

Respect life: Offer mothers-to-be support, not judgment

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



Support networks needed if we really want abortion to come to an end

Doctors can offer many tactics to help childless couples

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Dr. Courtney Sick, a Catholic, shares tips for couples struggling with infertility

Research, open mind crucial for interracial adoption

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Interracial adoption includes different races, but same abundant love

The joy, laughter and pain of reuniting with birth parents

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Adopted child, parents and birth mother share story of reunion after 18 years

Mothers speak: adoption ups and downs

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They adopted a daughter through Catholic Adoption Services and are waiting to adopt again. Her name has been changed to protect the family's privacy.

What is the worst comment you've heard as an adoptive mother?

I think the one that bothered me the most was after we adopted our daughter is "Well, now you're going to get pregnant and have a child of our own. " We'd say, "Well, we have a child of our own, our daughter. "

What do you wish people would understand about adoptive parents?

People sometimes will ask us about our daughter's real parents. Parenting is not just biology. Parenting is the love, the compassion, time and resources it takes to raise a child. Being a real parent is about the sleepless nights, the skinned knees, the doctor's visits and the first day of school. So when you ask about our daughter's real parents, please don't be surprised when we say you're looking at them.

Best advice for people looking to adopt?

Adopting a child can be an emotional roller coaster. My advice is to hold on tight, keep your eye on the prize, follow the lead of your adoption specialist and trust the process. All children are gifts from God and I truly believe that you receive the child you're supposed to receive.

Birth mother

Sara, who preferred to use her first name only, lives in Central Arkansas and made an adoption plan for her child after he was born in January 2016.

What is the worst comment you've heard as a birth mother?

"How could you give up your own child?" I wasn't shocked because that's everybody's first question. I was eager to explain to them it's not necessarily "giving up," it's giving a better life for the child and also for myself. I wasn't ready to raise a kid; of course, people don't know the whole story.

What do you wish people would understand about birth mothers?

That they're doing what they do out of love and not because they're irresponsible or that they don't care, because we do care, that's why we're doing what we're doing. They are still a big part of the child's life (in an open adoption) and with the adoptive parents.

Best advice for a birth mother intending to place her child for adoption?

It's OK to do adoption and it's not making you a bad person in doing that and you are not alone. I wish I would have known that I wasn't alone. It is a brave thing to do. Just don't be scared to tell somebody about the situation and ask for help because there are people out there that will help. They (should) have support because it's hard if you don't have support.

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What you need to know about adoption

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There is no orphanage for the agency. Birth parents either reach out to the adoption agency or a local hospital or pregnancy resource center notifies Catholic Adoption Services if a birth mother wants to place her child.

Antje Harris, director of Catholic Adoption Services, shared five tips that adoptive parents and birth parents need to know before going forward with the adoption process.

ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Am I emotionally ready to parent a child who is not biologically related to me?

Because many looking to adopt may have struggled with infertility and miscarriages, it's important to work through grief and get to a place of being "ready to be a parent, not a biological parent, but to open my heart and be a parent," Harris said.

"Sometimes when they come to the office and they're too sad, it's understandable, but they might need a little more counseling, a little bit more time, and more healing," she said. "... We can share information, so they know what the process is, but it might be too soon. "

- Am I comfortable with the agency and staff I'm considering? Have we established a relationship of trust?

"We have to trust each other. They have to know that I will give them every bit of information I can that's not identifying" about a birth family," Harris said. "... So do they trust me, do they feel comfortable working with us, are we the right agency for them? And maybe we're not for a variety of reasons. "

- What are their policies on openness in adoption?

"We try to be extremely clear, not only with the written information, but when there's a particular birth mom and what she expects, like she'd like to be able to meet them later in the year or around the first birthday or wants pictures, lots of little notes, or wants to give a gift. We try to match up what the adoptive parents are willing to do with what the birth mom is asking for," Harris said.

- What are the fees? And what personal finance information will an agency need?

"We have (an) exhaustive document that we go over with them ... we only ask for money for specific services up front," unlike other agencies, Harris said. There are smaller fees, including an application fee, home study fee and a one-time profile fee. There is no larger placement fee until a family is going to court to legally adopt after a child is born and in their care.

Harris said families can apply for adoption tax credits available as well.

Harris said her agency has “comprehensive financial background forms” to make sure an adoptive family is financially able to care for a child.

- What kind of long term support can I expect from the staff?

“We are there for them, both the adoptive parents and the birth parents. We want them to turn to us if they have issues. I hear from adoptive and birth parents from many years in the past and we’re there for them,” Harris said.

Other tips: Harris said the agency looks for adoptive families who are physically healthy and do not smoke. An adoptive family does not have to be Catholic.

“If (a birth mother) doesn’t care and is just looking for a Christian family, we do have a preference for Catholic families,” Harris said.

The agency has enough adoptive families at this time, but would encourage birth parents wishing to create an adoption plan for their child to consider choosing Catholic Adoption Services.

“We are really not looking for more adoptive parents at this time as we have a substantial waiting list. We plan to open our list again after we have made additional placements with our great waiting families,” Harris said. “We are hoping that birth parents would like to consider placing their child with our agency when they understand more about what we and our families have to offer. ”

BIRTH PARENTS

- Am I making my decision to place my child for adoption of my own free will and not being pressured?

“Sometimes there’s a birth father that wants them to place and they don’t want to,” Harris said, as well as parents pressuring a birth mother either way. We help a birth mother make this difficult decision to place or to parent her child of her own free will. ”

- What assistance will the staff and agency provide for me?

Harris said, “We can help with some rental assistance, food, clothing and reasonable expenses. We especially provide counseling, medical referral and legal assistance. ”

Other expenses like a car aren’t provided by CAS. Medical care is provided almost entirely by Medicaid, her insurance or through Catholic Adoption Services.

- Will I be able to select the adoptive family and meet them?

“Yes, they have a big say so. If they look at a profile and that’s not what they want,” that family is no longer considered, Harris said. A birth mother is also able to meet an adoptive family if that is clearly decided upon by all parties involved. Adoptive parents are very open to meeting with the birth mother, Harris added.

- What is the level of openness going forward?

“When somebody says they want an open adoption, they usually just mean pictures, letters and an occasional visit. We do not do adoptions where they are in and out of each other’s homes. They don’t share their last names, their phone numbers, their cells, addresses or emails. It’s all through the agency. So if a birth mom wants more openness than what we provide then we are not the right resource. ”

Other tips: Birth fathers do have parental rights. A father can sign up for free with the Putative Father’s Registry, through the state Health Department. Any man can register if they believe they have fathered a child that may be placed for adoption. He then has a right to notice that an adoption is pending. He may also contact an attorney about his paternal rights.

“We want him to have peace about the adoption too. We have some great birth father’s receiving pictures and counseling as well,” Harris said. However, “if he has not provided support to her while she’s been pregnant, it is possible for the court to terminate the father’s rights. ”

There are circumstances where an agency would protect the privacy of a birth mother from a birth father, particularly for the safety of a mother or child.

A birth mother has a 10-day time period after a child is born to decide whether she wants to go forward with the adoption process. The baby is can be with a “cradle care family,” a select group of licensed foster parents through Catholic Adoption Services who care for babies in their home during the waiting period. Birth parents can waive the 10-day waiting period to five days, Harris said.

If a birth mother decides not to place her child for adoption, even if the agency has provided care for her throughout the pregnancy, there is never pressure to go forward with an adoption. “Only the birth mother can make the decision to place her child for adoption,” Harris said.

For more information about Catholic Adoption Services, visit catholicadoptionservices.org.

Note: These policies are those of Catholic Adoption Services in Arkansas. Policies and contact agreements vary depending on the agency and the circumstances of the people involved.

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Diocese hopes to raise \$2 million in CASA pledges

written by Malea Hargett |



Diocese sets \$2 million goal for CASA pledges to support ministries