

Adoption and foster care fairly common in churches, study says

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NASHVILLE (BP)—The Bible has a lot to say about caring for orphans, and Protestant churches in the United States appear to be listening.

About four in 10 Protestant churchgoers say their congregation has been involved with adoption or foster care in the past year, according to a study released Jan. 24 by LifeWay Research.

Churches' involvement on this issue may be because the Bible tells them to, said Scott McConnell, executive director of LifeWay Research.

"Foster care appears to come naturally for churchgoers," he said. "It's not surprising, since the Bible commands them to care for widows and orphans."

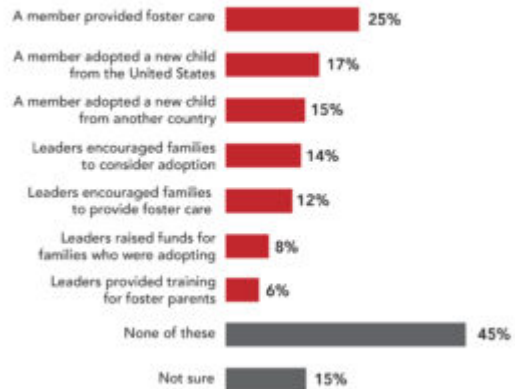
Since the early 2000s, many Protestant churches have commemorated "Orphan Sunday" every November to draw attention to the plight of orphans around the world. In the past, they've often focused on international adoption and orphanages. But in recent years, foster care—both in the United States and abroad—has become a focus, as well.

Significant numbers familiar with foster care and adoption

LifeWay Research's survey of 1,010 churchgoers—those who attend a Protestant or nondenominational church at least once a month—found 25 percent say someone from their church has been involved in foster care over the past year.

Which if any of the following have you seen at your church in the last year?

Among Protestant and nondenominational American churchgoers



Note: Respondents could select all that applied.

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Seventeen percent say someone from their church has adopted a child from the United States in the past year. Fifteen percent say someone from their church has adopted a child from another country.

Those at larger churches, with 250 or more in attendance, are most likely to know someone in their church who has provided foster care (37 percent). Those who attend smaller churches, with fewer than 250 in attendance, are less likely (20 percent).

Those who attend nondenominational churches (39 percent) are the most likely to know someone who has fostered children.

Churchgoers from nondenominational churches also are most likely to know someone at church who had adopted a child from the United States (25 percent). Baptists (15 percent), Lutherans (12 percent) and Pentecostals (10 percent) are less likely.

Churchgoers from larger congregations are more likely to know someone who had adopted from abroad (30 percent) than those from smaller churches (7 percent), as are those from nondenominational churches (34 percent).

White (20 percent) and Hispanic (15 percent) churchgoers are more likely than African-American churchgoers (4 percent) to say someone from their church has adopted a child from another country.

Still, church leaders in general don't talk much about adoption, according to LifeWay Research's survey.

Among churchgoers surveyed:

- 14 percent say church leaders have encouraged families to consider adoption.
- 12 percent say church leaders encouraged them to become involved in foster care.
- 8 percent say church leaders raised funds for families who are adopting.
- 6 percent say church leaders provided training for foster parents.

Overall, about half (45 percent) of churchgoers say their church has had no involvement with or conversation about foster care and adoption. Leaders at smaller congregations are less likely to encourage families to consider adoption (8 percent) or foster care (8 percent), to raise funds for adoptive families (5 percent) or to provide training for foster parents (2 percent).

Leaders at larger congregations are more likely to encourage families to consider adoption (23 percent) or foster care (20 percent) and to raise funds for adoptive families (15 percent) or provide training for foster parents (13 percent) than smaller congregations.

White (15 percent) and Hispanic (22 percent) churchgoers are more like to say their church's leaders encouraged families to consider adoption. African-American churchgoers are less likely (6 percent).

Among nondenominational churchgoers:

- 29 percent say their church's leaders encourage families to adopt.
- 26 percent say their church's leaders encouraged families to provide foster care.
- 14 percent say church leaders raised money for adoptive families.
- 12 percent provided training for foster parents.

The number of adoptions in the United States has declined slightly in recent years, according to National Council on Adoption, from 133,737 in 2007 to 110,373 in 2014. That coincided with a decline in international adoptions, which dropped from a high of 22,989 in 2004 to 5,370 in 2016, according to the State Department.

According to a 2015 report from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 427,910 children were in foster care, with 111,820 waiting for adoption.

"There may be no greater expression of the Christian faith than extending hope and love to children whose birth families are not able to care for them," McConnell said.

How researchers conducted the study

LifeWay Research conducted the study Aug. 22-30, 2017, using the Web-enabled KnowledgePanel, a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. population. Initially, participants are chosen scientifically by a random selection of telephone numbers and residential addresses. People in selected households then are invited by telephone or by mail to participate in the KnowledgePanel. Those who agree to participate but do not already have Internet access are provided a laptop

and ISP connection at no cost.

For this survey, a nationally representative sample of U.S. Protestant and nondenominational adults (18 and older) who attend religious services once a month or more often was selected from the KnowledgePanel.

Analysts used sample stratification and base weights for gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, metro/non-metro, home ownership, education and income to reflect the most recent U.S. Census data. Study-specific weights included for gender by age, race/ethnicity, region, and education to reflect 2016 data.

The completed sample is 1,010 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence the sampling error does not exceed plus or minus 3.1 percent. Margins of error are higher in subgroups.