



12 Ways Ordinary People Can Love Orphans

1. **Foster.** Some 400,000 children live in foster care today. The experience of a loving home and relationships can make a profound difference for these children, even if their stay with you is brief. To start, talk with others in your church or community who've fostered to get an honest take on the joys and challenges of the journey. Then reach out to a quality local agency that facilitates foster care to learn more about the process.
2. **Adopt.** Every child deserves a family. If you're considering adoption, start with prayer and then conversations with adoptive families and adoptees. Then begin asking questions of a quality adoption agency. You can find many at www.cafo.org. If you're considering adopting from foster care, visit www.adoptuskids.org.
3. **Advocacy and Orphan Sunday.** One great opportunity to engage your church is Orphan Sunday. On the first Sunday of November, churches worldwide celebrate God's love for the fatherless and how ordinary people can make a difference. Any church can participate—from a showing a short video or prayer for orphans during a church service...to a foster care "Heart Gallery" in the foyer...to a community-wide concert. Find event ideas, free resources and more at www.orphansunday.org.
4. **CASA.** Many counties link foster youth with a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). A CASA serves as advocate and ally for the child as the courts determine what is best for him or her. Learn more at www.casaforchildren.org.
5. **Mentor.** A consistent, caring adult presence can make a profound difference for any child, especially one who has bounced from home to home in foster care. Young adults who are aging out of care also greatly need caring older friends and a place to spend the holidays. Many communities have mentoring programs, and groups like The Mentoring Project or the Christian Association of Youth Mentors can help churches establish their own.
6. **Safe Families.** This all-volunteer alternative to the foster system is a great way to help prevent children from entering foster care. Volunteers can provide temporary homes, support these host families, and also aid birth families. If your area doesn't yet have a program, consider starting one. More at www.safe-families.org.

7. **Wrap-Around Supports.** Practical aid from the church community can be hugely helpful—and encouraging!—to foster and adoptive families. Consider household chores and yard work, shopping, giving rides, and babysitting. If your church doesn't have an organized ministry, don't be put off. Find out what families need and do it! Ultimately, you may want to create a formal "Foster/Adoption Support Ministry" with a few others.
8. **Skilled Service.** Put your professional skills to use in showing love to adoptive and foster families and to foster youth—from haircuts to orthodontics to car repair.
9. **Fundraising.** Funds help fuel ministry. Give personally and help raise money for trustworthy organizations, both nearby and globally. Find trustworthy organizations at www.cafo.org. Students group will value the www.heartwork.tv, which provides rich learning experiences as youth raise funds for worthy ministries. Churches also create "Adoption Funds" via www.abbafund.org and www.lifesongfororphans.org.
10. **Missions Trips.** Mission trips can be life changing for those who go. But without careful attention to the long-term situation we're entering, travel can eat lots of money with little impact. We may even do harm in the process. Make sure any mission trip includes thorough preparation and cultural understanding, and clear and appropriate objectives. Most of all, make sure that the local church—not wealthy visitors—is seen as the primary answer to long-term needs.
11. **Church Ministry.** Join with a few others to create an ongoing orphan ministry in your church. Find successful models and other materials at www.cafo.org and at the national www.CAFO2014.org conference. The ministry www.hopefororphans.org provides great resources, including their simple guide, "Launching an Orphans Ministry in Your Church." You can also learn much from mature church ministries like www.tapestryministry.org.
12. **Church Culture.** Beyond formal ministry, what can make all the difference for foster parents, adoptive families and mentors are the "intangibles" that make for a culture of welcome and hospitality. Sunday School teachers who grasp the unique challenges that come with wounded children. Pastors who honor adoption and pray for foster youth from the pulpit. People willing to invite families with special needs for BBQ.