

Mercy

In God the orphan finds mercy

in Our Midst

College Church families

reaching out to

vulnerable children

worldwide

In God
the orphan finds
mercy



God in His mercy has adopted us into His family through Jesus Christ. We reflect God's mercy when we love orphans and vulnerable children, even adopting them into our families. Caring for the vulnerable is a biblical alternative to the materialistic drive to spend excessively on ourselves.

The festival theme is based on Hosea 14:3. The Bible also says, "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27).

There are 18 million orphans in the world and millions more vulnerable children that need our compassionate care. These children are the focus of our 2012 Spring Missions Festival.

What Is Disrupting Service to Illinois's Vulnerable Children?

Children are made wards of the state because they have been abused, neglected or abandoned. Illinois contracts with agencies—religious and secular—to train and pay foster parents to care for them. Illinois has seriously lagged in its payments for some time, putting the agencies in a bind, and prompting some to opt out.

Then, in January 2011, the Illinois General Assembly passed, and Governor Quinn signed, a civil union law, recognizing same-sex relationships. The law took effect last June, and the state's Department of Children and Family Services notified the agencies that it would cease working with any that wouldn't place its wards with same-sex couples.

Some of the highest performing agencies were penalized. In September, Evangelical Child and Family Services was given only

a few weeks to transfer to other agencies all 242 children it was then caring for.

Bruce Hausknecht, judicial analyst for CitizenLink, notes that gay activists are little concerned with social services. "They want validation for their lifestyle. . . . They may use the language of equality, but really they want supremacy."

In November, the state severed its contract with Catholic Charities, which had arranged foster care for roughly 2,000 children.

Robert Gilligan, executive director of the Catholic Conference of Illinois, expressed doubt that the state's new policy had anything to do with the wishes of the general public. "We believe that children are best reared in a home with a mom and a dad," he said. For not deviating from its faith-based principles, he added, "the state of Illinois is punishing not only us, but the families—and the children."

Push Back?

"Let every person be subject to the governing authorities." Romans 13:1 ends the discussion for most Christians. But Paul's previous sentence says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." How the apostle himself balanced these two principles is instructive.

In Philippi, the newly converted jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have sent to let you go, Therefore . . . go in peace" (Acts 16:36). Paul's response was, "They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned men who are Roman citizens . . . do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out" (Acts 16:37). The magistrates came and apologized.

When Governor Festus, to curry favor with the Jewish chief priests, intended to send Paul to Jerusalem, where he would not get a fair trial, Paul's response? "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried . . . I appeal to Caesar" (Acts 25: 10–11).

Religion That Passes Musters

*Reach out to the
homeless and loveless
in their plight.*

—James 1:27 (THE MESSAGE)



Chris & Sarah Tews' Story

They provide foster care through Sunny Ridge Family Center for infants of birth mothers who are considering placing them for adoption. Since 2002, they've cared for 30 babies—some for just one night, most for a few weeks or months.

Sarah had worked at Sunny Ridge as a social worker prior to their marriage and having Alison. After Amy, their second child, was a little older, they talked with Sunny Ridge about serving children by fostering. Since Sarah could be home full-time, the Tewses saw this as a ministry that fit their family.

When the babies are in their home, Sarah gets a little less sleep, and therefore does a little less cleaning and cooking. Their girls have had to learn patience, since with a newborn, getting out the door on time is a challenge. Both sides of their extended

families have been supportive and gracious as they've shown up at family gatherings with a little one who may be fussing. They've pitched in to provide care for them as needed.

"Every time a baby is in our home," Sarah says, "we have at least some moments of challenge, but also of feeling blessed. We've been repeatedly reminded how each little life is precious to God. Every bit of love poured out on them is a way to say, 'Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world . . .'"

"Our home is just one stop on the journey God has planned for them. We love them and send them on with our prayers. Our girls have picked up on what a responsibility it is to bring a life into the world, of the difficult decision faced by the birth mothers, on the joy of the adoptive families, and the reality of what it takes to care for a newborn day after day!"

John & Nancy Black's Story

John and Nancy say that their decision to become foster parents was triggered by their strongly felt opposition to abortion. They discussed and prayed about what they should do to support life for babies. The Blacks acknowledge that the connection between that and foster parenting may be indirect, but it fueled their motivation to provide support to struggling families.

As it turned out, most of their foster children were older. They did care for a few infants, but only for short intervals—for an emergency, respite care and the like.

Some of their foster children brought difficult behaviors and attitudes into the Black home, sometimes impacting their entire family. Their eyes, and those of their four birth children, were opened to very difficult home situations right in the Chicago area. However, John and Nancy

report, God always provided for the needs of both kinds of children in their home.

The Blacks say that the biggest blessing for them has been adopting Kandy. Her placement with them, in 1989, was intended to be temporary, with an eventual return home to her birth parents. But when that became impossible, the Blacks were presented, in 1994, with the option of adopting her.

They discussed this possibility with their birth daughters. As parents, it was a delight for them to see how from the very beginning their girls accepted and loved Kandy.

There have been challenges along the way, John and Nancy admit, but they quickly add that God has provided for them in amazing ways. Now they find it hard to imagine their family without Kandy smack in the middle of it.

Two Ways We Could Help

Encountering orphans amid severe poverty on the STAMP trips we took to the Dominican Republic, dramatically shaped our worldview.

Scott and I always had in mind that we would like to adopt. We had talked about it before we got married. Then, after David, our third biological child, was born in 1998, we began looking into it more intentionally. We adopted Grace in 2000.

Another influence was teaching World Relief's English as a Second Language classes in our church facilities. Josh Selman was one of my ESL students his freshman year of high school. His parents are both deceased. He had come to the U.S with his stepfather as a refugee from Liberia. His story—and those of other refugees—opened our eyes to the needs in the world. Josh had a need; we saw no reason why we shouldn't meet that need. So he moved in with us in August of 2009.

—Debbie Bradley

Birth-family Baggage

Nacho's grandma, a sweet, gentle, religious woman, is the enabler. Out of the goodness of her heart, she's enabled her husband and two sons to be alcoholics, never fully taking responsibility for themselves.

Nacho's uncle has everything he could ever want, but is doing nothing meaningful with his life. An apparently "good" person, he doesn't sense the spiritual void in his life. His sins are "acceptable" to an increasingly secular society.

Nacho's father is a victim of addiction to drugs and alcohol, and perhaps other addictions, that enslave him and his family to lives of despair and depression.

Nacho has suffered abandonment and rejection, and been repeatedly appeased with things instead of experiencing genuine love. He's become insatiably materialistic, controlling of others, unable to see his own shortcomings, and lacking a conscience.

—Jon and Kathy Haley

Jon & Kathy Haley's Story

Unable to have a biological child, these missionaries to Spain prayed about adopting. God's answer was entirely unexpected.

For a year they'd been cultivating a relationship with Emilio, a former drug addict who'd turned to Christ, and with his two sons: Emi and Nacho. Then bad news from home pushed Emilio into depression. Church attendance ceased; he began drinking himself to death. His children roamed the streets with little to eat.

Rescuing this family, their pastor agreed with the Haleys, meant freeing Emilio from his addiction by sending him to another, more professional, rehab center. But the boys couldn't go with him. "I feel we should invite them to stay with us," Jon ventured.

So in 2003, the Haleys committed to these brothers for the two months till school was out. But after six weeks, they were forced

to ask Emi, 16, to leave. Emilio's second year of rehab required that he be on his own. So Nacho remained with them. Then Emilio, upon his release, begged them to continue parenting Nacho.

Despite escalating conflict in 2008, the Haleys planned on a summer visit to the States with Nacho. The four-month tourist visa they applied for was granted—only for ten years! But near the departure date, Nacho refused to go. He stayed in Spain, first with a church family, then in Madrid with his grandma and uncle.

The Haley's summer apart from Nacho provided a welcome reprieve. They sought advice from Kathy's parents, plus missionary friends who'd experienced, and done studies on, Radical Attachment Disorder (RAD). Until Nacho helped restore emotional safety to their home, they concluded, they couldn't reunite. They could only pray for Nacho to sense his need

and reach out for help.

That evening, Jon composed a letter, expressing yearning for Nacho to be their son, but informing him they'd bar his return until he could treat them with respect. They mailed the letter—expecting an angry outburst, and Nacho's rapid retreat to his grand-ma and uncle's place.

Instead, his host family reported, Nacho, on reading the letter, sat in shock for half an hour, then, angry with himself, sobbed for an hour.

Jon, accompanied by Kathy's

dad, flew to Spain, where they huddled with leaders from the Haley's church. These men individually told Nacho that his inability to form healthy relationships and live responsibly was due to deep wounds and ingrained behavior patterns that the Haleys were powerless to resolve for him.

Nacho called out neither to his family of origin nor to his friends. He pled with Jon, not for another chance, but for fatherly help in figuring out what to do next.

Back in Colorado, searching for homes for troubled youth, Kathy came upon Tierra Blanca, a New Mexico ranch experienced at working with RAD kids. She thanked God for a good fit—and Nacho's ten-year visa.

Informed by Jon and Kathy's dad about this option, Nacho balked at first, then agreed to go. They filled out the application and had a phone interview. He was accepted and enrolled!

College Church families providing foster care also include Chris and Kellie Cole, Dorothy Forsberg and Phil and Judy Nussbaum.

Foster care coordinating agencies
Safe Families for Children (*Evangelical Child and Family Agency partnering with Lydia Home Association of Chicago*)
www.safe-families.org

Youth Services Bureau, 40 DuPage Court, Suite 400, Elgin, IL 60120
(847) 742-4525, www.ysbiv.org

Sunny Ridge Family Center, 2S 426 Orchard Road, Wheaton, IL 60189
(630) 668-5117, www.sunnyridge.org

Children's Home and Aid Society of Illinois, 910 2nd Avenue, Rockford, IL 61104, (815) 962-1043
www.childrenshomeandaid.org

ChildServ, 8765 Higgins Road, Suite 430, Chicago, IL 60631, (773) 693-0300, <http://childserv.org>



A Delicate Exchange, Divinely Orchestrated

*God decided in advance to adopt us into his family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ.
—Ephesians 1:5 (NLT)*



One Birth Mother's Story

I'd always felt a void, emptiness, and a lack of self-esteem—a desire to be loved. That led to one unhealthy marriage, then another. But now God wanted me to remember just how much He loved me. So He brought me to my knees . . . with an angel.

From the time I learned I was pregnant, I knew I wanted to give my child life. When a mother knows her daughter is in danger she'll do anything to protect her. So I knew in my heart that I didn't want my husband to have contact with the child within me. And I knew God was going to be with me through this valley, He had orchestrated it before I took **my** first breath.

Just a few weeks into my pregnancy and after only four months of marriage, I decided to move out.

I called my parents and asked to come live with them until I sorted

this all out. My relationship with my parents had been strained since I became serious with someone else before my divorce was even finalized. They'd hardly had time to process the end of my first marriage, and were now being asked to accept a new spouse in my life.

They didn't think twice about helping; their response was a perfect example of unconditional love. As for me, I had no idea that this transition resulted from my feelings of inadequacy to care for myself.

After I was at my parent's home, the lawyer I was using suggested a Christian adoption agency that might be able to help. I didn't trust any decisions I was making, and needed wise counsel. God provided. I met weekly with a woman who knew just what I needed. She never judged, never told me what to do; she only showed me God's grace.

During this time, my parents gave me shelter but never asked about my circumstances.

My “angel” was a sweet baby girl I would never see grow up into the beautiful young lady she now is. The night she was born, she had ten fingers and ten toes, plus good lungs from the very first cry! I knew I’d done my part to be the best birth mom I could be.

After my daughter was born, my parents pressured me to keep her. For ten days they questioned a choice that had taken me months to arrive at. I prayed quietly in my tears. Then I called my husband to ask if he’d release all legal rights to our daughter, letting me adopt her from him. When the answer was no, God clearly showed me what to do. I immediately drove to the agency and signed the papers.

Why did I give her up? Not because I didn’t love her or didn’t want her, but precisely **because**

I **did** love her. She was an angel sent from heaven to remind me just how loved I’d always been.

Psalm 139 says, “Your eyes saw . . . the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.” He knows mine—and my daughter’s.

A few weeks before my daughter went to live with her adoptive parents, I had her dedicated with a few friends and church leaders. That is when the “peace that passes all understanding” poured over me. I placed her in the hands of a Christian family I chose; I know they were the right family.

Do I miss or think about her? All the time. Do I regret my decision? Never! Would I love to meet her? I would give up meeting her on this earth if I knew I would see her in heaven.

She wasn’t mine to begin with; I simply placed her back in God’s hands. That is my peace and comfort.

He Signed the Papers

“When we come to Christ, God not only forgives us, he also adopts us. Through a dramatic series of events, we go from condemned orphans with no hope to adopted children with no fear. . . .

“It would be enough if God just cleansed your name, but he does more. He gives you his name. It would be enough if God just set you free, but he does more. He takes you home. . . .

“Adoptive parents understand this more than anyone. . . . They know what it means to feel an empty space inside. They know what it means to hunt, to set out on a mission, and take responsibility for a child with a spotted past and a dubious future. If anybody understands God’s ardor for his children it’s someone who has rescued an orphan from despair, for that is what God has done for us.”

—Max Lucado in
The Great House of God

Instant Baby!

In 1976, NAE president Billy Melvin had counseled a local family with a pregnant unmarried daughter. He arranged for a couple to adopt her child. But they withdrew after the wife was diagnosed with cancer. Returning one weekend from an out-of-country trip, Melvin learned that the daughter had delivered three weeks early, and began praying for a solution.

Back in his office on Monday, Billy began calling local pastors. But since that was their usual day off, he failed to reach any. In the process of calling, however, the secretary of the church we were attending told him she knew of a couple unable to get pregnant, who hadn't applied for adoption, but had been praying that God would grant them a child.

She called our pastor at his home, who called Billy, and then my husband, Tom. We met with Dr. Melvin that evening, and on Wednesday picked up Kristina from the hospital!

—Carole Paulsen

Jerry & Jane Sundberg's Story
They'd been married for six years and had tried unsuccessfully for three years to conceive. Both were teachers and loved children. They were then members of Bethlehem Baptist in Minneapolis, where numerous families had adopted Korean children.

"To be honest," admits Jane, "we weren't gripped by the world's need, but by our desire to have children." They knew a social worker at Children's Home Society in St. Paul. She encouraged them to apply. The cost was set according to their income; for them that worked out to \$3,000. The process would take nine or ten months.

In April, 1979, four-month-old Betsy arrived with 12 other darling babies, accompanied by four women, on a 22-hour flight from Seoul. Betsy's armband bore the Sundberg name so that on arrival they could be identified as her parents. Passengers throughout

the plane helped hold, feed and rock the infants.

"It was really very simple," Jane reports. "I quit teaching and became a stay-at-home mom. I loved it, and we were dirt poor!"

One year later, Jerry and Jane decided to go for a second child by adopting again. They couldn't swing another \$3,000 for a foreign adoption, so they chose the county system, having been cautioned that going by that route could take up to five years.

They filled out a detailed questionnaire regarding their level of education, religious affiliation, ethnic background, financial stability and extended family background (to expose any skeletons in their closet!). Once their home study was complete, they were placed on the state roster of some 400 waiting families. Multiple families, they were told, usually matched with a waiting child, and the wait could be lengthy.

To make matters worse, in the summer of 1981 the state of Minnesota had a strike. To honor the picket line, the social workers stopped placing any children for adoption.

Meanwhile, eight-month-old Timothy started to bond with his foster family. Although obligated to honor the picket line, his social worker knew that it was crucial for him to be placed as quickly as possible. So she covertly called her social worker colleague, Dorothy, and asked if she had an applicant family on the state register that was composed of a



stay-at-home mom plus a potential sibling. The preference was that the family would also be Baptist with post-secondary education. Dorothy replied that she had recently placed on the register a family that just happened to fit all these preferences!

God, purposing to place Tim in their family, had circumvented the whole cumbersome process. The strike was settled, and the paperwork moved along.

Within a year they had a darling nine-month-old boy to join 2½-year-old Betsy. He was as blond and fair as she was black-haired and olive-skinned: salt and pepper.

"Tim came in August," Jane reports. "The Lord looked on us and decided we were too settled . . . so I got pregnant in November. Krista was born in August of 1982. Three babies in three-and-a-half years! Those were busy but wonderful days!"

Pregnancy services include:

CareNet DuPage, (630) 455-0300
<http://pregnanthelp.com>

- *Downers Grove: 515 Ogden Avenue, Suite 200*
- *Glen Ellyn: 1200 Roosevelt Road, Suite 101*
- *Naperville: 1301 S. Route 59, Suite 103*
- *Wood Dale: 132 E. Irving Park Road*

Evangelical Child and Family Agency (ECFA), 1530 N. Main Street, Wheaton, IL 60187, (630) 653-6400

Outreach Community Ministries
122 W. Liberty Drive, Wheaton, IL 60187 (630) 682-1910
www.outreachcommin.org

A Caring Heritage Catches On

Think of all the good that has come from their lives, and follow the example of their faith.

—Hebrews 13:7 (NLT)



Anita Deyneka's Story

Anita and her late husband, Peter, were childless. They learned of the overwhelming number and needs of orphans in the USSR through their missionary ministry there in the Soviet years. But almost no contacts with orphanages were then possible—even by national Christians. So they began to consider adopting from another country. Anita recalls Peter suggesting that they pray for God to give them a brother and sister. God did lead a brother and sister from Colombia to the U.S. and, through unexpected circumstances, brought the four together to form a family.

Mark and Lilianna Marson came as adolescents, so the challenges to all in forming a family were considerable. Some days, Peter and Anita felt that crossing Iron Curtain borders was easier than suddenly becoming parents!

But Anita also says that the

coming of children brought them happiness in ways they hadn't imagined. Their joy was great when Mark and Lily chose to follow and serve Christ. In 1991, when the four moved to Moscow after communism had collapsed, Mark and Lily said they wanted to help in orphanages. They began to visit one, for infants to five-year-olds, directly behind their Moscow apartment. Who could forget the babies trembling with happiness at being held? Or the cluster of preschool orphans who started calling them "momma" and "poppa"?

The first Thanksgiving after Peter died, Anita felt especially thankful to God for having her children near.

Now that Anita has relinquished the presidency of Russian Ministries, she is grateful that her children and their spouses support her current focus on its Home for Every Orphan Partnership.

Bill Bailey's Story

Growing up, Bill, an only child, had little contact with young children. But then he married Ginny. While a student at Moody, she had taught Sunday school and led a club for off-the-street kids. She worked as a house parent at an orphanage on Chicago's north side, babysat a lot, led VBS classes at several churches—including College Church—and whenever possible counseled at camps.

The Bailey couple was moved by a film about Harry Holt, an Oregon lumberman who started an orphanage in Korea to care for Amerasian war orphans. And they met College Church members Dwight and Jean Hooten, who'd adopted Mae Lynn, from Korea, and who encouraged them to consider an international adoption.

They did!

Foster children came and went in their home in the late 1960s.

Then, in 1971, they adopted young Korean Melissa Ann. Later that decade, Bill and Ginny traveled to Korea themselves. And in 1976 they adopted a Korean sibling group of three. Later, in 1972 and '82, they adopted two from India.

The adoption experience profoundly affected the Baileys' four biological children, stretching them, leading some to do foster care of abused children and later to adopt some. Bill's oldest daughter, a single mom, adopted a girl from China, and the Chinese officials have just approved another daughter's adoption of two special needs girls.

All Bill's adopted children are married, to non-Asians—with families spread from Nevada to New Jersey. Bill says that these children, along with 21 grandchildren and one great granddaughter, certainly keep up his frequent-flyer miles!

Kick Her Out?

My former husband, Jerry Poole, and I wanted to adopt to rescue a deprived child. Our two birth children, the agencies then said, disqualified us for an American child. So we turned to Korea. Our mentors, the Hootens, had earlier adopted three Korean children. Alongside us, Don and Carol Heykoop pursued adoption of Sonie.

When Jessica arrived, in 1984, she had screaming nightmares for five months. Then, except for minor learning disabilities, life settled down—until the onset of adolescence in fifth grade. Jess stole thousands of dollars from us. I had her arrested numerous times. Other times, we sat by her hospital bed, praying she'd live.

Now 27, Jess has been drug free for two years, and is returning to college in the fall to get a nursing degree. As difficult as it was for 13 years, I'm so glad we didn't give up. She's grown into a beautiful young woman and a loving, caring daughter.

—Frances (née Kay) Thompsen

How Adopting Changed Us

Adopting made us a completely different family than we would have been otherwise. It expanded our horizons and our understanding of life and eternity. Adoption is forever—whether into God’s family or into our family bloodline. Our adopted children (and all of our children) carry our name, bring joy to our hearts and are forever part of our family. We love seeing the different shades of color in our family. One third of our grandchildren are racially mixed, African, or African-American. You see a lot of them running around College Church every Sunday!

What more could we want in life than to share our lives and the glory of God’s grace with our birth children and our adopted children; and then to see them go on in their own lives to love the Lord and to share God’s grace and mercy with a wider and wider circle of people here and in other parts of the world?

—Lane and Ebeth Dennis

Lane & Ebeth Dennis’s Story

Their main motivation for adopting, the Dennises say, was knowing that they themselves—by the blood of Christ, and through His grace and mercy—had been adopted into God’s family.

They adopted Jenay back in 1970. This, they remind us, was before the *Row v. Wade* decision, so there were numerous children in need of adoption—especially racially mixed and African-American children. This was also during the civil rights movement, and they were deeply concerned about the enormous need for racial justice and for homes for

children of different and mixed race. In addition, in the late 1960’s an African-American friend of theirs was brutally murdered in Chicago. Lane and Ebeth decided that, even if they couldn’t make a major change in our culture, they could at least adopt a child in need to give her a home.

About eight years later, in 1978, the Dennises adopted Rachel, whose birthparents are also African-American.

Lane and Ebeth report that the Lord has greatly blessed them through their adopted- and birth-children. Their grandchild count now stands at 26!



Mike and Sasha Parker's Story

Soon after Mike and Sasha had their four biological children, and moved back to Wheaton, they felt God's call to begin bringing single moms into their lives, living more selflessly in order to join with them. As they engaged these women, they personally learned about God's heart for the weak and vulnerable.

In 2008, through their adoption agency, God brought them close to a few of these birth mothers. Their hearts broke as they witnessed firsthand what "pro-life" really means. They watched sacrificial love lived out daily, as these



vulnerable moms chose to carry their treasures full term.

Mike and Sasha say that, for them, these women gave the gospel new meaning and power as they grasped the full extent of the Father's unconditional love for them: giving his perfect Son to undeserving people.

From their side, Sasha observes, "The more we demonstrate the gospel of grace to a skeptical world, the more we can bring people to Christ."

Finally, one amazing mother entrusted her beautiful baby girl to the Parker family. The arrangement has included an ongoing relationship with the birth mother and the birth father.

Since then, the Lord has blessed Mike and Sasha with two more children, both from Ethiopia. Last November they traveled there to receive from an orphanage 11-year-old Joseph as their seventh child.

Our Family Needed Adoption

I grew up in the Lane Dennis family, with adopted sisters on either side of me. My family's diversity showed me the richness of God's view of family: how we all, as his children, share the same identity.

After Mike and I had our own biological children, I longed to offer the gift of adoption to our four—for how it expands your heart as you look beyond yourself, learning to live with, and love, people who differ from you.

Recently, one of our children confessed that sometimes the differences, sacrifices and adjustments can be hard. After talking, praying and continuing to walk by faith, we've learned that even in the midst of challenges, God is blessing us, by helping us understand and appreciate our own spiritual adoption. God, our Father, is actively bringing all us undeserving sinners into His eternal family.

—Sasha Parker

Couples Going Nuclear

*He gives
the childless woman
a family,
making her
a happy mother.*

—Psalm 113:9 (NLT)



Eric & Marilyn Enstrom's Story

The newlywed Enstroms longed to parent, but for three years struggled with infertility. They trusted God to somehow answer their prayers for a child. So when a good friend positively described growing up an adopted daughter, they inferred that God was directing them to form their family through adoption.

In 1998, when Alicia, their first daughter, came home with them and, four years later, when Nicole joined their family, they resonated with Hannah's words in 1 Samuel 1:27: "For this child I prayed . . ."

Only God's grace, they say, could have created their family. They praise Him not only for granting their request, but also for purposefully protecting Alicia and Nicole even before they knew them. That, Eric and Marilyn say, makes their daughters doubly precious gifts: first, because their birth mothers chose to bring

them into the world, and second, because they chose to place them in their home.

The Enstroms derive pleasure from observing how God has uniquely made each girl, differing from them and each other. Sometimes they discern personalities and gifts inherited from individual birth parents; at others, they perceive traits and strengths developed in their adoptive family.

Although Alicia's birth mother chose not to maintain a relationship with them, they honor her for her choice, made over 13 years ago, to place Alicia with them.

They've been able to develop personal ties with Nicole's birth mother, now married to a supportive Christian man, with their own young son and daughter. It has proved a mutually rewarding relationship, as they and both their girls see her flourishing, and she sees her birth daughter blossom.

Jeff & Jane Pelz's Story

During their engagement, Jeff and Jane had discussed adoption; both were open to the idea. So while adoption wasn't how they thought they'd become a family, it was never second best. God was preparing them. As they imagined holidays 20, 30, even 40 years ahead, they couldn't picture themselves without the blessing of kids. "When you start wanting to be parents more than you want to give birth to a baby," someone told them, "*then* you should adopt." It didn't take long to reach that stage.

After numerous inquiries at various adoption agencies, they settled on one and began the daunting process—adoption references, extensive application forms, fingerprinting, interviews, a home "inspection" (to make sure there was adequate space).

Step by step their excitement grew. Whatever this child's story

was, they knew they were going to intersect with him or her in God's good plan.

They had a lot of support from their small group, family and friends, especially from College Church. Money began to show up from people who realized there was a cost involved; gentle encouragements, with sensitivity, were commonplace.

The homecoming days were memorable. Even today Jane smiles when she thinks about the posters, balloons and visitors who streamed in to have a cuddle.

Fourteen years on, Jeff and Jane are still grateful to God for their two lovely children. They hardly think of them anymore as adopted kids, they are just *their* kids!

Where they've lived abroad—first in England, and now in New Zealand—adoption is less common. Yet their kids have taken it in stride.

God is good!

The Adoption Journey

There are so many variations in the adoption process. A few come readily to mind:

- *Deciding on whether to seek an infant or older child*
- *Preparing for potential babies that end up not working out*
- *Going to court, foreign or domestic*
- *Securing the required finances*
- *Deciding whether or not to meet the birth parents*
- *Acquiring all the goods needed at just the right time, so you aren't set up too early*

And parenting thereafter? Well, that definitely is a faith journey and, for us, has proved the much greater challenge!

Overall, we are instructed in Scripture to not worry about tomorrow, since today has enough worries of its own. With a strong sense of God's sovereignty, adoption can be a deepening of our trust in a mighty and kind God.

—Jeff & Jane Pelz

How Many Orphans Are There?

The best available estimate on orphans (children who have lost both of their parents, or whose parents have given up parental rights) worldwide is contained in a U.S. government report to Congress that is affirmed by UNICEF: 18.3 million! And that's not counting vulnerable children—with special needs or homeless.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that hard statistics are hard to come by, since at least 85 percent of orphans come from developing countries, where record-keeping is hardly an urgent priority.

Somewhat counter-intuitively, the most thorough estimates come from Africa, because of UNICEF's intense work with Africa's AIDS/HIV epidemic. Globally, more than half of all orphans are believed to be on that continent.

Roughly another third are in Asia. Figures from Central and South America and the Caribbean—with so many street children not placed in orphanages—are especially elusive.

Steve & Kate Hinchee's Story

Kate's medical history made conception doubtful. But the Hinchees biological child, Megan, was born just a month after their first anniversary! As the months rolled by, however, they realized that God had marked out a different road for growing their family.

During a church adoption class in 2009, they were challenged to examine their motives. Some, they discovered, weren't all that selfless. God began softening their hearts and reshaping their motives.

The adoption process entails long waits between intensive tasks. They'd scramble to get paperwork submitted in a few short days, only to wait weeks or months for the next step. Adoption caused them to depend on God more, and patiently wait for His timing.

Toward the end of 2010, their funds had been depleted. They'd

known all along that the investment required for adoption would stretch them thin. So Steve and Kate began exploring grants and low-interest loans. But their confidence that God was calling them to adopt, also led them to pray earnestly and watch expectantly to see how He'd provide.

When urged to complete some paperwork quickly, they guessed that a mother was considering them for adoption of her child. But the long review period for most funding options made the timing appear doubtful.

One evening shortly before Christmas, a family they were just getting to know showed up on their doorstep, sang a Christmas carol and handed them a card. In the card they found a check for half the adoption amount! They were later informed that the other half would be paid directly to their agency upon placement. The total fell within \$200 of what they

required.

Steve and Kate found the first few days after Faith's placement surreal. They had bonded with Megan through nine months of pregnancy; now they'd had only a few weeks to absorb Faith's arrival. It took a while for the feeling that she was really their daughter to sink in. Since bonding with her didn't come as naturally, they realized they needed to be more intentional about it. As the days and months have gone by, it has grown more and more natural to

see her as their daughter, whom they love dearly.

They've also had to retrain themselves to talk of Faith as their daughter, without automatically bringing up her adoption. They're certainly proud that God has entrusted this little girl to them through the gift of adoption. But they realize that adoption isn't the primary factor defining who she is as a person. Their prayer is that she'll one day confidently say that first and foremost she's a child of God.



An Open-and-Shut Case?

Faith's adoption is what is termed an open adoption. This means we have ongoing contact with Faith's birth mother and limited contact with her birth father.

We understand that not everyone may feel called to this form of adoption, but we really felt led to consider this. I had to overcome significant hesitations to come to this point. By God's grace, some major stereotypes were broken down, and we grew in understanding and love for those who experience an unplanned pregnancy. After all, we are all fallen people in need of God's grace and forgiveness.

Our relationships with the birth parents are a work in progress, but we have seen some growth and encouraging signs, even in the first year. It is our prayer that we would be a conduit of God's love and compassion, not only to our daughter, but also wherever God sees fit to use us.

—Steve Hinchee

Small Disciples

After serving full-time in Mercy Ships, in positions of significant responsibility, the shift to a stay-at-home mom of baby twins was huge for me. Initially I found it difficult to be home-bound with demanding infants and so little to show for my daily efforts.

But now, nearly four years later, I can see great fruit as I watch the girls grow and develop. I'm so thankful for the new job I have with my two children. As a family, we're committed to a lifestyle of service in mission; it's so rewarding to see the girls begin to grasp it. What a blessing to be expanding our missionary team from Brian and me to all four of us.

I'm convinced more than ever of the redeeming power of adoption in the lives of people, and look forward to seeing how the Lord will use the girls, and us as a family, for his Kingdom purposes. God is faithful and good to us and through us!

—Warrie Blackburn

Brian & Warrie Blackburn's Story

During the many years they lived aboard the Mercy Ship in Africa, the Blackburns encountered countless orphans as they did projects with orphanages and churches. Some crew families adopted a few of these orphans. Brian and Warrie were challenged by their willingness to respond to the need at this level of personal commitment. At the same time, they personally had asked the Lord for children, but had never been able to conceive.

Encouraged by these real-world situations and by the words of James 1:27, the Blackburns decided to step out on the adoption journey. They began exploring numerous confusing options both in Africa and the U.S.

In 2007, the Blackburns moved from the ship to Mercy Ships' Texas headquarters. They had contacts at a local adoption agency nearby, and decided that

starting the process there would be a natural, easy first step. They told the Lord that they'd follow where He led from there, knowing the path might become increasingly uncomfortable and/or difficult—and might never yield a child for them.

In early 2008, they were introduced to Addison and Alyssa's birth mom. Although she agreed to place the twins for adoption with the Blackburns after their birth, the case became complicated legally. So the placement didn't take place until the girls were nearly four months old.

During that six-month-long ordeal, Brian and Warrie often doubted if the adoption would ever be concluded. The turmoil they endured made them wonder what plans were on God's heart for the lives of the twins. But they committed to the Lord to stay on the adoption path until, one way or other, it led to a conclusion.

Justin & Annie Wilson's Story

The Wilsons had desired children for several years and were walking the hard road of infertility. Then College Church offered a class on adoption. There they met other couples, talking with several who listened to their questions and fears, and answered truthfully. Also, through the book *Adopted for Life*, they learned that nothing is more solid and beautiful than the way God adopts us into His family. In turn, they say, one of His greatest gifts to them is permitting them to adopt another life into their family.

Three weeks after returning home with baby Charlie, they found out he'd be a big brother! Watching Sam and Charlie over this past year has led them to worship the God who is so good. Seeing the love Charlie has for Sam, and the delight Sam has in his big brother, is a gift they pray will last for their lifetime.

Justin and Annie want Charlie to know that he is doubly loved: by his birth mom, who knew she couldn't take care of him, and by his parents. They also want him to know how sovereign God was in making him a Wilson! They tell him this story often. They're trusting God to equip them to help all their children see Him as the One who adopts them into His family, and to lead them to claim Him as their Father.

Another aspect of Charlie's adoption that leads them to praise the Lord on many occasions is the relationship they have with his birth family. After meeting Rachel "randomly" in November on vacation, they went back to California to stay with her and her family for a weekend a few months later. Now there is a foundational love with Rachel and her mom and sisters that runs deep across the many miles. They have truly become family.

College Church families that have adopted domestically also include William and Susan Bedrossian, Dan and Ellen Block, Elaine Meyer, Tim and Deanna Smith, Wil and Lorraine Triggs and Ed and Debbie Van Der Molen.

Steps you could take right away

- Attend a seminar at College Church Commons on Sunday, March 11, at 4–5:30 pm, on how to get involved in orphan care locally.**
- Get together with a family featured or listed in this booklet.**
- Attend an information meeting to be presented at College Church soon by Bethany Christian Services. Watch for an announcement.**
- Contact Bethany Christian Services, 6600 W. College Drive, Suite 207, Palos Heights, IL 60463 (708) 385-4889, www.bethany.org**

“They Are Precious in His Sight”

“I’ll round up all your scattered children, pull them in from east and west.”

—Isaiah 43:5 (The Message)



Cam & Christine Williams’ Story

Adoption is a challenging process—financially, emotionally, spiritually and mentally.

You’ll spend months filling out paperwork. Every aspect of your life, from your finances to your childhood memories to your relationship with your spouse, will be laid out to be perused by a social worker and the state of Illinois. You will clean out your bank accounts. You’ll be overjoyed at receiving a coveted immigration form in the mail, only to realize it wasn’t proofread. You’ll spend days, weeks trying to get a corrected form.

You’ll feel dehumanized. You’ll be a packet of papers on someone’s desk. That person has the power to ignore you for weeks. You’ll make dozens of calls and get automated replies each time.

You’ll know the wrenching despair of **waiting**. You’ll sob when you get that first photo of your

child, and then cry even harder as months pass and that little person grows older without you. Your child will be sick—mumps, respiratory infections—while you remain helpless on the other side of the ocean.

Foreign courts and government agencies will change their rules every two weeks, and you must comply immediately. Despite your travel experience and cultural understanding, you’ll hit the walls in frustration over the slow, arcane functioning of your child’s birth country.

You’ll be at the mercy of the U.S. Embassy and its investigations and requests for “more paperwork, please.”

You’ll meet your child, and then leave her, and pieces of yourself, strewn across the Atlantic. You’ll spend a total of 60 hours on a plane and fly almost 32,000 miles.

You’ll become a highly visible family. Family, friends and strang-

ers will make assumptions about your child based on the color of her skin and country of origin. You'll be asked extremely personal questions about your child's birth parents, her HIV status, her medical history and her orphan status. This may happen in the grocery store in front of your child.

So why, then, did we adopt?

Because God calls us to defend the cause of the weak and fatherless with **unbridled ferocity**. This call is greater than biology. It supersedes our genetics. It is greater than investing money in an iPad or squirreling away college funds. It is greater than the childhood milestones we missed, the material things we needed to forgo, or even our privacy.

From China to Ethiopia to Brazil, God sees these kids hurting, malnourished, prostituted, exploited, and abandoned. How could we sit still and say, "These children aren't ours?"

Adoption is only one aspect of defending the weak in this world. But for us, Christianity is the story of an adoption happening again and again. We aren't related to God biologically. We don't share His genetics. We're imperfect. Maybe our birth families are completely messed up. Maybe our origins are murky. But in spite of our histories, God invited us into His family: temper tantrums, scabies, head lice and all.

Adoption is **hard**. But it demonstrates our personal story as Christians. It also speaks volumes to a world where children are devalued based on their gender, color, age and physical limitations.

But what a reward! At the end of the process—after the paperwork, tears and travel—there is a fantastic, engaging human being who is **your** child.

And then you start the process all over again!

Divine Arithmetic

Early in 1997, Jim and I learned that our fifth in-vitro fertilization attempt had succeeded. But in my seventh month, our doctor detected an extremely low heart rate for our baby, and rushed me to the hospital. Delivered by c-section on June 17, Jessica Lynn lived only 22 hours. We returned home childless on June 19.

In the long months after our loss, I nearly lost my faith in God. But two years later our domestically adopted daughter, Audrey, was born on June 17, and placed into our arms on June 19. While overjoyed to be a mom, I remained upset with God. Why did He allow her birthday to fall on a date so painful to me?

One year later, Jim and I received international adoption paperwork for a Bulgarian toddler. Birjan's birth date was June 19, which meant he'd been conceived soon after the loss of our first daughter. I began to realize that God had been graciously acting to fill our arms on the same dates He'd emptied them.

—Kim Crispin

Role Models

I lost my father as a 13-year-old. A number of College Church men entered my life, helping fill the “dad” role for me. I believe that placing these men in my life was God’s provision for my needs as a fatherless young man. That experience also helped move Ann and me towards seeing ourselves in the role of parents to children with no one who could provide for them. [Jeff now directs Kids Alive in the Dominican Republic, and is its vice president for operations for Latin America.]

My brother and my sister have both adopted two children. Some of these nieces and nephews are adopted from Guatemala; so as we considered from where to adopt our four, Guatemala was a natural choice. The process taught us patience and perseverance. We’ve also learned to understand the unique needs of our kids as adopted children growing up in a culture—Dominican Republic—which is neither their birth country, nor ours.

—Jeff VanDerMolen

Jim & Kathy Hansen’s Story

The first time Jim and Kathy walked into the baby room (for babies 12-14 months old) at the neighborhood orphanage their first thought was that they could never leave. There were about 30 kids in the room, two to a crib, and no adults or caregivers. When they walked in, every baby stood up in anticipation of being held or hugged. Between the two of them, they only had four arms. Even if they stayed all day, they couldn’t imagine giving every child the warmth and attention they longed for and needed.

When Jim held one child (or two), all the other children looked at him with a look that made his heart want to break. Sometimes they would let them all out onto the floor so that they’d all have a chance to crawl over and hug them; but it’s hard to keep track of 30 babies! Even then, the Hansens knew that the hour would

come when they’d have to put the babies back into their cribs.

The orphanage staff was doing all it could. The international organization that sponsored the home had recently and abruptly withdrawn its support. The director had to cut the staff back to the bare minimum. There were just enough workers to keep the children fed, change the diapers, and keep the place clean. No one had time to give the children the affection they needed. At night the director was alone, and if any child was sick, she had to stay up all night.

A missionary friend who knew the director asked the Hansens to volunteer as often as they could. At the end of many visits, as they walked home, the emotional drain was so intense that Jim often found himself wondering if he could ever go back again.

At that time, Jim and Kathy were engaged and serving as

missionaries in Bolivia. As they talked about the future, they agreed that after they were married they would look into adopting a child from the orphanage.

Cochabamba, Bolivia, like many cities in Latin America, faces the complicated and difficult problem of abandoned children or poor and broken homes that are unable to care for the children. While Bolivia is working very hard to take care of these children, there is no easy solution. One recent study estimated that one in four children in this city is growing up



without any parents.

Four years after they were married, Jim and Kathy began the process of adopting two children through an agency. By an unexpected coincidence, the agency worked with the same orphanage where they had volunteered. On the morning of December 24, 1995, Nicole (2½) and Matthew (5 months) came home to live with them. That was almost 16 years ago.

The home is now sponsored by a new international agency and the conditions have greatly improved. They have more staff and the facility itself has expanded.

The Hansen family seems to have come full cycle. Now Nicole goes on Saturdays, and during school vacation, to play with the little ones and show them affection. They thank God for those who help the orphans in their city, but most of all they thank Him for making them a family.

College Church families that have adopted from overseas also include *David and Mary Carlson, Stan and Faith Delacour, Kent and Kristen Hughes, Todd and Sue Kelly, Keith and Chris Litavsky, Greg and Jody Maas and Ed and Debbie Van Der Molen.*

Next steps to consider

Visit the website of Together for Adoption for resources on global orphan care. Check out entries under its conference exhibitors and ministries in the right-hand column: www.togetherforadoption.org

Take the next class College Church presents on adoption, tentatively scheduled for this fall or spring of 2013.

Attend a DVD adoption workshop: *If You Were Mine*, presented by Family Life Radio, P.O. Box 7111, Little Rock, AR, 72223, (800) 358-6329, www.familylife.com

Extended Families That Really Are

Children are a gift from the Lord . . . How joyful is the man whose quiver is full of them.

—Psalm 127:3, 5 (NLT)



Chris & Laura Jones' Story

In the late 1990s, Chris and Laura became aware of the orphan crisis in China, precipitated by its one-child policy. Chris remembers hearing Steven Curtis Chapman interviewed on Moody Radio about the “dying room” in Chinese orphanages. This crisis broke their hearts. They knew that adding to their already large family would be scary. But as they prayed, they became convinced that, at least for them, shaking off this thought would be disobedience.

After deciding on an agency, the Joneses assembled the required paperwork, and within a year were headed for China, to meet Mimi, their new eight-month-old daughter. Their biological children were then 7, 6, 4 and 3.

Six years later, the Joneses began feeling a nudge from God to adopt again. But their children were now 13, 12, 10, 9 and 6. Their initial response was laced with

fear. But they prayed, concluding that if God was calling them to adopt again, he'd take care of the what-ifs.

After searching, Chris and Laura were drawn to a face they saw on rainbowkids.org. She was the same age as their youngest daughter. But she also had Thalassemia Beta, a life-threatening blood disorder. They watched a video Rainbow Kids had prepared, interviewing other parents who'd adopted children from Asia with this disorder. That made the prospect seem less scary. They decided that until God closed the door, they'd move ahead. They contacted her agency.

Some days later they noticed on the agency's website another girl the same age, in the same orphanage, with the same blood disorder. They surmised that the two were regularly being taken together from the orphanage for blood transfusions. They began

to envision adopting two. If they were committing to take care of one's medical condition for life, they reasoned, why not two? In addition, it would probably be a comfort for the two to have each other.

They again decided to move forward until God closed the door. He appeared to do so right away. Chris called the agency and asked if they could adopt two at the same time. The social worker said no. She explained that Chinese law, at the time, didn't allow two children to leave the country with one family unless they were siblings.

The Joneses accepted that God intended to provide for this little girl some other way. But three weeks later, they received a phone call. The agency had called China, telling the authorities about their family, and they'd been granted permission to adopt both girls: Laine, then 6½ years old, and

Zinnia, 7.

It was a nine-month process to adopt the girls, from the first day they saw their photos on the computer screen until the day they hugged them in their arms. Now, the pair's presence daily blesses their family—making them crazier, louder and better!

The Joneses are currently pursuing their next adoption, of Luke, a nine-year-old from Ethiopia. Two other church families are adopting Luke's friends. Chris and Laura say they felt burdened about his being left behind. Since they see their home as not really theirs, and children as a reward, they'll be thrilled to see these friends reunited in Wheaton.

Now passionate about adoption, Chris and Laura lead a support group for couples adopting. They want their friends to take the risk, providing one of God's children with a family and, more importantly, Jesus.

What Adoption Adds

It makes everything better! It started back in the '70s with my husband David's adoption as an infant into a family that loved God and taught him about Jesus.

We praise God for placing Megan in our family in May of 2010. She has shown us the "softer" side of our boys. David and Aaron's love for her was instant the second she came through the door, and they delight in almost everything she does. And now not just one, but two children from China! We adopted Josie last December.

Adding two daughters to our family has added more laundry, more food, more doctors appointments, more seats in the car and quite a bit more noise! It has added lots more hugs and kisses, funny stories, chasing around the house, books to read, prayers to say and friends to play with. It has added opportunities for our family to learn about God's heart for orphans and our part in caring for them.

—Julie Melilli

A Complete Surprise

When we adopted Jake and John, we knew that adoption always comes from a broken situation. But we naively thought that providing Christian love, support and training would make up for the brokenness in their biological families.

Instead, our family has been re-shaped in ways we never could have imagined. Our children have all experienced personal strain and suffering because of our decision to adopt. Sometimes it's a daily struggle to keep our son and the rest of us safe. Going places or doing things as a family has proven difficult because of his unpredictable, extreme behavior.

While we mourn the loss of the "ideal" family we once hoped for, we praise God for not leaving our sons hopeless on the streets of Guatemala. And while we don't know what the future holds for our family, we are confident that God is still working with us in our own brokenness

—Tina Simpson

David & Tina Simpson's Story

Tina was adopted as an infant and always thought she'd adopt children one day. She and Dave didn't pursue adoption before trying to have children themselves. But with both of Tina's pregnancies, she had a strong desire for two boys. Both times they had girls.

After a few years passed, friends of theirs adopted two boys from Russia. It was the first time the Simpsons had heard of anyone adopting two children at once. They started praying about adoption, asking questions, researching on the internet, and attending local seminars.

They went through the slow adoption process one step at a time. First God pointed them to international adoption. Since fertility wasn't a factor for them, they believed God had two children somewhere in the world for whom they could provide a home.

Their second step was picking

an agency to facilitate the adoption. God led them to an agency in the west that shared their passion and desire to help the world's orphans. After vetting the agency, Dave and Tina wrote the first check in January, 2002, launching the formal adoption process.

Their third step was picking a country. This was back when the scandal of eastern European orphanages was in the news, and they initially planned to adopt from Romania. Ironically, Romania closed its borders to international adoption right after they began the process. Their agency had just started facilitating Guatemalan adoptions, and suggested that they pray about Guatemala. They were impressed by the love and care the Guatemalans, even in extreme poverty, provided their orphans. Another plus was that while most Americans wanted Guatemalan girls, they wanted boys.

Next, they began to pray about the children they'd eventually get. The agency asked them to indicate their preferences. Did they want older kids or babies? . . . A sibling group? . . . Orphans who'd been abandoned or children whose mothers used adoption to legally send their children to America?

After much prayer, the Simpsons decided they shouldn't attempt to pick their children, but take whichever two boys were referred to them.

About a year later, in December 2002, after mounds of paperwork and much prayer, they brought Jacob and John home to their family. Tina soon discovered how difficult it was to go anywhere with two babies plus two young children in freezing weather. They couldn't all leave the house together till the end of March!

Dave and Tina firmly believe that God placed each of their chil-

dren with them. They love them all, and would make any sacrifice for them. But their world was turned upside down a few years ago when they discovered that one of their sons has a significant mental illness, coming over him, with little or no warning like an uncontrollable seizure.

Dave and Tina have been challenged and pushed beyond their limits. Over the past two years, they've spent all their extra resources, time and energy trying to help their son and the rest of their family.

On the positive side, their friends have been wonderfully supportive. They say that the College Church pastors and staff have always been understanding and a source of encouragement. And they're trusting God to continue leading them one step at a time, as He did when they began the adoption process.

A Fuller Life Experience

Every adoption is really both a happy and a sad story. Happy, since an orphaned child with a dim future is given a fresh start, resources, protection and love to build his or her life. Sad, because of feeling rejected by birth parents, incomplete bonding with the adoptive parents, and inability to show or express gratitude, to name a few. Adopting deepened our worldview, making us more aware both of the impact of the fall of man, and of what the Lord, us by His grace, has done for us.

Earthly adoption is a ministry: giving more than we receive, but reaping blessing. Loving and nurturing two ten-year-old girls, Dale and I have watched them grow and develop into adulthood to the extent of their abilities. In the process, our family has been altered: dealing with sibling complexities and with disability and discipline issues, acquiring larger housing, parenting years longer, curtailing later-life travels, and delaying retirement living.

—Susan Kemp

Heart Work

For years I'd bring up the topic of adoption with Jeffery. He finally agreed to pray and talk with a family friend at College Church who had adopted years ago. But even with that, Jeff just didn't feel called.

Our four children begged, checked out adoption books from the library; wrote persuasive essays about the top ten reasons we should adopt, and adeptly threw it into any conversation they could. However, God needed to do the moving in his heart, not us. So I placed this desire in the Lord's hands and prayed. Both spouses need to be on board, and I wasn't going to nag and coerce.

Well, God did the heart work in Jeffery. One afternoon in the fall of 2010, Jeffery walked in the door and was greeted with a joyous bear hug from Jonathan. In that moment God spoke: "You have more love to give" came loud and clear. Every rational reason melted away; faith took root.

—Clarinda James

Jeff & Clarinda James's Story

The seeds of adoption were planted in the James's lives early.

Clarinda, a missionary kid, lived on the jungle island of Borneo. One December while she was six or seven, her dad headed on his motorcycle to the wharf to find a Christmas tree. Returning hours later, he called out, "Come meet your new baby brother!" But instead of a boy, they met a tiny, wide-eyed gibbon peering from a cage strapped on the bike. Mom was relieved. The children were delighted. But Clarinda secretly wished it had been a brother.

Jeffery grew up in Pennsylvania, where his mom and dad had been foster parents since he was in grade school. Having children of different races in his life, taught him how to love and care for them.

As a high-schooler, Clarinda worked one summer at a Filipino orphanage. She remembers loving

every moment with those beautiful children, craving love and attention.

Later, during Clarinda's single days as a teacher, a friend working at an orphanage in Romania, asked her to come teach the staff how to run a VBS. She and a friend journeyed to Eastern Europe, their suitcases stuffed with craft supplies from Pacesetters (the former singles' group at College Church). There, in stark contrast to the state-run orphanages that made Romania infamous, they found orphans living in family-style homes. Clarinda remembers the joyful squeals of the children in the swings as she pushed, and how they loved learning about God.

For Clarinda, as a mom, these images were buried for years under the diaper bag and car seats. With a family of four—large by American standards—people assumed the James family was

complete. The diaper bag vanished long ago; the last car seat was retired this year.

But they'd struggled to have children, begging God for them. How could they then turn around and say, "Okay, thank you very much, Lord; we'd like to be in charge now," shutting off any possibility for more?

In November 2010, after attending the College Church Thanksgiving service in which Annie Wilson shared her testimony, they decided to read ***Adopted for Life*** each night. As they read, they asked God to show them how He wanted them to be involved. By the time they finished, the Lord had confirmed He was inviting them to by faith begin the adoption process.

The Jamses are now in the paper pregnancy stage! Their future child(ren) will come to them from the Philippines: one or two between the ages of three and

eight. Their home study is at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) awaiting approval before their placing agency can send their dossier to the Philippines.

Adopting has changed their lives already. As Jeffery and Clarinda have prayed, they're no longer content with the status quo; they want to live risky, radical lives for Christ. And hearts of compassion are blooming in their children.

They found God trustworthy in the past as they sold their home and moved, helping form the core group of the Naperville church plant. Now, they say, trusting Him to provide the money to cover adoption and travel expenses is *huge*. They're eager to see how He'll provide. Their children have already watched God do the seemingly impossible, providing an unexpected money gift just when it was needed to pay for the adoption's home-study portion.

College Church families expanded through adoption also include *Todd and Cindy Augustine, Kent and Cindy Cochrum, Stan and Elaine Dodds, Jeff and Mary Nelson and Terry and Vonnie Van Someren.*

If you're getting serious

□ **Join a support group** for those considering or venturing into adoption. *Chris and Laura Jones lead an active group at (630) 221-8905 or ljones500@yahoo.com. Others may form.*

□ **Apply for a home study**, the essential first step for domestic or foreign adoption. *Out-of-state agencies may not proceed with you until they have received your home study.*



In 2008, Brian and Warrie Blackburn, our missionaries with Mercy Ships, launched their own mercy voyage, bringing twins Alyssa and Addison aboard.

Read their story in the section about "Couples Going Nuclear."