

RAISING THE PROFILE
OF *fostering* **AND** *adoption* **IN**
THE LOCAL CHURCH



The Situation in South Africa

It is estimated by Safeline (a child abuse centre in Cape Town) that 1 in 3 South African *girls* are sexually abused before the age of 18. In Feb.2006 the Cape Times estimated that between 9-12% children will be AIDS orphans by 2015. Poverty, unemployment and addiction (especially in the light of the latest 'tik' epidemic) are causing welfare organisations to be swamped with cases of children in crisis. Places of safety are getting fuller and fuller; children are remaining in children's homes for long periods of time. How then, should Christians respond? This booklet aims to give practical ideas of how to get involved in the present crisis. It starts with a biblical theology, before moving to look at the processes involved, testimonies and some of the most common objections.

Where is God in this? Does He really care?

With such high rates of rape, neglect, abandonment and HIV, some might ask 'Where is God in all of this? Does He really care?' This is the question that the writer of Psalm 10 asks in the light of all the evil that is going on around. Yet, in verse 14 the writer makes the affirmation that God does see 'the trouble and grief and considers it to take it in hand' and in the same verse professes that God is 'the helper of the fatherless'. Many would suggest that in South Africa's situation, this psalm is a lie objecting that God doesn't really seem to be the helper of today's orphans.

Yet God's character is unchanging - thus His care for the outsider does continue as does His concern for justice. God in Christ demonstrates both these attributes clearly. Christ's life and death was one of radical love for the outsider. His life showed countless acts of mercy to the outsiders of His society - the prostitute, leper, tax collector and child. His death was the culmination of this life of love - a total self-giving in order to save humanity who were spiritually outsiders because of sin (Eph.2:6-11). 1 John 3:16 says 'This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.' Here is the real motivation for loving others, that God first loved us. The measure of His love is that Jesus died for us and this should be the measure of love for others. What's more, in the following verse John shows that this love can even be expressed in practical, 'worldly' ways. 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?' (1 Jn 3:17) Here we have a clear command to love our Christian brothers and sisters in practical ways - and this is following God's example. As Ephesians 5:1 says 'Be imitators of God, therefore as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.'

God Does Care: The Church Must Care

If the Christian was only to love other Christians then we would still have our work cut out! About 2 billion people worldwide would be our shared responsibility. But what about non-Christians, is the Bible saying that we can ignore their needs? To answer this we'll turn to another famous love verse, Romans 5:8. 'But God demonstrates His love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us.' Here we see that God loved us before we were his people - with that same practical love we saw described in John. In short God's love reaches people before they become His followers. Here we have a mandate for loving people who are

not yet in God's family - in imitation of Him. In fact as we meditate on the extraordinary kindness that God showed to us in Jesus' death for us, we should be motivated to love others. It is this kind of love that Jesus is describing in the parable of the Good Samaritan when a despised Samaritan proves to be a neighbour to the dying Jew by loving him practically and taking care of his needs. Jesus ends this parable by telling the crowd (and us) to 'Go and do likewise' (Lk 10:37).

In South Africa today just as in the Psalmists times, evil abounds and God remains caring and just. He has shown great love to us in Christ and calls us, the body of Christ, to show great love to others. In this the church becomes a foretaste of the perfect Heavenly community that God will set up when Christ's returns.

Taking a child into our homes and families is a good example of such self-giving love for those who do not deserve it. Some of this understanding lends weight and feeling to the Apostle Paul's picture of the Christian's status in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians. In these books we are told that we have been adopted into God's family through Jesus Christ (see Rom.8:15-19, Gal.4:3-7 and Eph.1:16). If that language is so comforting to us spiritually, might we not consider extending that love practically? Adoption and fostering can be powerful ways of picturing God's love for us. In light of South Africa's current crisis, the challenge and opportunity for adoption faces Christians as never before.

An awesome Opportunity

Foster-Care and Adoption are wonderful opportunities for the gospel to advance in our country. It presents:

- an awesome opportunity to teach children about the love of Jesus and to model the Christian life
- a wonderful opportunity to evangelise adults who often ask questions about the Christian carer's motivation to adopt
- a great chance to model racial integration, especially relevant in South Africa's legacy of apartheid and to enrich our lives
- provides us opportunity to act in obedience to God's word to look after widows and orphans (Jm.1:27 and Pr.31:8).

When is a child considered to be in need of care?

It is tempting to put all vulnerable children in the same box. The reality is very different; there are many reasons why babies and children end up in need of care. This can be broadly divided into the following groups, though this list is by no means exclusive:

- AIDS orphans
- Other orphans
- Abused or neglected children
- Abandoned children
- Children born as a result of rape given up for adoption

- Children born to very young or poor mothers who choose to carry their baby to term and have them fostered / adopted rather than to abort
- Sick and handicapped children

What are the different roles in fostering and adoption?

Emergency Care Parents

Emergency Care parents provide immediate 48 hour protection and care for a baby or child who has been removed, prior to the presentation of the case to the Children's Court by a social worker or police officer. After the initial hearing, the child will either be returned to its parent / care-giver or placed in alternative care until finalisation of the case.

Place of Safety

After an initial hearing, the Commissioner of the Children's court might issue a detention order for a child who has been removed, ensuring their protection whilst a thorough investigation of the case is completed by a social worker. As well as the need for immediate safety parents and longer-term foster carers, welfare organisations are seeking emergency homes in the community to place children. Like safety parenting, emergency care is intended to be of a very temporary nature (usually up to three months). The ultimate purpose is to care for a child until they can be returned to their family or alternative care can be found. A child is placed in emergency care by the Commissioner for the Children's court.

Foster-Care

The idea of fostering is to provide short-term care for a child whose parents require time to sort out their problems. In most cases, the initial period ordered by the children's court is two years. The aim is for a fostered child to return to the care of their biological parent(s) once the problems that caused them to go into foster care have been resolved.

The sad reality is that in a vast number of cases, family reunification doesn't and often cannot occur and the child remains in a state of perpetual foster care for years. Therefore, foster parents have to be willing to make a long-term commitment to a child with the knowledge that in some cases the children may return to family members. This would only happen on the recommendation of a social worker, once the situation has been thoroughly investigated and it was deemed in the best interests of the child/ren concerned.

Adoption cannot occur without parental consent and this is often denied. If there's a need for Christian couples to consider adopting vulnerable children into their families, the need for Christian Foster-Carers is far greater. Welfare organisations deal with literally thousands of cases of children who require temporary care. U-turn/Arise have had to place three children in Muslim or non-Christian homes because no Christian home could be found.

Adoption

Adoption is a way of providing a family for children who cannot be raised by their own parents or families. It is a permanent step. Legal responsibilities and rights are transferred from the birth parents to the adoptive parents. The adoption process can be lengthy. After serious prayer, the first step would be to talk to someone who is involved in adoption. This could well be one of the welfare organisations listed below or a friend who has been through the process. Arise would be very willing to meet and pray with you.

Different organisations have slightly different ways of doing things, but in general you will have an initial meeting with one of their social workers, attend a one-day training course, fill

in forms, under-go a thorough screening process in which your backgrounds, medical history, accommodation, health, financial stability and general suitability to adopt are examined. Once you are officially cleared by the welfare organisation as suitable carers, you enter the state of becoming officially 'pregnant'. The welfare organisation will then contact you if and when a child is found in need of care.

If the child has remained in a place of safety or in alternative care, you may be required to make several visits before bringing the child home. This is in order to give opportunity for the child to bond with you and to lessen the disruption in their lives.

The body of Christ can be encouraged to think of adoption as less about one couple choosing to make a non-biological child part of their family for life and instead see this decision as affecting the church community at large. There are many varying roles for the congregation to play. Those unable to adopt themselves, can provide vital support for adoptive parents by assisting financially, providing respite care, preparing meals and prayer. Similarly, helpful amounts of child raising advice / experience can be gained from mom's or families with older children.

Who is eligible to be a caregiver?

Arise is a ministry seeking to find Christian homes for vulnerable children. Thus we seek Christian couples that acknowledge and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and who display Christian principles such as love, self-discipline, gentleness and commitment to marital fidelity. In light of the current crisis in South Africa, we would also support and encourage single persons willing to act as caregivers, if it was felt that emotionally, financially and spiritually they would cope with such as task. Same sex applicants, atheists or couples not belonging to or not actively involved in a Christian Church will be referred to other welfare organisations.

We would like to see every family that takes a child into their home, be connected with another family that will pray for and support them emotionally. We also desire to see young adults entering into mentoring relationships with these children, giving the children someone to talk to outside of their care situation, and providing the 'care' parents some relief care on weekends.

Considerations for all potential caregivers

Deciding to be an emergency carer, foster carer or adoptive parent are all massive decisions. It is crucial that such a commitment to a child is only given after serious thought. Remember that if the whole thing blows up it is not only going to cause you emotional heartache, but impact on a child who is already vulnerable.

Here are some of the questions that you and your family will need to consider:

- Are you willing to treat a non-biological child equally to your other children? Not only materially, but emotionally, with your time, with other sacrifices that come with parenting?
- How do your other children feel?
- How will you ensure that their needs and the needs of a foster child are accommodated?
- Do you have enough time to give the child the attention they need?

- Would you need to give up work?
- Do you have appropriate finances to care for a child?
- Is your housing suitable?
- Are there any race issues in your extended family that are of a concern?
- What emotional support networks do you have as a potential caregiver?
- Can you provide security for the child long term if they require it?

Financial implications

Many people ask about fees when considering adoption. Welfare organisations generally charge for social work visits, for medical care for the child and to cover the legal implications of the adoption proceedings. In no way are you 'buying a child' which is unhelpfully voiced by those not familiar with the process. Fees are generally charged on a sliding scale according to income. Private organisations generally offer more comprehensive support throughout the process, but are generally more expensive.

There is no charge for fostering. Anyone caring for a foster child is eligible for a foster care grant of R640 a month. Children in foster care also receive free schooling from Grade 1.

Those caring for children under the auspices of place of safety are eligible for a grant of R13 a day.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What happens when it is time for the child to leave?

It is certainly true that if a child has been an important part of family life for just a few months, it will be very hard when it comes for the child to return to its birth family. *It is vital to acknowledge this so that the church can be ready to provide pastoral support to the carers from whom the child has just left.* Foster care is not easy and should therefore only be entered into with eyes wide open.

It is well worth noting that the foster carers will often continue to be able to give invaluable input into the child's life once they have returned to their family / community. Again it is best for the child to grow up having as many people loving and caring for them as possible - thus it would be in the child's best interest to maintain this contact if at all possible.

Wealthier congregations would do well to recognise that even when a child returns to a situation of lower living standards and opportunities, they return to their family and community. This is often more beneficial for the child in the long term. Recognising this at the beginning will help foster parents if the time comes for the child to leave.

Real comfort can be gained from the knowledge that the foster carer has given invaluable input into the child's life and provided important stability in the midst of crisis.

Q: If we already have children how can I be sure I'll 'love' an adopted child equally, i.e. not show favouritism?

The biblical motivation for love, throughout the Bible is one of "choice". God chooses to love us, unloveable sinners, despite our rejection of him, and not because of anything we've done, or any special qualities we offer. Christian marriage vows provide a concrete example of this. We promise to 'choose' to love our partners through all circumstances, because this is the

biblical portrait of marital love. God demands this kind of love in all circumstances, with our partners, with our neighbours, and with our children. Our understanding is often tainted by the worldly viewpoint which gets us dependent on our feelings, and emotions to work out how much we love. If we choose to love our children the way God demands we do, and they way he loved us, then we realise that we are capable of loving any child that God brings into our family. He can and will enable us.

Support for carers

Cape Town has a growing Christian Foster-care / Adoption Group which meets bimonthly on the last Saturday of the month. This is an informal time in which to meet other families who have opened their homes and lives to vulnerable children.

Contact Wendy Lewin for more information:

Home: 021 762 7165

Cell number: 082 592 9983

Email: Wendy.Lewin@uct.ac.za

Many of Cape Town's welfare organisations also run support groups for carers. Arise and uThandoleNkosi are in the process of developing a support group curriculum so that training and ongoing support of 'care' parents can be provided. We also aim to meet all carers monthly to pray and to assist in other matter pertaining to the placement. It is hoped that the 'care' parents' local church will also rally and support these families.

Useful Contact Information

Arise

What: General advice and assistance on all related issues
Foster-Care Network and Support
Public awareness

Where: St Stephens Church, 86 Belvedere Road, Claremont
Tel: 021 683 4945
Fax: 021 674 3019
Email: arise@ststephens.org.za

Who: *Project Leader:* Debbie Burt
Social Worker: Kirsty Naude

uThando leNkosi

What: Safehouse for children aged 3-9 years
Foster-Care Network

Where: Diep River
Tel: 021 713 4342
After-hours: 078 916 6836

Who: Sheralyn Thomas

Child Welfare

What: Emergency Care / Fostering / Adoption

Where: Lower Klipfontein Road, Gatesville, Athlone
Tel: 021 638 3127

Fax: 021 638 5277
Email: information@helpkids.org.za
Web: www.helpkids.org.za

Who: *Emergency Care:* Mrs Rooipen
Foster-Care:: Penny Whitaker
Adoption: Ann Bruce

Wynberg Social Development

What: Emergency Care / Fostering / after hours
Where: Maynard Place, Cnr Station and Main Roads, Wynberg
Tel: 021 710 9850 / 9800
After hour emergencies - Protocol 021 762 3954
Fax: 021 761 9998
Who: *Emergency Care Social Worker:* Desire Michels
Foster Care Social Worker: G. Ryland

Badisa

What: Emergency Care / Fostering / Adoption
Where: 4 Salisbury Road, Wynberg
Tel / fax: 021 761 2671
Email: badisawynbrg@mweb.co.za
Who: *Social Worker:* Mrs. Japhtha
Social Worker: Mrs. Olivier

Procare

What: Private Adoption Agency
Where: Regional Office (Western Cape)
PO Box 6005, PO Main Street, Paarl, 7622
Email: adoptions@procare.co.za
Tel / fax: 021 873 0532
Who: *Senior Social Worker:* Eloise Loots

Home of Hope

What: 48hr / Emergency Care / Fostering
Where: *Tel:* 021 556 3573
After-hours Child Protection Line: 086 010 9089
Fax: 086 671 8629
Web: www.homeofhope.co.za
Email: info@homeofhope.co.za
Who: *Senior Social Worker:* Cat Rieper

Christine Revell Children's Home

What: Hosting children for weekends and holidays
Where: Athlone
Tel: 021 697 5579 (social worker)
Email: crevell@iafrica.com
Who: *Social Worker:* Sunita
Director: Mrs Alicia Rhoda

Baphumelele Children's Home:

What: Hosting children for weekends and holidays
Where: Z118 Dabula Street
Khayelitsha 7784

South Africa
Tel: 021-361-8631
Fax: 021-361-2695
www.baphumelele.org.za

Who: *Director:* Rosie Mashale
Social Worker: Ella

Commissioner of Child Welfare:
Based in Pretoria 012 328 4026

After Hours Emergency Numbers

Protocol 021 762 3954
for Mowbray - Kirstenhof areas
based at Wynberg Social Development

Home of Hope 086 010 9089
for City Bowl, Llandudno-Atlantis areas
safehouse in Milnerton

Child Welfare Hotline 080 043 5754
for Athlone, Philippi, Langa

Should you ever encounter a child who needs intervention immediately, contact the police 10111 or ring the organisation listed above that works in your area.

‘Because of the
oppression of the weak
and the groaning of the
weary, I will now arise.’
Psalm 12:5

