



Will vs. Way:
The arrest of 10 Baptist missionaries to Haiti on child trafficking charges grabbed headlines, but experts say new country restrictions are the real threat to international adoptions by evangelicals.

ADOPTION

Idaho's Impact

Haiti scandal overshadows bigger threat to evangelical adoption efforts. By Steve Holt

The high-profile legal saga of 10 Idaho-based Baptists arrested in January for attempting to smuggle 33 Haitian children into the Dominican Republic is winding down. But evangelical adoption advocates wonder what the long-term impact will be.

Leading orphan care advocate Russell Moore suggested in the days following the arrests that the scandal might be a black eye to evangelicals' adoption efforts worldwide. But two months later, Moore said he is no longer worried about a fallout.

"In many ways, the controversy served as an opportunity to clarify what we mean and what we do not mean," said Moore, dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. "No one in the Christian orphan care community is calling for children to be adopted who are not in fact orphans . . . or to be adopted apart from the legitimate processes."

A larger hurdle for international

adoptions by evangelicals may be new restrictions on adoptions in countries where they have been most prevalent, including China, Guatemala, Russia, Vietnam, and Liberia.

China, which has traditionally accounted for the majority of adoptions to the U.S., rewrote its qualifications for adoptive parents in 2007. Guatemala, the second-largest source of American adoptions, completely shut down its program in 2008 due to widespread corruption, though it will launch a new program this June.

Since 2004, these and other restrictions have resulted in a 40 percent decline in overseas adoptions by Americans—from an all-time high of almost 23,000 in 2004 to fewer than 12,800 in 2009, according to the U.S. State Department.

Soon after news broke of the January 7.0-magnitude earthquake in Haiti—which the U.S. Census Bureau estimates added 15,000 new double orphans (children who have lost both parents) to the 380,000 single and double orphans already in

the country—scores of families began contacting the Christian Alliance for Orphans (CAO) to inquire about adopting orphaned Haitian children. Director Jed Medefind said a necessary tension exists between honoring the generosity of families who want to give orphans a good home and doing everything possible to find or provide family support networks within a child's country.

Medefind said the CAO includes both adoption and in-country care organizations, which he sees as mutually supportive. "They are working together, saying the Christian mandate to care for orphans in their distress includes both in-country solutions and, when necessary, inter-country adoptions," he said.

For example, member organization World Orphan had a relief team in Haiti within days of the earthquake, working with Haitian churches to find long-term care for orphans with relatives, church members, or, as a last option, church-run group homes.

With in-country solutions receiving renewed focus and international adoptions on the decline, what will become of international adoptions in the long run? Medefind maintains that the drop in international adoptions since 2004 does not signal a stagnating willingness among American families to adopt overseas, and he argues that evangelicals in particular have increased interest. Attendance at the CAO's Orphan Summit national conference has nearly tripled every year—from 30 people in 2006 to more than 700 last year. Medefind expects that number to grow at the April 2010 conference in Minneapolis.

When it comes to international adoptions, evangelicals seem to have the will. But with more country restrictions, will there be a way?

"There's more momentum than I've ever seen . . . not just toward adoption but orphan care of various kinds," said Moore. "The church is having its conscience awakened when it comes to orphans."

GO FIGURE Evangelism

According to a survey of 74 ministries, receptivity to the gospel—on a five-point scale—among first-generation immigrants from

Ecuador and Guatemala
4.2

Liberia
4.1

Japan
2.3

Iraq and Iran
2.2

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