

## Help for Uganda's orphans is new organization's first aim

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By Taryn Hutchison

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MILL VALLEY, Calif. (BP)--About 15 people affiliated with Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary have launched an organization to care for Uganda's orphans.

The group, called Fount, is seeking to connect resources with direct needs and to nurture community care for a generation of more than 2 million orphans from Uganda's HIV/AIDS epidemic and its 19-year civil war in which more than 30,000 child soldiers fought.

Bee Holland and Michelle Averna, neighbors in the married student apartments at Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary near San Francisco, took different paths to their concern for the needs of children in sub-Saharan Africa.

Averna researched the Ugandan crisis for her global studies program, in which students simultaneously earn dual masters' degrees, in theology and intercultural studies to give them a solid biblical foundation for ministering in difficult global contexts.



The combination of HIV/AIDS and war has orphaned these and millions of other infants and toddlers the African country of Uganda, some of whom are HIV-positive, requiring care that a new ministry, Fount, would like to help provide. *Photo by Brice Butler*

One evening, Averna discussed her findings with her downstairs neighbor, Holland, explaining the urgency of getting aid into Africa from the West. Holland, assistant controller in Golden Gate's business office and wife of a master of divinity student, described her heart's dream to build wells in Africa, offering hope to those who had only known despair in their young lives.

"It just clicked," Holland said. "I've always been drawn to Africa because it's the continent with the largest amount of social injustice. Michelle and I saw this huge need there," and the two felt they could help meet it in a culturally appropriate way.

The two women joined their skills. Averna did the research and wrote a detailed proposal. Holland, a graduate of East Texas Baptist University, used her business savvy to come up with bylaws and a projected budget. In November 2005, they started the process to become incorporated as a nonprofit organization. Just six weeks later, Fount was legally incorporated.

Averna and Holland were amazed when other students, student spouses, graduates and staff caught the vision and joined forces with them.

Something resonated deep inside when Jodi Dowell, for example, first heard Averna present her proposal in a global studies class. "The faith aspect combined with humanitarian aid is a very powerful combination," said Dowell, Jodi Dowell, who has had a strong interest in missions in general and Africa in particular, having traveled to seven countries for missions work, including Mali where she served over a year with the International Mission Board.

Dowell and a dozen other students, all in their 20s, chipped in for the \$500 fee to become incorporated, giving more affirmation to Holland and Averna's sense of God's leadership. Another green light came when the three people they had prayerfully selected to serve on the board all agreed.

Explaining the name of their organization, Holland said, "Founts spring up and make streams. You know, streams of mercy," and they are a source that dispenses water in many places.

Although all of sub-Saharan Africa is part of their long-term vision, they decided to start in Uganda after learning about the child soldiers there. Southern Uganda appeared to be a stable, safe environment from which northern Uganda could also be helped.

Fount is aiming high. They hope to become the largest channel of aid into Africa and to build confidence in

community-based organizations.

In the coming months, a Golden Gate contingent of about 10 people will make their first assessment visit to Uganda, networking with non-government and community-based organizations to identify potential partnerships. “We have to go in-country to see how to make Fount be Ugandan, not just another Western organization,” Holland said.

Jonathan and Becca Cipolla, newly married and both recent graduates of Golden Gate, will lead the charge in mid-May to do some preliminary work. Holland, Avera and her husband, Jesse, and Lori Acton will travel to Uganda mid-June and stay for almost two months. Dowell will use her international expertise to keep them on track culturally. Others will join them in Uganda for the month of July, each adding unique gifts to the team effort.

Jesse Avera, a filmmaker, plans to use his skills while in Uganda to make a documentary about Fount. The hope is that the film will inspire others in the MTV generation to catch the popular wave of social action by helping Fount fulfill its lofty dreams.

People interested in volunteering with Fount should visit the organization’s website, [www.fountofmercy.com](http://www.fountofmercy.com).

Golden Gate Seminary is a Cooperative Program ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention and operates five fully accredited campuses in Northern California, Southern California, the Pacific Northwest, Arizona and Colorado.