

**In the Heartland
With Bishop Pates**

The Gift of Adoption

I was recently on a “road trip” in northern Iowa listening to Iowa Public Radio. Two women who had the same birth mother were speaking of their relationship which had just been forged in the last year. The older was 70, had a family of three and had enjoyed a robust married life. The younger sister was 67 and also had enjoyed a life with basically “no regrets.”

The older had been placed for adoption by her birth mother who at the time was facing a severe crisis in her life. She was willing to allow her daughter to be adopted in everyone’s best interest. The adopting couple provided a warm and nurturing environment characterized by generous love. In turn, the adoptee grew and eventually experienced a good life.

The mother of these two women had died several years before the sisters met. All came together and after growing up in the adopted home, the elder sister was blessed with children and a loving husband.

The adopted woman never having seen her birth mother was asked, “What would you say to your Mother if you came upon her face to face?” I would say: “Thank you. Thank you for the courage of giving birth instead of taking the route of abortion whether legal or not. And I would introduce her to my loving children and grandchildren who are privileged to carry at least partially her genetic makeup. My children are of great benefit to church and society. A decision not to go the route of abortion insured their very existence.”

Adoption is a respectful and life-giving alternative to abortion. It clearly demonstrates that a human being is present from the moment of conception. We are very much aware and

sympathetic to the struggles of parents who experience a pregnancy that is highly problematic for a variety of reasons.

Adoption provides the alternative that resolves many issues. The very first is that the child will have the opportunity to be loved and to experience presumably a stable home environment. The birth mother, simply because of the mother-child relationship, may feel highly conflicted but will hopefully come to realize that this decision allows her to work through whatever issues she is confronting. For the parents who are adopting, it is a dream realized. They want children to share love and to give of themselves as nature urges them on to embrace family life.

One issue that surfaces is that the birth mother often feels pushed by contemporary culture to keep the child because it is “hers.” The primary option, if this is not possible, is to abort the child and thus address the problem with finality. One of the great challenges of our day is to emphasize the independent identity of the child and to highlight that not only should a stigma not be attached to adoption but rather great praise and appreciation should be accorded the mother for a mature and highly loving decision. It is a love in which the best interests of all are upheld. As the older sister in the story beginning this piece so accurately stated, the proper response is “Thank you!”

We might legitimately ask in our day are there prospective parents interested in adopting? Diana L. Baltimore, Ph.D., founder and executive director of the National Center for Adoption notes: “In the United States, 1 million women wish to adopt an infant but only 9,000 to 12,000 U.S. born infants are voluntarily placed for adoption each year.” Catholic Charities of Des Moines has a backlog of approximately 250 such parents. Recently, Catholic Charities has only placed children in the low single digits every year because of the scarcity of babies.

But Catholic Charities is determined and its employees feel it’s important to take leadership in this area – addressing the unfortunate restraints culture exercises in impeding adoptions. In so doing, Catholic Charities is assuring its root identity insofar as the agency was founded in 1924 to facilitate adoptions.

Catholic Charities, through its board leadership, is in the process of establishing a separate corporation which would be exclusively designed to deal with adoptions. Staffing envisioned at this juncture are a pregnancy-adoption counselor and a marketing expert to make known the adoption option and to counter the negative cultural perspective.

The first step has been taken in selecting a pregnancy counselor and a marketing professional is being sought. It is anticipated that an “adoption advocate” from each parish will be recruited to make certain this positive message reaches the grass roots. In addition, partnerships will be developed with different clinics, counseling centers and medical providers.

In launching this effort Catholic Charities is going to experience stiff headwinds as it develops and implements its renewed vision. You might hopefully ask, what can I do? The very first is to speak positively and with compassionate encouragement about adoption when disproportionate attention can be focused on the woman as opposed to the child. Opinion making is a critical contribution in our time. We need to clearly espouse that adoption satisfies the needs of all parties involved. Secondly, you should consider volunteering with the organization being established by Catholic Charities. It is an opportunity to open the door for children to enjoy stability and love.

Adoption is a win for the pregnant mother. Adoption is a win for the child. Adoption is a win for the parents who chose the path of adopting.