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Introduction

Over the past 26 years it has been my privilege to have worked with hundreds of Christian families who have provided a much needed, hands on ministry, to thousands of at-risk youth in the foster care system. These ultraistic moms and dads are my heroes! To the world they may seem to be nameless people who are doing the mundane work of caring for someone else's neglected, abused, or abandoned children. But to me they are my partners with God, who are committed to changing the destiny of a generation of throw away children. They are dedicated to impacting future generations. They change the trajectory of their life experience from one of abuse to protection, from neglect to commitment, from abandonment to connection, from failure to success, from fear to trust, from bitterness to forgiveness, and from brokenness to wholeness. These life changing experiences are a significant part of the journey to freedom that Jesus spoke about in Luke 4:18-19

I believe caring for these marginalized children is truly a mission that God has called us to engage in many practical ways. My hope is that you will prayerfully consider at least one or more of the opportunities that will be shared in this compassion ministry "Guidebook". Some may question or even discount the value of some of the practical suggestions that are offered to share with your ministry leadership team or congregation. In John 11:44, Jesus asked those who had been sympathetic onlookers to engage in up-close, hands on ministry in a very practical way when he instructed them to "loose him (Lazarus) and let him go." He chose to involve and challenge those who were aware of the unfortunate circumstance to participate in his life resurrecting miracle. Their responsiveness to his instructions to 'unwrap him' seemed unimportant, but he used it to teach a powerful message about the importance of their hands-on partnership which resulted in the completed freedom for Lazarus.

Recently, I witnessed this kind of team effort in the life of a young lady who came into our faith based foster care program. At the age of 11 she was introduced to a wonderful foster family who warmly welcomed her and her two younger sisters into their family. These children had been significantly neglected and abused. Our Resource Family was supported by many others who were a part of their local church family. The church helped in many practical ways as well as regularly praying for the family who was parenting our 11 year old and her younger sisters. These young girls began to experience the love and care of a wonderful family, and the support and encouragement of a committed church family. What were the results? Our 11 year old began to experience a powerful transformation in her life. She became free from her burden of pain and anger. She excelled in school and graduated from high school as a straight A student. She went on to enroll in a local university, completed 4 years of college education as a 4.0 student and graduated at the top of her class as the Valedictorian for the graduating class. Her younger sisters are now on a very similar path of wholeness and success. Their lives have been forever changed! This amazing

success story is the result of the transforming power of the gospel message and the many willing 'unwrappers' that helped along the way in many different and practical ways.

Some of our suggestions and identified opportunities in this guidebook may seem as insignificant as 'unwrapping' or may not seem to be a very spiritually oriented ministry. However, I encourage you to prayerfully consider how fostering a child, adopting a foster child or provide tangible assistance to those who are parenting these children will make a life impacting difference. Regardless of the size or the demographics of your congregation, I believe that every church family can make a significant contribution to serving some of the more than 62,000 marginalized youth in the California Foster Care System. As you read, may you be motivated to discuss the 'what ifs' of this life changing opportunity with your congregation.

Rick L. Smith
Pathway Family Services
Founder & Executive Director

Endorsements

“I have known Rick Smith for many years and have heard his heart for ministering to those in the Foster Care System. Rick has dedicated his life to help children who have been marginalized by family members and society.

Pathway Family Services is at the forefront of this important ministry that is needed in every community. The “toolkit” (guidebook) they have put together is a realistic, down-to-earth approach to help your church become engaged in helping those in the Foster Care System witness how much God and His people love them.

Jesus said “Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” You can be God’s instrument to bring children to Jesus by partnering with Pathway Family Services.

I urge you to consider asking Rick and the Pathway Family Services Team to speak at your church so you and your people can begin the wonderful journey of helping children realize the love of God through a loving family.”

Rich Guerra

Superintendent, SoCal Assemblies of God Network

“Jesus taught that the purest form of religion is lived out when one provides care to widows and orphans. At no other time in history is orphan care needed more than today. Rick Smith and the team of Pathway Family Services, are poised to lead the charge to live out Christ’s clarion call to care for orphans.

As a former foster parent, I can truthfully say that serving orphans enriched my life more than any other thing I have ever done. While my wife and I determined to help the foster children, our hearts and lives received far more blessing than we could contain. Don’t get me wrong, it is challenging, at times frustrating and arduous work, but as people of God, we have the opportunity to love on Christ’s behalf. There is nothing more rewarding.

Will you consider being the hands and feet of Jesus to practice pure religion and provide love and care for those who are eagerly waiting? It may change a life, not only the orphan’s, but yours!

Friend, this “toolkit” (Guidebook) has been prepared with you in mind. To help you and your church to engage in this very important ministry in various ways. It provides clear, concise and practical information on how you can make a BIG difference in the lives of marginalized children!”

John Johnson

Assistant Superintendent, SoCal Assemblies of God Network

1

Pathway Family Services

Who We Are:

Pathway Family Services is a Faith-based Foster Care and Adoption Agency whose pioneer office is located in Bakersfield, California. Pathway serves, Kern, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. We are also in the midst of expansion to more California cities and are excited about continued growth to serve more children within the foster care system.

Our History:

Since 2006, Pathway Family Services has answered the call to care for the needs of foster children by training, certifying, and supporting resource families (foster families) in their brave efforts to re-write the stories of abused and neglected children. Pathway Family Services has transformed the lives of a great number of abused, neglected, and at-risk children and their families by providing safe homes, counseling, resources, and education for both foster children and resource families. Established, proven and respected, Pathway is fully committed to seeing the lives of precious children healed, restored, and set on a steady path for life-long success.

Our Story:

Rick L. Smith, the Executive Director and founder of Pathway Family Services, is dedicated to see the destiny of foster children changed to impact future generations to come. With more than 25 years of experience, he has led a gifted team of managers, social work staff, and hundreds of resource families in serving thousands of children in the California foster care system. Rick has a history of serving as a key partner with Child Welfare Services in California. He works tirelessly with community leaders to provide solutions to an ever-growing problem of caring for 'At Risk' youth served in the foster care system. With compassion and vision, Pathway will continue to be a conduit for mercy, service, and wholeness to all of the children and families under its care.

Rick and his wife Jane have personally cared for foster kids as they raised their biological children for many years. Having compassion for foster children and youth is not a business; it is their hearts and their life.

Rick has a Bachelors Degree in Christian Education and a Master's Degree in Business, with decades of Executive Leadership experience. As the Founder/CEO of Pathway Family Services, he serves as the Chairman of the Board of Directors. He is also an ordained minister.

What We Do:

What we do at Pathway is both simple and complex at the same time. Simply stated; Pathway provides loving, healthy, Christian homes for foster children and youth. We also offer Adoption Services should those foster children become available for adoption.

Pathway Family Services has answered the call to care for the needs of foster children and works diligently to establish loving, healthy resource families (foster families) to connect children to.

- We provide training, coaching and support for resource parents/families. (foster families)
- We provide financial compensation.
- We provide 24 hour assistance from our professionally qualified, caring and experienced staff.
- We connect our families to numerous important Community Services and Resources.

Together with resource parents Pathway helps re-write the stories of an abused and neglected generation of children, to transform their lives; all by providing safe homes, counseling, relevant training and support for both foster kids and their resource families.

Loving, Christian families and healthy homes are one of the most powerful ways to bring renewed hope and a better future to children and youth within the foster care system.

To fulfill the call of providing homes to foster children and youth, we work diligently to enlist those within the faith community to become resource families or resource parents. (foster families or foster parents) Pathway has team members (Community Connection Representatives) who reach out to local pastors or their designee, where there are potential connections to couples or singles that will become resource parents.

Community Connections Representatives, pursue local churches to build rapport and relationships with congregations. After connection is established they arrange to deliver information packages filled with brochures, fliers, prayer cards, and introductory letters. Each package is a way to introduce our community to the staggering need within the foster care system. We most often connect with your congregations when we are invited to speak at Sunday Worship services or mid-week evening services.

We also enjoy connecting with members of your congregation and community by sharing at other groups such as Pastors Breakfasts, Women's Bible Studies, and Missions Events.

We recognize that the generations of people that will become our resource families are a unique mix of both young and more mature folks. For the younger of the generations, we have started thinking a little bit "outside the box" and a little more "inside the tiny screen". Thinking of ways to captivate the attention of a people that are a smart phone, social media

saturated generation. This younger generation is unique and extraordinary. We have found that reaching them in their environment is the best way to connect.

“Go to where the people are.” Take the idea of foster care to where these potential families are:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Blogs
- Brief videos that catch attention

We have a Facebook page where we post current events we are involved in, biographies of our awesome staff members from all over California, and articles and news relevant and helpful to resource parents. We have blogs we follow as well; written by dynamic journalists that are committed to the cause of foster care, and we have created catchy, modern and informative videos. Each video is full of the heartbeat of Pathway and the staggering statistics of foster care, all with a brief and contemporary style.

Reaching the more mature generation requires some “old school” tactics. This generation is a combination of both retirees and career oriented or family minded individuals. It tends to be more of a personal contact, relationship oriented generation.

However it is that we reach potential resource parents; we do so with diligence and passion. Reaching out isn’t an option for us, there are too many kids’ destinies at stake. Let’s stand together for their futures.

Join us in the Heartbeat, Vision and Mission of Pathway...

The Heartbeat of Pathway

Our Vision and Mission

The **VISION** of Pathway is to reach an abused and abandoned generation with help, hope and healing with the purpose of bringing wholeness to broken children.

The **MISSION** of Pathway is to provide every child a 'pathway' to physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wholeness through compassionate Christian homes and community partners.

Our Recognized Relationships and Partnerships

It is our Vision, Mission and Values that align us with the Compassion Ministry of CityServe. Pathway Family Services is a recognized partner of CityServe, which promotes that the Christian community should engage in caring for the thousands of marginalized youth in the foster care system. <https://cityserve.us/>

Pathway is also accredited and recognized as a highly qualified organization by the nationally recognized Council of Accreditation (COA) and undergoes regular scrutiny in how it provides quality services for foster youth and how it utilizes its financial resources. In short, we are grateful for our partnerships to help us to continue 'extending our cords and stretching our tent' to be the best we can be in providing vital and life changing ministry for as many at risk youth as possible.

2

The Staggering Statistics- Confirm the Enormous Need

Although, orphans are clearly a worldwide issue, for the sake of this guidebook we are going to focus on the United States and the “American Orphan” for Foster Care and Adoption statistics. By shining a bright light on this sobering problem, it is much easier to understand the need for the local church to step into this great opportunity to serve an ‘at risk’ generation of youth.

The Staggering Statistics in the United States

According to NFYI (National Foster Youth Institute) their most recent statistics give insight to Foster Youths’ reality and their outlook toward the future in the Foster Care System.

www.nfyi.org

- Nearly 60% of young men who age out of the foster care system and are legally emancipated have been convicted of a crime.
- More than 85% of children in public foster care have had a minimum of two different placement settings within the first 12 months of being placed in the system.
- 73% of the cases of child maltreatment are due to neglect
- Kids between the ages of 0-7 make up more than half of all child maltreatment reports that are generated in the United States every year.
- More than 6% of children who are placed into foster care have been sexually abused by a parent or family member.

According to the AFCARS Report Preliminary FY 2017, the Estimates as of August 10, 2018 (report No. 25)

- As of September 30, 2017 the number of children in foster care was 442,995
- Number of children served during the fiscal year was 690,548

Of the 269,690 children entering Foster Care during the FY 2017 (AFCARS report No. 25)

- 62% or about 167,00 children were removed due to Neglect
- 36% or about 97,00 children were removed to parental Drug Abuse
- 12% or about 33,000 children were removed due to Physical Abuse
- 4% or about 9,800 children were removed due to Sexual Abuse

The AFCARS Report is from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services/Administration for Children and Families/Administration on Children, Youth and Families/Children's Bureau. www.acr.hhs.gov/cb

When we look at the CLCCAL reports (The Children's Law Center of California) we see deeper into the affects of the above statistics. How trauma affects these young lives and manifest is evident from the continually growing statistics.

- Approximately 45,000 infants are placed in foster care, where they too often lack the stability that promotes attachment and early brain development. (US General accounting Office, (GAO-03-357),2003)
- One third of youth who age out of the system evidence mental health problems, the most prevalent diagnoses being Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, alcohol or substance abuse, and major depression. (US Department of Health and Human Services AFCARS report, 2014.

Marquis Cabrera is IBM's Global Leader of Digital Government Transformation/CEO of FosterSkills. (FosterSkills is a social enterprise – supported by Steve and Jean Case, and is focused on citizen-driven social and foster care innovation). Cabrera is a former foster child who was adopted at age 10. At age 10 his life was put onto a course that would change things within the foster care system and the lives of many foster children as well. He was a statistic as a former foster child, but, is now a man, whose life and innovations within the foster care system, is helping to shift statistic percentages positively.

In the BLOG in Huffington Post written by Cabrera, he shares some eye opening statistics from around the globe in the past decade, however, one sentence within that blog stood out from the others. It said, **“Children may make up only about 30% of the world's population, but they represent 100% of our future.”**

This is why we do what we do!

According to NFYI, and the AFCARS report the number of foster kids who are eligible for adoption on average every year range from 101,667 to 123,437.

Within Pathway we have seen many incredible success stories of former foster youth, foster families and adoption within those families. There is one story that stands out a little brighter than some. Rick shared about this family, these foster kids in his introduction. The reality is; the trajectory of these children's lives was changed forever. They are all an altered statistic because of a loving, Christian home and an incredible support base. They arrived to the home, angry, bitter, and emotionally wounded. The oldest of the girls often shares that it is the love her resource family provided and their safe, stable environment of family and friends for her and her sisters that changed their lives. Forever!

While statistically:

- only about 2% of Foster Youth go on to graduate from college

- 50% do not complete high school
- 80% are unemployed
- 40% go on to Public Assistance
- 25% are homeless
- 20% are incarcerated

The oldest of these sisters, not only went on to college, she graduated with a double major, with a 4.0 at the top of her class, she was Valedictorian speaker for her graduating class and her younger sisters are following in her footsteps.

She is a bright light in a world of dark statistics. This is the shift and life change a loving family can make.

It is confirmed that youth who are a part of a healthy family will be:

- **81% less likely** to be incarcerated
- **74% less likely** to be homeless
- **62% less likely** to be on public assistance
- **More than 50% less likely** to:
 - Drop out of high school
 - To be addicted to drugs
 - To be unemployed
 - To be involved with domestic violence
 - To be stuck in poverty

When placed into a loving Christian home with Pathway or other faith based agency children are 3 times less likely to be moved out of their foster home to a different one.

Currently at Pathway the percentage of our children staying with a single family is about 89%.

This is a staggering statistic in the VERY BEST of ways!

Rick Smith, the Executive Director of Pathway recently met with the Assistant Director of Social Services for one of the counties we work with. This Director had just returned from Sacramento and was concerned about the reports he had heard about how often children are moved from foster home to foster home. When he heard about our 89%, he stated that he had never heard such a positive high percentage.

This is a demonstration of Biblical Compassion. This is why the Christian Community is so important in providing the solution to the problem. **The Church is the Solution!**

3

Called to Care- Demonstrating Biblical Compassion

We are: Called to Be

- **A fundamental component of first century church ministry.**

James 1:27 (NLT)

“Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.”

We are: Called to Model

- **Our intrinsic value confirmed and demonstrated straight from the heart of God.**

Psalm 68:5-6

“Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God, whose dwelling is holy. God places the lonely in families; he sets the prisoners free and gives them joy. But he makes the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.”

We are: Called to Advocate

- **Advocate for the needs of the marginalized.**

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NLT)

“Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.”

We are: Called to Serve

- **Serve the ‘least of these’, as if we are serving Jesus himself.**

Matthew 25:35 (NLT)

“For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.”

Plan of Action-Checklist

Section 3

Called to Care

- We are: CALLED TO BE

- We are: CALLED TO MODEL

- We are: CALLED TO ADVOCATE

- We are: CALLED TO SERVE

- What do each of these look like in real life?
- What do they look like in my life as the pastor?
- What do they look like in my congregation?
- How can we 'Be', 'Model', 'Advocate' and 'Serve'?

Pastor's Thoughts and Notes

4

Actions, Driven by Values

God Calls us to Action and Expects us to Respond to the Mission

Helping orphans and widows isn't a suggestion, it's a Biblical Mission! James 1:27

If it breaks your heart to imagine a child feeling alone, removed from their home and what is familiar to them through no fault of their own, then you are ready to learn more about foster parenting or the ministry of helping foster children and youth.

There is an awakening among churches to become involved in foster care. This is clearly a welcome move of the Holy Spirit. Even so, this is not a social problem we can resolve by simply recruiting some foster parents.

Being a resource parent (foster parent) is not easy, and you need to be able to care for a child whose history, culture and family relationships may be different from your own. Resource parenting requires strong skills including sensitivity, flexibility, and selflessness. Of course, each family receives training and support in learning everything they need to know. Even with the support and coaching by professionally educated and trained teams, we know resource families and the foster children they serve thrive most when surrounded with a support base of their family and friends and most especially their church family rallying around them.

The Church partnering with Godly families who will foster, or assisting those who are fostering IS responding to the Mission. Even assisting families by offering emotional and caring support is vital for these resource families to be successful in the experience of this life transforming care.

Pathway has provided this 'Guidebook' to use in helping to mobilize, coordinate and strategically activate compassionate action within your congregation and your community. Action that is tangible! This guidebook was created to empower and encourage churches to actively pursue ministry that redeems the fatherless to family. Pathway's goal is to equip individuals in large or small churches to deliver evidence-based interventions to vulnerable families in their communities:

- To protect vulnerable children, youth and families
- To assist those in the community who provide custodial care for foster children and those who have adopted the orphaned.

What Does Responding to this Mission Look Like? How Do I Engage?

You may be saying to yourself, “As the Pastor I have caught the vision, now how do I get involved?”, “How do I get my leadership team involved?” or, “How do I get my congregation involved?”

Here is a simple step by step process to assess if your congregation is already involved or open to getting involved with foster care. Questions you may ask yourself:

Step One: Assess My Congregation

Are people in my congregation already fostering?

Are people in my congregation wanting and willing to foster?

Are there members of my congregation that I have talked with; (counseled with, prayed with possibly after the loss of a child or unable to conceive) who want to become parents and are open to becoming resource families, OR families who want to foster with a heart to adopt?

Step Two: Discuss with My Leadership Team

I'm ready to share my vision with my team. Is my leadership team on board? Do they need more information?

Should I invite Pathway to come and introduce the ministry of foster care to my team and help develop the vision for our church?

Each congregation has its own personality, and you know the best way to introduce the ministry of foster care to your church.

- You may consider having a luncheon after a Sunday service, to invite people to hear about the ministry of Pathway, or the Mission of foster care in general.
- You may desire to have Pathway share on a Sunday morning during service (for churches within our current ministry area)
- You may choose to begin by showing Pathway videos and use Pathway coffee sleeves before inviting Pathway to share the various ways to engage in this vital ministry.

Whichever avenue you decide to take, Pathway is here to assist you in succeeding to share the heart of God regarding the Biblical Mission of foster care with your congregation.

Plan of Action-Checklist
Section 4

Step One: Assess My Congregation

- Do we have families already fostering?
Families _____

- Am I or others interested in becoming a Resource Family/Parent?
- Am I or others willing to become a support base for Resource Families/Parents?

Section 4

Step Two: Discuss with My Leadership Team

- Leadership Team Meeting...
- Date? _____
- Leadership Team on board with vision?
- Invite Pathway for a speaking engagement with my team...
- Date? _____
 - Pastors/Leadership Team Breakfast
 - Luncheon with Leadership Team
 - Date? _____
- Watch Pathway videos/Visit website
- Get coffee sleeves from Pathway for church coffeehouse/coffee hour

Pastor's Thoughts and Notes

Step Three: Leading from the Pulpit

Voice the vision of the Mission to your congregation

Turn the topic of foster care into a sermon, or a series. When pastors want to share a message with their church they often do so with a sermon or a series. It is very unlikely your congregation will catch the vision if you yourself do not have the vision. When you have caught the vision of the Mission, and your team has caught the vision; it's then time to share with your congregation. By sharing your vision, passion and heart for the topic of foster care it will navigate your congregation in the direction you feel God is leading.

Encourage involvement as a church family

There are fun and fruitful projects you can do with your congregation for the biggest impact, and for greatest involvement. But again, access your congregation. If they are mostly an 'over 50' congregation, having a "family fun run" as your introduction may not be the best fit. Having a family potluck or a pizza party after church on a Sunday might be more the speed to go.

Have Pathway do a presentation on a Sunday morning

We see great response from churches that have had us come do a presentation, especially when giving time for our Executive Director Rick Smith to come and preach. He is an ordained minister, but even better than that, he is a phenomenal preacher/speaker and after decades of sharing is able to present Pathway and the mission of foster care with succinct and poignant passion. He will certainly pass the Foster Care Mission vision on to your congregation. For churches outside of the counties we are servicing presentations or connections may look differently, however, should we not be in your area, Pathway, would be happy to help guide you to a faith-based foster care agency within your community.

For counties within the Pathway area, we are here and ready to serve you. This is what it would look like for Pathway to come and share with your congregation.

- We can prepare a 7-10 minute presentation with a cutting edge video.
- **OR** we can prepare a relevant sermon to share with your congregation to ignite passion for your vision. Rick is a gifted communicator and has a way of sharing the mission of Foster Care with relevance and practical implementation.
- Provide coffee sleeves for your coffee hour before service for 1 to 2 weeks prior to our presentation.
- Provide video links to share with your congregation before or after our presentation.
- Provide brochures, bulletin inserts, prayer cards, pens and Pathway introductory information along with representatives at our booth after service to help answer any questions your church members may have.
- Guide church members step by step through paperwork and training should they desire to become certified resource parents.

Plan of Action-Checklist

Section 4

Step Three: Leading from the Pulpit

- Sermon OR Series?

- Promote the ministry of Pathway Family Services by showing videos.
- Invite Pathway for a Luncheon with church congregation
- Date?_____
- Family Potluck or Pizza? Get the church involved.

- Invite Pathway to do a Presentation on a Sunday Morning
- Date?_____
- Invite Pathway Executive Director Rick Smith to preach.
- Date?_____
- Distribute or display Pathway promotional materials.
 - Bulletin Inserts
 - Prayer Cards
 - Brochures
 - Videos/and Video Links
 - Coffee Sleeves

Pastor's Thoughts and Notes

Step Four: Develop Awareness

Keeping foster care and adoption at the forefront

There are dates through the year that are nationally recognized for serious concerns and issues within our Nation. Most of these national months have specific Sundays within that month that emphasize these concerns, with either events and/or prayer gatherings in churches all across the nation and globally.

- January-National Sanctity of Life/Life Matters month. The 3rd Sunday in January.
- April-Blue Sunday for Child Abuse Prevention month. Last Sunday in April.
- May-Foster Care Month in the United States since 1988 under President Regan
- November-National Adoption Month. The 2nd Sunday highlighting “Orphan Sunday” and “Stand Sunday”.

National Sanctity of Life/Life Matters Month

On January 13, 1984, President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation designating January 22 as the first National Sanctity of Human Life Day. January 22, 1973, was the day the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion-on-demand in all 50 states. Churches around the United States use the day to celebrate God's gift of life, commemorate the many lives lost to abortion, and commit themselves to protecting human life at every stage. Churches continue to recognize the 3rd Sunday in January as Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. This ministry has expanded their vision from just the Sanctity of the unborn life to the Sanctity of Life at every stage and age, from the unborn, to the newborn, the youth and to the senior.

Blue Sunday for Child Abuse Prevention Month

Blue Sunday is always the last Sunday in April. Churches take time in their services to pray for the victims of child abuse, and for those who rescue them.

Foster Care Month in the USA

National Foster Care Month is observed in the United States during the month of May every year. It began in 1988, also with President Ronald Regan. Since 1988, National Foster Care Month continues to be recognized and celebrated.

Orphan Sunday/Stand Sunday

Orphan and Stand Sundays are part of Christian Alliance for Orphans Ministry. (CAFO) On Orphan Sunday and Stand Sunday, Christians stand for children who've lost the protection and care of family. We are a people called to defend the fatherless...to protect the vulnerable...to visit orphans in their distress. Orphan Sunday highlights the issue of orphans globally and Stand Sunday highlights the issue of the American orphan. The 2nd Sunday in November is the day Churches all around the world and across the U.S. observe this cause.

Plan of Action-Checklist
Section 4

Step Four: Develop Awareness

- Promote JANUARY-National Sanctity of Life/Life Matters
- Promote APRIL-Child Abuse Prevention Month/Blue Sunday
- Promote MAY-Foster Care Month
- Promote NOVEMBER-National Adoption Month/Orphan Sunday/Stand Sunday

What are ways we as a church can promote these significant dates?

Pastor's Thoughts and Notes

Step Five: How Can We Make a Difference? How Can We Help?

Prayerfully consider becoming a Resource Parent

By becoming a certified resource parent as the pastor, you will be leading by example. You'll be living out compassion ministry right before the eyes of your congregation.

Foster to Adopt

Concurrent Planning is two parallel plans happening at one time (for a foster child), with reunification with the biological family as the primary goal and one of the other permanency outcomes (such as adoption) as the secondary goal. When a child is removed from a home, the first option for placement is a home that will support the reunification process, but that is open to adopting the child if reunification is not possible.

Adoption

Each adoption case has its own unique circumstances. We assure you if your families are partnered with Pathway, just as we do with the process of becoming a resource parent, Pathway is there to assist. A Pathway Adoption Social Worker will help you every step of the way. Remember with each agency, or county, they will have their own guidelines to follow should your foster children become available for adoption. Concurrent Planning will help that process be an easier transition in every way.

Become a church with a heartbeat for foster care AND adoption

Refer to Step Four, by keeping dates of awareness highlighted within your congregation. Highlighting these dates will continue to spark your people with passion for this ministry so close to God's heart, as well as, introduce any new church members to the heartbeat of your church regarding foster care and adoption.

Encourage your congregation to become Resource families

Whether your families are working directly with Pathway Family Services, or another foster care agency in your community; much of the legal processes will look the same. There may be some differences; however as a general guide becoming a resource family/parent will have much of the same required regulations.

- Attend an Orientation
- Complete paperwork required by the state (*Packets # 1 & #2 for Pathway*)
- Complete 12 to 30 hours resource family training (*foster parent training*) (*Number of hours of training is determined by the county you reside in.*)
- Live Scan (Federal & State Clearances)
- Health Screening & TB Test
- CPR/FA/WATER Safety
- Home Assessment-Home Study
- Family Evaluation and Written Report

Here are the steps to becoming Resource Families in greater detail:

- **Orientation and Paperwork**
Attend an orientation with Pathway Family Services or one of California's other foster care providers to get an in-depth explanation of the certification process. Get and complete the application with the agency. Remember each county may have different procedures, as well as different procedures between your County Child Welfare offices and a faith based agency.
- **Resource Parent/Family Training (Foster Parent Training)**
Complete 12 to 30 hours of training. The number of training hours varies from County to County and your number of training hours is determined by which county you reside. (Pathway training offers in-class and online training in 3 Modules totaling 12 hours) Training helps you assess your strengths as a parent and develop the special skills to meet needs of a child in foster care. You will learn how to work with birth parents, help a child adjust to their 'temporary' home, learn about the rights and responsibilities as a foster parent, as well as learn about the supports available to you, including financial subsidies.
- **Live Scan-Background Check (Federal & State Clearances)**
All adults who live in the home (18 and older) must be fingerprinted and cleared through the State Department of Justice. (DoJ) A Child Abuse Index Clearance system check and investigations with Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will be done for any history of felonies, child abuse or neglect.
- **Health Screening & TB Test-Medical Clearance**
Resource parents must be healthy enough to care for a child and are required to submit medical clearances signed by a licensed and registered physician. All other household members must also submit medical clearances.
- **Home Assessment-Home Study-Family Evaluation-Written Report**
The Home Study provides the foster care agency with the information needed to determine if a home is safe and that you will be able to care for a foster child. You will be asked to provide supporting documentation about your ability to be a competent foster parent. The agency's social worker will meet with you about 3 times during the home study process. Your house will also have an inspection to determine if all regulations for the household are met. If not you will be guided to what changes must be made and regulations met for clearance.

After successful completion of your required paperwork, training, medical clearance, background checks, home study, and house inspection you will become a certified Resource Parent/Family/Home.

Once you're a certified Resource/Adoptive parent, Pathway; or another agency you chose can place children in your home. The assigned social worker will tell you about court ordered visitation schedules with birth parents and siblings, give you any and ALL information that is known about the child/children, and review the child's needs whether medical, or emotional to help in creating a Care Plan. At this time you will determine if the child is a match for your home, and the child will be placed with you on either a short or long-term basis. Often the child will arrive to you with little or no belongings.

Now; being a resource parent is not for the faint of heart. For those considering opening their home to foster children, **here are things to definitely consider before becoming a resource parent:**

- **Being a Resource Parent Requires Adequate Time**
Individuals who are interested in becoming resource parents should be sure that their schedules will allow enough time to spend with their foster children. People that work long hours or have extremely busy social calendars may not have the time needed to foster. Many foster children are interested in having a resource parent who is willing to spend time with them and is available to listen. Giving foster children adequate attention will make a world of difference in the relationship.
- **Being a Resource Parent Requires Patience & Compassion**
It is important for resource parents to be patient with foster children. Many foster children have experienced trauma and are often placed into care because of abuse; both, physical and mental or have suffered severe neglect. These factors may make patience even more of a prerequisite. Resource parents must realize they are being entrusted with children who have suffered and need extra kindness and caring in this new and unfamiliar home. Compassion is the key, since most foster children have experienced a lot of turmoil and instability in their lives. Most are simply looking for someone to love and care for them in the proper manner.
- **Getting Acquainted Takes Time**
Most foster children will not enter the home on day 1 and be ready to share all of their past history, pain and secrets by day 2. Getting to know the child, and having them get to know you, takes time. Building trust takes time!
- **Many Foster Children need a Boost in Self-Confidence**
Self-confidence (or identity) is a trait which many foster children lack. Whether it is due solely to how their birth parents treated them or whether it is because of something that came about later in life, self-confidence (identity) is a hard thing for many foster children to find on their own. Helping them to build confidence and identity in themselves will take time, however, we know Christ is the true source of identity and as Christian resource parents you can guide them to that true source.

- **Some Foster Children have been to Prior Resource Homes**
Resource parents/families should be aware that for some foster children, the new home is not the first home or social service care facility which they have seen. In some cases, foster children have been in several homes and may therefore seem immune to the process. It may take time some extra time for the child to relax and become comfortable to their new surroundings. Again, it all takes, time, patience and compassionate care.
- **Resource Parent Care Payments are a Reimbursement**
Money which is paid to the resource parents is to primarily pay for the child's room/board and everyday care. It is not an income, it is a reimbursement. Most agencies require that a families' income is sufficient to cover general everyday expenses of the home. Having a family take in foster children to help cover expenses when they're having trouble paying their own bills is unacceptable.
- **Foster Parents may be able to Adopt their Foster Children**
In some cases, foster parents are able to adopt the foster children who they care for. It will all depend on the legal rights of the birthparents and whether or not they will allow the adoption to take place.

Step Five: How Can We Make a Difference? How Can We Help? (Continued)

Who will support us as our families engage to become foster parents?

If you partner with Pathway, we will assign a liaison who will provide to you all the necessary paperwork and guide you through the process to completion. You will be supported and coached by professionally educated and trained teams. If you are working with another faith-based agency in your area or with the County foster care system you will also be assigned a case worker and support staff to assist you.

Foster Parent Training from Pathway

We provide informative and concise training with both live and online classes so that your valuable time is maximized. We make ourselves available to you at any time should you need assistance. (Pathway training offers in-class and online training in 3 Modules totaling 12 hours)

Support from Pathway

After Certification-Resource Parents and Families have continued support and access through Pathway Social Workers. There are Quarterly trainings for families annually and we have wonderful Family Christmas Parties and additional gatherings through the year. A Pathway Social Worker is available on call 24/7. So our families have support at any time should they need it.

TBRI-Dr. Karyn Purvis Institute

Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) is a therapeutic model that trains caregivers to provide effective support and treatment for at-risk children. TBRI has been applied in orphanages, courts, residential treatment facilities, group homes, foster and adoptive homes, churches, and schools. Often foster children and youth have experienced traumas that most adults wouldn't know how to handle. Some may express their emotional 'woundedness' through defiant behaviors, others may be underdeveloped, and others may be too young to even express the wounds within their souls. So TBRI offers effective tools and insight how to connect and communicate with these "traumatized" children and youth.

'Compassion Fatigue' awareness and prevention

In Social Science there is a term called "Compassion Fatigue". It is a real condition and can be dangerous if not addressed. It refers to emotional burnout when engaged in "the Lord's work". Working together as a team, is the best way to prevent compassion fatigue.

Connection to local Support Services

Probably one of the greatest ways resource parents or families and church support teams can prevent compassion fatigue is to connect with Local Support Services. Of course there will be support services for counseling for some foster kids and youth with the possibility of being directed for other and additional emotional, mental or behavioral services. Probably the best way to figure out what kind of activity your foster kids are interested in trying is to ask what they like. Each community will have their own resources; however, almost all communities will have access to the following:

Music lessons (Piano, Drums, Guitar), dance lessons (Ballet, Hip Hop, Tap), Cheerleading, Karate, Soccer, art lessons (Painting, Ceramics, Drawing), Boys & Girls Club, Girl/Boy Scouts, After school clubs, Band, Math club, Debate, sports (football, baseball), and many other various activities. Also, don't forget to have resource parents encourage their foster kids to go to the church youth group. Having them engage in social activities with other kids in a wholesome environment is an important part of introducing them to a faith they may not know, or a faith they have a hard time understanding behind all their pain. Having a Youth Pastor/Pastors and staff that are knowledgeable with emotional trauma can be very helpful as well in connecting with foster kids and youth.

Plan of Action-Checklist

Section 4

Step Five: How Can We Make a Difference? How Can We Help?

- As Pastor, my family and I are prayerfully considering becoming a Resource Family
- For many families, getting involved means choosing to become a foster parent and for others it is helping in some other 'outside of the home' way.
 - We have chosen to foster
 - Start Training
 - Date? _____
- Foster to Adopt
 - We are encouraging our foster families to be open to adoption should the foster child being cared for becomes available to adopt.
- Adoption
 - I understand that with concurrent planning some foster children will become available for adoption.
- Become a church with a heartbeat for foster care AND adoption
 - We will be a church that will highlight the need for foster care. We will connect with Pathway
- Foster Parent Training from Pathway
 - Work with Pathway to set up training for our families to become certified foster parents.
- TBRI-Dr. Karyn Purvis Institute
 - Watch the videos on the Pathway or Institute website.
- Support from Pathway
- Connect to local Support Services
- List of our local support services
 - _____
 - _____
 - _____

Pastor's Thoughts and Notes

5

Unable to be In-Home Resource Parents, but Still Want to Help! Here's how to guide your church!

Volunteerism-Is a Biblical Concept

The purpose of the gifts Jesus gave the church was to help prepare us to help others. Serve others. Minister to others. VOLUNTEER! Maybe you are not in the position to be full time in-home resource parents or resource family; however you still have a heart for the HUGE NEED OF FOSTER CARE. Every foster community has a need for extra support. Here is a list of ways you are able to volunteer to help support foster children and youth, as well as resource families (foster families) even outside of the home.

Respite Care

COMPACT a foster care and family advocacy ministry; through the Assemblies of God, headquartered in Arkansas says, "Respite Care is one of the most sought after support programs identified by foster parents." Respite Care is the provision of occasional or, substitute care of children who are placed in a certified resource home. Typically Respite care can be a few hours to 72 hours.

Respite Care is designed so Resource parents can recharge or spend some time alone, to help provide relief from the stresses of constant responsibilities that providing out-of-home care can create. Perhaps resource couples plan for a getaway for an anniversary weekend, a conference, or a marriage retreat. Possibly single resource parents plan a getaway out of town to hang out with friends. Or possibly the getaway is for a family emergency and they need to leave town. In all these cases, an approved respite provider must be in place. Respite for a non-emergency situation should be fun and rewarding not only for the resource parents and families, but should be beneficial for the foster children as well. Perhaps the respite provider takes the kids for a fun day of adventure and hiking, or to a local park, or a fun social activity with other youth. The best of respite care has both resource parents and foster children returning rested, refreshed and ready to reunite.

Surrogate Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents or family

Surrogates are people who offer love, help, support, and even respite care; but on a deeper level of connecting and commitment. Stepping up to be surrogate "family" is a rewarding and also vital resource. You become a significant support for foster children and valuable additional support for families. Thinking of these foster kids as family, not just kids to look after once in a while.

Foster children often feel the loss of not only birth parents but of their other family members as well, by becoming “Auntie and Tia”, “Uncle Ron”, or “Papa Loren”, you are in a position to offer love, help and support on a deeper level. You become part of creating a healthy loving ‘family environment’. By becoming a valuable voice in a child’s life, in this life altering ‘mission field’, you are choosing to see them as Christ sees the lost and lonely, and then step in to tangibly become His love for them.

Mentoring

Mentoring is to enrich the lives of foster children and youth by introducing them to hobbies, sports, or activities they may not be familiar with, or have wanted to try, but were never able. Mentoring is especially a way to invest in skills you see in a child who has never been given the opportunity to develop those skills. It is a way for the mentor, to offer commitment, support, and guidance with an opportunity to share spiritual truths. As the Pastor maybe you are thinking, “There are members of my congregation that have exceptional skills like, music (singing or instruments) art, writing, dance, athletic skills or maybe even building skills they could share.” Maybe your mentors excel in singing, drums, or piano and the foster youth are offered a chance to help with worship services as the skills progress. Possibly they have always wanted to play baseball and have not had the ability to practice or try out for a team before. Coaching skills can be how one of your church members mentors. Perhaps a potential mentor likes to build things, depending on the children’s ages that mentor can teach them some basics or help them with a building project, and then as pastor you can highlight the project in the church lobby. All these mentoring opportunities help boost, encourage and motivate foster children, and invite them into your church family with open arms.

The main goal of mentoring and tutoring is to help the children achieve their maximum potential especially in an environment that is supportive with the child’s greatest spiritual development and personal growth at the forefront.

Tutoring

For Foster children experiencing disruptions in school attendance and school work is quite common. There are often large gaps in their education, especially in vital subjects like math and reading, where skills are cumulatively built on one another. In the **Compact** Family Advocate Manual (CompaCare), their succinct paragraph on tutoring says, “To function adequately at one level, there is an assumption that the child has mastered previous, more basic mathematical skills. When a child loses such an important piece, future success in that subject is compromised until such time as the missing pieces are replaced and mastered. Foster children often need tutoring to help them complete homework assignments or to gain understanding in subjects like Science, English, or Biology.”

Stepping in to tutor a foster child may just be the help they need to be able to move forward with understanding in a particular subject that has been holding them back.

Transportation

Transportation is a significant support to resource parents and families. Foster children often have court ordered visitation assigned, court dates, doctors appointments, as well as meetings with counselors, and a multitude of other appointments or meetings to attend. Having a transport support team in place to help resource families with the need is extremely valuable. Imagine needing to be at 2 schools at the same time and needing to take one kid to band practice or a doctor's appointment and the other to a court ordered visit. Both are important and both are non-negotiable. Having someone to help with transport to be able to drive one of the kids to their destination becomes one of the most valuable blessings to your day. Being part of a transportation support team to foster parents when many of the appointments added to their lives are ones that are not an option. What if transportation concerns is the only obstacle keeping some families from becoming resource parents? This is where your team of transportation 'missionaries' step in. It could mean the difference of some becoming resource families, or not. When it comes to supporting resource families there is NO small help. Each way of helping is significant!

Babysitting or 'Date Nights' for Resource Parents

Set up designated nights every few months (or even monthly) with respite providers to supervise and organize an evening of activities and care. Provide fun interactive games, or have a family fun movie with popcorn and s'mores. Staff your facility with qualified respite providers. Possibly provide babysitting for different age groups of kids with appropriate games and activities for each age group and have fun planning one of the most enjoyable evenings on the church calendar.

Babysitting and Date Night care is similar to Respite in that it provides time for resource parents to break away from the obligations of running the home for a couple hours and know that the foster kids (and biological kids) are in a safe and fun place. However, Respite, may be spontaneous or for an emergency, where, a Babysitting or Date Night care is something your church plans and organizes on a regular basis. It allows resource families (parents) to know for at least that designated night of the month they have safe care for the kids, and can plan a fun outing for a few hours.

One of our partner churches recently offered 'Valentine's Date Night' babysitting to members of their congregation, so couples would have the freedom to go on a date and yet know that the kids were in a fun AND safe environment. Better yet, the church provided the evening free of charge as part of ministry outreach to these couples.

Prayer Groups

Most churches have prayer groups that meet either on Sundays before services or specific days during the week. Praying for the foster care system, foster babies, kids, and youth and for the parents that step up to raise them in the place of their biological parents may quite possibly be one of the most powerful and valuable offerings a church can do.

Philippians 4:6-7

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by **prayer** and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Maybe your prayer group is filled with a mixture of younger, older, male and female members of your congregation or full of grandmotherly gals who have a heart for God, Prayer and kids. Praying to the heart of God does not require a certain age group or gender, just a heart that will add prayer for the significant burden of the American foster care system and the American Orphan to their list of prayers.

Clothes and Supplies

Clothes and supplies are always a need for our foster families and new kids arriving to our program. Typically foster kids arrive with a few items thrown into a large garbage sack. This is sad, but is the reality of how children often arrive into care. Of course, this is, if they arrive with any belongings of their own at all.

Churches are very creative and find ways to bless kids and youth in our program all the time. Churches often organize ‘clothes drives’ or ‘supply drives’ as a way to get their congregation members involved and feel unified in their ministry towards foster kids and Pathway Family Services. We’ve had churches do diaper drives (along with formula and infant supplies) which are always helpful and a true blessing for our families and our babies.

Last year one of our local church partners orchestrated a profound clothes and supply donation project for the kids that become a part of our program at Pathway. It was awe inspiring how this project was orchestrated with such distinctive flair and complete congregation involvement. On a Tuesday morning following Pathway speaking at their church, we received a call with exuberant and passionate resolve. She shared her vision and asked our needs at the time. We brainstormed some really fun ideas and yet, realistic and significant needs. During the following weeks we got exciting updates about how much the church members “are enjoying being a part of the project together”. The Pastor and his wife both introduced the project to partner with Pathway by sharing their hearts from the pulpit. They asked each member of the congregation to commit by getting involved. Each family or group committed to filling a suitcase for a child with items a new foster child needs. The members were able to choose the age group and child gender, then, proceed to buy items from a list of specific needs for that age group and gender.

The end result was nothing we could have ever imagined. About 6 weeks after our first Sunday visit to their church, they arrived with a delivery requiring a couple large SUV’s to accomplish. They brought in no less than 75 beautiful and high quality rolling duffle bags of assorted colors and prints, all filled with age and gender appropriate items. They paid attention to every detail, and even made sure each bag had a stuffed animal for cuddling and a kid’s Bible to soothe the soul. The loving care to each and every detail was evident by each bag having a ‘luggage tag’ with encouraging words and prayers.

This is just one example of the way ministries align themselves with the heart of God and bless these “little children”.

Christmas Gifts and Supplies to Resource Families and Foster Kids

At Pathway Christmas is a very busy season, but it is also a beautiful season. We do Christmas BIG!!! We love the Christmas season filled with many wonderful activities and parties. We celebrate with our resource families and all their kids, both foster and biological in each county we represent.

Christmas is a HUGE season of giving for Pathway as well. We provide gifts for each foster child in our program. We fulfill gifts from each child’s Christmas wish list. Families throughout the community choose a wish list and fulfill a couple gifts from the list. Each gift is then beautifully wrapped and delivered to the children before Christmas. It is a wonderful sight to see our offices during the holidays.

We have several community organizations that come along side Pathway, like churches, schools, and a chapter of a NFL Fan club, gift shops, and CityServe. Not only at Christmas but also throughout the entire year, they provide gifts, toys, snacks, infant and baby supplies, furniture, and a surplus of goods that bless our families.

Family Camp

Pathway has partnered with Royal Family Kids Camp whose Ministry allows foster children from ages 7 to 12 to enjoy a week at camp with other foster children free of charge. Each community will most likely have their own version of camp for foster kids. Some foster children have never had the privilege of having an adventure, like camp in the mountains. It can be a life changing opportunity for them. A time that is full of adventure, hope, and respite.

For many youth, going to summer camp is significant. For many youth, going to summer **Church** camp is significant in an entirely different and eternal way. For many it is a time to be introduced to Jesus in a way they’ve never heard before. Maybe at camp they ask Jesus to “come be my best friend”, or “come be my Lord and Savior”. Christian Camps offer all the fun activities, crafts, and fun, but the deeper purpose is always Jesus, always Faith. We all probably have our own memories of the camps we went to while growing up; however, have you heard the stories these kids share when they return home AFTER a week at camp?

Not each person can run off to camp to be a camp counselor, no matter how fun that would be. Still, there are so many ways to help out these kids and their resource families to be a friend, a help and a support.

There are endless possibilities of ways to support foster kids and their resource families. Here are some other wonderful ideas:

- Offer free haircuts/styling

- Offer free or heavily discounted services based on your business, ie: construction, home furnishings, family dinners at restaurants, or mechanic services
- Offer scholarships for camp, field trips or music, dance, or art lessons
- Provide a job for a youth old enough to get a work permit
- Host an event for resource families and foster kids like, a picnic, bowling or a get together at a skating rink. Invite the entire family and all their kids.

Protecting and strengthening families is such an important responsibility and calling for every member of the community, especially the Christian community.

Pathway and its many partners in many areas of Central and Southern California have responded to the words of Jesus that are recorded in Luke 18:16, "...allow the children to come to Me and do not forbid them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these (too)." (AMP Bible)

Will you prayerfully consider how you can help make it possible for more of the 'At Risk' youth in California to get connected to a loving, Godly family, who will help them get connected to Jesus?

Together we can make a BIGGER difference!

Plan of Action-Checklist

Section 5

Unable to be In-Home Resource Parents, but Still Want to Help! Here's how to guide your church!

Now that you see all the ways a team can tangibly respond to the Mission of Foster Care, and Volunteerism, it's just a matter of seeing, which way is a best fit for your congregation.

- Start building Respite Care Teams and prepare to set up for training.
- Introduce the idea of being a Surrogate Aunt, Uncle, Grandparents, and family.
- Build teams for Mentoring
 - Music
 - Dance
 - Singing
 - Art
 - Building
 - Sports
- Build teams for Tutoring
 - Math
 - English
 - Science
- Build teams for Transportation
 - Daily/Weekly transportation
 - Occasional transportation
- Build teams for Babysitting/Date Nights
- Prayer Groups to pray for foster care/foster kids/resource & biological families
- Clothes and Supplies
- Christmas Gifts and Supplies
- Offer Haircuts
- Offer Scholarships
- Build a team for Royal Family Kids Camp
 - Build teams to be counselors

Pastors Thoughts and Notes

6

Trusted Alliances

Pathway is honored to partner with the following organizations

