There are over a half million children currently in the United States foster care system, as well as an additional 12 million foster care alumni. It's hard to ignore the impact of child abuse and neglect on our nation's next generation. The answer to “How can I help 'the least of these'?” is found in a loving church community. Below is a list of 28 ways you and your church family can get involved in a caring ministry to our most vulnerable youth.

1. **Help** your church create an orphan care ministry, if it doesn't already have one.

2. **Pray** for the thousands of foster care children exposed to physical and emotional harm, and for the families and homes that have become a breeding ground for trauma and danger.

3. **Become a foster parent** to one or more children in the foster care system.

4. **Become an adoptive family**, and give a child a ‘forever family.'

5. **Become a 'respite family'** by providing temporary care for foster children so that foster families can have some personal time alone. Unlike childcare, respite services may involve overnight care. Respite care enables foster families to take vacations, a day off or just a few hours off when needed.

6. **Help a foster care child have a happy Christmas.** Have your church's orphan care ministry find a way to collect the Christmas wish lists of foster kids in your community.

7. **Put together care packages** (luggage, clothing, personal hygiene items, camera, flashlight, etc.) for children entering foster care.

8. **Put together 'first-night kits.'** Think of a traumatized child being placed in an unfamiliar home. The smells, noise level and general atmosphere are likely all different from what he or she is used to. By providing a first-night kit with items like toothbrush/toothpaste, a comb or brush, fresh underwear, a stuffed animal, a bedtime story book and a small flashlight (with an extra battery), you give the foster family tools to help calm the child's fears. Keep in mind that some kits might prove even more helpful by being gender specific and appropriate for a certain age range.

9. **Sponsor a child to go to a Christian camp for the summer.** The experience of a child going to camp for the first time could be life-changing.

10. **Volunteer** to help tutor a foster child, especially in reading.

11. **Offer to sponsor** a foster child's lessons in music, dance, etc.

12. **Help recruit people** you believe would make good foster parents.
13. **Get involved in an Adopt-A-Case- Manager Program** which creates a support system by matching a local organization (such as a church, school group, business) to a case manager. The adopting group helps meet the special needs of that case manager's caseload of families and children. The support may take the form of donating cash or tangible items like clothing or baby supplies.

14. **Participate in National Foster Care Month (May).** All children deserve a safe, happy life. Young people in foster care especially need nurturing adults on their side because their own families are in crisis and unable to care for them.

15. **Participate in National Adoption Month (November).** Help raise awareness about the need to adopt children and youth in foster care.

16. **Participate in National Child Abuse Prevention Month (April).** Help raise awareness about child abuse and neglect, and encourage others to support foster children and families. Learn more about the history of the month, too.

17. **Set up a 'Blue Sunday.'** Blue Sunday is like the National Day of Prayer for abused and neglected children and their abusers. Join faith communities across the nation as they take time in their service to pray for the victims of child abuse and those who rescue them. It's that simple. There's nothing to join and no fees to participate. Blue Sunday is usually the last Sunday in April, but it can be a Sunday of your choice.

18. **Help reduce tuition for day care.** Provide support for child care and for a day out for moms.

19. **Start a toy and supply drive,** whether for Christmas or back-to-school. Many children are not able to bring their toys from home to their new placement. And many of them do not have school supplies for the upcoming school year.

20. **Use your hobby or interest to help a foster child.** For example, if you're mechanically inclined, you might find good, used bicycles and repair and donate them to a foster care agency or a foster family you know.

21. **Prepare and freeze meals** and take them to a foster family. Depending on their situation, they may encounter unexpected changes in their schedule, and a ready-made meal can save them a lot of time and work.

22. **Host a 'Heart Gallery.'** Assemble a group of community volunteers to promote adoption and highlight children waiting for a forever home through photo shoots and gallery displays. Stirring portraits can reveal the children’s amazing spirits and individual qualities which can help raise community awareness of the need for adoptive families. Learn more at Heart Gallery of America ([www.heartgalleryofamerica.org](http://www.heartgalleryofamerica.org)).

23. **Volunteer to be a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).** Dedicated and committed people are needed to be a voice for abused and neglected children. As a CASA volunteer, you provide
caring and consistent support on behalf of an innocent child going through a difficult legal process.

24. **Support a 'Rainbow Room,'** an emergency resource room that stocks items such as diapers, formula, car seats, clothing, hygiene products and other necessities for CPS caseworkers to use when children arrive to the foster or adoptive home with little to nothing. The Rainbow Room motto is, "Abused and neglected children do not deserve abused and neglected things." You can be a ray of hope to these children. Volunteer in your local Rainbow Room. Make a cash or in-kind donation to your local Rainbow Room.

25. **Get local businesses to 'adopt' foster/adoptive families** by offering discounted products or services to those families. Offer a job to an adopted teen or a teen in foster care.

26. **Sponsor foster parent appreciation events** such as banquets, picnics, evenings out, etc.

27. **Donate meeting space** for Parent Resource Information Development Education (PRIDE), Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) conferences and foster/adoptive parent support groups. PRIDE provides training for families seeking to become licensed to adopt and/or care for foster children. FGDM conferences engage and empower families to make decisions and develop plans to protect and nurture their children.

28. **Throw special occasion parties** for foster and adoptive children in your area. You can host a holiday party or a picnic during the summer with food and refreshments. Birthday parties for several foster children and their families would be very special for them. Special occasion parties provide a "hands on" project where your church's orphan care ministry can help children and show appreciation for the foster parents who care for them.