



orphan  
—sunday

ATTENDEES at the 2010 National Orphan Sunday Concert.

## Churches Rise for Adoption and Orphan Care

By Vanessa Vasquez

*A simple idea that began in Africa is now echoing across the U.S. and beyond*

American businessman Gary Schneider could never have imagined what would come from that Sunday morning at the humble Zambian church. The day had been designated Orphan Sunday by the church's Zambian pastor. Schneider was struck by the pastor's impassioned sermon, urging the congregation to reflect God's love by caring for the many orphans struggling in the local community.

The region had been ravaged by AIDS and poverty, and many church members faced

deep needs themselves. But as the service ended, one individual after another stepped forward with generous offerings of money, food and other goods. It amazed Schneider to see some even take off their own shoes, placing them at the front of the church as a gift for orphans.

Schneider was so impacted that he began to help the Zambian pastor spread a vision for Orphan Sunday to other churches across Zambia. But it didn't stop there. Schneider soon shared the idea with friends in America. Ultimately, the Christian Alliance for Orphans took the lead in uniting more than 100 diverse organizations to champion a vision for Orphan Sunday. In 2009 and 2010, following the example of Zambian churches, hundreds of thousands of Americans participated in local Orphan Sunday events across America.

"It's thrilling to see how a simple idea born in Africa is having such a profound impact across America," Schneider said. "The echo just continues to grow."

Today, the Christian Alliance for Orphans offers a range of free resources that event organizers can use to plan Orphan Sunday activities, but each event is locally led. Some focus on adoption, some on foster care, some on global orphan care initiatives. All emphasize a call to care for children who don't have families, and how individuals can respond.

Jedd Medefind, president of the Christian Alliance for Orphans, explained, "Orphan Sunday rouses individuals and church communities to action. But the motivation isn't guilt or duty or even idealism. It's the

conviction that God cares deeply for these children and invites us to do the same. When we do this — whether through adoption, foster care, global efforts or otherwise — we're just mirroring the love God showed first towards us."

Orphan Sunday events are as diverse as their organizers, from concerts, fundraisers and sermons to hands-on experiences for students and local Heart Gallery displays. On Orphan Sunday 2010, College Heights Baptist in Casper, Wyo., did a slide show celebrating the 80 children who'd been fostered by families in the church during the past year. Many of these families had decided to foster as a result of the church's first Orphan Sunday service the previous year.

At the Atlanta Chinese Christian Church in Georgia, students led a bake sale to raise money for orphans overseas. The Moody Church in Chicago held an informational luncheon for families interested in adoption and foster care, many of whom are now caring for children in their homes.

In Minnesota, Faith Baptist Church organized a cornmeal breakfast and "Day in the Life of an Orphan" simulation in all of its Sunday school classes. First Evangelical Free Church in Austin, Texas hosted a concert attended by more than 600 people.

Many events occurred beyond churches as well. Families and friends gathered in homes to share a simple meal or to watch the "Answer the Cry" DVD. Meanwhile, hundreds came together for events like the city-wide March for Orphans in San Luis Obispo, Calif., and the 5K walk/10K run to fund adoption grants in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

The myriad grassroots expressions of Orphan Sunday have become a powerful catalyst for what the influential magazine Christianity Today recently labeled the "burgeoning orphan care movement." From church-based adoption funding and foster care support groups to global projects, local Christian communities are taking up what the Bible calls "the cause of the fatherless" (Isaiah 1:17) in ways not seen in generations.



Christianity has a deep history of caring for orphans going back to Roman times, when believers earned a reputation for rescuing abandoned infants left to die outside city walls. In recent years, this age-old priority has risen again as a focus in many Christian communities. As the New York Times described last year, Christian churches "have increasingly taken up orphan care as a tenet of their faith . . ." An article in the Wall Street Journal expressed, "As more and more evangelical churches take up the cause of adoption on a large scale, their congregations have begun to look like the multiracial sea of faces that Christian leaders often talk about wanting."

This new focus takes many forms, from special needs adoptions to mentoring of foster youth to global child sponsorship initiatives. According to the most recent "State of Giving Report" by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, three of the top four categories for increased giving by Christians during the past two years have been directly related to adoption or orphan care initiatives.

Already, plans are brewing in communities nationwide for Orphan Sunday on November 6. The website [www.orphansunday.org](http://www.orphansunday.org) serves as a hub for the campaign, offering event ideas, downloadable posters, videos and other free resources that can be used for local events. Families and churches can also participate in "The Orphan's Table," and upon

request are sent a simple meal package of food typically served to orphans worldwide, along with a discussion guide. In addition, on the evening of Orphan Sunday, individuals and churches will be able to join others around the world online for an hour of guided prayer and worship for the fatherless via the "LIVE from Kansas City" webcast.

This year, the Christian Alliance for Orphans is also working to help churches in other countries celebrate Orphan Sunday. Locally-led Orphan Sunday efforts are springing up worldwide, from Guatemala to Kenya to the Philippines. Ukrainian pastor Ruslan Maliuta explained, "Far too often, we've often failed to see and respond to the orphans all around us. Orphan Sunday is a powerful opportunity to encourage churches to reflect God's love for orphans through local adoption and orphan care efforts all across Ukraine and Eastern Europe."

Vanessa Vasquez, National Director of the 2011 Orphan Sunday campaign, concluded, "In the U.S., there are more than 400,000 children in foster care and nearly 120,000 waiting to be adopted. Globally, millions of children have lost both parents. Ultimately, the Orphan Sunday campaign endeavors to see each of these children lifted from their desperate situation and placed in loving families. This is the purest way we can honor God's love, and carry the echo that began in that small Zambian church."