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# NATIONAL SURVEY REPORT

Published February 2013



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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Assemblies of God Family Services agency recently commissioned a national online survey on foster care; the survey was conducted by FaithBridge Foster Care and powered by Qualtrics. A total of 1,597 responses were received from individuals affiliated with the Assemblies of God (AG), both pastors and adherents, and represented 939 unique AG churches with Sunday worship attendance ranging from 2 to 8,276. Nearly 70% of the respondents came from churches with weekly attendance of less than 800.

States with the largest number of responses were:

- Texas (8.6 percent)
- Missouri (6.2 percent)
- California (5.7 percent)
- Arkansas (5.4 percent)
- Pennsylvania (4.6 percent).

AG pastors representing 716 unique churches responded to the survey. Of the 705 senior pastors answering whether or not they would be willing to prioritize a foster care ministry currently, 47 percent answered that they would in fact be willing to prioritize this ministry in the top three ministries within their church at this time. This is a significant finding in that *nearly half of the responding pastors* identified foster care as a potential ministry priority.

Drilling deeper, we looked at the states where AG churches have current foster care programs or where AG church pastors indicated a high degree of willingness to prioritize a foster care ministry. AG churches in 26 states reported current foster care placement programs—and there are known programs that were not reported in the survey. In terms of AG pastors' willingness to prioritize foster care, the top states included Arkansas, California, Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin.

As for the AG adherent responses, we looked primarily of those who are currently, or who have previously, fostered or adopted. We found that 94 adherents, or 6 percent of respondents, are currently fostering, and an additional 14 percent had fostered previously. Of those who are currently or have previously fostered, most are Caucasian, married, and have an annual income between \$50,000 and \$75,000. Fifteen percent of respondents have adopted a child.

Beyond their direct foster care and adoption experiences, adherents indicated their willingness to assist with a foster care ministry through their local AG church. Respondents felt they would be *very interested* in assisting with a foster care ministry in the following areas:

- Support a foster care ministry by donating items (52 percent)
- Build mentoring relationships with birth parents (40 percent)
- Volunteer time (31 percent).

The survey results indicate several key factors: a willingness to embrace foster care at the local level (both pastors and adherents), prior involvement in this area of ministry and a missional call to build relationships with parents whose children are in foster care.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For centuries, families and communities cared for abandoned, abused and neglected children. All the way back to Moses and Joseph, the same pattern continued throughout society for hundreds of years to the formation of our own country.

During the 20th century, small not-for-profit organizations cared for U.S. children in need, generating their own capital and operational funding, and responding flexibly to problems according to their values and missions. The intervention of government, the large numbers of children involved, and the large amounts of money at stake today have transformed what was once a community-based, “cottage industry” into a large, anonymous marketplace.

The U.S. has developed a complex system of laws, government institutions, and programs to protect and provide welfare services to children and their families. Their mission is to keep children safe. Today, the child welfare system has mushroomed into a large, complex industry that is estimated to be a \$23 billion national industry. The fiscal impact of the child welfare system extends into a number of related services and budgets such as Medicaid, food stamps, and other family programs in the \$70 billion child and family services sector.

Although the problem is large and complex, the solution does not have to be. The responsibility for child welfare can be local and simple—local churches responding to the needs of the children and their families in their local communities. One at a time. Family to family. Neighborhood to neighborhood. The opportunity is ours as the body of Christ and Scripture clearly mandates our role to care for orphans in their distress.

In the pages that follow, you will find the results of a national, online survey of Assemblies of God (AG) pastors and their adherents. Included is national, regional and state analysis for the top states where pastors indicate a willingness to make foster care a ministry priority. This document concludes with recommended next steps that could lead to a national strategy for how local churches and families in the AG congregation can be linked to children in foster care across the U.S., actions that start out at a local level but that have the potential to forever change children and families across the U.S.

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***Project Overview***

In the fall of 2012, FaithBridge began work on a national foster care and family restoration ministry model for the AG Family Services Agency based on the proprietary FaithBridge Community of Care<sup>SM</sup> model. The goal of the project was to strategically position AG Family Services as a national leader and movement maker in foster care and family restoration ministry through an adaptation of the FaithBridge Community of Care model. The implementation of the Community of Care is a local church solution to serve foster children and restore families in obedience to the Great Commission, to preach the Gospel and to make disciples.

FaithBridge has a great deal of experience in and a deep understanding of the evangelical world, especially when it comes to church-based foster care and family restoration ministries. Its specialty is excellence in child welfare services from a Gospel-centered worldview. FaithBridge also has a track record in working through local churches and a firm grasp on the professional child welfare sector and the complexities of the corresponding legislative, legal, and regulatory environments. Its expertise made FaithBridge a natural partner to assist AG Family Ministries in mobilizing and equipping AG churches to serve the nation's foster children and to restore our communities' broken and hurting families.

Phase I of the project, a national survey and church readiness report, was completed in December 2012. This project had two major components: an online survey and analysis of child welfare data. First, FaithBridge designed and deployed a national survey that was powered by Qualtrics. The survey had two branches: one for AG church pastors and another for AG members and adherents in churches. The survey was distributed via email to all AG church pastors and promoted through AGFSA communication channels including listservs, social media and word of mouth.

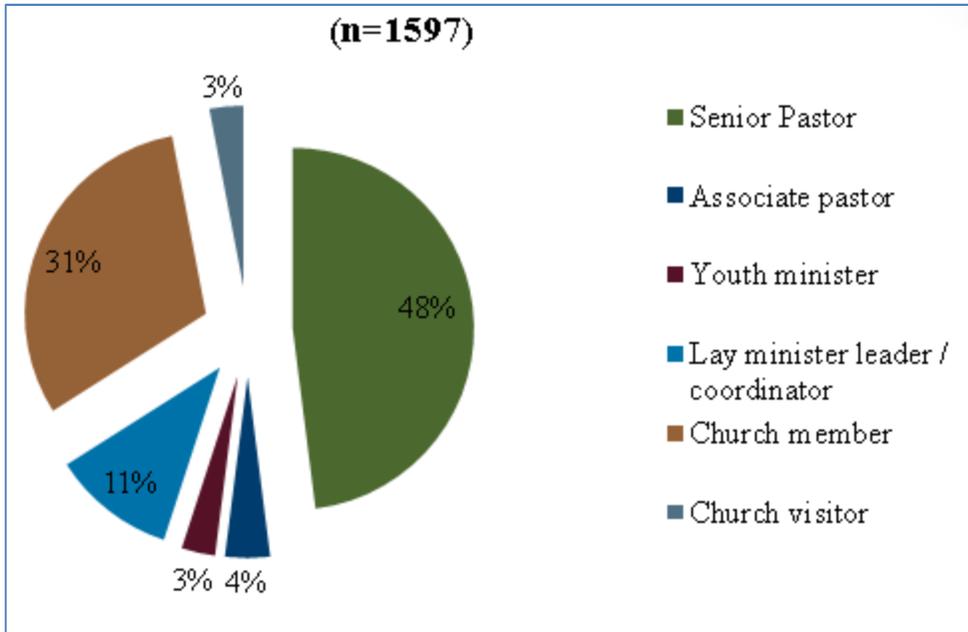
Survey emails were sent from AG national offices in Springfield to the pastoral addresses on file for the ACMR. In turn, pastors were asked to share the survey link with their congregations. The survey garnered a response rate of 7.5 percent of all AG churches.

While survey results were being gathered, topline child welfare data was compiled from each state where AG has a presence. Using both public data and open records requests, FaithBridge pursued local child welfare data—not just statewide statistics, but county where possible, so that we could more accurately project the local need and assess the potential ministry impact in the strategic planning phase of this project. In the end, FaithBridge analyzed the survey data and overlaid it with public child welfare data to create this report—a national church readiness study that details the expressed desires of the AG pastors, church members, and adherents.

**NATIONAL RESPONSE**

A total of 1,597 responses were received from AG-affiliated individuals from 939 unique churches nationwide. Of the churches that represented, the average Sunday worship attendance was 233 with a trimmed average of 143 (removing the top and bottom five percent of responses).

A breakdown of the survey respondents is below:



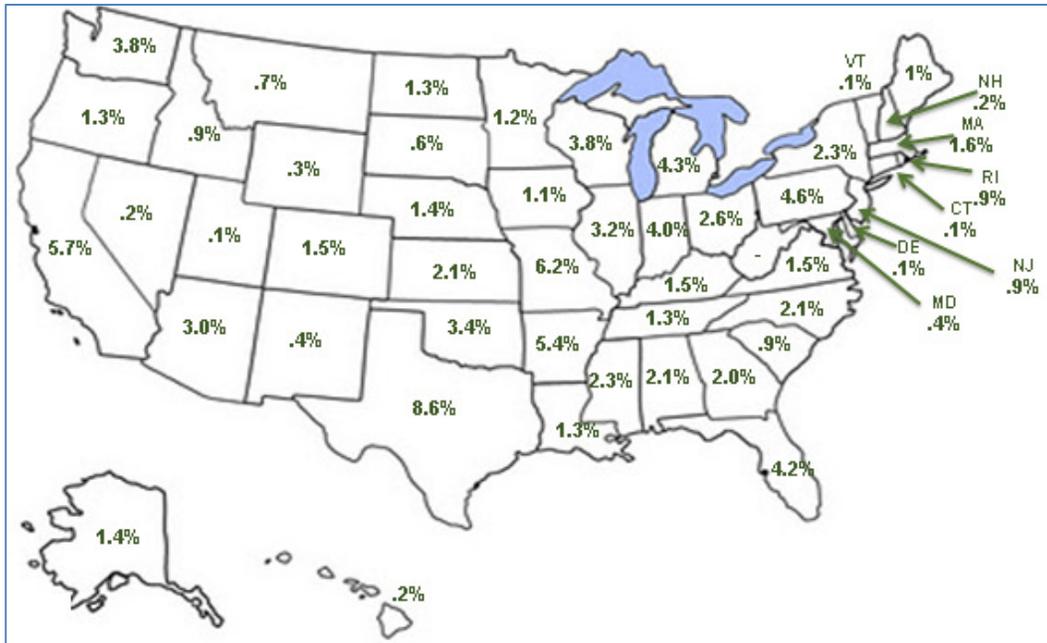
Looking just at the pastoral respondents, 775 were senior pastors, 66 were associate pastors, 49 were youth ministers and 181 were lay minister leaders/coordinators. The group of pastors represented 716 unique churches. In addition, 527 church members and 66 church visitors completed the survey.

Of the responding pastors, 360 of them (49 percent) said they'd like to be part of a focus group on foster care ministry and 325 (45 percent) said they'd serve on a steering or planning committee as part of a ministry rollout.

Four out of five respondents (78 percent), both pastors and adherents, asked to be kept apprised of the development and implementation of foster care ministry in Assembly of God churches.

The map below shows the percentage of respondents by state. This illustration includes both pastors and adherents. States with the largest number of responses were Texas (8.6 percent), Missouri (6.2 percent), California (5.7 percent), Arkansas (5.4 percent), and Pennsylvania (4.6 percent), with only one state, West Virginia, having no statistically significant responses.

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*Pastors’ Awareness of and Willingness to Work Foster Care*

In order to get a sense of the church’s current awareness of foster care issues on a national level, we asked a series of questions about the national foster care crisis as well as the role the church could play in serving foster children in their community.

When it comes to awareness of the extent of the U.S. foster care crisis, pastors were almost evenly split, with 51 percent stating that they were not aware and 49 percent stating they were. Three out of 10 AG pastors (28 percent) were aware that local churches could assist in placing foster children within their community, leaving the majority or 7 out of 10 unaware of the role their church could play in this local mission field.

When asked about the AG’s current participation in foster care and adoption ministries, responses indicate that the majority believed that there were no foster care ministries focused on placing foster children with families local congregations—and an equivalent percentage of ministries specific to the adoption of foster children (both at 6 percent). However, there were twice as many ministries focused on the *support* of foster families in the congregation or the community (12 percent). There are several possible explanations for this:

- The church continues to believe that foster care is a government issue.
- The Christian foster care movement is still a young one with a focus on the less complicated issue of foster family support vs. the placement of foster children.

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	Yes	No	Unsure
Foster care ministry that helps place foster children with families in your congregation	6%	77%	17%
Foster care ministry that supports foster families in your congregation	11%	72%	17%
Foster care ministry that supports foster families in your community	12%	70%	18%
Adoption ministry that is specific to foster children or children waiting to be adopted within the foster care system	6%	75%	19%

Senior pastors were questioned regarding their willingness to prioritize a foster care ministry in their church at this time. Of 705 responses to this question, *nearly half* (47 percent) answered that they would be willing to prioritize it in the top three ministries within their church. This statistic is a significant finding in terms of the Fellowship’s openness to making outreach to hurting children and their families a high priority and the opportunity to develop and implement a national foster care strategy.

As for attitudinal profile of this group, pastors most willing to prioritize the ministry displayed the following traits:

- they have some type of current foster care ministry at their church,
- they are serving or have served as foster parents or would be very or somewhat interested in doing so,
- they have adopted, and/or
- they would be interested in acting in an organizing or leadership capacity in the ministry, participating in a focus group, or serving on a steering or planning committee.

***Foster Care Experience***

When it comes to foster care experience, 20 percent of respondents have some experience with foster care--with 6 percent currently acting as a foster parent and 14 percent stating that they had acted as a foster parent in the past but were not currently acting in that capacity.

Of those currently serving as foster parents (n=94), 45 percent stated that this is their first experience with fostering, while 55 percent responded that they had fostered previously.

For those with previous fostering experience, the breakdown of source is below:

- State: 60%
- Christian organization: 26%
- My church: 3%
- Private organization in my community not associated with a church: 18%.

*Note: Percentages exceed 100% because multiple answers were allowed.*

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The majority of current foster parents are fostering one child (63 percent). A total of 23 percent responded that they are fostering two children, while 14 percent are fostering more than two children. For those fostering more than one child, 82 percent stated that the children were siblings.

A quick demographic look at current foster care parents found that 85 percent are Caucasian, 91 percent are married, and 27 percent have an income of \$75,000 and up. They are clustered in the Pacific and Central AG regions.

- 17% East North Central
- 16% Pacific
- 16% West South Central
- 15% West North Central

For those who answered that they had fostered in the past but are not currently fostering (n=212):

- 60% had fostered through the state
- 53% had made private arrangements with the birth parents
- 14% had utilized a Christian organization in their community
- 12% had utilized a private organization not associated with a church
- 5% had fostered through their church.

*Note: Percentages exceed 100% because multiple answers were allowed.*

Of those with previous foster care experience, two out of three have maintained a relationship with a previous foster child, indicating a long emotional/relational bond and a long-term Gospel opportunity and/or impact.

As for respondents who had adoption experience, 15 percent (n=223) responded that they had adopted a child in the past. Of those who had adopted:

- 53% adopted a child they had fostered
- 30% adopted via private adoption
- 17% adopted a child that they did not foster out of the foster care system
- 13% adopted internationally.

### ***Interest in Foster Care Ministry***

Overall, survey respondents indicated a high level of interest in assisting with foster care ministry. Those areas with the highest opportunity are the ones where respondents indicate they are *very* interested or *somewhat* interested but need more information. In order of priority, the highest ministry opportunities are as follows:

- supporting a foster care ministry by donating items (78%)
- building mentoring relationships with birth parents (76%)
- volunteering time (64%)
- acting in an organizing and/or leadership role (61%)

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- becoming a foster parent or learning more about fostering (46%)
- adopting a foster child or learning more about it (39%).

A breakdown of AG adherent responses can be found below:

	Already doing	Very interested	Somewhat interested, need more info	Not interested
Become a foster parent	7%	16%	30%	40%
Adopt a child	5%	15%	24%	46%
Act in leadership role	4%	24%	37%	30%
Donate supplies	7%	52%	26%	10%
Volunteer	5%	31%	33%	26%
Work with biological parent	6%	40%	36%	15%

*Note: 3 – 5 percent of respondents did not answer this series of questions.*

Overall, these responses indicate that Assemblies of God adherents are very open to reaching out to children and families in their communities who need a hand during trying times. Of particular interest is the high percentage of respondents who are interested in building mentoring relationships with birth parents.

Foster children are the faultless victims of broken families. If we can reach out and build relationships with their parents, we stand the greatest chance of breaking the cycles of intergenerational poverty and sinfulness which locks families into our government systems—child welfare, penitentiary, public assistance and more.

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**REGIONAL DATA**

Our regional analysis mirrors the AG church regions. We aggregated all responses and conducted regional analysis to help inform AG church leaders about their regional opportunities for ministry.



For the most part, there are minor statistical differences by AG region but no single region stood out in terms of its responses. Church members in AG regions have a variety of experiences with fostering and interest levels when it comes to becoming a foster parent or acting in an organizing and/or leadership role in the foster care ministry. Likewise, although each church region has at least one foster care ministry in place now, the percentage varies by AG region as does the percentage of pastors in each region who would be willing to prioritize the ministry.

The table below provides a summary of the responses of church members and adherents from each region:

**NATIONAL FOSTER CARE AND FAMILY RESTORATION MINISTRY MODEL**

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	<i>Nat'l</i>	<i>North-east</i>	<i>South-east</i>	<i>Great Lakes</i>	<i>Gulf</i>	<i>North Central</i>	<i>South Central</i>	<i>North-west</i>	<i>South-west</i>
<b>Experience with fostering</b>	20%	18%	19%	20%	15%	19%	17%	32%	21%
<b>Adopted</b>	15%	15%	17%	16%	11%	22%	11%	19%	10%
<b>Foster care ministry that places children in your congregation</b>	6%	6%	1%	7%	8%	5%	5%	6%	4%
<b>Senior pastors willing to prioritize ministry</b>	47%	40%	54%	41%	53%	49%	44%	58%	41%
<b>Interested in becoming foster parents</b>	53%	57%	55%	52%	54%	51%	53%	51%	50%
- Already acting as foster parent(s)	7%	7%	3%	8%	7%	9%	6%	7%	8%
- Very interested	16%	11%	22%	16%	18%	14%	18%	14%	11%
- Somewhat interested	30%	39%	30%	28%	29%	28%	29%	30%	31%
<b>Very interested in an organizing and/or leadership role in foster care ministry</b>	24%	20%	27%	20%	24%	18%	28%	26%	28%

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***NEXT STEPS***

The objective of this multi-phased project is to develop a national foster care and family restoration ministry model for Assemblies of God Family Services Agency based on the proprietary FaithBridge Community of Care<sup>SM</sup> model. This first phase of this project was to produce a study that discovers and states the expressed desires of AG pastors, church members, and adherents and to analyze that data to determine potential church readiness and project impact for a national ministry.

Research included a robust, national survey as well as researching, gathering and analyzing local and state child welfare data. After a thorough review of the results and projected need, it appears that there is a place for AG churches in the foster care arena. With that affirmation in mind, AGFSA will begin to pursue the establishment of a national foster care and family restoration ministry model.

FaithBridge appreciates the opportunity to serve God and the Assemblies of God Family Services Agency through this study. FaithBridge stands ready to assist in whatever way necessary to continue to explore and ultimately, execute the vision of these exciting initiatives.