

# God Places the Lonely in Families

## Not Orphanages

By George Davis

*God places the lonely in families . . . (Psalms 68:6)* Institutionalization is as destructive to God's children as it is to those natural children, who for whatever reason have been taken out of the home environment, and placed in an institution. The same principles, which are conducive to a strong natural family, apply to God's family.

Recently I read the following insightful e-mail by a brother to whom God has given a special understanding of a very serious problem in the Church.

"For several years I ran an orphanage. We had 50+ kids with several staff workers. There was a constant turnover of children and workers. These children were formed by institutionalism's rules and regulations. They were all very dysfunctional. They were relationally retarded, unable to form healthy relationships, living a lifestyle of self-preservation. Sue & I adopted 2 brothers from there. We also have 2 natural children of our own. The conflicts that arose from their adjustment from institutionalism to family were enormous, to the point of almost splitting up our family. The boys are still struggling with its effects. I said all that to show how destructive institutionalism is. I've seen it up front and personal. In these boys lives, I have seen my own relational retardation, having grown up in a spiritual institution. The real issue is institutionalism vs. family. As we struggle to live out our lives together as the church, I encourage us to ask ourselves constantly. Does this look like family? Does this feel like family? Are we acting like a family?" (Scott Ruffrage)

The word institutionalization does not appear in our older dictionaries. It is a word that is used to describe a modern epidemic, which has surfaced in our day due to the large-scale breakdown of the family and society. It is a word that is used in connection with children who are suffering from an endless list of social maladies that are the result of having been subject to a social environment that denies the basic stimuli required for the development of healthy well-adjusted children.

Simply put, children thrive in homes, not institutions. Over the past 40 years, those studying early childhood development have witnessed a transition from community based care, to family centered care. The more they study, the more they link our social ills to the breakdown of the family. This has resulted in a multitude of personal and societal disorders. In spite of all our great technological advancements, more than any other time in history, children are developmentally delayed. Many are unable to develop normal relationships.

It appears that the world is learning about these problems at a much faster rate than we Christians are. This could be because churches are so much like orphanages and the average church-goers are like orphans. Yes, you can paint flowers on the walls, and decorate with ribbons and bright, joyful colors, but no matter how you doll it up it's still an institution and the children remain acutely aware that they don't belong. Honor is bestowed on the comely child while the unattractive and handicapped children are carefully hidden from view. Every problem that occurs in the natural family due to institutionalization, occurs in the Spiritual family if the same conditions prevail. Institutionalization is as destructive to God's children as it is to those natural children, who for whatever reason have been taken out of the home environment, and placed in an institution. The same principles, which are conducive to a strong natural family, apply to God's family.

Father, teach us how to be a loving, functional family once again!