

Adoption decision is made out of love

Catholic Messenger
Staff

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(This is the first in a series focused on Respect Life Month, which is the month of October.)

When a woman faces an unplanned pregnancy, many things rush through her mind. One of those is what options are available for the unborn baby she is carrying. One of those options she may consider is adoption.

Deanna Solis, division director with Bethany for Children & Families in Davenport, said the nonprofit service works with mothers choosing adoption for their baby, as well as working with families wanting to adopt.

Many myths exist about adoption, she noted. "Age is one of them. These are not always teens giving up their babies. There are mothers of all ages. Unplanned pregnancies do not discriminate based on age, race or socioeconomic status," she said.

Another myth is that the birth mother doesn't care about her child. "That's an easy out," Solis said. "In fact this may be one of the hardest decisions a woman has to make in her life. It is a decision made out of love. A selfless decision made by the birth mom."

When a birth mother calls an appointment is set up to explain services Bethany offers, such as counseling throughout and after the pregnancy, referrals for services from various agencies if needed and options for adoption that Bethany offers. All services are free for the birth mother. Solis noted that sometimes the birth father is involved in the process, and is encouraged to be a part of the process.

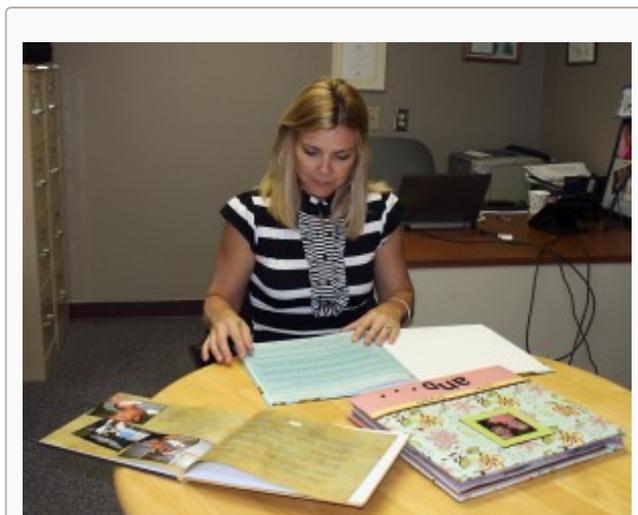
"Many birth moms will go back and forth with the idea of giving up their child," Solis said. "The decision is up to her. We at Bethany are not walking in her shoes and we cannot make the decision for her. We are here to offer support and information."

If a birth mother chooses adoption, she has additional choices: closed, semi-open and open adoptions.

A closed adoption means no correspondence with the adoptive family and most often Bethany chooses the family for the newborn.

In a semi-open adoption, the most popular, the birth parent selects the family and has contact with the adoption family — but through Bethany — not directly with each other. Both sides select, for instance, how many times a year they would like photos and updates sent to each other. Bethany acts as the go-between, providing some anonymity, Solis said.

In open adoption the birth parent has direct contact with the family she selects for her child. Bethany is not a go-



Anne Marie Amacher
Deanna Solis, division director at Bethany for Children & Families in Davenport, looks through profiles of couples seeking to adopt a child.

between. "It's whatever both sides agree to. Some will get together once a year and some even make the birth mom a part of the family."

Once the baby is born, Bethany offers counseling and service for the birth mom. Solis said many times, after about six months, the birth mother starts a process of grief or loss. "She has been suppressing her emotions. We are here for her."

Bethany for Children & Families provides services in Iowa and Illinois. Both states have a three-day waiting period after the baby is born for the birth mother to make her final decision about adoption. In Iowa, she has four additional days after signing to stop the adoption. In Illinois there is no more time. In general, it takes about six months for the adoption to be finalized. The adoptive parents care for the baby, but Bethany is the official guardian for the child.

For couples wanting to adopt

Bethany for Children & Families handles infant adoptions in Iowa and home studies for those considering international adoption. In Illinois, the agency handles infant and special needs adoptions and foster care licensing. In Iowa, families do not have to be licensed foster-care families in order to adopt.

The first step for singles or couples to adopt is the home study, Solis said. This includes an assessment of the family, background checks, information on their childhood, current life situation (education, job and finances), a physical, reference checks and motivation for adopting. A home visit also occurs to check for safety and space available to care for the infant. "They will need a legal document (given after the assessment) in order to adopt," she said.

Once the couple is approved, they complete a profile for Bethany and the birth mothers about their interests, hobbies and more. Oftentimes, families make a scrapbook with photos of themselves, any children or pets, vacation pictures and a letter thanking the birth mom for considering them.

Solis said inside the front cover of each profile, Bethany adds a standard profile that includes the prospective adoptive parents' first names, ages, race, marital status, number of children if they have any, occupation, religion and education.

Some birth mothers may want their child to be raised in a home of the same religion as hers. Others may look for a home with no other children. Some may connect with a common hobby or pet.

Those looking at adoption through Bethany do have fees. The home study, required by law, is \$2,000 for either prospective parents on either side of the Mississippi River. This does not guarantee placement.

There are no other fees until an adoption takes place. At that point, the adoptive family will have a placement fee, post-placement service costs and responsibility for legal fees for the adoption process.

The fees, Solis said, help cover costs for Bethany, a nonprofit organization. It helps pay for counseling, case management and ongoing support for both sides.

"We try to keep adoption affordable," Solis said. "This isn't just for the rich," she noted. Bethany offers interest-free payments and installment options to help the couples.

Solis said the adoption process isn't always smooth sailing. The birth mom has the right to keep her child. If that happens after she has selected a family, Solis said Bethany is there to support both sides.

Bethany limits the number of prospective adoptive families to 15 families at a time seeking to adopt a child. The waiting process might be a few weeks or several years. It depends on what the birth mom is looking for and how many women choose adoption for their children.

Bethany for Children & Families serves the metro Quad-City area on both sides of the river and some outlying areas.

It handles adoptions only in Iowa and Illinois. For those outside the Quad Cities, agencies are available. And there is always the private adoption option through a lawyer, she noted.

For more information about services at Bethany, contact Solis at (563) 327-0186 or Nancy Shaffer at (563) 327-0138 or visit their website at www.bethany-qc.org.