

# Stories from the field

how A Child's Hope International is making a difference

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## *Journey to the Fatherless*™

### Local Church Helps Combat Orphan Crisis

It is a sad reality that there are over 143 million orphans in the world. And what's worse? Less than 1% of these children will get adopted in any given year.



Urbancrest Baptist Church, in Lebanon, OH, however, is doing their share to help curb those numbers. This fellowship of about 900 boasts an impressive 30-40 families who are actively involved in adoption and/or foster care.

"Sunday mornings at Urbancrest are multi-colored," says Pastor Tom Pendergrass, "but that's what the Kingdom of God is supposed to look like."

*Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight...* Just as Jesus loves all the little children of the world, it is apparent that this church also has God's heart for His children.

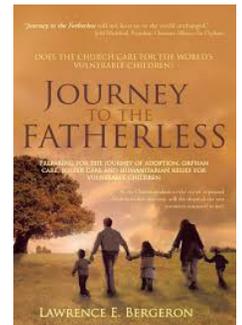
In 2009, Larry Bergeron, founder and executive director of A Child's Hope Int'l (ACHI), and his family began attending Urbancrest. Though Pastor Tom didn't know the Bergerons at the time, there's no doubt this was a match made in heaven.

As a corporate executive, then pastor, Bergeron had visited many countries around the world. It was actually a family mission trip to Russia to care for orphans that was his call out of the corporate world into full-time pastoral ministry. Then, years later, a visit to Africa with some of his staff to serve starving children became the catalyst to start A Child's Hope Int'l, a humanitarian organization whose mission is to motivate and mobilize the church to care for orphans and vulnerable children.

Subsequently, out of a broken heart for the children and a deep conviction that the Church is the answer to the orphan crisis, Bergeron wrote *Journey to the Fatherless*™.

Urbancrest's first JTF class was held on a Sunday morning in 2010 with about 75 people in attendance. For the next 10 weeks, participants were challenged to reflect on topics such as:

- The harsh reality of the numbers
- The biblical argument for the Church to care for orphans
- Challenges one might encounter with orphan care.
- The blessings of walking in faith and obedience.



Pastor Tom feels every church should go through this curriculum. "*Journey to the Fatherless*™ paints a panoramic picture of adoption and foster care," he said. "It focuses on the totality of the need that's out there and challenges the Church to do its part in caring for orphans."

Orphan care holds a special place in this pastor's heart. Pastor Tom's mother was adopted, so he takes every opportunity to get *Journey* into the hands of Christians. He feels so strongly about the message it conveys, that one year he gave a copy to each of the pastors who attended a large men's conference and challenged them to read it. Some of their churches are now involved in orphan care and one of the pastors and his family have even adopted from foster care.

Pastor Tom and his wife, Donna, have two biological daughters, Jessica and Vanessa. They have also been blessed to raise their 16-year-old granddaughter, Alianna, since birth and provided respite care for a season as well.

In 2014, Jessica and her husband, Michael, adopted Sadie, a precious African American baby who died from cardiac arrest due to a heart birth defect. Though she had been through two major surgeries and was given a great prognosis, God called Sadie home. As a result, this family understands some of the challenges associated with bringing an orphan into one's home.



Recognizing how critical it is for adoptive and foster families to have a support team in place when hard times come, *Journey* offers an extensive “wrap-around” model of support. This model encourages church members to use the

gifts God has given them to help meet the wide variety of needs these families may have—emotional, financial, spiritual, practical. One of the ways Urbancrest does this is to provide grants for adoptive families.

*Journey to the Fatherless™* is the building block upon which Urbancrest’s adoption ministry is being built. Through this, and by continuing to keep the congregation aware of the orphan crisis, the church has seen two to four families each year adopt from the U.S. and overseas.

The Snyders are one of those families. Before the JTF class, Tracy and Butch had two biological daughters and a son, and one adopted son from S. Korea. Since then, God has called them to adopt another boy and a girl with special needs from S. Korea and three teenage brothers from the Ukraine. They are also in the process of adopting a Ukrainian girl.



Besides adoption, the Snyders have hosted four Ukrainian boys and support another who lived with them one summer, who has aged out of the system.

When asked how JTF impacted her, Tracy shared, “It helped prepare us really well for the *baggage*. The kids are bringing baggage. We all have it and we have to learn how to deal with it.”

For Butch, “The class clearly illustrated the sheer magnitude of the numbers of orphans that are in the world.” Though Tracy had previously shared figures like these with her husband, they never translated to real children’s lives until the class.



143 million orphans are waiting...

Butch admits he wasn’t as eager to adopt as his wife was after they adopted their first son, but God sovereignly

changed his heart. One of the results of that heart change was a song he wrote titled *I’m Not Gonna’ Let Them Go* that closes out Chapter 10 in *Journey to the Fatherless™*.

The chorus goes like this:

*I’m not—gonna’ let them go  
We must—dare to let them know  
Jesus—said to care for them  
He said to save them, hold them, keep them at our side  
Take them, make them part of our lives...*”

And *that* is just what many Urbancrest families are doing.

Pastor Tom is excited about how God is drawing the hearts of his congregation to help combat the orphan crisis. Now, each week, dozens of once-fatherless children from many nations are being lovingly embraced by their extended church family.

“We have a multicultural church,” Pendergrass proudly reports. “We’re impacting children’s lives with the gospel who may never have had an opportunity to hear it otherwise.”

This grateful pastor dreams of the day when some of the children in their midst might be called back to their home countries as missionaries; or with the mission field now coming to America, perhaps they might even serve in the U.S. to people of their own culture.

A Child’s Hope Int’l is an organization of integrity,” says Pastor Tom. “They have a real heart for the orphan and do an amazing job stretching every dollar they receive to help the cause of the fatherless.”

To learn more about A Child’s Hope Int’l or how *Journey to the Fatherless™* can help prepare and equip your congregation to have a life-saving impact on children’s lives, please call us at the number below or visit our website.



As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, the mission of A Child’s Hope International is to motivate and mobilize the church and community to care for orphans and vulnerable children through adoption, foster care, orphan care, and humanitarian relief. As advocates for the least of these, our programs reach thousands of children worldwide.

*We exist because the children are waiting™.*

**A CHILD’S HOPE INT’L**

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