



Haiti's orphans Waiting on forever

BY JOY LUCIUS

Imagine Henri's solemn, sad, unforgettable face as he wanders through the rubble left by Haiti's 2010 earthquake. The disaster took his parents, his siblings, his grandparents. It took his home, his school and everything familiar. Henri needs to smile again, to hope again, to experience love again. Henri is waiting for a family.*

New Beginnings Adoption and Family Services motto is "Every child deserves a forever family." Children like Henri, orphaned in earthquake-ravaged Haiti, are no exception. The biblical truth behind this motto motivates staff at New Beginnings to match loving families with waiting children through the agency's latest international adoption program.

Why adopt? Staff members of New Beginnings unhesitatingly answer that question with one repeated sentiment – the need is great and, as Christians, we have a mandate to care for orphans. The need is indeed great, with an estimated 143 million orphans worldwide, but why should Haiti's orphans be a top priority for Christians?

Marcus Davenport, director of adoption services at New Beginnings and head of its Haitian adoption division, told *AFA Journal* that these Haitian children are ready and waiting for families, in contrast to the American adoption scenario in

which families often wait many months for available children.

Haiti is arguably the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and the earthquake that rocked the nation in January 2010 compounded already staggering problems. Almost three of every four Haitian adults are unemployed. While no real statistics exist on the number of children orphaned by the earthquake, pre-earthquake orphans numbered in the hundreds of thousands, and officials believe those statistics may have grown closer to a million.

Davenport also explained that entire sibling groups of children were left without parents, and domestic adoptions within Haiti will not solve a problem of this magnitude. Haiti's orphans need immediate international help and New Beginnings is doing its part. In fact, New Beginnings began the process for placement of Haitian orphans immediately following the earthquake. Prospective adoptive parents (PAPs) can begin the Haitian adoption process with a seasoned, prepared organization.

New Beginnings, a non-profit agency headed by president Tom Velie, is no newcomer to the international adoption scene. Founded in Tupelo, Mississippi, in the mid-1980s, this Christian agency is fully licensed and Hague Accredited, providing domestic and international adoptions. The international adoption process is not quick and easy, but New Beginnings can simplify the process.

The guidelines of their Haiti initiative state that "infants, children and teenagers, sibling groups, and special needs children are available" for adoption. As for the timeline, Davenport says it takes a year or more to complete the Haitian adoption process, maybe even longer to adopt a child under the age of two. These guidelines specify that PAPs of Haitian children must be married couples between the ages of 35 and 55. One parent may be as young as 30 if the spouse is 35 or older. Also, couples must have been married at least ten years and have no more than two biological children at

home. PAPs should also know that two visits to Haiti are required to complete the process. The agency's Web site (www.newbeginningsadoptions.org) gives information on other requirements of the entire procedure, including cost.

Granted, cost is a major consideration for most prospective parents. However, New Beginnings will provide help to find grants and loans, as well as available tax credits, both state and federal. Depending on the resident state of the PAPs, final cost can be reduced by 75% or more. In reality, the estimated price of almost \$28,000 might sound astronomical, until the voice of experience speaks.

Debbie Velie, domestic program director at New Beginnings, explained that when she and her husband adopted their two girls from Asia, the cost was comparable to buying a new car. She said that if they had "bought a new car instead of adopting one of our precious daughters, the car would now be sitting in a junkyard somewhere." Instead, both daughters are happy, productive, Christian adults who have made Velie a proud and devoted grandmother.

For the Velies and other parents who heeded the biblical mandate to "care for the fatherless" through the process of adoption, the value of their treasured children is immeasurable compared to worldly possessions. For Henri and other orphans in Haiti, the value of a forever family is immeasurable as well. ☪

*Henri is a composite child representative of a million Haitian orphans.