

## Adopting a special needs child

**The Church should be encouraging adoption instead of abortion. Many children who are destined for abortion are those whose circumstances qualify as "special needs" situations. The body of Christ is the place where those very special needs should be met with families built through adoption and communities living out their faith in support and nurture of every human life in their midst. This article contains information for starting a search for a "special needs" child.**

There is a virtual flood of couples in the U.S. seeking to start or build a family through adoption. Most couples find the experience long, frustrating, and expensive. It often is the case that only after a couple begins the search for a child, do they discover the great number of special needs children who are looking for families. And, often, because special needs children are readily available, the prospective parents will have to face fewer obstacles in adopting them.

### What is a "special needs" child?

"Special Needs" is a formal term in adoption, but its definition varies from state to state. In reference to adoption it does not mean the ease or difficulty of *educating* the child. It refers instead to the ease or difficulty of *placing* the child. Some factors that may classify a child as having "special needs" are:

- physical or health problems
- age
- member of racial or ethnic minority
- history of abuse or neglect
- emotional problems
- part of a sibling group seeking to be adopted
- HIV positive
- prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol
- developmental problems

### Who may apply?

Adoption agencies' requirements vary, but generally the expectations for parents of special needs children are much less restrictive than for newborns, who are in much shorter supply. Agencies will consider couples in an older age range. A parent's own physical limitations may not be a limiting factor. Usually neither the number of children a couple has nor their income level are factors in these adoptions.

The attitude of prospective parents in a special needs adoption is a primary consideration. The motivation shifts from an emphasis on building a family toward

improving the life experience for additional family members.

### Do they work?

Between ten and twenty percent of all adoptions fail. That means that from 80 to 90 percent succeed. A good support system is a critical factor in all adoptions. There are organizations that specialize in helping families adopt and nurture special needs kids. Every church is a community that families should be able to draw on for spiritual, emotional, and tangible support—an extended family of love and nurture for every child, and especially for special needs children.

### What does it cost?

The high cost of adoption to the family vanishes with a child who qualifies as a "special needs" child. Usually, there is little or no adoption fee. In addition, there are a number of public programs that offer financial assistance to help families meet the special needs of their adopted child. Many states and the federal government offer financial assistance. Some employers offer adoption benefits.

### Whom do I contact for information?

You can begin your education on adopting a special needs child by contacting the National Council For Adoption, 225 No. Washington St., Alexandria, VA 22314

(703-299-6633) or the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, 330 C St. SW, Washington, D.C. 20447 (888-251-0075). Both have websites.

## A call for help to our churches

*In a recent letter to our supporters, PPL President Don Elliott told about the people who contact our office for help. Though we are neither a pregnancy care center nor an adoption agency, our ministry supports and encourages both. Young women seeking help in their pregnancies, and couples seeking to build a family through adoption call us and send us email messages from all over the country. And we want to help.*

### Cross-country help

One recent example that Pastor Elliott gave was of a young pregnant woman in Southern California who called our office in Virginia. Her parents were urging her to have an abortion. She felt alone and turned to us—on the other side of the continent—for help.

In our age of technology, that help is not difficult to provide. We got on the phone and located a pregnancy care center close to this young woman. Pregnancy care centers offer help to women at no charge; typically they are ministries provided by Christians and sometimes they are outreach ministries of churches. We talked to the people at the center about the help the young woman needed, and made the personal connection between her and the center.

### Ministry for the long haul

Pastor Elliott explained that in each of these cases, we also look for a Presbyterian Church where there are people who will welcome the young women into their fellowship and walk alongside them in their pregnancies. Pregnancy care centers typically provide excellent short term assistance. The body of Christ is in ministry for the long haul. Young pregnant women often need both.

So, we asked our Presbyterian readers a simple question:

*If you are a Presbyterian Church with pastor and members who want to walk alongside women in troubled and needy pregnancies, would you allow us in PPL to contact you for that assistance when the needs of someone in your area are made known to us?*

### How your church can help

Many Presbyterian churches quickly responded with an offer of help. A pastor in Michigan wrote to say that his church "runs the full range of ideologies," and he is "on the more liberal side of things." However, he wants us to know that his church stands ready to "walk alongside a woman in trouble," and they are happy to be called upon by PPL as a resource for people in their area.

Presbyterian churches dot our country with ministry that reaches virtually every nook and cranny of the U.S. Our churches can help assure that no woman is left alone in a difficult pregnancy situation.

If your church would be willing to be contacted in a situation of such need, please let us know. Chances are, we'll be calling on you for help.