

Good Intentions Aren't Good Enough: A Variety of Reports on Money and Mission



1

Are Orphanages Our Best Response to AIDS in Africa?

Glenn Schwartz

... [A critical] challenge relating to AIDS is what to do about the increasing number of orphans. Because the innocent are suffering, this breaks the hearts of compassionate people far and wide. Good people simply feel compelled to help. This makes westerners with charitable intent want to use their resources to get involved and *do something!* Hence, the building of orphanages becomes an attractive option for them. One reason that westerners are attracted to orphanages is that our culture has often used “institutions” to deal with problems in society. Orphanages, prisons, homes for the elderly, and rehabilitation centers for those in substance abuse are among the kinds of institutions we have established.

Western-Style Orphanages and Other Resources

One reason that orphanages become attractive to westerners is that donors can see *visual* evidence of their investment. Not only can they see the pictures; they can go to visit what their resources have built.... As well-meaning outsiders, westerners often do not realize that they are bypassing other resources that could be used if they were identified and appropriately mobilized. One of those resources is the extended family – a God-given institution for caring for the young, elderly, crippled, unemployed and those suffering from illnesses such as AIDS. If the extended family is allowed to disintegrate or is rendered ineffective, one will end up with the kind of homelessness and alienation that we see on the streets of western cities....

Glenn Schwartz (glennschwartz@wmausa.org) is executive director of World Mission Associates. The full text of his article and other resources are available at www.wmausa.org.

The Extended Family and The Local Church As Resources

Unfortunately, the extended family in Africa is not the strong safety net it once was. It has been weakened by people moving to cities where they do not have affordable housing or fields where they can grow food for themselves or their families. In fact, many people in cities are unemployed, adding to the already strained extended family system. Add to the weakened family system the challenge of AIDS, and one can see the disaster that is unfolding in many parts of Africa.

But the extended family system is not the only God-given resource for society. The local church is also God's provision for those in need around the world.... Is the church adequate to meet the needs of the world where

it exists? In many places, the church empowered by the Holy Spirit, *is* adequate to do Christ's work in the world. In other places, however, because of the way churches were started, they are not contributing to the cause, but are draining from it. In other words, churches are often born “handicapped”, while those planting them assume that they will never be able to stand on their own feet....

Given the prevalence of handicapped churches, one begins to see the scale of the tragedy. Think of it this way: into the world of already dependent churches there comes a crisis with the magnitude of AIDS. The church is now expected to reach out to the many orphans in their communities, even though they have not yet learned how to support themselves from their own resources. Fortunately, this is not true of all churches for there are some admirable examples for the encouragement of us all. Little wonder that outsiders feel they must step in and build orphanages with foreign resources. After all, if they consider local

Good people simply feel compelled to help. This makes westerners with charitable intent want to use their resources to get involved and do something!

believers too poor to build their own church buildings without outside assistance, how could such churches ever be expected to build their own orphanages if, indeed, orphanages are deemed to be the right solution? I used the term “deemed to be right” because institutions such as orphanages were unknown in pre-Christianized Africa. It was the family that cared for orphans, the widowed, unemployed, and the elderly.

In light of that, what is an appropriate solution to the problem of AIDS orphans in Africa? I maintain that it is to rediscover the role and importance of the extended family and the local church. Admittedly, both the church and the extended family are stretched beyond their ability to carry the current burden of AIDS in Africa.

What Is the Role For Outsiders?

In light of this, what should well-meaning outsiders do to help in the face of this crisis? Outsiders might

consider helping to strengthen extended families so that they can better carry the load they already have on their shoulders. This can be done by helping to increase food production, stimulate job creation and get appropriate job training. Things like revolving loan funds can help to improve family finances....

The second thing outsiders can do is become aware of the factors that contribute to the mentality of dependency. Will local churches ever be able to make their contribution in the Christian movement if they are considered to be handicapped with no possibility of change? One should be aware that solutions such as this will require long-term commitment and involvement by those who are culturally and spiritually sensitive. The current trend toward short-term missions and “quick fix” solutions – financial and otherwise – will not be adequate for a challenge of this magnitude....

2

Church Growth Through “Sheep Stealing”

The authors, who choose to remain anonymous, serve with a mission agency among an unreached people.

In recent months the church in this country has been seriously hurt by an unfortunate situation. The churches we planted have been less gravely damaged than those started by other organizations, but the churches we are working with have also been affected. Last year an American-based Christian organization, which raises large amounts of money for their support of “indigenous missionaries,” came into our country looking for people to support. They made it known to the local believers that they had significant amounts of money available (huge sums, in fact, by local standards) to support local workers, but only on the condition that those local workers have no relationship whatsoever with any foreign missionary in the country. The problem is that there are no such local workers among our people group. When we first arrived here, there were no believers at all among our people. With only one or two exceptions, those who are believers today have all come to Christ through the ministry of foreign Christians. Nonethe-

less, a couple of local believers who had fallen into grave sin and had been disciplined by their churches announced that they were severing all ties with foreigners, and the American organization began channeling large sums of money to them to help them “grow” their group. This “growth” has occurred largely through “sheep stealing,” as they approach members of existing churches and offer them financial support on the condition that people leave their churches, sever all relationship with foreigners (except the American funding organization), and join the new group. Sometimes the funds thus transmitted have disappeared in suspicious circumstances. So far none of the churches we planted have accepted this offer. But every other church in the country has lost members, and one church has completely collapsed. [Two of our national colleagues] have been criticized and even threatened because of their refusal to join this group

3

Check Out *MF* Back Issues!

Two issues from the past decade are especially notable.

Previous issues of *Mission Frontiers* can help today’s readers get deeper and wider perspective on related topics. Go to the *Mission Frontiers* Website (www.missionfrontiers.org), click on “Back Issues,”

review themes, and do word searches. Two *MF* back issues that may be of particular help are “Money and Missions” (September-October 1994) and “Strategic Giving” (September 2001).