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# From the Father's Heart to our Hands: Christian Responsibility in the U.S. Foster System

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FROM THE FATHER'S HEART TO OUR HANDS:  
CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY IN THE U.S. FOSTER SYSTEM

by

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Submitted to the Honors Program Committee

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for University Honors Scholars

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## ABSTRACT

Nearly half a million children are currently served by the child welfare system in the United States. This overwhelming strain on state departments and non-profit placement agencies is compounded by the fact that there are not enough available homes. There appears to be a shortage of capable and resilient foster and adoptive parents. Thousands of children who are ready to be adopted do not have anyone to take them in, and thousands more float in the system until new families agree to foster. This seeming shortage of homes is absurd considering the wealth of compassion and capability within the American church. With training in trauma-informed care and the support of local ministerial leadership, the body of Christ can be empowered to be the solution to the foster care crisis in the United States.

This paper utilizes a variety of authoritative sources to synthesize information about the current state of the U.S. child welfare system and the church's responsibility to be actively involved. By examining secular literature, Christian literature, and Scripture, the investigator presents a comprehensive understanding of the church's role in the system, and progressive dreams for future growth. Reflections on personal interviews with ministry leaders and individuals associated with foster care draw together current research and experiential understanding of the relationship between church and state in the arena of child welfare.

## KEY WORDS

*foster care, Christianity, church, child welfare, orphan care, Great Commission, discipleship, missions, calling, abuse, neglect, trauma-informed care, social work*

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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Adoption is verbally celebrated in American society, but individual and corporate reluctance to engage often empties this praise of its merit. The trendy ideology of adoption is commended by many who readily confess they would not open their own homes to put it into practice, as adoption and foster care connote the ideas of being second best to rearing biological children and abundantly more difficult. While beautifully posed portraits of multi-cultural families circulate social networks, fueled by “likes” and “shares,” thousands of children go without the love and support they require for healthy development. The U.S. foster care system is an institution heavily burdened and desperate for relief. Child welfare workers are overloaded to the point where they are unable to maintain adequate care for all the individual clients for which they are responsible. While the system is bursting at the seams, things tend to slip through the cracks. These things are not just documents or calendar dates, but human beings. “As the problem of finding families has become more acute, professionals have begun to talk about a crisis in the foster care system.”<sup>1</sup> With this crisis in capacity, the American foster care system’s need for well-educated, thoroughly trained, compassionate, and resilient foster parents continues to intensify.

There is debate over the role of faith-based organizations (such as churches and their affiliated ministries) in child welfare stemming from the separation of church and state. Additionally, there is a wariness concerning government funding and the

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<sup>1</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): 25.

historically questionable motives of evangelicals using adoption as mission.<sup>2</sup> However, there is no denying that this system requires relief from and perhaps reform by outside organizations. From there, the case for Christian foster parents becomes increasingly apparent. Literature and research from the social work discipline demonstrate that religious and spiritual coping strategies have been shown to be “positively related to mental health and faster adaptation to stress.”<sup>3</sup> This is imperative in a field where the turnover rate is too high to be effective. The system’s inability to keep foster parents actively connected to agencies and willing to provide care for children makes healthy childhoods for youth in foster care less and less plausible. But this negative trend has been shown to change trajectory when strong believers insert themselves into the equation, as “the centrality of religion in the lives of the adoptive parents [is] related to less stress in adoptive parenting.”<sup>4</sup>

Cruver states that, “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>5</sup> And yet, this is what the calling requires: changing the narrative for children in care by educating and empowering the local body so that believers will be motivated to open their homes to love these children

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<sup>2</sup> Sheryl J Ryan, “A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing?: A Missiological Examination of the United States Evangelical Adoption and Orphan Care Movement,” *Missiology* 42, no. 4 (October 2014): 417.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Belanger, Sam Copeland, and Monit Cheung, “The Role of Faith in Adoption: Achieving Positive Adoption Outcomes for African American Children,” *Child Welfare* 87, no. 2 (April 3, 2008): 105.

<sup>4</sup> Belanger, Copeland, and Cheung, “The Role of Faith in Adoption: Achieving Positive Adoption Outcomes for African American Children,” 112.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Cruver, “Adoption Is Bigger than You Think,” *The Journal of Discipleship & Family Ministry* 4, no. 1 (September 2013): 73.



well, model Christ for them, point to his saving power, and advocate for institutional reform in public spheres. Christians certainly do have the capacity and capability to fulfill the steep demands of caring for children who have no one else. Cruver's statement highlights the urgency and absolute necessity of right motives, life-giving connection with God, and the support of faith communities. Religious individuals have the most compelling motivation to adopt and foster children, having been themselves chosen by God and adopted into his eternal family. "Christians can and should continue to affirm adoption as a witness to their faith."<sup>6</sup> This thesis addresses the child welfare crisis in the United States, its outcomes on the children who are subject to its authority, and the church's role in supplying the lack and reforming a broken model of care.

The following terms will be used throughout the paper, in these specific definitions: *Child welfare* is the arena of social work devoted to protecting, supporting, rescuing, and caring for children in need. The *child welfare system* is the government initiative dedicated to sheltering children who have been removed from their parents or do not have a legal guardian. The system's purpose is to maintain normalcy in the life of the child by providing for their needs and acquiring permanent residence for them. *Out of home care* is the placement of children in a group residential setting, emergency foster placement, or long-term foster home, until such time they are able to be reunited with their families or become available for adoption. *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. *Faith communities*,

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<sup>6</sup> Brent Waters, "Welcoming Children into Our Homes: A Theological Reflection on Adoption," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 4 (2002): 425.

*congregations, gatherings, and churches*, are used interchangeably to describe local groups of Christ-followers who meet together to study Scripture, build relationship, and serve their surrounding community, living in such a way that individually and corporately witnesses to God's love. *Church*, when capitalized, or *body of Christ* both refer to the Christian community at large. *Faith-based organizations* (or FBOs) are para-ministries, non-profits, or businesses that operate according to a set of values and priorities belonging to a particular faith.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Methodology**

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the American church's role in the foster care system, both objective research and biblical evidence must be examined. For this study and analysis, the investigator was driven by the following research prompts:

1. According to traditional Christian doctrine and exegesis of the Scriptures, how do adoption and foster care fulfill the Great Commission?
2. To what extent does the church have the potential to be the solution to the U.S. foster care system?
3. How should the church's role in the U.S. foster care system be defined?

Identifying solutions for the current issues of domestic foster and adoption systems means that the issues must first be defined. Peer-reviewed, scholarly journals were accessed through the EBSCO and Scopus databases, using search terms related to child welfare, orphan care, missions, the role of education in social change, and biblical foundations for adoption and mission. Journal articles and other sources such as books, reports, and websites were chosen based on their ability to inform the above questions and provide insight for proposed revisions and improvements. Sources were evaluated for their scholarly merit and relevance to each of the topics explored in the literature review. Order of discussion was decided by the logical flow of information: investigating the needs of the current system, and determining the capacity and responsibility of the body of Christ to meet those needs.

Following the accrual of literature pertaining to faith integration and American orphan care systems, interview subjects were chosen. A total of six leaders were interviewed: a pastor, a social worker, two orphan care missionaries, a foster parent, and local ministry heads. This assortment of Bible-believing individuals provided narrative evidence of the challenges and opportunities involved in child welfare. The investigator arranged a meeting time and place with each interviewee to complete the thirty to sixty-minute conversation sessions. The questions that guided the interviews pertained to the above focus prompts, and were formulated to glean both personal and professional insight (see Appendices A and B).

Exploring each leader's viewpoint alongside society's attitudes toward non-biological families and ideal environments for healthy development provides this thesis with a more in-depth, experiential perspective on child welfare in the United States. Data analysis through the lens of the best interests of children brings the most pressing concerns to the forefront of the issue. The young lives affected by these opinions, shaped by the child welfare system, are the central focus of the entirety of this work. Researched and written while childhoods hang in the balance, the aim of this thesis is to educate and empower American Christ-followers to step up in compassionate action and work for lasting change.

## CHAPTER 3

### Review of Literature

Though statistics paint a bleak picture of the plight of the American foster child, “congregational social work” has undeniable potential to reimagine and reprioritize child welfare in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Awareness and understanding of the government system’s workings, its most pressing needs, and its relationship to the church are key. As VanWynsberghe explains, education is the first step in social change. What *is* must be comprehended before moving toward what *ought to be*.<sup>8</sup> A survey on community attitudes toward adoption in the United States showed that “52% of Americans regard the media (news, books, magazines and entertainment) as their primary source of information about adoption.”<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the Child Welfare section utilizes a variety of authoritative sources to investigate the current state of the system and present real data about its challenges. It highlights areas of success and those in need of renovation, with facts and statistics to showcase positive promises and issues desperately in need of change to best serve, heal, and develop children in care. This section looks at methods of out of home care to determine what is in the best interest of the child, discuss pros and cons of the systemization of care, and apply information about trends of permanency.

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<sup>7</sup> Helen Harris, Gaynor Yancey, and Dennis Myers, “Social Work Field Education in and with Congregations and Religiously-Affiliated Organizations in a Christian Context,” *Religions* 7, no. 5 (May 9, 2016): 3.

<sup>8</sup> Robert VanWynsberghe and Andrew C. Herman, “Education for Social Change and Pragmatist Theory: Five Features of Educative Environments Designed for Social Change,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 34, no. 3 (May 4, 2015): 269.

<sup>9</sup> Katarina Wegar, “Adoption, Family Ideology, and Social Stigma: Bias in Community Attitudes, Adoption Research, and Practice,” *Family Relations* 49, no. 4 (October 2000): 363.

The second section, Faith Foundation, begins with Scripture to establish the priority of orphan care in the Christian worldview. This section then reviews other theological and ecclesiological literature in response to the needs of the system. It is an investigation into the church's mandate for involvement, and its capacity to engage and catalyze change. The Bible is explicitly clear about God's heart for the poor, lonely, and marginalized. It is also explicitly clear about the Christian's responsibility to be an agent of reconciliation and restoration. In myriad ways, the body of Christ is best suited to cover and supply the deficit of the foster care system, and go where policy cannot. In the third section, "Integration," secular literature provides proof that Christ-followers are the answer to social workers' search for well-trained, compassionate, motivated, and resilient foster and adoptive parents. Individuals and faith communities sold out for the Lord are the answer to the short-staffed and underfunded government initiatives trying to manage the orphan crisis in the United States. With the church's wholehearted engagement, managing a crisis will turn into *being* the solution.

### **Child Welfare**

The practice of social work in the United States has undergone tremendous metamorphosis over the past century, with the most dramatic alterations occurring in the last twenty years. The sanitized methods of the current system are a far cry from the orphanages of the 1920's, for example, but there are benefits and detriments in both these models of care. The following sections each approach today's practices from different angles in order to present a holistic summary of how entering care affects children. The targeted points include the experience of additional trauma due to patterns of removal,

reasons the business model of care is a disservice to children in need of nurturing, and the long-term importance of stability.

### Best Interest of the Child

In the wake of a family investigation by Child Protective Services, it seems as if anything can happen. After being displaced from his or her living situation, the child in question could end up in any number of places – the Child Welfare umbrella called “out of home care” includes kinship or other relative’s homes, family or treatment foster homes, and group or residential care.<sup>10</sup> Each situation is unique, with its own set of complications, and each child’s case requires the highest levels of expertise and attention. Removal from perhaps the only home environments these children have ever known adds to the trauma that caused their removal in the first place. Children are “hardwired to connect;” they are hungry for attachment and personal development, and the way these needs are met during early years shapes much about the rest of their lives.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, adoption is proven to be in the best interest of the child in care.<sup>12</sup> However, where the child welfare system is overburdened and struggling to safely place vulnerable children, reunification with family is considered the ideal endgame. These placement decisions are often not solely driven by the best interest of the child, but a compilation of influential factors and pressures stemming from the bureaucratic nature of

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<sup>10</sup> “Overview,” Child Welfare Information Gateway, accessed March 17, 2017, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/outofhome/overview/>

<sup>11</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), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Richard P. Barth and Marianne Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Responses*. (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), 23.

the system.<sup>13</sup> The driving force behind this synthetization of research is the premise that life with a birth family, while important and certainly desirable, is not always preferable above life with a non-biological family. This thesis calls for reevaluation and restructuring of placement protocol in the child welfare system, and begins by examining the avenues often advocated and ultimately chosen over adoption. The following research shows that adoption is the most beneficial option for children in care, when healthy reunification with biological family is not possible.

“Adoption is the one intervention which clearly makes a major, positive, long-term difference in the life of a child,” as stated by Rutter.<sup>14</sup> A study by Portland State University found that “children placed in adoptive and fost-adopt placements fared better in family adjustment and emotional and developmental functioning than did children returned home or in long-term foster care.”<sup>15</sup> Scarr and Weinburg call adoption “a comprehensive ecological system to promote the welfare of the child.”<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most glaring benefit of adoption verses other forms of care is that re-abuse is least common when the child is adopted.<sup>17</sup> “Children in group care are more than twice as

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<sup>13</sup> Andrew J. Germak and Karun K. Singh, “Social Entrepreneurship: Changing the Way Social Workers Do Business,” *Administration in Social Work* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 85.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Rutter, *Changing Youth in a Changing Society*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), quoted in Richard P. Barth and Marianne Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Responses*. (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), 28.

<sup>15</sup> Portland State University and Janet Lahti. *A Follow-Up Study of the Oregon Project: A Summary*. (Portland, OR: The Institute, 1978), quoted in Richard P. Barth and Marianne Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Responses*. (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), 29.

<sup>16</sup> Sandra Scarr and Richard A. Weinburg, “IQ Test Performance of Black Children Adopted by White Families,” *American Psychologist* 31, no. 10: 726-739, quoted in Richard P. Barth and Marianne Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Responses*. (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), 28.

<sup>17</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Responses*, 24.



likely to be identified as difficult to control – as are children in foster care – higher abuse rates are predictable in foster or group care.”<sup>18</sup> Children in foster care are safer from compounding trauma than those who remain in the original abusive or neglectful home, but are still more likely to experience further abuse than children who are adopted.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the threatening likelihood of re-abuse, residential care is the most expensive branch of out of home care (which serves the smallest number of children, respectively). Because of this, there is great pressure to justify the overall necessity of group homes and their costly methods.<sup>20</sup> There is an attitude of avoidance of group homes even among professionals working in the system, and placement specialists tend to pursue any and all foster home placement possibilities before resorting to considering residential facilities. These workers in child welfare understand that group homes are fundamentally unstable, as program milieus are in constant flux.<sup>21</sup> Each admission, discharge, or readmission creates an entirely new dynamic for residents and staff. Residential facilities are a microcosm of the entire child welfare system. Vulnerable children and those who work on their behalf are swung around by each facility’s responsibility to implement, alter, and revamp policy. Just as “appropriate adoption standards” have changed in fast, dramatic ways throughout United States’ history, the

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy L. Fitzharris, *The Foster Children of California: Profiles of 10,000 Children in Residential Care*. (Sacramento, CA: Children’s Services Foundation in cooperation with California Association of Services for Children, 1985), quoted in Richard P. Barth and Marianne Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Responses*. (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1988), 25.

<sup>19</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Responses*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> John S. Lyons et al., “An Outcomes Perspective of the Role of Residential Treatment in the System of Care,” *Residential Treatment for Children & Youth* 26, no. 2 (April 2009): 72.

<sup>21</sup> Noel Howard, “The Ryan Report (2009). A Practitioner’s Perspective on Implications for Residential Child Care,” *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 2012): 45.

constant, mandated updating of group care standards keep staff members' hands tied in red tape, and deprive the individuals in their care of a stable living environment.<sup>22</sup>

While any home environment can be messy at times and has the potential to be tempestuous, residential care is described as ambivalent, often volatile, and even sometimes "dangerous for children and staff."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, research shows that crowded living environments "may elevate physiological stress among children, negatively affect school achievement and task motivation, and can lead to more behavioral problems at school."<sup>24</sup> If children are placed in a residential setting that is "unsuited to their less severe needs, they are susceptible to 'peer contagion.'"<sup>25</sup> Peer contagion occurs when children with lower levels of need are negatively affected by housemates with more severe behavioral issues. Influenced by the actions and attitudes of their peers, the behavior of higher-functioning children worsens.

This problem is eliminated when "admission is tightened so that only the children with the most severe needs are treated."<sup>26</sup> Children with lower levels of need are protected in this scenario, by being fitted to a living situation that is able to more accurately and specifically meet their treatment needs. Children with higher levels of

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<sup>22</sup> Ellen Herman, "The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption," *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (2002): 341.

<sup>23</sup> Howard, "The Ryan Report (2009). A Practitioner's Perspective on Implications for Residential Child Care," 40.

<sup>24</sup> Gary W. Evans and Stephen J. Lepore, "Chronic Residential Crowding and Children's Well-Being: An Ecological Perspective," *Child Development* 69, no. 6 (December 1998): 1515.

<sup>25</sup> Lyons et al., "An Outcomes Perspective of the Role of Residential Treatment in the System of Care," 87.

<sup>26</sup> Lyons et al., "An Outcomes Perspective of the Role of Residential Treatment in the System of Care," 85.

need are also protected, by the facility's decision to target and treat a specific demographic for the best results. Residential facilities achieve their "greatest measure of success" when they narrow focus and make more "clinical rational placement decisions."<sup>27</sup> However, the ultimate effectiveness of residential care is determined by the "strong community programs available to the youth upon discharge."<sup>28</sup> Length of stay in residential care is irrelevant if community support programs do not help individuals transition after graduation or release from treatment.

From the above examples, it is clear that large group environments do not serve children in care as well as is possible. Long-term fostering or improper residential stay not only fail to heal and develop a child, but actually *increase* a child's overall risk for further trauma while in care. Additional issues with short-term permanency and their traumatic repercussions will be discussed in a later section of Child Welfare. This combination of outcomes begs the question: If re-abuse is rampant in a system designed to remove children from unsafe environments, at what stage in a case plan does protocol fall short and leave children vulnerable? What portion of that system is broken to such a degree that it litters the lives of those who pass through it with more wounds?

### Systemization of Care

Before any child welfare system existed, it was *people* who opened their spaces to those without their own families. In some places, the church abdicated its role and the government stepped in to fill the gap. In other places, specialists emerged and declared

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<sup>27</sup> Lyons et al., "An Outcomes Perspective of the Role of Residential Treatment in the System of Care," 85.

<sup>28</sup> Lyons et al., "An Outcomes Perspective of the Role of Residential Treatment in the System of Care," 87.

that they knew better than the lay people who devoted their lives to orphan care. Regardless of how divisions were drawn, the child welfare system evolved from a ministry of charity to a business model – driven by efficiency and restricted by policy. Though the upcoming specialists of the early twentieth century were motivated to remove child welfare from the grasp of baby markets, the modern system’s default mode still leans toward operating like a for-profit company more than an organization designed and determined to protect the best interests of children.

Social work was a newly emerging field in the early 1990’s, bent on “making adoption modern.”<sup>29</sup> Adoption has always been sought after most by those who cannot conceive their own children, a blessing to those who have experienced the deep pain of infertility, but still seen as second best to bringing a biological child into the world. Making adoption modern “entailed establishing a new paradigm, kinship by design.”<sup>30</sup> Rather than matching adoptive parents to kin-less children by way of assessing family milieu and capacity to care, matching was done to most closely resemble a biological relationship. This “reinforced the notion that blood was thicker than water, the very ideology that made adoption inferior to the ‘real thing,’ a last resort.”<sup>31</sup> The effort to make adoption invisible by matching families based on physical characteristics indicates the persistence of stigma surrounding non-biological families.

The child welfare system’s method of risk management is influenced and driven by “the primacy of birth families.” Weighing costs and benefits between adoption and

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<sup>29</sup> Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” 341.

<sup>30</sup> Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” 339.

<sup>31</sup> Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” 340.

reunification or family maintenance is useless when the society's sense of entitlement to birth families precludes all other decisions, even to the "enduring detriment of children."<sup>32</sup> Any possible angle for successful family maintenance is considered first in a child welfare case, since it is significantly less expensive than removing him or her from the home and providing care. If the family only needs additional supports to be a healthy and reliable environment, maintenance is of course the surest option for stability in the child's life. But when goals of lowest cost or quickest reunification drive the decision, leaving the child at risk for further abuse in that environment, the danger of the blood bias of American kinship is revealed.<sup>33</sup> Barth and Berry argue that this bias, which tends to put ultimate priority on biological familial bonds, results in "inadequate protection for the child" and necessitates reevaluation of the system.<sup>34</sup> When the biological family is the best place for the child because of strong relationships and potential for healthy growth, there is nothing wrong with prioritizing family maintenance or reunification. The trouble only occurs when these decisions are made solely on principles of a specific kinship model instead of on the basis of what will adequately protect the child in question.

The modernization of child welfare also resulted in depersonalization. Specialists emerged as advocates of standardization and regulation. Because of their emphasis on these procedures, public opinion on adoption and foster placement shifted from a task that only required love and good sense to a feat that could only be effective and safe with "technical skill, empirical investigation," and eventually, government oversight.<sup>35</sup> The

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<sup>32</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Resources*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Herman, "The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption," 390.

<sup>34</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Resources*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Herman, "The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption," 346.

old adoption agencies were dismissed by professionals as quaint and sentimental in light of newer, more strategic methods.<sup>36</sup> These attitudes moved childhood and kinship “into the public sphere” and transferred the power of decision away from parents to government representatives, whose involvement was once considered “beyond the legitimate reach of state power.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the tension of transitioning models of care in the early twentieth century, professional agencies began charging fees. It is common knowledge that the private adoptions of today cost thousands of dollars, but the first agency fees of the 1940s were considered controversial and even unethical.<sup>38</sup> Herman states quite plainly that “the mission of a federal bureaucracy contrasted with the aims of a service-providing federation.”<sup>39</sup> Systemized child welfare pushed for the development of the discipline of social work, rather than the “market logic” of people who essentially trafficked babies to turn a profit.<sup>40</sup> However, systemization has naturally led to further depersonalization, as evidenced above, and leans ever more toward a business model of care.

The phrase itself sounds contradictory but proponents of this model advocate for the self-sufficiency of agencies. This is achieved by embracing the “straightforward business sense found in social entrepreneurship,” where Germak and Singh call for a

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<sup>36</sup> Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” 344.

<sup>37</sup> Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” 341.

<sup>38</sup> Henrietta L. Gordon, *Adoption Practices, Procedures and Problems: Report on Workshop Material and Proceedings of the Adoption Conference Held May 9-12, 1948 in New York City*. (New York: Child Welfare League of America, 1949), 58-60, quoted in Ellen Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” *Journal of Social History* 36, no. 2 (2002): 344.

<sup>39</sup> Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” 348.

<sup>40</sup> Herman, “The Paradoxical Rationalization of Modern Adoption,” 342.

hybrid of social work practices and business innovation.<sup>41</sup> The face of social work has changed as agencies compete for funding, but there are always more entrepreneurial ways an agency can secure funding independently rather than relying on restricted amounts of donations or government contracts. If the garnering of resources is successful, there is more freedom to “develop programs that truly meet clients’ needs and wants.”<sup>42</sup> If an agency generates too much income from other sources, however, they are in danger of losing their 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. There is a fine line between business ventures funneling funds back into an organization and the risk of devoting too much attention to a limb of the organization not devoted to serving vulnerable children’s needs.<sup>43</sup>

The implementation of governmentally regimented programs has greatly expanded the scope of care since the inception of the twentieth century. However, the depth of care has been greatly shallowed. Depersonalization of child welfare means more efficiency and more protective measures, in some cases. The regulation of care has benefits as well: it makes residential service monitoring a legal requirement and raises the standards for inspections.<sup>44</sup> As in the issue of reunification and family maintenance – these measures *work* if they are introduced and used with the child’s best interest at heart.

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<sup>41</sup> Germak and Singh, “Social Entrepreneurship,” 79.

<sup>42</sup> *Understanding Nonprofit Organizations: Governance, Leadership, and Management*. Edited by J. Steven Ott and Lisa A. Dickie, quoted in Andrew J. Germak and Karun K. Singh, “Social Entrepreneurship: Changing the Way Social Workers Do Business,” *Administration in Social Work* 34, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 83.

<sup>43</sup> Germak and Singh, “Social Entrepreneurship,” 84.

<sup>44</sup> Howard, “The Ryan Report (2009). A Practitioner’s Perspective on Implications for Residential Child Care,” 39.

But any protective or progressive policy that fails to see and address the emotional, social, and spiritual needs as *well* as physical needs of children fails to serve them.

### Legacy of Permanency

Barth notes that the “lasting legacy of the placement on the child’s development” is often neglected.<sup>45</sup> Since childhood is only a small percentage of an individual’s lifespan, it does not serve him or her to value the immediacy of a placement over its long-term outcomes. “A permanent, safe, family-like living situation for every child is the goal of current child welfare legislation and practice. The ‘permanence’ in permanency planning is not, however, defined by law.”<sup>46</sup> According to the Child Welfare Information Gateway, permanency is defined situationally. Each case has specific difficulties and each child has specific needs.<sup>47</sup> Clearly these things cannot be satisfied across the board by a general definition of permanency. However, this perpetuates the ambiguity of a legislative goal that cannot be legislated.

A crucial aspect of a successful, long-term placement is the caregiver’s role in understanding a child’s trauma and aiming for healing, not just behavioral management. A child who has experienced severe or multiple traumas sometimes requires more intensive levels of treatment than the typical foster home can provide, but any person working with vulnerable children should be trained in this practice. Beyerlein and Block connect the prevalence of traumatized children in foster care to the legacy of permanency

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<sup>45</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Resources*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Resources*, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Children’s Bureau, Administration for Childrean and Families, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Overview,” *Child Welfare Information Gateway*, n.d., accessed March 26, 2017, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/overview/>.



by stating that ““foster caregivers’ lack of information about the trauma history and related behaviors is another issue that is thought to cause risk of placement instability.”<sup>48</sup> When caregivers without trauma-informed training wrongly attribute children’s coping strategies or maladaptive survival skills to bad behavior, those children are more likely to be displaced from a foster home. Caregivers must be equipped and willing to help heal, instead of just striving for behavioral modification.

For some children in foster care, instability is all they have ever known. For others, they are taken from a world thought to be stable and thrust *into* instability when they are brought into care. Many children “suffer additional traumatic experiences and stressors” due to the instability of out of home care, beginning with removal and continuing with repetitive re-placements due to behavior problems or policy mandates.<sup>49</sup> In the rush to place a child in a home, case workers often feel pressured to make hasty decisions. Placement mismatches occur when those in charge of the child’s welfare try to make them “look really good on paper” to get them placed, leaving the new caregivers in the dark about that child’s particular trauma history and behavioral issues.<sup>50</sup> Even in situations where permanency seems guaranteed, children experience disruption. Ten to twenty-five percent of pre-adoptive placements “disrupt before adoption proceedings are finalized.”<sup>51</sup> Between four and forty percent of supposedly permanent older child

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<sup>48</sup> Brittany A. Beyerlein and Ellin Bloch, “Need for Trauma-Informed Care Within the Foster Care System: A Policy Issue,” *Child Welfare* 93, no. 3 (May 2014): 18.

<sup>49</sup> Beyerlein and Bloch, “Need for Trauma-Informed Care Within the Foster Care System: A Policy Issue,” 13.

<sup>50</sup> Beyerlein and Bloch, “Need for Trauma-Informed Care Within the Foster Care System: A Policy Issue,” 14.

<sup>51</sup> Children’s Bureau, Administration for Childrean and Families, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, “Overview.”

adoptions do not last.<sup>52</sup> Older children experience this heartbreak far more often than younger children in care. Research shows that as age increases, length of each placement decreases.<sup>53</sup>

The results of a foster care study done by Greeson and colleagues showed that “over 70% of the sample met the criteria for complex trauma, and 83% had been diagnosed with at least one clinical disorder.”<sup>54</sup> Trauma-informed *care* is explicitly necessary in each of these lives, as opposed to only using trauma-focused interventions. As a philosophy of care, it goes beyond initial intervention and focuses on how best to treat and heal individuals who have suffered deeply.<sup>55</sup> Butler, Critelli, and Rinfrette’s conclusion is a sobering warning: “standard care practices can be retraumatizing.”<sup>56</sup> This is especially true for the children whose trauma histories go unknown and untreated, due to lack of screenings and assessments.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Resources*, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Resources*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> J.K.P. Greeson, E.C. Briggs, C.L. Kisiel, C.M. Layne, G.S. Ake, S.J. Ko, E.T. Gerrity, A.M. Steinberg, M.L. Howard, and R.S. Pynoos. “Complex Trauma and Mental Health in Children and Adolescents Placed in Foster Care: Findings from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network.” *Child Welfare* 90, no. 6: 91-108, quoted in Brittany A. Beyerlein and Ellin Bloch, “Need for Trauma-Informed Care Within the Foster Care System: A Policy Issue,” *Child Welfare* 93, no. 3 (May 2014): 11.

<sup>55</sup> Beyerlein and Bloch, “Need for Trauma-Informed Care Within the Foster Care System: A Policy Issue,” 10.

<sup>56</sup> Beyerlein and Bloch, “Need for Trauma-Informed Care Within the Foster Care System: A Policy Issue,” 10.

<sup>57</sup> Beyerlein and Bloch, “Need for Trauma-Informed Care Within the Foster Care System: A Policy Issue,” 11.

Even though many foster youth state they are ambivalent about permanency, there are thousands across the United States that desperately desire homes and families.<sup>58</sup> Thinking the concept does not apply to them is not the same as not needing a stable environment and loving support for healthy development. It is a tragedy that the child welfare system produces young adults who think that stability is not possible for them. Unfortunately, the compounding trauma of the initial removal is sometimes necessary and therefore ultimately in the long-term best interest of the child. However, it is the recurring re-placement of the child who has been brought into care that poses enormous questions and ethical dilemmas. Even while permanency is neither clearly defined nor reliably legislated, the first step in changing the narrative of child welfare instability is thoroughly training and preparing foster parents.<sup>59</sup> In the long-term view, adoption and fostering to adopt are the preeminent choices in a system legitimately motivated by “permanency.”

In this overburdened system, the goal is to keep children in care for the shortest possible amount of time. The primary method of achieving this goal is often reunification. In these scenarios, it is the priority of child welfare professionals to walk the biological family through a case plan that will result in their being able to create and sustain a safe and healthy environment to which the child can return. Working toward a goal of the shortest possible “in care” time is not the problem. The means by which that goal is accomplished, however, is another story. When case plans are a list of boxes to be

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<sup>58</sup> David C. Diehl, Robin B. Howse, and Carol M. Trivette, “Youth in Foster Care: Developmental Assets and Attitudes towards Adoption and Mentoring,” *Child & Family Social Work* 16, no. 1 (February 2011): 83.

<sup>59</sup> Barth and Berry, *Adoption and Disruption: Rates, Risks, and Resources*, 26.

filled by check marks and not corroborated with transformational change in the home environment, the child has no business being shuttled back to the place that instigated their trauma in the first place. Successful reconciliation stories are not written into existence with paperwork. They are forged in counseling, therapy, addiction rehabilitation, and relational accountability.

Ultimately, success stories are driven by whatever is in the best interest of the child. Without question, whole-family restoration is the preference. When a greater number of lives can be improved and made healthy, that is always the preferable course of action. But when *that* whole-family goal compromises what is best for the child in care, the broken cycle of foster care is perpetuated. Children grow up without proper nurturing, resulting in legal adults that society deems unsuited to be productive members of their community. Homelessness and incarceration are very real and have very threatening statistics and stigma that hang over the heads of these young adults aging out of the foster care system. Funding, training, and public education are the most crucial areas of improvement needed to halt the cycle of dysfunction.<sup>60</sup>

### **Faith Foundation**

In John 13:35, Jesus said that his followers would be known by their love. The child welfare system alone would look drastically different if Christians in the United States made every effort to be known for their love for others, especially the most vulnerable of society. Rather than relegating these children in need of care to a volunteer

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<sup>60</sup> Claudette and Elvia R. Krajewski-Jaime, "Exploration of the American Foster Care System: An Experiential Account," *International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (March 2011): 54.

service opportunity or a once-a-year sponsorship campaign, the Scriptures call Christians to open up their lives to the alien and the stranger. Psalm 68:6 says that “God sets the lonely in families.” He uses his people to do that. James 1:27 says that the kind of religion that God sees as “pure and faultless” is the care of widows and orphans. All throughout the Bible, God is called a father to the fatherless and a defender of the weak.<sup>61</sup> Those who have been adopted into his kingdom family are called to be perfect as he is, to walk in his ways and be his hands and feet in the world.<sup>62</sup> There is no better way to embody the Lord’s risk-taking love and scandalous grace than caring for those who have no one else to care for them, often forgotten by the rest of society.

#### Biblical Model

Adoption is often held up as the best analogy for the grafting of believers into God’s eternal family at salvation. Scripture provides foundational evidence for the importance of adoption, even in the first century. For example, Paul’s use of adoption as a metaphor for salvation in Romans and Galatians offer readers an insight into the heart of God, along with an opportunity to imitate him. Kim’s paper on Roman social and legal practices surrounding adoption in the first century help unpack Paul’s famous adoption metaphor in Romans 8:15 – “The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba*, Father.’” Specific parallels between the typical family of Roman society and the family of God explain Paul’s beliefs on the subject. The metaphor he employs pertains to adopting slaves in the presence of a legitimate heir and

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<sup>61</sup> Pss. 68:5, 82:3 (NIV)

<sup>62</sup> Matt. 5:48

allowing them to enjoy the same status and privileges (which was considered outrageous in the first century).<sup>63</sup>

In *The Child in the Bible*, Bunge states that there is “no controversy over the claim that adoption itself is both a personal privilege and a social good.”<sup>64</sup> Adoption is revolutionary and extraordinary because of the large scale on which God accomplished it first, by the perfect life and sacrifice of Jesus Christ and the grafting of human beings into the family of God. Mark’s gospel provides a powerful statement on God’s choice to love. The Father’s words to Jesus at his baptism “may well be an adoption formula.”<sup>65</sup> “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”<sup>66</sup> When Christians are motivated by the example of God and are mobilized “on mission,” they are participating in a movement of God that has eternal significance.<sup>67</sup> “Adoption is a powerful image because adoption transcends the boundaries and barriers set by biological and ethnic identity. Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free – all can be adopted. All can become part of the same family.”<sup>68</sup> It should not be just a “Plan B” but a priority, because Christians are called and commanded to take care of neighbors and the needy.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>63</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): 141.

<sup>64</sup> Marcia J. Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, (Johanneshov: MTM, 2015) 375.

<sup>65</sup> Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, 388.

<sup>66</sup> Mark 1:11

<sup>67</sup> Cruver, “Adoption Is Bigger than You Think,” 73.

<sup>68</sup> Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, 375.

<sup>69</sup> Kristin Johnston Largen, “I Love to Tell the Story: Reshaping the Narrative of Adoption,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 289.

## Making Disciples

The Great Commission and the imperative of “love your neighbor” illustrate the ideals of Christian witness, as believers strive to manifest the Kingdom in their day to day lives.<sup>70</sup> The mandate is fulfilled in a myriad of ways – as many as there are believers on the earth – and the terminology surrounding it has changed as Christian culture changed. Barro explains that “the term ‘missions’...is being now applied specifically to one of the many activities of the Church that combined becomes mission. ‘Missions’ is used for the sending of a person who will cross some barriers to proclaim the gospel.”<sup>71</sup> The variety of methods used to fulfill the Great Commission have especially increased with the popularization of short term missions. Traditional understanding of a life “on mission” has morphed with the advent of short term trips, and scholars are striving to define a mission-oriented lifestyle. Schreiter explains that “short-term mission is an oxymoron: true mission only occurs from long-term commitment and 'insertion' among a people.”<sup>72</sup>

Along these lines, 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. “Make disciples” includes raising up children, adopted or biological, in God’s ways.<sup>73</sup> While it is true that blended families are messy, the processes involve risk, and they demand weighty effort and sacrifice, fostering

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<sup>70</sup> Mark 12:31

<sup>71</sup> Antonio Carlos Barro, “Mission and Missions -- Ongoing Challenge for the Christian Church,” *International Congregational Journal* 11, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 45.

<sup>72</sup> Robert J Schreiter, “Third Wave Mission: Cultural, Missiological, and Theological Dimensions,” *Missiology* 43, no. 1 (January 2015): 11.

<sup>73</sup> Matt. 28:19

and adopting take on an even deeper and more worthwhile meaning when it is not only the physical body and emotional health of the child that is considered, but also his or her eternal soul.

There is a wealth of scholarly discussion on short term missions which is valuable by way of comparing the increasingly popular modern model of missions to the ways that churches embrace and endorse other avenues of mission, such as orphan care. Though the effectiveness and overall sustainable value of short term missions is highly debated, these programs are priorities for scores of churches across the United States (as emphasized in Koll's article, "Taking Wolves Among Lambs: Some Thoughts on Training for Short-Term Mission Facilitation"), while the ministry of orphan care is hardly ever publicly advocated within the church.<sup>74</sup> There is danger in presenting adoption as mission, and this is not to say it should be characterized by an evangelical zeal for conversion. Ryan stresses that while people of faith adopt with good intentions, Christian evangelical adoption that is missiologically driven can be dangerous. Right theology is imperative, along with additional sound education.<sup>75</sup>

Adoption advocacy should naturally flow out of a missional life, characterized by compassionate hearts that are motivated by that which the Lord's heart is tender toward. It is important that believers understand adoption as a practical, realistic, and desirable avenue to embody the Kingdom of God. When it comes to the theological basis for Christians welcoming children into their homes, Waters states how important it is to

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<sup>74</sup> Karla Ann Koll, "Taking Wolves among Lambs: Some Thoughts on Training for Short-Term Mission Facilitation," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 2 (April 2010): 93.

<sup>75</sup> Ryan, "A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing?: A Missiological Examination of the United States Evangelical Adoption and Orphan Care Movement," 414.



understand that parent/child relationships are not solely biological or social. Adoption is as an “unnatural, and yet also a naturally Christian act.” Fostering in Christianity leads to networks of relationships rather than an isolated family unit, and stresses the eschatological nature of relationships. It is not about fulfilling parental desires, but providing care, love, and support to those who desperately need it.<sup>76</sup>

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them. For the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”<sup>77</sup> Regardless of whether children in the foster care system are literal orphans, God’s word makes it very clear that their path to the Father should be unobstructed. About Christian parenting, Gentry says of children: “They will see the world through the window that we give them. We must make sure that our minds are so filled and saturated with the Scripture that our world-and-life-view is completely shaped by the biblical teaching.”<sup>78</sup> While physical safety is vital to a child’s upbringing, Christian foster parents and adoptive parents carry the precious responsibility of making every effort to raise their children in an environment and with a worldview that points them to Jesus.

### Secular Invitation

Studies examining the role of faith in adoption of African American children into faith communities show the networking power of church relationships and support ties.

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<sup>76</sup> Waters, “Welcoming Children into Our Homes: A Theological Reflection on Adoption,” 431.

<sup>77</sup> Matt. 19:14

<sup>78</sup> Peter John Gentry, “Raising Children, the Christian Way,” *The Journal of Discipleship & Family Ministry* 2, no. 2 (2012): 98.

Faith communities provide opportunities to relieve the overburdened system.<sup>79</sup> Agencies partner with congregations of faith for additional capacity. Organizations birthed out of churches partner with local agencies to train and license foster parents. Those trained in the church programs were shown to have more positive feelings, and were more confident in their abilities as foster parents because of better support. These programs have already been replicated, proving that this model is productive and can be implemented in other places.<sup>80</sup>

There are debates surrounding faith-based organization involvement in these government programs, but the additional capacity is needed because of the high stakes of the child welfare “crisis.”<sup>81</sup> Resiliency because of religious motivation is listed as an asset, along with built-in support networks and moral structure. However, there are also downsides of unwanted proselytization and inflexibility, which is where the concept of adoption as mission strays into damaging territory.<sup>82</sup> But as seen in Janet Lees and Jan Horwath’s study, young people understand how religion contributes to development of identity and ethical decision making. They see that religious beliefs help parents understand what is best for their children, and therefore consider it beneficial to their own

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<sup>79</sup>Kathleen Belanger, Sam Copeland, and Monit Cheung, “The Role of Faith in Adoption: Achieving Positive Adoption Outcomes for African American Children,” *Child Welfare* 87, no. 2 (April 3, 2008): 100.

<sup>80</sup> Michael Howell-Moroney, “Faith-Based Partnerships and Foster Parent Satisfaction,” *Journal of Health & Human Services Administration* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 243.

<sup>81</sup> Ryan, “A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing?,” 413.

<sup>82</sup> Howell-Moroney, “Fostering Capacity: The Role of Faith-Based Congregations in the Child Welfare System in the United States,” 36.

lives, showing that even the children involved in the adoption process can recognize how foundational religious beliefs can change lives.<sup>83</sup>

The Commission on Children at Risk released a report in 2003 that is full of secular research that says children *need* authoritative communities for healthy development, and faith congregations of faith fit the definition perfectly. Authoritative communities are defined as “groups that live out the types of connectedness that our children increasingly lack. They are groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life.”<sup>84</sup> Scientists and other expert used this report to publicly voice that American society must pay more attention to the moral, spiritual, and religious needs of its young people in order to affect change. Research has associated religious commitment with “significantly higher investments in parenting and better parenting environments.” Not only does faith better equip parents, but the “protective effects of personal devotion are twice as great for adolescents as they are for adults.”<sup>85</sup> In conclusion, the report states that the “deepest and most lasting social changes... ultimately require something from almost all of us.”<sup>86</sup> Roughly half a million young lives hanging in the balance, and the next generation of leaders and parents requires the involvement and sacrifice of both

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<sup>83</sup> Janet Lees and Jan Horwath, “‘Religious Parents... Just Want the Best for Their Kids’: Young People’s Perspectives on the Influence of Religious Beliefs on Parenting,” *Children & Society* 23, no. 3 (May 2009): 172.

<sup>84</sup> The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, 6.

<sup>85</sup> The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, 31.

<sup>86</sup> The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, 44.

individuals and faith communities. “Our future in this respect is less an externally structured or preordained process than an event in freedom and an act of choice.”<sup>87</sup>

The Scriptures mandate care for the vulnerable, without question. Secular resources make it clear that people of deep devotion have the *most* positive impact on the healthy development of children. Christians are hardwired for sacrificial love and growth through suffering, and orphan care is the perfect arena for those strengths to shine for the glory of God. Faith requires risk, and the opening of homes and hearts is nothing compared to the sacrifice Jesus endured to make a way for sinners to become family of God. “What Christians hope for is that adoption which is at the same time redemption... The link between the present reality of sonship and the future hope of sonship and redemption is the Spirit.”<sup>88</sup> Christ-followers who commit themselves to the challenge of caring for someone else’s child have a front row seat to the stories of reconciliation and restoration through which God heals those he created and loves. Living kingdom realities on earth force Christians to live in a kind of tension, but adoptive families have the unique opportunity to witness how the “mix of the family becomes a kind of parable of the marvelous complexity of the family of God.”<sup>89</sup>

The sources utilized in this literature review represent a wide range of perspectives and opinions, but distill into two truths: The United States’ child welfare system is in need of renovation, and Christians are perfectly suited to make the required impact. From a biblical standpoint, this involvement is mandated and promised to be

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<sup>87</sup> The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities*, 47.

<sup>88</sup> Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, 392.

<sup>89</sup> Bunge, *The Child in the Bible*, 396.

difficult but fruitful. Secular resources do not shy away from the difficult realities of caring for vulnerable children, but also emphasize the very real hope for widespread social change. Child welfare, or orphan care, is not an issue that Christians can sit back and debate – discussing whether or not they are called to the hard work of loving deeply and knitting together families for those that do not have them. As God threw open the doors to his kingdom and offered human being the inheritance of Christ, so should faith communities throw open the doors of churches across the country and give themselves for “the least of these,” whom the rest of the world overlooks more often than not.<sup>90</sup> The child welfare system cannot pause the effects of trauma in these young lives until Christians are ready for the challenge. Change *can* be achieved, if change is willing to be made.

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<sup>90</sup> Matt. 25:40

## CHAPTER 4

### **Analysis of Data**

The six interviewees who agreed to share their thoughts and beliefs on child welfare and orphan care are all leaders in their communities, primarily in the church world. Some brought years of experience in placement and caring for families, while others came with a multitude of questions and a heart to make a difference. After the story-sharing of these six individuals, common themes arose in the collected data that expounded on and personalized the research assembled in previous sections. To accommodate for personal history and varying involvement levels, and to glean the most relevant information possible, the order and depth of response prompts morphed slightly in each conversation. All identifying information has been excluded by the agreement of both parties. Answers and explanations given by the interviewees fall into three main categories: corporate involvement, personal involvement, and the church's suitability for the work of child welfare. Their reasoning and explanations have been synthesized in the following sections, and full interview transcripts can be found in Appendices C through H at the end of this paper.

#### Corporate Involvement

When asked whether there was more resistance on the side of the church or social workers regarding congregational partnership with child welfare organizations, interviewees two and four emphatically stated that the resistance is found on the side of the church. There are varying levels of church engagement in child welfare programs: putting out brochures, holding supply drives, and inviting social work professionals into Sunday gatherings to share about programs and use church facilities to hold events or

classes for prospective parents. Child welfare agencies recognize the church's potential to fill a need and support the work they are already doing and are actively reaching out to faith communities. By taking the initiative to create programs with the sole purpose of engaging churches and faith-based organizations, it is clear that the child welfare system values religious involvement. Unfortunately, they are often met with hesitation and skepticism. The protective instincts of church leaders are beneficial for their congregations, as these leaders are responsible for administrating church life and navigating relationships with their communities. However, turning inward when others ask for help defeats the purpose of, and is absolutely contrary to Christian community.

There is legitimate angst within church leadership that results in an inward bent, and much of it has to do with protecting the vision and mission of the ministry. Pastors and board members who know they have been called by the Lord to reach a certain population can be hesitant to divert time, energy, and financial resources to another cause. The inherent problem here is viewing orphan care as something other than the mission of the body of Christ, or as only a side ministry. There is no such thing as a side ministry. Wherever people are embodying the love of Christ and making room for others to encounter him, "ministry" is happening. Whether churches resource a foster and adoption sector under the "umbrella" of their current ministry or funnel their congregants to an existing ministry in their community, it is *possible* for every local gathering (regardless of size) to make an impact for the kingdom by choosing involvement in American child welfare.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> See Appendix G.

This goal should trump all other concerns. Denominational lines should never keep Christians from participating in God’s global mission to reach those far from him. Interviewee four shared about the resistance a non-profit agency encountered – not from government partners, but from faith communities.<sup>92</sup> Because the agency was *not* faith-based, it created a host of complications for some Christian churches, to the extent that they declined participation. In another instance, Christians refused to work alongside *other Christians* involved in child welfare because of denominational differences. This fragmentation of the Body is contrary to the purposes of God in caring for orphans and vulnerable children.

Some Christian communities do not partner with secular agencies because they are afraid of governmental jurisdiction infringing on their core values. This is ironic, because most churches register with the government be considered a 501(c)(3), and must comply with certain standards in order to maintain tax-exempt status. Even in cases where non-profit agencies reach out for assistance, they are often viewed as DCF or “the State,” which some pastors and leaders feel is threatening.<sup>93</sup> Especially concerning the culturally sensitive topic of homosexuality, churches tend to abstain from any activity that might make them liable. This plays out specifically with the refusal of many churches to open their facilities for adoption matching events or training classes. Individuals in leadership have the foresight to target potential value conflicts, but then choose to avoid the situation entirely. How would a church address or interact with a homosexual couple attending adoptive parent training on their campus? Would their open

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<sup>92</sup> See Appendix F.

<sup>93</sup> See Appendix F.



doors communicate an endorsement of same-sex marriage? In being overly cautious not to *appear* to have compromised certain tenants of the faith, the attitudes of these churches violate other tenants. Namely, the mandate to go into all the world and preach the Gospel. If churches abstain from *ministry* because they may brush against something with which they do not agree, they will never achieve lasting community impact.

The lack of corporate Christian involvement in child welfare is ultimately an issue of priority. Education plays an immense role, but it is clear from the gospels alone that the ministry of Jesus Christ was first for the marginalized and powerless. Churches that narrow their focus to reaching a single population or demographic lose sight of the inclusivity of a multi-generational, multi-ethnic, and multi-socioeconomic kingdom culture. It is never someone else's job to provide abused and neglected children with opportunities to meet Christ and experience his transformative love. It is the responsibility and privilege of the community called his Body.

### **Personal Involvement**

Several interviewees volunteered the information that there is a single, specific phrase they are tired of hearing – “I could never do that.” There is nothing special that sets these parents, compassion workers, and difference makers apart from other members of Christian community. The only measure of distinction is their willingness to step into the calling of caring for orphans God has mandated for all believers. Education, training, and real life experience follow, but there is no set of abilities or attributes that separate these people out from their peers. After their heeding the call, God has developed them into persons with deeper capacity for compassion and a unique understanding of his father's heart, but no extraordinary circumstances marked the outset of their respective

journeys. They are simply people who became aware of deep need and were willing to open their lives to be the solution. They are people who made themselves available for God's redeeming and restorative work in the lives of some of "the least of these" and were extravagantly blessed by the love that stretched their lives into beautifully full Gospel incarnations.

The fear of take-backs saturates domestic adoption, rooted in real and viable concern. Many make the choice to adopt internationally instead of adopting from foster care because there are many more degrees of separation from the birth family, and a more sterile process. Adopting from a government orphanage in another country eliminates the risk of running into a birth parent at the grocery store or, in more extreme cases, dealing with years of stress, sorrow, and legal complications if a birth parent attempts regaining custody. There are true circumstances where this route is legally appropriate: if a birth mother was coerced into giving up her parental rights, a birth father was not properly informed about his child's existence, or other instances where full knowledge and consent were not involved in the process of terminating parental rights and making a child available for adoption. However, this fear of a birth parent taking back their child after a successful adoption has been compounded by sensationalized and fictionalized adoption-struggle stories in media and entertainment, causing a true concern to appear much larger and much more prevalent than it is.

Another concern of prospective adoptive parents is the behavioral complications that could ensue after adopting a child from the foster care system. This is a much more legitimate objection and more common occurrence than birth parents taking the child back after he or she has been placed in an adoptive home. As discussed in the Legacy of

Permanency section of the literature review, nearly *every* child in the foster care system has experienced some form of trauma. The evidence of this is seen in difficulties with attachment, risk-taking behaviors, obstinacy and defiance, and unhealthy coping and defense mechanisms. These after-effects of trauma are realities for foster parents and those looking to adopt. But as stated in interview four, children who have experienced trauma need loving adults who will look beyond their acting out to ask, “Why?”<sup>94</sup> They need compassionate people to care more about the hurt they have experienced than the instances when it yields socially unacceptable behavior.

God-given depth of compassion and understanding is paramount, but training for foster and adoptive parents is *essential* as well. It begins with the knowledge to begin comprehending how the children’s experiences have shaped their growth and altered the very development of the minds. Through education and training in trauma-informed care, parents combat the fear of the behavioral implications of adoption and gain tools and wisdom to implement in their homes. Trauma-informed care places the child’s wellness and wholeness at the top of the priority list and at the forefront of treatment goals. Foster and adoptive parents who make the effort to learn and lean into the healing process can be equipped to partner with the Lord in the processes of redemption and restoration of their child’s life.

### **Suitability**

While some interviewees advocated for Christians coming alongside child welfare organizations, several others made the case that child welfare should be under the church’s jurisdiction entirely. The church stepped back from providing schooling,

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<sup>94</sup> See Appendix F.

healthcare, and welfare when those services were broken up and assigned to governmental sectors. However, society's placing child welfare under secular programming does not release Christians of their responsibility to care for orphans. As one interviewee said, "The State is not supposed to be their parents."<sup>95</sup> Current literature and conclusive research on foster care outcomes prove that guardianship by the government is neither an efficient nor effective mode of care.

Additionally, several interviewees expressed concern about the amount of money wasted in the current system of caring for foster children. Their assessment of the situation determines that the church can achieve better results with less cost, because of the volunteer base naturally present in the body of Christ.<sup>96</sup> Instead of paying dividends to case management organizations and outside agencies, the American church is large enough and resourced enough to organize itself around the cause of child welfare and change the pessimistic narrative surrounding out of home care. It is a long-term possibility, but one that is infused with hope and expectancy. There are Christ-followers across the country praying for this someday-reality, so that every vulnerable child is connected to a body of believers and is therefore introduced to the only method of care that can fully heal them of the trauma they have experienced – healing relationship with Jesus.

Not only could the Christian community better utilize the funds already allocated to child welfare, but they better understand the processes of healing and recovery. The best that governmental programs can do is place bandages on the deep wounds of

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<sup>95</sup> See Appendix D.

<sup>96</sup> See Appendix E.

traumatized children. Medical attention and professional counseling are absolutely necessary and do much good, but they are not sufficient to care for the child holistically. Especially in a system where constant relocation induces further trauma, these measures cannot serve children in their deepest places, where each one desires steadfast love, acceptance, and belief in better things to come. These expressions of redemption are inherent to the Christian life, and mandatory for believers to share with others. Regardless of structure, funding, or the formality of services offered, this alone makes the American church primarily responsible for the welfare of these modern-day orphans, even right now. If these levels of hope, redemption, and healing are found nowhere else in the world, Christians *must* rise to meet the challenges of child welfare and offer what Jesus bought at such a great price, but was given to them as a free gift.

## CHAPTER 5

### Conclusion

It is the mandate and privilege of Christ-followers to take on congregational social work and care for children in need. Scripture calls each person to consider how they will be involved, and shape his or her life accordingly. Whether that means giving financially to a local ministry, advocating in churches for social change, serving a foster family, or adopting a child, it is imperative that the Christian community becomes known for their love in this area of compassion-driven ministry. According to contemporary literature, they are best suited for the care and restoration of wounded children, and have the potential to change the face of the American orphan crisis permanently. Whole-hearted Christian involvement in child welfare means reimagining the system entirely. It does not cost to dream, and there can certainly be a day when the American church is able to provide for the physical needs of children, and also the emotional and spiritual needs not currently prioritized by the foster care system.

Until that day, Christian involvement means proving the church to be a resource for the government model of care. By opening homes and becoming foster and adoptive parents, Christ-followers will eliminate the “waiting” status of thousands of children in the United States. The need for safe homes and healthy families is paramount, according to placement agencies. It is a tragedy to be short on available homes and willing parents when there is a church on nearly every corner in the United States. Eliminating the dire need of social workers to place children in *any* acceptable living place will create the opportunity for choice in determining the *best* environment for children in need of homes.

Eradicating child homelessness and the cycle of re-abuse will require the widespread, interdenominational commitment of Christ-followers.

The interviews conducted for this research exemplify individuals and communities that have prioritized this biblical principle and willingly complicated their lives in order to care for those who need it most. They have forsaken the comfortable American notions of normality in favor of a missional lifestyle that refuses to compartmentalize home life and ministry. The child welfare crisis demands advocates and participants who are willing to lay aside personal preference to change lives. Full-bodied cooperation from the Christian community requires education, first and foremost, followed by empowerment of individuals and families to fulfill the Great Commission in their own homes. Foster care and adoption are rife with challenges, and seeking first the kingdom necessitates risk. Yet, it is ultimately in the best interest of the child. There is no better way for Christ-followers to be known by their love than welcoming this temporary disruption with eternal advantages.

#### Limitations and Further Research

The primary limitation of this analysis is that a small number of interviews were conducted within the same general geographic location. Also, at the time of the interviews, each person was either already involved in child welfare or interested in further involvement. To make the research more diverse and better representative of this country-wide issue, further interviews should be conducted across the country and with subjects of varying levels of interest in child welfare. Future interviewees should include individuals of an assortment of Christian denominations, other faiths, and non-religious persons as well. A variety of laypeople, ministers, social workers, and policy-makers

would be beneficial. Finally, a more quantifiable survey would be useful in a larger research project. This would enable the investigator to make firm statements on attitudes toward foster care and adoption, with firsthand physical evidence to support their claims.



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## APPENDIX A

### **Child Welfare Interview Questions**

1. Do you agree or disagree with the statement that the foster care system is currently in a kind of crisis?
2. In your opinion, to what is that due? OR: Why would professionals draw that conclusion?
3. Describe the ideal foster and adoptive parents.
4. Do you believe that religion/spirituality makes a difference in a foster or adoptive home?
5. Theoretically, do you believe that faith based organizations (specifically, church congregations) could provide healthy relief for the foster care system?
6. Have you seen this in action or had personal experience with it?
7. From what you have seen or your own ideas, what would be the ideal way to accomplish that?
8. What would it take for you to foster or adopt a child?

## APPENDIX B

### **Ministry Interview Questions**

1. What is your understanding of Christian responsibility in the care of disadvantaged or orphaned children?
2. In what ways does your home church carry this out?
3. How do you think foster care and adoption fit into that picture?
4. Have you seen other ministries do foster and adoption work successfully?
5. Would you encourage and support the formation of this specific kind of ministry in your congregation?
6. Would you be willing to use the platform of your leadership to teach on importance of fostering and adopting?
7. How do you think that fostering and adopting relate to the Great Commission?
8. Would you say that foster care and adoption are options through which we can show God's love and carry out his will, or specific responsibilities of the Christian community?
9. What would it take for you to foster or adopt a child?

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Transcript 1

AT: Could you describe to me your position – you're on staff at [church name]?

AG: Yes, I'm volunteer staff. So I am on staff but I don't get paid. My husband and I started putting together [organization] as an orphan care ministry about four years ago. Prior to that, [organization] existed just as a sponsoring program to [city name], an orphanage, actually it's an afterschool program in [city name], Ethiopia. Hence, the coffee shop. So this coffee shop is owned by our pastors and one hundred percent of the profits go back to the community. But our pastor [name] and his wife [name] felt a passion for [city name], Ethiopia and they wanted to invest in the work that was being done there. At the moment when they saw [city name], there was really nothing that was being done there, missionally. So they connected with this after school program and we have been sponsoring about a hundred children for the past maybe five, six years. Maybe a little longer. And so, [organization] was formed or created just for that. About four years ago, my husband and I felt the passion and the need to put together an orphan care ministry within the church and we, with the support of our missions pastor [name], were able to do that. My husband's passion is more for raising funds for adoption grants, and my passion is supporting the families and being able to provide a place where the families feel safe to share their stories, and a safe place for their kids to come together. Since then – and I can give you a little bit of statistics for [church name] – we have over one hundred and fifty, even more now, children who have been adopted within our church, and we have about sixteen active foster families at the moment, and about eleven safe families. Safe Families is a government program that is a preventative program, and

so before the kids go into foster care, if they're not being abused or anything, they're just maybe having some financial issues – the mom or the dad lost their job, they're living in their car, but they love their kids, they want to take care of their kids, they go to Safe Families and they find families within the church, within the program, that can take care of their kids until they get themselves back up and on their feet, and get an apartment or whatever. So the children are not usually per se from abuse, there are cases where they are, but most of the time it's just families that are having issues financially taking care of their kids. So that's the statistics of [church name] for the moment.

AT: So, comparatively, how big is the church?

AG: Our church has exponentially grown in the past four or five years, so right now we have one campus that has about four services, we have a [city name] campus and a [city name] campus. We have about 2,500 people that attend the different gatherings. Back four years ago, actually when I started attending nine years ago, it was only five hundred people. It has been growing and growing and just doesn't stop. It's an amazing thing. The core of [church name]'s passion is because our pastor and his wife, felt the need about eight years ago – they are in adoption. They wanted to adopt and saw this girl in one of their trips to Ethiopia; they just fell in love with her. Their story is great, I think it's online, but they ended up adopting a sibling group of four, and they have four biological children. For the purpose of your interview, really the ministry and the church being involved in adoption is our calling, and it's not like we're supposed to just put it on the side like a little ministry here, it's what we are called to do. Not everyone is called to adopt, but we're all called to do something. To us, that's what we want to make sure we're telling our church – we are all called to be in the lives of vulnerable children and



orphan children, and widows. We're not all called to adopt or foster or be a Safe Family, but we can all help and do something about it.

AT: A little more specifically, could you tell me the different areas of [organization]?

AG: When we started talking about [organization] four years ago, we said, "We have this sponsoring program, it's just a 501(c)(3), a nonprofit, that we use for the sponsoring of children in [city name], Ethiopia. But why don't we use that as the umbrella for our orphan care ministry?" So we cover adoptions, foster care, Safe Families, and we have a program called the Wraparound Care program, which is the support system that we utilize for families who are in the adoption and the foster care and Safe Family trenches. We also have the financial help – we have a grant that we do events to fundraise, so we can give out grants so people are financially able to adopt. As you know, international adoptions and private adoptions are really expensive. We've given over thirty thousand dollars in adoptions grants in the past three years since we've started, and we want to increase that. We want to make sure we're giving and doing everything that is in our hands to support the families – whether it's through support groups, equipping people, connecting people with the people that they need to be connected to, the ministries they need to be connected to, or it's financially.

We get connected with lots of different churches and one of the biggest problems in the church, and I'm saying the church at large, is the pastors having the passion and preaching from the pulpit about adoption care and foster care and Safe Families and just taking care of vulnerable children, however that looks for them. We have a pastor who is passionate about it, and when he preaches he's just bringing his life and being vulnerable and authentic as he's preaching about adoption. Having a pastor that does that really

serves as a place for everyone to be involved. So not only do we have a pastor who's preaching, but we have ministry leaders like children's ministry and youth ministries that are in the gaps. Because we have a large adoption and foster care community, children's ministry and youth ministry are seeing that. Every Sunday, thirty or forty percent of our kids are adopted or from foster care, so they have to adjust their children's ministry, the way they do youth, to make sure that we're all taking care of the children. It's crucial and it's important that pastors get on board to support that. I'm talking about the church at large. At our church, we don't have a problem with that, we are actually very blessed to have a pastor who's very passionate and very instrumental in making the movement of orphan care really known.

AT: Out of curiosity, what are some ways that children and youth ministry have to adjust to care for the kids that they have?

AG: With adoption and foster care, we are seeing children from trauma, children who have been abused, neglected, so on and so forth. We have to equip the volunteers and directors – we have to equip everyone to be able to understand why the children are acting out, why they are throwing a tantrum, why it's necessary for maybe the mom or the sister to come in the room with them for a little while until they get acclimated to the new system, and what is going on in children's ministry. We have a lot of people that are coming now because they have adopted and they have foster children, and so they come into the church and we don't know. They don't tell anybody. Then you see things that are happening, trauma, or tantrums that are being thrown, and we're asking questions. We find out the children are adopted, or fostered, which is okay because we know how to do

that. We know to serve that family, we know how to serve the children. We know that it's important for them to feel there's a safe place where their children can be.

I'll tell you a story. Orphan Sunday, not this past Sunday but the Sunday before, we had a lady who came to church. She brought her three children who were adopted from foster care, and my husband and I just happened to be in the lobby. We have a TV in the lobby for people that just want to stay there close to their children or maybe the church is already full, because that's happened many times, and they can't go into the sanctuary. She was standing there and she was just sobbing because our pastor [name] was talking about orphan care. It was Orphan Sunday, and we utilize that as a way to communicate what's going on with [organization], what's going on with children and orphans around the world and vulnerable children. She was standing there and she was just sobbing and sobbing and somebody saw me and they were like, "[name], come here and meet with this lady." So I'm talking to her and she's like, "This is just amazing. This is what I go through every day, and I go to churches, and I've gotten kicked out of churches because of my children's behavior. I've gotten kicked out of schools, and I come and sit here, and I'm listening to this amazing message of love and hope and redemption in adoption." And then she looks at me and says, "We'll see what happens. Because we've gotten kicked out and I don't know if we're going to get kicked out of here." And I looked at her and said, "You're not getting kicked out of here." She looked at me with so much doubt and she just said, "We'll see." So she's still doubting that the church is going to be able to help and serve her children. She's one of our most faithful persons – any event that we do for [organization] or for kids, she's there. She loves our church and it has made a difference. Her children are able to come into a children's ministry that is actually

beneficial to them, and they're hearing the Gospel and they're hearing the redemption, hearing, "I know this is my behavior and I come from trauma, but I'm loved. Jesus loves me," which is how it should be. And that's just one story.

AT: So people hear about your ministries and families are drawn to your church because they can find those resources and find that acceptance.

AG: The thing is that it's not that we have anything in particular. We are learning as we go. We are trying to look for the most resources out there – my husband and I, and our lead pastor, and our missions pastor. He's the one who leads this as well, he's a foster parent who is in the process of adopting his children. Anyways, we've gone to Christian Alliance for Orphans Conference. It's a national adoption conference that's been happening for the last fourteen years. My husband and I have been attending this for the last five years. So five years ago we attended our first one, my husband and I and the pastor and his wife. We went to Chicago for the conference and we said, "This is amazing." I'm trying to do a support group, my husband is trying to do the adoption grants, and we have this scholarship or after school care sponsorship in [city name], Ethiopia. From there, we've taken a lot of information and made it our own. Every year we're faithful to go to CAFO, and this year in May the conference was here and we had a big part of it. We are just trying to follow what Jesus is calling us to do – to serve, and to aid our children, and to do something for them. In reality, it's not that we're doing anything to rescue them. They really are rescuing us from ourselves.

AT: You've answered all these questions already, but you talked about pastors using their platform of leadership to educate people and motivate people to get involved with this as well. So if there's a pastor whose primary passion isn't orphan care, how you think that

would work? Should it be necessary to have someone on staff who is specifically passionate about that?

AG: Honestly, every pastor should be able to say, even if they're not in adoption or foster care...

AT: This is something they should be able to get behind and support.

AG: Exactly – supporting whoever, on staff or volunteer, to go ahead and do this. This is what we need to make sure that we are doing.

AT: Right. Equipping people and making sure resources of the church are devoted to that.

AG: We have an initiative going here, it's called the [geographic region] CAFO – [geographic region] Christian Alliance for Orphans. So it's under the umbrella of CAFO but is for this region. One of the initiatives is that we want to utilize this platform with the help of our pastor, motivating other pastors to start a movement specifically geared to our area in foster care. So in December, a few weeks ago, we had about fifteen pastors that came together. That's exactly what we want to do. We want to form a group, we want to make sure we're educating and equipping and connecting pastors so that they don't feel like they're on their own. We're going to come behind them and we're going to help them, equip them. We're going to equip the families and the people that need to be equipped to do the calling. That's our initiative, and we are hoping and praying that God will use the platform to make a difference in [geographic region] – our vision and our goal are large. We want to be able to have more foster families than our area needs. In other words, when there's a child in placement we have ten families that can take them, or two families, or three families. Right now there are not enough families to take care for our children. Social workers are going crazy, trying to find families and they're sending

these teenagers to group homes that may not be the best place for them. They just need a family. How can the church do that? [Church name] cannot do it alone. It has to be the church at large, to be able to come alongside the government. We don't want to take their job away, we want to come alongside them and say the church needs to be able to provide this. This initiative is hopefully something that will be successful, and we'll be able to equip other churches and other ministry leaders to do this job.

AT: I don't know how directly you work with social workers, but have you found any tension with the separation of church and state? Any attitude of, "We don't want you to be involved in this"? Or are they grateful in the sense that they are overfilled and need additional capacity, recognizing the church to be the solution to that?

AG: Yes, absolutely. I've seen both. We've worked with several social workers who are our friends, they come to our meetings every time. That's what we want. We want to let them know that we are here to help them, to support them, to come alongside them. We don't want to take their job, we just want to help them. Some of them get it! Some of them don't, and so there is a little bit of tension. With the government, here's the thing – we cannot say that we're going to be doing something and not do it, or give up a year from now. They have to see consistency in what we do. They have to see that we're going to be sticking for the long haul. We have this program that another lady started – she's an adoptive parent. She wanted to do babysitting for the Foster Parent Association, she's been doing it for the last four years. They have shown that the church has consistency. Mostly our church has been the one involved, but now we have other churches sending volunteers. And that's what we want. It used to be a [church name] thing. We want it to be a church at large thing, because we can't do it all on our own. For

many churches – and this is just personal opinion although there have been statistics about it – a lot of churches are very territorial. They want to do things with just their program and that's it, but this is something that we can't be territorial about. This is something that we need to make sure that we're working together about, just being the Gospel to the children and their families.

AT: How would you say that fostering and adopting relate to the Great Commission?

You touched on it earlier, but could you elaborate on your belief on that?

AG: It's a mandate from God, I think that God has called all of us to James 1:27. We're all called to aid – like I said before, everyone is called to do something. For me, it was international adoption. My husband and I adopted our daughter from China four and a half years ago. It was something that God called us to even before we got married. We've been married twenty-two years. It is a calling for all of us, it just doesn't look the same for all of us. We want to educate people to let them know that the calling for those that are high-level calling, if you will, will be adoptive parents, foster parents, Safe Families, or orphan care overseas. Some people God may not have called to be an adoptive parent, but maybe they can be a financial blessing to someone. Maybe they can provide a meal, maybe they can be a babysitter – there are so many things. Maybe they can be a handyman. For example, we have a family that is adopting a sibling group. This happened last week, and the kids are going to be with them on Saturday, so they have a week and a half to get their home ready. We have all these people – we call them missional communities, or life groups, whatever you want to call them – that are working together, educating people, talking from the pulpit, letting people know that this is a community that they need. If you go to a missional community, that will be a community

that wraps around the family. Another family just came back from Colombia, and we were painting their house, cleaning, making it pretty, providing meals for them. We have what we call her emergency soul group, it's only a couple of ladies. So whenever she feels like the weight is on her, she can text us so we can pray for her. There are so many things we can do, especially prayer. Can you commit to pray for a particular family, or for the foster care system, or for adoption in general? There are so many things, everyone can do something about it. The calling is there, we just have to make sure we're listening and obeying.

AT: That's all the specific questions that I have, but is there anything else?

AG: I wanted to share a little bit about our global partners. Our after-school program in [city name], Ethiopia is still part of what we do, and we also have two different partners in Guatemala, and a partner in Honduras. Those are all orphan care partnerships. Each of the programs is different, but we are involved in supporting them. When we say [church name] is going to be your partner, we mean we're going to send support to you as much as you need. For example, the partners in Honduras said last year that they would love to have an aquaponic system. They would love to have vegetables because they're hard to get there. So my husband and I got a group together – the guys built an aquaponic system, and the ladies helped around and took care of the kids, we did a lot of different projects that were needed. Our purpose is to partner with the global partners. The job in missions is not to redo something or create something that's not needed. Our goal is to partner with the missionary, who knows what needs to be done, and help them, aid them in their purpose, goal, and mission. We have two families from our church that have gone to Honduras. They're living there to partner. One of them is a girl, she's twenty-one years



old. She started an emergency shelter under the umbrella of our global partner. Another family is there as well. When we say we're going to partner with you, we will. We will go and do whatever we need to do. They have a planning meeting in January, so we're going to gather some ladies. It's very hard for them to gather as staff and volunteers, so they asked if we could send a small group of ladies to help and maintain all the things that need to be taken care of with the kids and the houses. We said yes, of course! We are building teams amidst the need, versus trying to make up a need and then trying to send our teams. That's very important to us, because global missions is something that we are really passionate about, too.

AT: So if that is all under the missions pastor, how is that structured? Is that all under the umbrella of [organization]?

AG: So [church name], as a church, has the organizational chart of the pastor, the other pastors, then all the other leaders of ministries. The missions pastor is very passionate about orphan care. Like I said, he's a foster parent and he would like to adopt the kids that he has now. He is the one that we've been working with. [organization] is under the missions umbrella.

AT: Okay. I was wondering if the global missions portion is technically separate.

AG: We have different partnerships. The global orphan care partnerships fall into [organization], and the others fall under missions. But [organization] falls under missions anyway.

AT: On a more personal note, if you don't mind – you said you and your husband both felt called to international missions before you were married. Were you called together? Or you each separately had that?

AG: I've always felt that, since I was like fourteen. I used to go to a church in California, that's where we're from. My dad is a pastor too, of a Spanish-speaking church. The senior pastor had three adopted children and I always thought that was so fascinating. At one point, one of the ladies came in with two little tiny babies, newborns. She came into our service, our gathering, and she said they were looking for families for these two babies. Back in those days things were a little bit different, you know. I was maybe fourteen or fifteen and I thought, "I want to do that someday, I want to adopt." God had just been working in my heart and I was thinking, yes I was called to this. But was it the right time, with finances and all these things? When I met my husband, I remember I was sitting in the car and I said, "Here's one thing that I want to do, if we ever do end up getting married. I want to adopt, are you okay with that?" He said, "Yes, I would love to!" It stayed there in the back of my mind throughout the years, and then about six years ago we said, "You know, I think this is where we need to be." It took faith, because my husband and I are pretty much breaking stereotypes. We are adopting international; we are Hispanic; we're not rich. International adoption has this stereotype of, you know, white rich people. Well we're not white, and we're not rich! This is where God is calling us. From there, God has just been speaking into my husband's heart about his calling and helping people financially. Finances should never be an obstacle for you to adopt, ever.

AT: Right. So if that's the only thing holding someone back you say, "We'll take care of it, go do what God's called you to do!" You're both volunteer staff, then?

AG: My husband works full time. So he helps, but I'm the one that is volunteer staff. I do a lot of the work, but he does a lot of it too. We work together. The cool thing is that he's gifted in some areas and I'm gifted in some other ones, so we complement each other.

## APPENDIX D

### Interview 2 Transcript

AT: First could you give me an overview of how you and [wife] got into all of this, or how [organization] came to be?

ST: Yes, it's a long story. Started with infertility, and for about seven years we tried to conceive. She had two surgeries, multiple treatments, and never had kids. That's what started us to think about adoption, just to have kids. We were youth pastors for five years, and then I was a children's pastor for twelve years. Being a kids' pastor without kids – we wanted kids and it was tough. So adoption is something we, like a lot of couples, always wanted to do at some point. “Someday I'll adopt,” you know, everybody says that. “We'll have a couple of our own and then we'll adopt.” That's how we were too, and now we were serious about it. [Wife] signed us up for foster care classes and I knew nothing about the foster care system – nothing at all. She just thought that would be a good way to do it, plus it's free. If you adopt through the foster care system, it's free, and foster care is free. She got us going on the thirty-hour course you have to take for that. Got our fingerprints, background checks, and home study done. Well, the home study was in the process. Then somebody at our church lets us know there was a little boy that was born and needs a family, that would be a private adoption. Private adoptions you have to pay for, so they can range. This was after church, one of the girls in our kids' church said, “My baby brother was just born” that they had adopted. But there was another baby available, and they didn't want to take two. He was born three days after *their* son. So they said, “Are you interested?” And we said, “Sure, put our name down.” But there was another couple ahead of us, so if they said no, they'd call us.

That Monday I went down to [city] to kids' camp, [wife] was here in [city]. She'd just started her first job. It was her second day working there as a guidance counselor. She got a phone call that the couple backed out and they asked, "Do you want this baby?" So she called me at camp and said, "You have to leave camp and come to [city], we've got to see if this baby's for us." Which was crazy. So I left, I got permission to leave, and she left [city], and we walked into the hospital and met the attorney. The attorney said, "Here's the baby. He's eight days old. He's three pounds eleven ounces, and he's full term." He wasn't considered a preemie. His lungs were fully developed, he was just little and nobody knew why. Birth mom gave birth, signed over her rights, and left. He was eight days old with no name, no family, and he's in this little NICU with all these little isolettes around him. All these families were there for these babies and then there's nobody for him. No balloons, no name, no pictures. So when we walk in, the attorney tells us the limited knowledge she has and she says, "There's the baby. You have fifteen minutes. I need a yes or no." That was the beginning for us. We picked him up, the nurse wouldn't even let us hold him, he was so tiny. We had to scrub all the way up and then go in there, and we got permission from the supervisor to hold him. We held him and he cried, and then Sandra put him on her shoulder and he stopped crying, instantly. She's looking at him like, "Are you supposed to be our son?" So we looked at each other and we said yes, and we've been saying yes ever since.

Once we said yes to him, we named him. We had his name. God gives us, prophetically, the names of our kids, usually before we get them, or when we get them. The Lord speaks to us about names, that's why they're all [letter] names. We got to name them all. Some of them came with different names, because they were in foster care. He didn't have a

name, so we named him [boy's name]. He's the twelve-year-old boy over here. Five days later we got to bring him home. Once he got to four pounds, he could be released. And then, a year later, we get a phone call that our paperwork and everything finally went through for foster care. It took a while for us to get our paperwork through, the system was backed up. We got licensed to be foster parents. They said, "Congratulations, you are now licensed for foster care, we're bringing over two boys." That was the day we got licensed, and it was those two – [boy's name] and [boy's name]. That's what they look like, right there, the two oldest. Then three months later, a lady in our church had some foster kids and the youngest was being separated from her siblings. They were being adopted and she wasn't, she was ten months old. The foster parent could not adopt her, but she was adoptable. I don't know if you know all the terms and acronyms, but TPR is the termination of parental rights. Her parents' rights had been terminated, or were about to be. So she needed a forever home, and that's [girl's name]. She's six months younger than [boy's name], and you can see how tall she is. She's the one playing the ukulele. It's another long story about her name, but [boy's name] and [girl's name] were the names we had for seven years. We were believing they were going to be boy-girl twins. We had people prophecy over us and tell us, "You're going to have twins, you're like Hannah, double portion." All this stuff, for years, and never conceived. We got [boy's name] and [girl's name] fifteen months apart, but they were around the same age. They were in the same room, had cribs together, they've been in the same grade. One day my mom called me, years ago, and said, "How are the twins?" And I went, "They're doing great!" And it hit me. Even though they're very different, growing up, it was like twins.

So we got the first four, and this need and desire to have a family was met. But in the process of getting our eyes opened to the foster care system, we realized how bad everything was and how many kids were waiting. We went to each other one day and we promised God that if we ever had an opportunity to adopt a child, if they had no family and needed a family, we would say yes. If it was his will, we'll never say no. We'll never say we're done. A lot of couples say that: "Two, we're done," "boy and girl, we're done," "three, we're done." We never say that. That's one of things people always ask us, "So are you done now?" They always want to know that. It seems like we're done, with ten, probably. But we'll never tell the Lord we're done. It went from trying to build our family, to a mission. From wanting kids in the home to, "Okay, now we've got to rescue as many as we can." So everything changed for us.

One day my wife – she may tell you this – pulled into the driveway of our home and the Lord said, "You're caring for orphans." I never said that word, I never knew about James 1:27. If you don't know that, it's a very popular Scripture about caring for orphans and widows. We never said orphan care, we never talked about the word "orphan," and the Lord said, "You're caring for orphans." *That* was the beginning of a heart for orphan care. We call the child in foster care the modern-day orphan. You've got 147 million orphans, globally, I think it is. But in America, it's 400 thousand or so foster kids. And those are the ones *in* the system, that have been removed because of neglect or abuse. We started really researching that world and we were learning a lot, and just got wrecked. During that time, we were fostering more kids. We fostered another ten or so kids that just came and then went back home or went back to family members, which was hard. One stayed with us for two years. We had another little boy with us for a year and a half,

and it was hard when he left. Some stayed for thirty days, some stayed for three months, six months. So we fostered a lot, and in 2008 [wife] really had a passion to do more. We started collecting clothes and giving them to foster families that we met because there was such a need. You get a phone call, and the kids can get dropped off in an hour and a half and you have nothing. When we got [boy's name], we had five days, thank God, to get everything you'd be working nine months for if you were pregnant. We didn't have a room ready, we didn't have a crib, we didn't have anything. She had just started a new job. We had nothing. We didn't have car seats, anything. So we had five days to scramble and get that stuff. People were great, they gave us a baby shower. Our garage became a place where we gathered resources. It became so much, because people started donating to us.

I became a children's pastor at the church down the street, and the old sanctuary was the kid's center, it's still that. And the old choir room – we decided to turn into an orphans' closet. We went to the pastor and his wife and said, "We'd like to start an orphan care ministry to help foster kids and their families." They blessed it. That's another funny story. [Wife] started praying for the pastor and his wife to really have a burden for foster kids. They had two girls and no boys, and she kept saying, "You need a boy! You need to adopt!" And they would say, "No, no, we can't adopt. We're not going to adopt. If the Lord tells us, we'll do it." [Wife] would go every Thursday to prayer with all the pastors and everybody, and she would lay out these little heart galleries – are you familiar with that yet? Heart gallery pictures of adoptable kids and little bios. She would lay them on the altar and pray for these kids to have homes. Pastor [name] and Pastor [name] would see these kids and little by little, it just started to wreck them. They ended up adopting a

five-year-old boy, he's now eleven. They adopted him out of foster care and really got a passion for it, because they did it.

So our orphan care ministry started at the church, and all we wanted to do was help families and connect with the local agencies. So that's the first thing we did. We called them up and said, "How can we help you, as a church?" "Well we need a building to do our training." "Use our building." We operated it kind of through the kids' ministry, and we started collecting clothes. We have these big closets of clothes and then we have the local agency to recruit families, and we also help to train people to do wraparound.

Wraparound is when you can't be a foster family, but you can help someone that is. It's a very important role. To me, it's just as important as the foster family – you've got to wrap around them in order to support them. So we ran that ministry as the children's pastors and a lot of great things happened for years.

And then, about three years ago, I started feeling real weird. We never thought we'd ever leave our church – great vision, loved doing kids' ministry, but I was just feeling like the Lord was telling me, "You've got to do more. There's more you can do." We had about 350 kids in our kids' ministry, we had about 100 or so volunteers. I had eight kids at the time, and the Lord kept saying, "You can do more." I went through this season like, "What are you talking about?" And I knew I was supposed to leave. I didn't even want to tell her, because she would've punched me in the face. No, we just love our church. We were so blessed there, and she doesn't like change, that's why. They had preschool, everything was taken care of. Financially, we had no cares, for the most part. Blessed. We were there twelve years. And I just felt, "We've got to go. We have to step down." And I didn't know why.



In prayer, the Lord revealed to me it was to do more for foster kids on a national level, or at least the state level, somehow. So I started really praying about that. At that same time, the children's home up in [location] had a new director come in and the new director's vision was a national vision – to see a national foster movement take place in the [denomination]. So I started calling him and talking to him and praying for him, all that he was doing, and just felt my heart connect to him. So we stayed in contact for a year or so, and he calls me one day – they have a maternity home. We put our profile in, in case any of the mothers wanted to give their child up for adoption. And one of the ladies picked us. At the time she picked us we had six kids, so most adoption agencies and birth moms are not going to pick a family with six kids already. This girl picked us. So we got even closer to that agency because of [girl's name]. We just stayed really connected and really close, and I just kept thinking, "I have to do something." So I asked him, "If I was to do this full time, what would that look like?" He couldn't pay me, with what he was doing. So he said, "Why don't you become a missionary?" So I started the process, or looked into the process, of becoming a U.S. missionary through the [denomination]. We felt like that was it, so we took the big step and I'll tell you, I'm going fast, it was a tough transition. We stepped down, but we told our pastor we wanted to stay and be a part. Not on staff, but be a part of the church, and still run the ministry. So we still do, I still have an office over there. We still run the orphan care ministry, we're under the outreach and children's department. We volunteer, we're not paid. When I stepped down, I had to raise support, which I was kind of fearful of. But the Lord really blessed us. We just started connecting with people, mainly in our state, to raise support and continually raising support. God just blessed us. We started homeschooling the kids, and I was really scared

to step down, because we were just really taken care of. But the Lord just blessed us immensely.

So we are called orphan care missionaries, and with our denomination, I don't even think there's a handful that call themselves U.S. orphan care missionaries. There's maybe three or four. There is a lot more than that, but in the [denomination] there weren't a lot. There really wasn't a culture. You know, there are kind of fad ministries, and I hate to say that, but some of the trendy ministries like trafficking and stuff – we were like, “Lord, let people get a passion for the fatherless and the orphans and the foster kids.” We're beginning to see a shift now with foster care being on the forefront, but a lot of pastors – I say “orphan care” and they don't even know what we're talking about, they're thinking “orphanage.” We don't have orphanages in America, we have foster care and we have some group homes. We just started going to churches and talking about it, and we are actually under the national movement called [organization]. [Organization] is really in the process of launching a national orphan care movement with resources and how to start orphan care in your church, and all this stuff. So we're representing [region], everything but the [region].

I did the first four kids, so I'll go through the last six kids, briefly. [Boy's name] and [boy's name] were in a foster home with someone in our church and there were some issues so they got removed. They wanted to find them another family in our church that could take these boys, so we took them. We really didn't want to because we wanted two more girls. We tried to find a family for them, and were doing our best, and the Lord spoke to us clearly to take them. We knew we wouldn't be able to foster anymore, because once you have five in [state] you get capped. You can't be a licensed foster home

with more than five, unless they give you an exception. Right now things are so bad, they're licensing people for eight and nine. I know a family with *ten*. That's four bios and six foster. Because especially in our areas, there's almost double the amount of kids. It's really intense. We're short homes, we don't have enough foster homes. Our job as missionaries is to go to the local church, share with them the need, recruit families and volunteers. Volunteers wrap around the family. We don't want to have waiting children anymore, we want to have families waiting for the children. If you ask the state, "Where do you get the best families?" "Church." They're the ones who do it the longest, they're the ones that have the best attitudes, they're the ones that have the healthiest environment – people of faith. Our county has 1800 churches. And they're fifty homes short. That doesn't make sense to me. So I'm trying to go to these churches and recruit families, and say, "As the body of Christ, we need to step up." So if a family steps up in your church, help them, wrap around them, support them – transportation, babysitting, meals. We had somebody mow our yard for five years for free. A lady brings us meals every week. We give her money and she buys the food and makes us meals, it's a huge blessing. Then we got [boy's name] and [boy's name], and then we got *her*. [Wife] gets a phone call from a mom of a girl who was in our children's church. I don't know how she found out about it, but she found out about this sibling group. So [wife] is trying to find adoptive homes for this sibling group of three. She found a family that would take the two older boys, but didn't have anyone who would take the little girl. We took her to help out the grandma, just to respite, and eventually felt like she was for us. The grandma wanted to be in their lives, so the kids got separated but she knew the families. So we got the two girls we wanted. She wanted a baby, and we got one a little bit older. And then everybody in the

family had a buddy except for [girl's name] and [boy's name], had somebody their age. [Boy's name] kept begging for a brother, and for his birthday he wanted a brother as a present. He said, "If you wrap him up, make sure you put holes in the box." I mean, he was serious! So we just started praying, and she started looking, and found a sibling group of a ten year old girl and a five year old boy. [Boy's name] is two days younger than [boy's name]. And [girl's name] is a little bit younger than [girl's name]. So that's, in a nutshell, how we got all ten of them.

Our job is to engage, equip, and empower the local church to reach *their* local population. Right down the street, there are foster kids. But you would never know who they are. So we as the body of Christ want to reach these kids. The average kid moves three to five times a year. They've seen abuse, neglect, trauma – major trauma. What do they need? They need Jesus. They need healing. They need healing from that trauma. So we want to reach the children, but we do that by reaching the church. The church is where we get the families, and then the families take in the children, and also train volunteers. Those are the basics. With this new movement coming, we'll be busy with this new launch. The general council they hold every two year will be launching it in August, that'll be exciting. Every week we typically try to schedule a church to speak at, and a bunch of events from adoption support groups to training churches to anything adoption and foster care related. We have foster care prayer vigil nights. Our whole life is just about helping – not only in our local area, but in our state – helping get homes for kids who need homes, wrapping around those families, training the church.

AT: In your own words, how would you define the Christian responsibility in the care of disadvantaged or orphaned children?

ST: Well, James 1:27 is the best verse in the New Testament. “Pure and undefiled religion is to care for the orphan and the widow in their time of need.” I really see it as a mandate. And then, if you read the Bible, you’ll see it over forty-five times in the Old Testament where he tells us to care for the orphan and the widow. What do the orphan and the widow have in common? They’re lonely and they need a family. The Bible talks a lot about family. The Bible says God puts the lonely in families. So we’re part of the family of God. They need a family, they need help, they need support, and that’s what he cares about – what we would call “the least of these.” In Matthew 25, the sheep went to heaven. The goats did not, they went to hell. They did six things that’s what got them to heaven, according to this passage. They gave somebody food, water, clothes, shelter, visited when they were sick and in prison. What does a foster kid need? Food, water, clothes, shelter. They are in the prison of the system, the prison of neglect and abuse. And they’re sick: physically, emotionally, spiritually. Kids came to us malnourished. One of our sons was five – he’d never seen a toothbrush before, never brushed his teeth for five years. He’d never seen a vegetable, never had a vegetable in their whole life, didn’t sleep on beds. So Matthew 25 is being fulfilled doing it unto the least of these when you care for them it’s up to the Bible. In fact, there’s a scripture in the Old Testament that says, “If you ever hurt an orphan, I will kill you.” For real! “And make your children orphans,” that’s what it says. So he’s serious about the least of these and the vulnerable. It is the churches mandate. There’s a funny article – have you ever seen fake news stuff like The Onion? There’s one called the Babylon Bee, have you heard of it? There’s one on adoption, you should look it up. There’s a survey they did that 95% of Christians who don’t adopt believe that the 5% who do should continue. It’s a joke because what they’re

saying is, "You do it." Only 5% of Christians adopt, and so the joke is everybody else is glad we do. Because they don't want to do it. So I really want to see the body of Christ becomes awakened. In fact, our prayer nights are called Awaken, because we want to awaken the church. It is a biblical mandate. Does that mean everybody adopts?

Everybody fosters? No. But everybody can do something. So this is what we tell people – not everybody does the same thing. You're not going to adopt 10 kids, probably. I can't tell people, "you need to adopt a ton of kids if you want to go to heaven." But everybody can do something. If you are helping, like the lady who does meals for us, she's doing her part. The guy who mowed our lawn, my dad often mows our yard. They are not taking in foster kids, but they're helping us. They are wrapping around us. People donate money to help adoptions, to help fund adoptions. They're doing their part. Everybody can do it.

You can babysit, you can hold the baby, you can help a family and give him a break for an hour. Everybody can do something. So I believe it is the Christian's duty to help the orphan and the widow, according to the Scriptures. I think it's very very important, and it's pretty clear that we should. And if we have the love of Christ in us, we should shift that love to people who need it. Foster children and their families are right in our communities, everybody has them so everybody can help in some way.

AT: Along those lines, how do you think that fostering and adopting relate to the Great Commission?

ST: The Bible says to go into all the world and preach the gospel, there's a scripture that says in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth is what a lot of people think of as missions the ends of the earth going overseas for missions, and that's important and it's very good and I believe in it. But there's also your Jerusalem and your

Judea. The great commission is "going to all the world" – United States is often not considered as part of the mission field even though it's a great mission field. Especially today. I have found occasions where US missionaries really didn't get the favor and overseas missionary would get, it's just not the same. In fact, I had one particular church tell me, "Well, we really like to give to foreign missions" what they call world missions. "That wouldn't really resonate with us, having foster kids." And it really broke my heart. Not everyone is like that of course, but we have a mission field right outside of our doors. Anywhere – go to the grocery store, you're on your mission field. You can minister to people. The great commission is ministering to people, reaching people for Christ. We think it's a great evangelistic field, because instead of having to go overseas and raise money to be a missionary for four years, which many people do and I love that, you can open up your door and let your house be a mission field. Let the mission field come and live with you. I hope the family does. If 400,000 kids in foster care were in Christian homes, if they got saved, healed, completely delivered from the trauma, and they broke the cycle of abuse, neglect, and addiction, then they would raise their children to love the Lord. You break the cycle of abuse, because orphans often produce orphans, it's a cycle. Drug addicts produce drug addicts, and alcoholics produce alcoholics. It perpetuates and continues, it's terrible. We've seen it happen over and over. And I truly believe if you heal the orphan, you can help the community, because what causes orphans to go to care? Drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol abuse, violence – all those things. You break all that stuff, you literally shift a generational line, because my children's parents were addicts, alcoholics, had domestic violence, or incarcerated, homeless, on and on I could go. My kids aren't going to be that way. They've been saved, healed, delivered, set free, and

they're in the process of being healed from stuff. They are going to raise their children to love the Lord. So it's an incredible mission field, because when you bring them into your home and give them Jesus, you literally can be a part of healing and breaking the cycle. When you go out and do street ministry, trying to witness to someone you don't have a relationship with, it's hard to tell them about Christ. I've seen and done that as well, and I think it's wonderful. But there's something really powerful about bringing this child in, and giving them love and what they need, and giving them Jesus. If we took these kids in, the 400,000 kids, as Christians in the body of Christ and we gave them Christ – what's happening is that they don't have enough families, so the homosexual community is stepping up big time. We just went to a local adoption here, four or five families adopting at once, and there was a gay couple there. It broke my heart. This little boy being adopted by these two men, these two dads. The gay community is stepping up and adopting these kids, because they're not able to have kids so they're doing it. It's the church's job, and it was never the state's job to do it. It fulfills the great commission because you're rescuing, you're tangibly meeting needs, but you're also giving Jesus to these kids who would have never heard about Jesus otherwise. And making disciples.

AT: So those lines of being involved with adoption and agencies, have you ever experienced or witnessed the tension between church and state? Do agencies ever say, "This is our area"?

ST: Usually it's the other way around. The state has trouble getting into the church. But usually both of them don't know how to talk to each other, and don't know how to get through that wall. They're both kind of afraid of talking to each other. That's our job, our job is a bridge. The state has its own language, the church has its own language. You



don't say "orphan" when you go to a state meeting, or meeting with local foster families. Our foster agency doesn't say "orphan." In fact, we've had people get mad at us when we said that at the beginning. "They're *foster* children." But in the Bible, we use the word orphan, so that's what we use. So yes, there's some tension, but that's what we're trying to break. A lot of churches think they're not supposed to work with the state at all. But the child welfare movement in America was because the church stepped back. That's our job. We were supposed to be doing that. The state is not supposed to be their parents. We as the body of Christ should have been doing that. And somewhere along the way the church backed up, and let them do it. But it's getting better. And the state will tell you, most agencies that I've worked with want churches, faith-based, especially in [region]. They really do. They're so desperate, and they know that they're really good families. And some of them will have faith-based liaisons or recruiters that go to churches, and that's all they do. I've met several of those. It's getting better, much better I would say.

## APPENDIX E

### Interview 3 Transcript

AT: In your own words, how would you define Christian responsibility in the care of disadvantaged or orphan children?

SA: Well there are two scriptures that mandate believers to care for kids that are orphaned, and this would be Matthew 25, caring for the least of these. Providing food, water, clothing, shelter, and visiting. And the other would be James 1:27, caring for the orphan and the widow in their distress or need, depending on what version you read. There are all kinds of scriptures throughout - I don't know them off the top of my head. There is one in Deuteronomy about leaving behind when you go harvest your field, leaving behind and not pick up every scrap because it's for the alien, foreigner, the person coming by that needs food. There are some scriptures in Psalms – God places the lonely in families. And there are several other scriptures. I believe it's a culmination of God's heart for these kids. They have nothing to give, and they own nothing for the most part. They are, I believe, in that group of “the least of these,” and we're to take care of them.

AT: So along those lines, would you say that foster care and adoption are options through which we can show God's love and carry out his will, or are they specific responsibilities of the Christian community?

SA: I definitely believe it's the Christian community's responsibility, because the government is dropping the ball in so many ways. The government wasn't meant to do this kind of social welfare. It's something the body of Christ should have been doing from the beginning, and we had been doing it in the very beginning – families taking care of each other. I guess at some point it was something the government felt like they had to

step in and do. I believe that if the church was equipped, I believe that if the body of Christ gave what they were supposed to give as far as tithe and offering – that's a huge issue right now. Somebody quoted yesterday at a church service that less than 40% of Christians actually give a tithe. I just thought about the immense things, the greatest things that the church could be doing if they had the finances to do it. It just boils down to people not doing their part in that area. There are other ways the church can be the church, and care for the kids in foster care, without money or with little money. There are those that are called to take in the children and to care for them in their home, and be family to them. And then there are others that I believe are called to step up and wrap around those families, and provide support services. That could be from babysitting respite care to transportation help to tutoring, lawn care, to light housework. There are so many ways that the body of Christ can surround the families that really feel like this is what God called them to do specifically. But I believe that as the body, we are all called to do something to help the crisis in America.

AT: Would you say the people who are called to do this in their own homes, to take in children, are mostly people that have a desire for it? Or how do you distinguish, personally?

SA: Well, the process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent is very stringent. It is very wearing, you would have to know you're called to do it. Because as soon as you start, you'll know if you are called to do it or not. There's a lot of paperwork, there are a lot of people coming in and out of your home, there are home studies, there are interviews, there are references you have to get. in private adoption you're talking 20 to \$30-\$40,000 of raising money, unless you just have that. I would think you'd have to be pretty called

to do something of that magnitude. Foster care doesn't cost anything as far as finances, it just costs a lot of time. And it costs a lot of your emotions. It can be very wearing on a marriage. But like I said, if you're called to do it, you just know. It's like if you're called to be a missionary in a foreign country, or if you're called to be a youth pastor, or if you're called to be a teacher, anything in the marketplace. You just know, it's that desire, you're going to work hard to do whatever it takes to get there. And I believe the same way for foster care and adoption. For me personally, I didn't know that I was going to have trouble having children, because infertility is not an issue in my family. So it took me by surprise. Apparently I was born with some things that wouldn't allow me to get pregnant. Nothing major, nothing that causes pain or is a big deal medically. But as far as being able to conceive a child, I'm not even able to. It's not like I can't carry a child, I can't even conceive a child. For me personally, that really strong desire to be a mom is what compelled me to do whatever it took to be a mom. For us it was, "Alright, what are some of the avenues? We can adopt privately, and this is what it's going to cost. We can foster children and not only fulfill the need and desire to take care of children, but help a child on the way." I think at first, for me, I don't know about my husband, it was a selfish thing. It was like, "I want to have children, I want to be a mom, I'll take care of anyone's children." But then once I got into it, I realized that these aren't just your typical children. These are children that have been scarred, scarred emotionally, they've been traumatized. You start to hear their stories, and then the whole reality of foster care starts to unfold. You realize, "This isn't really about me at all." Although it was fulfilling that desire, there is more depth. There is something greater. There is this whole mission field that was untouched, that was unheard of to me. And quite honestly, we went to a very large church

and nobody was fostering in our church. We had over a thousand people, and we had nobody. So I never knew of anyone doing it, it wasn't like I had seen it and thought "oh I can do that." We kind of walked through the process blindly, like I said, for myself. And once I get into it I realized, "Oh my goodness. This is an untouched mission field, and I can really use [husband] and I in this. And I want to be used of God in this area."

Because I love kids, and I didn't want them just for me. I wanted to make sure that whatever the Lord placed in our care, that I would be Jesus to them the best I could. That I would be the hands and feet of Jesus, and that I would love them like Jesus so that however old they were and however long they stayed, and wherever they went after here, they would always know that there's somebody who loves them so deeply, and it's God the Father. He sent his son Jesus to die for them. They often were babies, so they wouldn't know how to articulate that, but I believe that God allowed us to plant seeds in their little lives, and that the seeds will grow God and will protect them from being harmed again. What's really neat is that we did have 10 children that went back to be with family, and out of the 10 children, nine of them did not return to mom and dad, who were the initial perpetrators and victimized them. So out of 10, nine went to be with grandparents, aunts and uncles, or other relatives. So I have the reassurance of knowing that they went to a better place, and a loving home that was willing to take them in. I really believe that's because of prayer. God had his hand of protection on them because of people praying. Had they not been in a Christian home and environment, where people prayed and believed in prayer, and that prayer can change their destiny, then they could be somewhere different, somewhere else, or back to the same situation they came from.

AT: So you mentioned before how the government isn't really equipped to care for these children. Can you give me a summary of that?

SA: First, generally, the government is just that – the government. So they just put Band-Aids on everything. A kid comes into care, they've been burned by cigarettes. They go to the hospital and they get treated, or a child has been emotionally abused and told over and over again that they're horrible and that they're not worth living, and they're going to amount to nothing, so they might possibly be admitted into counseling. Which I have nothing against, and I believe in the medical field, obviously. And I believe in counseling, because we've had kids in counseling and it's done good. But there's something that's deep, and only Jesus can go down deep enough into that to heal it. And only Jesus can actually make life-long change in our lives, and in the kid's lives. So we can put Band-Aids on things and cover things up, and get through these seasons, but ultimately that true healing doesn't come except from Jesus, except from the Holy Spirit. That's one thing, generally. And just practically speaking, the government has half a million children in the US. How in the world can they honestly place children in good homes, knowing that they'll be well taken care of, when all they're requiring is for families to follow A, B, C. And it could be a single man, it could be a single woman, they can be any age, there are no age requirements. They could be in their 60s or 70s. They could be wheelchair-bound, doesn't matter. They could be a gay or lesbian couple. Basically they're desperate to put kids in homes. And I just believe that if the church was involved, we could be more strategic. If we were the ones placing children, then we would place them in Christian homes. We obviously wouldn't be putting them in same gender families, because we know that's not what's best for kids. We wouldn't be

desperate to put them anywhere, just to put them in a place. Just so they could mark off a box. Government spends a lot of money on child welfare. It's like billions of dollars, and a lot of money nationwide. I think the church can do it cheaper and better, because I believe the volunteer base in the churches would be the ones doing the work. It wouldn't be so much case management and outside agencies doing the work, but the body of Christ working together to raise these children. It's a whole mentality shift, though. It's a whole culture shift. It probably sounds crazy to you, but this is something we've been praying about for a long time, and really believing that one day the church will be more hands-on, and take more ownership of that area. It's huge area, I mean half a million kids is a lot. But there's a lot of churches. There are a lot Bible believing churches, and if we jumped in we can really do that. We could eradicate this system of spending a whole lot of money doing very little, putting Band-Aids on things, and really get down to the nitty-gritty. Get kids in Christian homes, and really see them walking wholeness and healing from whatever their past was. And see them fulfill God's plan and purpose for their lives. Because otherwise, when we just do the Band-Aid thing and put kids in non-Christian homes, then we perpetuate cycles of abuse and neglect just by the mere fact that they're not getting everything they need, that Christ can give them. You've got homelessness, you got incarceration, got girls getting pregnant, huge number. By the age of 21, huge amount of the girls will be pregnant that grow up in foster care, or a job. Drug and alcohol addiction, a lot of these things just continue and then the cycle continues. I believe the cycle can be broken in the power of the Holy Spirit. For me, the difference between the government and the church is really spiritual, mostly. But also the way they spend the money caring for the kids. It's really a waste, in my opinion.

AT: So you think, practically, it's very possible that sometime in the future the church could replace the system?

SA: I really do. I don't think it's going to happen soon, I don't see it in the next five years. But I do see a paradigm shift in the next 10 years. A huge paradigm shift, where we will see more and more of that happening. Maybe by state, maybe it won't be all at one time, maybe certain areas in certain states. Some states are really proactive in this area, with another state. For example, Colorado started something years ago called Project 127, based on James 1:27. The pastor there got all the pastors together in his state and started a whole revolution of the church taking these kids, there should be no waiting child. And they are seeing that in their state. They're the only state that I know of that did something like that. I know other states are trying, but like I said I think it's going to take a lot of time.

AT: In what ways has the church that you've been a part of done adoption and foster ministry? How does that fit into the structure of the church? Where have you seen it done well?

SA: The church where we started the orphan care ministry in 2008 is all volunteer-based. We started it when we were full-time staff there as children's pastors, but we started as volunteers. When we stepped down, we continued to volunteer, making sure it continued and that we were raising people up to take it over. It started out as a closet. It has grown into an entire room that has several areas where clothes are stored that are donated. We have clothes, shoes, once a year we collect diapers and wipes. We collect luggage once a year, so kids don't have to use trash bags, and toys. So foster families can call and schedule an appointment, or every Tuesday from nine to noon they can stop by and get



whatever they want, as much as they want, for their children. They can get it for their foster children, or any child in their home. That's been a really awesome blessing for families. We have a Facebook page, so sometimes if someone is in need of something they will ask me. Or if they want to donate something, they will ask me when they can drop it by. We also give out cribs and baby items like highchairs, and toddler beds, and things like that. It also turned into having the classes that the state requires you to take to be a foster parent. So the agency will come use our facilities, and we don't charge them. They do that six times a year. They do an orientation class, that's just the beginning of the 30 hours. It's basically the first two hours of your 30 hours, to see if this is still really what you want to do. So those take place at the church, every other month. We've hosted their adoption matching events before, where children who are available for adoption and families who already have their papers ready and their licenses to be adoptive parents will come, have a fun day, interact with the kids, and hope that there are matches made by the end of the day. We've done that three times. We partner with the agency in our area as much as possible, it's a government agency. We partner with them in any way that we can to help them do what they're doing, and give them space or provide things for them that they won't have to pay for. We try to just build that bridge between the church and the state when it comes to child welfare.

AT: With your relationships with the agency, or in other places, have you seen or experienced any tension between agencies and churches? What do those relationships typically look like?

SA: Not at all. They're very thankful, because we're not saying, "Hey guys, you're doing the job that we're supposed to be doing." We're not saying that. But we just go alongside

them, and say, "What do you need? What is it that you guys need us to start collecting? Oh, you need hygiene products? Okay, we will do a big push for hygiene products. Or you need us to speak at an event for you? Sure." We don't charge, ever. We just make ourselves available.

AT: Showing yourselves to be a resource.

SA: Yeah, exactly.

AT: Ideally, what do you think it would look like if every pastor had a heart for orphan care? How do you think adoption and foster ministry fit within the structure and culture of the typical church?

SA: When we first started, we felt like it should be under children's ministry. Then at our church, it turned into a ministry of the outreach department. I think either way is fine. But because it deals with kids and teenagers, it's really just student ministry. It's really an extension of what's already going on, because I can pretty much guarantee at any church that's at least 100 people or more, there is going to be somebody who has experienced foster care and adoption in some way. Whether they were in foster care or have been adopted, or they have a child in their home that has, or they know someone very close to them that has. I feel like there'd be at least someone, one family that's been touched in some way by foster care and adoption. I don't know that it fits in any particular box. But ideally, if it was perfect and I got to pick, it would be awesome for somebody to lead that and it actually be a paid position. And to lead that ministry - maybe working alongside the children or youth pastor, maybe in smaller churches that have the youth/children's person, it can go with that. It could even be an extension of an outreach ministry, for churches that do outreach ministry. I don't know that fits best in any one way, just that

somebody has the heart for it. Not just the compassion for it, but the action behind it. It's one thing to have compassion for something, it's another thing to act upon that compassion. It's one thing to see a homeless person on the road and say, "oh he's homeless. Let's pray for that guy, he has no home." It's a whole other thing to stop and pick him up some food, stop and give him a jacket if it's cold, and pray with him. That's action. I feel like so many of us as Christians have compassion, but sometimes we lack the action. Because we don't know what to do sometimes, we don't know how to do it. And I think if the body of Christ and pastors knew the need, I really feel like they would have more than just compassion. They would add action to it, and they would want to do something. I think one of the biggest things I see is when we're speaking at churches, pastors think, "we already have so many ministries, we can't take on another one." But I see it as an extension of other ministries already happening. Because if you're a youth or children's pastor, you're probably exposed to that and you don't even realize it. Or maybe you do and you don't know what to do about it. You have a foster kid in your kids church and they're acting out, and you're like, "I don't know what to do with this kid." Because you don't have any idea about their trauma, you don't have any idea of what trauma does to the brain and how that can act out behaviorally, and how to deal with it. You don't know how to connect with the parents, because maybe you don't understand. Anyway, I think that once a pastor can see that it's not necessarily adding a whole staff to your church to take care of this, it can work. It can be a beautiful part of the ministry at your church. I believe that when you take on this type of ministry, your church will be blessed because you are caring for the least of these. Kids who can't give anything back, just like

taking care of homeless who can't give anything back to your church, but you invest in them. Because that's what kingdom is.

AT: How do you think fostering and adopting relate to the Great Commission?

SA: There are half a million foster children, it's an untapped mission field. Maybe unevangelized, because we don't know where they're going. The Great Commission is, "go into all the world and preach the good news." Well, the world is right here in our own backyards. We don't have to go anywhere. You don't have to leave your home.

Evangelism can take place by taking children into your home. If the half a million children were taken care of by the church, and the church was evangelizing these children, that's the Great Commission. They would know Christ, and they would not just know Christ but experience the fullness and wholeness that he provides because of what he's done on the cross for them. If they're not told that, they're just going to live life repeating a lot of the things that have happened to them, unfortunately. Not everyone of them, but unless there's true healing and true restoration, they will they will end up in their brokenness. Growing up as a broken adult, in a broken relationship, raising children while they themselves are broken. It's just that repetitive cycle. It is the Great Commission, we as the body of Christ need to evangelize these kids. And what better way than to invite them into our home? Whether it's for a day, six months, or year, or whether it's forever. Whatever God calls us to for that particular child.

AT: Those are all the specific questions that I have. Is there anything else you feel is important that we didn't talk about?

SA: One of the biggest comments we get, a lot - like, a lot a lot - is, "I could never do that. I could never do what you do. God bless you. You're such a saint. I could never do

that. My heart would just break, I would just get too attached." So, I don't say anything. But really, what I want to say is, "You think your heart will get hurt, you think your heart is going to break, and you're going to get attached, and you can't say goodbye, but this child has been taken out of their home. They've been in a home where that's all they've known, whether there was abuse or neglect that they experienced, it's all they've known. And they get ripped out of that situation, and they don't get to take their clothes and their dolls and their teddy bear. They have to leave their family, including grandparents and extended family. They have to leave their school, if they're in school. And they have to leave their neighborhood, and get in some police car, and come to your house, and get dropped off at your door. You're total strangers to them. And you can't give all your insecurities up about how you can't handle that, to give a child a chance? To experience some restoration and some healing in your home?" I want to say that so bad. But I don't want people to be offended. It's not to lift myself up, because I can do this, but it hurts me too. That's what I want to say. Do you think I don't feel anything when I have to say goodbye to all these kids? That I don't hurt when they come into my home and I fall in love with them and they go back to their family and I wish they were mine? It hurts. But the hurt is so much more bearable, knowing that the time spent was worth it because of the redemption that's taking place. For 8 out of my 10 children, because they were from foster care and they were adopted, they are getting to walk out redemption and restoration and a new life. That could be the opportunity that the person who said they couldn't say goodbye has, but they're not even willing to take that risk. I just wanted to throw that in there, because I get that all the time. "You're such a blessing to those children, you're a saint. I could never do that." Well, you can. Because it takes the person who can't say

goodbye, who falls in love with the kids. That's exactly the kind of parent we need to do this work. You want to be able to love these children, attach to them, and love them like they're yours. Because if you can't say goodbye, that means you really did give your all. If it's easy for you, then you're probably not really called to do it. You're probably doing it for whatever other reason. Because you do give your all. It's a laid down life. It's a life of surrender. I think that as Christians, we get caught up in the American mentality of the nice house, the cute car, the cute name-brand clothing and purse. You know what? I had to give all that up to give a child a chance at living the life of Christ, and knowing who Christ is, and knowing how much he loves them, and the redemption that they get by knowing him. It's worth it. It's worth it. I never imagined driving a 12-passenger van, and I'm looking for a 15-passenger one now. If you would've asked me that 10 years ago, I would have said you were crazy. I am not driving a van like that. That is not me. But you lay things down. It's like what a missionary does overseas. They sell everything, they give everything up to go serve a people that God called them to. God called us to these people, these children. It's worth it. It's worth walking through all the ugliness of their past, to see them healed and to see them meet Jesus for themselves and know Jesus, encounter Jesus, know that they have a plan and a purpose, and their past does not define them. They don't have to be like their drug addict dad, and their prostitute mom. Or repeat the acts of violence that they saw their parents enact in front of them. They don't have to repeat that. They get a new life, a new start. How awesome is that? Just like we got that when we came to Christ. We may not have been abused or neglected, but we got a new start when we gave our lives to Christ. And they get that in a Christian home. That's why we need Christian homes. Otherwise, I feel like kids will just wander through

life and not really know who they are, what their purpose is, what God made them to be. They are destined for much. That would be my last thing I want to say. I know that sounds harsh in some ways, but I mean it in love. If someone's thinking about it and they feel like they can't, or it's too hard, God will equip them. God will strengthen them. He's going walk them through it. it's not like he's just going to say, "yeah, take care of my orphans," and then just walk away. It's a mandate.

AT: I saw a story shared on Facebook about people in church you say, "I could never do it, it would hurt too much." What the lady wrote that stuck with me the most is, "I would rather my heart carry that hurt, to save their little hearts more hurt than that." People just don't think about it that way, because maybe we only see the cycle of repeated loss.

That's what people think about when they think about foster care. It's so much more about the opportunity, like you said.

SA: Exactly. When you think about it, it's kind of selfish. To say, "I don't want to get hurt." Well we are adults, and we should be at a place where we can handle that a little better than the four-year-old who just got ripped away from his mom and dad. Who's scared, and having nightmares, and all those things. Or a teenager who has suffered abuse their whole life and just got found, they just got noticed. Some school counselor noticed they had a black eye, and they're finally getting "rescued." Some people don't like that word either, I've found. And they have a chance at a new life. But we are afraid, we don't want to get our hearts broken. But it's true. And some foster moms are a lot more bold about saying stuff like that, I try to be real careful. I don't want to come across condemning or judgmental, but I try to post things on our page to let people know that

they can do this too. We are not saints. Come spend the day with us and see how “saintly” we are. That's what I want to say.



## APPENDIX F

### Interview 4 Transcript

AT: Working in the system, why do you think many individuals choose international adoption over domestic adoption?

AH: Every birth parent who's ever placed their child up for adoption can put their information on the registry. So I could have been adopted at three, and I could submit my information. "Seeking parent with a child born on such-and-such a date in such-and-such a town at such-and-such a hospital." If I know the name, I put the name in. And if that parent happens to have information on the adoption registry as well, the adoption registry can link both parties. It's easier, through the state system of adoption, to locate birth parents than it would be adopting through another country. Unless your adoptive parents are very open with you about your adoption, your adoption history, your birth parent – along those lines. Just having done this work for a long time, I think that sometimes that's the motivator – not having to see that person in the grocery store, or family members.

AT: In a lot of cases, in international adoption, they wouldn't even know.

AH: They might not even know, because the child's in an orphanage. It really depends on the country, the type of adoption. Are you meeting the birth mother? Some missionaries, through the services they provide locally either with medical or through a school, they know the parents and then they help them. The parent says, "My little child would have a better life in American, or would be better adopted," so there's some likelihood of meeting the parent. But you're correct – with international, you're adopting typically from an orphanage or from the government. Whereas in the United States, with an open adoption, you have the opportunity in working with the birth parent where, let's say an

infant adoption, the birth parent would actually be shown family profiles and choose the family to be actively involved in that matching process. There would be opportunities for both those families to meet each other – the adoptive family and the birth family.

Whereas with an international adoption, it's really very... clinical? Sterile, so to speak. It's a lot less human interaction involved between the adoptive and biological families. And again, some folks prefer that, because of that fear of: "Will they come and find us? Will they take the child back?" A lot of times, when I used to do adoptions work, the question would be, "Well how long before it's legal and they can't take them?" Or, "Once this adoption is finalized, can they come back and take the child from me?" A lot of that fear-based, and lack of adequate information as to the systems of adoption. And then some of those TV movies of the week, and some real-life situations over the last couple of decades, where a biological parent *was* able to come back and get their infant. But you know, the background of those stories – oftentimes it's because a step was missed early on in the adoption process. Either there was duress on the part of the biological parent – they were coerced or forced into it, they weren't fully informed. Or possibly there was a father that was a known birth father to the mother, but it wasn't known to *him* that she was carrying his child. And then she made an adoption plan, and misrepresented to an adoption agency that there was no *known* birth father, or that he was out of the picture. And in that case, the birth father would have some legal right to try, if he can prove that it wasn't that he was an absent father and not providing for the birth mother, it's that she hid it from him or lied to him, or that sort of thing. So there's all those different legal ramifications but I think that some of the biggest fear that I've seen, in working with different folks for adoption, is the whole "running into the family" and

or, the birth mother wanting to try and find the child. When often, it's the adopted child that's wanting to know their history, more for just understanding who they are and where they came from, understanding that process. I'm all for open communication with adopted children on their adoption story, and helping to formulate that story for them so they can grow up feeling healthy and whole about who they are and where they came from. And that their birth parent – in the case where it's that matching or maybe foster care – *chose* to surrender their rights. So that comes from a whole place. It's not that your parent rejected you. They chose for you what they believed to be the best life possible.

AT: Could you give me a basic description of your position here and how long you've been working here? And maybe how that's changed? Basically, what you do and how you chose it.

AH: Here at [organization], I'm the Prevention Resource Specialist. That doesn't tell you a whole lot, but when you think about prevention you think, "Help before harm." So that's our goal through our prevention services. We're able to provide help to families, to strengthen them, to provide safety and stability to the parents and the children that are in their home and in their care, *before* there's any type of crises, or harm, or problem. So in the prevention unit, all of the activities that we do are to prevent any child abuse or neglect from every occurring. Our goal, through our mission and vision at [organization], is that there's permanency and stability for all children across our tri-county area, and that all children are able to grow up safe and happy and healthy in their homes, and that families are strong and able to raise their children in a safe environment. My role in doing that – I work with our business-based initiative, I work with our faith-based initiative, I work with our local task force, which is an initiative through [state capital], through our

governor's office, to help prevent child abuse and neglect and also to create permanency for children waiting for adoption. And then there's a lot of other little things along the way that I do that are involved with that in our unit and what we do, working with community resources, working with Title One and going in and training the parents on abuse and neglect. The [campaign name], a [campaign name] initiative and building protective factors, and helping the community know and learn what those protective factors are. When I initially started, I've been with [organization] for seven years, prior to that I was 21 years with [denomination] children's home. My initial career started in a faith-based environment, and working in that system of care from emergency shelter work, with children coming into foster care due to abuse and neglect. And then working the social work perspective for adoptions, maternity care, and foster care. And then directing programs over a twenty-county area for foster care adoptions and maternity care. And one of the reasons I chose to come to [organization], which is a non-faith-based agency, really, honestly – thought it would be more missions oriented, orphan care oriented, not internationally. But the opportunity presented itself here to do prevention work where we're able to build strong families, whether those be single-parent families, whether those be teen parents, whether those be a new couple or a parent that's moved to our community. Not involved with abuse or neglect at all, but maybe having some challenges. Maybe the challenge is that, "I've moved to [county] and I'm not familiar with schools or doctors, or how to get connected to this or that." Or maybe that, "I have had a divorce or am homeless, or my child is in need of support." Or supporting our kids that are in foster care for the holidays, and providing that holiday gift for the children in care. All the way through to child abuse prevention, which is our goal, preventing the child

abuse and neglect. Not just in the month of April, when it is an awareness campaign, 12 months out of the year. Ensuring that that message is communicated 365 days a year, annually, that's our goal – to be able to prevent child abuse and neglect. It's been a unique opportunity for me, to have done 21 years faith-based work in child welfare and then to transition for last seven years into a non-faith-based environment, but still within the child welfare system.

AT: So what are the strategies or actual initiatives, what are the differences between the faith-based initiative in the business initiative?

AH: For faith-based initiatives, it seeking to engage our partners of faith. A lot of times folks just initially think churches, but it doesn't necessarily need to be at church. It can be a church, it can be a synagogue, it can be a faith-based school, or some type of faith-based organization that in some way, shape, or form wants to align themselves and partner themselves with our child abuse prevention programming, our foster care recruitment – an initiative for recruiting quality foster parents, and our need and goal for recruiting adoptive parents for children that are in the foster care system, legally available for adoption and awaiting that forever home. So on any level, being involved in that. More so, probably the recruitment for the foster parents and adoptive parents than would be on the business end. On the business end, it's really engaging our businesses on our drives with building protective factors, providing supports for children who are in foster care already, whether that's events or activities, whether that supporting our pinwheels for prevention campaign, whether that's creating awareness or recognizing businesses that have family strengthening activities already integrated into their business, or a business that maybe wants to contribute to our foster parents and recognizing and supporting our

foster parents in some way. So really, engaging the businesses and how they see themselves interfaith community and fitting into the puzzle with [organization]. I think the greater challenge is the faith community, simply because we're not [organization] for children of the church of [county]. Because it's not a faith-based agency, and it's a private nonprofit and we happen to contract with the state to provide the services, there's sometimes a hesitation using the word partnership, because they want to be very careful with their mission and vision as a faith community who they're partnering or aligning themselves with. As we do too, we want to have a reputable partner. But for us it's not a matter of whether you're of a Christian faith or a Jewish faith, or a business that has no faith affiliation at all. It's about "do you align with the mission and vision statement for creating permanency and safety and stability for children and families?" And to eliminate child abuse and neglect throughout our tri-county area. We look towards those, rather than more of a religious affiliation. But obviously for our faith-based communities, that's very important to them. And we honor and respect that. We want them to be able to feel like they can do their vision and mission as a church, they can accomplish what they see as their vision and mission. So we look for where we intersect. What pieces of the puzzle fit into their vision and mission, and understanding that all of them may not. But what pieces do? Where do we agree, as opposed to where do we disagree.

AT: Interesting. So you see hesitancy in faith-based communities or organizations in partnering with a non-faith-based organization? Because they worry about the parts we don't overlap.

AH: Definitely. I think the parts where we don't intersect, some of it is government, just government involvement and not knowing what that's going to look like. Government

oversight, over what they consider to be their vision and mission, related to the church and how the church disciples, and imparts and equips themselves – that's a challenge, I think, definitely for the church. And for [organization], we get referred to as DCF or the state. We're not DCF or the state, we're a nonprofit that is a local business, that is providing the services, contracted with the state. And we see the importance of the faith community in accomplishing the goal of eliminating child abuse and neglect. Just like we see the importance of the school communities, and our school boards, and our businesses, and everyone playing their part to create a stronger community. one of the phrases and beliefs of our agency, one of the phrases that are CEO stated when I first started here that really resonated with me is, "The keys lie within our community." And there's no one key to eliminating child abuse and neglect. But if we bring all the keys, all of our puzzle pieces together, we can actually accomplish our goal. We are stronger together than we are divided. But it's about looking for were able to connect. I think that's the greatest challenge we have. Even when I was in the faith-based realm the challenge it's was then, "Well you work for a [denomination] agency and we are of a different denomination." Or, "You work for a Christian agency and the Christian agency principles and practices maybe aren't supportive of another faith's principles that would support alcohol or tobacco, so we can't partner with the agency." Or if I'm a Protestant-based agency, I don't align with a Catholic-based agency." When in reality, we had more similar than we had different. So again, if you look for those similarities and simply "love God love people" mindset, we'd be able to accomplish so much more if we got beyond the doctrinal differences. And find out what we agree on more.

AT: I know being on the prevention side you're not quite as much in the emergency placement realm, but would you agree or disagree with the statement that the foster care system is overburdened or in a kind of crisis? I know it depends, area to area. But in your experience, is there pressure in volume and capacity? Research says that the foster care system is in crisis because there are children waiting and not enough homes to put them in. Would you agree or disagree?

AH: I would agree with that at this current time, within this year particularly, this last fiscal year. The state runs on fiscal years of July 1 to June. So if you look in that 15-16 fiscal year, and then going into the 16-17 fiscal year that we're six months into at this time - do we have a higher rate of children coming into care due to abuse and neglect, which creates a higher number of children in the foster care system as a whole?

Absolutely. Which this creates a greater need for foster parents, a greater need for contracted providers that are providing those other services that those children are going to need, from case management to start with, to working with the parents and counseling supports, daycare needs, all of those things trickle down. We are probably, here locally, at a high. A 10-year high, probably, then where we've been in the past. We've had a lot of stable and solid impact in the foster care system and revising the whole foster care system. But here lately in the last year and a half, with a couple of different things – we've had a new methodology implemented within the state, and so we have the safety methodology, which is looking at the whole picture of the total child, total family, and the risk and safe versus unsafe in the home. It appears there's been a higher turnover of productive investigators. And of course anytime, even within case management itself, whenever you have that turnover rate you lose years, really, of knowledge. when you're



constantly having newer staff, decision-making can sometimes, and I'm not saying that's only reason, but decision-making can sometimes be more fear-based or "what if"-based, as to concretely based on "is there true abuse or neglect occurring?" Or "is there potential for abuse and neglect?" Versus "could supports be brought into the home to support the child, so the child can safely remain in the home?" The caveat on that is that the parent has to be willing to agree to those services, and to work with the services. From an outside perspective looking in, I see the safety methodology has some really great vantage points to it. But it would appear the safety methodology was based on the parents being willing to accept assistance, and I don't know if we're there yet. Then that creates an influx of children needing to be removed because the parents - whether because of their trauma or past negative experience, whether it's just because of where they are currently, or flat-out refusal – are not accepting those supports and services. because we would much rather, as a system, whether that's through the DCF protective investigator system or the community-based care system, we would much rather see children remaining in the home with their parents, because that's a strong relationship, and be able to support those relationships so they can be healthy, than to take children into care. And with the volume of calls that come into the state, I think it would be safe to say that more children remain with their parents than are removed, we just happen to have a high-volume right now.

AT: That makes sense. what are [organization] and other organizations looking for, in terms of recruiting foster parents? What are some adjectives that describe an ideal situation or, or people that make you go: "Yes. They would make incredible foster parents."

AH: From [organization]'s perspective, we really look for individuals, couples, that are willing to see the child's trauma. Instead of asking, "why are they behaving this way?" Asking, "what happened to them, that's caused this in their life?" Because it's really easy to say, "why why why" or point fingers of blame. But to say, "Wow. What's happened?" really comes from a place of empathy. As opposed to sympathy, where I can feel sorry for you but that's only going to last for so long. If I come from an empathetic and trauma-informed lens, I know this child or this teen has experienced ABC throughout their lifetime and has lacked care, stability, food, clothing, shelter - some of the basic premises of what helps develop a child develop in their brain, and emotional and social connections, and their educational connections. Understanding that they have a role to play in bringing healing to that child. Foster parents and adoptive parents that want to be healing agents, that want to come alongside and understand the child's trauma, have a level of empathy. They understand that it's not going to be easy. This is probably one of the most difficult choices and commitments that they're going to make, but they can be committed. They can be a healing agent for the child, and possibly even to the child's family. In one of our faith-based initiatives, the [project name], which is matching one church to one family for one purpose – one of the phrases that we use is that "foster care is a ministry of reconciliation." That's perfect for the church. It's reconciling the child to a safe, stable home through the foster parent relationship, it's reconciliation through a successful unification of the child to the parent. And then foster parents who can come alongside the biological parent, and be willing to co-parent with them. There may be things in your background, if you are the biological parent, that have left you broken, and have left you traumatized. Because of that trauma and that brokenness, the cycle is

continuing. But through the case manager's assistance, through the partnership with a foster parent who's co-parenting the child with you, you can learn positive healthy habits because I am modeling them for you. So a foster parent that's willing to be a model for the biological parent, that's willing to co-parent, that's willing to be an advocate for the child in education settings. Not necessarily know everything, but they're willing to partner and communicate with the other parties that are involved with the child's case, and understanding that they're not alone. And I think for an adoptive parent, understanding that this child does come with trauma, whether they're an infant or a teenager. They come with a history. That history doesn't need to be erased or wiped away, but it needs to be supported and nurtured to come to a place of wholeness, so that child can grow and be healthy and move on. Adoptive families need to be trauma informed. They need to be empathetic, they need to be loving, and caring and supportive – all those things we think of a parent, but that sometimes is more challenging as the foster or adoptive parent. Because it's about loving the child and caring for them right where they're at, and helping them come on the journey, sharing the journey with them.

AT: I understand that largely the goal for children who are coming into care is reunification. At what point does it transition from asking an individual or couple to care for this child for a short period of time to needing someone to take care of this child permanently? And wanting to them to be adoptive parents?

AH: For one thing, [organization] and many agencies in [state name] have two separate tracks for families. So when we're recruiting, we're recruiting families to be foster families and then we have other families that are going to adoptive families. Those families that are going to be adoptive families, they know that they know: they want to be

parents. But they want to be parents full-time, for the long-term. Foster parenting is just simply not for them, and it's not that they don't support the idea, but they know they themselves are not in that place. Their capacity is to love forever, not to love for short-term and then give you back. Because their goal is to be that forever parent. With our foster parents, we recruit specifically individuals, families, that are able to care for a child with the knowledge that the intent is to be short-term – whether the child is in their home a day, a couple weeks, months, or sometimes a year or two before that child is able to reunify with a parent, ideally in twelve months or less. But sometimes it goes longer than that. The intent is that this child is going to return home, and the majority of children *do* return home. The majority of children that are adopted are adopted by relatives or non-relatives – family members or non-family members who have been involved in the child's life and have a significant bond with them. When a relative or non-relative is not available for adoption, then we're looking at our adoptive families who have been waiting for adoption. And we'll also consider the foster family if they want to be considered for an adoption placement, but it doesn't necessarily guarantee that they'll be chosen. We need to look at what's in the best interest of the child. Not just, "Well, since you've been living with this family, we're just going to let them adopt you." As opposed to, "Do you have the strengths to continue to raise this child until they are eighteen and then beyond? Do you have a significant bond to the child? Does the child have a significant bond to you? Are you just adopting because you feel like that's what you're supposed to do, because this poor kid doesn't have anybody else? Or do you have a desire to adopt?" Many of our foster families that do adopt the children in their home see that child as their own. They've been raising them and taking on that responsibility as

their own. But I've worked with, over the years, many families that say, "No, we're a foster family. We're meant for that time between family and adoption." Or, "We're meant for that time of disruption and then going back, reunification, being reunified." And they know that they know that no matter what, they're here to simply be a foster home. So they know that revolving door is going to be there. But it doesn't mean that there's not going to become a time when a foster family doesn't say, "Well, Johnny's available for adoption now. We'd like to be considered." So their home study, their information goes into the same matching study in our match-adoption process, to determine – are they truly the best interest for the child? Oftentimes they are. But it's not one hundred percent guaranteed. So we try to be very upfront with that. And that process, getting back to the original question, that process begins when the court has determined, through their various court proceedings and hearings that go on, per statute, that the parent is unsuccessful in completing their case plan and that there needs to be a new plan. And so then a termination would occur. So there would be parental termination, which is a legal course of action through the courts. Then there's a due process even there, where parent can test that termination and once that has been contested and that process has occurred, and that due process has been given, and once the termination of parental rights are finalized, *then* that child in foster care is free and available for adoption. But not before then. So there should be no discussions early on other than reunification and a reunification goal for the child. Unless for some reason, there's an expedited TPR or something along those lines. But the child can't be up for adoption or on an adoption website until the TPR has occurred.

AT: Do you believe that religion and spirituality make a difference in a foster or adoptive home? Is that something that factors into your recruitment of foster parents? If they're not recruited from a faith-based organization, is that a factor that is looked at or noted when they are applying to be foster parents? Do you think that makes a difference in the home?

AH: It's not a requirement for a family to become a foster or adoptive family with [organization]. Now when I was with [FBO] children's home, it was a requirement. You had to be a family of faith, with a faith testimony, with a pastor's reference, you're attending church, and you have certain ecumenical beliefs and practices in your daily life. But again, that was a faith-based agency, so all of the guiding principles and policies were based on that. Here at [organization name], you don't have to have a particular faith existent or stated. However, when a couple years ago we looked and did an assessment of our foster homes, we said we wanted to look and see who are our strongest foster homes. And when we say strong, we say resilient. Who are our most resilient? Who are able to manage children that have some of the more difficult behavior problems or challenges, but are willing to co-parent with families, that are willing to and do rise above the rest? Not that we didn't have great foster homes – we have great foster homes. But what percentage? What was the difference in those foster homes that were able to really parent those children with more traumatic exposure? And what we found was that higher percentage were the foster homes that had a connection to community of faith. They weren't all the same community of faith, but where they had a faith connection. So what we found was that our most resilient foster homes had a connection to a faith community. That began driving some more of our work within the faith community to say, "We see this in our data. We see that some of our strongest homes, our most resilient homes when

it comes to trauma-informed care, being healing agents, are those that are a part of our faith community. So we really need to be reaching out to our faith community." Part of that, I believe, is that those individuals saw it more as a calling to be doing what they were doing, and were more missional about what they were doing. Or were part of a faith community that also saw that missional purpose, and they were supportive, they wrapped around the family. Or their additional family members who had faith were wrapping around them in that faith. That is what led us to partner with [project name], coming from a faith perspective, having a faith agency that we're partnering with in recruitment and in engaging the faith community. But we also have our individual relationships. We have over 100 churches that we are connected to throughout [county], [county], and [county], on some level. Some of them are willing to do our child abuse prevention initiatives, some of them are willing to share information, others are willing to put out brochures on foster care or adoption. Or others are willing to host events that specifically are recruiting families for foster care and adoption. They hold events for foster families, and have foster family support groups meeting at their church. They are just very engaged. It doesn't mean that the church on the lower risk end isn't any less engaged on what's comfortable for them as a faith community right now.

AT: You've basically already answered this, but just to put it in specific words – because the data shows that the most resilient foster parents are connected to a faith community, you said that was a motivating factor in seeking out parents that have faith connections. Is it the perspective of recruiting individuals from the church? I know you said you have connections with that community or organization. Or is it from a non-faith-based

organization standpoint, is the church viewed as a resource and a relief to the foster care crisis?

AH: I think from our perspective here, the faith-based community is definitely seen as a partner, and as a support system within our many partners in the community. But absolutely, a support system. And we'd love to increase that. We'd love to grow and develop that partnership with any of our faith communities that are willing and able. We have varying degrees. For instance, we have our partnership with a church here in Lake Wales. They hosted our academic success awards banquet, doing academic success awards for children in foster care. So the end of the year last year, we had a big celebration and the church was willing to be a host site. But they also provided some of the food and drink for that, they were willing to invest in it. That's more of a prevention type thing, supporting our foster care children. They've also supported a 1-1-1 project event, which is a huge recruitment event, inviting all of their church members and then local community persons that might have an interest to come to their church and hear about how to become a foster or adoptive parent to the 1-1-1 project. They've invited us to speak after their church service on Sunday, in small settings and small training courses where folks can come through and learn about prevention, learn about foster care, learn about adoption. And then they can sign up for the area that they would like to be involved in. The church also was a host site for our task force for human trafficking, because we know human trafficking victims, some of them, come out of the foster care system or are runaways or from broken homes. So we know that also involves our youth. There's a family strengthening piece there, and then also prevention for our foster care youth, seeking love and support out of somewhere that's going to victimize them. And then, in



addition to that, the executive pastor and her husband adopted a teenager out of our foster care system. Ultimately, the pastor and his wife became nonrelative caregivers to an infant. They have several families in the church that are foster parents. They also are a host site for two different groups: relatives and nonrelative support group that meets every other month, and the foster care parent association that meets every other month. They are a huge church partner for us in the [county] area. To get to that point, it was probably a year and 1/2 or two years of building relationship and starting on that low impact, low risk and of prevention and then building that up with dialogs and conversations. Really, I think the onus was put on us to show the church, the faith community, the pastor and his staff, that we could deliver with what we promised and that we could work together on what we agreed on. And where we differed, we weren't going to ask the church to be involved in something that went against their vision or mission. Obviously, to become a licensed foster home you have to agree as a foster parent to adhere to statutory requirements. So if a child in your home doesn't want to attend church, or wants to attend church of different faith, or go to synagogue as opposed to church – as a foster parent you have to be able to support those things. That's all a part of the home study process that goes on with individuals. But as a church partner as a whole, as a faith partner as a whole, they were committed to family strengthening and child abuse and neglect prevention. So they came along with us in that partnership. We have another church that partners with the similarly, and then we have quite a few churches that partner with our foster care Rudolph Roundup program, which supports holiday gifts for children in foster care. So we have multiple churches that will provide foster care children guess for the holidays. That's another support. They're not necessarily

willing to open up their pulpits to us coming in and recruiting foster families and saying, "If your family in this church... " almost like doing an altar call for foster families. "If your family in this church and you feel called to fostering or adopting, step forward!"

They may not be there yet, but they're still willing to partner. They're still willing to see us as someone that they can accomplish their mission with. And I think that's the key with our faith-based initiative. Looking for areas where we intersect as opposed to areas where we differ. We're going to differ, simply because we are not a faith-based organization. but can we agree on the fact that all families should be, and need to be healthy and whole. Can we all agree that it's important to create safe places for children and families? Absolutely. We talk about protective factors. In particular, the church is already doing a protective factors piece I would talk about. Whether that's parental resiliency – parental resiliency means that if they get knocked down they can stand back up, so to speak. Well, how did they do that? Churches offer parenting groups, they offer life groups, they offer Sunday school classes, concrete supports in time of need. So what do churches offer in concrete supports? They offer pastoral counseling, children's ministry services, sometimes churches pay electric bills or have a food pantry, maybe they do meals on Wednesday nights. So churches are already doing this. There is a lot that we both do, we just use different language to describe it. Social connections, what do churches provide? Social connections for like-minded people to come together – life groups, Sunday morning services, Wednesday night services, special events and activities. Churches celebrate together, churches grieve together. So families that don't have that connection in the community and need that can find that in the faith community. We know that if our families are part of a faith community as foster families,

they're going to be more supported and they're going to be more strengthened. But we also know that if families in general in the community are lacking that support – maybe they don't have family around, particularly in Florida. Central Florida tends to be nomadic type, not everyone has lived here for decades and decades. I'm from Philadelphia, I've lived here 27 years now. But I came from Philly, all my relatives are somewhere else. Personally, my church family is that family of support that I'm connected to day by day. I appreciate that I'm in a job that allows me to engage the faith community. Because personally, I see that as a support. But I love that professionally, the agency that I work for sees the faith community as a support as well.

AT: I know you covered it before, but just some specific examples – what are pieces of the way [organization] does things, or the mission of [organization] that are obstacles to some churches?

AH: I think one of the things is an obstacle for churches is the fact that simply, we are not a church. We are not a faith organization. So there is hesitancy to partner in that aspect. I tend to then tell churches, "But you're incorporated. So you're partnered with the State already, because you have that tax-free status. You're working with the State in partnership. It's a little different, but there is that tax-free piece. So try to step back from that fear. And just because we are contracted with the State doesn't give you any reason to believe that we're going to come in and change what you do as a church." I think, the understanding of who does what and when. With foster parenting and foster homes, the children can be of a different faith. When I worked with [FBO] in emergency shelter, a teenage girl was placed there and she was Jewish. She was actively involved in a synagogue, and we were a Christian agency and attended a church. But we made a way

for her to be able to still attend her synagogue, because that was something that she was actively involved then we were going to prevent her from doing that. Even though we were a faith community that had a different belief system, we couldn't prevent her from having her belief system. With that, some churches would be concerned that their families might be engaged in that capacity. The exposure to trauma, the messiness of foster care, the work we do is messy. I like to challenge our faith community that the work they do is messy too. We just maybe have different terms for it, cover it in a different way. And when I say cover it, I don't mean cover up, but the services we provide for it look different. And then, I think too, the big thing is simply same-sex marriages. Families that are same-sex that want to be foster parents or adoptive parents would not be welcome in the ecumenical faith community to come there for foster parent classes or adoptive parent classes, or even support groups. This applies when church are providing the foster parent association meeting, or the relative nonrelative meeting, or providing the foster care class. Some of our faith communities over the years – not just here at [organization], but in my 27 years – have said, "We can only have like-minded families coming to classes here and receiving services from here." As opposed to seeing it as a missional opportunity to make an impact on the family. Even if they're not necessarily going to change their views or opinions, you're able to impact them. Because again, that's their choice and they have to do what is right for their church and their mission. Or the fact that a family can be same-sex and adopt or foster through [organization]. That's Florida State law. That's the law across United States at this point. It's more on principle. I would have folks that would work with me at [FBO] simply because I'm a faith-based agency, that wouldn't work with [organization] just because

[organization] is not faith-based. No other reason. Or, let me take this to more present day, would work with the liaison relationship of the [project name]. [Project name] cannot license them, only [organization] for children can do that. But the [project name] can connect them to [organization]. And if they need any faith support, they could reach out to the [project name] for that faith support. And it's interesting, from a personal perspective - maybe also from a professional perspective, but I will say from a personal perspective - when I step back and take a 30,000 foot view of what we're doing in a few community and social justice, and if you want to call it a child welfare perspective, when I step back and look at that faith community seem to look at it from a fear perspective. As opposed to going out to the highways and byways. We know that James tells us and Psalms tells us to care for the widows in the orphans, or that he places lonely and families. And yet, if our avenue to care for the widows and orphans, particularly the orphan care, and to have those that have been hurt and are lonely in families is the foster care system or the adoptive system, we should be looking for a way to make that happen more as opposed to less. Or where we only would partner with agencies of faith, but maybe don't have that connection to get us to the next level. To do so responsibly, but be able to do so. And be looking for opportunities where we can say yes. I'm all about looking for where we can say yes more, from a faith perspective as well as a nonprofit, that community-based care perspective. Where can we say yes to a faith agency? And on the flipside, I think that private nonprofit agencies are hesitant to work with the church. Because we've seen where, and that's not necessarily one of your questions, but we've seen where the faith community through judgment or legalism – if the faith community can't love the children right where they're at, who can? And so, when our broken children

who have trauma and challenges can't be loved or excepted or nurtured or at least supported in some way by the faith community, where else is there hope, from a faith perspective? With that rigidity or legalism, the first disobedience of the child – and I don't mean extreme behaviors, but the first disobedience that is not the norm or not reflecting the church – that child needs to be removed. And that child needs to be removed again. Or that child can't come back to church. And many, many moons ago we had a child that could not come back to church because of their behavior at nine years old. At nine years old, if you're already told you can't come back to church, what else is there for you? And you are living in a residential faith community. That's burdensome to me. from, I guess, a personal and professional perspective, how can we say yes? How can we reflect the church better in the child welfare system, so that we don't over promise and under deliver? And how can the community-based care agencies respect the lines of the faith community, to see where we can say yes more? What can we say yes to you? I'm very fortunate to work at a community-based care lead agency that sees the yeses, that sees that the answers are in the community, and that includes the faith community. So our leadership believes that, we have experienced that, we have wonderful faith partners. But we need more. Our [project name] folks did a study, and they said, "Okay, we found that there are at least 700 or 600 churches. Legitimate churches, someone that answers a phone, there's an actual building and people in it. 600 Legitimate churches in [county], [county], and [county]. And we need 250 foster families, so that we have choice. So that all of our kids that are actually in a foster home – if we needed to, we could look at 2 to 3 options before placing them. And we try to do that now, we try to match on the family strengths and the child needs. Obviously when you have an overburdened system, you're

not able to do that as well. But 250 homes would give us choice. Because when we say there are 2000 plus children in the foster care system, the majority of those – some are still at home with their parents and are under judicial oversight, majority of those are with relatives and non-relatives, and then you have a couple hundred that are in the foster care system. I don't know the exact number. but when folks hear 2100, those aren't all in foster homes. Because we use the in-home, safe home model. I am specifically speaking about our three-county area. Looking at today, roughly 2100 children. That number fluctuates day to day. But the number of foster homes that [organization] would say we would like to have today is 250. We are at 178. there are 600 churches, 250 homes is not a problem, right? We still don't have them. If each church could identify one family – 600 families. The need would be met three times over. Families would be fighting over who gets the next child. So let's just say, not all 600 churches are bought into it. 50% of them would mean 300 families. That's 300 children. And we're not there yet. So personally and professionally, I question how or what do we need to be doing to communicate the message to the churches? That we are here, and we need them. We need them to step up. We need them to do their mission, and to truly care for the widows and orphans. To truly be that place that God can set the lonely and the brokenhearted into families, so that they can feel cared for. What do we need to do differently? So my challenge in coordinating our faith-based initiative is, how do I communicate that message and in what way? How can we as an agency communicate that message? What I found is that sometimes it just takes time. And what some of our kids don't have is time. Because they are being abused and neglected today. So to have that relationship built over a year or two, or three years before a church is willing to take that next step – I would just challenge pastors to put the

message out there. Do the altar call of foster care, so to speak. Because you may have families in your church, or a family in your church, that has a heart's desire and realizes that God has been speaking to their heart for years. But they've not had anywhere or anyone to reconcile that with. But when their pastor puts it out there for them, or they hear it through their church, they realize, "That's me. That's been in my heart. I didn't know where to go, who can I go to?" "Well, you know what? From what we know of, we trust [organization]. We suggest you partner with them." And if not us, any other agency. But [organization] has the oversight with community-based care for foster care and adoption in [county], [county], and [county]. And I mentioned [FBO] because they are contracted under us. So for a church that would prefer working with a Baptist organization, [FBO] still brings everything through [organization], the children still go through the State. The children that are placed there are through the Department of Children and Families, but it's that liaison perspective, that bubble perspective so to speak, that cushion that sometimes helps them feel a little more comfortable with that. And I get that. The goal at the end of the day is to have our kids safe. Let's have our families strong. And how can we do that together?

AT: This is more on a personal note, but since you've worked in this for a good number of years, have you or your family had any specific and personal interaction? Have you fostered or considered adopting?

AH: I have been a nonrelative placement. So I'll say foster son or foster daughter. But mine was legal guardianship in one case, and I was a licensed foster home in another. Both for youth that were in the system of care, but were known to me through my work. And then within my own immediate family, my first cousin is adopted through the



Philadelphia court system many moons ago. And then we have relative adoption where, through a second marriage, a child is adopted. So in that capacity, not necessarily through the child welfare system. I have friends that, through my relationship with them and my relationship with the child welfare work that I do, have adopted their children, through either [FBO] or the child welfare system, or have fostered. And that's great. And then, to this day, there are children in the foster care system – I say children, they are now adults – that I've worked with and it is as if they are my own. As adults, though some of them have moved on and had children and started their own family, you are family. You're connected to them for a lifetime, so to speak. Facebook makes that really really easy, and social media makes that really easy to reconnect with kids that I worked with for four or five or six or eight years in a residential care setting, in a residential group home setting. Those kids were raised by house parents and house parents moved on, so where's their connection to home and rootedness to family? Some of them were able to reconnect with their birth families and others were not. Others were just on their own in this world. So still being connected to those kids – I have one young man who is not young anymore, he's 30, and he is the son I never had. While he had connection to his birth family, adoption was never an option for him. But he is very much a son to me. And his kids, he's a remarkable father today, a remarkable person. He overcame many adversities. But he will tell you, as much as he pushed back from it, it was being in a faith community accepting Christ into his life that make that change for him, even if he's not always walked the walk as the church would say. He's had challenges and he's had difficulties, but that's always been the core that he's come back to and that he's raising his kids in – in the church.

## APPENDIX G

### Interview 5 Transcript

AT: In your own words, how would you define Christian responsibility in the care of disadvantaged or orphaned children?

BG: I think it is primarily, not exclusively but primarily, the responsibility of Christians or those who name the name of Christ. Then organizationally, I think the church has a responsibility. I think it's individuals who name the name of Christ. At some level, I feel like all of us at a period of time should even consider personally, actually have the thought, the conversation, the prayer of, "Should this be something that I am involved in at some point in my life?" I don't by any means think that God calls everybody to do that, I think it is a calling for a number of reasons. But I think it is our responsibility, so much so that I think every follower of Christ should pray that prayer or have that conversation at some point, asking how God would have them be involved in it. The whole gospel is a gospel for the disadvantaged, the underprivileged. It's in every aspect of what we believe, so I think absolutely – whether his foster care or a number of other areas, it's at the epicenter of what we believe, if we really believe it. I think we have a huge responsibility. There are a lot of out-workings of what that looks like, but just as far as that question – I think first and foremost, if just followers of Jesus took this seriously around the world, you probably have statistics, that foster care and adoption needle would change instantly.

AT: When you said that every Christian should, at some point, consider personally or asked those questions personally, do you mean adoption specifically? Or just being involved in this kind of ministry?

BG: This is a little bit extreme. Some may know right away that God is just not calling me to this, but I almost feel like in regard to adoption or foster care or things related to that, where you actually participate – to consider that. Would God have you to do that? Maybe that's a little bit extreme, but again, a lot of people God is not going to call. But I think it's about having the openness and willingness. I don't think it's this side thing, where only special people foster and adopt. With [wife] and I, we've come to see that even more clearly with a bunch of friends that we have that foster or have adopted. We already know the implications of the Gospel on that. But even more so, that motivates us to determine how God would want us to be involved. I personally think every Christian should have the responsibility to ask the Lord at some point, "Is this something that you would ever have me to be involved in?" as far as actually fostering or adopting. Now, I think being involved in a general level – I know God places different ministries upon different people's hearts, but I think at some level, every Jesus-follower. Maybe more so, what I would say, is every church – and we're just starting to move in that direction – at some level, should have some kind of involvement in foster care and adoption. Kind of speaking at the individual and corporate level. I think those may look a little bit different. But I think every Christian should pray that, and every church should be involved in some way, because I think it's that paramount to what we believe.

AT: Specific to your congregation, and what ways have you seen that carried out?

BG: On both levels, on a corporate level with our church, one of the things has been LifeCare. We have a number of people in our church who have or who do volunteer there on a regular basis, like every week. At certain times it's been a significant number. People are involved more sporadically, on a volunteer basis. That's been a big thing, the other

thing is that we've become increasingly involved with [organization], which is adoption. We have given money there, I believe, and we have more and more that are going to volunteer there and do different things for them. We've had different community groups who would go. And there have been several others. Those would probably be the two main ones, up to this point. And what we want to do, that we've just started, is adopting several organizations at Christmas and then over the long haul, we want to give money. We want to motivate volunteer resources there, and definitely foster care is one of them. The closest one to us is [organization], so we really want to do a lot for them because they are right down the road. Then on the individual level, there are a number of families within her church and her congregation that foster, have had multiple foster kids. I don't know how many families, but I would say right now there are at least 10 to 15 they're involved in foster care, or have recently adopted, those types of things. Maybe more, those are just personal stories that I know about. We have not gotten to the place, honestly, where we have done a lot in terms of promotion of foster care. It's kind of blown me away the number of people who are already connected and have already done things in the area foster care. Including our staff. Our executive pastor had a foster daughter who stayed with them for about two years.

AT: That's something I've noticed too, since I started researching this and starting conversations with people. I never knew how many people were connected to foster care, it's like people were coming out of the woodwork.

BG: I've found that a lot, even the last couple years. After hearing someone's story you say, "I had no idea."

AT: Corporately and organizationally, have you seen stand-alone ministries or ministries under the umbrella of the church – have you seen other ministries carry this out within the body?

BG: Within the church, and this is probably just my naivety, I don't know of a lot that are led by the local church, at least in my context. They've been more outside organizations and ministries. I probably won't be able to think of the names of them, but there have been several that I've known about that have done both adoption and fostering. Some of it is local, and then I don't know the global context. I have a friend that just came back from Africa, one of the things they did there was start an orphanage. Then of course, [name] and her parents, we partner with them to give money to the orphanage they started in Africa with the [project name]. But locally, I've mainly seen it as stand-alone organizations. The couple that I've been involved with or have known the directors of those ministries, it's been mainly around the foster situation, and funneling kids in foster care and that looks different, sometimes it's been general and sometimes it's been for troubled kids or underprivileged kids, and focusing on that aspect of it. There's been a couple of those, but they've all been parachurch organizations.

AT: If there was someone who wanted to volunteer and head up this kind of ministry within your church, would you encourage and support the formation of that kind of group?

BG: Yeah, I would be open to that. We would be absolutely open to that. What I would say, first and foremost, not only is this a hypothetical, I think it's an inevitable. It's one of the things that we want to be linked with, and part of our compassion or care network of ministries. The way it would look exactly, I don't know. But I think definitely we would.

I think there are two options: we start something, if we see if it's beneficial, within our church. The other thing we've always done is that if there are great organizations around us that are like-minded in terms of mission, and for us a biblical worldview would be what we want to partner with, then we would throw a lot of our resources into that. I know some friends at churches where that is kind of what they do. There are great fostering organizations in the community, so they focus on giving a lot of money to them. Doing a similar thing, because you're promoting all the time. But rather than it being housed under the umbrella of the church, you're sending your volunteers to be involved there, sending money there, participating and having leader buy-in. I think it would be one of those two things. I think it is inevitable that our goal is to partner in some way, whether it is something sustained in the church and just figuring out how that works, or something where we significantly partner. To the point where even for [wife] and I, we don't feel like we can do it right now with where our kids are at, or at least it wouldn't be wise for us in this season. But we've even thought about when they get older, being involved in foster care. It's not something I talk about really, now that I'm thinking about it, sitting down talking with you. But [wife] and I talk about it, we have this huge heart for it. We've had crazy ideas that we'd love to start an orphanage. I have no idea how, but as we've had kids and dealt in local church ministry, seeing all of the chaos and the dysfunction, all the kids that are displaced – it grabs your heart. All that to say, we would definitely want to partner.

AT: Would you be willing to use the platform of your leadership to teach on the importance of fostering and adoption, of the churches responsibility and orphan care?

BG: Absolutely. We have a little bit, indirectly at times. But it hasn't been fully geared around just orphans or adoptions. But yes, absolutely. It hasn't happened for one reason or another yet. And I can see, probably as I get more involved, that it will just be natural. As that begins to happen more, and you feel more of the angst, to want to communicate it. I think probably a lot of churches and church leaders would say, "Yes that's a great thing. Yes we need to do that." I think the practical understanding of how, or the issue of talking about something but also needing the knowledge to go with it. You're always preaching for a response, as people are responding, how do you direct them? How do you lead them? You almost feel like you have to have a structure or something in place before you really begin to talk about it. I think, honestly, that's how I feel about it. I think that's probably how a lot of local church pastors feel. You either have to have that ministry within the church set up or have an established partnership to send people to. Yes, and you know it well, and it's like an easy handoff: "If God is moving your heart, here's that next step to get involved." But a lot of times, unless you've done it, you're naïve. So it takes some time to figure that out, and forge those partnerships that you trust.

AT: How do you think that fostering and adopting relate to the Great Commission?

BG: Part of the Great Commission is moving out and leading people to become followers of Jesus, baptizing, the whole deal. But part of the Great Commission is also bringing the kingdom of God to the kingdom of earth. Which means all of the values, all of the mindset, all of the practicality of what Jesus lived out and what he taught, is part of the Great Commission. It's not just "go save people." it's literally, throughout planet earth, infuse God's kingdom into this present kingdom. That's what we are doing, is ushering that in. All that to say, even as you look at the life of Jesus, which is where I really think

you get it from, that's where his whole ministry was: the marginalized, the orphan in a sense, the displaced, the foreigner, the refugee. You could keep going on and on. I think all of it is part of the Great Commission. A lot of times we narrow it down to something very specific and focused, and then there is a bunch of other stuff that we just ignore, that's all a part of that. It's all a part of bringing the kingdom in. I think it is, to the earlier question, right at the heart of what we are about. Yeah, I want to tell people about Jesus, I want to lead them to know Jesus and love Jesus, but I also want to model for them what Jesus was about. I want to care for them the way Jesus cared for them. I want to usher in his values to planet earth, until he comes in sets things right. That's where I think it is at the core of the Great Commission.

AT: Would you say that foster care and adoption are options to which we can show God's love and carry out his will, or are these specific responsibilities of the Christian community?

BG: I don't know if I have anything different, but to reiterate, I think it's easy to make it a side issue and one of many things. "That's great for the people who are called to that." And yes, there is some truth to that. I think it is a calling. It's not calling to consider it, etc. calling to get involved at some level – that's not a calling. Other than, it's a calling that everyone has received. I think we have the propensity to put it off to the side, as just another thing among many things. The whole point of these questions is that it should be more centralized in what we are doing. This will sound political, but even the whole pro-life movement has to be redefined among Christians, the Christians is not just, "We should protect babies because they are made in the image of God." But that's everybody, and that's from the womb to the grave. That includes adoption and fostering, and all of



these things. I think when you look at it in that light, it is not optional. We, the church, have to be involved in it.

AT: What would it take for you and [wife] to either foster or adopt?

BG: Honestly, it's just one of those things which will sound overly simplistic, but as we pray about it and the Lord tells us, "Now is the time in the season." It's as simple as that.

But I think that's all it is for us, because even now, regularly, we bring it up and talk about it and discuss. It's already on the burner.

AT: Is there anything you can think of that you want to add?

BG: Those are pretty good, because it forced me to answer and think about what I would say around the topic. Just to render it, depending on the direction of the thesis, for a local church pastor I think you have two groups. I think you have some where it's just not on the radar the way it should be, but it's a bigger issue than just that. So many churches and Christians in general, we tend to get so focused. It's just a human propensity. There is just one part of it that we're going to do, and then we ignore a whole bunch of the rest of it.

Again, this may sound political too, but this whole refugee crisis – the church understanding a biblical perspective of that. But we tend to pick and choose a little bit. I think you have that group, and then I think you have a whole group of local churches and pastors that do know this is at the heart of the great commission and following Jesus, and just fulfilling what we've been called to fulfill. But they're just not set up to lead people in it, the way that maybe they should. There are so many demands and so many things pulling. That's one of the big things, and we've set up a whole team so that we can move forward in some of these areas. I want to be about this as a church, but we need people who can really go and flesh it out, and figure out the best way to do it, so that we can

mobilize our church. I think for a lot of local churches that is a big obstacle from my perspective as a pastor.

## APPENDIX H

### Interview 6 Transcript

AT: For starters, could you give me an overview of how you guys got involved with fostering, and how your church is involved with it? How is that set up?

HR: We got involved with fostering because when we originally planned to adopt for our family, we thought we would look into the foster care system first for adoption. Because there are a lot of benefits there with that, and there is high need. When we first came down here and were considering that option, the only place that was offering classes was way out by the airport and not on a night that works for our schedules. So we had to forgo that option, and consider other kinds of adoption. But it was always on our heart, and we knew that someday we would probably either adopt from the foster care system or foster someday. So we ended up adopting three sons through domestic adoption. Our church has always, from the beginning had a heart for adoption kind of organically. It was never in our bylaws or, "We are going to be at church for this." It's just that the people who were drawn there all had this collective, unified spirit for foster care and adoption. We have four families that foster in our church now, and we had three others that have gone on to different churches and stuff now. At one time we had seven different foster families in our church. That's just always been a part of our community. And then, I think it was four years ago now, that we were connected in networking with different licensing agencies because of all the different foster families in our church. So we had a lot of their prayer requests coming to our email, and I happen to see that a door of hope, one of the licensing agencies, was looking for a church or a building that would house some of their donated goods. People wanted to donate all the time. They have a storage unit for major

donations, but it was full and packed, it was difficult to get to, and they couldn't except a lot of these practical donations for the day to day needs of foster families. It was something that was on their prayer requests, praying that the Lord would provide for them in this. We happened to have had some changes in our church and we have this open classroom. So I brought it to the board and was like, "Hey we have this open classroom and here is this licensing agency that wants this. What if we accept donations on behalf of them, and on behalf of any foster family? We could house it in this room." And of course, the practical part of everyone was like, "Well, that's a lot of work, running a closet. Does anyone know how to do that?" And everyone was like, "No, no one has ever done that." But ultimately, we decided that because we have the space and there was this neat, even though there's a fear of the unknown and work, we just need to do it. So we did it. I essentially run the closet. We have a group of volunteers that come and help organize, implement different foster families there. It's actually run great. It took us a little while to get everything organized and figure out the logistics of it. But I'm there, I work at the space so foster parents can come when I am there. Or if they can't, and it has to be after hours, we tried to set that up with a volunteer who can meet them on a specific day that works. If they can't make it out because of logistics or timing, we have volunteers who will meet halfway or meet at drop points. We have clothes, toys, toiletry items, car seats, highchairs, cribs, and things like that. It's not a huge storage space, so we have to say no sometimes. But it's been awesome to be able to interact with the fostering community and these parents. It's honestly turned into more than just practical needs, because we've been able to hear their prayer requests and become community with them.

We do big events with them. It's grown from more than just housing staff, to be a little bit more relational, and it's been really awesome.

AT: In your own words, how would you define Christian responsibility in the care of disadvantaged or orphan children?

HR: Well I think that the Christian responsibility is exactly what the Bible says it should be. I think that the modern-day orphan in our culture in the United States is the child in foster care. We don't have orphanages or children wandering the streets. This is the modern-day orphan for our country, and so I think the first responders should be the believer. I think that there is a place for government to be involved, I think that there is a place for people who have goodwill to be involved, but there is more than just a place, there is a responsibility for believers to lead the way in all of this. They really should be the ones with the greatest involvement.

AT: In the area nearby, and in your networking with other ministries and organizations, how have you seen foster and adoption ministry done well?

HR: One of them I spoke with you earlier about was [community name]. The concept is such a good one, but when I first heard it I thought, "It would be really tough to create a community out of all these different people, that are coming from different backgrounds. The only thing that's coming to them is that they've adopted out of the foster care system." But it really is done well, they do a great job of connecting their people and creating this safe haven in [community name] for these families who have essentially said, "We are not only going to adopt out of the foster care system, but we are going to take responsibility for other families who have adopted. We're going to lean on each other and be more than just a family unit for these kids. We're going to create a

community for these kids." It's awesome to see how it works. They are very close. They help each other and meet each other's needs. Another one is the one I told you about, the couple in our church that have started the life coaching for teens in the foster care system. They've done a great job in the way they involve the church. They go into churches one of the things they say is "Listen, not everybody is able to take a child into their home, but you can still give these children peace of life." If it's with finances, you can sponsor a child to be coached in life. Or maybe it's because you sign up to be a mentor and coach a child one hour a week. They really are able to give alternative options for the body to get involved, to meet the needs of these kids. Which isn't always just a bed – it's never just a bed. That's the least of these needs. It's actually community, they need people who will pour into them and love them. It's been awesome in [county], we've connected with several licensing agencies. What's awesome about the state of Florida, and lots of states don't have this luxury, is that they have decentralized foster care. It doesn't have to be just done through the state. So [agency] in [county] can subcontract out to some private agencies, so it allows these licensing agencies to be faith-based, which is been such a beautiful thing. They have done a great job of rallying the churches in the community and getting them involved.