, to these young kids. So P4, anything else you had there?

P4:

I also think that there is something about leading your people to invest in something like this, to invest in children that also spurs them to spiritual growth. Watching the effectiveness of that ministry will cause them to grow. We always know that serving causes us to be accountable and then we grow from that. So we're talking about being a blessing to foster kids, but I think sometimes we don't realize the blessing that that will bring to our church just in being part of something like that and the accountability that comes with that, and the spiritual growth that happens in our people because of that.

P4:

Every pastor wants that. It's something that we all want for our congregation.

Interviewer:

Very good. Yeah.

P3:

There's the wisdom.

Interviewer:

Yeah. Okay, so let's piggy back on that. Why do you think some churches or some leaders, or organizations don't or fail to have effective compassion to foster to these orphans and widows?

P3:

One, they don't think they can do it, be able to afford it, be able to have the workers do it. So there's a fear there. Also-

P4:

They're afraid they won't get the volunteer help and the burden.

P3:



Exactly. There's a fear that it will become too much of a burden on the church. Then that would be too hard. Plus ...

Interviewer:

Break the burden thing down. I've heard that before.

P3:

Pastors don't want to come across as a failure. So you don't want to take on a program that, if it doesn't work, it's going to look like a failure.

P4:

That you have to step in and make it work.

P3:

That you have to step in and make it work. Maybe they think that I can't even make this work. The burden is, as a pastor, you look at it. The biggest thing ... Finances is one, but the big thing is finding the workers. Right now, you know our situation. The county's already called us. We have kids right now. Start your program now. Well, that [inaudible 00:22:40] okay, we don't even have a thing laid out. We don't have workers. We've got to have a little bit more in order to do it, but I also don't want to say no to the county or to the state because, if I say no, that's their first answer they'd get from us.

P3:

I don't want that to be their first impression of us. Oh, you came and told us about this great program and now you're not even going to take a kid when we call you. So you also ... Here's another fear is you get that kid that is real trouble, and then you have to ... there's always discipline involved or you have to make decisions. Then that makes me ... puts me in a place where I've got to make another decision, hard decision. Pastors want to avoid that if they can. Does that make sense?

P4:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Very much.

P3:

Just don't want to put themselves in that place. They just don't want to open that door. But again, like I said, you know us. We do things, we pray about it, and if God opens the door, we go through it. We just trust God to take care of it and put things together. You've seen it's not us, but you've seen, you yourself Alan have seen our church come through with things that are just crazy. How does that little church do that?

Interviewer:

Yeah.

P3:

*That's just because we just put in God's hands. The bottom line is, as pastor, I can't make this program work. I can't do it, but God can. There are people in this area, not even living here yet, that are going to be part of Accelerate and I haven't even met them yet. People that are going to come in and work and really do this. I haven't even met those people yet. But that's the same thing as planting a church. There's going to be people that are going to be part of your church and board members one day, but you haven't even met them yet, but you go plant that church.*

P3:

So this is a ministry. This is like church planting to me. You don't have all the pieces in place in the beginning, but you do it and God puts those pieces in place. So it's a faith thing. As pastors, we preach faith, but sometimes we're the biggest scardy cats about things around because we're worried about the appearance. We're worried about looking like a failure, worried about not working. We look at it this way. If we do a program, if we start something and it's just not working ... We wouldn't do this with this, but we start some kind of little ministry or something at the church and it doesn't work well and we nobody ... We just never talk about it again. We just put it aside. All right, tested, move on.

Interviewer:

It doesn't exist.

P3:

Yeah, we never did that. Let's just go. There is no fight club.

Interviewer:

Awesome.

P3:

But yeah, I think the biggest thing is fear, and that's that that is, and that's why we have those fears. But we're in the faith business.

Interviewer:

That's good.

P3:

So we've got to remember where ...

Interviewer:

This next question is perfect.

P3:

Okay.

Interviewer:

What difficulties have you faced since you decided to start serving foster kids.

P3:

All right, let's get back to the beginning. Let's just start first with our director. As soon as we said we're doing this, she gets offered a house in her neighborhood from an older couple that basically they gave it to her at a price she could afford. She basically named the price. So that kind of-

P4:

Came in the form of a blessing, but also-

P3:

Came in the form of a blessing, but it also was a standstill for us because she was super busy with that, and we also found out there was some issues with that house. She is not a widow, but she is a single mother. So of course the church stepped in and helped her with some of the things, but that slowed us down right away. Then of course now that we're having ... The very same week the county says, hey we've got kids for you, let's get started I'm going through having to let a very loved staff member go. So right now, morality ... not morality. What am I thinking? Morale. Morale was low in my church because he was loved.

P3:

I think P4 said it really well this morning. He was the fun guy. Everyone saw him as the fun guy, but they didn't work with him during the week. So we have to make tough decisions. People are in church ... I just had a conversation yesterday with someone who said, I know exactly why it had to happen and I understand it, but it's still hard because we all loved him. My church is going through a process right now where there has to be some healing. So, that's making it kind of hard. Hey, let's everybody get involved in this. They don't want to be involved in anything right now, so it hits me. But really, if they would get involved in something else, they've got to get involved to start doing something that gets their mind off of things.

P3:

So yeah, if we get hit with some hard things ... being hit by starting this, this right now is making it even harder. There's two ways to look at it. It's making it harder to start it, or it's also a good time to start it because it puts a new ministry, it's moving us forward. My biggest thing when I started this year is being an outreach to our community. Our outreach to our community last year dropped and we've got to get that back. So this is exactly what we've been wanting to do and talking about.

Interviewer:

Yep.

P3:

Like I said, there's two sides to look at it. Is it just going to be too hard because of what we're going through right now, or is it the perfect thing to get us out of this, get us moving and get our focus on something else. Our focus never should be on one person anyway. It should always be

on doing what we can for the kingdom. So this is ... I look at it as helping us to get our focus back during this time. Did I answer that right? Not right, did I answer that question?

Interviewer:

That's great. That's really good. I think, looking at this seminar as our prize from this dissertation, you just brought up a salient, powerful point that we can't talk all the good things and not share, hey this is a spiritual thing. It's not just another program. It's not like, hey we're going to change a song in our song service. [inaudible 00:31:34] This is going into a new area where darkness has prevailed for some time. When you start opening up new avenues, you start taking your worship team outside the church. You got to the next level, you add more instruments, more instruments means more people.

Interviewer:

So every time you add a new person, you add a new dimension. That's really good y'all, thank you very much. Here we go. A couple of questions you can't answer until we get started, but here's a great question that I can only ask pastors. I didn't ask directors. If you could do this over, would you launch this program or would you not?

P3:

I would always launch the program. You've got to have timing. I would launch it just because of the effectiveness that it has, and it's who the church should be. So it's a needed program, but I would launch it no matter what because I know that ... I do think in faith and know that God's going to provide what we need. So even with right now in the midst of how we're starting this and launching this right now, now the doors are open. I'm a person who always prays, God open the doors that need to be open and close the doors that need to be closed. So that close the doors is sometimes more important than open doors so that we don't go and get to an area that's going to take us away from the goal.

P3:

So even with this, this didn't happen, this didn't launch a year ago because I just been praying, hey we're going to do what we need to do and when God launches this ... God's going to launch this program, not us. So He will open the doors for us and we'll get started. So I guess the questioning is it's not really me launching the program. If God wants us to do it, He's going to launch it. He's going to put things in place. He's going to get things started. So I'm always a walk through open doors.

P3:

P4 [inaudible 00:34:26]. You look like you're thinking.

P4:

I just ... yes, because it's biblical. That's the bottom line. We don't say should we tithe or not. It's biblical, so we do. We don't say let's wait for the right timing to tithe. It's biblical, so we do it. I don't think there's a question of would we do it again. If the Bible tells us to do this, then yes we'll do it. It may not always seem like it's the right time, but it always is if you're doing what God has told you to do.

P3:

For us right now, people would say we're crazy to take this on right now. But I don't know. We've kind of ... It seems like [inaudible 00:35:23] crazy.

P4:

We are crazy.

P3:

What you just said is so true. P4 did say, we don't wait for timing to tithe. It's not that-

P4:

I don't mean that.

P3:

It's not the timing.

P4:

I don't believe it's ever the time if the enemy knows that that's important.

P3:

Exactly. The enemy is never going to make it look like a good time.

P4:

It's like becoming a parent. Are you every really ready to become a parent?

P3:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

That's good. That I like. That was very helpful. Thank you. P4, you're just slamming home runs right now. So P4, this question is for you then. You're on stage every single week looking at your people. How do you believe this program has been received by the congregation as a whole at this point?

P4:

Oh, I don't think that you can watch that video that we showed and not have people moved. He's already talked about that. There's no doubt. I think people are excited. There's a difference between excitement and commitment. So we're in that zone right now. But no, I think it's received very well. Everyone wants to see it happen. Whether they're going to choose to be a part of it or not is the next step. So we are in that next step.

P3:

I'll also, just something ... I think it was about four years ago when you were the speaker at district council here. You and I went to breakfast, we talked about this program, and you sent

me the link to the video. I'm like, I'm loving this program. I showed the video to my church and they like it, but all they could think was we've got to buy a car for somebody. They didn't really ... The thing about their faith wasn't where it needed to be yet, and that's the job of the pastor. This church, you've been a recipient of it. This church will come up with a \$10,000 offering for a missionary on a Sunday morning and less than 100 people are sitting in the crowd.

P3:

So after that happens time and time again, and you ... we brought you in to preach but also share this program from your heart.

Interviewer:

Yes sir.

P3:

Then they invested into the program. Once they invest into the program, they invested their hearts into the program. So it was a process. I planted a seed about it four years ago. When we got here, church was running 35 people. We might be there again soon. I don't know. But we were only 35 people, and that group of people wasn't quite ready for that. But because we planted a seed, then on top of that seed, we brought you in to be able to just ... We watered that seed a little bit as time went. You came in and we got to really water the seed and see what it could look like.

P3:

I think that's what helped. It was a process. I'm not some smart guy that thought that out in advance. It's just the way it happened. But I think it was a really good way for it to happen. We just planted a seed. Hey, there's a ministry out there I want to be part of. I want our church to be part of this, knowing that right then it wasn't going to happen, but at least I'm letting them know this exists and this is a goal to be able to do this one day. Then we bring you in. Just kind of the way that it happened, the word that I hate that all millennials like to use, it happened organically. I hate that term.

Interviewer:

Was it fair trade? Was it a craft planning? Sorry, I shouldn't be coloring this, but it's funny.

P3:

Like I said, I'm not smart ... I'm just not, oh this is how we'll do it. We'll do this, we'll do this. I did what was on my heart and what the spirit was telling me to do. So it's been through a good timing, but now that we're going to start it, it's like okay, make it as hard as you can. But that's normal. If Satan is not coming against it ... We already said, it's a spiritual thing. [inaudible 00:40:42] serious about it to do this. So you've got to know that you're taking that on. You're on another front making the enemy a reason to stop you.

P4:

I think we just started this sign up for volunteers to get involved on this team.

P3:

For new people, yeah.

P4:

Even with where we said the climate of our church is right now this moment, one Sunday last Sunday, a quick announcement and we have four-

P3:

New people that weren't on from the beginning.

P4:

Four new volunteers signed up last week. So that's a good indication that, yes, people are on board. At a very difficult time in our church, they still are moving forward with that.

Interviewer:

That's great. Thank you. What are the best and worst parts so far of this program?

P3:

I don't know. We're not deep enough into it.

Interviewer:

If you don't have anything, it's okay. I just have to ask the question in journalism and all.

P3:

I know who's there, but I don't know if we're deep enough into it to really give that answer.

P4:

We're figuring out the logistics of how we make that work for us in our building, in our scheduling. So far, that's where we're at right now.

P3:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

The logistics.

P4:

Yeah, making everything work. We have a small building with little classroom space, and just trying to figure out Wednesday nights, how Wednesday nights are going to go.

P3:

Well, with two people. We're only going to start with two kids. They can meet ... That's what we she said, logistics. We've got to think about where they could meet. So they could meet in one

of our offices because we've done small groups like a small group Bible study where it'll meet in one of our offices. We'll have eight chairs and just have one leader and three people.

Interviewer:

Exactly.

P3:

That works.

P4:

Getting [inaudible 00:43:20].

P3:

Well getting the food together. That's another thing. Those are logistics. It's not saying what's ... I just don't think we're into it enough to be able to answer this question well.

Interviewer:

Yeah, okay. That's actually really good already. My final question, final jeopardy, how would you describe success or failure in leading a program like this?

P3:

I don't think you'll see the success until way down the road. The success is how these kids ... The success is not going to be how many kids we have and that kind of stuff. The success is going to be where these kids end up and is their life truly changed. But not just the kids, but the success will also be in how it will change the people who volunteer. This is an opportunity for people to grow. Even though they're volunteering, they're being disciplined by helping others and giving of themselves to help others. They will grow through this.

P3:

So the success is to see how the members of our church grow through this. The big thing is to see how these kids grow. I personally think just a great thing is to see one of these kids go through this, they get a job in town, they get married and they're still attending our church and serving our church in the future. If they move away or they're a great success and they saw people serve them, they go on and serve others in the future. That's how I would measure the success. If we ... did you ask for success and failures?

Interviewer:

Sure. Yeah, failures as well.

P3:

Yeah, if it's a failure ... I don't know there is a failure because, if you look at, well that person we weren't able to help, Jesus ... Let's just say Jesus and Judas. If Jesus couldn't reach Judas, who do I think I am. But obviously he did because he felt so bad at the end of what he did. Even in that, if a kid quits the program, we still planted a seed and we've still given them something in their life. Anytime you do something for the kingdom of God, it might look as a failure to you, but



something is happening there in the spiritual world that we cannot see. So if you're doing it, how can you be failing as long as you're doing it for the right motives and for the kingdom of God.

Interviewer:

That's really good.

P3:

Yeah, sometimes we just look at things and see it as a failure and then we quit. The enemy loves to make us think of things as failures. So we just-

Interviewer:

Wow, that's good.

P3:

Our battle is not against flesh and blood. So what is in that kid's heart? I might never ... There might be a kid quit our program and I'll never hear from that kid again, but in his or her walk to becoming a disciple of Christ, I might be ... Real Life Church might be number five on a scale of 10 for their walk with Christ, and somebody else is going to come in after. Someone else is going to get them to 10. We just have to do our part. I think that's it.

P3:

Did I lose you? Allen? We lost you.

Interviewer:

Sorry. I was talking and my mute button was on.

P3:

Oh okay.

Interviewer:

I bet a lot of pastors wish they could do that to me on Sunday. That is really good, that perspective on failure. I think with a real corporate world and a corporate church ... I'm not against a corporate church. I think business is awesome. Ti's helped the church immensely. My dog keeps barking, I will bite my dog. But remembering that Jesus never even called Judas a failure. He called him brother at the very end. That's just powerful. So, that's really good.

P3:

We don't get to see. We won't until [crosstalk 00:49:22] see the effects we've had on people.

Interviewer:

That's right.

P3:

That's another faith thing, and that's why you've got to use the word. Not your words, but if you can use the word it will not return void. My words can be empty, can come back empty, but I've got to be able to do things according to the Word and use the words of the Word in my speech.

## APPENDIX I

**“Who Cares?” Compassion for Children in Foster Care**

Session One  
By Rev. Allen Griffin

Biblical Text: Luke 10:25-37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’” “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”<sup>1</sup>

A. The shape of foster care in the communities of the United States.

1. What is foster care?

A short-term service consisting of placing a child in a foster family home, group facility, or semi-independent living arrangement.

2. Who is placed in foster care?

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

A child up to age 18 or 21 placed in the care of a local department of social services by a voluntary or involuntary placement agreement with the birth family, adoptive family, legal guardian, or by a court commitment order.

### 3. Can children in foster care be adopted?

A majority of the children in foster care have living relatives. For a myriad of reasons, these children are placed into state care. Adoption is an option for the children whose parents have terminated their rights/had them terminated via court order or who have passed away. The best-care scenario for adoptable children in extended family placement. When extended family placement is not an option, non-relative adoption families are needed.

### 4. How many children are in the foster care system?

There are approximately 440,000 youth in foster care nationwide. Despite child welfare's efforts to prevent the removal of children from their parents, the number of children in foster care has been increasing. Currently, we are at an all-time high as the demand for foster parents is far higher than the supply, and factors like parental opioid addiction are forcing more children to be removed from their homes.

The number of children in foster care increased during the 1990s, from 400,000 in 1990 to 567,000 in 1999, before dropping to a historic low of 397,122 in 2012. The numbers have increased since 2012, to 442,995 in 2017.

Similarly, the rate of children living in foster care increased from 6.2 per 1,000 children in 1990, to 7.9 in 1999, before decreasing to 5.4 around 2012—the lowest figure in two decades. By 2017, the rate had increased to 6.0 per 1,000.<sup>2</sup>(chap. 1 p.6-7)

B. The plight of the child in foster care.

Small Group Assignment:

(Engage Addendum A and discuss the answers you gave with your group for 7 minutes)

**30,000 youth age out of the foster care system between the ages of 18 – 21 annually.** The exact time a foster youth ages out of the system depends on where they live. Regardless, roughly 30,000 youth are forced to exit the system annually without having found a forever family, leaving them to fend for themselves. It is not surprising then that within four years of aging out, 70% will be on

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<sup>2</sup> Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "Overview." Child Welfare Information Gateway, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=foster-care>

government assistance, 25% will not have completed high school, and less than 12% will ever earn their college degree.

Concern for the children that enter foster care and never find a forever home mounts as the numbers are compiled with many entering adulthood directly from foster care. “Of the children waiting in foster care, 30,000 age out every year, without families.”<sup>3</sup>

Within four years of aging out, 50% have no earnings, and those who do make an average annual income of \$7,500. After a foster youth ages out, homelessness and unemployment become a huge issue. Despite there being more than 34 million entry level jobs nationwide, many foster youth aren’t prepared to be independent and don’t have the skills or resources needed to access the opportunities that could launch them into employment.

C. Biblical support for compassionate care of the children in foster care.

1. The story of the Good Samaritan:

- a. Jesus identifies our neighbor.
  - 1. A person that can be different than us. (culture, race, religion...)
  - 2. A person who has been harmed by injustice.
- b. Jesus specifies the activity of compassion.
  - 1. Jesus demonstrated compassion is not to be restricted by religion.
  - 2. Jesus demonstrated compassion is not to be restricted by proximity.
- c. Jesus describes the results of compassion.
  - 1. Jesus demands the activity of compassion from His devotees.
  - 2. Jesus declares compassion on our neighbor as effort leading to eternal life.

2. The biblical mandate of compassion for the less fortunate.

- a. The local church needs to defend these children (Zech 7:9-11).

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<sup>3</sup> Show Hope, “4 Statistics You Should Know About the Orphan Crisis,” Show Hope, last modified March 24, 2014, accessed July 23, 2017, <https://showhope.org/2014/03/24/4-statistics/>

- b. The local church should not withhold justice from them (Deut. 27:19).
- c. The local church must be willing to stand as the advocate for these children (Is. 1:17).
- d. God vehemently opposes those who abuse and neglect these children:

1. “Beyond the command to avoid exploitation of the widows and orphans comes an understanding that these individuals are so precious to God that he will personally judge those who fail to account for their needs. The learned principles continue in Exodus 22:23-24: ‘If you do exploit them and they cry out to me I will surely help them. My anger will blaze forth against you, and I will kill you with the sword. Your wives will become widows and your children will become fatherless.’ This rather harsh pronouncement demonstrates a couple of key items that need to be considered. First, based on verse 23, we may discern that the widows and orphans have direct access to God. He hears their cries and appeals for help and promises swift action. Second, avoiding upholding justice for the widow and orphan secures judgment—even death—upon those who look the other way. In the prophets, this becomes one of the burning indictments against the rulers of the house of Israel as they avoided caring for the needs of the widow and orphan.”<sup>4</sup>

D. Current Literature about compassionate care for children in foster care.

1. Yates goes on to summarize, what orphan care looks like in Scripture:

- 7. Orphan care is commanded by God for the entire community of faith.
- 8. Orphan care is designed to protect the rights of orphans in the hereditary transfer of land.
- 9. A curse followed those who did not take up the cause of the orphan and oppressed.

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<sup>4</sup> Yates, 67.

10. In the definition of evil found in the condemnations of the prophets that were recited against Israel and the surrounding nations, lack of care for orphans almost always appears.

11. God hears the prayers of orphans.

12. God promises to be the defender and father of orphans.<sup>5</sup>

2. There are many who believe the Church is making headway into the problems facing foster children today. However, as Perry states there is no statistical evidence that supports such a notion and, “there is no available evidence that adoption or fostering by evangelical families has increased at the national or state-level since 2000. In fact, there is no reliable evidence that evangelicals in particular, or Christians in general, are more likely to adopt or foster children than other Americans.”<sup>6</sup>

3. Blessings are declared upon they who serve the needs of those in need.

a. Van de Weile says the third-year tithe mandated in Deuteronomy 14 remained in the local community to care for orphans and others in need.<sup>7</sup> This tithe was an offering to the Lord through the care of the orphans, and as a result of the offering “God would bless those who tithed.”<sup>8</sup> The blessings of God are multi-faceted and promised to those who obey the directive to care for the widow, orphan, and alien.

E. What should be our response to the crisis of these children at-risk?

1. Available state & local programs to serve the needs of children in foster care:

a. **Fostering:** Caring for a child in foster care in your home.

b. **Adoption:** A legal process in which a person related or unrelated to a child becomes the adoptive family for that child and he/she is given all of the legal rights and privileges as if he/she were born to that family. The child’s birth parents no longer have any legal responsibilities or rights after an adoption.

c. **Guardian Ad Litem/Casa:** A program where volunteers accompany children to court appointments, take them to doctor’s

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<sup>5</sup> Yeats: 68-69.

<sup>6</sup> Perry, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

appointment, and they serve as the primary contact between the court and the child.

d. **Respite Care:** A program designed to give foster parents a break for a limited period of time. Someone else provides care so the foster parent can go on holiday, attend to everyday activities or just relax. Sometimes a foster parent might need emergency respite care if, for example, they get sick or need to go to hospital.

e. **Mentoring:** An individual who listens, supports, and encourages another individual. A mentor serves as a role model and helps a child get through difficult times.

f. **CAFO:** The Christian Alliance for Orphans is a non-denominational non-profit organization that unifies others serving the need of children at risk within compassionate organizations, churches and individuals worldwide.

g. **COMPACT Family Services:** Is a licensed child welfare agency of the Assemblies of God.

h. **Excellerate:** A non-profit organization whose program focuses on serving the unadopted teens within the foster care system through the efforts of the local church.

Olivia Core asks a pertinent question that I answer within this project and successive seminar:

“How can the church fulfill the physical and spiritual needs of foster youth who are preparing to age out of state care and take on the responsibilities of adulthood?”<sup>9</sup>

Excellerate is one of the ways the Church can minister to the need of the modern-day orphan.

**“Who Cares?” Intro to Compassion for Children in Foster Care**  
**Session 2**  
**Rev. Allen Griffin**

A. Addison Terrell: A young man in foster care who lived with Allen and his family. Addison came of age in care and ended up serving time in prison, struggling with poverty, and was tragically murdered in Detroit. This story, and many stories like it are part of the inspiration that led to the launch of the Excellerate Foster Teen Development Program.

1. According to the National Foster Youth Initiative, the reality experienced by children in foster care today is dire:

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<sup>9</sup> Olivia T. Core, “Fostering a Generation: Discovering the Church's Theological Obligation to the American Orphan” (master’s thesis, Southeastern University, 2014), abstract.



- a. Over 80 percent of women who are sex-trafficked come out of the foster care system.
  - b. 60 percent of teens in foster care who age out are homeless, imprisoned, or dead within a year.
  - c. High School dropout rates of teens in foster care are twice that of single/dual parent homes.
  - d. One out of every two kids who age out of the system will develop substance dependence.
  - e. About one in four kids who age out of the system will not graduate from high school or be able to pass their GED.
  - f. Only one out of every two kids in foster care who age out of the system will have some form of gainful employment by the age of twenty-four.
  - g. Seven out of ten girls who age out of the foster care system will become pregnant before the age of twenty-one.
  - h. There is less than a 3 percent chance for children who have aged out of foster care to earn a college degree at any point in their lives.<sup>10</sup>
2. Small Group Enhancement: Each table or group of 8 attendees are placed in groups to read and engage the biography and life choices of a former teen in the foster care system. (Addendum B)
  3. One of every four children adopted from the foster care system in the U.S. are returned to private care agencies. Nearly one-half of the students in the Excellerate program in Daytona Beach FL have experienced this type of rejection.

B. Excellerate is a life skills training and development program for displaced young adults who are either currently in foster care or have recently removed from the system due to coming of age. It is designed to teach them the skills and give them the tools they need to take care of themselves, succeed in life, and receive the love of Christ from the church.

1. Mission: To help students who have achieved a measure of success live in victory.
2. The Excellerate Team: The essential members of an Excellerate program.
  - a. Program Director: coordinates classroom instruction and assists volunteer development.
  - b. Volunteers: teach classes, establish relationships with and mentor students

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<sup>10</sup> National Foster Youth Initiative, "51 Useful Aging Out of Foster Care Statistics," NYFI, last modified May 26, 2017, accessed December 18, 2019, <https://www.nfyi.org/51-useful-aging-out-of-foster-care-statistics-social-race-media/>

- c. Mentors: self or leadership assigned to each student for one on one relational impact...i.e. advice, connection, network and care.
- d. Guest Educators: community partners that teach Excellerate curriculum principles.

\*Desirable ratio of two volunteers per student in the program.

3. The Excellerate Classroom: Two-hour classroom instruction periods per week. Traditionally meet on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening for 16 weeks.

- a. Curriculum: Modular training material for each classroom session. Provided by the national Excellerate office.
  - 1) Life Skills: tools for managing self effectively in the events and challenges of everyday life.
  - 2) Professionalism: tools for managing self in the workplace.
  - 3) Financial Responsibility: tools for managing personal finance.
  - 4) Social Skills: tools for managing positive and negative social environments.
  - 5) Spiritual Enrichment: instruction on the principles of the Bible in a culturally relevant and inclusive manner.

4. How to establish an Excellerate Program.

- a. Pastoral partnership is foundational to the effectiveness of the program.
- b. Date and location: Where the program will meet and future schedule of program.
- c. Connectivity: Establishing relationship with your local compassion organizations is often facilitated through pastoral and national team partnership.
- d. Fundraising: Training is available from the national team for establishing a non-profit and raising funds in your community.
- e. Promotion: sharing the program with your local church members and community for partnership and volunteer assimilation.
  - 1) Promo materials available from the national office for your use.
  - 2) Website framework available from the national office for your use.

5. Samples of Excellerate promo materials passed out while promo video is shown.

6. Discussion: What are your immediate concerns regarding the launch of a program in your community? (Frequently Asked Questions)

- a. Data from surveys/interviews of pastors who launched programs.
  - Desire for biblical narrative to be shared regarding care for foster children.
  - Seeing a need in community and filling it is spiritual maturity.
  - Overcoming the fear of failure was one of the biggest struggles.
- b. Data from surveys/interviews of volunteer directors who launched programs.
  - Desire for financial and non-profit training be made available.
  - Overcoming fear to minister to this need is part of Godly living.
  - Visiting the flagship program helps leader better understand the vision.
  - Training for dealing with state and partner agencies.
  - Testimonies of children who've achieved success needed in church.
- c. Data from surveys of volunteers of programs.
  - Training for classroom functions made available.
  - Personal/leadership investment to manage critical relationships needed.
  - Scheduling time to serve the students was their biggest struggle.

7. Questions and Answers from the audience.

- a. Access to the private Excellerate Facebook page for connection.
- b. Contact information for Excellerate national team and partner leadership.

8. Conclusion: Words in which to live and lead.

Quote from Pastor of program in Beaufort, SC.

“Why Do It? I just... yes, because it’s biblical. That’s the bottom line. We don’t say should we tithe or not. It’s biblical, so we do. We don’t say let/s wait for the right timing to tithe. It’s biblical, so we do it. I don’t think there’s a question of would we do it again. If the Bible tells us to do this, then yes we’ll do it. It may not always seem like it’s the right time, but it always is if you’re doing what God has told you to do.”

## 9. Prayer

## 10. Helpful Books on the Topics of Compassion and Foster Care:

**Charity Detox** by Robert Lupton

**Counter Culture** by David Platt

**Growing God’s Family** by Samuel L. Perry

**In Pursuit of Orphan Excellence** by Philip Darke

**Orphan Justice** by Johnny Carr

**Orphanology** by Tony Merida and Rick Morton

**Smart Compassion** by Wesley Furlong

**To the End of June** by Cris Beam

**Toxic Charity** by Robert Lupton

**Who is My Neighbor** by Wayne Gordon

Definitions of common vocabulary:

**Abuse** - The physical, mental, or sexual injury of a child by a person, who may be any household or family member, who is responsible for the child’s care or supervision, as well as any indications that a child’s health or welfare is harmed or threatened.

**Access** - The ability to obtain the services that you need.

**Adoption** - A legal process in which a person related or unrelated to a child becomes the adoptive family for that child and he/she is given all of the legal rights and privileges as if he/she were born to that family. The child’s birth parents no longer have any legal responsibilities or rights after an adoption.

**Adoptive Parents/Family** - Persons who did not give birth to a child but selected that child to be a member of their family. After a legal adoption, adoptive parents have all of the legal rights of natural parents.

**Aftercare** - These are services provided when a child leaves foster care. The first type of aftercare is a service given to a child, his/her parent(s), or his/her relatives when he/she goes to live with them. The second type of aftercare is a service given directly to a child when he/she is between the ages of 18 and 21 to help him/her live independently.

**Agency** – A public or private organization providing a service.

**Advocate** - A person who acts or who speaks on behalf of another person to get things done for that person.

**Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement (APPLA)** – A future plan in which a child is connected with a person(s) and a relationship is established, nurtured, and maintained so that he/she will have support upon leaving foster care.

**Anxiety** - A feeling of being fearful, worried or nervous. This may interfere with playing, learning, and a sense of well-being.

**Assessment** (also called evaluation) - The process of obtaining information from tests and observations.

**Attorney** (lawyer) - A person who will represent legal desires and interests while a child is in foster care.

**Biological or Birth Parents** - The two people who gave birth to a child.

**Chafee (John H.) Foster Care Independence Act of 1999** – A federal law from the United States Congress that requires States to provide services and money to help youth in foster care become self-sufficient.

**Child Protective Services (CPS)** - A child welfare program responsible for investigating reports of child abuse and neglect as well as providing services to families in crisis. It is usually the first service that a child and family receive to prevent the child's removal from the home and placement in foster care.

**Concurrent Permanency Plans** - Two future plans that detail where and with whom a child will live upon leaving foster care and the legal relationship between the child and the future caregiver(s). The child, his/her family, and his/her caseworker will work on these plans to see which is most viable and immediate.

**Commitment** - The process through which the local department of social services obtains the legal responsibility for foster care and placement.

**Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) (Guardian ad Litem)** - A trained volunteer appointed by the court to ensure the safety of children in foster care and that they receive the services they need.

**Custody** - A legal term describing the legal right/responsibility of either a person or an agency to make decisions about where a child should live.

**Depression** - Sad or lonely feelings that are sometimes caused by a certain event or hormones in the body. It may interfere with a person's daily functions.

**Early Periodic Screening, Diagnostic, and Treatment Program (EPSDT)** - A State medical program that requires that a child receive health care services that include full medical, dental exams, immunizations (shots), and laboratory work.

**Eligibility** - The determination that a child does or does not qualify to receive services based on certain rules.

**Emergency Foster Care** - Immediate placement in foster care because of a crisis related to a child or his/her family.

**Excellerate** - is a 16 week educational program that helps foster teens transition into adulthood with tools required for them to live successful lives with the gift of life skills and a automobile.

**Foster Child** - A child up to age 18 or 21 placed in the care of a local department of social services by either a voluntary placement agreement with the birth family, adoptive family, legal guardian, or by a court commitment order.

**Foster Care** - A short-term service consisting of placing a child in a foster family home, group facility, or semi-independent living arrangement.

**Foster Care Placement** - An approved family home, a group home setting, or a residential treatment facility where a child will reside 24 hours a day and receive care, nurturing, and support.

**Foster Parent** - A relative or non-relative adult who is approved by the local department of social services to protect, nurture, educate, and care for a child.

**GED (General Education Development)** - A series of reading and math schoolwork, upon completion of which a diploma is conferred.

**Group Home** - a home where a small number of unrelated people in need of care, support, or supervision can live together, such as children or under aged teens without parental guardians.

**Individual Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** - Educational Services Plans that are developed by the school to provide needed special education services.

**Judge or Master** - The head of the court who is responsible for listening to a child and others involved in his/her life. The judge or Master makes decisions about what will happen to the child.

**Local Department of Social Services (LDSS)** - Provides services such as foster care, medical assistance, food stamps, and financial assistance when people are in crisis.

**Managed Care Organization (MCO)** - A health care company that is selected to provide health care services to a child.

**Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR)** - A state agency that oversees an agency for the local department of social services.

**Medicaid** - A joint federal and state health program that pays for health care services.

**Mental Health Service** - Services provided to assist individuals in identifying and resolving issues that impact one's thoughts and behaviors. The main goal is to make self-improvements and learn ways to cope with an individual's concerns.

**Mentor** - An individual who listens, supports, and encourages another individual. A mentor serves as a role model and helps a child get through difficult times.

**Neglect** - Not providing food clothing, shelter, health care, or education to a child.

**Out-of-Home Placement** – Short-term care that consists of 24-hour care and supervision as well as supportive services for a child whom the local department of social services has determined needs to live outside the home because the child has been abused, abandoned, neglected, or because his/her family is unable to provide care.

**Permanency Plan Hearing** - A court hearing for all children in foster care that must occur within 11 months of coming into foster care and every 6 months after that until a child leaves foster care.

**Reunification** – When a foster child returns to his/her birth parents or relatives.

**Residential Placement** - A private or public group type facility that provides 24-hour care for a child with medical or emotional needs.

**Respite Care** – is designed to give foster parents a break for a limited period of time. Someone else provides care so the foster parent can go on holiday, attend to everyday activities or just relax. Sometimes a foster parent might need emergency respite care if, for example, they get sick or need to go to hospital.

**Semi - Independent Living Arrangement (SILA)** - A placement in an apartment, room or college campus for a child to practice living independently.

**Service Agreement** - A plan signed by two or more people that details what each person must do to get to a specific goal.

**Shelter Care Order** - This gives the local department of social services the right to remove a child from his/her home and place him/her in foster care.

**Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)** - When a judge signs an order that permanently ends the ties between a child and his/her parents.

**Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)** – Temporary funds to assist families that are in crisis and need financial help.

**Treatment Foster Care (TFC)** - A program in which foster parents are trained to provide care for children with disabilities or serious health care needs that require special services. Youth in treatment foster care have an extra caseworker (a TFC caseworker) that sees them once a week and helps them through crises.

**Transition** - The process of moving from one living arrangement to another.

**Voluntary Placement** - When a child's parent or guardian places him/her temporarily in foster care by signing a voluntary placement agreement with the local department of social services instead of going to court. Voluntary placement provides care for a child when his/her parents are unable to do so. If a child is in foster care voluntarily for more than six months, the court will hold a hearing to decide whether or not he/she should remain in foster care.