

GLOBAL CHILD NETWORK

*“A Report from Dr. Donnie Smith to the
72nd General Assembly of the Church of God”
San Antonio, Texas (August 2008)*

The year was 1920 and the Church of God consisted of a very loosely connected group of individuals who were seeking a deeper experience of God’s presence in their lives. Yet, contrary to the shallow observations of the outside world, these early believers were not just a group of people who were sold out to an “experience only” theology. These early believers cried out to God to find the very heart of God and follow his divine will in reaching out to the world around them through benevolent care.

It was during this great “spiritual awakening” that the heart of the Church of God was turned toward the needs of children. Some ninety years ago, the first orphaned children were dropped off at the home of our leaders. It was Reverend Paul H. Walker, while serving the church in the Dakotas who sent the very first financial gift, an offering of \$100, to build the first Church of God Home for Children. Today, the Church of God Home for Children in Sevierville, Tennessee serves as the flagship ministry of the Church of God division of care and benevolence.

Care ministry has always been the thread that binds the Church of God to our communities. We have long recognized that no sermon is ever preached that divorces the hearer from the circumstances in which they live. Church of God Care Ministry has always been contextually driven. From church “poundings” when a family was in distress to the current mega-ministry achievements of “Operation Compassion” disaster relief, we have been about getting the resources of the Church to the needs of the people.

Today, the Church of God has 75 orphanages worldwide (five within the continental U.S.) and 70 outside the United States of America. We are a people that believe in caring for the fatherless, the abandoned, neglected and abused children of our world. We continue to be about getting the resources of the church to children in need. Wherever there is an abandoned, neglected and abused child, let the Church of God be there to wipe the tear, heal the hurt and restore the hope. It is in our DNA! Before we were Pentecostal – we were benevolent! Before we were the Church of God – we were benevolent! Before we had the 1st General Assembly, we cared for

hurting children. Even before there was an official orphanage there were foster children living in our homes. We, the Church of God are a people of compassion and care. It is this unique characteristic of compassion and care that has brought to the church an overwhelming season of development and growth in care ministry.

From its humble beginnings in 1920 until today, the benevolent ministry of the church now reaches its arms of love around the world to over 169 countries. We, in the division of care and benevolence are ready and resourced to reach the children of our world.

This is a defining moment. It is a time when we will radically confront the *status quo*. We will challenge our thought patterns. We will confront the way we do ministry nationally and internationally.

It is a time when we will be called upon to leave our own personal comfort zones – to believe that effective ministry of unprecedented significance can yet be achieved even in an apparent negative financial environment.

God is calling us to take a bold vision of benevolent care to a new level of effectiveness and impact.

This is indeed a defining moment – a turning point.

The challenge has never been more evident. In a time of downsizing of church-wide budgets, by faith the time has come for the *Division of Care and Benevolence* to seize the moment and boldly go where it has never gone before. By faith, the time has come for significant vision mapping, charting an attainable course to follow the Lord as he leads, to achieve new paradigms of ministry, results in global ministry to children at risk

When the Eastern Sky reveals the coming of Christ, let it be known that the Church of God around the world was totally saturated in reaching out and extending our hand to the most vulnerable members of our society.

When future generations look back on this time, let them hear the unparalleled stories of remarkable ministry, let them hear about our triumphs and our challenges. Let them know that we were the generation that moved to save the lives of children so they could become successful adults.

Our world is a planet in peril. Today, there are 44 million child laborers in India. In Great Britain, 50% of all 15 year olds have used illegal drugs. While we speak today, 300,000 child soldiers are fighting in conflicts around the world. Children of poverty are three times more likely to suffer mental illness than those who are properly nourished. Worst yet, in America children have become a disposable commodity with over 50 million aborted babies, infants being brutally abused and exploited on the internet and children repeatedly being subject to mental, physical and sexual abuse daily at catastrophic rates.

We cannot wait another day. The division of care and benevolence must act now and come along side our partners in faith, the department of World Missions, to help the children of the world.

One may ask, why now? First and foremost, the plight of children is a biblical priority. The scriptures both Old Testament and New reveal the mind of God in caring for children. Secondly, caring for children has been the historical root of our church benevolence ministry for some ninety years now. And finally, the needs of children around the world seem to have captivated the attention of the world at this particular moment in space time history.

So, what can the division of care and benevolence offer the world and the church at this time, most especially those who serve as missionaries around the world and are heavily involved in a ministry to children?

First, through our vast network of skilled leaders, counselors and caregivers, we will be able to resource the vast network of children's ministries around the world. The Church of God Chaplains Commission consists of some 3,000 chaplains serving in over 69 countries around the world. These highly skilled, highly trained individuals will be able to continue their network with World Missions by further expanding their outreach to include resourcing the staff of orphanages through training and development of workers. Dr. John Sweet, program director for the Church of God Children's Home, Smoky Mountain Campus, will serve as our chief consultant, along with his own outstanding clinical staff that will be able to assist those overseas in receiving essential training to do the work of ministry in caring for children.

Secondly, we have already prepared a document that reflects a Biblical Model of Child Care that will be offered as a biblical foundation for all orphanages throughout the world. It will become the “gold standard” of child care for the church because it is built upon the premise of scriptural model and methodology in caring for children. Along with this “Biblical Model of Child Care” will be our own International Accreditation for Child Care Agencies that is currently being completed at our Smoky Mountain Campus. Upon its completion, we will be able to provide an umbrella of International Accreditation to orphanages around the world who desire to be covered by this same accreditation as they comply with minimum standards expected of all child care agencies.

Third, the division of care can provide “alternative funding” through corporate grants, foundation gifts and even U.S. aid as we seek to enhance our ministry to children everywhere. There will still be the need for local churches to continue their support of our orphanages but these types of alternative funding will assist us with major building projects and even food essentials. “Operation Compassion” was begun 14 years ago in the back of a pick up truck but today has its own trucking company, some 16 warehouses in numerous countries around the world, partnerships with some of the most outstanding aid agencies of our time and ranks among the top charitable relief agencies in America. Dave Lorency and his staff have provided, over the past four years, some 1.4 billion dollars of charitable relief goods to help in disaster ridden areas, feeding centers, orphanages and other areas of need globally. This aid agency will be of tremendous assistance in helping us get needed supplies and distribution of goods to our Global Child Network.

Fourth, as nations of the third world continue to develop, there will be a change within the governments of various nations that will lead them to ultimately call for foster care and adoption. This has already happened in many countries but will come to others. Our people are ready to assist in this remarkable change when the time comes for such.

Fifth, we will seek to build a bridge between the local church and the ministry to children worldwide by offering those who are interested an opportunity to spend time working with children in various nations of the world. While there are numerous ministries within the church that already offer these opportunities, we will seek to expand them and enhance the approach to overseas mission ministry to children.

Finally, realizing that we are in a season when young people throughout America are being touched by the needs of their world, we will open the door for intensive training in child care ministry on the campus of the Church of God Home for Children Smoky Mountain in Sevierville, Tennessee. Here, university and seminary students across America will come for a 2-3 week intensive on child care ministry followed by an overseas visit to an actual orphanage. During their visit they will not simply be relegated to paint walls and learn carpentry skills but they will actually engage children via ministry skills they have been taught from our excellent team of clinicians.

This is not the first time that *Benevolence Ministries* and the world wide ministries of *World Missions* have teamed together. In fact, it was only a few years ago when these two major ministries joined hearts and hands for “a miracle in the making”. It was a big dream that had never been accomplished...until then. It was a dream to raise the largest World Missions offering in the history of the church for the *Children of the World*. That night in St. Louis will never be forgotten. It was that night that the Church of God revealed just how much we care for the world’s children. An offering of over 5 million dollars was given that evening in an historic first for the Church of God. From that night forward some 35 orphanages around the world were begun because we care for children.

The Bible teaches us that God cares for the fatherless and widow. Our widow’s ministry that is now reaching beyond our center in Sevierville to nations around the world has already begun to challenge the widows of the world to assist us in caring for the needs of children.

The intent of the **GLOBAL CHILD NETWORK** is not to take over any ministry anywhere. What we do desire to do is what God has called us to do by working together in reaching, resourcing and investing in the needs of children around our world.

When people look back on this time, I want them to see those who invested in this ministry to perpetuate it to the next generation and throughout the world. Let them see those who squared their shoulders and answered the call of the fatherless of our generation. Church of God Care must never be learned from a history book, it must be experienced through stories that are current events of the ongoing ministry that has spread across

the nation and around the world, caring for the fatherless and disadvantaged children. We invite you today to be a partner in that effort.