

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**LEADING THE FAMILIES OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF LONG BEACH, CA,
TO SUPPORT THE FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION COMMUNITY**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
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Doctor of Ministry

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The PLACED (Promoting Love And Care for Every Child with Dedication) action research project at First Baptist Church (FBC) was designed to address the complex needs of the foster care and adoption community in Los Angeles County. This project aimed to equip the FBC members to actively support foster and adoptive families through a structured project. The project included community events, educational sessions, and partnerships with local agencies. The project was grounded in a scriptural mandate to care for vulnerable children and sought to bridge the gap between the church and the foster care system.

The research involved qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups, to assess the needs of the foster care and adoption community. Key outcomes included increased awareness within the church community, the successful implementation of support programs, and the establishment of ongoing partnerships with foster care agencies. The project demonstrated that a faith-based community could significantly contribute to the well-being of foster and adoptive families by providing the necessary levels of support. The findings suggest that structured church initiatives, like the PLACED project, can play a crucial role in filling gaps left by formal support structures within the foster care system. This thesis project not only validated the importance of church involvement in foster care but also provided a replicable model for other ministries seeking to engage in similar work.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FBC	<i>First Baptist Church</i>
DCFS	<i>Department of California Family Services</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In 1858, when many families were living in high-risk situations due to poverty, lack of proper education, and dire economic conditions, Dwight L. Moody started teaching Sunday School in Chicago.¹ Moody wanted to help vulnerable children who were facing desperate situations. Moody's teaching style and personality became popular, and the Sunday School classes began to grow. Encouraged by his associates, Moody took a monumental step forward and, in 1864, established a church, initially known as the Illinois Street Church. This fledgling congregation would later evolve into the renowned institution recognized today as the Moody Church.² Through his efforts, Moody aimed to make a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable children living on the inner-city streets of Chicago.

The examples of believers who have made this type of commitment are countless because vulnerable children seem to be present everywhere. The focus of this project is in only one area: the work of foster care in the church. This project will demonstrate how providing a safe home for children in need reflects one of the oldest Christian traditions. The project will emphasize how foster care and adoption are not considered just a charitable act but are a crucial aspect of the Christian mission.³ Providing a safe environment for children highlights the fundamental message of the gospel. Just as Christ embraced human weakness, adopted believers into His family, and transformed their lives forever, Christians are called to extend that same love and

¹ Kevin Charles Belmonte, *D. L. Moody: A Life Innovator, Evangelist, World-Changer* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 39.

² *Ibid.*, 78.

³ Eugene Cho and Stephanie McDyre Johnson, eds., *No Longer Strangers: Transforming Evangelism with Immigrant Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021), 2.

care to others, especially those most in need of support.⁴ This project emphasizes that foster care and adoption are not merely a social responsibility but a profound expression of Christian compassion.

Child maltreatment is an epidemic that demands urgent attention and immediate action. According to every indication, the number of these types of cases is increasing.⁵ According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2018, approximately 4.3 million reports were made to child protective services, which involved 7.8 million children. Approximately 678,000 children were identified as experiencing child maltreatment—most cases center on neglect, mental illness, personality disorder, and substance abuse or addiction.⁶

Unfortunately, the most vulnerable among child maltreatment victims are often the youngest. Startling statistics reveal that infants in their first year of life constitute a significant portion, accounting for 15% of all victims, while over a quarter of child maltreatment victims are no older than two years old.⁷ These distressing figures underscore the critical need for protective measures and support systems for the youngest members of society.

Data compiled by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services highlights a troubling trend: children ages 1 to 4 have consistently comprised the largest age group within the foster care system since 2011. By 2021, this age demographic represented a staggering 30% of all children in foster care. These findings underscore the urgency of addressing the unique challenges faced by infants and toddlers, as well as the importance of comprehensive

⁴ Jason Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care: Filtering Your Foster Parenting Journey Through the Lens of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Credo House, 2018), 13.

⁵ N. Huang et al., "The Prevalences, Changes, and Related Factors of Child Maltreatment During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 135 (2022), accessed April 3, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105992>.

⁶ Joan Moore, *Therapeutic Stories for Foster, Adoptive and Kinship Families: Addressing the Domino Effect of Issues Facing 10-14-Year Olds* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 19.

⁷ David Finkelhor, *Childhood Victimization: Violence, Crime, and Abuse in the Lives of Young People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112.

intervention strategies aimed at safeguarding their well-being, providing them with stable and nurturing environments. Foster care and adoption emerge as crucial avenues for providing the necessary support and protection for these children. Beyond just offering immediate assistance, these initiatives embody the transformative power of the gospel in action.

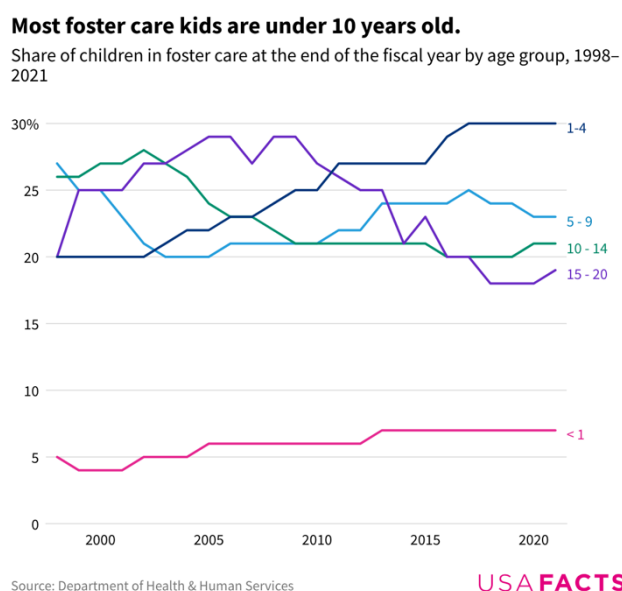


Figure 1. Ages of Children in foster care system, Source: Department of Health & Human Services.

In the cases where maltreatment was substantiated, children were removed from their homes and placed into foster care. Foster care is meant to be a short-term intervention to address a child being in serious danger in their home.⁸ There are many ongoing debates as to when the foster care system should step in and remove a child from their home. The focus of this project does not extend to the discussions surrounding the appropriate circumstances in which the foster care system should intervene and relocate a child from their familial environment. Instead, this project centers on other aspects of foster care and adoption, such as supporting foster and

⁸ Sarah A. Font, and Elizabeth T. Gershoff, *Foster Care and Best Interests of the Child: Integrating Research, Policy, and Practice* (Cham: Springer, 2020), 6.

adoptive communities, addressing the needs of vulnerable children, and enhancing the role of the church in providing assistance and care to these individuals and families.

Children placed in foster care experienced greater instability, including behavioral and mental health problems.⁹ Foster and adoptive families carry a far greater risk of dissolving than biological families.¹⁰ While the delicate nature of foster care is widely recognized, it is commonly believed that placing children in such an environment should be a last resort.¹¹ However, refusing to utilize the foster care system fails to acknowledge that the alternatives may include continued maltreatment, abuse, neglect, or, in the worst cases, death.¹²

The church has an important role to play in collaborating with the foster care system to offer much more than just a safe place for children who have undergone traumatic experiences. Two things are crucial for any foster family: education and support.¹³ The church is equipped with the knowledge to educate children and develop them into confident adults ready to face the world's challenges. The church plays a pivotal role in supporting these families by bringing food, sharing resources, or acting as *big brothers* and *big sisters*. Additionally, the church can offer a safe environment for mandated visitations, providing a way for birth parents to reconnect with their children and an entry point into birth parents' lives.

Ministry Context

The context for this research project is the First Baptist Church of Long Beach, California. The First Baptist Church has served the Long Beach community in various ways for over 130 years. Like most cities, Long Beach has seen many transformations throughout the

⁹ Jennifer M. Geiger and Lisa Schelbe, *The Handbook on Child Welfare Practice* (Cham: Springer, 2021), 227.

¹⁰ Jenny Kenrick, *Creating New Families: Therapeutic Approaches to Fostering, Adoption and Kinship Care* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2018), 3.

¹¹ Font and Gershoff, *Foster Care and Best Interests of the Child*, 6.

¹² Geiger and Schelbe, *The Handbook on Child Welfare Practice*, 2.

¹³ Kenrick, *Creating New Families*, 2.

years, from a farming community, an oil town, and a military base to an inner-city urban area in the shadow of Los Angeles.¹⁴

The story of First Baptist Church begins in 1894, with eight people meeting in a home Bible study group under the direction of J. C. Alair. In time, the church grew into one of the largest churches in the American Baptist Convention. According to church records, First Baptist Church welcomed some of the most influential preachers of their day in the pulpit: John MacArthur, Warren Wiersbe, and J. C. Penny, to name a few. As the world changed and became more challenging, First Baptist Church learned to adapt to these changes in order to pursue its mission. This meant undergoing painful transitions, but the church was willing to go through them to move from surviving to thriving.

In March 1933, a 6.4 magnitude earthquake struck Long Beach and caused widespread destruction.¹⁵ The Long Beach earthquake caused the death of 120 people and an estimated \$40 to \$50 million in damages, including the collapse of the First Baptist Church building.¹⁶ The earthquake left hundreds of residents in Long Beach homeless.¹⁷ Even in the face of such loss, the First Baptist Church resolved it would carry out its mission. The church members whose homes survived the earthquake opened them to the less fortunate. The pastoral team provided counseling sessions for those who had suffered loss, and the deacons conducted wellness checks on the elderly and widows. Despite the challenges, the First Baptist Church responded with resilience and compassion.

¹⁴ Barbara Kingsley-Wilson, *Long Beach State: A Brief History* (Charleston: The History Press, 2015), 94.

¹⁵ Abraham Hoffman, *California's Deadliest Earthquakes: A History* (Charleston: The History Press, 2017), 94.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

In the 1940s, a Naval base was stationed in Long Beach, and the First Baptist Church opened its campus on the weekend to provide ministry services to sailors. The church provided a Sunday home-cooked meals to the sailors who were stationed on the base. The Sunday meal was a heartwarming gesture intended to make the sailors feel closer to home. While the sailors spent the day at First Baptist, they were offered help in the form of counseling services and Bible study sessions. Any sailor needing to talk and share his feelings could avail of these services. Phones were made available so they could call home. The church allowed the sailors to use its facilities for activities, such as basketball, volleyball, racquetball, and pickleball.

In the 1990s, in the wake of the Los Angeles Riots, the First Baptist Church recommitted itself to the persuasive influence of the Scriptures, with a commitment to preach the Word to capture the hearts of individuals regarding race issues.¹⁸ The city of Long Beach is known for its diversity.¹⁹ According to the latest census conducted in 2020, the five most prominent ethnic groups in Long Beach are White, Non-Hispanic at 28.1%; White, Hispanic at 21.3%; Other, Hispanic at 16.9%; Asian at 12.5%; and Black or African American at 12.1%.²⁰ The congregation of First Baptist Church of Long Beach is as diverse and multicultural as the city itself.

At a time when 11:00 on Sunday morning was considered the most segregated hour in America,²¹ the First Baptist Church engaged in cross-cultural ministry, contributing to individuals' spiritual growth and development.²² They multiplied their efforts to reach their

¹⁸ Andrea Smith, *Unreconciled: From Racial Reconciliation to Racial Justice in Christian Evangelicalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 57.

¹⁹ Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 254.

²⁰ United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts: Long Beach city, California," *U.S. Census Bureau*, accessed January 15, 2024, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/>.

²¹ Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2019), 179.

²² Mary A. Fukuyama, and Todd D. Sevig, *Integrating Spirituality into Multicultural Counseling* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1999), 79.

community by starting Filipino, Korean, Spanish, and Cambodian ministries. First Baptist Church embarked on a new approach to community outreach by blending biblical principles with a nuanced understanding of cultural dynamics. This innovative approach assisted individuals in navigating the intricacies of ethnic diversity and creating spiritual transformation. The multicultural congregation at First Baptist Church in Long Beach is a testimony to the beauty of diversity and the power of unity in Christ.

The First Baptist Church of Long Beach has faced its fair share of changes and has successfully implemented a missional model that goes beyond the church's walls. Every day, homelessness, loitering, abuse, and drug addiction are happening on the sidewalks around First Baptist Church, and the church has engaged in ministry to address these issues. Still, the city of Long Beach has changed once again. The most dramatic change can be seen in the number of child maltreatment cases that are reported around First Baptist Church. Currently, Los Angeles County (where Long Beach is located) has over 23,000 children in foster care, with more being added every day, making it one of the largest foster care systems in the country.²³

The mission field has become foster care and adoption ministry. The work of foster care and adoption ministry is not for everyone. Foster care involves adhering to the government's regulations, which demand a certain degree of adaptability. Foster care can strain family relationships. Foster care requires daily self-sacrifice. Foster care aims to reunify families, so when a child leaves, it can be emotionally difficult for everyone involved. While foster care and adoption ministry are not for everyone, they do require everyone. Foster care is too difficult for isolated families but deeply embedded within the church community; the church family must find the ideal education and support necessary for this mission.

²³ John E. B. Myers, *Child Protection in America: Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 215.

Problem Presented

The problem First Baptist Church faces is the absence of an organized program to equip members to support those involved in the foster and adoption community. The lack of such a program inhibits the church's ability to offer meaningful support and guidance to foster families, adoptive parents, social workers, and children in need, hindering an organized program's potential impact on the community. This lack of organization can leave foster and adoptive families without essential resources, emotional support, or guidance, making their journey more challenging.

Many members of First Baptist Church may be unfamiliar with the distinct needs and challenges faced by individuals in foster care and adoptive communities, as well as the hardships endured by vulnerable children within these settings. This lack of awareness can act as a barrier to providing meaningful support and involvement within these communities.²⁴ The church can bridge this gap in understanding and empathy by learning about the realities and experiences of those involved in foster care and adoption.

Moreover, raising awareness about the issues faced by vulnerable children in foster care and adoption can inspire church members to become more actively involved in supporting these communities. When individuals within the congregation understand the profound impact of their support and involvement, they are more likely to step forward and offer their time, resources, and prayers to help meet the needs of foster and adoptive families. This increased awareness and engagement can strengthen the bonds within the church community and demonstrate the transformative power of God's love.

²⁴ Jason Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something: A Field Guide for Strategically Rallying Your Church Around the Orphaned and Vulnerable* (Spring: CreateSpace, 2018), 37.

Members of First Baptist Church may encounter hindrances in their resources when supporting foster and adoption ministries.²⁵ These hindrances can encompass financial assistance, as well as emotional and practical support. Many churches, including First Baptist, may face challenges in allocating sufficient funds to support foster and adoption initiatives due to the associated costs.²⁶ Financial constraints can manifest in various ways, from securing adequate space for meetings and events to ensuring that necessary resources are available for families and children in need. Additionally, arranging schedules to accommodate the diverse needs of foster and adoptive families can present logistical challenges for the church.

However, despite these financial hurdles, the intrinsic value of serving the vulnerable in the name of Christ far outweighs any monetary cost. As Jesus taught, even the simplest acts of kindness done in His name carry eternal significance and are rewarded by God. The Scripture says, “For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward” (Mark 9:41, King James Version). Therefore, while limitations may pose obstacles to supporting foster and adoption ministries, the spiritual rewards of serving others motivate First Baptist Church members to find ways to overcome these challenges and extend compassionate support to those in need.

The problem also involves acknowledging and appreciating the diverse backgrounds and cultural identities of foster and adoptive children and families.²⁷ For the members of First Baptist Church to effectively support foster and adoptive families, it is crucial to understand the profound significance of cultural identity in shaping the lives and experiences of these

²⁵ Jedd Medefind, *Becoming Home: Adoption, Foster Care, and Mentoring—Living Out God’s Heart for Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 94.

²⁶ Tony Merida and Rick Morton, *Orphanology: Awakening to Gospel-Centered Adoption and Orphan Care* (Birmingham: New Hope, 2011), 112.

²⁷ Juli Alvarado, *Parenting with an Open Heart: Strategies for Embracing the Diversity of Foster and Adoptive Families* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2012), 88.

individuals. One of the most pressing cultural challenges faced by foster and adoptive families, and indeed society as a whole, is the presence of racial tensions. In a world marked by division and strife, communities desperately need tangible demonstrations of God's love and reconciliation. Within this context, the ministry of foster care and adoption emerges as a unique opportunity for First Baptist Church to exemplify and embody the character of God while actively addressing immediate needs within the community. By engaging in foster and adoption ministry with a deep appreciation for cultural diversity and a commitment to fostering racial harmony and understanding, First Baptist Church has the potential to serve as a beacon of hope and reconciliation in a fractured world.

The absence of a structured support program within First Baptist Church presents significant challenges that may dissuade prospective foster and/or adoptive families from joining or remaining active within the congregation. Without a formalized system in place, these families may feel isolated and disconnected from the broader church community, lacking the vital support network that is essential for navigating the complexities of foster care and adoption.²⁸ Additionally, the absence of a structured program raises concerns about whether the unique needs and challenges faced by foster and adoptive families will be adequately understood, acknowledged, and addressed by the church community. Without clear guidance and resources, these families may struggle to find the support and assistance they require, potentially leading to frustration, alienation, and disillusionment.

Ultimately, the crux of the issue at First Baptist Church lies in the absence of an organized program designed to equip church members with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to support those involved in the foster and adoptive community effectively. Establishing

²⁸ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 115.

such a program is crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and community among these families and demonstrating the church's commitment to compassion, inclusivity, and support for the most vulnerable members of society.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to develop the PLACED seminar to equip participants to support the foster and adopt community. The acronym, "PLACED," stands for Promoting Love And Care for Every Child with Dedication, encapsulating the core values and goals of the seminar. The PLACED seminar is dedicated to instilling a profound sense of responsibility and commitment to the well-being and success of children, families, and workers within this community. With an emphasis on providing unwavering support through compassion, nurturing, training, and dedicated effort, the PLACED seminar aims to empower its participants to become advocates for positive change and the dignity of all individuals within the foster care and adoption community.

The PLACED seminar will provide valuable information, meaningful partnerships, and essential resources for First Baptist Church members who desire an impactful ministry that reflects God's heart. One of the primary objectives of the PLACED project is to strengthen the relationships between First Baptist Church and foster and adoptive families within the community. Through the seminar sessions, attendees will be able to deepen their understanding of the unique needs and challenges these families face, enabling them to offer more meaningful and practical support.²⁹

Additionally, the project endeavors to create avenues for the church to express love, care, support, and prayer in tangible, relational ways, fostering a sense of belonging and community

²⁹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 134.

among all members. The PLACED seminars serve as a platform for equipping believers with the necessary tools and resources to step up and serve in new avenues of ministry. The seminars aim to mobilize individuals within the congregation to actively engage in ministry efforts that reflect God's heart for the most vulnerable by imparting practical knowledge, sharing best practices, and facilitating networking opportunities.

The PLACED seminar aims to provide comprehensive support to families considering or already involved in fostering and adopting by offering valuable insights and practical guidance on various crucial aspects of the process. Through informative sessions and guidance, attendees will gain a deeper understanding of the legal requirements, procedures, and available resources. This knowledge will empower them to navigate this aspect of the journey with greater confidence.

The PLACED seminar recognizes the importance of understanding and addressing the unique emotional needs of children from diverse backgrounds who may have experienced trauma or adversity. Workshops and discussions will be tailored to equip parents with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide sensitive care to foster and adopted children, fostering healing and resilience within the family unit. The seminar seeks to enhance foster and adoptive families' overall well-being and stability by fostering a deeper understanding of trauma-informed parenting approaches and effective communication strategies. The PLACED seminar will educate families on practical strategies to address their challenges.

The PLACED seminar will allow families to form partnerships with others who have shared similar experiences and create a caring community for vulnerable children. By coming together in a supportive and nurturing environment, families can build a loving community dedicated to the well-being and growth of vulnerable children. These partnerships serve as vital

support systems, offering companionship, understanding, and encouragement to families navigating the complexities of fostering and adoption. Through the PLACED seminar, families can connect with others who intimately understand the joys and struggles of foster and adoptive parenting. This sense of community helps combat feelings of loneliness and isolation that may arise from the unique challenges of foster and adoptive parenting, providing families with a sense of belonging and connection.

Basic Assumptions

The assumption for this project is that the First Baptist Church of Long Beach can make a positive impact on the lives of individuals involved in the foster care system. This approach is understood as missional fostering.³⁰ Missional fostering entails more than simply providing temporary shelter or support; it involves actively engaging with the foster care community in ways that promote holistic well-being, stability, and growth. Missional fostering emphasizes the church's role in not only offering material assistance but also emotional and spiritual support, mentorship, advocacy, and long-term relationships.

When the church embodies the values of love, compassion, and service, it creates a nurturing and empowering environment that can profoundly impact both children in foster care and the families and caregivers who support them.³¹ In Christ, believers have the solutions to the needs that vulnerable children face. Believers should demonstrate the message of Christ, who died and rose again, to provide them with safety, love, and community.³² This research is founded on the belief that the church can make a significant contribution towards the well-being of all the individuals involved.

³⁰ Jon Stone and Dawn Stone, *Missional Fostering: A Temporary Assignment, A Tremendous Cause, A Timeless Impact* (Grand Rapids: Credo House, 2021), 4.

³¹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 134.

³² *Ibid.*, 132.

Another assumption is that the overburdened foster care system in Los Angeles County will not soon change. This assumption is based on statistics that reveal California has one of the highest populations of children in foster care in the United States.³³ The exact percentage of children in foster care residing in California can vary over time due to changes in policies, demographics, and other factors. The reported reasons for children entering into the foster care system are varied. In 2022, 10.9 percent of children referred to DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) were alleged victims of sexual abuse, 16.3 percent were referred to DCFS for physical abuse, 16.5 percent for emotional abuse, and 19.7 percent of children fell into the category of “at risk, sibling abused.” Another .2 percent of children were referred for sexual “exploitation.”³⁴ Each of these cases requires investigations, medical examinations, wellness checks, visits, case files, and court hearings, along with the task of ensuring children are living in the safest environments possible.

The capacity of DCFS to provide back-end support to every family is limited at best.³⁵ This reality underscores the important role the First Baptist Church can fill in addressing the needs of foster youth and families. The foster care system is overrun with children experiencing these adversities, and they need the church's compassion to show them Christ's love.

It is assumed that as families foster or adopt, they will need support and help from the church community. Supporting foster care and adoption families should be an extremely important part of the church's responsibility in ministry.³⁶ The most commonly recognized areas

³³ Jill Duerr Berrick, *The Impossible Imperative: Navigating the Competing Principles of Child Protection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 78.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁵ Richard P. Barth, *Foster Care Dynamics: The Impacts of Social Workers' Caseloads on Service Delivery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 89.

³⁶ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 43.

of support for foster and adoptive families are tangible, educational, and relational issues. The one area that the church can alone meet is spiritual support.³⁷

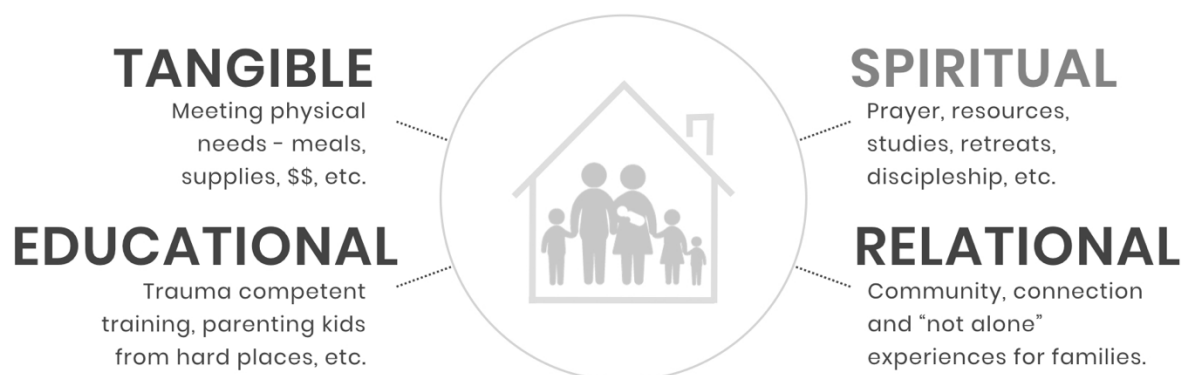


Figure 2. Areas of Support for Foster Care diagram, Drawing by Jason Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care: Filtering Your Foster Parenting Journey Through the Lens of the Gospel*, (Grand Rapids: Credo House Publishers, 2018) 43.

The realization that these families will require support when welcoming a child into their home is not unexpected. However, what may come as a surprise is recognizing the need for support in navigating the bittersweet moments associated with reunification. Most foster children, three in five, will be reunited with their parents or other family members.³⁸ While this reunification signifies a restoration of family connections, it can evoke complex emotions for foster families who have provided care and formed attachments with those children. Learning to navigate these emotions involves relying on individuals God has strategically placed in their lives to accompany them through such seasons.

Another assumption is that First Baptist Church is not intentionally neglecting the needs of children in foster care and their foster families. Rather, it is believed that the church may not be aware of the calling placed upon it through Scripture and the dire need for support in the

³⁷ Merida and Morton, *Orphanology*, 136.

³⁸ Mark Courtney and Dorota Iwaniec, *Residential Care of Children: Comparative Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 78.

community. By providing proper training and resources, the church can play a positive and empowering role in providing relief to both the birth families and foster families.

Definitions

Adoption. There are two uses for the term, “adoption.” In the first sense, adoption is the legal process that establishes the relationship of a parent and child between a child and someone other than the child's natural parent.³⁹ When a child is adopted, that child becomes a permanent member of a family. Second, adoption also has a spiritual connotation, referring to the belief that God has adopted believers as His children (Rom 8:15–17, KJV).⁴⁰

Disruptive Behavior. Disruptive behavior may manifest as chronic illness, cognitive difficulties, emotional challenges, such as low self-esteem and trust issues, and behavioral issues, such as lack of impulse control, aggression, and substance abuse, ultimately impacting various aspects of an individual's life.⁴¹

Faith-Based Community. Institutions like the church and evangelical organizations represent communities deeply rooted in a religious tradition, where religious observance and a shared faith identity are integral components that shape the communal life and interactions of their members.⁴²

Foster Care. Foster care is a form of substitute care provided to children who are removed from their parents and are under the care and responsibility of the state agency. Foster

³⁹ Francis Lyall, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1984), 67.

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 13.

⁴¹ Janelle Marra, “Care of Diverse Families: Foster Care and Adoption,” *Family Physicians Essentials* 524 (2023): 13.

⁴² Paul Christopher Manuel and Miguel Glatzer, eds., *Faith-Based Organizations and Social Welfare: Associational Life and Religion in Contemporary Western Europe* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 10.

care provides temporary living arrangements for children who cannot live with their parents or have been removed from their homes.⁴³

Childhood Trauma. This refers to the negative experiences that a child may go through during their early years. These experiences can have long-lasting and adverse effects on a person's physical and mental health. Childhood trauma includes four categories: general trauma, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse.⁴⁴

Maltreatment. Child abuse and neglect refer to any actions or behaviors that harm or neglect a child.⁴⁵ Professionals in the field of child welfare often use the acronym “CAN” as a shorthand to describe the various forms of child maltreatment. This helps to easily reference and communicate the diverse aspects of child abuse and neglect.

Neglect. Defined, at a minimum, as any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker that results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or trafficking, or an act or failure to act that presents an imminent risk of serious harm.⁴⁶

Removal. The procedure through which the state intervenes to relocate a child from their residence and assumes temporary custody. Such removals occur exclusively in cases where there is substantiated evidence of maltreatment, an immediate risk of harm to the child, or at the explicit request of the legal parents or guardians.⁴⁷

⁴³ Font, *Foster Care and Best Interests of the Child*, 6.

⁴⁴ J. Douglas Bremner, Eric Vermetten, and Carolyn M. Mazure, “Development and Preliminary Psychometric Properties of an Instrument for the Measurement of Childhood Trauma: The Early Trauma Inventory,” *Depression and Anxiety* 12, no. 1 (2000): 6.

⁴⁵ Paula E. Crowley, *Preventing Abuse and Neglect in the Lives of Children with Disabilities* (Switzerland: Springer, 2016), 6.

⁴⁶ Font, *Foster Care and Best Interests of the Child*, 7.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 7.

Reunification. The primary goal for children in out-of-home care is reunification with their biological family, making it the most common outcome of returning children who are temporarily in out-of-home care to their homes.⁴⁸

Vulnerable Children. Refers to children who have been exposed in varying degrees to issues of neglect, abuse, instability, violence, substance abuse, or some other form of trauma. This is the vulnerable population frequently adopted through the foster care system.⁴⁹

Limitations

While valuable and impactful, the engagement of the First Baptist Church of Long Beach in foster care and adoption ministry will encounter several limitations. Understanding these limitations will contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of the project's potential impact and help develop strategies to navigate these challenges effectively.

First, this project is limited because foster care involves multifaceted challenges rooted in complex social, familial, and systemic issues. The results of foster care support programs cannot be subjected to experimental manipulation. The nature of the problems, such as poverty, substance abuse, and family dynamics, requires comprehensive societal efforts, and the church, though an essential partner, is limited to some degree. Foster care and adoptive families must deal with numerous variables and real-world difficulties that necessitate a thorough understanding of the legal complexities, emotional needs of foster children, and the unpredictability of reunification processes.

The second major limitation of this PLACED seminar project is that the removal and placement of children into the foster care system will persist in society. Even if the church were

⁴⁸ Font, *Foster Care and Best Interests of the Child*, 8.

⁴⁹ Camilla Nelson, and Catharine Lumby, *Broken: Children, Parents and the Family Courts* (Collingwood: Black, 2021), 25.

to wholeheartedly commit to fostering all children currently in the foster care system, the influx of new cases would continue to pose an ongoing challenge. Therefore, the project is susceptible to external factors beyond the church's control, such as changes in government policies, legal regulations, or societal attitudes toward foster care and adoption.

Third, this PLACED seminar project will be limited to those who voluntarily accept the invitation to participate. To ensure the project is sustainable, managing and preventing volunteer fatigue is crucial. The invitation to participate will be extended to all members and regular First Baptist Church attendees, including those who are part of adult Connection Group classes, the membership roster, service teams, and databases.

The fourth limitation of this project is to the adult members of the church who are eligible to assist in foster care within the age specifications defined by DCFS. It is important to note that certain age minimums exist for certification eligibility to participate. Any changes made to the foster care system should also be considered, such as changes in policies, procedures, or organizational structures, which may impact the relevance and efficacy of the church's programs.

The fifth limitation of the PLACED seminar project heavily hinges on the availability of essential resources, encompassing both financial and human aspects. Adequate funding is crucial for the project's success, covering seminar materials, outreach efforts, support services, and collaborations. More resources may help the program's ability to address the diverse needs of foster and adoptive families. Additionally, committed individuals, volunteers, and skilled professionals provide human resource support, engage with foster and adoptive families, and facilitate the seminar.

The sixth limitation of the PLACED seminar project is that the results may be affected by the characteristics and preferences of the First Baptist Church members who decide to

participate. This means that the findings may not fully represent the entire church community and should be interpreted cautiously. This may also affect the willingness of church members to actively participate or support the initiatives, which could limit the overall impact of the project.

The seventh limitation may be the sustained commitment of First Baptist Church members to foster care and adoption efforts, which may fluctuate over time. This could be due to various factors, such as changing priorities, job transfers, relocation, financial difficulties, leadership changes, or evolving community needs. These factors could have a significant impact on the church's ability to continue its engagement with the foster care system in the long run.

Finally, this study is limited in that it cannot measure the quantity of new foster parents resulting from the PLACED seminar due to the lengthy licensing process involved in becoming a foster parent. Thus, the study will only concentrate on the number of individuals who have initiated the licensing process.

Delimitations

While the church faces constraints in addressing the underlying causes of the foster care crisis, First Baptist Church can provide vital support, including tangible, educational, relational, and spiritual assistance to foster families. The focus of this project is to create and teach the PLACED seminar, which will empower the First Baptist Church members with the knowledge, skills, and resources to better support foster and adoptive families in their community.

The seminar will cover a wide range of topics, which include the challenges faced by foster and adoptive families. The seminar will also address the difficulties encountered by individuals within the foster care system, especially those dedicated case workers grappling with overwhelming workloads. The seminar will also focus on trauma-informed care and provide practical tips for supporting and advocating for these families. The seminar aims to empower

church members to become a valuable support system for foster and adoptive families, providing tangible, educational, relational, and spiritual assistance through strategic program implementation.

The project is the implementation of the PLACED seminar that will encourage and instruct the members of First Baptist Church on effective strategies to support foster and adoptive families. The effective strategies encompassed in this project involve providing valuable information, cultivating partnerships, and offering essential resources to equip First Baptist Church members in supporting foster and adoptive families. By strengthening relationships, the seminar aims to empower believers with diverse gifts for impactful ministry and community engagement.

The seminar will educate the members of the First Baptist Church on the biblical teaching and scriptural mandates of caring for vulnerable children within the ministry of the church. Through proper exegesis of the biblical text, First Baptist Church will establish ministry with cultural implications based on this biblical mandate. This will help the church to foster a compassionate and supportive environment that reflects the heart of the gospel in action.

The research for this project will not include interviews with children currently in the foster care system. While these insights may prove useful in the classroom education component of the project, they are not relevant to the primary focus of the research project itself, which centers on developing the PLACED seminar. This seminar aims to empower participants at First Baptist Church with the knowledge, partnerships, and resources needed to effectively support foster-adopt families. The PLACED seminars aim to improve the relationship between the church and families, reflecting God's heart and providing practical support.

While it is often reported that caseworkers are burdened with heavy workloads, low compensation, and inadequate training, the primary objective of this study does not encompass any efforts to alleviate these issues. Instead, the study will concentrate on examining other factors the First Baptist Church can take that may impact caseworkers' ability to effectively perform their duties and provide optimal care for their clients.

Thesis Statement

At the core of Christian doctrine lies the imperative to make disciples (Matt 28:16-20). Throughout history, the Christian church has strived to fulfill this mandate by engaging in various forms of service, outreach, and advocacy aimed at promoting justice, compassion, and the common good. From feeding the hungry and caring for the sick, to championing human rights and advancing education, Christians have endeavored to address the diverse needs of society, guided by their faith and commitment to following Christ's teachings. Through various initiatives, God's people have become increasingly engaged in matters near to the heart of God.⁵⁰ These initiatives often emerge from a deep sense of compassion and a commitment to serving others, which are integral to many aspects of the Christian faith.

For over 130 years, the First Baptist Church has been no different. The First Baptist Church has leveraged its strengths and resources for local food banks, homeless shelters, educational programs, and discipleship initiatives. There are many ways the church is called to respond to the vulnerable. This project focuses solely on the challenges faced by the most vulnerable people in our society: children and those served by the foster care and adoption system.

⁵⁰ Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Dutton, 2010), 57.

The implementation of the PLACED seminar on a personal level will cultivate a supportive community environment within the church. As Johnson states, “When churches implement targeted programs and seminars focused on foster care and adoption, it not only equips individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills but also fosters a deeper sense of community.”⁵¹ Foster-adopt families will receive emotional encouragement, guidance, and understanding from fellow congregants who may offer mentoring, counseling, or simply a listening ear. Volunteers or support teams will be organized to provide practical assistance or emotional support, helping foster-adopt families navigate the challenges they face and ensuring they do not feel isolated in their calling.

The implementation of the PLACED seminar will increase support in tangible ways through practical assistance, such as financial aid and access to necessary resources, like clothing and groceries. Also, the PLACED seminar will increase support involving respite care, which enables families to take much-needed breaks while ensuring continuous care for their children. Support could even mean a family chooses to begin fostering or adopting due to being made aware of the significant need prevalent within the community. The PLACED seminar ensures that First Baptist Church becomes a cornerstone for foster-adopt families, enhancing their ability to provide stable and nurturing homes for the children in their care. If the PLACED seminar is implemented by First Baptist Church, then foster-adopt families will be supported in tangible and personal ways.

⁵¹ Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 89.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout history, faith-based organizations have played integral roles in the essential task of enlisting, equipping, and encouraging families to care for children and youth within the foster care system.⁵² Developing and maintaining relationships between the church and the state can expand their collaborations, resulting in a more significant impact on providing care to those in vulnerable situations. Church leaders and members need to stay informed about the most recent scholarly research on foster care and adoption to effectively prepare the church for meaningful engagement in these topics.

Church leaders and members can acquire valuable knowledge and understanding to inform their ministry approaches and practices by keeping informed of the latest findings and insights emerging from academic studies. This includes understanding the complexities of the foster care and adoption systems, the unique needs and challenges faced by children and families involved, and evidence-based strategies for providing support. Integrating scholarly research into their ministry efforts can help churches enhance their ability to provide compassionate and well-informed care, tackle issues, and effectively collaborate with others in the wider foster care and adoption community to improve the well-being of vulnerable children and families.

The following literature review provides a comprehensive analysis of scholarly literature focused on foster care and adoption families, offering insights into the multitude of challenges encountered by these individuals. Through a thorough examination of research findings, this review endeavors to enhance comprehension and awareness of the intricate dynamics inherent in

⁵² Medefind, *Becoming Home*, 45.

foster care and adoption, with the ultimate goal of empowering the church community to respond adeptly and compassionately to the needs of these families.

Literature Review

Faith-Based Partnership

For decades, faith-based organizations have played a crucial role in the child welfare system. Many modern practices can be traced back over 100 years.⁵³ The literature recognizes that believers are instrumental in God's plan to care for vulnerable children.⁵⁴ Biblical accounts, such as Moses and Esther (Exod 2:10; Esth 2:7), illustrate instances of God's people providing care and protection to children facing adversity. By drawing inspiration from these narratives, Christians can fulfill their duty to uphold the principles of love, justice, and compassion that are inherent in the Christian faith. The apostle James gives the church specific instructions for what pure religion is when he writes, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (Jas 1:27, KJV).

Foster care is understood as a temporary service provided by states for children who cannot live with their biological families.⁵⁵ This care is provided by volunteer families who have obtained certification through state agencies. There are a large number of children involved in foster care, and every indication is that the numbers are increasing.⁵⁶ There are roughly 425,000 children in foster care across the United States, while the country has approximately 400,000

⁵³ Silke Hackenesch, eds., *Adoption Across Race and Nation: US Histories and Legacies* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2022), 43.

⁵⁴ Todd R. Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home: Why the Church Can and Must Care for Orphans* (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 54–55.

⁵⁵ Janelle Marra, "Care of Diverse Families: Foster Care and Adoption," *Family Physicians Essentials* 524 (2023): 7.

⁵⁶ Deborah N. Silverstein and Susan Livingston Smith, *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 9.

evangelical churches.⁵⁷ These churches could be an answer to engaging in the spiritual battle for vulnerable kids.⁵⁸

Adoption involves a legal transfer of parental rights and responsibilities from the biological parents to adoptive parents. Adoption can occur through various means, including domestic or international adoption agencies, private arrangements, or through the foster care system.⁵⁹ Approximately seven million American citizens are adopted, including approximately one in every fifty children.⁶⁰ This is undoubtedly America's next mission field.⁶¹

Jason Johnson, in *Reframing Foster Care*, contended that the church's role should extend beyond reactive responses, advocating for proactive ministering in areas of brokenness.⁶² The church bears the responsibility of offering hope to children who suffer from trauma, neglect, behavior disorders, and emotional problems.⁶³ These issues stem from more than human brokenness; they reflect spiritual fractures that align with Christian values, such as compassion, care, family, love, grace, and redemption. Faith-based organizations help individuals overcome this brokenness by responding in a way that contradicts the hurt experienced.⁶⁴ For instance, when believers demonstrate the same level of compassion towards vulnerable children as Christ, they can help victims overcome the adverse effects of trauma. Beth Chapman argued that

⁵⁷ Marra, *Care of Diverse Families*, 208.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁹ Alison Roy, *A for Adoption: An Exploration of the Adoption Experience for Families and Professionals* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶¹ Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life: The Priority of Adoption for Christian Families and Churches* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2009), 91.

⁶² Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 67.

⁶³ Elizabeth Trejos-Castillo, and Nancy Trevino-Schafer, eds., *Handbook of Foster Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 7.

⁶⁴ Tori Hope Petersen, *Fostered: One Woman's Powerful Story of Finding Faith and Family Through Foster Care* (Nashville: B&H, 2022), 13–14.

expressing appreciation towards children who have experienced brokenness can help them heal.⁶⁵

The literature strongly affirms that faith-based communities are critical resources for families seeking to provide for children in need. Child protection agencies are increasingly recognizing the importance of partnering with faith-based organizations to support vulnerable families. Mary Collins and Judith Scott emphasized the important role of faith communities in the child welfare system due to their Christian principles. Foster Care, Adoption, and Other Life-Giving Ways (FBOs), with their deep-rooted community connections and shared values of supporting families, can serve as a bridge between child protection agencies and the communities they serve. Jenn Ranter Hook, Joshua N. Hook, and Mike Berry highlighted the natural connection between adoption, foster care, and Christian beliefs.⁶⁶

Collaborating between FBOs and child protection agencies requires effort and hard work from both partners, particularly as they often bring together organizations with different operating frameworks. It is crucial for child protection agencies to establish a trusting relationship with their faith-based partners and thoroughly evaluate the potential contributions of each organization and its leaders before taking any further steps. Moreover, child welfare should acknowledge FBOs as knowledgeable resources within their communities. Adoption and foster care are ways to show God's love and share the gospel message with the world, and they should be integral to church culture.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Beth Troutman, *Attachment-Informed Parent Coaching* (Cham: Springer, 2022), 147.

⁶⁶ Jenn Ranter Hook, Joshua N. Hook, and Mike Berry, *Replanted: Faith-Based Support for Adoptive and Foster Families* (Chicago: Templeton, 2019), 201.

⁶⁷ Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 64.

Community Support

Navigating the complexities of foster care and adoption presents significant challenges for families embarking on this journey. Particularly, the initial six months with a foster or adopted child often prove to be the most daunting for parents as they grapple with adjustment periods, trauma, and the intricacies of building trust and connection.⁶⁸ Building trust and forging connections become paramount endeavors during this pivotal period. Individuals who have experienced trauma may exhibit behaviors such as withdrawal, fear, or defiance as a result of past traumas; it is within these moments that the true essence of Christian faith and love can be revealed.

Research indicates that having a supportive faith-based community can greatly enhance the fostering and adoption experience.⁶⁹ While many families may feel overwhelmed and discouraged, leading them to discontinue fostering within the first year, those who receive support from religious organizations tend to persevere for longer durations.⁷⁰ Russell Moore underscored that not every believer is necessarily called to engage in specific acts, such as praying outside abortion clinics or adopting children.⁷¹ However, the fundamental Christian principle, as outlined in Matthew 25:40, is that every believer is called to give of himself to help “the least of these.” This commandment inherently includes those in the foster care and adoption community. Instead of merely offering transient gestures, such as a one-time sermon or a

⁶⁸ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 40.

⁶⁹ Adam S. Hodge et al., *The Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations Designed to Support Adoptive and Foster Care Families*. Spirituality in Clinical Practice, (Washington, D.C: American Psychological Association, 2022), 8.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷¹ Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 64.

welcoming basket, foster and adoptive families benefit most from sustained support networks. This entails ongoing assistance, guidance, and compassion from FBOs.⁷²

The mandate to care for “the least of these” is a profound call to action that transcends mere parenthood; it extends to every aspect of community engagement and compassion. While the traditional emphasis within the church has often revolved around recruiting foster or adoptive parents, this approach has inadvertently excluded individuals who may possess a fervent desire to contribute to the cause of foster care and adoption in alternative capacities. According to John DeGarmo, author of *The Church & Foster Care*, the church has primarily focused on recruiting foster or adoptive parents.⁷³ This approach has left no room for those not interested in parenting and fails to acknowledge the myriad ways individuals can make meaningful contributions to the welfare of vulnerable children and families.

The Scripture is clear that believers have all been blessed with unique skills and talents by the grace of God. While some may feel called to open their homes and hearts to foster or adoptive children, others may find their purpose in offering assistance, resources, or emotional support. Studies show the pivotal role of support in the journey of foster and adoptive families. Three fundamental pillars—emotional, informational, and tangible support—are identified as essential components for navigating the complexities of fostering and adoption.⁷⁴

Emotional support provides comfort and a listening ear during times of uncertainty and emotional turmoil. Informational support equips families with the knowledge and resources needed to navigate the intricate legal, logistical, and emotional terrain of foster care and

⁷² Bill Blacchiere, and Kris Faasse, *Called to Care: Opening Your Heart to Vulnerable Children--through Foster Care, Adoption, and Other Life-Giving Ways* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2019), 21.

⁷³ John DeGarmo, *The Church & Foster Care: God's Call to a Growing Epidemic* (1st ed) (Birmingham: New Hope, 2019), 37.

⁷⁴ Hook, Hook, and Berry, *Replanted*, 91.

adoption. Furthermore, tangible support—such as practical assistance, financial resources, or material goods—serves as a tangible expression of love and solidarity. From providing meals and transportation to offering childcare or financial assistance, tangible support addresses the practical needs of foster and adoptive families, alleviating the burdens of daily life and allowing them to focus on nurturing and caring for the children in their care. Just like any challenging circumstance, having a support system can make a significant difference along the way.⁷⁵

Believers are called not only to recognize and celebrate the unique contributions of each member but also to extend a helping hand and a compassionate heart to those in need.

Emotional Support

Fostering and adopting demands a thorough consideration of the immense emotional strain it poses on families, children, and marriages.⁷⁶ Many foster and adoptive parents possess good parenting experience, but it is crucial to acknowledge that this experience might not fully equip individuals for the added complexities involved in nurturing a child dealing with maltreatment, trauma, and the potential loss of a parental relationship.⁷⁷ The emotional toll of nurturing a child who has endured such experiences demands different strategies and understanding. Foster and adoptive families are ministering to children who have substantial needs and require more time, energy, and resources.⁷⁸ While the precise factors contributing to the emotional challenges faced by foster and adopted children remain incompletely understood, the research underscores the transformative impact of empathetic and responsive parenting in aiding these children on their journey toward healing and resilience. However, it has been

⁷⁵ Jeanne Nagle, *Coping With Foster Care* (New York: Rosen, 2020), 84.

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 116.

⁷⁷ Beth Troutman, *Attachment-Informed Parent Coaching* (Cham: Springer, 2022), 141.

⁷⁸ Jenn Ranter Hook, and Joshua N. Hook, *Thriving Families: A Trauma-Informed Guidebook for the Foster and Adoptive Journey* (Harrisonburg: Herald, 2023), 90.

established that empathetic and responsive parenting can go a long way in helping these children overcome their challenges.⁷⁹

It is common for children to struggle to express themselves verbally, especially those who have had challenging early experiences.⁸⁰ These difficulties in self-expression can stem from a variety of factors, including past trauma, attachment disruptions, and developmental delays. As a result, many of these children may struggle to communicate their innermost feelings and experiences. It is estimated that up to 17.1 million children and adolescents in the United States (US) may be diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders before they turn eighteen.⁸¹ These disorders encompass a wide spectrum of conditions, ranging from anxiety and depression to attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For families who choose to foster or adopt, the journey is further complicated by the need to navigate new relationships while simultaneously grappling with the profound complexities of loss and trauma.⁸²

Fostering or adopting a child often involves welcoming them into a new family environment, where they must adjust to unfamiliar surroundings, routines, and expectations. This challenging dynamic is compounded by the fear experienced by these children from prior maltreatment, abandonment, or rejection, which can hinder the establishment of new relationships in their new environment. Children who have experienced neglect or abuse often

⁷⁹ Kathleen Whitten, *Labor of the Heart: A Parent's Guide to the Decisions and Emotions in Adoption* (Lanham: M. Evans, 2008), 39.

⁸⁰ Hollie Rankin, *Guide to Re-Building Trust with Traumatized Children: Emotional Wellbeing in School and at Home* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 43.

⁸¹ Thomas W. Farmer, Maureen A. Conroy, Elizabeth M. Z. Farmer, and Kevin Sutherland, eds., *Handbook of Research on Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Interdisciplinary Developmental Perspectives on Children and Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 23.

⁸² Troutman, *Attachment-Informed Parent Coaching*, 14.

disconnect from the intense emotions associated with the trauma.⁸³ This emotional disconnection serves as a defense mechanism, shielding them from the distressing memories and sensations linked to their past trauma. Gillian Shotton underscored that these children often avoid expressing their emotions due to the fear of damaging the relationships they have formed.⁸⁴ This disconnection might manifest as trust issues, disruptive behaviors, or a lack of responsiveness toward the families attempting to provide assistance.⁸⁵

Clinicians are increasingly aware that children born to parents with mental health disorders may have difficulties with early attachment and may develop other mental health issues.⁸⁶ Consequently, foster and adoptive families often encounter challenges interpreting a child's emotional disconnect, which might mistakenly be perceived as rejection. Foster and adoptive families, while motivated by compassion and a desire to provide a loving and stable home for these children, may find themselves navigating unfamiliar territory when attempting to interpret and respond to their child's emotional disconnect. What might initially appear as rejection or indifference from the child may, in fact, be a manifestation of underlying trauma, attachment insecurities, or unmet emotional needs stemming from their early experiences.⁸⁷

Foster families encounter numerous uncertainties related to the child's placement and the potential reunification with their birth family.⁸⁸ Reunification often embodies the central hope of foster care.⁸⁹ For this reason, the court often times mandates weekly parent-child visits for the children in foster care. The literature on parent-child visits sheds light on its impact on placement

⁸³ Gillian Shotton, *A Session by Session Guide to Life Story Work: A Practical Resource to Use with Looked after or Adopted Children* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 147.

⁸⁴ Elaine Schulte, and Robin Michaelson, *Caring for Your Adopted Child: An Essential Guide for Parents* (Chicago: American Academy of Pediatrics, 2018), 171.

⁸⁵ Trejos-Castillo and Trevino-Schafer, *Handbook of Foster Youth*, 7.

⁸⁶ Roy, *A For Adoption*, 5.

⁸⁷ Petersen, *Fostered*, 81.

⁸⁸ DeGarmo, *The Church & Foster Care*, 22.

⁸⁹ Nagle, *Coping With Foster Care*, 37.

duration, child behavior, and attachment. Research suggests that children exhibit significantly less disruptive behaviors, have lower levels of depression, and are more likely to be reunited with parents who consistently attend visits following the recommended plan.⁹⁰

Conversely, when a parent fails to appear for scheduled visits, it inflicts emotional distress upon the children, sparking feelings of unworthiness, betrayal, anger, and sadness. Children may exhibit behavioral issues, have difficulty settling down, and have trouble finding comfort.⁹¹ The absence of expected parental visits can intensify feelings of insecurity and disrupt the child's emotional well-being, complicating their adjustment within the foster family relationship. Given these challenges, many foster parents express apprehensions regarding their ability to manage the emotional stress arising from these complex situations.⁹²

Informational Support

Navigating the legal framework surrounding the foster care system is necessary in order to effectively care for vulnerable children. Foster carers operate within a highly regulated environment governed by laws, rules, regulations, and guidance that dictate their responsibilities and obligations as caregivers.⁹³ These legal provisions encompass various aspects, including regulations governing the foster care agency, child welfare laws pertaining to the children under their care, and potential involvement in the criminal justice system in certain situations. Having a good understanding of the legal system is essential for foster families to navigate complexities.

Foster and adoptive families face substantial uncertainty when considering taking a child into their care.⁹⁴ Often, they are confronted with the difficult decision of whether to take a child

⁹⁰ Ande Nesmith, "Factors Influencing the Regularity of Parental Visits with Children in Foster Care," *Child & Adolescent Social Work Journal* 32, no. 3 (2015): 218.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁹² Blacquiere, and Faasse, *Called to Care*, 40.

⁹³ Lynn Davis, *A Practical Guide to Fostering Law Fostering Regulations, Child Care Law and the Youth Justice System* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2010), 13.

⁹⁴ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 22.

into their home with very little information. Typically, they are given only a general description of the family scenario and a one-page medical report; if that information is accurate, they must decide within a few hours whether to bring this child into their home. This can be an extremely stressful situation for even the most resilient parents.⁹⁵

Children who enter these families may have experienced abuse or neglect, which can cause severe reactions to certain situations.⁹⁶ These issues surface in the vast majority of children in the foster care system.⁹⁷ A basic understanding of trauma, attachment, and sensory processing is crucial for foster and adoptive families to provide adequate support to the children and families under their care. Without this knowledge, it becomes challenging to comprehend the needs of the children and families and provide the necessary support.⁹⁸ Informational and educational sessions covering a range of subjects relevant to adoptive and foster care families are crucial to ensure a smooth process of caring for children. These topics include parenting children with traumatic backgrounds, managing sensory processing challenges, navigating transracial family dynamics, and understanding openness in adoption.

Foster and adoptive families should guide children through discussions about adoption in the context of their life journey.⁹⁹ When discussing adoption and permanence, children should have an understanding of why they are looked after away from home, in line with their stage of development. This can be a challenging task, but it is undoubtedly necessary for every child to learn the truth about their past and communicate with compassion and sensitivity.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁵ Whitten, *Labor of the Heart*, 1.

⁹⁶ Troutman, *Attachment-Informed Parent Coaching*, 152.

⁹⁷ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 33.

⁹⁸ Hook, and Hook, *Thriving Families*, 18.

⁹⁹ Audrey Tait, and Becky Dunn, *Conversation Starters for Direct Work with Children and Young People: Guidance and Activities for Talking about Difficult Subjects* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2018), 106.

¹⁰⁰ Betsy Keefer Smalley, and Jayne E. Schooler, *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2000).

literature on discussing adoption with foster and adoptive children highlights the importance of timing, honesty, affirming language, sensitivity, and support as children navigate their emotions and histories. Elaine Schulte and Robin Michaelson pointed out that adoption is part of life throughout life.¹⁰¹ Therefore, it is necessary that foster and adoptive parents prepare themselves on how they will talk about adoption at different stages and ages. Children need to understand that they came into the world the same way as everyone else; otherwise, they might develop fears and insecurities. Kathleen L. Witten underlined that adoption is a positive way of building families and should not be a stressful topic for adoptive parents who have been adequately prepared.¹⁰² Regardless of openness levels, adoptive children express curiosity about their birth families.¹⁰³

Tangible Support

The literature underscores the critical importance of tangible support for foster and adoptive families, emphasizing various forms of assistance that go beyond emotional and informational support. Tangible support encompasses a wide range of practical resources and aid aimed at alleviating the financial burdens and everyday challenges faced by foster and adoptive families. There are several key aspects of tangible support for foster and adoptive families, encompassing financial aid, provisions like groceries and clothing, babysitting, and the role of community involvement.¹⁰⁴

Financial aid is a central component of tangible support. Devoting a part of one's financial resources is seen as a form of worship for believers, presenting opportunities to impact children's lives through various means, such as supporting orphan ministries or sponsoring a

¹⁰¹ Schulte, and Michaelson, *Caring for Your Adopted Child*, 174.

¹⁰² Whitten, *Labor of the Heart*, 22.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁴ DeGarmo, *The Church & Foster Care*, 60.

child.¹⁰⁵ Financial assistance can come in various forms, such as stipends, subsidies, or grants, designed to offset the financial strain associated with parenting children from foster care or adoption.

Additionally, provisions like groceries, clothing, baby items, beds, shoes, and other essential items are also crucial forms of tangible support. Community organizations, religious institutions, and charitable initiatives often play a vital role in providing these tangible resources to families in need.

Babysitting services represent another aspect of tangible support that can significantly benefit foster and adoptive families. Respite care, temporary relief, and childcare assistance enable parents to take breaks, attend to personal needs, or manage other responsibilities while ensuring that their children receive proper care and supervision.¹⁰⁶

Community involvement is also highlighted as a key element of tangible support for foster and adoptive families. When communities come together to support these families, they create a network of assistance that enhances the overall well-being of children and caregivers alike.

Separation Issues

The painful effects of separation are experienced throughout the entire spectrum of child welfare social work, affecting not only the children directly involved but also their families, social workers, foster parents, and adoptive parents. These emotional and psychological impacts permeate every facet of the child welfare system, leaving a lasting imprint on all those touched by its complexities.

¹⁰⁵ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 241.

¹⁰⁶ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 243.

The trauma of separation can manifest in a myriad of ways. For children, the experience of separation and loss can be particularly devastating, disrupting their sense of security, stability, and identity.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, the families of these children are not immune to the profound effects of separation and loss. Biological parents may grapple with feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy as they confront the circumstances that led to the removal of their children. Social workers tasked with the delicate responsibility of facilitating these transitions often experience a profound sense of empathy and responsibility for the well-being of the children under their care, bearing the weight of their stories and struggles. Foster parents and adoptive parents also navigate their own emotional journey as they open their hearts and homes to children in need. While motivated by a desire to provide love, stability, and support, they, too, must confront the inherent challenges of attachment, trust-building, and healing in the aftermath of separation and loss.

Identifying the underlying reasons for separation is crucial. Various resources outline the primary types of behavior that can warrant separation: neglect, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and other criminal behavior.¹⁰⁸ Foster care then involves providing twenty-four-hour temporary substitute care for children who have been removed from their biological parents, families, or guardians by government agencies due to these various reasons.¹⁰⁹ Even when these separations are warranted, they can inflict severe trauma on the children involved.¹¹⁰

Trauma refers to highly distressing events that can have lasting emotional effects.¹¹¹ Trauma can refer to physical harm, such as an injury or assault, or emotional harm, such as abuse

¹⁰⁷ Silverstein and Smith, *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care*, 85.

¹⁰⁸ Barnardos and National Childhood Network, *Protecting Children: A Child Protection Guide for Early Years and School Age Childcare Services* (Dublin: Christchurch Square, 2018), 7.

¹⁰⁹ Trejos-Castillo, and Trevino-Schafer, *Handbook of Foster Youth*, 20.

¹¹⁰ Andrew L Fitz-Gibbon and Jane Fitz-Gibbon, *Nurturing Strangers: Strategies for Nonviolent Re-Parenting of Children in Foster Care* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 26.

¹¹¹ Nagle, *Coping With Foster Care*, 64.

or neglect. Trauma can also be the result of experiencing or witnessing a distressing event, such as a violent crime. Regardless of the source, trauma has the potential to cause long-term effects on a person's physical and emotional health and can lead to conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹¹² According to studies, it is not uncommon for foster children to develop PTSD. A 2005 study by Harvard Medical School found that children who had been in the foster care system were more likely to suffer from PTSD compared to US military veterans.¹¹³ Some children may not experience long-term negative effects of a traumatic event, while others may experience dramatic long-term effects.¹¹⁴

Child Identity and Self-Esteem

Although foster care and adoption are intended to protect children from abusive and harmful situations, they can often have negative effects. Being subjected to hurt, mistreatment, and separation can significantly damage a child's self-esteem, causing them to feel unworthy of love and care, particularly if they did not receive these things from their biological parents.¹¹⁵ The task of discovering one's true identity without the guidance of biological parents is challenging.¹¹⁶ The absence of preserved meaningful memories implies a lack of love, care, or recognition. This can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and amplify pre-existing sentiments of rejection.¹¹⁷

In many cases, children in foster care, through their history of abuse and neglect and due to their search for affection and belonging, tragically find themselves vulnerable to sexual

¹¹² Hook, and Hook, *Thriving Families*, 50.

¹¹³ Nagle, *Coping With Foster Care*, 64.

¹¹⁴ Hook and Hook, *Thriving*, 52.

¹¹⁵ Nagle, *Coping With Foster Care*, 61.

¹¹⁶ Roy, *A for Adoption*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Shotton, *A Session by Session Guide to Life Story Work*, 6.

exploitation.¹¹⁸ In a report by the California Child Welfare Council, it was found that 50% to 80% of victims of commercial sexual exploitation, including child sex trafficking, had a history of involvement with child welfare.¹¹⁹ The most effective approach to combat the foster care sex trafficking pipeline is through the church providing a support structure to give those children an identity in Christ.¹²⁰

Another common theme in the research literature was promoting cultural diversity within foster and adoptive families.¹²¹ The literature highlights the contrasting experiences of children who have learned to embrace their individual identity over their national identity.¹²² Secure adoptees exhibit confidence in their appearance when their birth and adoptive cultures are integrated. In contrast, insecure adoptees struggle with comments about their appearance, holding tightly to their birth culture while feeling disconnected from the adoptive one. This dichotomy illustrates the importance of secure identity and self-esteem.

Theological Foundations

Foster care and adoption represent two contrasting experiences. First, foster care and adoption is an experience of rejection, of not belonging in the world where one begins, of being disconnected, separated from origins, and denied the basic rights of birth. Second, foster care and adoption signifies being received, embraced, accepted, and welcomed by others. Adoption means being given a new name, a new status, and a new place in the world.¹²³ This section aims to

¹¹⁸ DeGarmo, *The Church & Foster Care: God's Call to a Growing Epidemic*, 29.

¹¹⁹ Trejos-Castillo and Trevino-Schafer, *Handbook of Foster Youth*, 362.

¹²⁰ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 164.

¹²¹ Hackenesch, *Adoption Across Race and Nation*, 175.

¹²² Jane Jeong Trenka, Julia Chinyere Oparah, and Sun Yung Shin, *Outsiders Within: Writing on Transracial Adoption* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021), 255.

¹²³ Ronald J. Nydam, "Adoption and the Image of God," *Journal of Pastoral Care*, no. 3 (1992): 247–260.

explore how the experiences and emotions associated with foster care and adoption are shaped by one's understanding of God from a theological perspective.

Not every believer is called to foster or adopt a child, but every believer has a responsibility to help care for children in some way.¹²⁴ Caring for vulnerable children is a consistent theme woven throughout the narrative of the Bible.¹²⁵ Whether it is God's miraculous provision for vulnerable children or the scriptural plan that existed inside family and governmental structures, God intends His people to provide families and children with tangible, educational, relational, and spiritual support. Beginning with Moses and the giving of the Law, God commanded his people to show careful treatment toward children who became fatherless (Exod 22:22-24). Continuing with the prophets, God told Isaiah that Israel should act compassionately toward the known needs of vulnerable children (Isa 1:17). Finally, the instruction extended to the church was that the demonstration of true religion would include caring for vulnerable children and their families (Jas 1:27).¹²⁶ According to the scriptures, it is clear that God desires His followers to take care of those who are vulnerable.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a biblical and theological foundation to support the claim that every Christian should be involved in caring for vulnerable children. The objective is to examine critical passages from the Bible that will highlight the connection between faith and action, emphasizing the biblical mandate to extend support, compassion, and care to those in need.

¹²⁴ Russell D Moore, "Abba Changes Everything: Why Every Christian Is Called to Rescue Orphans," *Christianity Today* 54, no. 7 (2010): 22.

¹²⁵ Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 28.

¹²⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 11–22.

Foster Care and the Image of God

When constructing a home, the foundation is paramount. Without a solid foundation, the structure is vulnerable to instability and collapse, regardless of how well-designed the upper levels may be. In matters of faith and culture, a strong foundation is crucial for long-lasting impact. Imagine laying the groundwork for a house on unstable soil. Even if the walls are built with the finest materials and craftsmanship, the structure will eventually fall without a secure foundation. Likewise, in our foster and adoption endeavors, addressing issues like abuse, neglect, separation, injustice, and moral decay requires a firm moral and spiritual base.

How do these concepts connect to faith, vocation, and culture? Here's the connection: Our society upholds essential values, such as equality, generosity, kindness, and virtue, while condemning injustices like racism, sexism, and human trafficking. These values are foundational layers that contribute to a just and ethical society. Our world has both great and not-so-great instincts, but at its best, our culture values human dignity deeply. Christianity forms the foundation for human dignity, providing consistency and support for all other layers. The Christian belief is that humans possess inherent dignity by being created in God's image.

When reading the scriptures, it is remarkable to find that people are the objects of God's great mercy. God's creative work in Genesis 1–2 climaxes with the creation of humanity, who were made in the image of God.¹²⁷ In Genesis 1, the Bible says, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female create he them” (Gen. 1:26-27, KJV). This statement is a distinctive tenet specific to the Christian belief system.¹²⁸ This verse has numerous implications,

¹²⁷ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 21.

¹²⁸ George Hobson, *Imago Dei: Man/Woman Created in the Image of God: Implications for Theology, Pastoral Care, Eucharist, Apologetics, Aesthetics* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 47.

but the foundational truth is that humans are made in God's image. The secular worldview posits that humans are the product of an aimless, evolutionary process, and therefore, each individual does not have any inherent purpose. Conversely, the Bible teaches us that all people are made in the image of God and that He longs for a personal relationship with them.¹²⁹

The scripture teaches that all of creation displays God's design, power, and goodness, but only humans are made in the likeness of God, the *imago Dei*.¹³⁰ The way Genesis 1 is structured emphasizes that humans are not an afterthought or a random occurrence, but rather, they are the highest point of God's creation. As such, they are entrusted with the responsibility to rule and care for the rest of God's world.¹³¹ Unlike plants and animals, humans are not made "after their kind" but instead have been created in the image of God, which means they share some of God's characteristics, although imperfectly. These qualities include spiritual understanding, intelligence, knowledge, creativity, compassion, and justice.¹³²

What does it mean to say humans are "made in God's image"? Clarifying what it means to bear the image of God involves dispelling certain misconceptions. It is crucial to understand that the concept of being made in the image of God does not imply that God merely resembles humans on a larger scale. This misconception is often reflected in portrayals of God as the "man upstairs." Additionally, being made in the image of God does not suggest that humans possess

¹²⁹ J. Alan Branch, *Affirming God's Image: Addressing the Transgender Question with Science and Scripture* (Ashland: Lexham, 2019), 28.

¹³⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word, 1987), 1–29.

¹³¹ Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 126.

¹³² Allen Ross and John N. Oswalt, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Genesis, Exodus* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2008), 39.

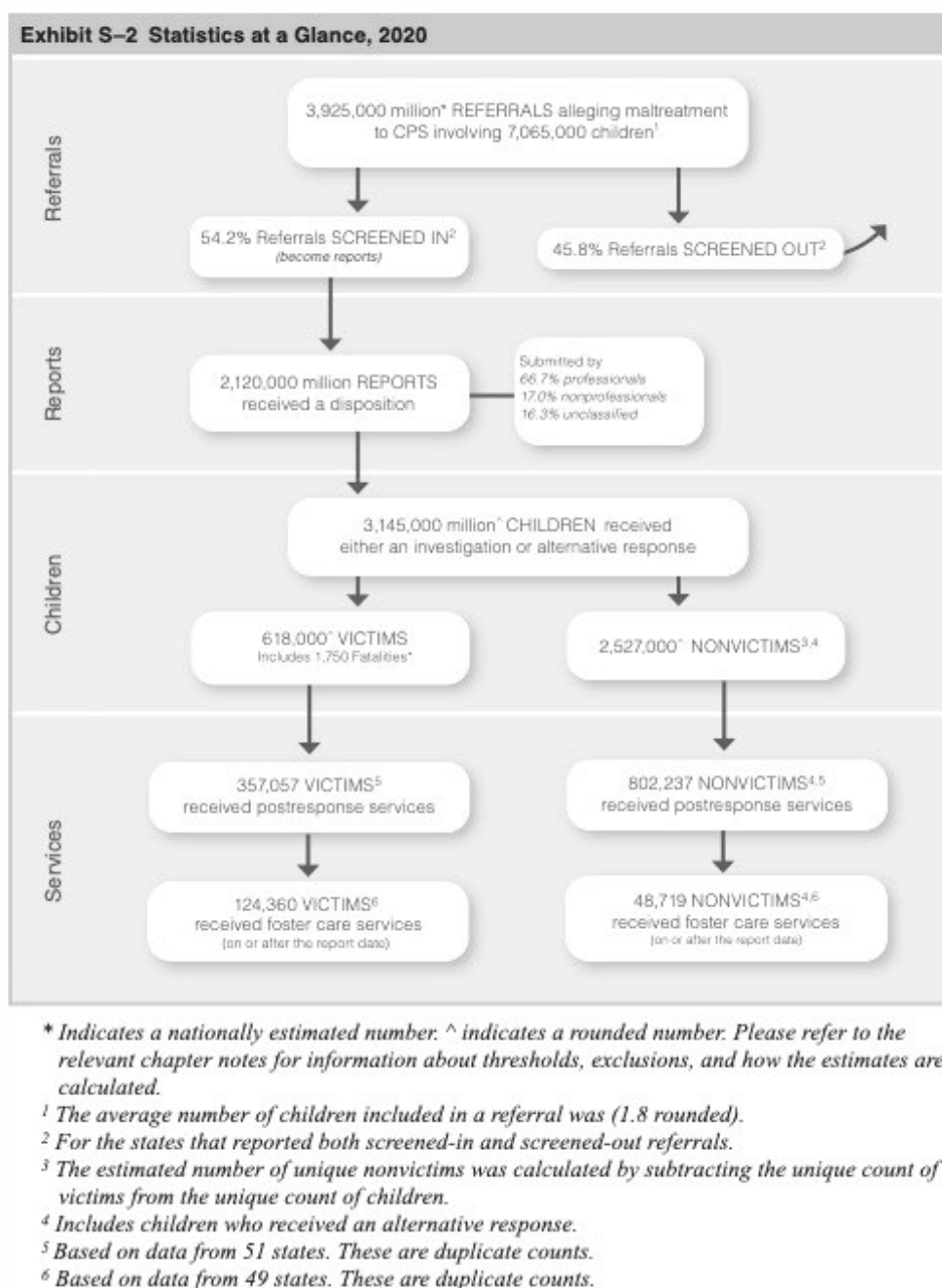


Figure 3. Child Maltreatment Cases, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020.

divine qualities and can aspire to attain godhood in the future.¹³³ The first is a belief that is

understood as anthropomorphism. This belief leads to a view of God that diminishes his sovereignty and holiness, presenting God as having human limitations and needs.¹³⁴ The second leads to an idolatrous overestimation of man's potential, seen in certain forms of pantheism or New Age spirituality.¹³⁵

With misconceptions out of the way, the expression “the image of God” reveals the uniqueness of humanity compared to everything else in creation.¹³⁶ The phrase, “Let us make man,” highlights the intimacy with which God created humanity.¹³⁷ The phrase, “male and female created them,” highlights the distinction between male and female, which is fundamental to what it means to be human.¹³⁸

A final insight from Genesis 1 is that when God saw everything He had made, He noted that it was “very good” (Gen 1:31, KJV). The phrase, “very good,” means the embodiment of goodness, wholesomeness, and beauty.¹³⁹ “Very good” suggests that everything was made fit for its purpose. Since people are made in the image of God, they possess purpose, dignity, value, and worth (notwithstanding the fall of man in sin; see below, *Foster Care and the Problem of Sin*).

The understanding of humanity, being made in the image of God, provides the foundation for foster care and adoption strategies that seek to restore dignity to children everywhere. These ministries are willing to provide care and support to children born addicted to methamphetamine, cocaine, or fetal alcohol syndrome. The ministries are also ready to meet the significant needs of

¹³⁴ Gabriella Airenti, Marco Cruciani, Gabriella Airenti, Marco Cruciani, and Alessio Plebe, *The Cognitive Underpinnings of Anthropomorphism* (Lausanne, Frontiers Media, 2019), 49.

¹³⁵ Richard Hardack, *Not Altogether Human: Pantheism and the Dark Nature of the American Renaissance* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 16.

¹³⁶ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2001), 65.

¹³⁷ Richard M. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality from the Beginning: Genesis 1–2,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26, no.1 (1988): 5–24.

¹³⁸ Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex* (New York: Lutherworth, 1964), 7.

¹³⁹ Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 345–346.

young adults who have suffered years of neglect, abuse, or abandonment. This is because they recognize the purpose, dignity, worth, and value inherent in every human life. As image bearers of God, humans are relational beings, and foster and adoptive ministries do the challenging task of helping children form healthy relationships in traumatic circumstances.

Foster Care and the Problem of Sin

The problem of humanity, then, is that 'the image of God,' imprinted on every human being, has been shattered by sin. Genesis 2 describes the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, which led to the distortion of that divine image. As J. I. Packer notes, "Sin has marred the image of God in which man was made, leaving him in a state of spiritual ruin."¹⁴⁰ This profound disfigurement affects every aspect of human life, necessitating redemption and restoration through Christ. The Baptist Faith and Message says:

At first, man was innocent and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice, man sinned against God and brought sin to the human race. Through Satan's temptation, man transgressed God's commandment and fell from his original innocence, so his posterity inherits a nature and an environment inclined towards sin. Therefore, as soon as they can act morally, they become transgressors and are under condemnation.¹⁴¹

Children may indeed find themselves in traumatic situations due to a variety of reasons. However, regardless of the specific cause, one thing that remains certain is that the root cause of all such traumatic experiences is sin. Sin leads to the suffering and harm of innocent children, who are often the most vulnerable members of society.

According to the Bible, since the fall of man, everyone who has ever lived has sinned (Rom 3:23), and the result of sin is death (Rom 6:23). Everyone is in need of God's saving

¹⁴⁰ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 68.

¹⁴¹ Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention, 1971), 45.

righteousness because everyone has broken His law.¹⁴² The phrase in Romans 3:23 says that sin has caused humanity to come “short of the glory of God.” The word, *the glory of God*, refers to the state Adam enjoyed at his creation but lost in his fall because of his sin.¹⁴³ Sin creates separation between a Holy God and His creation.

Paul then explains in Romans 6:23 that the “wages of sin are death.” The word *wage* signifies the pay that someone would receive.¹⁴⁴ Sin pays out in death. Sin is the ultimate source of all misery. Sin leads to negative attitudes and behaviors, such as loneliness, guilt, shame, hatred, greed, selfishness, pride, envy, anger, and so many more, a list too long to mention here. The results of sin are destructive, devastating, and hurtful. Sin leads to failure in the relationship between man and God, but also a failure in the relationship between man and humanity.

The social impact of sin is devastating. God has entrusted parents with the responsibility of caring for children, so they have a moral responsibility to protect, feed, care for, and love their children (Eph 6:4, Prov 22:6, Deut 6:7, Titus 2:4–5, Matt 18:10).¹⁴⁵ There is a general sense in which God has given moral responsibility to adults. Every good authority mirrors God's character, while every corrupt authority distorts the truth about God and His nature to children.¹⁴⁶ When any adult abuses a child, it is a violation of the moral responsibility entrusted to adults and is, therefore, a sin. Mohler rightly puts it, “Such an act is not only a betrayal of trust but is fundamentally a sin against the innocence and dignity of the child.”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Ada: Baker Academic, 2018), 206.

¹⁴³ Schreiner, *Romans*, 207.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁴⁵ Deepak Reju, *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* (Greensboro: New Growth, 2014), 14.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Albert Mohler, *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 142.

Sin can destroy lives through a vicious cycle of personal tragedy, which can often be seen in the cycle of foster care. Adults who engage in child abuse and neglect often struggle to effectively manage their own lives, leaving them ill-equipped to provide adequate care for children.¹⁴⁸ As those children grow up, they may perpetuate the cycle of abuse by mistreating others, thereby perpetuating the harmful cycle. The cyclical nature of abuse is one of the more troubling aspects that makes it all the more important for it to be ended quickly. Intervening to prevent abuse in one child's life can potentially break the cycle, sparing numerous future generations from experiencing similar trauma.

Child abuse is a sin and is a tragic consequence of sinful humanity.¹⁴⁹ Unfortunately, a considerable number of children are subjected to abuse and neglect. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that in 2020, over 600,000 children across the United States were documented victims of abuse or neglect.¹⁵⁰ The abuse, mistreatment, and neglect of children are actions that go against everything Christians are to represent (Psa 127:3–5). The Lord considers abuse an abomination (Matt 18:6, Mark 9:42, Luke 17:2).

Christians must come to know the definitions and ramifications of child abuse and neglect. The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) defines abuse to be at a minimum:

- any recent act or failure to act on the part of a parent or caretaker which results in death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or
- an act or failure to act which presents an imminent risk of serious harm.

CAPTA defines child sexual abuse as:

¹⁴⁸ Kathleen K. Reardon, and Christopher T. Noblet, *Childhood Denied: Ending the Nightmare of Child Abuse and Neglect* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2009), 1-38.

¹⁴⁹ Oliver L. North and David Goetsch, *Tragic Consequences: The Price America is Paying for Rejecting God* (Jarrell: Fidelis, 2020), 59.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. (2022), accessed March 6, 2024 <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/data-research/child-maltreatment>.

- the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct.
- the rape, and in cases of caretaker or familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children.¹⁵¹

The existence of such acts underscores the reality of the sinful nature inherent in humanity. As Mohler points out, “The tragic reality of child abuse highlights the deep-seated sinfulness inherent in humanity. It is one of the most grievous of human failings, as it not only shatters the trust placed in those who are meant to protect, but it also inflicts profound and lasting harm on the most vulnerable members of society.”¹⁵² Among all the dysfunctions in human relationships, child abuse is one of the worst because it victimizes the most vulnerable individuals and is often perpetrated by those entrusted with their safety.

Abuse of any kind—physical, emotional, verbal, or sexual—is a sin. The scripture condemns those who are given to anger. (Prov 22:24–25, 29:22; Ecc 7:9). The qualifications for spiritual leadership in the New Testament include having self-control, being gentle, and not being violent (1 Tim 3:1–7). The apostle Paul exhorts, “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Col 3:21, KJV). Elsewhere, he says, “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath” (Eph 6:4). In light of the biblical teachings urging believers to embody gentleness, self-control, and love, the concept of child abuse could not be more antithetical to the character traits God encourages His followers to exhibit.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway, “*Definitions of Child Abuse & Neglect*,” accessed March 6, 2024, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/can/defining/>.

¹⁵² Albert Mohler, *Culture Shift: The Battle for the Moral Heart of America* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2008), 83.

¹⁵³ Reju, *On Guard*, 14.

Unfortunately, child abuse is nothing new. Abuse and neglect have existed since ancient times; several examples are recorded in the Bible. While the Bible does not explicitly use the term, *child abuse*, there are instances of abuse and neglect recorded in its narratives. The experiences of these individuals will be explored to demonstrate that the effects of child abuse and neglect in biblical times were as equally devastating as in modern times.

The Story of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:8–21)

The story of Hagar and Ishmael begins in Genesis, chapter 16, and runs through chapter 21. Hagar was an Egyptian slave belonging to Sarah, Abraham's wife (Gen 16:1–3). Sarah was barren and unable to conceive, so she gave Hagar to Abraham as a wife to bear him children. Hagar became pregnant and gave birth to Ishmael (Gen 16:4). Tensions arose between Sarah and Hagar after Ishmael was born. Sarah mistreated Hagar, leading Hagar to flee into the desert (Gen. 16:6–7). There, an angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar, instructed her to return to Sarah, and promised her that her descendants, through Ishmael, would be numerous (Gen 16:9-10).

Hagar's encounter with God transforms her identity. She is no longer just a slave but an heir to God's promise. She calls the Lord "the God Who Sees" (Gen 16:13). Hagar learns that God listens to the cries of those who suffer abuse. Hagar and Ishmael return to Abraham and Sarah's household with a different perspective.

When Hagar and Ishmael returned, they continued to face difficulties. She and Sarah were never amicable. The environment was incredibly hostile. Even after Isaac, the son of Sarah and Abraham, was born, tensions between Sarah and Hagar continued to escalate. She and Sarah had a complicated relationship, and the environment was highly antagonistic (Gen 21:8-10). This time, Sarah demanded that Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael, fearing that Ishmael would inherit alongside Isaac. Reluctantly, Abraham complied, sending Hagar and Ishmael away.

While in the desert, Hagar and Ishmael faced dire circumstances. They wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba, running out of water and fearing for their lives. In a moment of despair, Hagar placed Ishmael under a bush.¹⁵⁴ She distanced herself, unable to bear seeing her son die (Gen 21:19). Hagar's cry was full of desperation and hopelessness, but her son's voice, not hers, was heard (Gen 21).¹⁵⁵ The Lord intervened in the middle of this difficult situation on behalf of the child (Gen 21:17). God gives them not only a promise but practical provision, water (Gen 21:19). This serves as an example of how believers intervene on behalf of those who have diminishing supplies and are vulnerable children.

Although Hagar's story unfolds in a distant historical context, it nonetheless offers valuable insights that resonate with the contemporary understanding of abuse and abandonment. First, it is important to recognize that anyone can inflict great hurt. Even the patriarchs of the Old Testament were not above sin. Second, often, abuse comes from those who are closest to the individual. The majority (seventy-seven percent) of perpetrators of abuse are a parent of their victim.¹⁵⁶ Third, positive outcomes from the emotional pain of abuse take time. Healing from the scars of abuse is not a linear process; instead, healing involves a journey of emotional, psychological, and spiritual growth that unfolds gradually. Just as wounds take time to heal physically, emotional wounds from abuse require patience. Fourth, victims of abuse need practical solutions to the problems they face. Many victims of abuse are in immediate danger and need practical solutions to ensure their safety. This is why foster families are crucial; they offer immediate comfort and stability to children in crisis.

¹⁵⁴ Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), 196.

¹⁵⁵ Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2019), 153.

¹⁵⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, *Child Maltreatment 2021* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2023), 24.

The Story of Joseph (Gen 37)

Another biblical story that illustrates the detrimental impact of abuse, trauma, and neglect on children is the account of Joseph in the book of Genesis. As a young boy, Joseph was favored by his father, Jacob, which created resentment among his brothers (Gen 37:3–4). This sibling rivalry culminated in Joseph being sold into slavery by his own brothers and taken to Egypt. This sudden and traumatic separation from his family, coupled with the betrayal and abandonment he experienced, undoubtedly had a profound impact on Joseph. At least one of his brothers felt remorse, guilt, and loss as a result of what was done.¹⁵⁷

Throughout his time in Egypt, Joseph faced numerous challenges, including false accusations, imprisonment, and abandonment. These experiences further compounded the trauma he had endured. The inconsistency of his circumstances, from being favored by his father to being cast into slavery and imprisonment, would have undoubtedly affected Joseph's sense of security. Joseph ultimately rose to power and influence in Egypt, demonstrating resilience and strength in the face of adversity. However, the effects of his early trauma lingered, as evidenced by his emotional reaction when he was reunited with his brothers years later; nothing could be more natural.¹⁵⁸

The story of Joseph serves as a poignant reminder of the long-lasting impact of trauma and inconsistency on children's development. It underscores the importance of providing children with a safe, stable, nurturing environment to support children's healthy development and resilience. Allender notes, "Joseph's resilience was remarkable, yet his story also highlights

¹⁵⁷ Arnold, *Genesis*, 321.

¹⁵⁸ Kidner, *Genesis*, 217.

the critical need for a nurturing and stable environment to foster healthy growth and emotional well-being in children.”¹⁵⁹

Understanding the destructive nature of sin provides insight into why so many children need loving homes. These children have often been through traumatic experiences, which can exacerbate their already fragile sense of self. Because of sin and humanity’s sinful nature, there will always be foster children, orphans, and vulnerable children.

Foster Care and the Gospel

The relationship between God and His people has been described in a variety of ways throughout the scriptures: a Shepherd and flock (Psa 23, Isa. 40:11), the Bridegroom and Bride (Hos 2:19–20, Eph 5:25–27), the Vine and Branches (Isa 5:1–7, John 15:1–8) each expression is rich in meaning. Of all the authors in Scripture, Paul is the most descriptive.¹⁶⁰ He uses terms like *redemption* (Gal 3:14), *election* (2 Thess 2:13–14), and *justification* (Rom 3:24). In addition, he introduces the term *adoption*. (Gal 4:5; Rom 8:14; 23; Rom 9:4; Eph 1:5). He is the only New or Old Testament writer to use this particular term; it does not appear anywhere else in the scriptures.

Adoption is one of the most impactful doctrines.¹⁶¹ Adoption informs the understanding of the believer’s relationship with God, which is seen in viewing God as a Father and believers as His children. Adoption confirms the believer’s justification.¹⁶² A judge can acquit, but only a

¹⁵⁹ Dan B. Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 47.

¹⁶⁰ Trevor J. Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 18.

¹⁶¹ John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1871/1990), 275.

¹⁶² R.L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), 627.

father can adopt.¹⁶³ The Westminster Confession says that adoption is to receive God's name and access to His throne, protection, provision, and promise, never to abandon.¹⁶⁴

The biblical use of the word *adoption* is comprised of two words: son and placed.¹⁶⁵ The term *son* represents the idea of identity or an individual. The term, *placed*, suggests the idea of inheritance or belonging. In ancient cultures, being a son carried significant privileges, including the right to inherit the father's estate and carry on the family name.

The concept of adoption in the Roman world is much different than the modern idea of adoption. Today, adoption is thought of as an action. A father “adopts” a son. The family “adopts” a baby. The child is an outsider prior to adoption and a son after adoption. The attention often centers around the actions of the adoptive family. Adoption, however, is not merely an action; it is a multifaceted emotional journey that profoundly impacts the lives of everyone involved. It requires navigating legal frameworks, emotional attachments, grief and loss, identity formation, and the complexities of family dynamics.

Adoption in the biblical perspective is not just a specific action but a position conferred upon an individual. Biblically, adoption is the “placing as a son.” The emphasis differs from modern times in that sons were not adopted but received the adoption (Gal 4:1–7). Adopting a son is not about simply adding a child to a family. It is, however, about providing a family for a child.¹⁶⁶ Adoption, in this sense, refers to recognizing an individual as a full-fledged family member with all the rights, privileges, inheritance, and identity that come with that status.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Joel R. Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) 21.

¹⁶⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, with an introduction by John Macpherson (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2020) 10–20.

¹⁶⁵ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 19.

¹⁶⁶ James M Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of Huiiothesia in the Pauline Corpus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019) 9.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Viewing adoption in this light reveals that it is not merely a human endeavor but a reflection of God's heart. Adoption is not just a theological concept or a legal transaction; it is God's gracious promise of providing a family for sinners.¹⁶⁸ This provision brings a spiritual transformation and shapes the believer's identity as God's child. Biblically, adoption is not just about growing a family; it is about giving a family.

God has adopted those who believe in Jesus.¹⁶⁹ Through adoption, believers are elevated to a position of full privilege and identity. While regeneration pertains to a change in nature (2 Cor 5:17), justification pertains to a change in standing (Rom 5:1), and sanctification pertains to a change in character (1 Thess 4:3). Adoption pertains to a change in position (Rom 9).¹⁷⁰ According to Paul, the chief advantages of this adoption position are possession of the Holy Spirit, (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15), a personal relationship with God as Father (Rom 8:15), deliverance from the law (Gal 4:3–5), and freedom from fear (Rom 8:15).

The doctrine of adoption not only has significant theological implications but has strengthened Christians throughout some of the most challenging circumstances. As slaves in America endured the harsh realities of bondage and sometimes risked their lives in pursuit of freedom, they viewed God not only as their sovereign Lord but also as their compassionate Father who would assist them in their escape from bondage.¹⁷¹ During periods of persecution and adversity, believers have relied on their identity as heirs of God's kingdom to use even their death to bring glory to Himself.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1994), 736.

¹⁶⁹ Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 205.

¹⁷⁰ Beeke, *Heirs with Christ*, 19.

¹⁷¹ Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 305.

¹⁷² Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 43.

The doctrine of adoption reveals the profound spiritual truth that God has graciously provided incalculable blessings to believers. Paul emphasizes four positions accompanying adoption, which Christians inherited through Jesus Christ's redemptive work. These positions of privilege and blessing underscore the transformative power of adoption in the lives of believers, shaping their identity and destiny as children of God.

The Status of Adoption

In Romans 8:14, Paul reaches a pivotal point in his letter, writing, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14, KJV). After meticulously laying out the human condition marked by sinfulness and the inability to meet the demands of the law, Paul introduces the reality of God's grace through adoption.¹⁷³ He describes Christians as “sons of God” (Rom 8:14), adopted sons (Rom 8:15), “children of God” (Rom 8:16), and “heirs of God” (Rom 8:17). The Christians new status is described as adoption, a familial and intimate relationship with God. In other words, to be a Christian is to be adopted.¹⁷⁴ A Christian has been graciously brought into God's family through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ—His life, death, burial, and resurrection.¹⁷⁵ In Ephesians, Paul says, “He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will” (Eph 1:5, KJV).

God's adoption is driven solely by His grace and love for mankind, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (1 John 3:1, KJV). God chose to adopt people into His family by His own decision. While human

¹⁷³ Douglas J Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 468.

¹⁷⁴ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 22–23.

¹⁷⁵ John Stott, *Romans: Encountering the Gospel's Power* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2020), 59.

parents may adopt someone who fits well with their family, God adopts people who are the complete opposite of Himself, showcasing His amazing grace. (Rom 5:8).

Adoption, in this sense, refers not to a change in character but to a change in status. Adoption in the first century and twenty-first century includes a legal process where the adopter takes on the responsibility of the adoptee. This is not just a formality; it is a transformative process that grants the adoptee full access to the privileges and rights of belonging to a family. As the children of God, believers, by grace, having put their faith in Christ, have inherited the privileges, blessings, and promises of God, including the assurance of eternal life and fellowship with Him.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Gal 4:4–7, KJV).

An illustration from Roman history captures this metaphor perfectly, and most commentators believe Paul understood the adoption metaphor. Caesar Augustus, originally named Octavian, came to power through the extraordinary act of adoption, becoming the heir of Julius Caesar. After Julius Caesar's assassination, Octavian embraced his new identity as heir to the fallen leader. He issued coins engraved with the declaration “*divi filius*,” which means the son of a god.¹⁷⁶ He also commissioned markers along Roman roads proclaiming his identity, each a testament to his elevated status and unparalleled authority as the emperor's adopted son.

¹⁷⁶ Robert Brian Lewis, *Paul's Spirit of Adoption in Its Roman Imperial Context* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 10.

This adoption was not just a formality; His adoption granted Augustus access to wealth, military might, and dominion over the vast Roman Empire.¹⁷⁷

Similarly, believers experience a profound transformation through spiritual adoption, made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 8:14). This status elevates them to heirs of God's kingdom (Gal 4:4–7, KJV), granting them access to spiritual riches and an intimate relationship with their heavenly Father. Just as Augustus' adoption reshaped his identity and destiny, so too does spiritual adoption redefine believers' identity, securing their eternal inheritance as beloved children of God (Rom 8:16–17).

In Roman society, adoption was driven by the motive to ensure the continuation of the family legacy and prevent family extinction.¹⁷⁸ Under the Roman patriarchal system, men had all the power, authority, rights, and privileges.¹⁷⁹ Adoption often leaned towards fulfilling the needs of the adoptive parents rather than considering the well-being of the child. A farmer seeking help with the fields, a childless couple longing for companionship in their golden years, or an aristocrat yearning for someone to carry on the family name.

However, God's gracious act of adoption stands in stark contrast, motivated not by self-interest but by selflessness. Unlike the Roman model, God's adoption is not about fulfilling His needs, growing His family, or continuing His legacy. Instead, it is a gracious act intended to provide blessings to believers. In God's adoption, the benefits are entirely directed toward the child. God's motive to adopt is selfless, not selfishness. God's act of adoption is rooted in His grace to offer individuals a new status as His beloved children.

¹⁷⁷ Michael J. Gorman, *Romans: A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 169.

¹⁷⁸ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 65–66.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Peppard, *The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* (New York: Oxford University, 2011), 52.

The Spirit of Adoption

In Romans 8:15, Paul says, “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (KJV). The conjunction *for* connects verses 14–17 to 1–13. Paul argued that believers in Jesus are, in fact, children of God. To be a child of God is a relationship brought about by Divine design, the will of the Father, and the work of the Son, with the help of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁰ At the center of the adoption process is the divine work of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and God the Father. Paul emphasized the reality that children of God are not “in the flesh” (8:9) and “debtors” to the flesh (8:12) but “in the Spirit” (8:9) and “led by the Spirit” (8:12–14).

In His ministry, Jesus shattered conventional ideas of God’s family, proclaiming that God’s true family extends beyond mere bloodlines and, instead, consists of those who align with the will of His Father (Mark 3:34–35; Matt 12:48–50). This perspective changed everything, showing that spiritual connection with Him, not shared lineage or common ancestry, defines God’s family (John 14:6). After His resurrection, Jesus instructed His disciples to remain in Jerusalem and anticipate the arrival of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). This significant occasion occurred during Pentecost (Acts 2:41), signifying their official acceptance as members of God’s family. The Holy Spirit operates within believers, instilling a profound sense of belonging to God’s family.

Paul clarifies that those who have received the “Spirit of Adoption” have been made sons of God, not by human initiative but by an act of reception. The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Adoption.” Paul presents the unique work of the Holy Spirit in affirming and confirming the believer’s adoption status. When Jesus spoke to Nicodemus, He spoke about being born again of

¹⁸⁰ Moore, *Abba Changes Everything*, 20.

the Spirit; He was speaking about the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of adoption (John 3:30). Being “born again” is something that the Spirit of God does in the heart of the believer. The Holy Spirit is the One that signs the adoption papers for the believer, brings the believer into God’s family, and seals the believer as God’s children (Eph. 4:30). This adoption brings the believer into a new status, identity, and relationship with God.¹⁸¹

In Romans 8:15, Paul continues with the adoption metaphor but contrasts with the slavery metaphor, showing the difference between freedom over fear and belonging over bondage.¹⁸² Believers are no longer slaves to sin but are sons of God's family. Paul says that slavery leads to fear, “ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear” (Rom. 8:15, KJV). The most appropriate emotional response to slavery is a sense of fear.

In Paul's time, slavery was marked by harsh treatment, coercion, and the constant threat of punishment. Within this context, fear was pervasive, driven by the constant threat of punishment or even death for disobedience.¹⁸³ Slaves were considered the property of their owners and were treated harshly for any perceived shortcomings. Slaves were often kept in chains and could be jailed or severely punished for failing to meet labor expectations.¹⁸⁴ A slave faced a situation where the master could torture, kill, or dispose of him without social repercussions.

Paul contrasts this picture of slavery with believers being given all the rights of a member of God's family through adoption.¹⁸⁵ Unlike enslaved people who are bound by chains of fear, adopted children of God are granted freedom, acceptance, identity, and belonging. The contrast

¹⁸¹ Lewis, *Paul's Spirit of Adoption*, 182.

¹⁸² William S. Campbell, *Romans: A Social Identity Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 228.

¹⁸³ Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 118.

¹⁸⁴ Dennis P. Kehoe, *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 301.

¹⁸⁵ Lewis, *Paul's Spirit of Adoption*, 180.

Paul has in mind is between the faith of Old Testament and New Testament saints (Rom 8:1-4). In the Old Testament, faith was often characterized by fear, duty, and obedience to God's law. This fear-driven faith led to a relationship with God like a servant. Individuals sought to uphold the law and avoid punishment. New Testament saints experience a faith rooted in love, brought about by the doctrine of adoption. Rather than being motivated by fear, believers are motivated by love (1 John 3:1).¹⁸⁶

Jesus brought about this transformation by revealing God as the Father to both Himself and humanity. One of the greatest privileges of the believer's adoption is speaking to God as a good and loving Father. The believer is to pray, "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt 6:9, KJV), and men are to realize that they are "no longer slaves, but sons" (Gal 4:7, KJV). Therefore, man can now relate to God, not as a slave relates to a slave master, but as a son to a Father.¹⁸⁷

Paul goes on to say that by the Spirit believers cry out, "Abba, Father." It is the Spirit of God who allows believers to address God as Father in a unique way. *Abba* is an Aramaic word for "Daddy or Dad" that conveys a sense of intimacy, trust, and affection.¹⁸⁸ *Abba* reflects a childlike dependency on God, acknowledging Him as a caring and compassionate Father intimately involved in His children's lives.

By addressing God as "Father," believers affirm their identity as beloved children of God, which signifies closeness in their relationship with God, which is only made possible by the Spirit of God. This connection allows believers to approach God with trust and openness, knowing they are deeply loved and cared for as children. The ability to cry out, "Abba, Father,"

¹⁸⁶ Beeke, *Heirs with Christ*, 18.

¹⁸⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 739.

¹⁸⁸ Kent R. Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 181.

is evidence of the believer's newfound freedom in Christ. Membership in God's family brings the experience of the fullness of joy.¹⁸⁹

The Security of Adoption

One remarkable aspect of adoption is its permanence. Roman law stated that an adopted child could not be disowned or disinherited from the family, whereas a biological child could be removed from the household and inheritance.¹⁹⁰ The adopted child was secure in the family.

Once a person is placed into a family, that status cannot be revoked or undone, providing a sense of security and belonging that lasts a lifetime, regardless of any challenges or obstacles that may arise. This assurance of belonging can have profound implications for the adopted individual's sense of identity, self-worth, and emotional well-being, offering stability and reassurance amid life's uncertainties.

In Romans 8:16, the apostle Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit “bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” This assurance of identity as God's children is similar to the permanence of adoption. Just as adoption cannot be undone, the witness of the Holy Spirit assures believers that their position as God's children is permanent and unchanging, bringing peace and confidence in their relationship with Him. The grace of adoption is the believer's comfort for all eternity. As Packer puts it, “To be adopted by God is to be welcomed into His family forever, a truth that brings enduring solace and hope.”¹⁹¹

Adoption as children of God brings the legal right to inheritance.¹⁹² This is as wonderful and mysterious as a father's love for the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). In the parable, the

¹⁸⁹ Osborne, *Romans*, 206.

¹⁹⁰ Hugh Lindsay, *Adoption in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 98.

¹⁹¹ Packer, *Knowing God*, 207.

¹⁹² David E. Garland, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2021), 425.

prodigal son squanders his inheritance in reckless living, only to find himself destitute and longing for his father's house. When he returns home, expecting to be treated like a servant, he is met with the unwavering love of his father, who not only welcomes him back but restores him to his rightful place as a son.

Paul is deliberate in his choice of words in describing believers as “the children of God.” This designation signifies not only a legal status but also a deep emotional bond and sense of belonging within God's family. As adopted children of God, their position in God’s family is secure and unchangeable. Adoption is not based on their merits or abilities but is solely grounded in the character of God. Therefore, regardless of their past mistakes or present struggles, they can take comfort in the fact that they are eternally secure in their identity as beloved children of God.

The witness from the Holy Spirit to the believer is that they belong to God. In an earthly adoption, when a child is brought into a home, if someone were to ask, “Whose child is that?” The adoptive parents would answer, “Mine.” That does not simply mean that the child belongs to their parents but that they are proud of him and have taken responsibility for caring, loving, and providing for him. Similarly, this is what the Spirit of God says about believers. When they wonder where they belong, God shouts, “Mine! You’re Mine.” God, through His Spirit, says, “I am proud to call you Mine; I take responsibility for caring for you, loving you, and providing everything you need. I have sealed you with My Spirit.”

The Suffering of Adoption

Adoption assumes suffering.¹⁹³ Adoptions occur when biological parents are incapable, unfit, or unwilling to provide care for the child they have brought into the world.¹⁹⁴ Paul

¹⁹³ Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 29.

¹⁹⁴ Jedd Medefind, *Becoming Home: Adoption, Foster Care, and Mentoring—Living Out God’s Heart for Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 67.

concludes that those who are led by the Spirit, as children of God, are heirs of God with Christ and will one day share in His glory. Romans 8:17 says, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (KJV).

The main benefit of a Christian's adoption can be summed up as the privilege of being an heir.¹⁹⁵ By making believers heirs, God ensures they are not merely recipients of His blessings but participants in His plan.¹⁹⁶ While human adoption may underscore the incapacity of earthly parents, spiritual adoption into God's family highlights the limitless capability of God. God gives everything He has, not just a portion. The inheritance of believers is unmatched by anything else in this world. Believers inherit something incorruptible, without succession, and cannot be divided (1 Pet 1:4; Heb 7:24; Gal 6:10).¹⁹⁷

Believers inherit everything that is owned by Him, and He owns everything (1 Cor 3:21-23). When Paul says, “All things are yours,” the emphasis is that all aspects of life, including the world, life, and death, can be a source of joy for the believer. Through adoption, death becomes a servant, existing solely to benefit the believer.

Paul says that for now, believers must share in his sufferings. Romans 8:17 says, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together” (KJV). Spiritually, adoption was born out of love and suffering. Adoption was grounded in love (John 3:16), as Jesus died for sinners (Rom 5:8); it was patient in suffering and willing to endure the shame on the cross (Heb 12:2).

Paul acknowledges suffering as part of the inheritance. Adoption cannot occur without suffering, grief, loss, and shame.¹⁹⁸ Adoption stems from a series of tragic circumstances that

¹⁹⁵ Beeke, *Heirs with Christ*, 42.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 43.

¹⁹⁸ Hook, and Hook, *Thriving Families*, 32.

have left a vulnerable child without the support that every child deserves by God's design.

However, Merida points out, "It is through adoption that the church can respond to these heartbreaking situations with love and care."¹⁹⁹

Similarly, Jesus, in His redemptive work, bore the weight of shame on the cross, enduring immense suffering for the promise of eventual joy. Paul assures believers of their future inheritance, which they will share with Christ. This future inheritance shapes how Christians live their lives now. As believers move towards glorification as heirs with Christ, their lives progressively become more like Christ (Rom 8:29). The fact that believers will suffer with Christ indicates that they will bear the distinguishable marks of Christ in their lives.

Once the judge has made the final decision and the adoption is finalized, many adopted children question whether their new home will last. They often feel uncertain about their place in the family and their ownership of the new home. However, there is no uncertainty when it comes to God's adoption of His people. He is forever their Father. Believers, then, understanding the reality of their spiritual adoption, are motivated to live according to their new identity in supporting children in foster care or those needing an earthly adoption.²⁰⁰

Foster care and adoption are not only about preaching the gospel but about practically living the gospel. Platt writes, "By welcoming children into our homes and hearts, we embody the love, sacrifice, and redemption that are at the core of the Christian faith."²⁰¹ As the children of God in this world, the church must embrace who it is and where it is sent. As the church moves to support those in the foster and adoption community, it must offer itself sacrificially and compassionately in the example of Christ.

¹⁹⁹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 41.

²⁰⁰ Merida, *Orphanology*, 32.

²⁰¹ David Platt, *Counter Culture: Following Christ in an Anti-Christian Age* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2015), 147.

Adoption is about giving someone a family before it is about growing that family. In the secular world, adoption was usually for the benefit of the adoptive parents, not for the benefit of the child. Adoption is not merely about expanding one's family but about sacrificially opening one's heart and home to a child in need. Just as in spiritual adoption, God extended His family to believers, offering them love, acceptance, and a new identity as His children; believers should be willing to open their families to those in need. It is a means of providing a safe and secure home for children who may be in danger due to reasons such as abandonment, abuse, neglect, or the inability of their biological parents to care for them.

Foster Care and Early Christians

Charles Spurgeon

In the 1860s, Charles Spurgeon famously described London as “the city of Gog, Magog, and Fog!”²⁰² London was an infamously filthy city. Spurgeon is often called the “Prince of Preachers” because his sermons captivated thousands of people weekly.²⁰³ While some know Spurgeon started a college, few know he also started an orphanage, reflecting his passion for education and compassion for vulnerable children.²⁰⁴

Spurgeon stood before his congregation and said, “Dear friends, we are a huge church and should be doing more for the Lord in this great city. I want us, tonight, to ask Him to send us some new work, and if we need money to carry it on, let us pray that the means also may be sent.” With the help of providential circumstances, meaningful discussions, and generous donations, the church rallied together to start an orphanage.

²⁰² Charles Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1923), 202.

²⁰³ Timothy Larsen, *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2011), 250.

²⁰⁴ Lewis A. Drummond, *Spurgeon: Prince of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 398.

Charles Loring Brace

In the nineteenth century, Reverend Charles Loring Brace founded the Children's Aid Society.²⁰⁵ Brace witnessed an estimated 150,000 to 400,000 needy children wandering the streets of New York City.²⁰⁶ He decided that something must be done to help. Brace would say, "We have such a formal idea of Christianity—giving and prayer meetings and Bible-reading and revivals are religion." However, he asserted, "I certainly can see very little in which piety affects social relations in New England or here, except in keeping from the worst crimes, which isn't much."²⁰⁷

Brace initiated the Orphan Train Movement; this groundbreaking movement sought to provide these vulnerable children with opportunities for stable homes by relocating them from overcrowded urban orphanages to families in rural areas across the country. Brace's vision behind the Orphan Train Movement was multifaceted. Not only did he aim to alleviate the overcrowding and dire conditions in urban orphanages, but he also believed in the transformative power of family life for these children. The Orphan Train Movement was not without controversy. Critics raised concerns about the potential exploitation of children and the lack of oversight in the placement process. Today, the Orphan Train Movement is recognized as a pivotal moment in the history of child welfare in the United States. It laid the foundation for what would eventually evolve into the modern foster care system, which continues to play a crucial role in providing support and care for vulnerable children and families nationwide.

²⁰⁵ Elizabeth Trejos-Castillo, and Nancy Trevino-Schafer, eds., *Handbook of Foster Youth* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 4.

²⁰⁶ Jeanne Nagle, *Coping with Foster Care* (New York: Rosen, 2020), 8.

²⁰⁷ Karen M. Staller, *New York's Newsboys: Charles Loring Brace and the Founding of the Children's Aid Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 53.

Theoretical Foundations

Foster care is intended to provide temporary safety for abused or neglected children who cannot remain with their families.²⁰⁸ The number of children in foster care and the number of families required for foster care services has grown substantially and shows no sign of slowing down.²⁰⁹ These families face significant challenges that require substantial resources, which can often be found in the church. Estimates show that thirty to fifty percent of families quit fostering within the first year or after the first placement.²¹⁰

This is where churches can make a difference. As Merida and Morton suggest, “Partnerships between churches, agencies, and families are essential in foster care.”²¹¹ Because of strong community networks, resources, and ethos of compassion, churches can play a pivotal role in supporting the needs of those in the foster and adoption communities.

Throughout history, the church has been a crucial asset in driving positive social changes and movements. People of faith have often played a vital role in positive social movements, from the abolitionist movement in the 1800s to the pro-life movement today. Providing care for vulnerable children and the families that care for them is no different. Most recently, FBOs have played a crucial role in the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, contributing their unique perspectives, resources, and networks to the collective effort.²¹² As key participants in the initiative, FBOs bring a moral and ethical dimension to the discussion, advocating for the

²⁰⁸ Marra, *Care of Diverse Families*, 7.

²⁰⁹ David W. Anderson and Paul Hill, *The Foster Care Crisis: Translating Research Into Policy and Practice* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 23.

²¹⁰ American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Foster Care, Adoption, and Kinship Care; Douglas Waite, Mary V. Greiner, and Zach Laris, “Putting Families First: How the Opioid Epidemic is Affecting Children and Families, and the Child Welfare Policy Options to Address It,” *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk* 9, no. 1 (2018): Article 4.

²¹¹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 102.

²¹² Jens Koehrsen, *Faith-Based Organizations in Development Discourses and Practice* (Abingdon; Taylor & Francis, 2020), 102.

protection of children based on religious principles, mobilizing religious leaders, congregations, and volunteers to raise awareness, promoting positive parenting practices, and advocating for policy changes that protect children from violence and exploitation.

Theologically, the mission of the church matches the needs of vulnerable children. In 1 Timothy 3:15, the church is described as “the pillar and ground of the truth” (KJV). This metaphor underscores the role of the church as a beacon of truth in a world filled with deception and falsehoods. Vulnerable children, who may have been subjected to lies and manipulation, find refuge in the unwavering truth proclaimed by the church. Similarly, Colossians 3:12 depicts the church as “the heart of compassion” (KJV). This characterization emphasizes the compassionate nature of the church community, which mirrors the love of Christ. For vulnerable children who bear emotional wounds from neglect, abuse, or abandonment, the church offers a safe haven where they can experience healing, acceptance, and genuine care. Colossians 3:16 highlights the church's role in providing instruction and shaping worldview.

As the original institution for teaching and discipleship, the church equips individuals, including vulnerable children, with the spiritual knowledge and guidance needed to navigate life's challenges.²¹³ In the context of foster care, where children may lack stable family environments or consistent role models, the church becomes a source of moral and spiritual formation, offering a framework for understanding their identity and purpose in God's plan. The church has the capacity to meet the tangible, educational, relational, and spiritual needs of those who find themselves in the foster care system.

The church has an important scriptural mandate to fulfill in addressing the complex needs of foster and adoptive families. There are over 8,000 faith-based child placement agencies in the

²¹³ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 41.

country. These organizations have a unique position to improve outcomes for families in need, as they share common values of supporting families. Faith-based organizations can partner with child protection agencies to achieve this goal.

Tangible Needs

Families who are involved in foster care and adoption often feel isolated and unsupported.²¹⁴ The unique challenges and complexities of many families, children, and individuals in the foster care system can make it difficult for these families to connect with others who truly comprehend the intricacies of their experiences. This isolation may result from a lack of understanding in society, leading to feelings of alienation. Families within the foster care system often face difficulties in finding the support they need due to concerns about confidentiality, privacy, and the safety of the children involved.

The church is already equipped with the necessary resources to support foster and adoptive families. This includes physical infrastructure, such as building space, financial structure, and a network of dedicated individuals who meet regularly and are willing to assist their fellow congregants for the sake of children. The church has access to an extensive network of members who can donate, offer, and provide concrete support for individuals in need, such as furniture, clothing, strollers, diapers, food, or financial resources to cover rent or utilities. This includes anticipating the myriad of items these families might need, which they may not even realize. To foster a sense of community and connection, the church can organize monthly meetings hosted by a designated family within the congregation. These gatherings would bring together adoptive and foster care families.

²¹⁴ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 129.

One church in Texas aimed to improve the public perception of child protective service investigators who are overworked, overwhelmed, under-resourced, and overly criticized.²¹⁵ They wanted these workers to be seen as heroes, just like firefighters and emergency medical service workers. To achieve this goal, the church initiated a program that provided a monthly hot lunch for child protective service workers. They also created an “Adopt a Caseworker” program to make child protective services more visible and help caseworkers meet the needs of the families they work with.²¹⁶ This created a sense of community involvement, recognized the challenging role of caseworkers, and sought to contribute to their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the families they are supporting.

Educational Needs

Foster and adoptive families often face unique challenges related to understanding how to address the educational needs of children under their care.²¹⁷ These challenges may stem from the backgrounds of the children, including experiences of trauma, neglect, or abuse. As Harden points out:

The challenges faced by foster children often stem from their backgrounds, including experiences of trauma, neglect, or abuse. These early adverse experiences can have profound and lasting effects on their emotional and psychological development, making it essential for caregivers to provide not just physical care but also emotional and therapeutic support.²¹⁸

Many families find themselves unprepared to address the specific needs of children who may face emotional challenges related to their past experiences.²¹⁹ The church plays a vital role in providing comprehensive support to children and families dealing with the trauma experienced

²¹⁵ Ibid., 204.

²¹⁶ Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 102.

²¹⁷ Kathleen L. Whitten, *Labor of the Heart: A Parent's Guide to the Decisions and Emotions in Adoption*, (Lanham: M. Evans & Company, 2008), 14.

²¹⁸ Harden, *Infants in the Child Welfare System*, 45.

²¹⁹ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 79.

by foster youth. The church can offer trauma-informed training, identity issue counseling, specialized parenting strategies, conferences, workshops, and resource provision to support children and families in addressing complex trauma experienced by foster youth. The church encourages recovery and resilience in the face of complex trauma by providing a safe environment for individuals and families to express their experiences, concerns, and emotions. Additionally, the church can build partnerships with local organizations, businesses, and professionals to create a referral network. Referral networks connect families with supportive resources beyond the church's immediate scope.

The Trinity Family Life Center in Virginia has established a program that focuses on imparting life skills to foster and adopted children to help them become successful adults.²²⁰ The program provides access to a technology lab, various resources, referrals, life skills assessments, specialized programs, and monthly workshops. In addition to these resources, the program fosters a supportive community where children can build relationships, gain confidence, and receive mentorship from dedicated volunteers committed to their growth and well-being.

Relational Needs

To provide qualified families, the church and state should work together to encourage volunteers to become licensed resource families.²²¹ The process of recruiting and training foster families is expensive and time-consuming, which puts a strain on already limited state resources for child welfare.²²² One effective approach for recruiting foster and adoptive families is through

²²⁰ Trinity Life Center, "Positive Paths," accessed January 31, 2024, <https://www.tflconline.org/>.

²²¹ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 79.

²²² Michael Howell-Moroney, "The Empirical Ties between Religious Motivation and Altruism in Foster Parents: Implications for Faith-Based Initiatives in Foster Care and Adoption," *Religions* 5, no. 3 (2014): 720.

church congregations. Churches and church leaders have long been involved in recruiting, preparing, and supporting families for vulnerable children.²²³

One practical approach is encouraging and supporting the licensing of foster families within the church community. This involves promoting awareness of the need for foster families, providing information about the licensing process, and offering resources to guide potential foster parents through the necessary state requirements. The church can be a great place to create a supportive environment for individuals or families considering fostering a child. This can be done by organizing workshops, training sessions, or informational events covering various topics, such as the foster care system, the licensing procedure, and the challenges and rewards of fostering.

Fostering Hope Austin, a faith-based organization in Texas, wanted to offer short-term babysitting services for foster families.²²⁴ However, they faced challenges because each child-placing agency's certification process varied greatly. Child services collaborated with Fostering Hope Austin to address this issue and created a simplified certification process. As a result, interested respite care providers can now attend a one-day training and become certified to provide respite care anywhere in the state, regardless of agency affiliation.

Spiritual Needs

Foster and adoptive families are well aware of various forms of loss inherent in the foster care and adoption process. Brodzinsky offers this insight, “Foster and adoptive families are acutely aware of the multiple forms of loss inherent in the process—whether it be the loss of biological ties, the loss of a stable past, or the potential loss of future relationships.”²²⁵ This

²²³ Eileen Mayers Pasztor, and Marcus Stallworth, “Place and Pray or Develop and Support: Why a Model of Practice Is Essential for Foster Parent Retention and Recruitment,” *Children’s Voice* 28, no. 2 (2019): 22–25.

²²⁴ Fostering Hope “Who We Are,” accessed January 31, 2024, <http://www.iamfosteringhope.org>.

²²⁵ David M. Brodzinsky, *The Psychology of Adoption* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 77.

awareness applies to all individuals involved in the process: birth parents, foster and adoptive parents, and children.

Social workers talk about these losses during the licensing process. The birth parents lose a child, the child loses the birth family along with potential cultural ties, and the foster and adoptive parents often lose the sense of autonomy.²²⁶ The foster family is often encouraged not to get too attached to the child, as foster care is understood as a temporary situation. Foster parents have to cope with various forms of grief, including the grief of the biological parents whose child they are caring for, the grief of the foster child in their care, and their grief when they lose a child to reunification, other placement, adoption, or other family members when a foster child leaves their care.²²⁷

Through its ministries and support systems, the church can offer spiritual support to individuals experiencing loss. Through prayer, workshops, counseling, and a community that understands their unique challenges, spiritual support can be found. The church contributes to replacing the feelings of loss with a sense of spiritual gain and support.

Conclusion

To better support individuals in the foster and adoption community, believers must understand the theological implications of the biblical passages related to caring for vulnerable children. First, God created every person in His image. Therefore, every individual life has inherent value and should be treated as such. Second, man has sinned against God. Thus, every kind of evil is owed to the sinfulness of humanity. This doctrine provides the basis for understanding the brokenness in the world, including the mistreatment and neglect of vulnerable

²²⁶ Whitten, *Labor of the Heart*, 202.

²²⁷ Susan B. Edelstein, Dorli Burge, and Jill Waterman, "Helping Foster Parents Cope with Separation, Loss, and Grief," *Child Welfare* 80, no.1 (2001): 8.

individuals. Thirdly, believers are adopted by God as His children through the completed work of Jesus Christ.

At First Baptist Church, there is an identified problem of the absence of an organized support program for foster and adoptive families. The proposed PLACED seminar is a solution to equip church members with the necessary tools to offer tangible, educational, relational, and spiritual support. This support would include training to equip church members with the necessary skills and knowledge to ministry and care for children and families with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Agency partnership to ensure that any families wishing to foster or adopt would have access to a support network and licensing organization. Workshops and events that would offer real-time tangible support to families. By embracing this project, First Baptist Church has the potential to create a community that embodies God's compassion for the vulnerable.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The PLACED action research project at First Baptist Church provides ways the church can form intentional partnerships with social workers and families in the foster care and adoption community. These relationships should be developed to ensure that everyone involved receives the necessary support to create the best possible outcomes for vulnerable children. The project was designed to address the multifaceted needs of the individuals in this community by providing them with tangible, emotional, educational, and spiritual support.

Recognizing the critical roles that social workers and foster families play in the lives of vulnerable children and acknowledging the vital support that the faith-based community can provide, the project sought to create a supportive network that would enhance their well-being and effectiveness. This collaborative approach is underscored by Merida and Mortin, “Collaborative efforts between churches, foster families, Foster Family Agencies (FFAs), and social workers are essential for creating a comprehensive support system.”²²⁸

The methods employed in this project are designed to create opportunities for First Baptist Church members to actively support those in the foster care system in Long Beach, CA, and surrounding areas. This project focuses on providing a support network that addresses the varied needs of the foster care community. Specific attention is given to extending the ministry to the foster and adoptive families who are current members of FBC, as well as to the foster children and youth in their care.

²²⁸ Merida, *Orphanology*, 89.

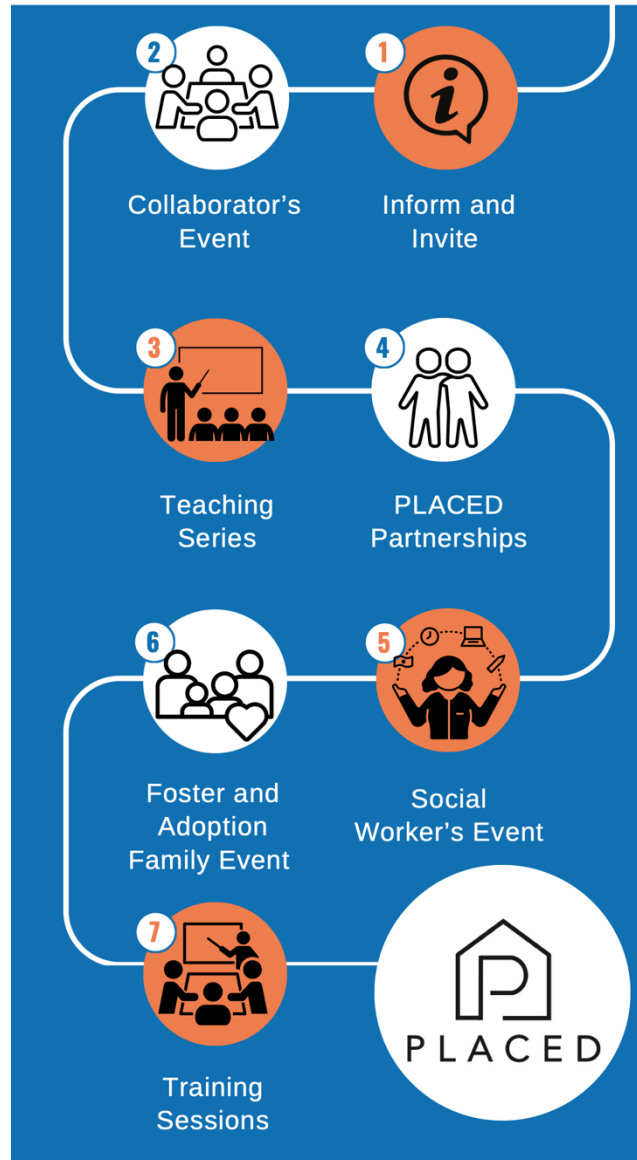


Figure 4. PLACED diagram, Drawing by David Delaney

Purpose and Objective

Foster care should go beyond merely providing shelter for children who have experienced neglect and abuse. Johnson emphasizes, “Foster care must transcend the basic provision of shelter for children who have experienced neglect and abuse; it should aim to create a nurturing

environment that addresses their emotional, psychological, and developmental needs, helping them to heal and thrive.”²²⁹ Foster care should also focus on preparing these children to navigate their formative years successfully, equipping them for a fulfilling and productive future in society. The PLACED action research project is necessary to ensure that foster care fulfills this broader role. By offering comprehensive support that addresses the tangible, relational, educational, and spiritual needs of those in the foster care and adoption community, the project aims to create an environment where these children can thrive and reach their full potential.

Therefore, this action-research project is to study ways the church can come alongside those in the foster care and adoption community, specifically the First Baptist Church foster and adoption families, to form intentional relationships. These relationships should be cultivated to ensure that everyone involved can access and provide the necessary support to create the best possible outcomes for foster children. The PLACED action research project is essential to this goal. By fostering strong, supportive connections among social workers, foster families, and the church community, the project aims to build a network that can effectively support foster care and adoption families as they prepare for adoption, reunification with birth parents, or transitioning out of the system.

This research aims to enhance the levels of support for the foster care and adoption community within First Baptist Church by identifying specific areas where the church is equipped to provide meaningful assistance. It is believed that the information gained through the PLACED project will motivate the leaders and congregation of First Baptist Church to become personally involved in supporting foster care and adoption families so that a lifelong impact on vulnerable children can be made.

²²⁹ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 102.

Intervention Design

This project sought to assist the foster care and adoption community by empowering members of First Baptist Church to provide meaningful support over twelve weeks. The initiative featured a comprehensive approach, incorporating a series of community and collaborative events designed to cultivate engagement among church members and demonstrate support to those in this community. These events involved social workers, foster families, agency representatives, and church leaders, creating a platform for dialogue, sharing experiences, and building a network of support. Additionally, the project included teaching sessions and training opportunities to achieve these goals (see Appendix B).

The project provided a better understanding of foster care and adoption within the ministry context of First Baptist Church. Primarily, it sought to equip members of FBC with strategic ways to support individuals in the foster care system and the adoption community. This process enhanced awareness and facilitated practical expressions of support through targeted events and initiatives. As Medefind states, “Churches that are intentional about equipping their members with the knowledge and tools to support foster care and adoption can create a powerful impact.”²³⁰ The PLACED project provided this understanding by using qualitative research methods and practical initiatives to encourage support among members. While the PLACED project initially addressed immediate needs and challenges, its long-term effects extended beyond the twelve-week research period.

Inform and Invite

To inform members and attendees of First Baptist Church about the PLACED project, a multi-faceted approach that included distributing information via Care Cards for the first two

²³⁰ Medefind, *Becoming Home*, 115.

weeks was used (see Appendix B). The Care Cards were placed inside the church bulletin and made available at the church information center. These cards featured three designs containing statistics about those growing up in the foster care system, with information sourced from the Los Angeles County Department of Child and Family Services. On the back of each card, a QR code (see Appendix C) linked to a registration page where individuals could provide their contact information to receive updates about the upcoming Teaching Series on supporting the foster care and adoption community. As Nona Jones points out, “In today's digital age, churches must embrace technology as a tool for discipleship and outreach.”²³¹ This registration page allowed individuals to sign up to be notified of the Teaching Series, emphasizing the importance of supporting the foster care and adoption community.

The information concerning the PLACED project was also announced in the church bulletin for two weeks. An announcement containing similar information to that found on the Care Cards (see Appendix C) was placed in the upcoming events section of the bulletin. The bulletin also provided a barcode leading to the registration page. If a member or attendee of FBC scanned the code, it directed them to the same registration page mentioned earlier.

Another recruitment method involved hosting a ten-minute informational session following the Sunday morning service (see Appendix V). This session provided an overview of the PLACED project, its objectives, and how individuals could get involved. The QR code was also available during this session, allowing individuals to register for the Teaching Series.

Finally, First Baptist Church's social media platforms were utilized to share information about the PLACED project and encourage participation, effectively recruiting more people. This approach allowed for a wider audience and engaged those who might not usually attend church

²³¹ Nona Jones, *From Social Media to Social Ministry: A Guide to Digital Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 89.

services. The advertisements on the social media pages mirrored those on the Care Card and found in the church's bulletin (see Appendix C). Through these methods, members and attendees of FBC were effectively informed and encouraged to participate in the project.

Collaborators Event

The initial step in establishing the PLACED action plan involved identifying all necessary stakeholders to ensure the program's efficiency. As Bryson emphasizes, "The first crucial step in any strategic action plan is identifying and engaging all relevant stakeholders."²³² The importance of this foundational task in setting the stage for success. This began with reaching out to key administrative figures within the foster care system in Los Angeles County.

The researcher identified and contacted Bob Levy, Director of Relations with Foster All, and representatives from Olive Crest, a prominent faith-based foster agency. Their participation was essential for gathering insights and scheduling interviews. Additionally, the researchers reached out to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) social workers, leveraging their relationships with foster families who are members of First Baptist Church. This approach ensured that a wide range of perspectives and expertise were included in the planning and execution of the PLACED action plan, laying a solid foundation for effective collaboration and support (see Appendix F).

This step facilitated partnerships with agencies that would later participate in the training series. By identifying and contacting key stakeholders, the event brought together social workers, foster families, agency representatives, and church leaders. This initial engagement served as a platform for dialogue, fostering meaningful partnerships and collaboration. The presence of these

²³² John M. Bryson, *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 143.

key individuals provided valuable insights and information, equipping First Baptist Church members with a deeper understanding of the issues faced by the foster care and adoption community.²³³ This foundational step ensured that the church could effectively support and collaborate with these agencies throughout the training series and beyond, creating a robust network of support for foster and adoptive families.

Additionally, this foundational step facilitated partnerships with foster families who would later participate in the Foster Family Day Off event and serve as PLACED Partners. By reaching out to foster families connected to First Baptist Church through DCFS social workers, the researcher was able to establish relationships and build trust with these families. This engagement provided a platform for foster families to voice their needs, concerns, and experiences, allowing the church to tailor its support initiatives more effectively. By cultivating these connections early on, the researcher was able to create a supportive community environment, encouraging foster families to engage in each step of the PLACED project.

This step also facilitated partnerships with social workers through foster families and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). By engaging with DCFS social workers who had established relationships with foster families connected to First Baptist Church, the researcher was able to create a collaborative network that included key players in the foster care system. This partnership ensured that the Social Worker Care Package event could be successful in including social workers in the project.

Recruitment letters were sent to administrators, social workers, and former social workers (see Appendix E). Several agencies, including Olive Crest, Children's Bureau, DCFS, and Foster All, were identified for participation. The Collaborators Event also included foster families,

²³³ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008), 89.

former foster families, and adoption families, identified through contact information received electronically (see Appendix D). Church leadership, such as pastors, deacons, and other staff, were also invited via a recruitment letter (see Appendix D). A room request and setup for this event were arranged through an email sent to the church secretary detailing the room's size, setup, times, and dates (see Appendix G).

Participants who expressed interest in contributing to the PLACED project were required to sign a letter of consent, ensuring their answers could be used for research (see Appendix H). As Creswell points out, “Obtaining informed consent is a critical component of ethical research practices.”²³⁴ This consent letter was crucial for maintaining ethical conduct throughout the research process, ensuring participants were fully aware of how their information would be utilized. Once consent was obtained, a list of attendees who accepted the invitation to participate was compiled. This list served as a reference for organizing follow-up activities and scheduling future events related to the PLACED project, allowing for efficient communication and coordination.

The secondary goal of the Collaborators Event was to collect firsthand insights from participants in the foster and adoption communities. This initiative aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and needs encountered by foster families, adoptive parents, social workers, and agency representatives. Information was gathered through structured questionnaires, open discussions, and interactive question-and-answer sessions (refer to Appendices I, J, and K). These methodologies were intended to encompass a range of viewpoints and experiences, contributing valuable insights for FBC's endeavors to provide meaningful support to these communities.

²³⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*, 149.

The questionnaires, discussion, and question-and-answer format took place at the Collaborators Event on FBC's campus. Participants, including social workers, foster families, agency representatives, and church leaders, engaged in open discussions and interactive question-and-answer sessions to share insights, concerns, and perspectives related to the challenges and opportunities in the foster care and adoption community. During the discussions, participants were able to ask questions, share their experiences, and offer suggestions for potential interventions that would encourage FBC members to support the foster care and adoption community better.

Teaching Series

After the Collaborator's Event, all the information collected, including personal accounts, experiences, and potential opportunities, was thoroughly reviewed. The data from the Collaborator's Event was incorporated into the information presented during the teaching series (see Appendix M). Individuals whose stories were collected and who expressed a willingness to share their stories with the larger church community were invited to share them in the teaching series on the appropriate evening. This approach “can be a powerful tool for fostering empathy and understanding.”²³⁵

The first goal of this stage was to assess the church's understanding of its role in supporting the foster care and adoption community. The current attitude toward foster care and adoption ministry among FBC members was evaluated using a pre-survey assessment (see Appendix N). This initial assessment determined the comprehension of theological concepts

²³⁵ Richard L. Hester and Kelli Walker-Jones, *Know Your Story and Lead with It: The Power of Narrative in Clergy Leadership* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2009), 112.

related to the church's support, personal responsibility, and beliefs toward foster care and adoption.

The classes were held at FBC, and approval from the church leadership was necessary to begin this teaching series. This request was emailed to the church secretary (see Appendix G). The sessions were open to the members and attendees of FBC. The lessons were designed to incorporate valuable features, including personal testimonies, stories, and opportunities discovered from the Collaborators Event (see above).

These lessons provided significant insights, informed understanding, and actionable information that participants could utilize to improve their support of the foster care and adoption community (see Appendix M). Geiger and Schelbe mention, “These programs offer significant insights and actionable strategies that enable participants to more effectively support foster and adoptive families, ensuring that the specific needs of these communities are met.”²³⁶ It was necessary to evaluate the success of these lessons in a post-teaching survey (see Appendix O).

The second goal of this stage was to conduct a four-part series (see Appendix M) focusing on educating the church in supporting the foster care and adoption community. The sessions took place in the context of Sunday evening classes within a forty-five-minute teaching time. To participate, members and attendees of FBC filled out a registration form that included their contact information (see Appendix D), which was received electronically. Participants were then notified of the times and rooms of the session through the email addresses or phone numbers they provided via the contact information (see Appendix L).

The classes addressed the four areas where foster and adoption support can be shown: Tangible, Relational, Educational, and Spiritual needs. The objective of the curriculum was as

²³⁶ Geiger and Schelbe, *The Handbook on Child Welfare*, 233.

follows: Week one focused on the tangible needs, aiming to understand and address the practical needs that those in the foster and adoption community face. The first session included an overview of what the classes would cover. Subsequent classes began with a review of all the previous classes. In week two, attention turned to relational needs, which aimed to cultivate healthy relationships within the foster care system and with adoptive families. In week three, the focus shifted to educational needs and aimed to address the educational aspects relevant to adoption and foster care families. Finally, week four explored the spiritual need to delve into the spiritual dimensions of supporting individuals in the foster care and adoption community. As each session unfolded, the curriculum underscored the significance of active engagement through compelling presentations, interactive discussions, and real-life examples. Participants were continually encouraged to consider how they could offer their support.

The third goal of this stage was to move the participants of the teaching series to action by inviting them to become a PLACED Partner (see below). Johnson notes, “Building partnerships between church members and foster families is one of the most effective ways to ensure that these families feel truly supported.”²³⁷ As participants progressed through the teaching series, the goal was to empower them to take tangible steps toward making a difference in the lives of those in the foster and adoption community.

During the final week of the teaching series, participants received a handout (see Appendix P) inviting them to step forward to support individuals in the foster care and adoption community. Those who expressed interest in increasing their support were directed to how to extend their support to the foster and adoption community through the PLACED partnership (see below). This goal was emphasized throughout the teaching series, with the majority of

²³⁷ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 92.

participants expected to express interest in becoming PLACED Partners by the program's conclusion.

The fourth goal of the teaching series was to establish partnerships between families and local agencies that could assist them in taking the next step toward fostering or adoption. Again, Medefind points out, “This collaboration not only helps families feel supported but also strengthens the overall effectiveness of foster care ministries.”²³⁸ The teaching series encouraged church members to participate in supporting children in need by becoming fostering or adoptive families. Those who expressed a strong interest in this endeavor were directed to a training series (see below) to further their knowledge and skills.

PLACED Partner

The FBC members who had completed the teaching series and indicated their willingness to increase their support became PLACED partners and were paired with individuals working in the foster care and adoption community for four weeks. The teaching lessons had encouraged extending support in various ways: tangible support through acts of kindness, educational support through inquiries about current needs and situations, relational support with words of encouragement, and spiritual support through prayer. Merdia offers a poignant reminder here:

Prayer is one of the most powerful ways we can support foster and adoptive families. These families face unique challenges and spiritual battles, and covering them in prayer is essential to their endurance and well-being. The church must be committed to regularly lifting up these families, asking for God’s guidance, strength, and protection over them.²³⁹

During the four-week partnership period, PLACED Partners engaged with foster care workers, adoptive families, or social workers in various ways, each aiming to provide support and cultivate meaningful connections. PLACED Partners offered a range of support actions for

²³⁸ Medefind, *Becoming Home*, 106.

²³⁹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 145.

the foster care and adoption community. Together, these efforts cultivated a strong sense of community and ensured that the families and workers felt truly supported and valued. As Moore indicates, “When the church comes together to support adoptive and foster families, it not only meets physical and emotional needs but also builds a strong sense of community.”²⁴⁰

A PLACED partner was paired with a foster family, adoption family, or social worker who had also expressed a willingness to partner during the Collaborator’s Event (see above) for four weeks. This arrangement was based on a questionnaire provided to each individual (see Appendix I, J, and K). Once the questionnaire responses were collected, the researcher reviewed and matched PLACED partners with foster families or social workers based on compatibility. The goal was to ensure that each partnership was well-matched and met both parties’ specific needs and preferences, including keeping track of contact information, communication preferences, and any particular requirements or requests from both parties. By maintaining clear and organized registration of partners, the PLACED program effectively facilitated ongoing communication and support between partners and foster families or social workers.

Members of the FBC who had agreed to become PLACED partners received a weekly checklist detailing various ways to provide support (see Appendix Q). They could submit this checklist to the researcher at any time during the week but before the beginning of the new week, either in person or electronically. The researcher maintained a log to keep a record of the checklist. After four weeks, a post-PLACED partnership assessment was given to the social worker, foster families, and adoption families (see Appendix R) to evaluate the level of support offered. Participants had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and provide valuable insights into the effectiveness and adequacy of the support offered by PLACED Partners. The

²⁴⁰ Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 129.

post-PLACED partnership assessment was a critical tool for program evaluation and continuous improvement. By soliciting feedback directly from stakeholders within the foster care and adoption community, the assessment enabled the researcher to identify strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities to enhance the support provided through the PLACED initiative.

Finally, the PLACED partnership culminated in two separate events, which offered practical support to those in the foster and adoption community. The goal of these events was to highlight the diverse ways in which FBC members could make a positive impact and offer assistance to those in the foster and adoption communities. Through these events, participants witnessed firsthand the importance of community involvement and support in addressing the challenges individuals and families face in the foster care and adoption system. By actively providing practical support, participants demonstrated their commitment to serving vulnerable populations within the community.

Training Series

The Training Series aimed to provide participants, who expressed a desire to take more steps in supporting foster care or becoming foster families, with partnerships that would help guide, assist, and direct them to local agencies.²⁴¹ Johnson gives great insight here, “By connecting participants with local agencies and offering partnerships, churches can provide the necessary guidance and support to ensure these individuals are well-prepared and equipped to serve foster children and families effectively.”²⁴² Motivated by the insights gained from the teaching series, participants were equipped with the knowledge needed to make a significant impact. The series not only educated participants about the foster care system but also empowered them to take concrete actions.

²⁴¹ Medefind, *Becoming Home*, 83.

²⁴² Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 67.

There are clear processes for families in Los Angeles County who want to foster or adopt; the training series was designed to aid the families of First Baptist Church in two key ways: family support and facilitating foster agency partnerships. This type of training is necessary because fostering is complex. As one author points out, “Fostering is a complex and challenging commitment that requires navigating the emotional needs of children who have often experienced significant trauma, as well as dealing with the legal, logistical, and relational dynamics involved in temporary care.”²⁴³

The training program served a dual purpose. First, it offered families a comprehensive understanding of the fostering and adoption process, equipping them with the essential knowledge and resources needed to navigate these complex journeys. Secondly, the training was designed to forge strong partnerships with local foster agencies, ensuring that families were not only well-prepared from the outset but also had access to ongoing support from experienced professionals throughout their fostering or adoption experience. This approach ensured that families were supported both educationally and practically, enhancing their ability to provide loving homes for children in need.

The individual's willingness to take this step was indicated in the PLACED partnership survey (see Appendix N) at the conclusion of the teaching sessions. Through the teaching curriculum, participants received guidance on various aspects of foster care and adoption, including the legal framework, licensing procedures, and the responsibilities of foster and adoptive parents. By providing families with the necessary knowledge, these individuals became better prepared to handle the challenges of the foster care and adoption system.

²⁴³ Helen C. Brittain, *Fostering Hope: Stories of Foster Families and the Children They Love* (New York: Beacon Press, 2015), 47.

It should be noted that it is beyond the scope of this project to certify or license any individual for any official capacity in the foster care system.²⁴⁴ This section of the project has two goals: to help participants prepare for the challenges associated with foster care and adoption and to connect participants with local agencies to help them accomplish their goals.

The first goal of the training series was to help participants prepare for the challenges and responsibilities associated with fostering or adopting by partnering with a family within the FBC community that had experience in fostering and adopting. Participants could learn, ask questions, and share experiences with others who were currently on or had been on a similar journey. This information was obtained from the initial contact information completed in weeks one and two (see Appendix C). Whether it was understanding the legal requirements, addressing behavioral challenges, or navigating emotional hurdles, participants could draw upon the support of their mentor families to overcome obstacles in their roles as foster or adoptive parents.

The second goal of the training series was to connect participants with local agencies and organizations involved in the foster care and adoption system. By establishing these partnerships, the PLACED project effectively supported families throughout the fostering or adoption process, offering a network of resources and expertise. This connection ensured that families had access to professional guidance, practical assistance, and emotional support, helping them navigate the often complex and challenging journey of fostering or adopting a child. Additionally, these partnerships allowed FBC to provide ongoing support to foster and adoptive families within its community.

Social Worker Care Package Event

²⁴⁴ Geiger and Schelbe, *The Handbook on Child Welfare Practice*, 251.

Social workers are the backbone of the foster care system, tirelessly working to ensure the well-being of vulnerable children and families. Despite their critical role, many social workers frequently experience high levels of stress, burnout, and emotional exhaustion due to the demanding nature of their work and the lack of adequate support and recognition.

The Social Worker Care Package event was designed to offer tangible support and encouragement to social workers. This initiative was informed by the relationships and insights gathered through the PLACED Partnerships. The feedback from social workers and foster families during these partnerships highlighted the need for tangible, relational, emotional, and spiritual support for social workers, which was then addressed through the care packages. As Gerdes points out, “Care packages and similar initiatives can serve as meaningful expressions of appreciation, offering both practical resources and a reminder that their work is valued and supported.”²⁴⁵

First Baptist Church, located in Los Angeles County, recognized the crucial role that the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) plays in the foster care system. Therefore, the Social Worker Care Package Event was specifically directed to support DCFS social workers. By focusing on DCFS, the church aimed to provide support to the local social workers who manage numerous foster care cases.

Approval was required for PLACED partners to deliver the care packages directly to the social workers (see Appendix S). Additionally, foster families coordinated to set up convenient times to deliver these packages, ensuring that the support reached those who needed it most. The arrangements for this approval were secured during the Collaborators Event, where necessary

²⁴⁵ Karen E. Gerdes, *Strengthening Social Workers: Fostering Resilience in the Helping Professions* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 145.

permissions and logistical details were discussed and finalized. This collaborative approach ensured that the care packages were delivered.

Once approval was obtained from DCFS (see Appendix S), FBC provided a care package for the social workers as a gesture of appreciation for their tireless efforts in supporting children and families. Members of FBC who had expressed their interest in supporting the PLACED project were notified through their preferred means of contact. They were also asked to participate by writing letters of encouragement to the caseworkers. Figley appropriately points out, “Simple acts of recognition, such as a handwritten letter of appreciation, can have profound effects on social workers who often operate in high-stress environments. These gestures of gratitude can help mitigate feelings of burnout and validate the essential, yet often overlooked, work that they do.”²⁴⁶

In addition to the letters of encouragement, FBC prepared thank-you packets for the social workers attending the event. These packets included information about the various ministries offered by the church, providing social workers with resources and support networks that they could access beyond the event. A response card was also included, allowing social workers to provide feedback or request further assistance from FBC if needed (see Appendix T).

Foster Family Day Off Event

The Foster Family Day Off event aimed to provide foster families with a much-needed break, offering childcare and activities for their children. This initiative was based on the challenges and needs identified during the Collaborators Event, where foster families, social workers, and agency representatives shared their experiences and needs. The relationships and

²⁴⁶ Charles R. Figley, *Compassion Fatigue: Coping With Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder in Those Who Treat the Traumatized* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1995), 212.

data gathered during this event highlighted the importance of respite for foster families, which was then addressed through the Foster Family Day Off.

The event's primary goal was to show the members of FBC one of the many ways that foster and adoptive families could be supported. For the event to succeed, collaboration with local agencies and organizations was crucial; these relationships were initiated during the Collaborator's Event. The collaboration with Foster All and Olive Crest significantly amplified the PLACED project's impact. As Medefind writes, "Partnerships between Foster Family Agencies and churches are critical in creating a support network that extends beyond the foster family itself."²⁴⁷

These partnerships ensured a broader reach, bringing more families into the project. By inviting their network of families to participate, Foster All and Olive Crest helped create a more supportive community for foster and adoptive families. This collaboration not only enriched the lives of those directly involved but also strengthened the overall effectiveness of the PLACED project in fulfilling its goal.

Recruiting volunteers from the church community to assist with event logistics was an essential aspect. To accomplish this, members of FBC who had expressed their interest in supporting the PLACED project were notified through their preferred means of contact. Additionally, bulletin announcements asking for volunteers were made. Approval to use rooms in the church facilities was needed. This approval was requested via an email to the church secretary.

²⁴⁷ Jedd Medefind, *Upended: How Following Jesus into the Margins Has Shaped My Faith and Changed My World* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2012), 132.

Finally, establishing a registration system was essential for maintaining contact with foster and adoptive families and inviting them to participate in future events related to the PLACED project (see Appendix U). This registration collected and organized families' contact information, including names, email addresses, phone numbers, and other relevant details. Additionally, it provided a means to track engagement and communications to meet the specific needs and interests of each family, ensuring that the support offered remained relevant and impactful.

Implementation of Intervention Design

The implementation of the PLACED action research project at First Baptist Church was designed to provide support to the foster care and adoption community through a series of targeted events. As Schooler suggest, “The implementation of targeted events within the church setting plays a crucial role in addressing the multifaceted challenges of the foster care system.”²⁴⁸ These events underscore the church’s dedication to addressing the complex needs of the foster care system and emphasize the pivotal role of the teaching series in raising awareness about these needs.

By actively engaging in events like the Foster Family Day Off and the Social Worker Care Package event, the church demonstrated a hands-on commitment to supporting all stakeholders within the foster care system. These practical applications of support were not isolated efforts but were deeply rooted in the comprehensive educational framework provided by the teaching series. Through these efforts, First Baptist Church has shown how structured educational initiatives can motivate a faith-based community to support and provide essential resources for the foster care and adoption community.

²⁴⁸ Jayne E. Schooler, *The Whole Life Adoption Book: Realistic Advice for Building a Healthy Adoptive Family* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2011), 198.

Triangulation

This research includes gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. A methodological triangulation method was used, incorporating interviews with stakeholders, such as those mentioned in the Collaborators event, questionnaires for fostering parents, church leaders, and congregants, and validation of information gathered through discussions and sessions. Creswell notes, “By combining interviews, questionnaires, and validation through various discussions, researchers can cross-verify data, leading to a more robust and credible analysis of the needs and challenges faced by specific communities.”²⁴⁹

The three events—Training Series, Social Worker Care Package, and Foster Family Day Off—were practical implementations that were triangulated with the data gathered from the teaching sessions, relationships formed in PLACED Partnerships, and insights from the Collaborators Event. These events created a robust framework for support. This triangulation ensured that the initiatives were well-informed, relevant, and effectively addressed the identified needs, demonstrating the church's commitment to making a meaningful impact in the foster care and adoption community.

For the project to be considered successful, it was necessary that the researcher obtain surveys to measure the level of support that stakeholders experienced. The researcher, guided by insights from his mentor, implemented a strategy to incentivize the completion of surveys by incorporating gift cards as rewards. This approach not only boosted survey response rates but also demonstrated appreciation for the respondents' time and effort. By providing gift cards, the researcher ensured a higher level of engagement and a more robust collection of data, which was crucial for accurately assessing the project's impact and areas for improvement.

²⁴⁹ Creswell, *Research Design*, 214.

The gift card donations came from individuals participating in the teaching series, significantly adding to its success. This generous support not only facilitated the incentive of survey completions but also underscored the series' impact on the participants. Their willingness to donate reflected a deepening commitment to the foster care and adoption community, inspired by the insights and education provided during the sessions. This outcome suggests that incorporating a teaching series can effectively increase support within the church. The gift cards were five-dollar increments to a coffee shop.

Location

The majority of the PLACED project events were held on-site at the First Baptist Church in Long Beach. The researcher chose this location because the church has a well-established presence in a community known for its significant number of children in foster care. As Daniel Heimpel points out, “Long Beach, as part of Los Angeles County, grapples with substantial child welfare challenges. A significant number of children enter the foster care system annually, driven by a range of socio-economic issues such as poverty, substance abuse, and domestic violence, highlighting the need for robust support and intervention strategies.”²⁵⁰

Additionally, FBC has an expansive facility that significantly contributed to the success of the PLACED project. The church is equipped with a range of amenities, including a nursery, a gymnasium, a fully-equipped kitchen, and numerous meeting rooms. These facilities provided an ideal setting for the diverse activities and events organized under the PLACED project. The nursery was particularly beneficial during the Foster Family Day Off event, offering a safe and welcoming space for young children, while the gymnasium accommodated larger group activities.

²⁵⁰ Daniel Heimpel, *Foster Care in California: Los Angeles County's Challenges and Innovations* (Berkeley: California Child Welfare Indicators Project, 2015), 32.

The sessions for the Teaching series were also held on the campus of FBC. This decision was made to leverage the regular Sunday evening program, which already aligned with the routines of church members, thereby creating convenience and ensuring consistent attendance. Additionally, the church's nursery services, provided by its members, facilitated participation by offering childcare, allowing parents to fully engage in the sessions without concern for their children's care during that time and without requiring the researcher to find additional volunteers to run the childcare program and miss out of the teaching series.

Equipment

The researcher equipped himself with a recorder and microphones, ensuring that interviews, sessions, and lessons were accurately captured. Setup facilitated the transcription of conversations that took place during the Collaborators Event and allowed individuals who missed a week or two of the Teaching Series to complete the lessons in absentia. The use of these tools ensured that no valuable insights or discussions were lost, providing a thorough record for analysis. Creswell writes, “Surveys are a valuable tool in research because they allow for the systematic collection of data from a large number of respondents, providing a quantitative measure of attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics.”²⁵¹

Additionally, the researcher utilized his existing computer, equipped with Numbers and Pages software and ample storage space for interview recordings and notes, enabling efficient organization and management of the data collected. Leavy points out, “Utilizing existing technology and software, such as spreadsheet and word processing programs, can significantly streamline the data management process in research. These tools are essential for organizing

²⁵¹ Creswell, *Research Design*, 159.

large amounts of data, allowing researchers to efficiently store, retrieve, and analyze their findings.”²⁵²

Moreover, First Baptist Church provided extensive support by offering access to video monitors, other audiovisual equipment, tables, chairs, meeting rooms, and a copier, all without incurring extra expenses for the researcher. This support was crucial in facilitating each of the project's steps, including the Collaborators Event, Teaching Series, and Foster Family Day Off, along with other various activities. Furthermore, FBC contributed design artwork for the flyers created to invite and inform the congregation about the upcoming project. This ensured that communication and engagement were effective, maximizing participation and awareness among church members. The combination of these resources and support systems underscored the collaborative effort between the researcher and the church, enhancing the project's overall impact.

The researcher's daughter volunteered by assisting with record-keeping and tracking attendance during each of the project's sessions and events. Her responsibilities included maintaining attendance logs for the Teaching Series, Collaborators Event, and Foster Family Day Off, ensuring accurate records of participant engagement. Additionally, she managed the sign-in sheets for childcare services provided during events, helping to ensure a safe and organized environment for the foster children.

Finally, the researcher subscribed to several third-party sites, such as Canva and Eventbrite. As Creswell points out, “Subscribing to third-party platforms such as Canva and Eventbrite allowed the researcher to access specialized tools for design and event management,

²⁵² Patricia Leavy, *Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches* (New York: Guilford, 2017), 214.

which were crucial for creating visually appealing materials and efficiently organizing research-related events.”²⁵³ Canva was utilized to create visually appealing flyers, social media posts, and other promotional materials, ensuring that the communication about the project was engaging and professional. Eventbrite facilitated the organization and promotion of the project's events, making it easier to manage registrations, send reminders, and track attendance.

These tools helped streamline the administrative aspects of the project, allowing the researcher to focus more on content and engagement. Additionally, the professional quality of the promotional materials and the efficient event management contributed to higher participation rates and overall project success. Creswell again states, “Subscribing to specialized services allows researchers to enhance the quality and efficiency of their work, ensuring that their presentations, data management, and event coordination are professional and effective.”²⁵⁴

Collaborators Event

The Collaborators event used the triangulation research method. This event utilized interviews, questionnaires, discussions, and interactive sessions to gather stakeholder information. This event utilized a combination of interviews, questionnaires, discussions, and interactive sessions to gather comprehensive information from various stakeholders, including social workers, foster families, agency representatives, and church leaders.

Through interviews, the researcher gained in-depth insights and personal narratives that highlighted individual experiences and challenges within the foster care and adoption community. Questionnaires were distributed to collect quantitative data on specific issues faced by the foster care and adoption community. Discussions and interactive sessions facilitated group engagement, where stakeholders could share their experiences and insights in a collaborative

²⁵³ Creswell, *Research Design*, 110.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 85.

environment. These sessions encouraged open dialogue, enabling participants to build on each other's ideas and offer practical solutions based on their collective experiences.

The session began with secretarial help marking attendance on a spreadsheet located outside the classroom doors. The chairs for this session were set up in a square so that participants could interact with each other face-to-face. Refreshments were provided at the back of the room, and participants were encouraged to help themselves at any time throughout the session. This ensured that the participants felt comfortable and relaxed during the session, which lasted for one hour.

This event needed to provide adequate childcare to ensure that foster families could attend without concern for their children's supervision. To facilitate this, the researcher's daughter took on the responsibility of contacting members of First Baptist Church to organize and manage childcare arrangements. This provision not only increased attendance but also cultivated a sense of community and support among the church members and foster families.

Teaching Series

The triangulation method was used in this aspect of the project. The combination of data collection methods, such as reviewing information from the Collaborators Event, incorporating it into the teaching series, conducting pre-and post-surveys, and evaluating the teaching series, demonstrated the presence of the triangulation method. Creswell highlights the importance of surveys, "Surveys are a critical tool in research projects because they provide a structured way to gather data directly from participants. They enable researchers to collect quantitative information, understand trends, and gain insights into the attitudes and behaviors of a target population, which is essential for making informed conclusions and recommendations."²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 194.

The pre-and-post assessment determined if there was a statistically significant difference in the comprehension of theological concepts related to the church's support for the foster care and adoption community between members of FBC before and after participating in the four-part teaching series. The utilization of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, along with the pre-and post-surveys, allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention's impact. As one author noted, “This mixed-methods approach allows researchers to capture a fuller picture of the intervention’s impact, combining numerical data with in-depth, contextual insights.”²⁵⁶

Each session began with secretarial help marking attendance on a spreadsheet located outside the classroom doors. Refreshments were provided at the back of the room, and participants were encouraged to help themselves at any time throughout the session. The sign-in process helped the researcher track participation and attendance accurately, while the availability of refreshments ensured that attendees felt comfortable and welcome, promoting a relaxed and engaging environment for all sessions. For the first three sessions, chairs were facing the stage to see and interact with speakers and other folks who were presenting. The final session included a panel discussion of foster parents, adoptive parents, parents of homes where there were biological children and foster children, and former foster parents. The chairs for this session were set up in a square so that participants could interact with each other face-to-face.

Placed Partner

The triangulation method was also used in the Placed Partner section of this project. Participants in the PLACED partnership were carefully matched with foster families, adoptive families, or social workers based on their responses to a detailed questionnaire. This matching

²⁵⁶ Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 205.

process ensured compatibility and addressed specific needs and preferences, facilitating effective communication and support. Weekly checklists and logs were maintained to track the support activities, and a post-partnership assessment gathered feedback from all involved parties, providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of the support provided.

The researcher tracked the responses and activities of PLACED partners using spreadsheets and weekly checklists. Each week, PLACED partners submitted their completed checklists, which detailed the various support actions they provided. At the end of the four-week partnership period, a post-PLACED partnership assessment was distributed to the social workers, foster families, and adoptive families. The data was used to evaluate the effectiveness and adequacy of the support offered.

The culmination of the PLACED partnership in two separate events, Foster Family Day Off and Social Worker Care Package, further solidified the triangulation approach. Foster Family Day Off provided foster families with much-needed respite, demonstrating tangible support and engagement from church members. Meanwhile, the Social Worker Care Package event offered appreciation and encouragement to the social workers, acknowledging their critical role and the challenges they face.

All the events were integral in validating the triangulation approach, where data gathered from teaching sessions, relationships formed through PLACED partnerships, and insights from the Collaborators Event all converged. This convergence of information from multiple sources and activities strengthens the project's findings.²⁵⁷ It underscores the importance of a multifaceted approach in addressing the complex needs of the foster care and adoption community.

²⁵⁷ Uwe Flick, *Managing Quality in Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2007), 42.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the PLACED action research project at First Baptist Church not only aimed to support the foster care and adoption community but also sought to empower church members to become active, informed, and compassionate advocates. By integrating community events, educational sessions, and practical training, the project created a support network. This comprehensive approach not only provided immediate support to those in the foster care and adoption community but also laid the groundwork for ongoing engagement and advocacy, ensuring that the church's efforts would continue to make a positive impact long after the project's conclusion.

The project's success is evidenced by the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including pre- and post-surveys, which allowed for a thorough evaluation of the intervention's impact. This approach is crucial, as “the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, supplemented by pre- and post-surveys, provides a robust framework for evaluating the effectiveness of an intervention.”²⁵⁸ Moreover, by creating an environment of learning and partnership, the church not only supported current foster and adoptive families but also inspired other members to consider how they might contribute to this vital work. As Johnson writes, “When a church creates a culture of support and education around foster care and adoption, it naturally motivates others within the congregation to step forward, knowing they will not be alone in their journey.”²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 205.

²⁵⁹ Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 63.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter outlines the results of the PLACED ministry research action project, which is a product of the groundwork laid in the first three chapters. The chapter provides a detailed account of the project's development and execution. From the beginning, this project has had one goal—to support foster and adoptive families. This goal was accomplished through a multi-step project that aimed to help the foster care and adoption community by empowering the members of First Baptist Church (FBC) to provide meaningful support over twelve weeks.

Having established a foundation for supporting the foster care and adoption community, this chapter will detail the development and implementation of the PLACED action research project. The PLACED project was structured around key initiatives, each designed to address specific needs within the foster care and adoption community. The project's development involved events collaborating with current foster care and adoption families, including social workers, church leaders, and community members. Each initiative was carefully designed to support families, strengthen community ties, and create a culture of compassion within First Baptist Church. As this chapter will detail, the PLACED project stands as a testament to the power of strategic action and community collaboration in transforming the lives of vulnerable children and supporting the families who care for them.

The research conducted in this study was designed to identify areas in the foster care and adoption community where First Baptist Church could effectively provide support. The goal was to equip the church with specific strategies to address these areas. As Johnson wrote, “The power of partnership in foster care cannot be overstated. When churches, families, and agencies join forces, they form a strong, united front that can meet the diverse needs of children in the system,

offering them not just care, but hope and a future.”²⁶⁰ To achieve this, the researcher employed both qualitative and quantitative methods, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the needs and opportunities for church involvement. The study then challenged the church to respond proactively to the insights gained, fostering a community dedicated to supporting the foster care and adoption community in meaningful ways.

Collective Results

As will be demonstrated below, the collective results of the PLACED project illustrate the church's dedication to addressing the complex needs of the foster care system and the effectiveness of a structured, collaborative approach in raising awareness, fostering engagement, and providing meaningful support. By leveraging partnerships, educational initiatives, and practical events, First Baptist Church successfully created a supportive network that benefited foster families, adoptive families, and social workers.

The project's impact extended beyond immediate interventions, laying the groundwork for ongoing support and involvement within the foster care and adoption community. The project laid a strong foundation for ongoing support and involvement within the foster care and adoption community. The relationships formed, the knowledge gained, and the commitments made during the PLACED project ensure that First Baptist Church will continue to play a pivotal role in supporting the foster care and adoption community. The project demonstrated that a well-organized, compassionate, and community-driven approach could significantly improve the lives of those involved in foster care and adoption.

Collaborators Event Results

The Quantitative Results

²⁶⁰ Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 67.

The Collaborators Event had twenty-four individual attendees ranging from foster parents, resource providers, adoptive families, and administrators of foster family agencies. The participants were eight foster care and adoption families (fifteen individuals), one director from a local foster care agency, and eight individuals in positions of church leadership. Participants were asked to complete a survey questionnaire (Appendices I, J, and K) and sign a consent form before the meeting. The survey reveals several key insights into the perceived needs and priorities for support services that the church could provide to help address challenges faced by the foster care and adoption community.

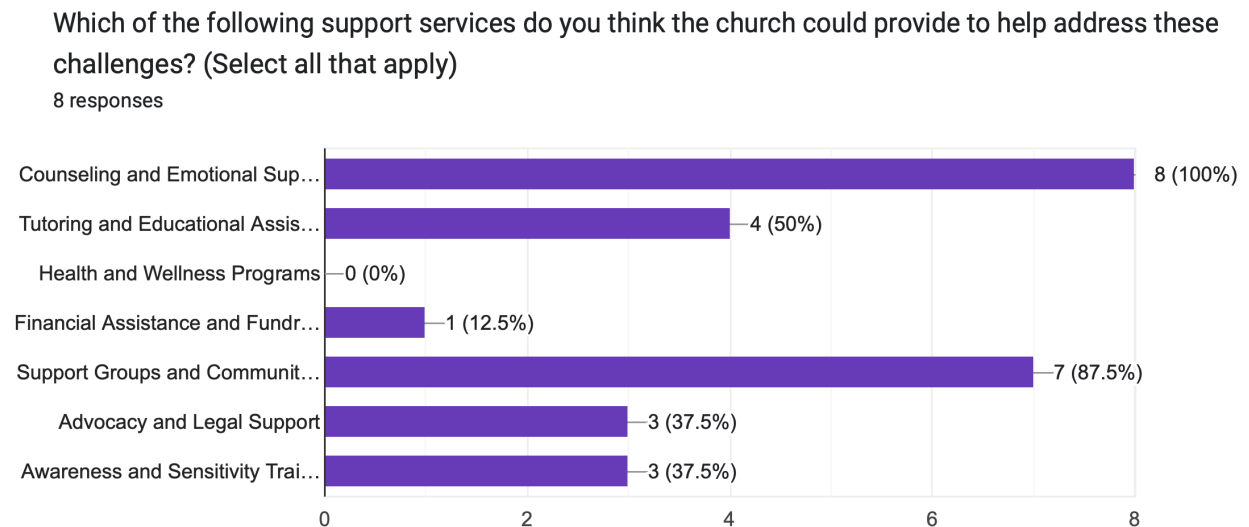


Figure 5. Areas of Support Needed.

All respondents, one hundred percent, indicated that counseling and emotional support are crucial areas where the church can provide assistance. This highlights a significant need for mental health and emotional well-being services within this community. A large majority of respondents, eighty-seven percent, identified support groups and community building as essential services. This suggests a strong desire for opportunities to connect with others who share similar

experiences and challenges, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. Half of the respondents, fifty percent, believed that tutoring and educational assistance are valuable services the church can offer.

The survey aimed to better understand the challenges that foster children and foster and adoption families face. By asking participants to share their experiences and insights, the conversation at the event sought to identify the most significant issues that impact these communities. The goal was not only to highlight these challenges but also to explore potential solutions that could support families in navigating the complexities of foster care and adoption. As Schooler noted about support for foster care, “We must bridge the gap between identifying problems and creating actionable, sustainable support systems.”²⁶¹

The survey results indicated that foster children and foster and adoption families face a wide range of significant challenges, with specific issues being more prominent than others. Emotional and behavioral issues were identified as the most pressing challenge, with one hundred percent of respondents acknowledging its significance. This indicates a unanimous recognition of the mental health struggles and behavioral difficulties that foster children often face. As Harden points out, “Foster children often face significant mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and attachment disorders, which are compounded by the behavioral difficulties that arise from their trauma-filled pasts.”²⁶²

Seventy-five percent of respondents pointed to a lack of support networks as a significant challenge. This underscores the need for strong community and relational support systems to help foster families thrive. Educational challenges, health and medical needs, legal obstacles, and

²⁶¹ Jayne E. Schooler, *Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 132.

²⁶² Harden, *Infants in the Child Welfare System*, 112.

social stigma and isolation were identified by fifty percent of respondents, highlighting them as equally significant challenges. This suggests that foster families often face multifaceted difficulties that span different aspects of daily life, from navigating the education system to dealing with social prejudices.

What compelled you to consider foster care and adoption?

9 responses

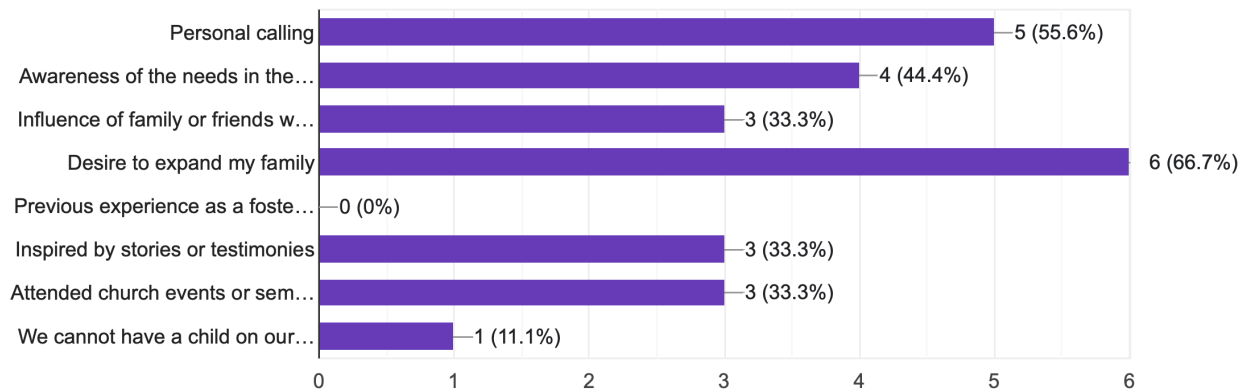


Figure 6. Consideration to Foster or Adopt

An unforeseen insight gained through the survey was why foster care and adoption families gave for beginning their foster care or adoption journey. This discovery sheds light on the diverse and often deeply personal motivations that drive individuals and families to engage in foster care and adoption. As Foli and Thompson point out, understanding these motivations is crucial, “Behind why individuals and families choose to engage in foster care is crucial. These motivations often stem from a deep sense of compassion, a commitment to providing a safe and nurturing environment, and sometimes a desire to expand their family.”²⁶³

²⁶³ Karen J. Foli and John R. Thompson, *The Post-Adoption Blues: Overcoming the Unforeseen Challenges of Adoption* (Emmaus: Rodale, 2004), 45.

The most significant motivating factor, with sixty-six percent of respondents indicating this, is the desire to expand their family. Studies indicate that a majority of foster families, about sixty-six percent, cite this as their primary reason, reflecting a deep-seated human aspiration to nurture and grow a family.²⁶⁴ This insight reveals a fundamental human desire to grow and nurture a larger family unit. It indicates that many individuals and couples view foster care and adoption not only as a way to provide a home for children in need but also as a means to fulfill their aspirations of having a larger family. They see fostering and adoption as a way to make a positive impact on a child's life while simultaneously enriching their own family life.

Additionally, a substantial number of respondents, fifty-five percent, feel a personal calling to foster care and adoption. This reveals the importance of individual conviction and a sense of purpose in driving people to engage in these activities. It underscores the idea that when individuals feel personally called to this mission, they are more likely to commit to the long-term challenges and rewards of fostering and adopting children. This insight highlights what Medefind writes, “When individuals perceive their involvement in foster care and adoption as a personal calling, they are more resilient in facing the long-term challenges and more dedicated to the rewards that come with nurturing and raising these children.”²⁶⁵

By gaining a deeper understanding of these motivations, the researcher for the PLACED action project has been able to better tailor the messaging in the teaching series, resources, and support structures to address the unique needs and drivers of prospective foster and adoptive families. This knowledge allows for more targeted outreach, more effective recruitment

²⁶⁴ David M. Brodzinsky and Marshall D. Schechter, *The Psychology of Adoption* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 87.

²⁶⁵ Medefind, *Becoming Home*, 74.

strategies, and the development of programs that resonate with these families' journeys and aspirations.

The survey revealed another informative insight from the perspective of foster care families: why social workers leave the workspace. High caseloads were identified as the most significant factor in social workers leaving the field, with one hundred percent of respondents acknowledging this. This confirms what Barth writes, “Many social workers struggle to keep up with the demands of their caseloads, which can result in burnout and a diminished capacity to effectively support the children and families they serve.”²⁶⁶

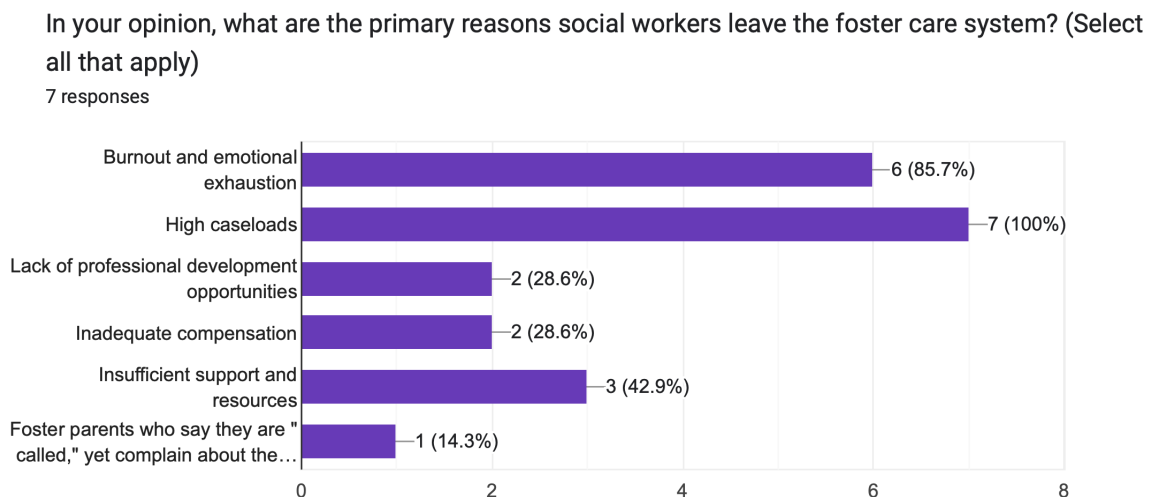


Figure 7. Primary Reasons Departure.

This suggests that social workers are overwhelmed by the cases they must manage. Additionally, forty-two percent of respondents mentioned insufficient support as a contributing factor. This highlights the need for better organizational support systems, such as those

²⁶⁶ Richard P. Barth, *Foster Care Dynamics: The Impacts of Social Workers' Caseloads on Service Delivery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 54.

implemented by the PLACED action project, as important to social workers' longevity in the field.

The Collaborators Event was successful in confirming partnerships for the PLACED action project. As the post-event survey revealed, respondents were unanimously willing to become PLACED partners. This reflects a high level of engagement and readiness within the community to collaborate and contribute to the success of the PLACED action research project.

Would you consider becoming a PLACED partner?

13 responses

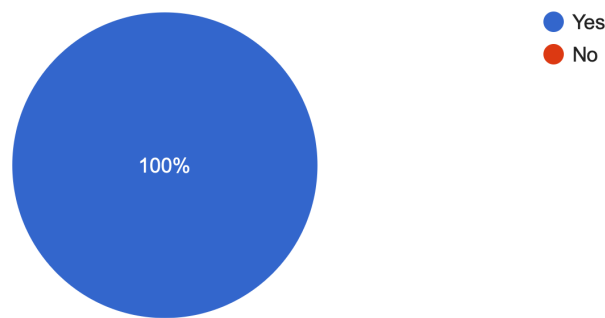


Figure 8. Collaborators Commitment to Partnership.

Additionally, the post-event survey reveals the specific capacities in which respondents are willing to participate as PLACED partners. Twelve families and individuals were willing to participate in the Social Worker Care Package initiative. Eleven of the participants were interested in participating in the Teaching Series. This suggests a high interest in educational initiatives, likely aimed at providing training, sharing knowledge, and fostering a better understanding of foster care and adoption. Lastly, ten participants were willing to attend the Foster Family Day Off events. This shows a significant interest in providing direct support and

relief to foster families, acknowledging the need for rest and community building among these families.

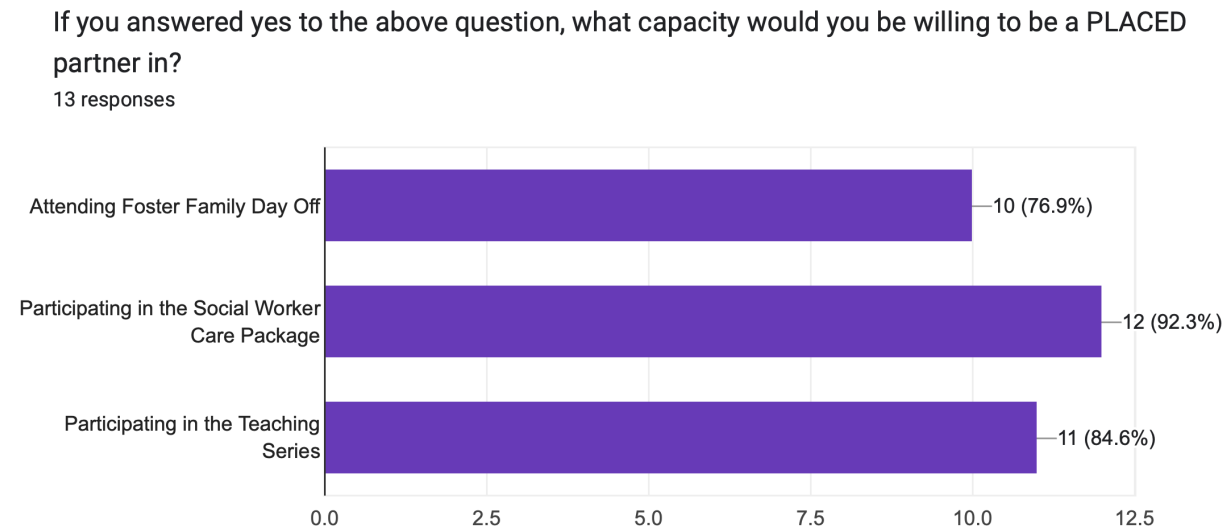


Figure 9. Area of Commitment

Most notably, the Collaborators Event involved a Foster Family Agency to help pass the word to their families for the Foster Family Day Off. This partnership is particularly significant as it leverages the agency's established connections and credibility within the foster care community, ensuring the event reaches a broader audience.²⁶⁷ By tapping into this network, the Foster Family Day Off is likely to see an increase in participants. This heightened participation enriches the event itself and amplifies the reach and impact of the PLACED seminar. With more families attending, the seminar can engage a more extensive and diverse group, fostering greater community support, and providing more families with valuable resources and information. The

²⁶⁷ Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 112.

increased turnout also presents more opportunities for networking, shared experiences, and community building among foster families.

The Qualitative Results

The qualitative feedback provided deeper insights into the personal experiences and motivations of the attendees. All respondents (100%) recognized emotional and behavioral issues as the most pressing challenge. The unanimous acknowledgment is what Harden notes, “here is unanimous recognition among professionals that foster children frequently endure significant mental health challenges and behavioral difficulties. These issues are often rooted in the trauma, instability, and loss they have experienced, necessitating a comprehensive and compassionate approach to their care.”²⁶⁸

What are the most significant challenges that foster children and families face? (Select all that apply)

8 responses

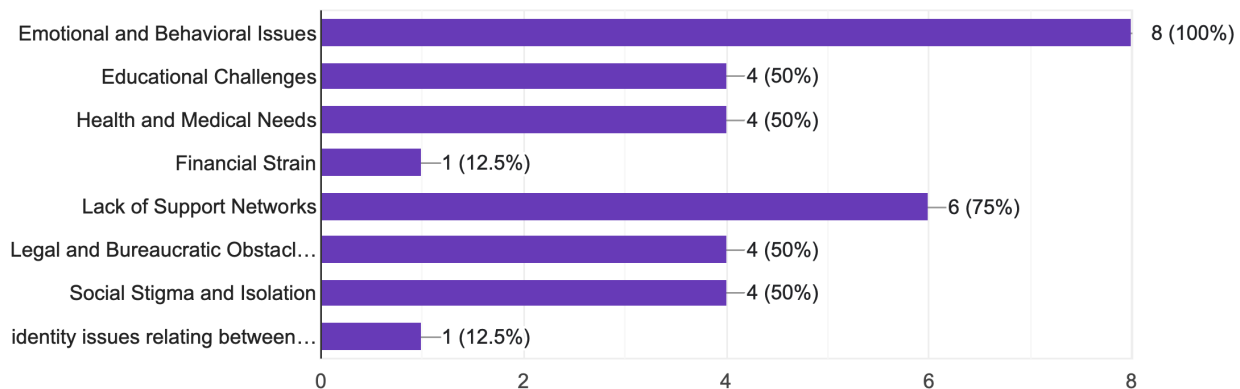


Figure 10. Significant Challenges

²⁶⁸ Harden, *Infants in the Child Welfare System*, 112.

This shared recognition highlights the significant emotional toll on foster children and underscores the urgent need for targeted mental health support within the foster care system. By understanding these deeply personal challenges, the church can better tailor its support services to address the emotional and behavioral needs of foster children, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and stability. By developing deeper understanding of the specific emotional and behavioral challenges that foster children face, the church can more effectively customize its support to meet their unique needs. This tailored approach plays a crucial role in enhancing the overall well-being and stability of these children, ensuring they receive the love and care necessary for them to flourish.²⁶⁹

Teaching Series Results

The teaching series consisted of four lessons highlighting the multifaceted nature of support required by foster children and families, framed by biblical principles and historical examples. Each lesson focused on a specific area of need—tangible, relational, spiritual, and educational—and underscored the church's crucial role in providing comprehensive care. By examining key scriptural passages and drawing inspiration from historical figures like Charles Spurgeon, Dwight Moody, and Charles Loring Brace, the series challenges believers to actively participate in fostering and adoption ministries.

Session 1

Session 1 highlighted the tangible needs that foster and adoptive families require, drawing from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25–37. The message emphasized the importance of providing practical support to those in foster care, inspired by the actions of Charles Spurgeon and the Samaritan. The lesson brought attention to the dire statistics of the

²⁶⁹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 95.

U.S. foster care system, with over 400,000 children in care and 100,000 available for adoption. High turnover rates among foster families and social workers exacerbate the instability and trauma these children face. The church's proactive role is crucial in addressing these needs.

The lesson began with the example of Charles Spurgeon, who, beyond his renowned sermons, established an orphanage in nineteenth-century London. Highlighting the work of Dallimore which states, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon established the Stockwell Orphanage in London, driven by his deep compassion for the city's abandoned and destitute children. Spurgeon's commitment to caring for the physical and spiritual needs of these orphans was a practical outworking of his Christian faith."²⁷⁰ His call to his congregation to take tangible actions for vulnerable children set the stage for understanding our modern responsibilities toward foster care.

The lesson informed the participants of the practical ways to help, including babysitting, making phone calls, providing respite care, and providing clothes and supplies. However, these require us to build, develop, and maintain relationships. As Johnson points out, "these acts of service are most effective when rooted in genuine relationships, as ongoing connections foster trust and understanding, making the help truly meaningful."²⁷¹

Session 2

Session 2 was centered on the loss that those in the foster care and adoption community face and the church's ability to provide relational support. The lesson reflects on the story of Ruth from the Bible, which provides valuable insights into responding to loss. Naomi, having

²⁷⁰ Arnold A. Dallimore, *Spurgeon: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 173.

²⁷¹ Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 45.

lost her husband and sons, initially sabotages her relationships out of pain, urging her daughters-in-law to leave her.

The lesson began by considering the pioneering work of Charles Loring Brace and the Orphan Train Movement, which highlighted how education and opportunity can transform lives. O’Conner writes, “Charles Loring Brace, through his work with the Children’s Aid Society, revolutionized the approach to caring for homeless and orphaned children in 19th-century America. His belief in placing children with foster families, rather than institutional care, laid the foundation for modern foster care systems.”²⁷² The lesson then encouraged the church to support educational initiatives, provide mentorship, and advocate for the educational needs of foster children.

For foster and adoptive families, the loss of biological family, identity, attachment, trust, and childhood are profound and varied.²⁷³ These losses can lead to emotional turmoil, difficulty forming attachments, and trust issues. Understanding these impacts, the church can create a welcoming and supportive environment by ensuring foster and adoptive families feel fully included and supported.

Session 3

Session 3 focused on the church’s responsibility to address the spiritual needs of those in the foster care and adoption community, drawing principles from the story of the lame man found in Mark 2. The lesson highlighted the contrasting experiences that those in this community feel. First, it is an experience of rejection, of not belonging in the world where one begins. Second, it signifies being received, embraced, accepted, and welcomed by others. It emphasizes

²⁷² Stephen O’Connor, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 56.

²⁷³ Schulte and Michaelson, *Caring for Your Adopted Child*, 100.

practical ways the church can help, such as providing foster families with a day off, creating care packages for social workers, and establishing partnerships to offer spiritual and emotional support.

The lesson began by drawing from the example of Dwight Moody's evangelistic efforts and the spiritual guidance he provided to many; this lesson calls on the church to nurture the spiritual lives of those affected by foster care through prayer, Bible study, and community support. As Noll pointed out, "Moody understood that shaping young hearts was crucial for the future of the church, and he invested significant effort into Sunday Schools and other ministries aimed at bringing children to Christ."²⁷⁴ This lesson calls on the church to nurture the spiritual lives of those affected by foster care through prayer, Bible study, and community support.

The lesson also explores the biblical concept of adoption, explaining how it informs believers' understanding of their relationship with God, confirms their justification, and transforms their lives. Adoption is presented not just as an action but as a multifaceted journey that deeply impacts everyone involved. From the biblical perspective, adoption is about providing a family for a child and signifies a profound spiritual transformation for believers as God's children.

Session 4

Session 4 of the teaching series was deeply impactful. It featured foster and adoptive families from the congregation who generously shared their personal journeys. This session was unique because it moved beyond theoretical discussion and biblical principles, providing participants with firsthand accounts of the challenges and rewards of fostering and adopting.

²⁷⁴ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 290.

During the session, the families answered a wide range of questions, offering valuable insights into their daily lives, the emotional and practical hurdles they face, and the profound joys they experience, from the initial decision to open their homes to children in need to the ongoing commitment required to nurture and support these children.

Participants in the teaching series better understood the tangible needs of foster and adoptive families, such as the importance of respite care, financial support, travel arrangements, and supportive networks. The session also underscored the relational and emotional support that foster and adoptive families require. The families spoke candidly about the importance of the church family's support. As Johnson writes, "Their candid discussions highlighted the need for the church to be more aware and involved in providing both emotional and practical support to these families."²⁷⁵

Teaching Series Pre-Assessment

A pre-assessment survey was administered the weeks before and during the teaching series to evaluate the congregation's attitude and understanding toward foster care and adoption. Assessments were collected before the first teaching session. Families and couples were allowed to take the test together but asked to note their names individually in the comment section. Twenty-eight participants completed the pre-assessment.

The pre-assessment collected basic demographic data and informed the researcher of the basic information concerning participants. The assessment also utilized a six-point Likert scale to assess beliefs, attitudes, and current involvement in and toward foster care and adoption. The assessment was about the participants current biblical understanding regarding support toward vulnerable children and families. The second assessment was about the participants' attitudes

²⁷⁵ Johnson, *Reframing Foster*, 92.

toward adoption and foster care. The third was about the participants personal responsibility for children and families in foster care and adoption scenarios. The data taken from the assessment contributed to the makeup of the material and placed partnerships.

Teaching Series Post-Assessment

A post-assessment survey was administered during the final week of the class to quantify how the class material, structure, and teaching were received. The post-assessment offered valuable insights into how the class inspired participants to actively support the foster care and adoption community. It also highlights how the class successfully engaged participants in becoming committed PLACED partners dedicated to making a tangible difference.

Twenty-two participants completed the post-assessment. The two areas that revealed the largest difference between pre-assessment were the level of personal commitment and personal involvement with the foster care and adoptive community. These findings highlight a substantial increase in participants' readiness to actively support and engage with foster care initiatives, reflecting the impactful nature of the teaching series.

The personal commitment was indicated by the fact that sixteen participants from the class signed up to serve during the Foster Family Day Off. This represents a 69.6% positive response. Each participant committed to volunteering between four and six hours to provide childcare for foster families. This response highlights their commitment to support foster care and adoption, reflecting the teaching series' impact in inspiring, actionable support within the church community.

Every participant who completed a post-assessment indicated a willingness to support the foster care and adoption community in some capacity. The areas where participants expressed a personal commitment to get involved include:

- Coordinate care packages for social workers.
- Volunteered to become a PLACED Partner.
- Reaching out and enlisting social workers.
- Coordination of PLACED ministries (meals, cribs, clothes, etc.).
- Donations toward purchasing gifts for the care package.
- Train to become a licensed respite caregiver.
- Train to become a visit monitor.
- Serve and coordinate transportation for foster families.
- Host foster families for meals.
- Host a quarterly foster care and adoption family event.

It should be noted here that the participants who indicated a willingness to foster, begin respite care, or help conduct monitored visits were put into contact with foster family agencies to obtain licensing for the individuals. Two families expressed a strong desire to start fostering, demonstrating their commitment to providing long-term, stable homes for children in need. Additionally, four families showed interest in offering respite care, which is crucial for providing current foster families with much-needed breaks and support. These connections will help ensure that these participants can transition into their roles and be equipped with the necessary resources.

The Qualitative Results

The qualitative results of the post-assessment revealed deeper insights into the motivations and readiness of these families. The willingness of participants to volunteer their time and resources, coordinate care packages, become PLACED Partners, and undertake training for respite care and visit monitoring shows a profound personal commitment beyond what numbers alone can convey. Specific commitments included coordinating care packages for social workers, becoming PLACED Partners, enlisting social workers, coordinating PLACED ministries, donating gifts for care packages, training to become licensed respite caregivers and

visit monitors, serving and coordinating transportation for foster families, hosting foster families for meals, and organizing quarterly foster care and adoption family events.

Foster Family Day Off Results

The PLACED action research project organized a Foster Family Day Off event, inviting participants from the teaching series to extend their support to foster and adoptive families in the Los Angeles area. This event provided a much-needed break for these families by offering free childcare services for their foster children. As Mosley points out, “Foster families often struggle to find respite or time off due to the stringent certification requirements and the shortage of qualified respite caregivers. The bureaucratic hurdles involved in ensuring that temporary caregivers are properly certified can make it difficult for foster parents to take a much-needed break.”²⁷⁶ Through this event, the teaching series participants had the opportunity to put their learning into practice, demonstrating tangible support and care for the foster community.

The Quantitative Results

The event was promoted through a multi-faceted approach within the broader church community. Announcements were made during church services, encouraging congregation members to spread the word and invite any foster families they knew. Additionally, two foster family agencies partnered with the researcher to send email invitations to their licensed families, extending the event's reach to a wider audience. Lastly, personal invitations were crucial, as foster families were encouraged to invite others within their network. This comprehensive promotional strategy ensured that the event reached a diverse group of foster and adoptive families, maximizing participation and impact.

²⁷⁶ Jennifer E. Mosley, *The Bureaucracy of Compassion: Managing the Complexities of Foster Care Systems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 128.

Six foster families agreed to participate in the Foster Family Day Off event, representing a total of twenty-two children under their care. One family, in particular, demonstrated an extraordinary desire for support by driving two hours one way to take advantage of this day of respite. The participation of these families highlighted our event's significant impact and reach, demonstrating broad engagement from the community. This turnout reflected the effectiveness of the outreach efforts and the pressing demand for supportive services within the foster care community.

All of the foster families volunteered individually, twelve individuals in all, to complete a detailed survey, providing feedback on the effectiveness of this aspect of the project. Their participation in the survey was instrumental in offering insights into their experiences and needs, enabling the researcher to assess the impact and success of the Foster Family Day Off event. The survey responses highlighted key areas where the event succeeded and areas that could benefit from improvement. The willingness of these families to share their experiences and insights validated the importance of the Foster Family Day Off.

The survey evaluated four key areas of support provided by the Foster Family Day Off event. First, it assessed the personal benefits received by foster parents. Second, it measured the support felt from the broader church community. Third, it examined the event's impact on the families' motivation to continue fostering. Finally, the willingness to become PLACED partners,.

The Foster Family Day Off event survey results indicate a predominantly positive reception, with most participants reporting a high level of support across various areas. Specifically, 8 out of the 12 participants felt very supported in all surveyed areas, reflecting the overall effectiveness of the event in demonstrating support to the foster care community. One participant remained neutral regarding the support received from the broader church community,

indicating an area that might benefit from further attention to enhance feelings of inclusion from the church community. Additionally, three participants expressed interest but did not agree to participate as a PLACED partner.

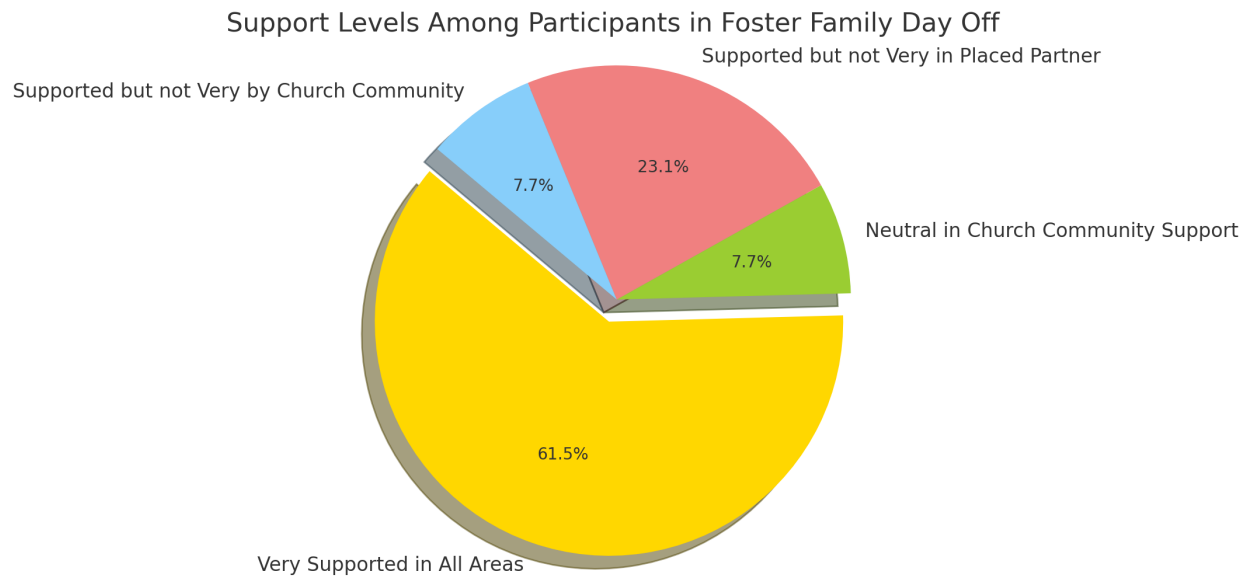


Figure 11. Support Levels

Another indicator of the Foster Family Day Off's success was the willingness of sixteen participants from the teaching series to volunteer to serve during the event. By volunteering their time, these participants demonstrated a proactive approach to applying what they learned in the teaching series, showing a tangible commitment to making a difference in the lives of foster care families and children.²⁷⁷ These volunteers played a crucial role in providing essential childcare, a cornerstone of the event, allowing foster parents to take a much-needed break from their demanding roles. Mosely writes, "When foster families are able to take a break, it significantly rejuvenates their ability to provide care. Respite opportunities, though difficult to arrange, can

²⁷⁷ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 102.

offer foster parents the necessary time to recharge, leading to improved stability and emotional health within the foster home.”²⁷⁸

In addition to childcare, the volunteers were instrumental in organizing and running the day's various events and activities. Their tasks included setting up rooms, organizing crafts, helping to facilitate moving children from room to room, setting up food, and ensuring that all activities ran smoothly and efficiently. This participation underscored the church community's collective effort to support foster families.

The Qualitative Results

Quantitatively, the high percentage (69.6%) of participants who felt very supported demonstrates the effectiveness of the event in meeting the needs of the foster care community. The willingness of sixteen participants from the teaching series to volunteer their time underscores a strong commitment to translating the knowledge and inspiration gained from the teaching series into tangible actions. Additionally, the feedback from the surveys provided deeper insights into the specific areas where foster families felt supported and areas needing improvement. The personal stories and expressions of gratitude from the foster families highlighted the event's significant positive impact on their well-being. The qualitative data also revealed the importance of the church community's role in providing, not just practical support, but also emotional and relational support, which are crucial for the sustained engagement and well-being of foster families.

Social Worker Care Package Results

The Social Worker Care Package event was designed to support the dedicated individuals working within the foster care system. As Garretson writes, “The sheer volume of work and the

²⁷⁸ Mosely, *The Bureaucracy of Compassion*, 135.

intensity of the situations they encounter can lead to a sense of being stretched too thin, battling burnout while striving to make a difference in the lives of children.”²⁷⁹ Recognizing the intense demands often experienced by social workers, this project aimed to provide a tangible expression of support to encourage them in their pivotal roles. These care packages, filled with useful and thoughtful items, were intended to convey gratitude and boost morale, reinforcing the church’s support of their vital work.

The Quantitative Results

Several individuals donated items for the care packages. They had also participated in the teaching series and expressed a desire to support the broader foster care community. Their contributions resulted from their increased awareness and commitment, motivated by the insights and education provided during the teaching series.

Six volunteers from the teaching series assembled the care packages, selecting each item. Items such as water bottles, notebooks, pens, and several gift cards ensured that each package would provide practicality and a sense of appreciation to the recipients. An additional four volunteers, making the final count ten in all, helped deliver the care packages over seven days in conjunction with the individual social worker schedules. Some of those deliveries took place at the social workers’ offices or in foster families’ homes.

Eleven social workers volunteered to complete a detailed survey, providing feedback on the effectiveness of this aspect of the project. Such a positive response indicates that the care packages met the intended goals of demonstrating support. Although the sample size of eleven is relatively small compared to all the social workers in Los Angeles County, the unanimous

²⁷⁹ Charles L. Garretson, *Burnout in Child Welfare: Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place* (Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 2004), 45.

agreement within this group provides strong internal validity, indicating that the intervention was effective for this specific sample.

Moreover, the absence of any negative or neutral feedback further underscores the intervention's effectiveness. In research, it is common to encounter a range of responses, including some degree of dissatisfaction or indifference. The fact that this study received exclusively positive feedback highlights the care packages' success in resonating with the social workers and fulfilling their intended purpose.²⁸⁰

The Qualitative Results

The qualitative results from the Social Worker Care Package event provide a rich, detailed understanding of the impact of this initiative, complementing the quantitative data. While the quantitative data showed a 100% positive response rate from the eleven social workers surveyed, the qualitative feedback revealed deeper insights into the emotional and professional upliftment experienced by the social workers. The personal expressions of gratitude and specific mentions of how the care packages improved their morale and sense of being valued highlight the nuanced ways in which the initiative succeeded.

This qualitative result also underscores a significant issue within the foster care system: the often inadequate support that social workers typically receive. The fact that every respondent reported feeling supported by the church through these packages suggests that social workers often feel overlooked and undervalued in their daily roles. This response reveals a gap in the current system where the emotional and professional support for social workers is insufficient, leading to feelings of isolation and under-appreciation. As Barth points out, “When social

²⁸⁰ Patricia H. Thornton, William Ocasio, and Michael Lounsbury, *The Institutional Logics Perspective: A New Approach to Culture, Structure, and Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 154.

workers feel supported by their supervisors and have access to adequate resources, their ability to manage their caseloads and provide quality care improves significantly.”²⁸¹

PLACED Partnership Results

The PLACED partnerships confirmed much of the qualitative results discovered in the Collaborators event listed above. Through the PLACED partnerships, participants engaged directly with foster families, social workers, and adoptive families, gaining firsthand experience of the challenges that this community faces. Through the personal interactions and support provided in the PLACED partnerships, families and workers expressed feeling supported and, therefore, encouraged to continue in their work. The findings also demonstrated the practical impact of addressing these needs through structured, church-led initiatives.

The Quantitative Results

All those who had participated in the PLACED project at any level were invited to participate in the partnerships. Twenty-seven individuals accepted the invitation to participate. Three social workers agreed to participate. This was a surprising outcome, as these workers were not members of FBC, nor did they participate in the Teaching series. Five foster families accepted the invitation to participate. This was an expected outcome because these five families had participated in each step of the PLACED project, beginning with the Collaborators event and through the Teaching Series. Fifteen church members who neither fostered nor adopted nor were involved in social work determined to participate as a PLACED partner. This result is a direct qualitative measurement of the Teaching Series. This participation underscores the project's success in cultivating a supportive network within and beyond the church community.

The Qualitative Results

²⁸¹ Barth, *Foster Care Dynamics*, 141.

The qualitative feedback was that eight of the nine foster families indicated having felt very supported by the partnership. The families highlighted various aspects of the partnership that contributed to this feeling, such as the personalized attention they received, the practical assistance provided, and the emotional encouragement offered by the church members. This feedback underscores the effectiveness of the PLACED partnership model in creating a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of foster families.

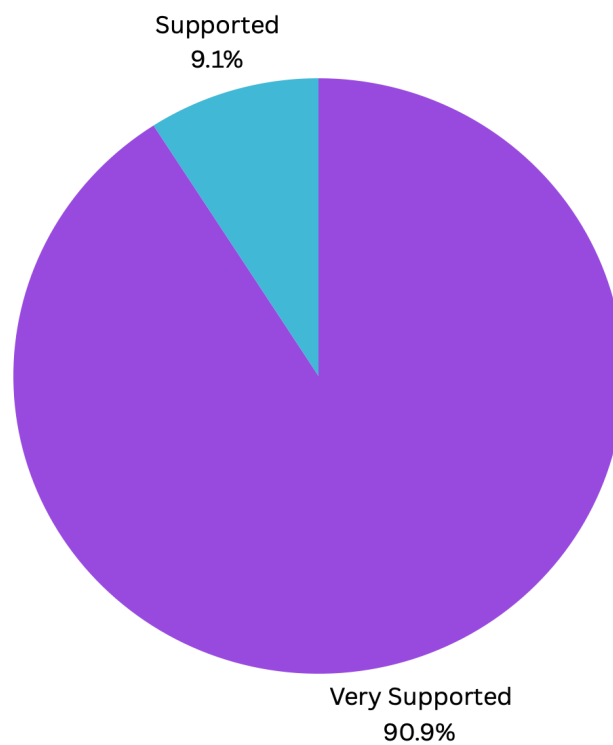


Figure 12. Foster Families Support.

All three social workers indicated that they felt very supported by the PLACED partnerships. This feedback underscores the effectiveness of the PLACED partnership model in creating a meaningful and positive impact on social workers' lives. Their responses highlight the importance of fostering strong, collaborative relationships between the church and social service

professionals. By providing not only practical resources but also emotional and spiritual support, the PLACED partnerships help alleviate some of the stress and challenges faced by social workers.

Additionally, PLACED partner participants expressed feeling a higher level of commitment to continue as a social worker and a foster family. All twelve—comprising nine foster families and three social workers—indicated that this level of support provided through the PLACED project reinforced their dedication to their crucial roles. Foster families felt more capable and encouraged to continue providing stable, nurturing environments for children in need, while social workers reported feeling more appreciated and motivated to persevere in their demanding positions.

Training Series Results

The final step of the PLACED action project was to facilitate a partnership of willing individuals into active participants within the foster care system. This was achieved by establishing partnerships with organizations specialized in certifying and licensing new foster families. This strategic collaboration affirmed what Merida and Morton write: “Partnerships between churches, agencies, and families are essential in foster care. When we work together, we can provide the comprehensive support needed for both children and foster parents, creating a network of care that no single entity could achieve alone.”²⁸² The objective was not only to recruit more foster families but to ensure that these families were well-prepared and supported throughout their journey.

The Quantitative Results

²⁸² Merida, *Orphanology*, 102.

As a result of the teaching series, two families expressed a strong desire to start fostering. This outcome highlights the effectiveness of the teaching series in not only raising awareness about the needs within the foster care system but also inspiring real-world commitments from the participants. The quote from Jason Johnson summarizes it best, “The church has been called to step into the lives of the orphaned and the vulnerable, not as a passing gesture, but with real-world commitments that reflect the heart of Christ. It’s not just about providing temporary care; it’s about embracing these children with a permanent love, offering them a family that will walk alongside them for life.”²⁸³

The information presented throughout the series—covering the challenges, needs, and rewards of fostering—provided these families with an understanding of what fostering entails. This education likely played a crucial role in their decision. Their decision to begin the fostering process represents not just a personal commitment to help children but also highlights the broader impact educational seminars, like the PLACED project, can have in strengthening the foster care system through church involvement.

The two families were introduced to representatives from the Foster Family Agencies who participated in the collaborator’s event. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the project to report the outcome of such a partnership, as it takes anywhere from eight to sixteen weeks for a foster family to gain certification, depending on various factors, including the agency's specific requirements, the availability of training sessions, and the completion of necessary background checks and home assessments. However, the initial steps taken by these families, supported by the connections made through the PLACED project, underscore the project's role in bridging the gap between potential foster parents and the agencies that can facilitate their journey.

²⁸³ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 85.

Additionally, four families showed interest in offering respite care. Respite care is a vital component of the foster care system, allowing regular caregivers the opportunity to rest and recharge, which is crucial for maintaining the long-term sustainability of foster placements. These families' interest in respite care demonstrates a broadening community support network and highlights the varied ways individuals can contribute to the foster care ecosystem without committing to full-time fostering. By stepping in temporarily to care for foster children, respite caregivers offer invaluable assistance that helps prevent caregiver burnout and ensures that children in foster care continue to receive attentive, loving support.

The four families were introduced to representatives from the Foster Family Agencies who participated in the collaborator's event. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the project to report the outcome of such a partnership, given the requirements that are necessary to secure such certification. The process to become a certified respite caregiver can vary in length, but it generally takes several weeks to complete.

In conclusion, while the outcomes of these certifications are yet to be fully realized, the initial steps taken by these families are promising. As Medefind points out, "While we may not yet see the full impact of these initial steps, the commitment of families stepping forward to foster and adopt is a beacon of hope."²⁸⁴ They signify the PLACED project's significant role in connecting potential caregivers with the resources and agencies that can facilitate their transition into active roles within the foster care system. It should also be noted that those who step into foster care do so because they sense a profound pull to make a significant difference in the lives of families and children who are experiencing trauma. It is beyond the researcher's ability to

²⁸⁴ Jedd Medefind, *Becoming Home: Adoption, Foster Care, and Mentoring—Living Out God's Heart for Orphans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 154.

instill such a profound calling in someone, as the decision to embrace the role of a foster parent comes from deep personal conviction, situational awareness, and emotional readiness.

The Qualitative Results

The qualitative feedback revealed deeper insights into the motivations and readiness of these families, providing a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and aspirations.

Personal stories shared by participants offered a glimpse into the emotional and spiritual journeys that led them to consider fostering or respite care. These narratives highlighted the profound sense of calling and purpose that many participants felt, often describing moments of inspiration from the teaching series that resonated deeply with their personal values and faith.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this project was to lead families in First Baptist Church (FBC) to cultivate support in tangible, emotional, educational, and spiritual ways to individuals involved in the foster and adoption community. As Johnson pointed out, “Churches have a unique and vital role in the lives of children in foster care. By providing a stable community, emotional and spiritual support, and resources for both foster and adoptive families, they can help transform the outcomes for these children and their families.”²⁸⁵ The project helped many in the church grow in understanding how to find their role in supporting the foster and adoptive families and community. FBC gained a clear picture of how the church would be involved with foster care in LA County.

The PLACED action research project successfully validated the thesis statement through both quantitative and qualitative outcomes. The quantitative results clearly demonstrate the accuracy of the thesis, as evidenced by significant metrics, such as the high percentage of participants willing to engage in foster care support activities. Similarly, the qualitative results reinforce the thesis' validity through personal testimonies and feedback from participants, revealing a deeper understanding and commitment to foster care and adoption support.

The first way this goal was reached was by engaging in a conversation with stakeholders to gather data on ways the church could effectively support those involved in this community. These stakeholders included social workers, foster and adoptive families, agency representatives, and church leaders. By bringing these groups together, the project aimed to create a dialogue that would highlight the specific challenges faced by each group.

²⁸⁵ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 215.

Secondly, the goal was accomplished by developing four lessons in a teaching series on the church's role in caring for children. The lessons aim to encourage church members in different ways so that the church can support those in the foster or adoptive community. Those who enrolled in the session were introduced to the theological implications of caring for the most vulnerable.

Third, those who went through the teaching series were offered the chance to participate in PLACED Partnerships, which provided a four-week partnership between someone from FBC membership and those involved in the foster and adopt community. These partnerships aimed to cultivate meaningful connections between church members and foster families or social workers. Chipman writes, "Many adoptive, foster, and Safe Families need support teams around them, especially for new placements or during stressful times."²⁸⁶

Finally, the church hosted two separate events, facilitating an opportunity to demonstrate support for the foster and adoption community. As a result of the work done through the project, the church established a PLACED Program, which supported ministry for those involved in the foster care and adoption community. These events provided immediate support and helped build long-term relationships between the church and foster families, laying a solid foundation for continued engagement and support in the future.

Research Implications

The PLACED action research project at First Baptist Church demonstrates several key implications for future research and practice in the field of foster care and adoption support. This action research project provided a structured approach to understanding and addressing the

²⁸⁶ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 241.

complex needs of foster and adoptive families. This project underscores the importance of church involvement, the necessity of support, and the benefit of partnerships.

Frustration Within the Foster Care System

The PLACED project uncovered significant frustrations within the foster care system among foster families and social workers, aligning with findings from other studies and works in the field. Specifically, social workers frequently reported feeling overwhelmed by their caseloads, which limited their ability to provide individualized attention and support to each foster family.²⁸⁷ This aligns with broader research indicating that high caseloads contribute to social worker burnout and high turnover rates.²⁸⁸ Additionally, many social workers expressed frustration over the lack of resources available to them, such as insufficient staffing.

Both foster families and social workers described the foster care system as difficult to navigate. The complexity of legal requirements, paperwork, and procedural hurdles can be frustrating, leading to delays in placements and support services. Specifically mentioned in the study was that foster families often face significant delays in the placement of children, which can prolong the uncertainty and instability that foster children experience.

Foster families and social workers often feel undervalued and under-appreciated for their efforts. The PLACED study revealed that expressions of gratitude and tangible support, such as the Social Worker Care Package event, can significantly boost morale and reinforce the importance of their roles.

Diversity Difficulty

During the PLACED study, a common concern voiced by foster and adoptive families was the fear that their children might be treated differently because they are different from their

²⁸⁷ Barth, *Child Welfare Research*, 178.

²⁸⁸ Pasztor and Petras, *Assessing and Addressing the Needs of Foster Youth*, 125.

families and other families or children in the church. Foster care is as diverse as the children and families it serves.²⁸⁹ These families worried that their foster or adopted children might face exclusion, both subtle and overt, within the church community. This fear of differential treatment highlighted the need for greater awareness and sensitivity within the church community. It underscored the importance of creating an inclusive environment where all children, regardless of their backgrounds, are welcomed, accepted, and loved equally.

During the teaching series of the study, the necessity for the church to actively promote understanding and inclusivity was emphasized to ensure that every child feels a sense of belonging and acceptance. This difficulty was not initially a part of the researcher's program until it was brought up in the Collaborators event by several of the families. Recognizing this, the researcher adapted the program to include focused discussions on diversity and cultural sensitivity, further enriching the project's scope and impact.

The Importance of Church Involvement

The project underscores the role of church involvement in supporting foster and adoptive families. Church members in providing tangible, relational, spiritual, and educational support highlights a model that can be replicated in other faith-based organizations. This project demonstrated what Johnson wrote of as the "Everyone can do something model."²⁹⁰ By involving church members in various foster care and adoption-specific events, the project highlighted the potential of faith-based organizations in bridging gaps within the foster care system.

The findings from the PLACED action research project strongly suggest that cultivating a supportive community environment can significantly enhance the stability of foster and adoptive

²⁸⁹ Choi and Wilson, *Gender Diversity and Child Welfare Research*, 80.

²⁹⁰ Johnson, *Everyone Can Do Something*, 37.

families. This was clearly demonstrated by the overwhelmingly positive feedback and outcomes from the Foster Family Day Off event. The event underscored the importance of building relational support networks within the church community. By engaging directly with foster and adoptive families, church members were able to better understand the unique challenges these families face and offer more personalized and meaningful support.²⁹¹

The project also revealed how the church's intentional involvement in generating a conversation about the needs of foster care can encourage families to volunteer to foster. This outcome serves as compelling evidence of the church's essential involvement in the foster care and adoption arena. Throughout the project, families from the congregation were educated on the urgent needs within the foster care system through a comprehensive teaching series. This series covered the emotional, educational, spiritual, and tangible support required by foster and adoptive families, thereby deepening the participants' understanding and empathy. As a result, two families expressed a strong desire to begin fostering, while four others showed interest in offering respite care. The PLACED action research project's success in enlisting families into foster care and respite care roles clearly illustrates the important role that the church can have in order to make an impact in this community.

The Necessity of Support

The importance of emotional and relational support was a recurrent theme throughout the PLACED action research project. This was particularly evident in the responses gathered from the Collaborators Event survey, where every participant underscored the necessity of counseling and emotional support. Foster and adoptive families often face unique challenges that can lead to feelings of isolation, stress, and emotional fatigue. This highlights what Blacquiere and Faasse

²⁹¹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 123.

point out, “Foster care adoptions can be challenging, intense, and emotional.”²⁹² The unanimous agreement among respondents highlights that, beyond the tangible needs, the emotional well-being of these families is crucial for their stability.

As the PLACED Partners' findings demonstrated, this emotional and relational support can take various forms, such as regular counseling sessions, peer support groups, and access to other resources. This type of relational support involves building strong, trusting relationships within the community that can offer continuous encouragement, a listening ear, and understanding. The survey responses indicated that fostering such relationships and providing dedicated emotional support are essential components for any effective foster care and adoption support program.

The Benefit of Partnership

The church greatly benefited from the partnerships with Foster Family Agencies (FFA) through the PLACED series in several significant ways. As Hodge noted, “Faith-based organizations have played a major role in the child welfare system throughout American history.”²⁹³ These partnerships provided invaluable insights, expanded outreach, and facilitated essential training opportunities. The participation of FFA representatives at this meeting offered the church profound insights into the practical realities and complexities of the foster care system. These insights were instrumental in shaping the content of the teaching series and ensuring that the church’s support initiatives were both relevant and effective.

Additionally, the partnership with FFAs significantly extended the church's reach by enabling more effective promotion of events, such as the Foster Family Day Off. FFAs helped by

²⁹² Blacquiere and Faasse, *Called to Care*, 55.

²⁹³ Hodge, *The Effectiveness of Faith-Based Organizations*, 9.

advertising these events to the families they serve, ensuring that the church's initiatives reached a broader audience. This collaboration resulted in increased participation from foster and adoptive families, as evidenced by the turnout at events.

Lastly, the benefit of partnering with FFAs was the ability to offer further training to church members who expressed interest in becoming foster or respite care providers. This partnership not only facilitated a potential for future certification processes but also provided ongoing support and guidance to new caregivers.

Research Applications

Individual Development

During the interview and collaborative stages of the PLACED study, many participants expressed a recurring sentiment: “Everyone can do something.” As Johnson points out, “We’re not all called to do the same thing, but we are all capable of doing something.”²⁹⁴ This statement underscores the belief that every individual, regardless of their specific skills or resources, has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the foster care community. It reflects the collective understanding that fostering and supporting foster families is not solely the responsibility of a few but a communal effort where each person plays a vital role.

Whether through direct actions like becoming foster parents, providing respite care, participating in mentoring programs, or through indirect support, such as donating supplies, offering financial assistance, or simply providing emotional and spiritual support, everyone has something valuable to offer. The PLACED study's findings reinforce that cultivating a culture of support and involvement can significantly impact the lives of those in foster care and adoption

²⁹⁴ Johnson, *Reframing Foster Care*, 44.

communities. This collective effort not only strengthens the community but also ensures that vulnerable children receive the care and attention they deserve.

Moreover, this phrase served as a motivational call to action within the study, encouraging individuals to recognize and embrace their unique contributions. By acknowledging that every effort, no matter how small, can make a difference, this principle encouraged a broad range of participation and highlighted ways individuals can support the foster families, ultimately contributing to the project's success. This approach helps the broader church community to find ways to support foster and adopt families.

Program Development

The findings from the PLACED action research project highlighted the significant impact that the church's initiatives—such as the Social Worker Care Packages, Foster Family Day Off, and PLACED Partners—had on the foster care and adoption community. These initiatives underscored the essential role that external organizations, like churches, can play in addressing the unmet needs of social workers, foster families, and children. Moreover, the project's success demonstrated how churches could serve as a vital resource, bridging gaps in support systems and fostering stronger, more resilient communities. One author writes, “Churches have the unique ability to bridge gaps in social services, providing support where government and other systems fall short.”²⁹⁵

By providing practical support and fostering a sense of community, these church-led efforts helped to fill the gaps left by formal support structures, thereby enhancing the overall well-being and stability of those involved in the foster care system. The success of these initiatives demonstrates the potential for collaborative efforts between faith-based organizations

²⁹⁵ Jedd Medefind and Erik Lokkesmoe, *Upended: How Following Jesus into the Margins Can Change Everything* (Colorado Springs: Biblica, 2012), 145.

and the foster care community to create meaningful and lasting change. As Chipman puts it, “If (social workers) were overwhelmed with foster-parent applications from churches, social workers might be less inclined to place children in potentially harmful kinship placements, reducing the risk of them falling into cycles of abuse.”²⁹⁶

Churches can develop structured programs similar to the PLACED project to support foster and adoptive families. These programs can address the multifaceted needs of these families by focusing on tangible, relational, spiritual, and educational support.²⁹⁷ By developing programs that address these four key areas, churches can create a support system that significantly enhances the stability of foster and adoptive families.

Churches can organize initiatives that provide support and resources to foster and adoptive families. This can include offering respite care to give parents much-needed breaks, organizing clothing and supply drives, and creating a fund to help with unexpected expenses. Regular events, such as the Foster Family Day Off, can be a cornerstone of this tangible support, providing families with the assurance that they have a reliable support system in place for their practical needs.

Churches can facilitate relational support groups where families can share experiences, offer advice, and provide emotional support to one another. The church can play a vital role in addressing the spiritual needs of foster and adoptive families. This can include offering prayer support, hosting Bible studies that focus on themes of adoption and care for the vulnerable and providing pastoral counseling. Spiritual support helps families stay grounded and find hope and encouragement through their faith, especially during challenging times.

²⁹⁶ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 166.

²⁹⁷ McCormick, *LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care*, 50.

Churches can host training sessions and workshops that educate members about the foster care system so the membership can increase the support they offer. These sessions can cover a wide range of topics, including the legal and procedural aspects of foster care, the emotional and psychological needs of foster children, and the best practices for supporting foster families. By increasing awareness and understanding among church members, these sessions can empower the congregation to provide more meaningful and effective support to those involved in foster care. Additionally, churches can use these sessions to dispel misconceptions about foster care, addressing any fears or concerns that might prevent members from getting involved. By cultivating a supportive community, churches can significantly increase the level of support provided to foster families.

Training and Certification

Establishing partnerships with foster care agencies to facilitate the training and certification of new foster families and respite caregivers ensures that potential caregivers are well-prepared and supported. Foster parent training and certification can be a rigorous process, often involving extensive background checks, home inspections, and multiple training sessions, which can be overwhelming for prospective caregivers.²⁹⁸ Strong support from agencies and churches can significantly ease this burden, helping new foster parents feel more confident and equipped to meet the challenges of fostering.

While foster care agencies can provide detailed guidance on the necessary steps, paperwork, and requirements for certification, churches can offer logistical support, such as hosting training sessions and workshops. This dual approach simplifies the certification process and makes it more accessible and manageable for those interested in fostering or providing

²⁹⁸ John DeGarmo, *The Foster Parenting Manual: A Practical Guide to Creating a Loving, Safe Home* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2013), 32.

respite care.²⁹⁹ Additionally, churches can create a welcoming environment where prospective foster parents can connect with others who have undergone the certification process, offering mentorship and emotional support, which are critical for navigating the complexities and challenges of foster care.

Churches can serve as intermediaries to help motivate and enroll individuals into the certification process, providing resources and mentorship. This intermediary role is crucial, as it bridges the gap between potential caregivers and the often complex bureaucratic processes involved in becoming certified. Churches can organize informational sessions, offer one-on-one mentoring, and provide emotional support throughout the journey. This support network can include experienced foster parents from the congregation who can share their insights and experiences, creating a sense of community and reassurance for new caregivers. By acting as intermediaries, churches can play a pivotal role in strengthening the foster care system. They can ensure that new foster families and respite caregivers are not only well-prepared and supported but also feel valued and part of a broader community committed to making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children.

Research Limitations

While the PLACED action research project provided valuable insights, it faced several limitations that should be considered. The most challenging limitation that must be acknowledged is that abuse and neglect will continue to happen. As Chipman points out, “Churches cannot prevent criminally minded parents from having children nor can we prevent the abuse some kids live.”³⁰⁰ Foster care is the willingness to be there when it does.

²⁹⁹ Kenrick, *Creating New Families*, 2.

³⁰⁰ Chipman, *Until Every Child Is Home*, 166.

The project was conducted within a single church community, which may limit the findings. The unique dynamics, culture, and resources of First Baptist Church might not reflect those of other churches or communities. As a result, the effectiveness and applicability of the interventions and support strategies implemented in this project may vary in different settings.

The project focused on supporting those involved in the foster care and adoption communities; however, it shifted its focus from directly ministering to foster children. By not interviewing, questioning, or surveying the children and youth currently whose families benefited from this program, the study may have missed capturing the full spectrum of outcomes and experiences. However, the limitations of this project necessitated identifying specific areas of support that FBC could effectively address. Given the constraints on resources and access, the project focused on tangible ways FBC could make a meaningful impact on foster families and social workers as a means of positively impacting the foster care system and, consequently, the children within it.

One of the significant challenges for foster parents is managing the relationship with the biological parents. Silverstein and Smith point out, “Foster parents often face considerable challenges in managing the complex and sometimes strained relationships with biological parents.”³⁰¹ This study did not engage with biological parents whose children were removed and placed into the foster system. However, during the Collaborators, foster parents and foster agency administrators all emphasized the need for spaces where these interactions can occur.

Another limitation was that the project's short duration (twelve weeks) may not capture the long-term impacts of the interventions and support provided. Foster care and adoption involve complex, ongoing challenges that require sustained support over extended periods.

³⁰¹ Deborah N. Silverstein and Susan Livingston Smith, *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care: Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), 67.

While the project showed promising initial results, a longer study would be necessary to evaluate the enduring effects of the support events on foster and adoptive families.

The project acknowledged that it could not report on the final outcomes of foster family certifications and respite caregiver training due to the lengthy and variable nature of the certification process. The certification process for foster families and respite caregivers can take anywhere from several weeks to several months, depending on various factors, such as agency requirements, the availability of training sessions, and the completion of necessary background checks and home assessments. This limitation means that the project could not provide definitive conclusions about the success rates of families moving from interest to certification.

Further Research

Foster Children

Further studies could be conducted to assess the impact of programs like PLACED on the children in foster care. Extended studies could track the progress of children over several years to determine the long-term effects of such support programs on their overall growth and stability. Additionally, comparative studies could analyze outcomes between children involved in programs like PLACED and those who are not, highlighting specific areas where these programs make a significant difference. Courtney and Dworski point out, “By comparing the outcomes of children involved in specialized programs with those who are not, researchers can identify key areas where these programs make a significant difference, thereby providing evidence to inform best practices and policy development.”³⁰²

Biological Families Impact

³⁰² Mark E. Courtney and Amy Dworsky, *Outcomes for Children and Youth in Foster and Out-of-Home Care* (New York: Springer, 2006), 154.

Further research could focus on the impact that the church could have on the relationship between biological families and foster families. This study suggests that faith and religious beliefs play a significant role in children entering the foster care system due to challenges unique to those who are living in violation of God's design for human flourishing. The church can play a greater role by providing spaces for court-appointed meetings, offering parenting classes, and facilitating interactions between biological parents and foster families, thereby supporting the overall well-being and stability of children in foster care.³⁰³ Exploring how the church's involvement in bridging the gap between biological and foster families can lead to improved outcomes for children is crucial. By fostering a collaborative environment and offering resources for reconciliation and relationship-building, the church can help mitigate some of the common conflicts and misunderstandings that arise in these situations.

Long-Term Impact

Future research could delve into the long-term impacts of sustained community support on foster and adoptive families, examining a variety of critical factors. One such study was done by Rubin, O'Reilly, Luan, and Localio, which concluded:

A meta-analysis of studies on placement stability for foster children indicates that sustained support from the community significantly contributes to better behavioral and emotional outcomes. The long-term impact of these supports includes improved mental health and stronger family relationships, suggesting that ongoing community involvement is crucial for the well-being of foster and adoptive families.³⁰⁴

One area of focus could be family retention rates, assessing whether continuous support from the church and community leads to higher rates of families remaining within the foster care system over extended periods. Additionally, investigating the emotional and behavioral health of

³⁰³ DeGarmo, *The Church and Foster Care*, 50.

³⁰⁴ David M. Rubin, Amanda L. O'Reilly, Xianqun Luan, and A. Russell Localio, "The Impact of Placement Stability on Behavioral Well-being for Children in Foster Care," *Pediatrics* 119, no. 2 (2007): 336-344.

children in these supported environments could provide valuable insights into how consistent community involvement influences their overall well-being. By exploring these areas, future research can offer a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of sustained community support in the foster care and adoption community.

Newly Certified Foster Families

Future research should include follow-up studies to evaluate the success and integration of newly certified families and caregivers. As Hook, Hook, and Berry point out in *Replanted* about the challenges of Fostering, “The challenges can feel overwhelming and might leave you feeling alone, rejected, and isolated.”³⁰⁵ Ensuring that these families have ongoing support structures is essential in helping them navigate these challenges and remain committed to their roles as foster caregivers.

These studies could track the progress of families and caregivers over an extended period, assessing their ability to meet the needs of foster children and adapt to their new roles. Such research would provide valuable data on the effectiveness of training and support programs, identifying areas where additional resources or improvements are necessary. Furthermore, these follow-up studies could explore the long-term impacts on the children placed with these newly certified families, examining their emotional, educational, and social development.

Emotional Impact

Further research should focus on the emotional effects experienced by both biological and foster families when a child is reunified with their biological family. This complex dynamic

³⁰⁵ Hook, Hook, and Mike, *Replanted*, 215.

presents a range of emotional responses, with significant positive impacts for the biological family but often negative repercussions for the foster family. Understanding these effects is crucial for developing comprehensive support systems that address those in the foster care and adoption community.³⁰⁶

For biological families, the reunification of a child often brings a profound sense of joy, relief, and restoration. The return of a child signifies the successful resolution of challenges that initially led to separation, marking a pivotal moment of healing and familial reconnection. Parents may experience an enhanced sense of self-worth and validation, knowing they have met the necessary requirements to regain custody of their child.

For foster families, the reunification process can be emotionally challenging and distressing. Foster parents often develop strong, affectionate bonds with the children in their care, treating them as integral members of their family.³⁰⁷ The sudden removal of a child can lead to feelings of grief, loss, and even a sense of emptiness. Foster parents may struggle with the abrupt transition, experiencing a void in their daily lives and routines that were previously filled by the child's presence. These emotional hardships are compounded by concerns about the uncertainty of the child's future.

Final Thoughts

The research conducted for the PLACED action-research project at First Baptist Church validated its thesis. FBC responded to the presentation of a scriptural mandate and the statistical analysis of the current situation of foster care in Los Angeles County, right outside the doors of

³⁰⁶ Troutman, *Attachment-Informed Parent Coaching*, 144.

³⁰⁷ Gillian Schofield, Emma Beek, and Emma Ward, "Parting, Reunification and Contact: Understanding the Impact on Foster Carers and Children," *Adoption & Fostering* 34, no. 2 (2010): 46.

the church. As anticipated, the members who chose to participate in the classes were eager to address the issues presented, especially when they recognized how practical and immediate the needs were.

Moving forward, the efforts must be sustained. As Moroney stated, “Religious communities are often uniquely positioned to provide ongoing support and encouragement to foster families, not only through initial involvement but through sustained commitment to these families over time.³⁰⁸” Sermons must be preached, events must be organized that highlight the needs of foster families in the community, and invitations to participate must be consistently extended.

This is already taking place; several members have expressed interest in organizing additional events and even revisiting some of the activities conducted as part of this study. Notably, one member, has expressed the desire to help with providing a clothes closet for newly placed children with foster families. This growing enthusiasm within the congregation underscores the ongoing impact of the project and the desire to provide continuous, practical support to foster families.

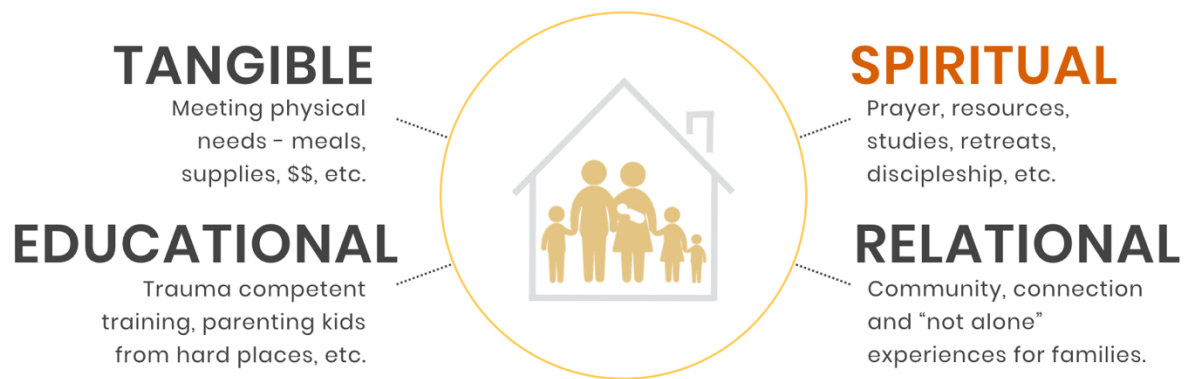
In conclusion, the PLACED project has laid a strong foundation for ongoing and expanded support for foster care and adoption within the church community. The enthusiastic response from members highlights the church’s capacity and willingness to make a significant, lasting impact. By continuing to engage and mobilize the congregation, FBC can ensure that its mission to support vulnerable children and foster families remains at the forefront of its ministry, exemplifying Christ’s love in action.

³⁰⁸ Howell, *The Empirical Ties between Religious Motivation and Altruism in Foster Parents*, 733.

APPENDIX A

AREAS OF SUPPORT CHART

Areas of support chart. The church can provide essential spiritual support to foster and adoptive families, in addition to the commonly recognized areas of tangible, educational, and relational issues.³⁰⁹

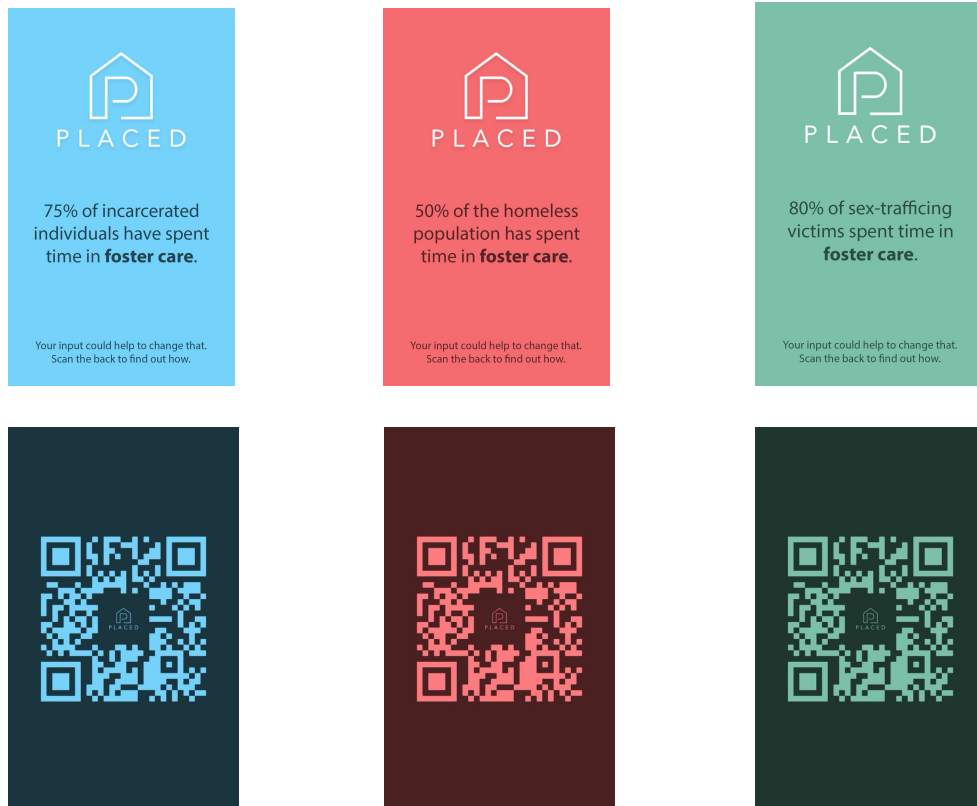


³⁰⁹ Merida, *Orphanology*, 136.

Appendix B
SEVEN STEPS



Appendix C



CARE CARDS

Appendix D

CARE CARDS CONTACT INFORMATION

1. Name _____
2. Email _____
3. Phone Number _____
4. Are you willing to attend a Seminar to find out how you can support those who are in foster care? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
5. The PLACED Seminar will take place over four weeks. Can you commit to attending all four weeks? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
6. Would you want to be notified of future opportunities to support those in the foster care system? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
7. Are you a member of First Baptist Church of Long Beach? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
8. Age _____
9. Do you consider yourself a Christian? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
10. What is your gender? A. Male ____ B. Female ____
11. What is your current relationship status? _____
12. Do you currently have children? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
13. Have you fostered or adopted previously? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
14. Have you or any of your family members ever been orphaned, placed in foster care, or adopted? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
15. To your knowledge, is FBC involved in any foster care or adoption ministry? A. Yes ____ B. No ____

Appendix E

RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR COLLABORATOR'S EVENT

Dear [Recipient],

I am a graduate student at Liberty University's School of Divinity. As a part of my Doctor of Ministry degree requirements, I am researching ways the church can better support those in the foster care system. I am inviting eligible participants to join me in this crucial study.

The eligibility to participate in this study is limited to individuals involved in the foster care system (active or inactive), administrators of foster care resources, foster care agencies, or adoptive parents.

If participants are willing, they may be asked to complete one or more of the following tasks:

- Participate in an interview (15-30 minutes)
- Complete a questionnaire (10 minutes)
- Attend a discussion group (1 hour)
- Share in training ways the church can support those in the foster care system. (1 hour)

As part of this study, we will request names and other identifying information. Please be assured that all information gathered will be kept confidential and not disclosed without your express consent.

To get more information or participate, please get in touch with me by phone, text at 562-362-8356, or email at pastordelaney@gmail.com.

You will receive a consent document one week prior to our initial meeting. This document includes further details about my research. If you decide to participate, please sign the consent document and bring it along for our first meeting.

Sincerely,

David B Delaney
Pastor, First Baptist Church
Doctoral Student at Liberty University

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or further questions, you can contact Dr. Al Sarno at [REDACTED].

Appendix F

AGENDA COLLABORATOR'S EVENT

Collaborator's Meeting Agenda: Supporting Foster and Adoption Community

Welcome and Introduction

- Welcome remarks by the researcher.

- Introduction of the purpose.

- Prayer by a designated church leader.

Overview of Current Challenges.

- Panel discussion on the current challenges faced by Collaborators.

- Opportunities for attendees to share personal experiences.

Presentation on Church Resources.

- Highlight resources, facilities, and support services available within the church.

- Break out groups to facilitate discussions on potential initiatives.

Identifying Partnership Opportunities.

- Open forum for social workers, foster families, and adoptive families to express their needs and preferences regarding potential partnerships with the church.

- Establish timelines, responsibilities, and communication channels for ongoing collaboration.

Q&A Session

Close and Dismiss.

Appendix G

EMAIL TO CHURCH LEADERSHIP FOR COLLABORATOR'S EVENT

Dear [Church Leadership],

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to request a room reservation at our church premises for an upcoming event titled the PLACED Collaborators Event (Or PLACED Teaching Series).

Event Details:

Event Name: PLACED Collaborators Event

Date: [Insert Date]

Time: [Insert Time]

Duration: [Insert Duration]

Expected Attendees: [Insert Expected Number]

Thank you for considering our request. Your support in facilitating this event is invaluable as we endeavor to impact the lives of foster care and adoption families positively.

Sincerely,

David B Delaney

Pastor, First Baptist Church

Doctoral Student at Liberty University

Appendix H

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: PLACED Seminar

Principal Investigator: Dave Delaney, pastor of First Baptist Church and DMIN candidate at Liberty University.

Invitation to be Part of a Project Study

You are invited to take part in a project study. To participate, you must be involved in the foster care system in some capacity (foster parent, licensed to be a foster parent or provide respite care services, or an administrator of foster care services). Participation in this project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the current perception of the church's role in supporting vulnerable children and attitudes toward individual involvement. The data gathered in this project will be used to develop a project that will encourage church members to contribute meaningfully to support foster and adoptive families, foster care providers, and foster care workers within the church's ministry area.

This project is to determine the specific aspects of foster care that need attention, explore ways in which the church can offer support to address these needs, and encourage church members to participate in improving the foster care experience for both the foster families and the children and youth under their care.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

Answer the questionnaire. Questions will be provided at the beginning and after the project to help determine its effectiveness.

Participate in a round-table discussion. This will last approximately one hour and will be a time to share the information gleaned from interviews, collectively identify areas that need to be addressed, and discuss ways the church can be a part of the solution. Round-table discussions will take place at First Baptist Church to provide enough space for all participants.

Attend one training class for church members. You may be asked to participate in one class session designed to educate the members of First Baptist Church on how they can be most

effective in improving the quality of experience for families and foster children/youth. This will help the church put faces on the information being presented to them. The class will be approximately one hour long.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Although possible, participants should not expect a direct benefit from participating in this study. As the First Baptist Church assists those involved in foster care services, benefits such as material and hands-on assistance may be received. This, however, cannot be promised and should not be expected. Additionally, should there be an identified need that can be provided by the First Baptist Church, such as offering training, physical facilities, and so forth, it may be interpreted as a tangible benefit for the participants.

Benefits to society would include providing support to those already involved in the foster care system, which affects how kids and teens in your care will do in the future. By equipping these individuals for adulthood, the enhanced support they receive presently will shape their engagement with society and their capacity to make meaningful contributions in the future.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Note: I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Project records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Any information you provide will be kept entirely confidential, and your name will never be reported or identified with your responses.
- All the information collected during this study will be confidential and kept private. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Your name or number will be used solely to match and analyze your pre-test and post-test.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in roundtable/group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members might share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher is the pastor of First Baptist Church of Long Beach and intends to use the data collected to design a class that will enable church members to become involved in effective ways to support those providing services to vulnerable children.

This disclosure is made so you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, First Baptist Church, or the foster care system. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If, at any point, you decide to withdraw from the study, please get in touch with the researcher at the email address or phone number provided. In case of withdrawal, any data collected from you, other than discussion group data, will be immediately destroyed and not considered in this study. The discussion group data will be retained, but your contributions will not be considered if you withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Dave Delaney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr Al Sarno, at [REDACTED].

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

[] I agree to participate.

Printed Subject Name

Printed LAR Name and Relationship to Subject

LAR Signature

Date

Appendix I

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COLLABORATOR'S EVENT

Questionnaire for Foster Care Administration/Agency

Note: Your information is for the researcher's information only. You will not be identified by name or agency title in the writing of the research thesis.

Name: _____

Title: _____

Agency: _____

1. How long have you been working in foster care? _____
2. What are some of the key reasons that children/youth in Los Angeles County enter foster care? _____
3. Can you share specific examples of challenges that foster children and families face and how we, as a church, might address them? _____
4. How long do administrators, social workers, and foster parents typically remain involved in the foster care system?? _____
5. What are some reasons they leave the program? _____
6. What are ways our church can support the foster care system that would make a positive impact? _____
7. What resources or services do you believe are most needed by foster children and families, and how can we, as a church, help provide them? _____
8. How can our church create a welcoming and inclusive environment for foster children and families? _____
9. What are some potential barriers to foster care adoption within our community, and how can our church help overcome them? _____
10. Would you be willing to participate as a PLACED Partner? A. Yes ____ B. No ____ If you answered yes, what is your preferred method of contact? _____

Provide the best answer in your opinion. The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. First Baptist Church regularly partners with local foster care agencies and organizations to provide comprehensive support to foster children and their families.

SD D DS AS A SA

2. First Baptist Church provides sufficient support to foster and adoptive families within our community.

SD D DS AS A SA

3. Members of First Baptist Church are well-informed and actively encouraged to get involved in foster care and adoption efforts.

SD D DS AS A SA

4. First Baptist Church creates a welcoming and inclusive environment for foster children and adoptive families.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. First Baptist Church effectively communicates to the congregation the needs and opportunities related to foster care and adoption.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. How aware are you of the current involvement of local churches in foster care and adoption support?

Very Aware Somewhat Aware Neutral Somewhat Unaware Very Unaware

7. What type of support do you think churches could provide that would be most beneficial to foster and adoptive families?

Financial Emotional Spiritual Community Training

8. How likely would you be to seek support or resources from a church if you were involved in foster care or adoption?

Very Likely Likely Neutral Unlikely Very Unlikely

9. What barriers do you think exist that might prevent foster and adoptive families from seeking support from a church?

Lack of Awareness Perceived Stigma Insufficient Resources Cultural Differences

10. In what ways do you believe a church could effectively raise awareness and promote involvement in foster care and adoption within the broader community?

Community Programs Workshops Collaboration with Organizations Public Events

Appendix J

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COLLABORATOR'S EVENT

Questionnaire for Foster Care/Adoption Family

Note: Your information is for the researcher's information only. You will not be identified by name or agency title in the writing of the research thesis.

Name: _____

Agency: _____

1. How long have you fostered or adopted? _____
2. What compelled you to consider foster care and adoption? _____
3. Are you a member of First Baptist Church? _____
4. If you answered yes to the above question, do you feel supported by First Baptist Church?
_____ Explain: _____.
5. Can you share specific examples of challenges that foster/adopted children and families face and how we, as a church, might address them? _____
6. Can you share any fears or uncertainties you may have had before becoming involved in foster care or adoption, and how did those feelings evolve? _____
7. How do you navigate the complexities of the children you care for, their needs, and backgrounds? _____
8. How can our church create a welcoming and inclusive environment for foster and adoptive children and families? _____
9. In your experience, what types of support have benefited you and your family most, and how can we ensure that these resources are more readily available to others in similar situations? _____
10. Would you be willing to participate as a PLACED Partner? A. Yes ____ B. No ____ If you answered yes, what is your preferred method of contact? _____

Provide the best answer in your opinion. The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. First Baptist Church regularly partners with local foster care agencies and organizations to provide comprehensive support to foster children and their families.

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
----	---	----	----	---	----

2. First Baptist Church provides sufficient support to foster and adoptive families within our community.

SD D DS AS A SA

3. Members of First Baptist Church are well-informed and actively encouraged to get involved in foster care and adoption efforts.

SD D DS AS A SA

4. First Baptist Church creates a welcoming and inclusive environment for foster children and adoptive families.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. First Baptist Church effectively communicates to the congregation the needs and opportunities related to foster care and adoption.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. How aware are you of the current involvement of local churches in foster care and adoption support?

Very Aware Somewhat Aware Neutral Somewhat Unaware Very Unaware

7. What type of support do you think churches could provide that would be most beneficial to foster and adoptive families?

Financial Emotional Spiritual Community Training

8. How likely would you be to seek support or resources from a church if you were involved in foster care or adoption?

Very Likely Likely Neutral Unlikely Very Unlikely

9. What barriers do you think exist that might prevent foster and adoptive families from seeking support from a church?

Lack of Awareness Perceived Stigma Insufficient Resources Cultural Differences

10. In what ways do you believe a church could effectively raise awareness and promote involvement in foster care and adoption within the broader community?

Community Programs Workshops Collaboration with Organizations Public Events

Appendix K

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COLLABORATOR'S EVENT

Questionnaire for Church Leader

Note: Your information is for the researcher's information only. You will not be identified by name or agency title in the writing of the research thesis.

Name: _____

Position in the Church: _____

1. How long have you served at First Baptist Church? _____
2. To your knowledge, is FBC involved in foster care or adoption ministry? A. Yes ____ B. No ____.
3. If yes, please describe how the church is involved or elaborate on why you perceive the church is not involved. _____.
4. What is your awareness of the need for foster and adoptive homes for children in Los Angeles County and worldwide? _____
5. What barriers or challenges do you perceive in engaging our congregation in foster care and adoption ministry, and how can we overcome these obstacles? _____
6. How can we better educate our church community about the needs and realities of foster care and adoption? _____
7. Are there specific ministries or programs within our church that you believe could be developed to serve foster care and adoption families better? _____
8. What training or resources do you believe church leaders and volunteers need to effectively support foster care and adoption families, and how can we facilitate ongoing learning and growth in this area? _____
9. What partnerships or collaborations do you see beneficial for our church in expanding our impact in the foster care and adoption community, and how can we leverage existing resources and networks to maximize our efforts? _____

Provide the best answer in your opinion. The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. First Baptist Church regularly partners with local foster care agencies and organizations to provide comprehensive support to foster children and their families.

SD D DS AS A SA

2. First Baptist Church provides sufficient support to foster and adoptive families within our community.

SD D DS AS A SA

3. Members of First Baptist Church are well-informed and actively encouraged to get involved in foster care and adoption efforts.

SD D DS AS A SA

4. First Baptist Church creates a welcoming and inclusive environment for foster children and adoptive families.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. First Baptist Church effectively communicates to the congregation the needs and opportunities related to foster care and adoption.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. How aware are you of the current involvement of local churches in foster care and adoption support?

Very Aware Somewhat Aware Neutral Somewhat Unaware Very Unaware

7. What type of support do you think churches could provide that would be most beneficial to foster and adoptive families?

Financial Emotional Spiritual Community Training

8. How likely would you be to seek support or resources from a church if you were involved in foster care or adoption?

Very Likely Likely Neutral Unlikely Very Unlikely

9. What barriers do you think exist that might prevent foster and adoptive families from seeking support from a church?

Lack of Awareness Perceived Stigma Insufficient Resources Cultural Differences

10. In what ways do you believe a church could effectively raise awareness and promote involvement in foster care and adoption within the broader community?

Community Programs Workshops Collaboration with Organizations Public Events

Appendix L

NOTIFICATION OF TEACHING SERIES

Our PLACED teaching series is just around the corner! Get ready to learn, grow, and support foster care and adoption families like never before. Mark your calendars and stay tuned for more updates! #PLACED #FosterCare #AdoptionSupport.

Appendix M

TEACHING SERIES LESSONS

LESSON 1

Foster care is intended to provide temporary safety for abused or neglected children who cannot remain with their families.

WEEK 1: TANGIBLE NEEDS

PASSAGE: Luke 10:25-37

In the 1860s, Charles Spurgeon famously described London as “the city of Gog, Magog, and Fog!”³¹⁰ London was an infamously filthy city. Spurgeon is often called the “Prince of Preachers” because his sermons captivated thousands of people weekly.³¹¹ While some know Spurgeon started a college, few know he also started an orphanage, reflecting his passion for education and compassion for vulnerable children. Spurgeon stood before his congregation and said, “Dear friends, we are a huge church and should be doing more for the Lord in this great city. I want us, tonight, to ask Him to send us some new work, and if we need money to carry it on, let us pray that the means also may be sent.” With the help of providential circumstances, meaningful discussions, and generous donations, the church rallied together to start an orphanage.

In our passage, Jesus tells the story of a Jewish traveler who is beaten, robbed, and left on the side of the road. Other travelers pass by the hurting man, ignoring him and his pain. He remains in this state until a Samaritan man passes by and not only tends his wounds but puts him up in a hotel room until he is healthy enough to move on. These actions are even more impressive when you consider the cultural and racial hatred between Jewish people and Samaritans during this time.

THE VERTICAL INDICATIVE.

This parable is preceded by a conversation Jesus had with an “expert in the law” who is trying to “justify himself.” The lawyer’s question exposed two troubling things: (1) He was trying to limit his compassion to certain types of people, and (2) He hoped Jesus would provide specific qualifiers that would make the commandment achievable.

³¹⁰ Spurgeon, *The Letters of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 202.

³¹¹ Larsen, *A People of One Book*, 250.

V.25: He was asked a vertical question, a question about a person's relationship to God: 'When it comes to God? When it comes to my relationship with God what is important? How do I become in such good standing with God that I gain access to Him?' That's a big question. This is the greatest question ever asked or answered. Do you know that you have eternal life?

V.26: Jesus answers with a question: "What is written in the Law?" Now, this is huge. Jesus is telling this lawyer, "Let Me tell you where you're going to get the answer to the question you're asking. Where are you going to get to that answer? You're going to get that answer in the Bible." We live in a day and age where people are comfortable with spirituality, but they don't like Christianity, and one of the reasons is that they don't like an authoritative Book telling them the answers.

You cannot follow Jesus and reject what He says is the source of final spiritual authority.

V.27: You can divide all the Law of God into two categories. It either relates to man and God or man and man. All of God's Law regulates the relationship between man and God, or man and man. It's all summed up in those two categories. You can squeeze it down and the summary of the Law of God given in the Scriptures would be: Love God perfectly and love your neighbor completely.

V.28: Jesus says, you're right.

To inherit eternal life, you must keep God's law perfectly, including loving your neighbor as yourself. No wiggle room.

You must always love perfectly, sacrificially, selflessly—not just on the outside, but on the inside too. In other words, you must always want to love perfectly, sacrificially, and selflessly.

You must never hurt anyone—physically, emotionally, or relationally. And you must always help everyone—physically, emotionally, and relationally. You must never harbor grudges. Never. You must never seek retribution. Ever. You must never want to seek retribution.

When someone cheats you, you have to give them more instead of trying to get your stuff or money back. You have to turn the other cheek to your most aggressive enemies. You must love perfectly.

Now, at this point, the lawyer should have been honest. He should have said, "I can't do that, and I haven't done that. I haven't done that. I'm not capable of that. I won't do that in the future. I admit my inability. I live in constant violation of this standard. I can not be perfect as my Father in Heaven is perfect. I am, therefore sinful. I am headed for punishment. I will miss the Kingdom unless I receive mercy and forgiveness."

V.29: But cynically, he says, "Maybe you'd like to redefine neighbor for me." Here is what he is asking, "Who qualifies for me to love them completely?" Jesus turned it around and said, "Let's talk about who is neighborly." Let's not talk about who qualifies to be your neighbor - let's talk about the quality with which you love.

It is not about who qualifies for your LOVE; it's about the character of your love. So Jesus has already turned this upside down, and now He's talking about the love of the individual toward someone in need, not whether the person in need qualifies to be loved. And it's not who your neighbor is; it's who you are that determines your love.

This is the same spirit that led Spurgeon to say to his beloved Metropolitan Tabernacle Church, “Dear friends, we are a huge church and should be doing more for the Lord in this great city.”

Of course, the irony here is that we're more identified with the traveler in desperate need than with anyone else in the story. We are the needy, we are unable to do anything to help ourselves. We are broken people, beaten up by sin, robbed of hope, and abandoned by self-righteous.

But then Jesus comes. Unlike the Priest and Levite, He doesn't avoid us. He crosses the street—from heaven to earth—comes into our mess, gets his hands dirty. At great cost to himself on the cross, he heals our wounds, covers our nakedness, and loves us with an everlasting love. He brings us to the Father and promises that his “help” is not simply a one time gift—rather, it's a gift that will forever cover “the charges” we incur.

Jesus is the Great Samaritan. We are the bruised traveler.

THE HORIZONTAL IMPERATIVE.

The mark of a heart that's been touched by the grace of God will inevitably be led to deeds of compassion to the neediest, to the most broken, and even to the most ungrateful ... Charles Spurgeon, put it this way, “what the law demands of us, the gospel really produces in us.”

He completely reprioritized his schedule, valuing the victim's life over his own.

He was willing to get personally involved as he cared for the victim.

He sacrifices valuable resources to help meet the need.

He committed to the man's recovery.

THE PLACED INITIATIVE.

That brings us to what we are talking about in this seminar - Who has been passed over and left in the ditches today? Who can we help? There are over 400,000 children in the U.S. foster care system; 100,000 are available for adoption. That number continues to rise.

Currently, Los Angeles County, has over 23,000 children in foster care, with more being added every day, making it one of the largest foster care systems in the country.³¹²

³¹² California Department of Social Services, “Foster Care,” accessed January 15, 2024, <https://dcfs.lacounty.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Monthly-DCFS-Data-Fact-Sheet-November-2023.pdf>.

Average foster family last less than 2 years.

Average social worker last than 5 years.

Every time there is turn over in these areas it creates more dysfunction in the life of a child, which is already filled with all kind of pain and trauma.

Children placed in foster care experienced greater instability and behavioral and mental health problems.³¹³ Foster and adoptive families carry a far greater risk of dissolving than biological families.³¹⁴ Those who work in the foster care community like caseworkers, officers, and lawyers are finding themselves burnout and overloaded with the amount and the degree of cases that they are faced with.

The church's role in this crisis should be PROACTIVE, not simply REACTIVE. The church bears the responsibility of offering hope to children, families, and individuals who suffer from trauma, neglect, separation, or behavior disorders. ... while people may find themselves in traumatic situations for a variety of reasons, one thing is certain: the root cause is SIN. The results of sin are destructive, devastating, and hurtful. Sin leads to failure in the relationship between man and God, but also a failure in the relationship between man and humanity.

The social impact of sin is devastating. Sin can destroy lives through a vicious cycle of personal tragedy, which can often be seen in the cycle of foster care. Adults who engage in child abuse and neglect often struggle to effectively manage their own lives, leaving them ill-equipped to provide adequate care for children.³¹⁵ As those children grow up, they may perpetuate the cycle of abuse by mistreating others, thereby perpetuating the harmful cycle - which has generational consequences.

Most Christians understand that caring for the vulnerable is a biblical mandate, not just a suggestion. The good news is that there is something everyone can do something to help.

What we are talking about in the seminar is exactly that - how do we help? Let's start with the most obvious — the TANGIBLE ways we can help —

THE WORKERS.

What would it look like to help a caseworker who just got cussed out and threatened because she had to remove a child who was abused and neglected?

THE FAMILIES.

What would it look like to help a family who just received a placement of an infant 1 week-old with nothing more than a hospital onesie?

³¹³ Geiger and Schelbe, *The Handbook on Child Welfare Practice*, 227.

³¹⁴ Kenrick, *Creating New Families*, 3.

³¹⁵ Reardon and Noblet. *In Childhood Denied*, 1–38.

LESSON 2

Estimates show that 50% of families quit fostering within the first year or after the first placement.³¹⁶ The reasons for this vary, but one is that they fail to find the support they need to continue in their calling to minister to the foster and adoption community. We have identified four needed support areas: TANGIBLE, RELATIONAL, SPIRITUAL, and EDUCATIONAL.

We came up with tangible ways to help - babysitting, phone calls, respite care, clothes, supplies, etc... But all of these require us to build, develop, and maintain relationships.

In the 19th century, Reverend Charles Loring Brace founded the Children's Aid Society.³¹⁷ Brace witnessed an estimated 150,000 to 400,000 needy children wandering the streets of New York City.³¹⁸ He decided that something must be done to help. Brace would say, "We have such a formal idea of Christianity— giving and prayer meetings and Bible-reading and revivals are religion." However, he asserted, "I certainly can see very little in which piety affects social relations in New England or here, except in keeping from the worst crimes, which isn't much."³¹⁹ Brace initiated the Orphan Train Movement; this groundbreaking movement sought to provide these vulnerable children with opportunities for stable homes by relocating them from overcrowded urban orphanages to families in rural areas across the country. Brace's vision behind the Orphan Train Movement was multifaceted. Not only did he aim to alleviate the overcrowding and dire conditions in urban orphanages, but he also believed in the transformative power of family life for these children.

Most fairytales I read to my girls begin with the words "Once upon a time," and nearly all of them end with those same words: " They lived happily ever after." It occurred to me that those words are an absolutely appropriate ending for every believer—this journey we're on is very seldom a straight line—but God's plan is always the best.

WEEK 2: RELATIONAL NEEDS

PASSAGE: RUTH 1:16

So, on a practical level, this is a book of the Bible that's all about responding to loss: What do you do, how do you act, how do you think about God..... when something very important and very precious to you gets taken away? The book of Ruth is going to help us answer those kinds of questions.

THE LOSS SHE EXPERIENCED.

³¹⁶ American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Foster Care, Adoption, and Kinship Care; Douglas Waite, Mary V. Greiner, and Zach Laris, "Putting Families First: How the Opioid Epidemic is Affecting Children and Families, and the Child Welfare Policy Options to Address It," *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk* 9, no. 1 (2018): Article 4.

³¹⁷ Trejos-Castillo, and Trevino-Schafer, *Handbook of Foster Youth*, 4.

³¹⁸ Nagle, *Coping with Foster Care*, 8.

³¹⁹ Staller, *New York's Newsboys*, 53.

The main point of this message is that in life, loss is inevitable, but if we surrender to the Lord, our losses can be transformed into gains. Every one of us has experienced loss. Either you're going through it now or will go through it soon.

What is the most significant loss that you have experienced?

I want you to notice how Naomi handled her loss, v.6-13: She begins to sabotage her relationships.

SHE SABOTAGED RELATIONSHIPS.

Four times, she will tell these young women to leave her alone and return home. In other words, "Since my sons are now gone, there's no longer the bounds of marriage; there isn't anything in myself that is worthy of you following me or caring about me . . . I'm just an old woman now . . . surely you won't bother with me."

Naomi is detaching herself from them, and in detaching herself, she is isolating herself from those closest to her.

Isn't it the case that when we experience PAIN, we want to retreat, to withdraw, to urge others—even beloved others—to turn away from us and leave us in loneliness, with memories, with the past, with themselves only? Isn't it the temptation of those like Naomi to un-attach themselves from what they once loved?

WHEN OTHERS HURT, the temptation is to pull away when the need is that we press in.
WHEN WE HURT, the temptation is to pull away when the need is that we press in.

SHE BECAME SELF-RELIANT.

When we are experiencing loss and pain and heartache and grief, it either drives the roots of our faith very deep into who God is for us. Then we find strength and life and sustenance and joy, and God walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death, as it were. And He is our Good Shepherd. It either drives those roots really deep or it uproots us altogether. And we become self-reliant, and our faith grows cold and distant, and we end up walking through our suffering and pain alone.

SHE BECAME BITTER.

Bitterness and loneliness are the two pedals of the same bike.

APPLICATION TO FOSTER AND ADOPTION COMMUNITY.

Peeling back the layers of this, she has convinced herself that God no longer loves her, and neither should Orpah or Ruth.

The foster care and adoption community often experiences various losses, which can impact individuals involved in different ways:

The Loss of Biological Family.

The loss of a biological family is often the most immediate and profound loss experienced by foster children. Being removed from their biological parents and siblings, foster children are separated from the people who have been their primary caregivers and source of emotional support. This separation can lead to feelings of abandonment, confusion, and grief, as children may not fully understand

What do you think the impact of this type of loss might be?

- Emotional turmoil and grief.
- Feelings of abandonment and rejection.
- Difficulty forming new attachments due to fear of further loss.

The Loss of Identity.

Our sense of self is tied to our family, culture, and community. Foster kids often experience a loss of identity as they are uprooted from those things. This can lead to a crisis of identity, where children struggle to understand who they are and where they belong. Frequent moves and changes in caregivers can exacerbate this issue, making it difficult for children to develop a stable and coherent sense of self.

This explains the prevalence of LGBTQ issues that foster children experience.

What do you think the impact of this type of loss might be?

- Confusion and insecurity about personal identity.
- Struggle to fit in or feel a sense of belonging.
- Potential for identity conflicts, especially in cases of cross-cultural or interracial placements.

The Loss of Attachment.

Attachment is a fundamental human need, and secure attachments are crucial for healthy emotional and psychological development. Foster children often experience disruptions in their attachment relationships, especially if they have experienced multiple placements or had to leave a caregiver they were attached to. This loss can hinder their ability to form healthy, trusting relationships in the future. The instability and uncertainty of foster care can make it difficult for children to form new attachments, as they may be wary of getting close to someone for fear of another loss.

What do you think the impact of this type of loss might be?

- Difficulty forming and maintaining relationships.
- Emotional and behavioral issues stemming from attachment disruptions.

The Loss of Trust.

The trauma of being removed from their homes and placed into the foster care system can significantly impact a child's ability to trust others. Foster children may feel betrayed by adults who they believed were supposed to protect and care for them. This loss of trust can extend to new caregivers, social workers, teachers, and other authority figures.

What do you think the impact of this type of loss might be?

- Difficulty trusting caregivers and authority figures.
- Reluctance to open up or form close relationships.
- Potential for behavioral issues as a defense mechanism against perceived betrayal.

The Loss of Childhood.

The experiences that lead to foster care placement—abuse, neglect, and other forms of trauma—can rob children of a normal, carefree childhood. Instead of experiencing the joys and discoveries typical of childhood, foster children may be preoccupied with survival, coping with trauma, and adjusting to new environments. The responsibilities and emotional burdens placed on them can force them to grow up too quickly, missing out on important developmental milestones and the simple pleasures of being a child.

What do you think the impact of this type of loss might be?

- Accelerated maturity with the burden of adult-like concerns.
- Potential for developmental delays due to trauma and stress.

THE LIFE SHE EXCLUDED. v.14

Most of us can *identify* with Orpah because we have been wired to do our cost-benefit analysis and to consider the long-term benefits of our decisions.

When Naomi first demanded that the girls return to their mothers, you'll notice in **verse 10** that both Ruth and Orpah refused to go, and they both said in unison, ***"We will return with you to your people."*** But then Naomi lays out the reality of what they'll lose if they do.

The logic of pragmatism hinges and is based on self, and as we have seen above, depending on self is the way to great despair.

The ability to NOT GIVE UP is one of the most important abilities in our Christian life. It's a matter of refusing to become distracted, discouraged, or dissuaded. It is the act of using faith to look beyond and overcome life's challenges as and when they arise. It is the decision to "never doubt in the night what God told you in the light."

THE LOVE SHE EXPRESSED.

Ruth remained steadfastly loyal to Naomi. Ruth was taking a huge step. It wasn't just about moving to a new place, giving up the comforts and security of a home and family. For a Moabite, moving to Israel meant giving up her gods and identity. It meant giving up everything.

What causes this scene to be among the most dramatic moments in all of biblical history is **NOT** *simply* the tender display of Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law but the *collision* that takes place between the weight of evidence Naomi has mounted against God and the *RESOLUTE* choice Ruth makes.

She will not leave Naomi alone. Even though Naomi's God has "done all of this to them," allowing them to go through so much suffering, this would now be Ruth's God as well.

Go read the end of the story — Ruth got everything that her mother-in-law said she would lose by going to Bethlehem, and she got more!

What we are talking about in the seminar is exactly that - how do we help? Let's start with the most obvious —

How can the church create a welcoming and supportive environment for families and children who have experienced this type of loss within the congregation?

What steps can the church take to ensure that foster and adoptive families feel fully included and supported within the church community?

LESSON 3

The number of children in foster care and the number of families required for foster care services has grown substantially and shows no sign of slowing down. These families face significant challenges, require substantial resources, and can use support that can often be found in the church - TANGIBLE, RELATIONAL, SPIRITUAL, and EDUCATIONAL.

In 1858, when many families were living in high-risk situations due to poverty, lack of proper education, and dire economic conditions, Dwight L. Moody started teaching Sunday School in Chicago.³²⁰ Moody wanted to help vulnerable kids who were facing tough situations. His teaching style and personality became popular, and the Sunday School classes began to grow. Encouraged by his associates, Moody took a monumental step forward and established a church in 1864, initially known as the Illinois Street Church. This fledgling congregation would later evolve into the renowned institution recognized today as The Moody Church.³²¹ Through his efforts, Moody aimed to make a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable children living on the inner city streets of Chicago.

Foster care and adoption represent two contrasting experiences. First, it is an experience of rejection, of not belonging in the world where one begins, of being disconnected, separated from origins, and denied the basic rights of birth. Second, it signifies being received, embraced, accepted, and welcomed by others. Adoption means being given a new name, a new status, and a new place in the world.

Today, we will explore how these two experiences integrate spirituality into our support efforts, and we will talk about some actionable steps to meet these needs.

Not every believer is called to foster or adopt a child, but every believer has a responsibility to help care for children in some way. Caring for vulnerable children is a consistent theme woven throughout the narrative of the Bible.³²² Biblical accounts, such as Moses and Esther (Exod 2:10; Esth 2:7), illustrate instances of God's people providing care and protection to children facing adversity. The apostle James gives the church specific instructions for what pure religion is when he writes, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction."

The church bears the responsibility of offering hope to children who suffer from trauma, neglect, behavior disorders, and emotional problems.³²³ And offer support to the families and communities of people who are attempting to serve these children.

Let's look at the story to pull out some principles:

³²⁰ Belmonte, D. L. *Moody: A Life Innovator, Evangelist, World-Changer*, 39.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Jason Johnson, "Orphan Care Ministry: When Your Pastor Doesn't Get It," accessed January 26, 2024, <http://jasonjohnsonblog.com/blog/orphan-care-ministry-when-your-pastor-doesn't-get-it#>.

³²³ Trejos-Castillo, and Trevino-Schafer, *Handbook of Foster Youth*, 7.

WEEK 2: SPIRITUAL NEEDS

PASSAGE: Mark 2:1-12

THE MAN'S PHYSICAL NEED WAS EVIDENT.

He was paralyzed. We don't know how severe his paralysis was. It's bad enough to be confined to a portable bed. And it affected all of his life.

We have talked about the obvious need that those in foster care and adoption situations face - in light of the loss that they have experienced. This is where we can make a difference. Because of strong community networks, resources, and commitment to compassion, we as the church can play a pivotal role in supporting the needs of those in the foster and adoption communities.

What are some needs that we can meet today? With what we already have and what we already know — We know the majority of foster families give up within the first year or after the first placement. We know that social workers carry an untenable load of trying to balance biological families, foster families, court dates, visits, inspections, paperwork, and 1,000 other things - stretched out over 50-something cases a month. We know that every child in foster care and adoption has suffered a great loss — a loss that is greater than the loss that many of us will ever face — certainly a loss that is more catastrophic in the sense that it is unnatural.

FOSTER FAMILY DAY OFF.

We have a building, qualified personnel, and nurseries. We can give foster families a day—some time to just unwind. We can't answer the questions that many of them have about the future of the child they are taking care of, but for a day, we can step in and let them have a moment to relax while we help them carry the burden.

What other ways can we help a foster family?

SOCIAL WORKER CARE PACKAGE.

We can show up and say thank you. We all like to receive some encouragement. An acknowledgment of the work that we do. Social workers are like everyone else, they picked a profession or a career because they were optimistic about their ability to make a difference in that arena.

Similar to a firefighter choosing to chase fires or a police officer willing to run down bad guys, why do they do this? They want to be contributing members of society, and what better way to contribute than by protecting children and preserving families?

Like many other professions, once you get into it, you quickly realize that there are aspects of the job that no one told you about. You realize that no matter how many kids you help there are always more that need help. You also realize that most people even the ones you help - never say a thank you, or an I see you, or a keep it up it's worth it. Most social workers feel — overworked, overwhelmed, under-resourced, and overly criticized.

So let's do something - let's deliver care packages to show that we are thankful to those who serve in this way.

What other ways can we help social workers?

PLACED PARTNERS.

A four-week partnership between a member of our church with a foster family or a social worker to provide spiritual support and encouragement these families and workers need to continue their vital roles in this community.

If you agree to become a PLACED partner we will pair you with a foster family or social worker, allowing you to walk alongside them, offering encouragement, prayer, and a listening ear. Your role will be to provide spiritual nourishment and emotional support, helping them navigate the challenges and joys of their important work.

THE MAN'S SPIRITUAL NEED WAS PROMINENT.

The spiritual isore important than the physical. In the context of foster care and adoption, while physical needs are often evident and pressing, it's essential to recognize that the ultimate needs of individuals in the system extend beyond the physical realm to the spiritual.

Foster and adoptive families are well aware of various forms of loss inherent in the foster and adoption process. This awareness applies to all individuals involved in the process: birth parents, foster and adoptive parents, and children. Social workers talk about these losses during the licensing process. The birth parents lose a child, the child loses the birth family along with potential cultural ties, and the foster and adoptive parents often lose the sense of autonomy.³²⁴

The foster family is often encouraged not to get too attached to the child, as foster care is understood as a temporary situation. Foster parents have to cope with various forms of grief, including the grief of the biological parents whose child they are caring for, the grief of the foster child in their care, and their grief when they lose a child to reunification, other placement, adoption, or other family members when a foster child leaves their care.³²⁵

V.5: SON, your sins are forgiven.

The relationship between God and His people has been described in a variety of ways throughout the scriptures: a Shepherd and flock (Psalm 23, Isa. 40:11), the Bridegroom and Bride (Hos. 2:19-20, Eph. 5:25-27), the Vine and Branches (Isa. 5:1-7, John 15:1-8) each expression is rich in meaning.

³²⁴ Whitten, *Labor of the Heart*, 202.

³²⁵ Edelstein, Burge, and Waterman, "Helping Foster Parents Cope with Separation, Loss, and Grief," 8.

Of all the authors in Scripture, Paul is the most descriptive.³²⁶ He uses terms like redemption (Gal. 3:14), election (2 Thess. 2:13-14), and justification (Rom. 3:24). In addition, he introduces the term “adoption.” (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:14; 23; Rom. 9:4; Eph. 1:5). He is the only New or Old Testament writer to use this particular term; it does not appear anywhere else in the scriptures.

Adoption is one of the most impactful doctrines.³²⁷

ADOPTION INFORMS THE BELIEVER’S UNDERSTANDING.

Adoption informs the understanding of the believer’s relationship with God, which is seen in viewing God as a Father and believers as His children.

ADOPTION CONFIRMS THE BELIEVER’S JUSTIFICATION.

Adoption confirms the believer’s justification.³²⁸ A judge can acquit, but only a father can adopt.³²⁹ The Westminster Confession says that adoption is to receive God’s name and access to His throne, protection, provision, and promise never to abandon.³³⁰

The biblical use of the word adoption is comprised of two words: son and placed.³³¹

The term “son” represents the idea of identity or an individual.

The term “placed” suggests the idea of inheritance or belonging. In ancient cultures, being a son carried significant privileges, including the right to inherit the father’s estate and carry on the family name.

The concept of adoption in the Roman world is much different than the modern idea of adoption. Today, adoption is thought of as an action. A father “adopts” a son. The family “adopts” a baby. The child is an outsider prior to adoption and a son after adoption. The attention often centers around the actions of the adoptive family.

Adoption, however, is not merely an action; it is a multifaceted emotional journey that profoundly impacts the lives of everyone involved. It requires navigating legal frameworks, emotional attachments, grief and loss, identity formation, and the complexities of family dynamics.

Adoption in the biblical perspective is not just a specific action but a position conferred upon an individual. Biblically, adoption is the “placing as a son.” The emphasis differs from modern times in that sons were not adopted but received the adoption (Gal. 4:1-7). Adopting a son is not about simply adding a child to a family. It is, however, about providing a family for a child.³³²

³²⁶ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 18.

³²⁷ Dagg, *Manual of Theology*, 275.

³²⁸ Dabney, *Systematic*, 627.

³²⁹ Beeke, *Heirs with Christ*, 21.

³³⁰ Westminster Confession of Faith, 10–12.

³³¹ Burke, *Adopted into God's Family*, 19.

³³² Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God*, 9.

ADOPTION TRANSFORM'S THE BELIEVER'S LIVING.

Adoption is not just a theological concept or a legal transaction; it is God's gracious promise of providing a family for sinners. This provision brings a spiritual transformation and shapes the believer's identity as God's child. Biblically, adoption is not just about growing a family; it is about giving a family.

APPLICATION: How can we help foster families who are feeling overwhelmed and considering giving up?

What would it look like to help a social worker who is feeling overworked, overwhelmed, and underappreciated?

What role can the church play in providing a stable and loving environment for children in foster care and adoption?

Appendix N

The first section of the PLACED assessment will obtain some demographic information about the individuals taking this survey. Directions: Answer the following questions by filling in the blank space provided.

1. What is your current age? _____
2. Would you consider yourself a Christian? _____
3. Are you a member of FBC? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
4. What is your marital status? _____
5. Do you have children? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
6. Do you have any children 18 or younger living in the home? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
7. Have you or any member or any of your family members ever been orphaned, placed in foster care, or adopted? A. Yes ____ B. No ____
8. If yes, please elaborate: _____

The second section of the PLACED assessment examines the theological understanding of foster and adoption ministry and evaluates individual motivations regarding such a ministry.

Directions: The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:
 SD = strongly disagree, D = disagree, DS = disagree somewhat, AS = agree somewhat, agree,
 SA = strongly agree.

1. The Bible significantly mentions God's care for the fatherless, vulnerable, and orphans.

SD D DS AS A SA

2. The Bible clearly instructs Christians to care for the fatherless, vulnerable, and orphans in the world.

SD D DS AS A SA

3. Foster Care and adoption are part of how the church fulfills its mission.

SD D DS AS A SA

4. I understand how caring for fatherless, vulnerable, and orphans fits within the church's mission.

SD D DS AS A SA

5. The Bible teaches that Christians have been adopted into God's family.

SD D DS AS A SA

6. Christians have sufficient theological motivation to participate in social causes within their community.

SD D DS AS A SA

7. Our church has instructed its members how to care for the fatherless, vulnerable, and orphans.

SD D DS AS A SA

8. I believe our church has provided leadership for its members on how to be involved in foster care and adoption ministry.

SD D DS AS A SA

9. Our church taught me that foster care and adoption are gospel-motivated issues for Christians.

SD D DS AS A SA

10. Every Christian has a responsibility to care for vulnerable children.

SD D DS AS A SA

11. Adoption is primarily for families who cannot have biological children.

SD D DS AS A SA

12. Foster Care is primarily for families looking to earn additional income.

SD D DS AS A SA

13. I believe the costs, whether financial or emotional, of foster care or adoption, are the most significant associated with foster care, and adoption is the biggest obstacle to more Christians becoming involved.

SD D DS AS A SA

14. I am willing to explore the next steps in becoming personally involved in foster care and adoption ministry.

SD D DS AS A SA

15. I am willing to explore the next steps in becoming a foster or adoptive home.

SD D DS AS A SA

Appendix O

PLACED TEACHING SERIES POST-ASSESSMENT

1. How many classes did you attend in person? _____
2. What have been the most significant biblical insights during the foster care and adoption teaching series? _____

3. What misconceptions did you have about caring for vulnerable children, and what does the Bible say about it? _____

4. In what ways do you think the foster care and adoption teaching series was healthy for our church?

5. What ministries do you see FBC able to begin immediately?

6. What ministries would you like FBC to be able to begin, only they would require more organization?

7. In what ways do you plan on being involved in foster care and adoption care ministry?

8. How can the church help you move forward with foster care or adoption?

The project intends to find tangible ways that we, as a church, can partner to support those involved in serving the most vulnerable members of our society. We are encouraging two different partnerships. The first is to partner with a social worker to offer support to them every month. The second is to partner with a foster/adoptive family. **Please check the area(s) you are personally committing to:**

_____ I will commit to being a PLACED partner with a Social Worker.

_____ I will commit to be a PLACED partner with a Foster Family.

_____ I will commit to participate in further training to increase support.

Please indicate the type of training you are interested in:

_____ I will commit to becoming a licensed Foster Family.

_____ I will commit to receiving respite training.

_____ I will commit to trauma-informed parenting training.

What is your preferred method of contact?

Appendix P

PLACED PARTNERSHIP

The research project intends to find tangible ways that we, as a church, can partner to support those involved in serving the most vulnerable members of our society. There are two different partnerships that we are encouraging. The first is to partner with a social worker to offer support to them every month. The second is to partner with a foster/adoptive family. **Please check the area(s) you are personally committing to:**

- ☐ I will commit to being a PLACED partner with a Social Worker.
☐ I will commit to be a PLACED partner with a Foster Family.
☐ I will commit to participate in further training to increase support.

Please indicate the type of training you are interested in:

- ☐ I will commit to becoming a licensed Foster Family.
☐ I will commit to receiving respite training.
☐ I will commit to trauma-informed parenting training.

What is your preferred method of contact? _____.

Appendix Q

PLACED PARTNER CHECKLIST

Contact Information: [Insert Name]

Reach out to your assigned foster family or social worker to check in and see how they are doing.

Check When Completed	Area of Support	Important Information to Communicate	Feedback
	Tangible	Are there any areas of need that we can help with...	
	Relational	Are you practicing self-care and prevent burnout...	

	Educational	Is there anything you need...	
	Spiritual	How can I pray for you...	

Appendix R

PLACED PARTNERSHIP POST-ASSESSMENT

1. How many weeks did your PLACED Partner contact you? _____
2. What was the most beneficial element of the PLACED Partnership? _____
3. Do you feel more supported as a result of the PLACED partnership? _____
4. What is the reasoning for the answer above? _____
5. Is there a way in which the partnership could be better? _____

Appendix S

SOCIAL WORKER CARE PACKAGE EMAIL PERMISSION

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I am writing on behalf of First Baptist Church to request permission to organize a special event for the social workers serving in the Department of Children and Family Services. Our church community profoundly values the vital role that social workers play in supporting vulnerable children and families, and we would like to express our gratitude and appreciation for their dedicated service.

Our goal is to create a supportive and welcoming environment where social workers can feel appreciated and valued for their efforts to improve the lives of our community's children and families. We believe this event will express our gratitude and strengthen the partnership between First Baptist Church and DCFS in our shared mission to serve those in need.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to collaborating with DCFS to organize this special event for social workers, and we hope to receive your approval soon.

Sincerely,

David B Delaney
Pastor, First Baptist Church

Appendix T

Social Worker Care Package Survey and Foster Family Day Off Survey

Directions: The questions in this section ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:
VS = very supported, S = supported, N = neutral, SS = slightly supported, NS = not supported.

1. How supported do you feel by receiving a care package?

VS S N SS NS

2. How supported do you feel from the broader church community in general?

VS S N SS NS

3. How supported do you feel by any assistance in helping you perform your work as a social worker or foster family?

VS S N SS NS

4. How supported do you feel by the idea of being paired with a church member for encouragement through the PLACED partnership?

VS S N SS NS

Appendix U

FOSTER AND ADOPTION FAMILY DAY RSVP CARD

Please RSVP by [date] to confirm your attendance at our Foster and Adoptive Families Day event. Your response will help us ensure we have adequate arrangements for all attendees.

☐ Yes, I/we will be attending the event.

☐ No, I/we are unable to attend.

☐ Maybe I/we are unsure at this time.

Number of Adults: _____ Number of Children: _____

Please provide the following information:

Name(s): _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Would you like to receive updates and information about future events and resources for foster and adoptive families?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please indicate any dietary restrictions or special accommodations needed:

Thank you for your RSVP! We look forward to seeing you at the event.

Appendix V

Sunday Service Informational

Throughout America, faith-based organizations have been pivotal in supporting the child welfare system. Their contributions have been profound, with multiple studies showcasing the significant impact they've had on foster care and adoption. A study in 2022 revealed compelling insights into the effectiveness of faith-based adoption programs. Participants in these programs reported higher levels of support, readiness to accept new placements, access to respite breaks, emergency assistance, and affirmation in their roles as foster families. They also expressed feeling more prepared and effective as parents, highlighting the invaluable sense of community and confidence that faith-based programs offer.

These findings underscore the vital role that faith-based organizations play in fostering a supportive environment for foster parents. One of the many things I pray for FBC is that we would have a culture of care for children in need and that adoption, foster care, and caring for women and families in crisis pregnancies would be commonplace among us.

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IRB APPROVAL LETTER



April 15, 2024

David Delaney
Albert Sarno

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-1686 Leading The Families Of First Baptist Church To Support The Foster Care and Adoption Community

Dear David Delaney and Albert Sarno,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study/project is not considered human subjects research because it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application. Any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office