



Students serve Christ through serving foster kids

By **Kathy Kinnan**

[Front page photo: Volunteer students (and one of their moms) from Whitefield Academy plant new flowers at the Show-Me campus.]

What qualities must our young people need to be equipped for the world they will face as adults? More than a degree and work skills, we all are called to have a transformed life; one which is not just about making a living but living for a higher purpose. For knowledge to become wisdom, it must be experienced and understood through God's lens: our Christian faith is the foundation to every aspect of life and thought.

For Whitefield Academy, located in the Kansas City metro, that means serving at the Show-Me Christian Youth Home in La Monte, Mo. This service trip provides each student with the opportunity to connect with the three things central to that growth: Christ, character, and community. On a week-long mission trip, students connect with kids just like themselves

— in age, in interest, and even dreams for the future. The difference: for most of Show-Me kids is there isn't always a safe, stable home and family ready to care for them if they leave. The chance to serve other kids has opened Whitefield's students' eyes to the grace and blessings in their own lives and to the responsibility that each of us has to help others.

Stepping Out of their Comfort Zones

Whitefield Academy, a classical Christian Pre-K through 12th grade school, has long sought to provide students with opportunities to stretch themselves and their faith through the avenue of mission trips and serve days in their community.

Approximately, 15 years ago, Whitefield was looking for a safe envi-



ronment for their seventh graders to do a service trip. The school had tried several types of missions, including serving in Kansas City's urban core, but none seemed to be the right fit. Parents began hunting for a new safe, service-oriented opportunity that would be conducive to help their seventh graders get out of their comfort zones and be the "hands and feet of Christ." Their search led them to Show-Me and they have been traveling to the small rural community in Central Missouri every spring since then.

Work Hard. Play Hard.

We hope and pray the benefits of our week each year bring reciprocal benefits. Yes, we do work for Show-Me such as weeding, painting, cleaning, and sorting. Our "sevies" have dug ditches, planted gardens, cleaned bathrooms, babysat for children, and washed puppies. We play hard too, organizing a soccer match against the Show-Me team, joining their track practice, playing volleyball and basketball and so much more.

Our trips have evolved over time with the students taking on more lead-

ership roles. They help in the planning of their trip, they give the nightly devotions, and plan and lead games. They see God stretching them to do things they didn't think they could do. They bond to their classmates and get to know their teachers in a way that being in a classroom doesn't accomplish.

Cultivating Something Greater

Our juniors and seniors talk frequently with such fondness of their week at Show-Me. We even have had a set of twin sisters continue their relationship with Show-Me after they graduated and come back year after year on their own.

Our students' time at Show-Me builds character, teaches what a hard day's work is like, and moves them outside their comfort zone to meet people and do things they've never done before. They learn how to give and not get something material for it in return, just the satisfaction of doing a job well.

Just Like Me

Our students get to encounter children that have different needs and some similar to their own; They often say the kids are "just like me" in terms of interests. The students realize just how much they have been given, and also what a responsibility they have to give back — "To whom much is given, much is required." I believe the relationship that Whitefield Academy has developed through the years with Show-Me Christian Youth Home has helped to raise a group of people to love God, love others, and to give unselfishly. We couldn't ask for more than that.

—Kathy Kinnan is Lead Teacher at Whitefield Academy in Kansas City.

Saint Francis Keeps Kids in Prayer

Kevin, 13, would like to become a professional chef when he grows up and has been apprenticing at a local soul food restaurant. He also likes to play guitar, swim, watch movies, ride his bike, and visit the library. Eager and enthusiastic, Kevin makes friends easily and performs well in school — although he sometimes gets in trouble for talking too much. Friendly and polite, with a beautiful smile and an easy sense of humor, he gets along with just about everybody.

Several of his siblings have already been adopted, and Kevin would like a forever family of his own. He needs a loving family that understands his unique situation and parents to guide and support him.

Kevin is just one of the hundreds of children awaiting adoption in Kansas. He's also one of the children featured in Saint Francis Community Services' Fostering in Faith program. As a ministry, Saint Francis believes that one of the most powerful acts we can perform on behalf of children is to hold them in our prayers. In our own families, we pray for our children all the time — but sadly, many children have no family and no one to pray for them.

Fostering in Faith arose from that realization. We know that most congregations and religious organizations have within their fellowship groups of people to whom God has given a spirit of intercessory prayer. Fostering in Faith ensures that children desperate for "for-

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Practical advice to avoid pitfalls and dispel fears



RANDY BOHLENDER
Senior Pastor at
Hillcrest Covenant
Church

viewpoint

BEING PRO-ADOPTION WITHOUT BEING SCAMMED

Adoption is an idea that rests in the heart of many couples but fails to come to fruition for a variety of reasons. Sometimes fear holds them back. Hearing stories of fraud causes them to avoid taking those first steps.

Recent news articles have told the stories of families who have lost significant sums of money in adoption proceedings. In some cases, the expectant mother bilked them out of funds. In others, the agencies closed down after accepting payments.

Whatever the reason, it's horribly discouraging to people who are trying their best to adopt and willing to lay out significant amounts of money to do so. The result is even more people who decide it's not worth trying.

If you're considering adoption and want to limit your financial risk, there are a few steps you can take. Due to all the variables, it's impossible to risk-proof an adoption process, but you can put guards in place so you limit your potential loss and insure that you're being good stewards of the finances God's given you.

CONTROL THE HOME STUDY PROCESS

The first step in adoption is getting a home study. It is a written assessment of your home, history, and preparedness for adoption and will be necessary to file for adoption with the court. There is no way around this, and a good social worker will actually help prepare you for your adoption.

Make sure you are getting the right home study. Home studies for foster-to-adopt, international adoption, and private

adoption are all different. If you are going through a private agency, make sure you own your home study when it is over and if you choose to go to another agency, you don't need to pay for the home study to be released.

A home study will cost you up front. Someone is investing significant time in writing it for you, so they need to be paid for that – but once you pay for it, you should be able to use it elsewhere for a similar adoption rather than be locked in with one agency. Ask how many signed copies you will receive and if they insist that they don't give home studies directly to families, go elsewhere.

AVOID ALA CARTE MARKETING CHARGES

Some agencies will offer you greater visibility in front of expectant moms if you pay a substantial fee up front. That's a huge red flag – trust God to get you in the right spot rather than paying huge sums for websites or specific ads that highlight your family. Those dollars are hard to justify.

Direct marketing, Craigslist ads, even Facebook pages promoting your availability to adopt are more often invitations to being scammed rather than helpful in connecting with an expectant mother.

BE CAREFUL ABOUT EARLY MATCHES

It's not unusual to have an expectant woman approach us when she's only 8-12 weeks pregnant, asking to see family profiles so she can choose a family to adopt her child. We are happy to help care for her in the process, but we don't match expectant moms and adoptive parents until the beginning of the third trimester.

At match, most agencies charge estimated fees for the care of the expectant mom. Many states have relatively modest limits on those amounts, but some do not. A



large number of agencies match early to collect those funds up front, knowing the expectant mother may or may not choose to go forward. If she chooses not to make an adoption plan, the expectant family forfeits those funds.

ASK QUESTIONS

Once you are matched, you will most likely need to pay fees. Ask pointedly, if the expectant mother decides not to go through with her plan, what happens to those funds? Some of the fees will be unrecoverable (birth mother expenses) but your match fee should not necessarily be forfeited. Many agencies will offer you a credit on your next match. A few will offer a refund under unique circumstances.

In cases where families are not offered a cash refund, it does not mean they are been scammed. The agency has done all the work they were able to do in caring for the expectant mother, counseling, preparing you, etc. There is inherent risk in adoption that cannot be entirely mitigated, but that is true of any worthwhile pursuit.

Adoption is not easy or without pitfalls. Even so, it is a beautiful expression of the heart of God and a key part of standing for life. May the grace of God rest on those who say yes.

Randy Bohlander and his wife, Kelsey, have ten children, six of which were adopted. They founded Zoe's House Adoption Agency. He recently became the Senior Pastor of Hillcrest Covenant Church in Kansas City.



The foster care crisis is ours and now is the time to save it

By **Robert R. Duke**

The decision to foster a child brings great challenge and great reward. You become the stabilizing force in a life disrupted by turbulent times. Knowing that reunification with the birth family is the goal, you open your home and heart. And you fall in love.

Several years ago, my wife and I embarked on this adventure. Today our family includes two biological sons, an adopted daughter, and a foster daughter who joined our family at three months old. She just turned two and likely will be reunited with her birth family soon. Saying good-bye will break our hearts, yet we are not called to an easy path—we are called to be faithful.

I can say unequivocally that we sense a calling on our lives to care for these little ones. Children living right in our cities and towns who have no one to hold them, take them to a park, or put a warm meal on the table—this trumps many things that command more attention. Children represent the future. They represent the hope and

possibility of our communities, our churches, and our nation. All people, regardless of faith tradition, must come together to advocate for these children.

Since November is National Adoption Month, religious leaders must begin cultivating a massive inter-faith movement to target not only adoption but also the need for foster care. On any given day, approximately 402,000 live in foster care in the United States, and on average, these children remain in state care for nearly two years with eight percent of children enduring five or more years. We must do better than this.

Recently, a Jewish friend, who works for a foster-adoption agency, and I discussed how our faith backgrounds shape our views on how our communities should pursue foster parenting. The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament for Christians) includes several verses about taking care of those who are parentless (Isaiah 1:17, "...learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."). This provides very

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ever families" are remembered and held in prayer by our faith communities.

Each month, Saint Francis sends participating congregations a photo and brief biography of a child who needs faithful, caring people to pray for him or her. The biography includes a prayer composed specifically for that child to help guide you in prayer. Congregations typically include the material in their Sunday bulletin or distribute it to their members so they can pray for the child at home if they wish.

Your prayers can transform the lives of these beloved children of God and bless the lives of the families who adopt them. To learn more, visit www.fosteringinfaith.org.

To meet Saint Francis children in need of a permanent, loving family, visit www.st-francis.org/adoption.

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