



Three Principles

TO *CONSIDER* AND COMMON PITFALLS TO
AVOID WHEN *LAUNCHING* AND *LEADING* AN ORPHAN
CARE *MINISTRY* IN YOUR *CHURCH*

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Introduction

Many churches around the country are taking bold, noble and exciting steps towards responding to God's call to care for orphans and vulnerable children in unprecedented ways. It's a historic time in the Church, one which generations to come will undoubtedly recognize as a time when God moved mightily through His people to press into a matter that is near to His heart.

While it is an exciting time, it is also a time filled with many questions from church leaders regarding how to launch and lead effective and sustainable orphan care ministries. Many are passionate, ready and eager to establish thoughtful strategies, sustainable systems and realistic next steps for their people. The question they are asking is not *should* they do it; it's *how* should they do it.

That's the goal of this resource - to provide practical, tangible and manageable "first steps" to leading and launching an orphan care ministry that are implementable in a variety of different types of church sizes, contexts and cultures.

THE THREE PRINCIPLES WE WILL EXPLORE IN THIS RESOURCE ARE HOW TO:

1

START **SIMPLE**

2

START **SLOW**

3

START **SMALL**

I hope this resource can be a valuable help to you or your leadership team as you identify the opportunities you have before you and set your strategic priorities moving forward.



PRINCIPLE #1

Start Simple



IT'S MORE *IMPORTANT* TO DO THE *RIGHT*
THINGS *THAN* IT IS TO DO *MANY* THINGS.

Saying "No" _____

The temptation is to say yes to every good idea and launch the ministry with as much impact as possible. Yet, simplicity and focus are essential to effective, sustainable ministry. That requires being willing to say no at certain times, not yes all the time.

HERE'S THREE SPECIFIC TIMES YOU MAY HAVE TO SAY "NO" IN YOUR MINISTRY:

- 1 **To bad ideas.** For obvious reasons – they won't work, they don't fit the vision of your ministry, they'll drain your budget or your volunteers, etc.
- 2 **To the most vocal or influential voices in the room.** This is often hard for leaders for fear of what the consequences may be – Will they leave? Will they stop financially supporting?
- 3 **To good ideas.** Maybe temporarily – "Yes, but not now.". Maybe forever – "Great idea, but probably something we'll never get involved with." You don't have to say yes to every good idea. Remember, be simple.





Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains.

STEVE JOBS



Find Your "Lane" _____

FIND YOUR "LANE" OF MINISTRY AND MAXIMIZE IT.

What unique assets has God given your church?

Are you predominately young families? Perhaps you should focus on providing homes for children who need them.

Are you primarily an empty-nester or older generation church with some money to spend? Perhaps you focus your efforts investing in an adoption fund that financially supports those who are caring for kids.

Are you a diverse congregation with all different types of people? Then diversify, but be careful that you don't say yes to everything. Identify a few things you can do right now that complement each other well. For example, it could be mobilizing younger families to open their homes to kids and then tapping into the older demographic of the church to wrap around them and offer support. What's your lane? What are the few things you are going to do well?

Your answers to these questions will not only help you decide what to say yes to, but will also act as guardrails that protect you from things you need to say no to.

**IT'S MORE
IMPORTANT TO
DO THE *RIGHT*
THINGS *THAN*
IT IS TO DO
MANY THINGS.**



Story

I recently spent time with a pastor in Kansas City. Just eight months prior he had become the new senior pastor after at a large, historic, traditional church. One of the first things he learned as he settled into his new role was that the church had spent years investing in an adoption fund - but had never distributed any of those funds. Needless to say there was quite a bit of money in it.

He told me that at his "state of the church" address just a few months before our time together he was able to share some exciting vision for the church moving forward, that in part included (and I quote the pastor here) "Ensuring that under no circumstances should it cost anyone in our church one penny to foster or adopt a child".

Wow! He told me he recognizes that with a large demographic of senior-aged adults in his body they have to be diligent about presenting unique opportunities to get involved that don't simply consist of bringing children into their home. He's convinced that the primary and probably most crucial way his church can serve orphaned and vulnerable children is through their financial support of families who are fostering or adopting them.

I couldn't agree more with his assessment or with his understanding that his church may not be able to do everything, but they could certainly do something - so they've identified their something and are committed to doing it well.





DO WHAT YOU CAN TODAY
WITH WHAT YOU HAVE TODAY.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Take a few moments to answer the following questions either as an individual ministry leader or as a team.

What 3-4 things...

...can your ministry focus on and do right now?

...would you eventually like to see your ministry involved with?

...might be good things but are not within the scope of your ministry?



PRINCIPLE #2

Start Slow



THE GOAL OF YOUR MINISTRY IS *SUSTAINABILITY, NOT SPEED.*

Too fast too soon —————

Don't go too fast too soon. **It's entirely possible to be simple but not slow.** You can identify the few things you want to do well but still move too quickly on them.

For example, if your mission is to raise up more foster and adoptive families, be smart about it. Your goal is not just to recruit more families faster but to equip and support the right families longer.

Quality preparation is more important than a quick pace.

Moving too fast too soon can end up doing more harm to the ministry than help. The last thing you want to do is inadequately equip and prepare people only to have them burn out in the end. We have to develop realistic expectations for what we can accomplish effectively with what we currently have to work with.





It is better to take many steps in the right direction than to make a great leap forward only to stumble backward.

CHINESE PROVERB



A marathon, not a sprint —————

Going slow may require that you as the leader take two steps back so your people can take one step forward. You recognize the potential and feel the urgency, but they may not be there yet.

It may be your goal to eradicate the foster care crisis in your city tomorrow, but for today the best your ministry can do is organize a backpack drive for a local agency - and that's ok. That may be where you need to start – not end – but at least start.

**Slow does not necessarily mean insignificant or unsuccessful.
Slow often means smart.**

If caring for the orphaned and vulnerable is a lifelong marathon, not a short-term sprint then it's important to pace yourself early so that you can ultimately make it to the finish line.

It takes time, and the cause is too important to not ensure you're doing it well. Slow down, take a deep breath and move forward...slowly, but surely.

**YOU MAY NEED
TO TAKE TWO
STEPS *BACKWARDS*
SO YOUR PEOPLE
CAN TAKE ONE
STEP *FORWARD*.**



Story

I recently met with a ministry leader who is launching a non-profit in Chicago. His work will primarily focus on equipping, inspiring and empowering churches to engage the foster care crisis in their city. A fantastic vision, indeed.

The question we spent most of our time on was not whether the vision of the ministry was clear enough or the need in the city was great enough to necessitate a non-profit like this. Instead, we spent most of our time talking about what he should do first, and subsequently what he shouldn't do first.

His strategy was two-part: 1) Create small group based communities of support for foster and adoptive families throughout the city by utilizing local churches in specific regions; 2) Coordinate monthly service projects around the city to help churches engage their people in the ministry in a tangible way. Again, a fantastic vision.

We had to put both pieces of strategy on the table and ask some critical questions about them:

What do you already have that can help you do this? What do you still need? Is it possible to launch the ministry doing both, or does one need to roll out first then the other follow?

It became clear that the greatest, most imminent need at the time was for current foster and adoptive families around the city to feel supported in the ministry they're already doing, not recruited to add more to their plate - like service projects. The answer was simple - let the early days of the ministry be defined by how well you are supporting families, then build from there.

The service project component was not removed from the equation, just put on pause so that first things could be first things. In the end, we became convinced that if over time a strong network of support groups were established around the city then it would only make the rollout of the collaborative service projects that much more successful. They would have a stronger foundation of community, legitimacy and momentum to stand upon.



A person wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt is shown from the chest down, holding their right hand out flat, palm up, in a gesture of offering or support. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm tones.

**THE GOAL IS
NOT SIMPLY TO
RECRUIT MORE
FAMILIES
FASTER; IT'S TO
EQUIP AND
SUPPORT THE
RIGHT FAMILIES
LONGER.**



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Take a few moments to answer the following questions either as an individual ministry leader or as a team.

What do you want to accomplish...

...in the next 6 months?

...in the next 6-12 months?

..in the next 12-24 months?



PRINCIPLE #3

Start Small



THE *SUCCESS* OF YOUR MINISTRY IS NOT
DETERMINED BY ITS *SIZE* IN YOUR CHURCH BUT BY
ITS *SIGNIFICANCE* IN THE LIVES OF YOUR PEOPLE.

Getting small —————

Don't try to do too much too soon. As the ministry grows you'll be glad you took the time to build strong systems of structure and support when things were still small. Use this time to invest in leaders, clarify vision, line out strategy and develop relationships with key ministry partners outside of your church that are going to help you accomplish the objectives and goals you have set within for your people.

How Do You Get Small?

Gather the interested and already involved in your church and begin to form community among them. Whether your church is 10,000 people, 1,000 people or even less than 100 people, make it “smaller” by getting that cross-section of people in a room together. Draw the few who have a passion in their hearts for this out of the masses and give them an opportunity to be in the same room together. There's incredible power in them looking around and perhaps for the first time seeing they're not alone in this. Community naturally begins to form as a result.



Creating smaller circles...

Whatever passion was once isolated within each one of them individually is now given the opportunity to collectively burn together – better, bigger and brighter. Ask God to continue to put kindling around it. See what happens.

This simple graphic is a visual of what it could look like when you engage the crowd of your church (larger circle) and gather the interested and already involved into smaller circles of community together (smaller circle).



Examples of how to “Engage the Crowd”

- [Orphan Sunday](#)
- Sermon (or series)
- Missions Emphasis
- Church-wide initiative
- Etc.

Examples of “Smaller Circles”

- Luncheon
- Informational Meeting
- Social Gathering
- Small Group / Class
- Etc.



Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together.

VINCENT VAN GOGH



First things first —————

Starting small is not meant to imply that we don't want to set big goals for our ministry and believe God for big things. It's simply suggesting that in order to see both those things happen there may be some things we need to consider doing first.

Identify those first things first, do them well and build from there.

Perhaps before you work to start a new orphan care *ministry* at your church your first step will be to establish a new orphan care *community* at your church.

Has there ever been a time when everyone in your church that has adopted, is adopting, has been adopted, has fostered, is currently fostering or has ever been in foster care been in the room together? What about those that are interested in adopting or fostering? If not, start there. Begin forging a sense of community and comradery among them. Share stories, find ways to serve and support one another. Make it abundantly clear that they are not alone, but there is a community of people in their church that understands them and wants to rally around them.

**PERHAPS YOUR
FIRST STEP IS TO
FORM A *COMMUNITY*
BEFORE YOU
START A *MINISTRY*.**





HERE'S A FEW SUGGESTIONS FOR ENGAGING PEOPLE IN COMMUNITY WITH ONE ANOTHER:

- 1 Identify those who are already involved and invite them to a social event – a BBQ or some type of hangout to begin forming community.
- 2 Host an informational luncheon after church one Sunday for those that are interested as well as those that are already involved. Share stories, cast vision and identify next steps together.
- 3 Invite those who have personally expressed some interest to you into a small group where you'll read a book or walk through a study together on the subject of God's heart for the orphan.
- 4 Research local and national orphan care conferences, workshops or forums and take a group from the church with you. The annual Christian Alliance for Orphans Summit is the largest of its kind in the country. Learn more at [CAFO Summit](#).
- 5 Simply meet one-on-one over coffee with people who share a similar heart as you.

These are just a few examples of the endless amounts of opportunities you have to begin connecting people into community around God's heart for the orphaned and vulnerable. Be creative!



Story

I had the pleasure of starting a church in 2008 in the Houston area with an incredible team of people. Almost two years later something unexpectedly happened that shifted much of our focus, energy and pastoral responsibilities.

Of the maybe 150 people in our church at the time, over 40 signed up to go to an adoption conference together in a nearby city. We were shocked and thrilled but also curious about what God was up to.

During the conference we began to get a sense that even in the life of our young church, God had brought a significant amount of people whose hearts were already burning in some capacity for foster care, adoption and orphan care.

For most, their stories at that point were simple: "We've always thought that we might want to do it one day." That was enough to get them to the conference. Shortly after returning home, maybe a week later, we gathered everyone together who had attended in order to debrief, hear what they were thinking and discern what strategically our next steps needed to be.

I'll never forget being in that room that night, seeing fires that once burned isolated in the hearts of each individual person now beginning to burn collectively together. I realized we would not have been having that meeting, at that time, with that group of people, had we not put the invitation to the conference out in front of our whole church.

Our ministry didn't begin church-wide; it began small. The conference acted like a "carrot" on the end of a stick, dangled out in front of our people to see who would take a bite. Everyone didn't, but 40+ people did – that's a lot of individual, isolated and in most cases anonymous fires that were already burning – now being given an opportunity to burn together. We did not know those fires were burning; it took the "carrot" of the conference to reveal that to us. It drew the few out of the masses.

We realized a significant part of the culture of our church had a heart for foster care, adoption and orphan care and that our first steps were not so much to "start" a ministry as much they were to steward the ministry God had already brought us. We needed to start small before going big.



THINK ABOUT IT:
MOST OF THE
THINGS WE
LOVE AND
VALUE THE
MOST STARTED
SMALL AND
HAVE GROWN
OVER TIME.





QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

Take a few moments to answer the following questions either as an individual ministry leader or as a team.

How can you engage people...

PERSONALLY

Who can you meet with, invite to coffee or spend time with on a more one-on-one basis?

SOCIALLY

What events can you plan for foster/adoptive families to connect and get to know each other better?

CHURCH-WIDE

How can you engage church-wide via sermons, announcements or other macro-level communications?



Conclusion

It is breathtaking to see commitment to orphan care well up as a movement within the Church today. This commitment has always defined the Church at its best. Yet there is always a danger that growth in zeal for a cause can outpace our capacity to engage it wisely. Any time that happens, we run great risk of doing as much harm as good.

Scripture says that *zeal without knowledge is not good* because it causes us to make careless, otherwise avoidable mistakes (Psalm 19:2). Scripture is not against us being passionate - it is against our passion being uninformed and unguided by truth. It's not against us feeling strongly about things - it is for us learning how to appropriately act on those strong feelings. In practical terms, zeal without knowledge, like a 2-year-old left alone with a marker around furniture, is not good - it's actually very, very dangerous.

Passion is not enough to sustain the timeless call to care for orphans and vulnerable children. It must be undergirded by a more sustainable base of knowledge, belief and practical understanding. That's really the heart of this resource, and likely your heart as well as a leader within your church or ministry. Sometimes simple, slow and small are necessary today in order to make maximum impact tomorrow.

In some cases, the best thing we can do for the growing movement of caring for orphans and vulnerable children in the Church is to temper its zeal - not to stop the momentum of the movement but to teach ourselves and others how to appropriately and effectively maneuver within it. The point is not to diffuse passion but to educate it, inform it and provide the proper guardrails in which that passion can thrive and flourish long term. In the end, everyone will win - the children being helped, the families responding to the call and the long-term sustainable impact of the movement as a whole.

That's the purpose of this resource and my prayer for you, your team, your ministry and your church.



ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN ALLIANCE FOR ORPHANS

The Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAFO) unites 180+ respected organizations and a national network of 600+ churches. Our joint initiatives inspire and equip Christians to live out effectively the Bible's call to care for orphans and vulnerable children.

CAFO Membership is an opportunity to join in a vision for God's glory and the care of orphans that is larger than any one organization or project. Together, we seek to inspire, interlink and equip God's people to reflect His heart for the orphan. To a watching world, the Alliance is an all-too-rare picture of the church unified, serving the fatherless in both word and deed, bearing poignant testimony to the character of our God.



THE NATIONAL CHURCH MINISTRY INITIATIVE

Through the National Church Ministry Initiative, CAFO helps churches build effective, sustainable ministries across the country – serving local leaders with essential knowledge, best-practice models, practical resources, strategic coaching and networking opportunities.

Visit www.cafo.org/ncmi to learn how your church can be a part of this national movement.



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In his role at CAFO, Jason works to equip and mobilize churches nationwide through the coaching, resourcing and networking of church leaders within the National Church Alliance Network of over 600 churches.

Three Principles

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