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The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



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Well-intentioned missionaries or criminals?

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This is the question Haitian courts will answer to determine the fate of the jailed Idaho missionaries who tried to take children out of Haiti illegally. When arrested, the missionaries initially claimed they were trying to “rescue” orphaned children from the disaster caused by the earthquakes.

But, the changing story makes it difficult to decide how truthful they are. First, we heard they were taking orphans to an orphanage in the Dominican Republic. When authorities learned most of the children had families, the missionaries quickly claimed the families willingly gave them their children. Then, their attorney in the Dominican Republic fired their Haitian attorney amid rumors he was trying to bribe officials to release the missionaries. Not long after, the Dominican Republic attorney himself faced questions about his possible link to a human trafficking case.

Now, questions are surfacing about the group’s organizer. Reportedly, she was near-obsessively determined to open an orphanage in Haiti’s neighbor, the Dominican Republic, planning to use the orphanage as a base to arrange adoptions by Americans, the Haitian earthquake simply accelerating her plans.

Prior to leaving the United States, she repeatedly contacted a couple in Kentucky who had already received permission to adopt three Haitian children, telling them she would “like to pick up their kids” for them. Despite the couple’s continual

refusals, the missionaries went to the orphanage where the children were living and tried to convince the caretakers to give them the children, the couple saying she even told the orphanage she was a family friend.

When this failed, the missionaries went to other orphanages literally begging for children, despite the reality that those children were already receiving needed care. That failing, they expanded their search to include children from intact families—families they claim freely gave them their children. With 33 children, only 13 of them orphans, they headed for the border where authorities stopped them and arrested them – potentially for child trafficking.

Why was the group, or at least the group’s organizer, recklessly trying to get children out of the country? The many unanswered questions, the many coincidences and the ongoing changing explanations make it hard to believe all they were doing was trying to help. The seriousness of the questions parallels the vagueness of the answers.

Are these missionaries, as the Journal suggested, rescuers rather than criminals? Are caring and good intentions enough to enter an area like Haiti? Was their goal to save children or something more? Did they have the right to take children from their families in the midst of this crisis? Did the families who gave up their children really have a choice?

Imagine being in the parents’ situation. Imagine losing everything, no home, no income, nothing. Imagine the fear of not being able to care for your children. Imagine life an unreal blur. And then, just when you lose hope, strangers approach, explaining the many wonders they can offer one or more of your children. All you have to do is give them your children, receiving nothing more than a promise that one day they will return. What might you do? How easily could you be convinced to give away your children in this situation?

Did these missionaries offer families hope or did they offer coercion? Unfortunately, similar situations occur in our hospital emergency departments with families crushed by unexpected tragedies. It is difficult to help people in a crisis sort through the life and death decisions they need to make and well intentioned is not enough. Without skill, experience and the proper motive, you could easily get people to agree with what you think best, rather than helping them decide what they think best.

These missionaries set out to find children for American families, and find them they did. But, what they did was neither proper nor defensible. In this instance the regulations, the red tape and the government bureaucracy all served to protect the children. Well-intentioned missionaries or willful criminals, you decide.

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