



BECAUSE WE ARE CATHOLIC

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN CALIFORNIA SERVES AND ADVOCATES FOR THE POOR, VULNERABLE AND THOSE IN NEED NOT BECAUSE THEY ARE CATHOLIC, BUT *because we are Catholic.*



“ADOPTION IS A VERY GENEROUS WAY TO BECOME PARENTS. ADOPTING A CHILD IS AN ACT OF LOVE, OFFERING THE GIFT OF A FAMILY TO SOMEONE WHO HAS NONE.”

– Pope Francis

Year of Mercy- Foster Care Crisis in California

The phone always seemed to ring in the middle of night. “Can you take just one more? It will just be for one night.” The answer was always yes then cookies and milk was set out.

The children were often petrified when they arrived at the door. But a loving smile, a nice bed, clean pajamas and a bedtime story calmed their fears.

Jan Potts, a parishioner at St. Charles of Borromeo in Livermore, was just out of college and working for Social Services of Shasta County when she met two elderly widows who faithfully accepted foster children on that critical first night. Their kind acts had a lasting effect on Jan.

Later in life, happily married and raising her son, Jan and her husband Bill began the journey to become foster parents themselves. Within months they began helping children in need. “I was inspired by what those women did and I knew I could offer a child, if just for a short time, that stability and care.”

With over 60,000 vulnerable children in California, the foster system constantly struggles to find them suitable homes.

Foster families can step in and fill this need while parents or other relatives work to regain custody. One of the first things prospective foster parents learn in class is that the primary goal is reunification with parents or other family members.



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Friends from their parish always asked Jan how she could say goodbye to a child she had grown to love. Jan explains: “I knew that they would not be staying forever. I felt called to care for them during this transition and do my best to love them and make them feel safe.”

Foster care is handled individually by counties in California. The system is constantly altered to meet the needs of these children. Recently in Orange County, a law went into effect that prohibits a child from staying in a group home for more than ten days. This law caused social services to get more “creative” with their outreach efforts.

Orange County Social Services reached out to the Diocese of Orange to see if the two could join forces to bring awareness to this important issue. Michael Donaldson is the director for the Office of Pastoral Care for Families in the diocese and was eager to help children in their county.

“Immediately I knew we could promote this in our parishes and with Catholics making up 40 percent of the county, we can reach a lot of people,” said Donaldson. The diocese decided to hold a forum to explain the foster process and encourage people to become involved.

Social opportunities, allowing children to feel like part of a community, are another way churches can assist these children. Donaldson suggested parishes hold events such as movie nights, pumpkin carving contests and dances. “We are just starting this outreach but we need to spark that energy to get more people involved in this issue.”

“Children may stay a day, month, year or even a lifetime in a foster home if the permanent plan moves to adoption,” explains Cherie Schroeder, Director for the Yolo County Foster & Kinship Care Program. “Concurrent planning is complicated; as the first path is to help children go home but we have to build a second system of support should reunification fail.”

Misconceptions about fostering often keep people away. They may shy away because they feel they are not perfect. But youth in foster care don’t need perfection; they need the commitment and love that a permanent adoptive family can provide.

This year of Mercy calls on us to tend to the needs of others, what a better way to answer this call than to be there for a child that needs help. Jan and her family ended up fostering six children and went on to adopt one of them. Without her son, Joe, they would be incomplete. “Joe is funny and devoted to us; we can’t imagine our lives without him.”

For more information, go to:

catholic.org

Diocese of Orange

<http://www.rcbo.org/events/foster-care-and-adoption-forum/>

Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County

<https://www.catholiccharitiesscc.org/refugee-foster-care>

California Department of Social Services

<http://www.cdss.ca.gov/>

Adoption Services

<http://www.adoptuskids.org/>