

“THE FORGOTTEN OPTION” WHY ADOPTION MATTERS

The e-mails kept flooding my inbox, several per day for well over a week. No, they were not advertising a special fare sale on Expedia or the latest offerings from Rockport shoes (I get plenty of those!). Rather, they were at once **heartwarming and heartbreaking stories** of hope, challenge, prayers and trust in God. Every single e-mail or phone message made reference to the incredible events following the 5:15 p.m. Mass here on that bitterly cold evening of January 4, the feast of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. They all shared one thing in common. Each was written by couples sharing their personal story, including bearing the cross of infertility combined with their **deep faith** in God. Each ended with a heartfelt request for any possible assistance with respect to the possibility of adopting this newborn. Several were written on behalf of couples, but most were written by the couples themselves, and what an eye opener it was for me.

Adoption can be a very time consuming, heartbreaking, roller-coaster ride for would-be parents, and each time that I read the latest e-mail, I felt more and more helpless. How could I have missed this? Didn't I know, even generally speaking, the number of people waiting to adopt a child? Perhaps I did, but now they had names, they had heartfelt stories. This weekend, it is fitting to pause and reflect on an aspect of creating a culture of life too often overlooked, that of a woman's decision to place her own baby up for **adoption**, as well as the journey of would be parents who desire to welcome a child into their homes.

The majority of adoptions are facilitated through private agencies, especially with respect to newborns. Still, as I learned recently, the state is involved in plenty of them. Of the nearly 500 children waiting for adoption under the auspices of the state of Minnesota, about 25% are under six years of age. But largely due to the prevalence of abortion, some statistics really stand out. In the mid-1970s, as many as 49,000 American newborns were placed for adoption each year. In 2007, just 18,078 domestic newborn, non-relative adoptions were registered. That is a significant drop. Why has adoption become **the forgotten option**? In the past decade, it is accurate to say that abortions dwarf adoptions by 12 to 1. But in reality if one removes the older children from the equation, and focus on newborns only, the ratio is far greater than that. Domestically, the percentage of infants given up for adoption has declined from 9 percent of those born before 1973 to just 1 percent of those born between 1996 and 2002.

Particular challenges have befallen Catholic adoption agencies, as many have run afoul over state regulations, including those that insist upon adapting the organizational rules to reflect the reality of same-sex couples who seek adoption services. Many have stepped aside from the adoption arena rather than violate their deeply held beliefs on marriage and family. “In the name of tolerance, we're not being tolerated,” said Bishop Thomas Paprocki of Springfield, IL when the diocese stopped altogether providing adoption services, rather than compromise religious doctrine.

Obviously, I'll never be able to know what goes through the minds and hearts of mothers who are considering abortion, how they may feel as though they have no viable alternatives. We Catholics must clearly and unequivocally proclaim from the mountaintops that indeed **there are alternatives**, and good ones. Adoption is a beautiful one, though it too must be a very difficult decision. But I can think of **nothing more loving** than to place a newborn child with a well prepared, loving couple, willing and able to offer the very best care. A birth mother, far from turning her back on her child, is giving the child all that she herself, due to circumstances, may not be in a position to provide. Far from abandonment, it is the most compassionate of choices.

Forty-four years ago today, **January 22, 1973**, our country received the infamous *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision. We pause to pray assiduously for a greater respect for all life and consider the best ways in which to promote a **Culture of Life**. Reading (and yes, re-reading) the e-mails from those directly impacted by various health factors that led them to pursue adoption, I was moved beyond words. Why I was so **tone deaf** in the past to the plight of those desiring children? I honestly do not know, but I think I am forever changed, at least on this count. Some of the individuals who wrote to me included those who chose **not** to try artificial means such as *in vitro* fertilization, precisely because they have such respect for the Church's teaching on procreation.

In many cases, it increased their pain of not being able to conceive and yet they have remained faithful. That cold Wednesday night has forever changed me in some very significant ways.

- A penny saved... My very first earnings were placed in my baby book. Dated July 23, 1966– 3¢ for washing a neighbor’s car. That is just \$0.22 today, so clearly, I was oblivious to child labor laws!
- Speaking of pennies—the admission to the **Minnesota State Fair** is increasing by \$1, to \$14 this year. In what might be a rare example of youthful rebellion, I once paid my State Fair admission entirely with pennies I had saved. Despite my protestations that it was legal tender, the gate workers were not amused. My solution...buy your tickets early, as pre-fair discounted tickets are just \$11.
- Did you know? Approximately 90% of fetuses diagnosed with Down syndrome in utero are lost to abortion. Once again, **all life is precious**, every single child is a gift from God. Today is the MCCL Annual March for Life. Join young people and families in urging state and federal lawmakers to protect defenseless, unborn human beings. The march will begin at 2:00 p.m. on the State Capitol grounds in Saint Paul.
- **Sister Mary Mark Mahony, CSJ** died last week, on her 106th birthday, nonetheless! That’s right– she was born in 1911, attended St. Joseph’s Academy down the street on Marshall and Western and taught for 35 years in many schools in this Archdiocese, and later worked in parish and retreat ministry. In her retirement, at 87, she took to writing letters to death row inmates all across the country. Well done, good and faithful servant. May she rest in peace.
- **Theology on Tap** continues its sessions at O’Gara’s on Snelling Ave. this Wednesday. All young adults 18-39 are invited to attend the social at 6:30, followed by the featured speaker at 7:30 p.m.
- Food for thought in playoff season: “When Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes subordinate to a secular concept of ‘weekend’ dominated by such things as entertainment and sport, people stay **locked within a horizon so narrow** that they can no longer see the heavens” (Pope John Paul II, to Australian bishops 26 March 2004, cf. *Dies Domini*, 31 May 1998).

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector