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Alumni Profile

A children's champion

When Joe Knittig, CEO of the [Global Orphan Project Inc.](#), explains the mission of the international ministry based in Kansas City, Mo., his compassion and faith resonate from every word. Also known as the GO Project, the organization mobilizes churches in some of the world's poorest nations to care for vulnerable children. GO is active in 15 countries helping to establish housing, schools, health care, businesses and agricultural projects.



Joe Knittig, JD '96, visits Haiti and other poor nations as CEO of the international humanitarian organization Global Orphan Project Inc. Photo courtesy of Joe Knittig

Knittig, JD '96, established a law firm in 2003, and his career was cruising along. But when he visited Haiti in 2005, a new path became clear.

"I was cold-cocked by the conditions in which the children were living and the sheer enormity of the problem of children who have no day-to-day champions in life," Knittig says.

He started with GO as a funding participant and joined the board of directors in 2005. In 2007, he was spending one day a week running the everyday functions of the project. One day

became two, and by November 2008, he decided to join the nondenominational ministry full time.

“Everybody in the leadership of this organization is Christian, and we all share the belief that many within the faith have lost their way and are not representative of the Bible’s Jesus Christ,” Knittig says. “We believe that we should live Christ by our actions the best we can, not brow beat people with mere words.”

He describes the program as having a “here” side and a “there” side. The “here” side runs like a “Mary Kay for orphans,” Knittig says, with a decentralized, word-of-mouth style of fundraising. All people are welcome to participate in the GO Project, though the Christian message of the ministry is central.

As an example of the “there” side, Knittig uses GO’s operation in Uganda, where civil war and AIDS have orphaned millions. Project workers select church partners in African villages who help determine needs, create budgets and begin to solve problems such as providing clean drinking water and finding mothers to staff the orphanages. Once the infrastructure is established and the orphans move in, the children are unaware of GO because Ugandans are running everything — an important point to Knittig.

“Unless you’re empowering people to take ownership of their own social problems, then the project is, by definition, not sustainable,” Knittig says. “We exist to equip people to solve their own social problems.” — *Marcus Wilkins*

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