



# Agape Today

## A *Bridge* TO THE NEWNESS OF LIFE



Over Easter this year, something new occurred to me. As I meditated on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, my thoughts led me to draw similarities to the work of Agape and the change we strive to effect in the lives of innocent children. The revival, renewal, and restoration we seek for children and their families.

The first similarity is not an ounce of any of it is possible without God. We continue to rely daily on his strength and direction in serving children and families. It is God's providence and blessings that continue to inspire hearts to partner with us in this mission of Agape.

Second, the journey is not an easy one. We care for children who have experienced trauma and pain that is simply heartbreaking. Families who have walked through devastating loss and adversity. Changes in legislation and lack of resources add barriers and challenges to the work of Agape. At times we, too, pray for God to intervene and allow these difficulties to quickly pass. In the end, we trust God's will.

Lastly, there is something overwhelmingly beautiful on the other side. When children and families are restored, strengthened, and reunited, there is no greater joy. When forever families are created, and healing is in progress for all, a newness of life becomes evident.

We are in the midst of a national crisis. Six percent of children in the United States will spend time in the foster care system before age 18. Today, over 400,000 children in the U.S. are in foster care including nearly 8,000 here in Georgia. An increasing number of children are sleeping in state offices and hotels due to the lack of foster parents across our country. We need to do more.

Our work is one answer to the call of pure religion (James 1:27). Together, we can be part of that bridge to the newness

of life. Do you have a heart to become a foster or adoptive parent to children in need? Are you able to financially support our mission? Do you have a mind to volunteer your time and skills to help meet the needs of so many? In whatever way you are able, Georgia Agape is so very grateful. 🍌

**Racquelle Grant**, Executive Director

### *Will you?*

**Foster parents are greatly needed. If your heart is pulling you towards serving families via foster care, please contact Sondra Colbert, our Director of Social Services, at [Sondra@georgiaagape.org](mailto:Sondra@georgiaagape.org) or via phone at (770) 452-9995.**



# Insight AND Inspiration

## Strengthening Minds, Uplifting Families



May is recognized and celebrated as National Foster Care Month. In acknowledgement of this annual recognition and time of renewal,

Aysha E. Schomburg, Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau, published a message of encouragement and focus for the broader foster care community.

Based on feedback her office received, Ms. Schomburg stated, "... children and youth in foster care, and their caregivers, need us to focus on their mental well-being as diligently as we focus on their physical health and safety."

With this year's theme, *Strengthening Minds, Uplifting Families*, she went on to say, "an approach that is trauma informed and individualized will consider that each child in a single family may be impacted differently and any plan will be person-centered ... Using a lens of compassion and cultural humility to understand the ways that culture can impact how a person approaches mental health is vital to being able to connect children, youth, and families to the services they need."

At Georgia Agape, we discussed Ms. Schomburg's message with our social ser-

vices staff. We realize we have an important role as a partner on the journey of exploring the mental health needs of the children and families we serve. We thoroughly agree with and support the commissioner's emphasis on the importance of early assessment and identification of mental health concerns. This is a task we must begin exploring early in foster care. Georgia Agape is well-positioned as a proactive and supportive agency in helping to mitigate mental health struggles before they manifest.

As part of our mission, Agape is committed to doing all we can to help our families and children realize a better and brighter future by ensuring their mental health services are intact or by providing necessary resources for them to obtain these critical services. As Ms. Schomburg concluded, "We have a unique opportunity to be the added support when more is needed."



**Aysha Schomburg, J.D.**

**Ms. Schomburg's message can be read in its entirety at:**

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth/about/>



**Racquelle Grant, executive director of Georgia Agape, speaks at the 2023 Network 1:27 conference.**



**Above and at right: Our community of Church of Christ agencies across the country recently gathered in Lubbock, Texas, for fellowship, encouragement, and inspiration through Network 1:27.**



## Building Christ-centered Connections

Each year, Georgia Agape staff participate in the conference of Network 1:27, formerly known as Christian Child and Family Services Association (CCFSA). Network 1:27 members are Church of Christ agencies across the country who support children and their families with counseling, residential care, family foster care, maternity and adoption services, and much more. Their mission is to love and serve families through Christ-centered connections.

This year's conference in April was hosted by Children's Home of Lubbock in Texas. We focused on the three scriptures which inspired the new name of the organization, Network 1:27.

### GENESIS 1:27

*So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (NIV)*

### 1 SAMUEL 1:27

*I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. (NIV)*

### JAMES 1:27

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (NIV)*

Through our long-time commitment to Network 1:27, the national conference remains a great opportunity to form relationships and enhance services at Agape. Our executive directors have served on the board, providing guidance while learning through other agency leaders.

Next year, Agape will host the Network 1:27 conference in Atlanta! Scheduled for April 14-17, 2024, our theme will be *I Have a Dream*, focusing on civil and human rights. Agape last hosted 12 years ago. If you would like to donate to help reduce the cost of the conference, please contact us. We are anticipating an awesome event planned by our Executive Director Racquelle Grant. 🌟

**Sondra Colbert, MSW**  
Director of Social Services



***Our thanks to each team captain, player, donor, sponsor, and volunteer who contributed to our successful 2023 Children's Golf Classic!***

## Children's Golf Classic Surpasses Goal

Folks from all over Atlanta and throughout Georgia with big hearts for children in crisis joined teams, set goals, raised funds, and came together to support the annual Agape Children's Golf Classic on Monday, May 15, 2023. Along with contributions from various congregations and corporate groups, these generous donors helped us surpass the goal of raising \$100,000 to help sustain the work of Georgia Agape. Perfect weather and the rolling green hills of the Royal Lakes Golf and Country Club in Flowery Branch gave a beautiful space for a day of good will and great fellowship. We are grateful to each team captain, player, and volunteer for contributing to the success of this event.

We also are grateful to our sponsors who make our fundraising events fun and successful for the children we serve. 🌟



- Alex Roush Architects
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- KBD Group (Kajima Building & Design Group)
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- Valentines Diabetic Supply

## FUNDRAISING FUN



*Our youth race winner proudly displays his award. Congratulations!*



**STRICKLAND**  
Chiropractic Clinic



*Brandon and Denise Johnson ran in the 5K with their children: Wyatt, Ava, and Loria*

## Agape 5K For Kids Raises Funds

The beautiful campus and excellent track and field facilities of Greater Atlanta Christian School made a great venue for the Georgia Agape 5K for Kids held Sunday, March 19th. Nearly 90 participants ran in the event which included a one-mile Fun Run and a 5K. The course is recognized by the USA Track & Field and the Road Runners Club of America as a certified course.

Although it was only eight months since our last race, we wanted to re-establish the race in March in an effort to have cooler weather than the Atlanta summer heat. We also get a jump on the competing early spring race schedule. It was a picture-perfect day.

Our sponsors included Cable Depot, Greater Atlanta Christian Schools, T.E.M. Promotions, Forester Roller Company, and Strickland Chiropractic Clinic. We are grateful for their support as Agape raised well over \$10,000 through this event.

This event could not have happened without the dedicated leadership and work of the best volunteers. Thanks to Brad Kinser, Cliff Sharp, Ted Thames, and Doug Buce along with the Agape staff for their role in making this a great day. 🌟

**Ken Dowdy**, Director of Development

*The excellent track and field facilities of Greater Atlanta Christian School*



# TO WHOM *Honor* IS DUE



Over the years as I have written for our Georgia Agape partners, I have shared sources of inspiration to encourage us as we engage in this work of building better and brighter futures for the children who come into our care. Seeing workers on the frontlines of service in the kingdom, practicing true religion as defined in James, is a source of inspiration to me. I don't write about this much, but observe week after week, the case workers of Georgia Agape standing in the gap for birth parents, foster parents, and the children we serve. They spend hours each week in direct contact with each child, each foster parent, each biological parent, working toward the best resolution for the children entrusted to our care. These tasks intrinsically require care, compassion, and competence. What fires these components begins with a deep spiritual sense of mission I see renewed weekly through the disciplines of devotion: reading of the Word, prayer, and contemplation of the calling each has from Christ. The prayers for each family and the special concerns are offered and the hearts of compassion are filled. The foundation of spirituality in this work has kept these workers going.

I was so impressed by them, in a special way, during the early days of the pandemic when there was so much uncertainty about the virus and how it was to be contained. But complete certainty remained on their part to fulfill the work of attending to these children and their birth and foster parents. On the frontlines, they bravely attended to the routines and requirements of foster care. The office was not physically open, but the work itself continued. The spirit in which it has been done is admirable, and the competence is praiseworthy. With utmost professionalism, Georgia Agape case workers do the work of this agency, in a manner garnering highest marks in their unannounced audits by the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services. As a result, their work over the years has earned Georgia Agape the utmost respect among their peers. They are the driving force behind our agency receiving accreditation by the Certificate of Accreditation (COA), which is internationally recognized for evaluating and recommending industry standards of best practices.

Another source of inspiration to me has been the generous giving by so many. The faithfulness of countless individuals and groups makes it possible to support the staff of Georgia Agape, to provide the training and the practical tools needed to perform the work of foster care. So many of you have been intentional about remembering Georgia Agape's work in all seasons. You give during the Thanksgiving Appeal, provide Christmas gifts for families, support our golf outing, and frequently honor milestones in the lives of friends and family by your gifts.

Paul, the apostle, admonished the Roman church to outdo themselves in showing honor to one another (Romans 12:10). He says to show honor to those to whom honor is due (Romans 13:7). So today, we celebrate the care, compassion, and competence of the team of Georgia Agape's case workers and the generosity of our supporters. May we all work to care for children in need of parental care and to live our lives with spiritual integrity. May we relentlessly answer the call of fostering hope and changing lives. 🍌

**Ken Dowdy**, Director of Development

## Some Ways to Give



### Leave a Legacy

**Whether you would like to put your donation to work today or benefit us after your lifetime, you can find a charitable plan that lets you provide for your family and support Agape. A few options are: Wills and Living Trusts; Beneficiary Designations; and Charitable Remainder Trust.**

**Contact your legal or financial advisor to prepare the proper documents and learn which kinds of gifts will have the best benefit for you as you support Georgia Agape.**



### Donate Your Used Vehicle

**You can donate your car, truck, boat, RV, or motor home to Georgia Agape. By using the donation services of CARS, you will receive a tax deduction for the gross proceeds. All donations require a clear title to the vehicle.**

**Navigate to the donation page on the Georgia Agape website. Just below "Donate Your Vehicle to Charity," you'll find the blue **DONATE** button to begin your donation.**

**You can also contact CARS by phone at 855-500-7433. Tell our agent you want the proceeds to go to Agape.**

**Thanks to so many of you who have donated your used vehicle!**

## *in Loving Memory*

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 Jimmy & Corlis Ellis

**Jim Tucker**  
 Patrick & Doris Graham  
 Brent & Kimbra Wiseman

**Jim Tucker's 100th birthday**  
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**Jody Vickery**  
 Wayne & Frances Mitsch

**Charles Westbrook**  
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**Mattie Rose Wren**  
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## Memorial or Honor Gift

1) **Give online!** Visit [www.GeorgiaAgape.org/donate](http://www.GeorgiaAgape.org/donate), and use the dropdown box for Memorial and Honors.

2) **Give by mail!** The enclosed gift of \$\_\_\_\_\_ is given in  
 Memory of or  Honor of \_\_\_\_\_.

### Please notify:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

For memorials, relationship to the deceased \_\_\_\_\_

For honor gifts, occasion \_\_\_\_\_

**Georgia Agape, Inc.**

**3094 Mercer University Dr., Suite 200, Atlanta, Ga. 30341**

*Our Mission* is to provide professional social services as a compassionate Christian outreach to children, families and individuals in order to enhance their prospects for a better and brighter future.

### Georgia Agape Staff

Racquelle Grant, MSW, *Executive Director*  
Karen Anthony, MAOM, *Director of Administration*  
Ken Dowdy, *Director of Development*  
Sondra Colbert, MSW, *Director of Social Services*  
Kristi Buce, *Administrative Assistant*  
Cayla Matthews, MSW, *Maternity and Adoption Coordinator*  
Dana Stanley, *Accountant*  
Erica Williams, BSW, *Child Placement Case Manager*

### Board of Directors

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Fernando Nasmyth, *Vice Chairperson*  
Renard Anthony, *Treasurer*  
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Brenda Hunter  
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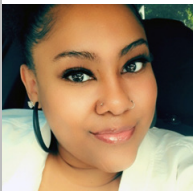
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## NEW STAFF MEMBER

### Meet Cayla Matthews



My name is Cayla Matthews, and I am the new Maternity and Adoption Coordinator for Georgia Agape. I am from Cincinnati, Ohio, and relocated to Atlanta, Georgia, to attend Clark Atlanta University, where I earned my master's degree in social work.

I am a Christian who has a passion for helping others. Being in service to others enables me to share a tiny bit of God's love that has shaped me into who I am. Serving as a social worker is what God has called me to do. I have helped children and adults with coping and overcoming traumatic experiences. I have also helped families in reunification and building their family units. In my spare time, I enjoy crafting, traveling, and going to concerts.

I look forward to strengthening our communities and helping to provide forever homes through reunification, adoption, or foster care! 🌈

**Cayla Matthews, MSW**, Maternity and Adoption Coordinator



### Celebration Banquet Date Change

**Please make your plans to join us at the beautiful Westin Atlanta Perimeter North on Thursday, Sept. 21, for our 2023 Celebration Banquet. This date is a week earlier than last announced.**

**We hope to see you there!**

