

‘Baby Box’ Pastor Rescues Unwanted Korean Infants

Hundreds of unwanted babies are abandoned on the streets of Seoul, South Korea, every year. Many of them do not survive.

It’s a subject 22-year-old film producer Brian Ivie tackled in a new documentary “The Drop Box.” The film tells the story of South Korean Pastor Lee Jong-rak, whose church rescues dozens of unwanted disabled babies.

Ivie was awarded \$101,000, the top prize at the San Antonio Independent Christian Film Festival, for making the movie.

The Baby Box

Above a “Baby Box” on a normal residential street in Seoul, South Korea, is a sign that says “place to leave babies.”

A thick towel covers the bottom, and lights and heating keep a baby comfortable. A bell rings when someone puts a baby in the box. Then a helper comes to immediately move the infant inside.

This past year, six infants or small children were rescued this way. They’re physically or mentally handicapped, or babies from unmarried mothers who can’t care for their children.

“His skull is not shaped right,” Rev. Lee, pastor of Jesus-Loving Union Church, said of one infant. “This note says that ‘He has this handicap. I am so sorry, but I am not able to raise this baby, so I put him safely in the baby box of Jesus-Loving Union Church.’”

According to official reports, about 600 infants or young children are abandoned in the streets every year. But the number is probably higher.

Only about 20 percent of abandoned infants or children are rescued and placed temporarily in juvenile protection centers. Hundreds are said to die on the streets.

The numbers of infant deaths and abandoned children are bound to get worse as the rate of children born to single mothers increases.

Government efforts have not kept up with the need, which is why Christian professionals developed the baby box.

"Obviously it is best for the parents themselves to raise their children, but when the country does not perform its function in this situation, it is important to save the lives of babies first," Sang Duk Sim, an obstetrician, said.

Rev. Lee first introduced the idea of the Baby Box in Korea as a temporary solution to keep abandoned babies alive.

"There is no reason for the baby box to exist if the government takes care of the children's safety and making them happy," he said. "Baby Box should go, but right now there is only inaction and lack of concern."

Today the Baby Box embraces abandoned infants and young children because they're handicapped and poor, instead of the country and the parents.

But Rev. Lee said he hopes that better social services for parents and their special needs babies will someday make the baby box unnecessary.