THE SPIRITUALITY OF ADOPTION

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Chapter I

"I will not leave you orphaned; I will come to you." John 14:18

In my faith tradition, there is a dearth of liturgical and faith-based support for the experience of adoption. As an adult adoptee and an adoptive parent, I am interested in the spirituality of the adoption experience for both adoptees and adoptive parents. What impact does the adoption journey have on the faith of an adoptive parent or adoptee? Where do adoptees and adoptive parents experience the Sacred in their adoption journey? Most important of all, how might clergy and their respective faith communities affirm, celebrate, and enhance the adoptive experience of their congregants? In the Gospel of John, Jesus promises, "I will not leave you orphaned; I will come to you." Faith leaders and faith communities are called to embody God's promise to accompany and affirm the child who is to be adopted and the parents involved in the adoption process.

As a pastor, I have accompanied many foster parents and adoptive parents on their journey to welcome a child into their family. It has been a great honor to baptize children who are to be adopted or who are cared for lovingly in foster homes on their way to adoption. In addition, I have been privileged to listen to the faith journeys of many adult adoptees. As an adoptee myself, I can relate to their varied experiences and struggles with identity formation as well as marginalization in their faith communities. As part of my doctor of ministry project, I have interviewed adoptive parents and adult adoptees to listen to their faith stories and to learn from them how faith communities might more effectively minister to their unique spiritual needs.

The theological principle I will employ in this project is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which includes: 1) tradition; 2) scripture; 3) reason and 4) experience. In

Chapter One of this project, I will address reason and experience. I will discuss the background or history of the adoptive experience; the specific needs to which I plan to minister; and the relevance of this project to a wider context.

Background or History—Reason and Experience

I must first reference my own adoptive experience as a child who was adopted and then, as an adoptive parent myself. Every family has stories that reflect their unique family history. An early family story in my own family concerns my arrival into the family. My parents could not conceive and contacted a lawyer to help them work on a private adoption. A man who worked with my Father knew a teen-ager who was pregnant and wanted to give her child to a loving family to be adopted. This teen-ager, Patsy Ann Lee, hoped her child would have the loving, secure home she could not provide. My birth mother named me Kimberly Ann and then surrendered me at birth to my parents. Later I would learn that my birth mother first visited my parents in the home in which I would be raised. Patsy did everything she could to make sure her baby would have the best life possible. I thank God for her faithfulness and for giving me life.

Enthusiastically, my parents replied that yes they would love to adopt Patsy's baby girl; however, they had no baby furniture or any other baby supplies. When I was only three days old, my parents brought me home from the hospital. For the first week or so of my life, I slept in a bureau drawer until my parents could purchase the necessary baby equipment including a crib. My adoptive parents quickly found a new book almost as important to them as their Bible—Dr. Spock's guide to caring for infants.

About thirty years later, my husband and I were trying to conceive with no success. We had already decided to build our family both through birth and adoption so

it was a natural transition for us to seek to adopt as a first choice. We rejected the idea of using extraordinary efforts to conceive. With so many children in the world in need of loving homes, we sought to open our home and our heart to a child in need. We traveled to Viet Nam to adopt our own baby girl at five months of age. We could not, of course, bring a crib with us and so our little daughter (Katie Grace Chin Thi) slept for the first two weeks of her life in a suitcase. I couldn't help comparing my own early sleeping arrangements with hers. I spent my first days in a blanket-lined bureau drawer while she slept in a suitcase. One day while looking at a photo of her peacefully sleeping in her make-shift crib, I couldn't help thinking about the baby Jesus whose temporarily homeless parents placed him in the soft, fragrant hay of a manger. Like the infant Jesus, we had no crib for a bed but that didn't matter to us. We may not have had a room in our house prepared with baby furniture but we did have room in our hearts prepared and ready to welcome a new life into our family.

Growing up as is true for many adoptees of my era, the subject of adoption was taboo. (Lifton, 2009) No one mentioned it and my mother showed signs of acute distress if I even attempted to raise the subject. Thus, I spent many hours reflecting privately and silently on my origins. A common assignment in most any elementary grade was the completion of a "family tree." This assignment always caused anxiety in my adoptive family and confusion in my mind. What was my birth country of origin? Where did I get my green eyes? Where did my love of poetry come from? I learned from my life experience what Betty Jean Lifton (2009) concluded that adoption hampers proper identity formation. Secrecy surrounding the adoptive experience compounded my confusion.

Another family story concerning my arrival into my adoptive family turned out to be not so unique. When I was seven years my old, my adoptive parents took me on a family camping trip with the express purpose of telling me that I was adopted. They told me nothing about the circumstances of my birth. Instead, they concentrated on the fact that I was a "chosen" child. I always had the image of my parents looking through a glass window at rows and rows of babies arranged like departments store dolls. In my fantasy, my parents studied all those tiny faces and, at last, cried out, "Over there. That one in the last row. We choose her."

According to Betty Jean Lifton (2009), "Life does not begin for the adoptee at conception, nor at the moment he emerges from the womb, and gives his first outraged cry, but at the moment he is told of his adoption. It is the birth of consciousness of being different from the people around him." (p. 21) My parents actually told me about my own adoption using their own version of a common story based upon adoptee myths of the day as told in books such as The Chosen Baby by Valentina Wasson and The Family that Grew by Florence Rondell and Ruth Michaels. These books reflected the prevailing psychological wisdom of the day that a child who is loved enough will not need to know about their origins. The books and the myriad array of chosen-stories they spawned were up-beat in tone but vague on details and concentrated not on the birth origins of the adopted child but instead on how the child came into the adoptive family. The word "chosen" was meant to act magically on the child's psyche thus eliminating all need to know about their birth family and origins.

Unfortunately, these "chosen stories" tended only to obfuscate the child's legitimate need to understand the facts about his or her origins. No matter how traumatic

the birth story, there is an age-appropriate way to pass it on to a child. Secrecy fosters confusion and anxiety whereas openness fosters communication and care. Although these chosen-baby stories contain an element of truth, they are more myth than reality and may serve as the source of the adoptee's distortion of reality. Lifton comments, "When society sets any group of people apart as chosen, or special, it both exalts and dehumanizes them. In neither case does it allow them to be like others...It is a burden to be chosen. Its very specialness isolates one." (2009, p. 19)

Knowing the facts of one's origins is essential to proper identity formation. Ironically, the dearth of information on my biological origins created in me a hunger to know more about the circumstances of my birth. Verrier points out that, "The tie to the mother and the apparent need to reconnect with her, then, is not only a longing to find the lost object, but a longing to find the lost self." (1993, p. 33) Like many adoptees, I searched for and found my birth mother and half-siblings. My birthmother was delighted that I found her and introduced me joyfully to my birth grandmother, Ruby Moses Burt, and to three half-siblings—David, Greg, and Shari. I needed the information that only my birth family could provide in order to psychologically complete the "family tree" project of my youth. Like other adult adoptees who searched for and found birth family, biological information connected the dots of my life and made me feel more whole, more complete.

Paradoxically, meeting my birth family also confirmed that I am the child of my adoptive parents. After the honeymoon of information sharing, I felt closer than ever to my adoptive family. Once the secrecy was dissolved, I could embrace with an open heart the adoptive tie. I may have gotten my green eyes from my birth grandmother, Ruby

Moses, but I got my love of learning and my faith from my adoptive parents. My birth family hailed from the hills of Kentucky and on the surface, I had little in common with them; however, we shared biological history such as an allergy to sulfa drugs that proved invaluable to know. My half-sister Shari was the first person I ever met who looked like me. Our childhood pictures are nearly identical. We share the same eyes and the same smile, the same skin tone. I nearly fainted when I first met her. Meeting a family member who resembled me was a profound spiritual, psychological and physical experience.

My birth mother welcomed our meeting and eagerly embraced me as her long-lost daughter. My birth mother's greatest concern was that I would not be able to forgive her for abandoning me. Only by meeting me—the child she relinquished— could she face and/or begin to resolve her greatest fear. During our meeting, I assured her that I had no conscious anger towards her but only gratitude. Not only did I forgive her, but I thanked her for her care for me at the very beginning of my life. Prior to our meeting, I did not know that it was she who named me and that she had researched my parents to make sure that they were the people they said they were. She had given me life and had done everything she could to make sure I would have the best life possible. She shared with me that my birth father—an engineer at Bethlehem Steel and a married man—had begged her to have an illegal abortion but she refused. I was as thankful to learn this difficult truth about my origins as I was to learn of her loving care. This was the truth of my life and knowing the truth helped me to better understand myself. Although I attempted to find my birth father, I was never successful.

The meeting with my birth mother provided me with key information I needed to complete my own identify formation; however, I already had a family. After our initial meeting, I chose not to continue the relationship with my birth mother as a daughter. I was and am the child of my adoptive parents. Ironically, the dissolution of the secrecy surrounding my adoption proved as helpful for my adoptive family as it was for me. My adoptive parents who had always feared my reuniting with my birth mother were relieved to discover that the reunion had occurred but had not harmed my relationship with them. They no longer needed to carry the burden of keeping the facts of my birth secret. Pandora's box had been opened but no harm had come to me or to them.

The Specific Needs to Which I Plan to Minister

Betty Jean Lifton refers to the cast of characters in the adoption experience as the adoption triangle: birth parents; child to be adopted; and adoptive parents (2009). In this project, I am primarily interested in the spirituality of the adoptee and the adoptive parents. I plan to interview Christian and Jewish adoptive parents and adoptees and explore the impact of their relationship with God and with their faith community on the adoptive experience and vice versa. In this paper, I do not plan to explore the impact of the adoption journey on birth parents, a topic which although worthy is too broad for this project. After attentive in-depth listening to the stories of adoptees and adoptive parents, my goal is to explore how faith leaders and faith communities might embrace, affirm, and enhance the adoptive experience. In addition, what might we learn about the nature of God from the adoptive experience?

The Relevance of this Project to Ministry in a Wider Context

Adoption is a prevalent phenomenon in contemporary society. All faith communities include families that are formed by adoption. How can we more effectively minister to the unique needs of these families? What can we learn about faith and about the image of God from the experience of adoption? How can Christian and Jewish religious rituals serve as a gift of God to provide meaning and joy to the adoptive experience? In short, how can pastors and rabbis better meet the spiritual and psychological needs of their congregants on their adoption journey? My goal is to provide some answers to these and other questions through this project.

My adoptive father wrote me a letter before he died in which he shared, "From the first moment I saw you, I knew you were a gift of God." His words powerfully influenced my self-image and my relationship with God. Who am I? I am not unwanted and rejected. Instead, I am a gift of God. My husband and I named our own daughter Katie Grace because her father and I believe that she too is a gift of God's grace. We kept her Vietnamese name "Chin Thi" because we wanted to celebrate her birth heritage in our life together. In contrast to the secrecy surrounding my own birth and adoption, we chose to be as open as possible with our daughter. We carefully documented each scrap of information given to us about her origins from the Vietnamese police report, which documented her abandonment to the description of the eight-year-old deaf boy who found her and brought her to the orphanage in Bac Ninh, a town north of Hanoi. Someday, we hope to return with Katie to the country of her birth and help her search for the truth of her origins.

In addition, we wanted to lift up the mutuality of the adoptive experience. We adopted our daughter and her birth origins and she, in turn, has adopted us. In Vietnam the actual ceremony legalizing the adoption is called, the "Giving and Receiving Ceremony." For our family, the adoption journey has been profoundly spiritual and reciprocal full of giving and receiving love and faith. We believe our daughter, like all children, is a gift of God. Along with the primal wound of abandonment, we have faith in God's steadfast love or hesed that heals all things, hopes all things, believes all things, and endures all things. As my daughter spontaneously said to me at age six after seeing the musical *Annie*, "I'm glad I'm not an orphan. I'm glad God gave me you!" God will never leave us orphaned. After loss, God will come to us to give us the gift of new hope, new faith, and new life.

Chapter II

The organizing principle for this initial phase of my paper is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral that includes: reason, experience, scripture and tradition. In Chapter One, I discussed reason and experience as they relate to the adoptive journey. In Chapter Two, I will discuss tradition and scripture as they relate to the experience of adoption. In the second part of this chapter, I will discuss the key psychodynamic principles of D.W. Winnicott, Daniel Stern and Erik Erickson as they relate to the adoption journey.

Tradition

Adoption is an ancient concept. In a Greek myth, the God Zeus attempted to persuade his wife Hera to adopt Heracles. Cuneiform texts from ancient Nuzi located near Kirkuk in Iraq include tablets on adoption. Hammaurabi's Code of Laws first printed in ancient Babylon include the responsibilities of adopting parents and of adoptees. Moessner (2003) cites the example of Code #192 which states, "If a son of a paramour or a prostitute says to his adoptive mother or father, 'You are not my father, or my mother,' his tongue shall be cut off. Unduly harsh, but it tells us that adoption was a part of Babylonian culture and that adoption was recognized to be a strong parental tie.

Jewish tradition supports the value of adoption although there remains the question of conversion requirements. The Talmud states, "Whoever brings up an orphan in his home is regarded...as though the child had been born to him." (Sanhedrin 119b) Jewish law, however, affirms that whether the biological mother is Jewish determines if the child is Jewish. A child's status as a Gentile is not changed simply because a Jewish family adopts the child. Conversion requirements vary but most conversions performed

by Conservative, Reform or Reconstructionist Rabbis are not recognized by the Orthodox. A Mikvah requires the ritual immersion of the infant, youth or adult and must take place before a "beit-din" of three rabbis. The intention is for the Mikvah to be a day of welcome for the adopted child into the Jewish community. Blessings are recited and the child is given a Hebrew name. A "Bar" or "Bat Mitzvah" is especially important for the converted child because it is a reaffirmation of his or her conversion. (Moore, 2002)

The tradition of the Christian Church regarding adoption has been reflective of society as a whole. Adoption was viewed as a necessary, if not natural, answer to a child orphaned by their parents. Adoptees with an uncertain parentage remained outside the mainstream of church liturgy and tradition. Many Christian denominations and other faith traditions established orphanages and encouraged adoption but rarely was adoption written about as a theological theme other than in the story of Moses and in the writings of Paul in the Christian Scriptures. One of the early church Fathers, Bishop Irenaeus wrote that the Spirit of God did "announce that the fullness of the times of the adoption had arrived, and that the kingdom of heaven and earth had drawn nigh, and that He was dwelling within those that believe on Him who was born Emmanuel of the Virgin." During the Reformation era, Martin Luther did not reference adoption directly; however, he did translate the Greek word *huiothesia* as "filial spirit" in Romans 8:15 or as "sonship: in Romans, Galatians 4:5 and Ephesians.1:5. Luther, thus, connected adoption with God's parental love (Moessner 2003, p. 114).

Because having a child out of wedlock or giving up one's child was considered a sin, a veil of secrecy surrounded adoption to protect the reputation of both mother and child. As early as 1917, Minnesota passed the first law requiring children and adoptive

parents to be investigated and adoption records sealed (Herman, 2007). This law and others like it sought to protect the privacy of the adoptive parents, birthparents and child to be adopted. A child of uncertain parentage was considered "illegitimate" or a "bastard." A woman giving birth out of wedlock or relinquishing her child was often considered a "whore." Author and adoptee, Betty Jean Lifton wrote poignantly of her pain and confusion as an adopted child in her book Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter. Lifton refers to herself as a *bastard* or *changeling,* rather than the legitimate, biological child that might have been born to her adoptive parents (1977). In time, the practice of sealing adoption records was aptly criticized by adult adoptees for contributing to the stigma and secrecy of adoption. Today, adoption professionals recognize that the practice of sealing adoption records served to protect the emotional needs of parents at the expense of the child's need and right to know the facts of their origins.

In the United States, state legislatures passed the first adoption laws in the nineteenth century. For example, the Massachusetts Adoption of Children Act in 1851 was considered the first modern adoption law. By the turn of the century, adoptions were still relatively rare. The number of adoptions steadily increased until peaking around 1970. Some major shifts have occurred in the field of adoption in modern times. Due to the phenomena of celebrity and trans-racial adoption, adoption may be more visible today but it is statistically less common than in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the twentieth century, stranger adoption was more common whereas today more children are adopted by near relatives or step-parents than by strangers. Open adoptions where information is shared openly between birth and adoptive parents are far more common.

For the first time, in the year 2000, the designation "adopted son/daughter" was added as an official category to the U.S. census. Results of that census indicated that adoptive families are atypical and tend to be more racially diverse, financial well-off, and better educated than families in general. (Herman, 2007)

Scripture and the Development of Images of God

Many adoptees struggle with identity formation. A positive view of adoption in the religious tradition and especially in the interpretation of Scripture could powerfully impact an adoptee's sense of self as well as the adoptive parents' journey. Many of the people I interviewed commented on the impact of their faith on their adoption journey. Jeanne Stevenson-Moessner has written eloquently on spiritual aspects of adoption in her book The Spirit of Adoption. Dr. Moessner points out specific areas in which a church or other faith community can "strive to create a stronger theological foundation around all the adoptees of God." Two of those areas include the development of images of God related to adoption and recognizing and affirming the central importance of the household of faith in supporting adoptees and adoptive parents (2003, P. 82).

Church tradition changes based on the interpretation of Scripture. The writer of Psalm 27:10 affirms, "If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up." In this and other Scriptures, God is imaged as an adopting parent who embraces the child who is orphaned. God as adopting parent forms a new family, which is related by love and commitment rather than blood. Scripture is replete with images of God as a nurturing parent. For example, God cares for a nursing child in Isaiah 49:15, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." In Matthew 23:37, God in

Jesus is described as a mother hen longing to gather her chicks under her wings. Multiple examples of God's nurturing activities are mentioned in Hosea 11:3-4; Isaiah 46:3-4; and Isaiah 66:13-14. In Psalm 27:10 and Isaiah 49:15, the image of God as an adopting parent is implied.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, there are a number of positive albeit informal adoption stories including Abraham who adopted his servant Eliezer and Mordecai who raised his orphan cousin Esther. Esther goes on to marry the King of Persia and save her people from destruction. The story of Moses in Exodus is essentially a story of a Hebrew mother who relinquishes her child out of love for him in order to save his life. Watched over by God and his sister Miriam, Moses is first lost and then "found" by the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh who raises him as her own son. Moses later discovers his origins and returns to save the Israelites from the cruelty of slavery. Moses' birth identity and Moses' adoptive identity are both crucial to God's call and plan for his life as a redeemer of Israel (Cohen, 1995).

In the Christian Scriptures, God is depicted as an adoptive parent in passages from Paul's writings such as Ephesians 1:5, Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:4-5. Adoption is the pre-eminent motif for how one comes into the Christian faith. In Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, he writes, "God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of God's will." Thus, all Christians share a common identity as God's adopted children. Moessner (2003) affirms, "Adoption is the overarching Biblical image for the invitation and inclusion of Gentiles in the Judeo-Christian lineage as family of God" (2003, p. 15).

Far from being marginalized or outside the norm, the experience of adoption is core to the Christian faith. Paul asserts in Romans 8:15-16, "For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." The Aramaic word for "Abba" is an intimate term for Father. The adopted child of God is close to the heart of God as the Adoptive Father and is a joint heir with Christ. Paul affirms this radical truth once again in Galatians 4:4-7, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...so that we might receive adoption as children. God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child than also an heir, through God." The adopted child is not second class, illegitimate, or unnatural but a cherished child and a joint heir.

The Living Practice of the Faith Community

Adoption touches the families of only a small minority of Americans but includes stories of identity and belonging that are universal to human experience. Only about 2-3 percent of children in the United States are adopted. However, a greater than average number of children referred for mental health counseling are adopted. Moessner notes that 4-5 percent of children referred to outpatient mental health facilities are adopted and, even more striking, 10-15 percent of children in residential care facilities are adopted (2003, p. 81). Undeniably, adopted children have greater psychological vulnerability. I believe that the attitude and affirmation of their faith communities can be a powerful influence in the healthy development of a positive self image in adoptees and can

positively impact how adoptive parents relate to their adopted children. The more normative the adoption experience within the faith community, the less adoptees may experience isolation and alienation; thus potentially reducing their psychic vulnerability.

We know the African proverb that it takes a village to raise a child. It, also, takes a faith community to raise a child of God in the household faith. Jesus, in effect, created a new family in which ties of faith became even more important then blood kinship. For Christians, the theology of baptism is that a child is reborn as an adopted child of God through water and the Spirit. Christians believe that they are related to God and to each other through a second birth as described in Jesus' answer to the Pharisee named Nicodemus in John 3:3, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." It is no wonder that for many of the Christian adoptive parents I interviewed, baptism was a central and confirming religious ritual on their adoption journey.

Bruce Malina describes the early Christian faith community as "fictive brothers and sisters in Christ" in his book The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective, For Malina, "fictive" denotes non-biological support groups that form associations such as house-churches. (2001) The emerging household of faith was essentially an adopted family. This is not surprising when one considers that according to Christian doctrine, Jesus Himself was born to the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit but raised by his earthly Father, Joseph. One might even say that Jesus was an adopted child.

Regardless of one's faith tradition, the role of the faith community is integral in supporting both adoptee and adoptive parent in their faith journey. Many adoptive

parents feel called by God to welcome a child who has no home into their family. Moessner (2003) cites one family who responded to God's call in the hymn "Here I am, Lord" by adopting not one, but seven special needs children. The words to this hymn are based on the prophet Isaiah's response to God's call to serve God's people in need. (Isaiah 6:8) It would be difficult to overestimate the power of faith communities and faithful individuals who take seriously what it means to be the household of faith and embrace a child of God through the journey of adoption. In both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, God promises that God will not leave us orphaned, God will come to us. Although flawed as all parents are, adoptive parents embody the grace of God to fulfill this Divine promise.

Clinical Principles

There are a number of psychodynamic clinicians and clinical principles that directly relate to the adoption journey. While Sigmund Freud's theories do not specifically refer to the internal world of the infant, psychoanalysts Donald Woods Winnicott and Daniel Sterns address the mother/infant dyad directly. D. W. Winnicott's groundbreaking work on the relationship between mother and child has many implications for the child who is adopted and for adoptive parents (1971). In addition, the work of Daniel Sterns (1995) on the motherhood constellation both amplifies and provides a counter-point to Winnicott's research. Regarding the social implications of adoption on human development, it is useful to employ Erik Erikson's eight stages of human development as a framework for understanding the dynamic interplay between the issue of adoption and the individual's development in a social context.

Donald Woods Winnicott and the Mother/Baby Unitive View of Self

D, W. Winnicott studied the complex and deep relationship between mothers and their children. His findings revealed a great deal about the critical importance of this early attachment between mothers and their babies. Based on extensive research, D.W. Winnicott concluded that at the beginning of life there is no such thing as a mother and her baby. Instead, there is a mother/baby matrix of self. Although the infant is physiologically separated from the mother at birth, there remains a deep psychological connection. Physical birth and psychological birth are separate events. Physical birth takes place at one point in time whereas psychological birth occurs more as a gradual unfolding over many months. Obviously, this has critical ramifications for psychological health for the infant who is relinquished by his or her birth mother. Winnicott asserts, "From birth, therefore, the human being is concerned with the problem of the relationship between what is objectively perceived and what is subjectively conceived of, and in the solution of this problem there is no health for the human being who has not been started off well by the mother." (1971, p. 15) Only a "good enough mother" can set the stage for optimal emotional development in an infant. There can be no psychological health for the infant who is relinquished apart from the dynamic relationship between the infant and a "good enough" mother.

An infant begins to develop a separate sense of self as a result of the mother's growing failure to meet his or her every need. Winnicott defines a "good enough mother" as one who starts off with almost complete adaptation to the infant's needs, "an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration." (1971, p. 13)

If there is an abundance of frustration too early in an infant's development, the results can be psychologically damaging, even devastating.

Although Winnicott confirms that a "good enough" mother doesn't have to be the infant's own mother, he does assert that "the infant's own mother is more likely to be good enough than some other person, since this active adaptation demands an easy and unresented preoccupation with the one infant; in fact, success in infant care depends on the fact of devotion, not on cleverness or intellectual enlightenment"(1971, p. 14). Obviously, an infant separated from their birthmother is at risk. Orphanages usually cannot provide the kind of one on one care an infant requires for optimal development. Many children who are adopted spend at least some portion of their early life in an institution or in foster care where the devoted care Winnicott describes may not be provided. In addition, adoptive parents may not be adequately prepared to deal with the psychological damage that early and traumatic separation ensues in a developing child. It is important to note for the purposes of this paper that D. W. Winnicott never addressed the issue of adoption directly. He was working at Tavistock Clinic in England. His concern was to encourage mothers to nurture their children themselves rather than handing them over to the care of Nannies.

Winnicott, Daniel Sterns and the Motherhood Constellation

Both D. W. Winnicott and Daniel Sterns view the relationship between parent and child as the interaction of representational worlds: the real, actual, scientifically verifiable world and the subjective, imaginary world of representations. Sterns points out that birth is the moment when the real mother meets the real baby, versus the imagined baby of her pregnancy. Infants who are to be adopted have a double representational

world. There is the mother who births them and the mother who relinquishes them. Later, there are the adoptive parents who care for them, introducing even more complexity into their real and psychological worlds. Symbolically, there is the breast of the birth mother and the bottle of the adoptive mother. Winnicott's book Playing and Reality brilliantly explores object-relations theory and the interplay between the real and representational world of the infant and young child (1971).

In contrast to Winnicott, Daniel Sterns does not believe that the infant begins life merged with the mother; rather that the baby has a separate sense of self even at the beginning of his or her life. Sterns views the mother/baby relationship as a constellation rather than as a dual unity with the mother. Sterns asserts that "by 3-4 months of age, if not before, the infant has sufficient capacities to differentiate self from other" (1995, p. 92). Sterns reaches his conclusions based on in-depth observation of mothers and fathers interacting with their infants. In addition to the dynamic, multi-layered, dyadic relationship between mothers and their babies, Sterns also studied triadic interaction as fathers were added into the parent/infant constellation of relationships. Over time, Sterns developed a number of "schemas," networks, and mini-narrative plots for infant interactions with their parents. Sterns explored the dynamic, multi-layered relationship between lived experience, represented experience and evoked and/or enacted representations between infant and the mother and father.

Sterns' research is fascinating and has many implications for the adoption journey. The infant in Sterns work is as much an actor in the relationship as a recipient of devoted care. For example, Sterns observes that when the infant confronts a depressed mother, the infant responds first by seeking to actively engage and animate the mother. If

that is unsuccessful, the infant responds to her "flat affect" by suffering his or her own "micro depression." Sterns postulates that such mirroring of affect is motivated by the infant's desire connect with the mother (1995, p. 100). The infant's internal representational world is engaged in seeking to first enliven and finally to-be-with or accompany the mother. To me, this implies a great resilience in response to the mother's limitations on the part of the infant. The child who is relinquished at birth is psychologically vulnerable but is also able from a young age to seek interaction and elicit behaviors on the part of caregivers that meet his or her needs.

Erik Erikson and the Social Significance of Adoption on Human Development

Adoption is a social construct, created to solve the problem of children who are orphaned and couples or individuals who wish to parent but are unable to conceive. Therefore, Erik Erikson's landmark text Childhood and Society (1963) on the eight stages of human development in society provides a significant framework for understanding the issue of adoption throughout various life stages. Adoption is both an individual and a social phenomenon that is processed in different ways throughout one's development. Erikson's work is uniquely helpful in examining the adoption journey throughout a normative pattern of human development in society.

Upon examining Erikson's eight stages of human development, I am primarily interested in three stages or developmental crises as they relate to the adoption journey: the first stage of basic trust versus basic mistrust; the fifth stage of identity versus role confusion; and the seventh stage of generativity versus stagnation. Erikson's first stage of psychosocial crisis is basic trust versus basic mistrust. Foundational to a healthy human psyche in society is the ability to trust one's self, others, and the world in which

one lives. If this developmental crisis is positively resolved, we see the formation of hope and drive in the individual. The infant or young child develops basic social trust as his or her most basic needs of feeding, sleeping, and eliminating are regularly attended to by a competent maternal provider. The absence of basic trust results in psychopathology that may develop in infancy or be manifested later in life. Erikson asserts, "The firm establishment of enduring patterns for the solution of the nuclear conflict of basic trust versus basic mistrust in mere existence is the first task of the ego, and thus first of all, a task for maternal care" (1963, p. 249).

Obviously, children relinquished by their birth parents even for the best of reasons are at risk for a negative resolution of this first and foundational developmental crisis. A potential negative outcome in which basic mistrust takes root in the infant or young child as a prototypical response to life includes sensory distortion and withdrawal as well as psychopathology. Erikson points out that religion itself and the religious layer in each individual are replete with efforts at various "atonements" which try to make up for maternal deficits and "restore faith in the goodness of one's strivings and in the kindness of the powers of the universe" (1963, p. 251). In this way, religious beliefs may be motivated by an effort to restore a basic sense of trust in the individual.

Erikson's fifth developmental crisis of identity versus role confusion is particularly crucial for adopted individuals and their families. This particular stage is congruent with adolescence in which the youth begins to ask and seek answers for the question of, "Who am I?" Answering this question is particularly complicated for the adoptee. Am I the child of my birth parents or my adoptive parents? I believe that not knowing the facts of one's origins hampers proper identity formation and may contribute

to a potential negative resolution of this important developmental psychosocial crisis. Erikson identifies the danger of this stage as role-confusion. The ability to develop healthy intimacy and self-acceptance may be damaged by an ability to integrate one's ego fully at this stage. The individual who lacks an integrated sense of self may be unable or unwilling to enter fully into adult relationships. In attempts to ward off role-confusion, other adolescents may be cruel or exclusive of those who are considered "different"(1963, p. 262). The child who is adopted may be the target of such developmentally understandable but socially cruel behavior, further complicating his or her efforts at identity formation.

Finally, I am interested in Erikson's seventh stage of human development, generativity versus stagnation. In contrast to the other childhood and young adult stages, this is a mid-adult psychosocial developmental crisis. Generativity for Erikson is primarily the adult task of providing guidance and nurturance for the next generation; however, generativity may also include the drive to produce and create, a focus on production rather than progeny. We often focus on the needs of young children for care and guidance. Conversely, the mature adult needs to be needed. Regarding the adoption journey, adults with the drive to care for and raise children may be frustrated by infertility and other impediments to conception. These adults may turn to adoption as a meaningful path to positively resolve this developmental crisis.

If the adult does not achieve generativity, "regression to an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy takes place, often with a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment" (1963, p. 267) Individuals with a negative resolution to this adult developmental crisis may tend to indulge themselves as if they were their own one and

only child. Pseudo-intimacy can manifest as excessive self-love and self-indulgence. Some individuals may develop a form of early invalidism, where the physical becomes a vehicle for self-concern. Adoption, thus, serves as a meaningful life-choice for adults to avoid such pit-falls and positively resolve this developmental crisis by seeking an opportunity to nurture and guide the next generation.

Chapter III

Methodology influences outcomes. Thus, in this chapter, I will discuss the approach and procedure I shall take in executing my doctor of ministry project on the spirituality of adoption in a Judeo-Christian context. In addition, I will explore the criteria I will use to assess outcomes, specifically what I will be looking for to determine gains, losses, or qualitative changes. I will utilize two questionnaires developed in consultation with my mentors: one for adoptees and one for adoptive parents. The questionnaires are included as Appendix A and B at the end of the paper. The differing experiences of adoptive parents and adoptees necessitate the preparation of a questionnaire to fit the unique situation of each. I chose to interview both adoptees and adoptive parents because the experience of each both complements and dynamically impacts the experience of the other. Because of the abundance of psychodynamic theory on the mother/baby dyad, I chose to interview adoptive mothers, rather than adoptive fathers, in order to more fully explore the relationship between adoptive mothers and their infants.

My intent is to interview a racially, culturally and religiously diverse group of adoptees and adoptive parents. I intentionally chose adoption stories from a variety of backgrounds including foster to adopt; international adoption; and domestic adoption. Because of time limitations, I chose to focus on the quality of the interview rather than quantity of interviews. The stories of two adult adoptees were utilized in the project and four adoptive parents. One adult adoptee I interviewed was, also, an adoptive parent. In addition, I referenced my own experience as an adult adoptee and adoptive mother. Although I had the opportunity to interview two teen-agers who were adopted as younger

children, I did not do so because I did not want to raise complicated and emotionally laden adoption issues for them until and unless they initiated a conversation with me. I chose to respect their privacy regarding their adoption stories. The adults I interviewed, not only consented to the interview, but were eager to participate in it thus affirming my belief that adoption is an on-going faith and psychological issue which must be dealt with in differing ways throughout one's life cycle.

My primary methodology involves listening to the stories of both adoptive parents and adoptees. I believe that the process of telling one's story is, in itself, healing. Theologian, Nelle Morton, has imaged God as a great ear that hears us into speech. Much has been written about the "ministry of presence." When one is truly present to the pain or joy of another person, one is engaged in a holy and healing activity. Although I developed two questionnaires in consultation with my project mentors, I was careful to first listen to the journey of the adoptees and adoptive mothers I interviewed rather than barrage them with questions. First, I listened and then, I gently asked a series of probing questions designed to elicit more information on their adoption story as it relates to faith development as well as to psychological and social development. My goal was to gain information that might be helpful to clergy in affirming and ministering to congregants on their unique adoption journeys as well as to gain a greater understanding of the nature of God through the lens of adoption. Each interview lasted several hours. In almost every case, each person wanted to talk more about their adoption story and expressed eagerness to read my paper once it was finished to learn more about the experiences of others with adoption and faith.

In assessing outcomes, I will be utilizing the clinical principles outlined in Chapter Two to evaluate and assess psychological development and the presence of psychopathology. Specifically, I will listen for issues of basic trust versus basic mistrust and issues of identity formation in adoptees. I will, also, listen for issues of loss, abandonment, and mourning. When interviewing adoptive mothers, I will listen for the motivations that led them to choose adoption. One possible motivation, of course, is Erikson's theory of generativity versus stagnation. What challenges and joys do adoptive parents face as they seek to nurture a child not biologically related to them? I hope to learn more about the relationship of nature and nurture, blood and belonging as these issues relate to adoptive families.

Regarding faith development, I will interview Christian and Jewish adoptees and adoptive mothers and listen for the dynamic interplay between their faith convictions, spirituality, and their adoption journey. Specifically, I am looking for where in their adoption story, if at all; they experienced a sense of the Sacred. My hope is to learn more about the nature of God and God's care for the most vulnerable of all human beings, an orphaned child. Equally important, I hope to be taught by adopted adults and adoptive families on how clergy and communities of faith might more effectively minister to and with them.

Chapter IV

In this chapter, I will discuss results obtained from my interviews with two adoptees and four adoptive mothers. One adoptee is, also, an adoptive mother. Although the results were obtained in the form of responses to a questionnaire, the questions were posed during an oral interview. Two questionnaires were developed in consultation with my project mentors: one for adoptees and one for adoptive parents. The questionnaires are included as Appendix A and Appendix B at the end of the paper. During each interview, I allowed the person being interviewed to first tell their story in their own words before posing interview questions. This was a deliberate decision on my part in order to allow the integrity and unique characteristics of each individual story to emerge. I will discuss the interviews in case format. The actual interviews are available in the Appendix section of the paper.

Sarah—From Adoptee to Adoptive Parent (See Appendix C and H for the actual interviews.)

Sarah was adopted as a young baby by a Jewish couple in New York. She grew up as an only child and became a successful nurse and later a medical writer. Sarah regrets that relationships never seemed to work out for her. She always wanted to marry and have children but as time passed and that didn't happen, she remained determined to become a mother. As a single adult in the middle of her life, Sarah decided to adopt a baby girl from China. Today, Sarah lives in Manhattan and is a full-time mother of a teen-aged daughter named Anna and a part-time medical writer. Sarah's story is particularly interesting because it includes two primary aspects of the adoptive experience, both as adoptee and adoptive parent.

Like many adoptees, Sarah recalls the exact moment that her parents told her that she was adopted. Similar to my own parents, Sarah's parents used a book popular with adoptive parents of that time—The Chosen Baby by Valentina Wasson—as a tool to explain to Sarah about her adoption. In her own words, Sarah describes the moment she was told of her adoption:

> "My parents told me that some people have babies but other people get to choose their babies. I was a chosen baby and that was special. I remember the unease I felt. I don't think I could put it into words but it didn't feel good to me. My parents told me over and over again that it was really important that I not tell anyone that I was adopted. Even as a young child, I thought to myself that if it was such great news, why did I have to keep it a secret? (Appendix C, p. 1)"

From a young age, Sarah was aware of the incongruity inherent in the adoption story her parents passed on to her. The fact that she had to keep her identity as an adopted child a secret caused Sarah to feel ashamed rather than special. As a teen-ager, Sarah asked her parents if she could tell her husband-to-be that she was adopted on the night before her wedding. Sarah's parents replied that she should not tell even then because, after discovering that she was adopted, her fiancée might not want to marry her. As an adult, Sarah realizes that her parents' desire to keep her adoption a secret probably had more to do with their own feelings about their infertility than with her. Nevertheless, their choice to hide Sarah's adoption remains troubling. Sarah explains, "I always saw myself as if there was something wrong with me...Not only did I have to keep my adoption secret and hidden, I had to hide the unacceptable parts of myself. (Appendix C, p. 2)"

The "chosen baby" story focused on how Sarah came into her adopted family rather than the facts of Sarah's own birth. Sarah was painfully aware that she did not

look like anyone else in her family. She wondered about her birth family and her origins. She longed to share her concerns with her mother but felt that to inquire about or search for her birth mother would be a "negation" of her adoptive mother. When Sarah ultimately raised questions about her birth parents, Sarah's adoptive parents unwittingly compounded the damage already done to her self-image and relationship with them by lying to her. They told her that her birth parents were dead—that her father had died in the war and that her birth mother died giving birth to her.

When Sarah was thirty years old, Sarah's adoptive mother told her that her birth mother was alive and living in Brooklyn. Sarah's mother was concerned that Sarah's birth mother had taken thalidomide when pregnant with Sarah and she wanted Sarah to contact her to discern this important piece of medical information about herself. Shocked by the news that her birth mother was alive, Sarah asked why her adoptive mother had lied to her? Sarah's mother replied that she lied to her in order to stop her from asking questions about her birth mother. Even after her parents told her the truth that her mother had not died giving birth to her, Sarah remained terrified that she herself would die in childbirth. Sarah felt emotionally unable to contact her birth mother and traces the trauma of the discovery that her parents had lied to her with a weight problem that plagues her to this day.

Sarah's relationship with her adoptive family was deeply impacted by her adoptive experience. Although Sarah affirms that family members did not treat her any differently because of her adoption, Sarah had difficulty trusting the strength of the family bond. Sarah recalls times when she was a teen-ager and had gotten into some minor trouble, her adoptive mother would scream at her and tell her she was going to call

the police and the police would take her away. Sarah describes her terror at her mother's threat, "As an adopted child, I was always aware that having been relinquished once, it could happen again. I wasn't sure how secure my place was in my family" (Appendix C, p. 2). Sarah is not alone in her insecurity. Verrier affirms, "Rather than trusting the permanence of the care-giver, many adoptees never feel as if they can count on anyone; they have to be self-sufficient in life" (1993, p. 31). As an adult, Sarah started her own medical-writing business that flourished in Manhattan. Today, Sarah is independently wealthy and able to be a full-time, stay at home mother to her daughter Anna. Sarah's drive to get-ahead and her business success surprised her middle-class parents. It is possible that Sarah's great drive to succeed came from her need as an adopted child to be self-sufficient enough not to have to depend on anyone.

Although Sarah's life flourished professionally, her personal life did not. Sarah always hoped to be married and have children but affirms that "relationships just did not work out for me." Erikson noted that the stage of development that follows identity versus role confusion is intimacy versus isolation. The positive resolution of the identity crisis of adolescence is necessary to develop secure intimate relationships as an adult. Erikson asserted, "Thus, the young adult, emerging from the search for and the insistence on identity, is eager and willing to fuse his identity with that of others. He is ready for intimacy" (1963, p. 263). It is likely that Sarah's struggle to establish an enduring intimate relationship with an adult partner was hampered by her inability to forge a strong identity in adolescence and young adulthood.

Unfortunately, Sarah's adoptive parents gave her little help in positively resolving her search for her own identity. When Sarah asked directly about the circumstances of

her birth, her parents frustrated her natural curiosity about her origins and lied to her. Even worse, Sarah's parents made her birth the cause of her mother's death. No wonder Sarah struggled to establish intimate relationships with other adults. No wonder she feared the experience of childbirth. Compounding Sarah's basic sense of mistrust in her origins and in the security of her attachment to her adoptive family, Sarah's sense of role confusion was overwhelming. When finally given the truth of her birth mother's identity, Sarah felt emotionally unable to act upon the truth. Instead of attempting to contact her birth mother, Sarah withdrew. Sarah's response is not surprising given her life experience. Erikson notes, "The counterpart of intimacy is instantiation: the readiness to isolate, and, if necessary, destroy those forces and people whose essence seem dangerous to one's own" (1963, p. 264). Although Sarah bore no ill will towards her birth mother, meeting her was potentially threatening. Having been rejected once as an infant, Sarah could have been rejected again. It is possible that Sarah did not pursue contact with her birth mother in order to protect herself.

After learning the truth about her birth mother, Sarah developed a significant weight problem. Sarah connects her weight gain with discovering that her parents had lied to her. Although Sarah intuitively knew her parents had not told her the truth, she was traumatized to discover her birth mother was alive. I can't help wondering if Sarah "buried" her real self under layers of excess weight just as she "buried" the secret of her adoption so many years ago. Excess weight can be a form of self-protection. Sarah may have unconsciously used weight as a way to avoid the threat of intimate relationships. In addition, of course, overeating can be used like a drug to numb painful feelings of loss. Verrier notes that the primal wound of abandonment often leads to unrecognized grief

and loss in adoptees. "A sense of loss expressed by most adoptees often seems to manifest in sadness and depression...the result appears to be a loss of a sense of goodness of self and mistrust of the permanency of future relationships with significant others" (1993, p. 47).

Eventually, however, Sarah was able to move on from her loss and develop a profound intimate relationship with her own adopted daughter, Anna. Sarah was initially motivated to adopt because she felt she needed meaning and purpose in her life. Sarah explains, "I wanted to adopt a child because I wanted to give back and do something meaningful with my life" (Appendix H, p. 1). Sarah chose to adopt internationally from China because she was uncomfortable with the need to "impress a birthmother" in order to adopt domestically. In addition, Sarah hoped to parent a little girl and girls were available from China.

On the surface, Sarah's decision to adopt seems like a classic resolution to Erikson's mid-life developmental stage of generativity versus stagnation; however, I think Sarah also chose to adopt in order to fully embrace her own healing journey. Certainly, Sarah did long to nurture a child and pass on her considerable wisdom to the next generation. Even more however, I believe that in adopting Anna, Sarah was also adopting herself and affirming and embracing the adopted self she had been urged to hide as a child. The fact that Sarah chose a trans-racial child to adopt is instructive. Sarah's identity as an adopted child remained a secret to anyone outside her family. Sarah told no one about her adoption until she was thirty years old. In contrast, when Sarah chose to adopt a child of another race, she chose a form of adoption that could not be hidden. Sarah and Anna are immediately identifiable as a family formed through adoption. Even

more, Sarah affiliated with other families who had adopted from China and found a new source of communal support and affirmation from other adults. Sarah explains,

> "When I was growing up as an adopted child, I never forgot how alone and different I felt. I knew it would be much better for Anna to know other families like ours. What I didn't realize was how much it would mean to me" (Appendix H, p. 3).

After adopting Anna, Sarah describes a profound transformation in her own life. Sarah states, "Adopting Anna opened me up to the joy and wonder of experiencing life through the eyes of a child." For Sarah, motherhood was the "best kept secret." She experienced great joy in spending time with Anna, so much so that Sarah quit her job in order to be home with Anna full time. However, Sarah experienced profound sadness as well as joy in becoming an adoptive parent. Sarah confessed that for nearly a year after Anna came home, she would rock Anna to sleep at night and "sob." Sarah grieved the months Anna spent in an orphanage in China without a mother to rock her to sleep. As an adopted child herself, Sarah understood deeply the pain and loss of abandonment to a very young child. Sarah affirms, "You know your own suffering and you accept it but for your child to suffer is agony" (Appendix H, p.3). One of the adoptive parents in Anne Tyler's fictional novel detailing two very different couples adopting Korean infants describes a similar sorrow:

> "What do you suppose their lives were like before they came to us?" Bitsy asked, not for the first time. 'They've had all those months of experiences that we will never know about. I'm sure they must have been treated well, but, oh, it kills me, it just kills me that I wasn't there to hold Jin-Ho when she first opened her eyes on the day that she was born" (2006, p. 202).

Even as Sarah rocked her baby and cried for Anna's early loss and experience of abandonment, Sarah may have also been crying for her own loss. Tears are healing. Eventually, the depth of her joy in Anna surpassed the depth of Sarah's sorrow.

Although raised by Jewish parents, Sarah felt disconnected from any sense of God's presence in her life until she adopted Anna. Sarah learned Bible stories as a child but did not have a sense of intimacy with God or with a faith community. After Anna came home, Sarah joined a local Temple. She had Anna converted when she was a toddler and faithfully brought her to Shabbat services and to the nursery school in her Temple. Sarah describes her experience with Judaism as an adoptive parent as "fun and meaningful" for both her and for her daughter. When I asked Sarah if she had experienced a sense of the Sacred in her adoption journey, she responded passionately,

> "That was the most amazing thing...when I looked at Anna for the first time, thought to myself, 'Now, I know there is a God! There was no doubt in my Mind. This baby came from God. All my life, I felt sorry for myself. Nothing seemed to work out for me especially in the way of relationships. But after Anna came home, I no longer felt sorry for myself. God had given me this incredible gift. I can't explain it but I just knew that Anna is the child I was meant to have. God always intended Anna and I to be together. If I had to go through all that pain and loneliness to get to this place that was all right with me. Anna's adoption was the one time in my life that I really felt I saw divine intervention. From the moment I saw Anna, and they put her in my arms, I felt the presence of God" (Appendix H, p. 4)

When Sarah chose to embrace Anna as a gift of God, she was also embracing her own adopted self. Becoming an adoptive parent helped Sarah to better understand her own adoptive mother. Sarah affirms, "My mother was flawed but she loved me deeply and completely...She is the one who sees through the windows of my soul." If Anna is a gift of God, then so is Sarah. Faith in God became one of Sarah's core convictions as a

direct result of her journey as an adoptive parent. The fact that her Rabbi and her faith community embraced her and Anna as a new family formed by adoption was extremely healing for Sarah. No longer isolated, Sarah and Anna were embraced by a community of other adopted families and a family of faith through their Temple. After 9/11, Sarah expressed her faith to Anna, "The only way people could do this to one another is that they don't understand that everyone is a child of God." In contrast to the flawed sense of self Sarah possessed as a child and young adult, Sarah now affirms that she and Anna are created in God's image and are gifts of God. Even more, Sarah is able to apply that faith to her wider community. Life itself is precious because all people are gifts of God, adopted or not.

Debbie—An Adoptee's Journey Home (See Appendix D for actual interview.)

Debbie was adopted as an infant in New York. Debbie's adoptive parents were Jewish and her Grandparents were Orthodox which meant that Debbie grew up steeped in a Jewish milieu. Debbie attended Jewish sleep away camp for seven years and learned about her faith in many ways. She studied Hebrew in college and was active in Hillel, even going to Israel when she was seventeen to work on a Kibbutz. Unfortunately, she did not make her bat-mitzvah. Despite her Jewish adoptive identity, Debbie was acutely aware that she did not look Jewish. People would often tell her that she had the "map of Ireland on her face." Debbie struggled to integrate this information with her Jewish identity.

Like many adoptees, Debbie felt as if something was missing in her life. Because of the secrecy and lies obscuring the facts of her birth, Debbie developed a basic sense of

mistrust rather than trust when dealing with others. When I asked Debbie to tell me the story of her adoption, her first words were, "Well, if I can believe my parents..." When one cannot trust one's parents and the significant adults in one's life to tell the truth, one may become suspicious of others. Debbie explains, "I always felt like a bit of an outsider in my own life. It was very painful" (Appendix D, p. 1).

Not surprisingly, Debbie struggled with identity formation. She often wondered about her birth origins but, as with many adoptees of her era, adoption was a taboo subject in her home. When she would dare to ask her mother about the facts of her birth, her adoptive mother would cry and Debbie would feel guilty for causing her mother distress. When she was sixteen, the lawyer who arranged Debbie's adoption came to dinner. Even though everyone knew Debbie had questions for this attorney, nothing was said. After the meal, Debbie walked him to the car and finally had the opportunity to ask her burning question if he knew what had happened to her birth parents. Deliberately fibbing, the lawyer told her that her birth mother, although unmarried when Debbie was conceived, had gone on to marry her father and the couple had other children, Debbie's brothers and sisters. Debbie recalls ruefully, "I don't know why he told me what turned out be a blatant lie." The lie contributed to Debbie's struggle with identity formation. She felt that her birth family was complete and that she was a lost missing link. As a social worker and child advocate in her adult life, Debbie is an advocate for always telling the truth to adopted children affirming, "No matter how horrific the birth circumstances of any child, there is always an age-appropriate way to tell the truth."

When Debbie was an adult, one of her birth sisters located her. Through this sister, Debbie was eventually connected to her birth mother and other siblings. She

learned that her biological heritage was indeed Irish and Polish Catholic. Debbie describes the intensity of that first meeting with her birth sibling, "We met for the first time in a restaurant and ordered the same meal. There was a mirror on one wall and we couldn't take our eyes off each other in the mirror." Debbie and her sister were mesmerized by the ways in which they looked alike; they had the same forehead and hair, the same tastes in food. When Debbie later examined baby pictures of her siblings, she was stunned by the resemblances. Debbie's birth mother showed her a picture of her First Communion. In the snapshot, her birth mother was wearing a white dress and flowers in her hair, far from any religious ritual Debbie had been exposed to as a child. Debbie pored over the way her mother was scrunching her forehead in the picture, exactly the way Debbie's own forehead wrinkled when she was concentrating on something important. Such mirroring for biological children is a natural, and barely noticed, part of development. For adoptees like Debbie, each scrap of identity information, physical and emotional, is precious. Debbie explains, "It's those little pieces of identity that tear at your heart. As an adoptee, you feel like part of you is missing. I think people underestimate how important that is" (Appendix D, p. 2)

Meeting her biological family helped Debbie solidify her identity formation. Debbie went on to marry and to have biological children of her own. She remains happily married and deeply connected to her adoptive family. Debbie's adoptive parents were loving and supportive, although unable to tolerate Debbie's need to know the circumstances of her birth. To this day, Debbie refuses to tell her adoptive mother that she has met her birth mother, fearing that the information would "devastate" her. Knowing her biological heritage and the circumstances of her birth allowed Debbie to

positively resolve Erikson's developmental crisis of identity formation versus isolation. Debbie observed:

> "Meeting my birth family was important to me. It helped to put the pieces together. Now, there are no gaps. It made me feel more whole, more connected, like there is solid ground beneath my feet. After I had my own children, it felt even more important. Not knowing would have been denying my children a piece of their identity" (Appendix D, p. 2)

Debbie makes an important point that lack access to the facts of one's origins may negatively impact identity formation in the adoptee and in successive generations.

Even though Debbie valued meeting her birth family, she learned negative as well as positive information. She learned that of all her birth siblings, she had had the best life. Some of her siblings did remain with her birth mother and suffered abuse. At times, Debbie struggled with a sense of "survivor guilt." Similar to my own experience, connecting with her birth family served to strengthen the adoptive tie. Debbie struggled with maintaining contact with her birth family. When she was invited to visit one of her birth sisters at Christmas, she was hard pressed to explain that she was Jewish and didn't celebrate Christmas. Naturally, she would spend the holidays with the family who raised her, her adoptive family.

Learning that her birth mother was a Gentile raised troubling identity questions for Debbie, which she determined to resolve by officially converting to Judaism. Debbie wanted there to be no question of her Jewish identity when she was married or when she was buried. In seeking official conversion, Debbie longed to embrace the Mikvah as a ritual, which would help integrate her birth and adoptive identity. Despite being turned away a number of times, Debbie eventually found a Rabbi who guided her on the path to official conversion. Debbie's initial rejections for conversion were painful to her, more

so because of her own history of abandonment. Debbie studied for a year before her conversion and found great joy in the experience of ritual immersion. Debbie describes,

> "Finally, the Rabbi said I was ready for the Mikvah. Three Rabbis waited outside the room. One woman stayed in the room with me in the pool to make sure that not even a hair on my head stayed above the water. I went under three times. I had strep throat and a fever of 102 but nothing could have kept me form those waters. After the Mikvah, the Rabbis were singing with joy and cheering" (Appendix D, p.3).

For Debbie, the Mikvah provided a kind of rebirth into her true identity, which included her birth and adoptive identity. Not only was she Jewish because of her adoptive parents, she was officially Jewish through her own journey home to her roots. When she officially converted, Debbie took the Hebrew name of Miriam, Moses' sister, because of her profound connection to the story of Moses, another Hebrew child who, like Debbie, was born to one faith but raised in another. Debbie observed, "Since I was a female, I couldn't take the name of Moses but I wanted to embrace the story of Moses as in a way my story...I felt a sense of connection to Moses and, of course, to Miriam. This is my true identity. After my journey to meet my birth family and become officially Jewish was complete, I felt more whole, more connected, and like I finally had solid ground beneath my feet" (Appendix D, p. 4) The ritual immersion experience of the Mikvah helped Debbie integrate the two aspects of her identity, gifting her with a powerful new sense of wholeness.

Adoption Stories—Mary, Merris, and Cynthia

Four adoptive parents were interviewed for this project including Sarah who is both an adoptee and an adoptive mother. I chose to interview adoptive mothers because

of Winnicott's research on the critical importance of the "good-enough mother" delineated in Chapter II of this project. A healthy child cannot develop apart from the devoted care of a "good-enough" mother (1971, p. 15). Given Winnicott's insights, I was interested to explore the dynamic relationship between adoptive mothers and their infants. These adoptive mothers are representative of different forms of adoptions including foster to adopt; international; and domestic adoption.

In another vein, I was interested to explore Erikson's (1963) adult developmental stage of generativity versus stagnation as it relates to the motivation of adoptive parents. Each adoptive mother interviewed did express a desire to parent a child as providing a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. Each adoptive mother found their drive to care and raise children frustrated by infertility or by the lack of a suitable partner with which to father a child. Each set out to positively resolve this adult developmental crisis through adoption. Each parent hoped to provide guidance and nurturance to the next generation by parenting a child, including a child not biologically their own.

Mary—From Foster Parent to Adoptive Parent (See Appendix E for interview.)

Mary's journey to adoption is permeated with faith. Mary and her husband Frank tried to conceive for many years. Mary prayed fervently for a child but none came. The couple experienced numerous disappointments but finally began the process to become foster parents hoping to adopt. Their motivation to enroll as foster parents included a lack of financial resources. Foster parents receive subsidies that help defray costly adoption fees.

Once they began their work with the Talbott-Perkins adoption agency in New York, Ryan's homecoming was so quick that Mary and Frank actually finished their foster parenting classes with Ryan in a baby carrier at their side. Mary and Frank found the whole experience of going through classes and meeting other prospective foster and adoptive parents to be unexpectedly bonding for their marriage. Mary and Frank hoped to open their hearts and their home to a child of another race and culture than their own. Mary affirms, "We were told that our child would be non-white. We responded that we didn't care if the child was pink, green or polka-dotted" (Appendix E, p. 1)

Mary's experience of adoption deepened her faith in God who she felt had answered her ardent prayers for a baby so many years ago by saying simply, "Trust." Mary affirmed, "When Ryan came home so quickly and so swiftly, I knew it was the answer to my prayers." Mary and Frank trusted and waited upon God and their hope was not disappointed. Mary is the biological daughter of a Lutheran pastor and his wife. Her deep faith in God's providential care is rooted in her early life as a child. Mary's family of origin already included foster and adoptive children. Growing up, Mary had a foster brother. Mary's brother, also, adopted a child, which helped pave the way for Mary to adopt a child.

Baptism was an extremely important religious ritual for Mary and Frank as they formed their new family. Ryan's baptism was their first public affirmation and welcome for Ryan as their son. Upon his baptism, Mary and Frank named their new baby "Ryan" which means "Little King." Mary shared, "Ryan is the king of our hearts and he is God's child, the son of a Heavenly King" (Appendix E, p. 2). Mary felt that God had formed their family though adoption.

Mary's greatest fear and sadness had to do with Ryan's birth mother. Because Mary and Frank were first foster parents before they adopted Ryan, the court mandated visits with Ryan's birth mother. Although Mary wanted an open adoption, these visits were initially terrifying primarily because Ryan's birth mother was suspected of killing another of her biological children. Mary was understandably concerned about how Ryan's birth mother would treat Ryan even on a supervised visit. In addition, although sensitive to Ryan's birth mother's pain at losing Ryan, Mary knew she might resent her for taking Ryan away from her. Over time, Mary developed compassion for Ryan's birth mother but she does not keep in contact with her.

Mary and Frank's greatest joy turned out to be meeting other prospective foster and adoptive parents. The people in their foster parenting class became like family and even gave them a baby shower when Ryan came home. Mary and Frank commented on the power of this "amazing" newfound community of parents. Mary observed, "The adoption experience impacted my faith enormously. I grew in openness to many different kinds of people and different family structures."

Mary and Frank received Ryan when he was only eight days old. They had little time to prepare and literally no baby supplies. Mary was surprised to find herself completely overwhelmed with the care of a newborn infant. When her physician diagnosed her with post-partum depression, Mary was surprised by the diagnosis since she hadn't given birth but relieved to find that medication helped alleviate her symptoms. Despite her joy at being parents at last, Mary and Frank needed to grieve the loss of some aspects of their lives before they had a child.

Rather than seeing Ryan as a chosen child, Mary sees herself and Frank as "chosen parents." Similar to many adoptive parents, Mary felt it took time for her to bond with Ryan. Verrier discerns a difference between attachment and bonding in the experience of adoption. While most adopted children and parents attach quickly to each other, Verrier asserts that "bonding" implies a more profound connection, one that is not so easily achieved (1993, p.19). However, Mary explains that once she did bond with Ryan as his mother, it was deeply and completely. One day Ryan asked her about his birth mother. If his birth mother gave birth to him, how was Mary related to him? Mary replied, "I am your chosen mother. God chose me and your Dad to be your parents" (Appendix E, p.3).

Merris—Story of International Adoption (See Appendix F for interview.)

Merris is a pre-school teacher in Brooklyn who adopted in mid-life. Although she had always hoped to have biological children, she felt that adoption would be a wonderful way for her as a single parent to build a family. Merris began to research adoption issues through the Adoptive Parents' Committee or APC, an active resource and support group in her community. Because Merris felt that most American birth mothers would be looking for a family that included a mother and a father, she chose international adoption from China as the path to achieve her dream of adopting a child. Like Sarah, Merris forged deep connections with other families who had adopted children from China especially the families who traveled with her to China to adopt their children. Her China group meets annually for a reunion and often sponsors additional activities and events. Last summer, Merris and her twelve-year-old daughter Amanda traveled back to China

with their original China group to visit the orphanage from which their children were adopted.

Merris' family was very supportive of her adoption journey. Her Father, a Protestant minister, came to the airport to be the very first person from Merris' family to welcome his baby granddaughter. As an infant, Amanda went right to him and smiled prompting him to say, "She's adopted us as quickly as we adopted her." Merris' family and friends surrounded her and Amanda with love and support right from the beginning. Baptism was an important religious ritual for their family to celebrate the homecoming of their newest family member. Merris' father baptized Amanda and her brother served as Godfather.

Morris' adoption journey is both typical and unique. Merris experienced God in the joy she felt when she received Amanda. When Amanda was placed in her arms, Merris was almost in an altered state of consciousness, a dream-like state in which she felt suffused with happiness. Merris, also, experienced God's forgiveness in a unique way through her adoption experience. Merris had an abortion when she was a young woman. At the time, abortion was only legal in two states, New York and California. When the New York Times Magazine did a photo series on fetal development, Merris was pierced to the heart to learn that at nine weeks (the time of her abortion) the human brain is developing. Having been raised in a deeply Christian home with strong religious values, Merris found it difficult to forgive herself for having undergone an abortion. She believed God had forgiven her but she struggled with forgiving herself. Although Merris explored her guilt and grief in therapy, her grief over the abortion was never completely resolved until she adopted Amanda. When Merris received Amanda, Merris also

received a deep sense of God's forgiveness. Merris observed, "When I adopted Amanda, I felt in my heart that God had forgiven me and given me a new life to love and cherish. Adoption for me was the confirmation of a spiritual healing that had already begun. Not only had God forgiven me, but God trusted me to be a Mom" (Appendix F, p. 2). For Merris, adoption was a healing journey as well as a profound journey of joy to embrace a child to love.

Cynthia—Story of Domestic Adoption (See Appendix G for interview.)

An attorney, Cynthia knew that she was infertile when she married her husband Julian. Julian had a biological son, Mark, from another marriage and was supportive of Cynthia in whatever path she wanted to take to have a child. Cynthia's doctor confronted the couple with their reality saying that they could either spend twenty thousand dollars trying to have a child or they could adopt and have a child. Cynthia needed to discern if she wanted to be pregnant or to have a child. Cynthia decided that, for her and for Julian, it was more important to be parents. As an African American couple, they learned that there were many healthy African American babies available for adoption domestically. After attending an adoption conference, Cynthia and Julian quickly made contact with a lawyer specializing in adoption and began to work on their adoption paperwork. Three months later, they received a call saying that a baby girl was available for adoption.

Cynthia and Julian's adoption process went very quickly, so quickly that they had little time to prepare for the arrival of their child. They had just finished their adoption paper work when they were notified that a baby was ready for them. Like Mary, Cynthia unexpectedly suffered from post-partum depression. Cynthia commented, "Now I

understand why God made women pregnant for nine months. You need to time to adjust, to slow down, and prepare for the arrival of a baby. Our process went so fast that we didn't have time to prepare" (Appendix G, p.2). Like other parents of newborns, Cynthia and Julian received the support of their family and friends. The couple couldn't believe how their family embraced Jessica. Jessica's eight year old step-brother Mark even wrote a letter telling how lonely he was until Jessica came into their family.

Cynthia's adoption journey served to strengthen her faith and her confidence in God's ability to answer prayer. A strong Christian before adopting her daughter Jessica, Cynthia felt even closer to God and her Church family after Jessica's adoption. Cynthia explains, "For me, the whole adoption experience was a faith-building experience...I just look at Jessica and I know God answers prayers" (Appendix G, p.2). Cynthia first learned about Jessica's birth on Ash Wednesday, the first day in the Christian season of Lent. Cynthia saw God's hand in the timing explaining, "Lent is about giving up, challenging yourself to grow spiritually, making room for God, returning to the Sacred. Adopting Jessica brought new meaning to the Lenten season for me" (Appendix G, p. 3)

The experience of adopting Jessica strengthened and enlarged their sense of family to go beyond blood kinship to a wider community of connection and care. For Cynthia, Julian, Jessica and Mark, their church is truly their family. Cynthia's faith community surrounded Jessica and her family with love and support. One woman knitted a blanket for the baby as a baptismal gift and Cynthia felt that each time she put it over Jessica, the love of the whole Church was covering her child. Another woman in the congregation gave Jessica a white doll. Although initially hesitant about the gift, Cynthia

and Julian talked about it and decided, "This Church is Jessica's family and it includes all races of people so why shouldn't she have a white doll."

Jessica's baptism was very important to Cynthia and Julian. Cynthia even designed a special photo book for Jessica entitled, Jessica's Story, A Celebration of How God Brought Our Family Together. On the title page, there is a picture of Jessica with her new parents at her baptism on October 8, 2006. The caption reads, "Jessica, this book was created for you to celebrate your adoption. This is your special story of how God brought us together as a family by baptism." The photo book contains pictures of Jessica's adoptive parents as well as her birth parents. Cynthia writes that while all babies are born, there are many reasons why families do not stay together and that their family was formed by adoption. I was struck by how much more integrative and open this homemade book was to the unique nature of adoptive families than the "chosen baby" books of decades ago. Far from ignoring the facts of Jessica's birth, the book included pictures of both Jessica's birth mother and birth father as well as a photo of a birth sibling, adopted by another family. Cynthia feels that her faith and her family was strengthened by the power of the baptismal ritual:

> "I became aware that God trusted me to care for this child. God sent his Son to this earth to be cared for by human parents. It was actually during the baptism that I felt a rush of sacred responsibility. God trusted me with this baby and now I am giving this baby back to God" (Appendix G, p.2)

Chapter V

One outcome of my Doctor Of Ministry project, which I did not anticipate, was finding evidence of post-partum depression in adoptive mothers. Two out of four adoptive mothers I interviewed were diagnosed with post-partum depression. I realize my sample is not large enough upon which to base a scientific conclusion; however, it certainly alerted me as a pastoral caregiver to be aware of the potential of post-partum depression in adoptive mothers.

Post-partum Depression and Adoptive Mothers

Two out of the four adoptive mothers I interviewed (Cynthia and Mary) indicated they suffered from post-partum depression following the adoption of their newborns. Their physicians eventually diagnosed both and both took medication to ease their symptoms. Cynthia sought help from her pastor (me) and I have to confess that I did not realize she was suffering from post-partum depression. Because she was an adoptive parent, I did not even consider post-partum depression a possible diagnosis. When she came repeatedly to me in tears, I assumed that she might be worrying about her daughter's birth mother changing her mind regarding the adoption or other adoption-related issues. Because of my insensitivity to the possibility of post-partum depression, I was not able to provide optimal pastoral care. I was empathetic but mystified as to the real source of her complaint.

One surprising outcome of my doctor of ministry project was to sensitive pastoral caregivers to recognize and even expect post-partum depression in adoptive mothers. As Mary's physician affirmed, one does not have to give birth in order to experience post-partum depression. Becoming a mother, whether via birth or adoption, necessitates a

profound reorganization of one's identity, goals, and overall sense of self. As Cynthia noted in her interview (Appendix G), pregnant women have nine months to prepare their minds, hearts, and physical lives to receive a newborn whereas adoptive mothers may have only a few days, weeks, or months. For example, Mary and her husband were in the midst of adoptive parenting classes when Ryan arrived. Only weeks old, Ryan accompanied them to their last few classes. While some adoptive mothers wait years to receive a child, others may receive the child for which they have been longing literally overnight. Such a dramatic life-change may have profound spiritual, emotional, and even physical ramifications.

Daniel Sterns (1995) comments on the profound change in the mother's basic status and identity upon becoming a parent. "The networks of schemas that undergo reworking are the mother's self as woman, mother, wife, career-person, friend, daughter, granddaughter, her role in society; her place in her family of origin; her legal status; herself as the person with cardinal responsibility for the life and growth of someone else; as the possessor of a different body; as a person "on call" 24 hours a day; as an adventurer in life, a creator, a player in evolution's grand scheme, and so on—in short, almost every aspect of her life. All these networks are thrown by events into the postpartum crucible, potentially to be re-forged" (p. 24). With such a huge change in identity and overall sense of self, pastoral caregivers should expect a period of transition, adjustment, and even post-partum depression. As her pastor, I should have encouraged Cynthia to seek medical help rather than simply listening to her concerns. Post-partum depression is a medical condition which necessitates medical evaluation and, often, medical intervention and treatment.

Treatment for post-partum depression is especially important because infants are impacted by the depression of their mothers. D.W. Winnicott (1971) revealed that an infant has "capacity for concern." When trying to connect with a "dead" or flat-affect mother, infants may mirror their mother's affect and even take their mother's suffering upon themselves. Daniel Sterns (1995) built on Winnicott's observations of the infant's capacity for concern in his discussion of the propensity of an infant to respond to the flat affect of a depressed mother by developing their own micro depression. Both D.W. Winnicott and Sterns identified the capacity of the infant for concern and even to take into themselves the suffering of the depressed mother.

Adoption and the Reality of Loss and Grief: Implications for Pastoral Care

The experience of post-partum depression in adoptive mothers may be complicated or even exacerbated by the reality that they are caring for a grieving infant or young child. The primal experience for adopted children is abandonment. Regardless of how well the transition from birth to adoption is handled, the infant or young child will inevitably experience loss. With loss, there is grief. Verrier explains, "That an adoptive child would grieve has not been adequately addressed in the literature. Yet for a child, absence and death may amount to the same thing, and the memory of the loss of the original mother may be imprinted in his psyche and cells" (1993, p. 39). Infants cannot communicate their loss in words, but that does not mean that they do not or cannot grieve.

Research suggests that infants go through stages of grief that are similar to adults but more difficult to discern. According to Verrier (1993), upon separation from the birth

mother, an infant first responds with outrage and anguished cries for her return. Next comes despair, which is marked by despondency when the hope of being reunited with the original mother diminishes. An infant at this stage may withdraw, stop crying, and appear detached. The child may seem detached even from a consistent, caring adoptive mother. For a mother already experiencing depression, this aloofness on the part of the infant may be deeply troubling.

The grieving infant will eventually attach to the loving, devoted adoptive mother. Verrier (1993) quotes John Bowlby in his groundbreaking work on separation and loss who put it this way, "Provided there is one particular mother figure to whom he can relate and who mothers him lovingly he will in time take to her and treat her almost as though she were his mother." Verrier points out that "almost" gives insight to the feeling that many adoptive mothers have that they accepted their child, but their child had not quite accepted them as mother (1993, p. 41). Few adoptive parents are prepared to expect, discern and respond effectively to a grieving infant or young child. This lack of preparation for the reality of loss and grief in a child who is adopted may exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and depression in adoptive mothers. In turn, a depressed mother is even less able to deal with the needs of a grieving infant. More attention and care on the part of pastoral caregivers, therapists, and adoption professionals needs to be paid to this painful, but real, aspect of the adoptive experience.

Broken and Blessed: Implications for Pastoral Care in a Wider Context

Faith communities and faith leaders have a legitimate claim upon them to respond to specific life transitions such as adoption. As an adult adoptee myself, I expected to

find adoptees in my interviews struggling with identity formation and with basic issues of trust. The primal wound of abandonment has life-long consequences for optimal emotional and spiritual development. Additionally, there is little doubt that the lack of information about one's origins hampers proper identity formation. If unable to positively resolve Erikson's first developmental crisis of trust versus mistrust, adoptees may struggle with a basic sense of mistrust throughout their lives. Likewise adoptees who fail to positively resolve Erikson's adolescent crisis of identity versus role confusion, may be unable to achieve healthy intimate relationships.

Both of the adoptees I interviewed—Sarah and Debbie—reflect such struggles in their journey to wholeness. Nevertheless, human beings are resilient and adopted children and adults can and do work through their core issues to lead healthy, productive, and meaningful lives. Even more, their very wounds can be a source of compassion and strength. For example, Debbie utilizes her adoptive experience in her work as a social worker and child advocate. Debbie concludes:

> "The gift in being adopted is that I am more sensitive...I feel deeply for the kids who don't fit in. I wonder how many adoptees there are like me who chose caring professions to help others" (Appendix D, p. 3).

The experience of both Debbie and Sarah reveals that dealing effectively with the experience of adoption can strengthen one's ability to cope with life's many challenges.

Verrier (1993) notes that the child who is relinquished may develop a premature-ego, resulting in a strong drive for survival. It is as if such a child sat up in his or her crib and determined, "I can't trust anyone. I will have to take care of myself" (p. 31). As an adult adoptee, Sarah may have utilized her drive to be self-sufficient, the survival-value aspect of premature ego development, as a means to fuel her drive to be successful and

independent. Hampered by the lack of information about her origins, Sarah struggled to forge her identity and establish healthy intimacy with another adult partner. While Sarah flourished professionally, she struggled personally with intimate relationships. Nevertheless, Sarah worked hard to resolve her core issues and adopt Anna. When she adopted Anna, she, also, adopted and accepted herself and grew emotionally and spiritually more whole.

I agree with Winnicott (1971) that there is a profound, emotional connection between birth mother and infant. Winnicott asserted that at the beginning of life, there is no such thing as a baby, only a mother/baby matrix of self. When that tie is severed, the child's self is fractured. Verrier (1993) applied Winnicott's research and insight to the adoptive experience and suggested that one might compare the mother/infant self to a plate. Upon separation, the plate is smashed. Verrier explains, "In the case of adoption, not only does the plate have to be glued back together, but the other half of the plate is different, so that the pieces will not quite fit together...For the child who has experienced these 'breaks' in the continuity of bonding, his trust in the environment has been shaken and his sense of Self has been compromised. Something is broken; something is missing, and it will never be the same again (1993, p. 30)." No wonder, adoptees, like the ones I interviewed, experience enduring feelings of not fitting in and of feeling like an outsider in their own lives.

The implications for pastoral care of adoptees are manifold. More than other congregants, adoptees need to be reassured that while human relationships cannot always be trusted, God can be trusted. Images of God which mirror God's hesed—God's steadfast love—will be comforting to the child who is adopted. The image of God as a

faithful, adopting parent is profound for the adoptee. The child who has been relinquished by a human mother, even for the best of reasons, needs to know that he or she can count on God to care for them. Scriptures such as Psalm 27:10, "If my father or mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up," and Isaiah 49:15 are critically important to the adoptee. Christian Scriptures such as Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:4-5 which portray God as the adopting parent of all believers will be powerful resources for pastoral care of adopted children and adults. All of the adoptees I interviewed emphasized their need to hear positive stories about adoption from Scripture.

Issues of belonging are, also, core to the adoptee. The child who has experienced the primal wound of abandonment will need to be welcomed and embraced by their faith community on a core level. Conversely, adoptees will experience rejection more keenly and may be deeply scarred by a faith community that rejects or marginalizes their experience as an adoptee or adoptive family. Ritual is particularly effective in addressing core needs. Ritual transcends the verbal and touches pre-verbal archetypes and memories. For this reason, initiation rituals such as the Christian rite of baptism and the Jewish Mikvah are powerfully healing and affirming experiences for the newly formed adoptive family. Clergy have an opportunity at an initiation ritual for an adopted child to lift up positive stories of adoption in Holy Scripture. Cynthia, who is one of my congregants, shared with me how touched she was that I preached about adoption in my sermon the day that her daughter was baptized.

In addition, pastoral caregivers may be called upon to provide pastoral care for the adoptee as they search for and meet birth parents and birth families. Pastors and other professionals need to remember that for the adoptee, the search for the birth mother is,

also, a search for self (Verrier, 1993, p. 33). Truth, even in difficult circumstances, must be encouraged by pastoral care-givers. Secrecy and outright lies to adoptees are to be avoided at all costs. Adoptees need access to the facts of their origins for proper identity formation and for basic trust issues. A child who has been abandoned will not easily trust others. Let us not compound trust and identity issues for our adoptive congregants with lies and half-truths. Debbie is correct that even the most horrific of birth circumstances can be shared with the adoptee in an age-appropriate manner. A child who is lied to by a significant other will not easily trust again.

Language creates reality and the language we use when discussing adoption may be harmful or healing. Clergy and faith communities have a responsibility to exercise care and sensitivity when addressing adoptive families. The term "birth parent" or "biological parent" is to be used rather than "natural" or "real parent." Adoptive parents are not unnatural or unreal. Mary raises the point in her interview that our culture uses the word "adopt" far too casually. Phrases such as "adopt a highway" denigrate the real meaning and depth of adoption. Mary, also, points out the power of putting the child first in our language such as referring to a child who is adopted rather than an adopted child. A friend of mine who adopted two children at different times from Korea was continually frustrated when well-meaning friends asked her in front of her children if they were related. She would reply, "Of course they are related, they 're brother and sister!" Worst of all is the question, "So how much did you pay for that baby?" Adoptive parents do not buy babies. They pay attorney and orphanage fees just as biological parents pay hospital and doctor fees. When faith communities and clergy model positive adoption language and employ images of adoption in sermons and in ritual, adoptive families are

strengthened and uplifted. Moving adoption to a more central and respected place in our religious traditions may reduce the psychic vulnerability of our congregants who are adopted.

Thankfully, we have moved beyond the need to hide or keep secret the reality of adoption. However, a lack of regard for the privacy of adoptive families is equally unhelpful. Faith communities and clergy must respect the privacy and confidentiality of adoptees and adoptive families regarding the details of their adoption stories. In her interview, Cynthia shared her pain when a well-meaning church member pointed out her daughter Jessica to a visitor as a child who was adopted. Jessica is African American like her parents and, thus, not immediately visible as a child who is adopted. Such insensitivity is painful and potentially scarring for adoptees who already struggle to feel they fit in. Jessica's mother affirmed, "Adoption is personal and no child should be pointed out as being different" (Appendix G, p.3). Children who are adopted deserve honor, respect, and privacy as children of God.

Pastoral caregivers may, also, be called upon to reassure adoptive parents that they have nothing to fear from their children's curiosity about their birth parents. Paradoxically, reuniting with birth parents usually reinforces the adoptive tie. While biological information is necessary for identity formation, we really are the children of the people who love and care for us throughout our lives. People of faith are uniquely prepared to proclaim the truth that we are primarily related as children of the Living God and not only through blood-ties.

Jewish adoptees born to Gentile mothers may be particularly vulnerable to faith-related identity issues since that person is Jewish who is born to a Jewish mother.

Adoption does not mean automatic conversion (Moore, 2002). Both Sarah and Debbie confronted such concerns in different ways. Debbie sought official conversion as an adult, while Sarah officially converted her daughter Anna as a toddler. Whatever path is taken, the community of faith is instrumental. When the community of faith is welcoming and affirming of the adoption journey, the conversion experience will be a joyful one. If, however, the community of faith is unwelcoming an adoptee will feel such rejection deeply. Debbie sounds a cautionary note, "Conversion is meant to be difficult. You are to turn someone away three times...but I think we need to be more sensitive to the needs of adoptees. For someone like me to be rejected was very painful. I was raised Jewish and the experience of being turned away added to painful feelings of alienation" (Appendix D, p.4). The story of Moses may be extremely helpful to Jewish adoptees, as it was to Debbie. Moses, too, was born to one faith and raised in another. Nevertheless, God used Moses' birth and adoptive identity in order to prepare him to be a redeemer of Israel.

Adoption and the Power of Community

All of the adoptive mothers I interviewed praised the healing power of community in their adoption journey. Mary observed, "After our experience of adoption, we had a wider sense of family and community" (Appendix E, p.2). It would be wise for pastoral caregivers to encourage congregants hoping to adopt to seek out community resources and support groups such as APC or the Adoptive Parents' Committee; Foster Parenting Groups; Families with Children from China and other similar groups. One of the great joys for many adoptive families is the discovery of this rich community of adopted

parents and children and adults who are adopted. Adoption professionals and the internet are rich resources to use in order to connect with these groups.

Faith communities are called upon to embrace, celebrate, and affirm adoptive parents and their children. When they function in this way, a faith community can become a second family for the child who is adopted and their parents. It is impossible to overstate the importance of such a community to the adoptive experience. Cynthia described the power of her faith community in surrounding and supporting her daughter Jessica and her family with love and care. Even before Jessica was adopted, an elderly woman in her community was praying for Cynthia to receive the child for which she longed. Many women in Cynthia's congregation made blankets for Jessica. Cynthia observed, "I feel all of those blankets were made with love. When I put those blankets over Jessica when I tuck her into bed at night, I feel the love of God is over her, shielding her and protecting her" (Appendix G, p. 3). Similarly, Sarah praised her faith community and Temple Nursery School for helping her raise Anna with values of compassion and faith. Sarah observed that her Rabbi and her faith leaders made Judaism "fun and meaningful" for Anna (Appendix H, p. 2). Where is God in the experience of adoption? God is in the care and commitment of communities of faith to children who are adopted and their families.

Trans-racial Families and the Household of Faith

Isabella Rossellini chose to adopt a child and indicated on her adoption application that she preferred a non-white child. When the actress, the daughter of Ingrid Bergman, and filmmaker Roberto Rossellini adopted a son who was part African

American, she was asked, "How does it feel to look at your child knowing that none of your parents, whom the entire world adored, is in that baby?" Rossellini replied without hesitation, "The genetic connection in adoption includes my parents and goes far beyond them, all the way back to Adam and Eve...Adoption carries the added dimension of connection to your own tribe but beyond, widening the scope of what constitutes love, ties and family. It is a larger embrace" (Moessner, 2003, p. 116).

The household of faith is intrinsically the home of that larger embrace of God's family, which includes all people of the world. Moessner (2003) points out that for Christians, the household of faith is essentially an adoptive family, which one enters through the waters of baptism. Through baptism, children are reborn as "adopted" children of God. Diverse communities of faith are optimal for trans-racial adoptive families. Sarah chose the Temple that she and her Chinese born daughter attend because it included trans-racial families like her own.

Adoption is often trans-racial. Four out of the five adoptive families I included in this paper are trans-racial. Trans-racial families formed by adoption have much to teach us about the nature of God's family. Despite the success and visibility of mixed-race families, stereotypes persist. My own daughter was adopted from Vietnam as a five-month-old infant. I cannot tell you how many people asked me if she would speak Vietnamese rather than English. Like many toddlers, she loved to squat. One day, she was squatting to better pick up a toy from the floor when an adult in my faith community commented, "Look at that, she looks just like she is in a rice paddy in Asia." I was grateful she was too young to understand the thoughtless comment.

A child who is adopted and who does not share the same race as his or her parents may feel painfully different. Sarah and Merris point out how important it was for their daughters, adopted from China, to develop close relationships with other mutli-cultural families like theirs. Adoptive mother, Myra Alperson affirms, "Adoption is a clear expression that although blood may be thicker than water, love is thicker than blood. A person's choice to look past these difference shows that we have the ability to relate to others first as human beings. We support intercountry, interracial adoption because it works" (2001, p. 182).

Families adopting cross-culturally or trans-racially are encouraged to celebrate their child's birth culture so that he or she will feel proud of their cultural origins. Faith communities can aid in the celebration of the birth culture of even their youngest members by recognizing and including items specific to their cultural as appropriate. For example, when my own daughter was baptized, she wore a traditional Vietnamese Ao Dai as her baptismal garment. The cover of the worship bulletin for the day pictured Jesus surrounded by children from all corners of the globe, a little Asian girl was cradled in his lap. Yet another family I know adopted a child from China and another child from Ethiopia and included music from both cultures in their children's baptismal celebration. God's family is intrinsically diverse. Trans-racial adoptive families mirror that diversity and remind us of the diverse beauty of God's good creation.

The Living Practice of the Faith Community—Implications for Future Ministry

In Farewell to Arms Hemingway wrote, "The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong at the broken places." The child who is abandoned or

relinquished for adoption has experienced a profound separation and loss often at the very beginning of their lives. Nevertheless, they are blessed in their brokenness. In both Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, God promises, "I will not leave you orphaned, I will come to you" (John 4:18). The writer of Psalm 27:10, affirms, "If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up." The faith community is called upon to embody God's promise and support adoptive parents and adoptees in their adoption journey. With Sarah who adopted Anna at six months, we can affirm the presence of God, "When they put Anna into my arms for the first time, I knew there was a God. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that this baby came from God" (Appendix C, p.3). Although representing only a minority of congregants, issues adoptive families face touch universal human concerns of blood and belonging, connection and kinship. We have much to learn from their experience and we are spiritually enriched by their journey to wholeness.

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APPENDIX A
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptee

1. Please tell me about your adoption story.

2. What, if any, impact has being adopted had on how you see yourself?

3. What, if any, impact has being adopted had on your relationship with others (family, friends, community)?

4. Do you and/or your family intentionally celebrate or affirm your adoption? If so, how?

5. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, whose eyes penetrate yours and see you?

6. What impact, if any, has being adopted had on your relationship with God?

7. What impact, if any, has being adopted had on your relationship with your faith community? Have you felt welcomed, invisible, discounted, embraced, connected, disconnected?

8. How, if at all, does your faith community celebrate and/or affirm adoption?

9. What wisdom would you like to share with your faith leader and faith community regarding your adoption journey? How might your faith leader and faith community affirm and/or celebrate adoption?

10. Where, if at all, have you experienced the Sacred in your adoption story?

APPENDIX B
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptive Parents

1. Please tell me about the journey that led you to adoption.

2. What motivated your choice of adoption process?
   - † Domestic
   - † International
   - † Trans-racial
   - † Special needs
   - † Foster to Adoption
   - † Open/Closed
   - † Other

3. What impact has adoption had on your family? ...extended family?...community?

4. What impact, if any, has your experience as an adoptive parent had on your relationship with God? ...your relationship with your faith community?

5. What role, if any, have religious rituals played in your experience of adoption?

6. What was or is your greatest joy in your adoption experience?

7. What was or is your greatest sadness in your adoption experience?

8. What was or is your greatest fear in your adoption experience? If your fear was resolved, how so?

9. What, if anything, surprised you in your adoption experience?

10. What impact, if any, has your adoption journey had on you as a person created in the image of God? Have you changed or grown in any way as a result of your adoption journey?

11. Where, if at all, did you experience a sense of the Sacred in your adoption journey?

APPENDIX C
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptee

Adoptee: Sarah
Date of Interview: February 8, 2009
Place of Interview: Manhattan

1. How do you describe your adoption story?

I remember exactly when and how my parents told me I was adopted. I was four years old. They told me they had something wonderful to tell me. They made it sound so amazing that I really thought I was getting great news. They read me a book that was popular among adoptive parents back then called The Chosen Baby. They explained that some people have babies but other people get to choose their babies. I was a chosen baby and that was special. I remember the unease I felt. I don't think I could put it into words but it didn't feel good to me. My parents told me over and over again that it was really important that I not tell anyone that I was adopted. Even as a young child, I thought to myself that if it was such great news, why did I have to keep it a secret. When I was older, I asked my parents if I could tell my husband on the night before we got married. My mother told me no and I asked why? She responded that if I told him I was adopted, he might not marry me. I was over thirty years old before I told anyone outside my family that I was adopted.

I felt that to inquire about or to search for my birth mother would somehow be a negation of my mother. My parents always stressed that birth was nothing. Raising a child was what made you a parent. The stories about my birth parents kept shifting. First, the story was that my parents were too poor to keep me and so they gave me up for adoption. Then, I was told that my birth parents were dead. My parents said that my father died in the war and that my mother died giving birth to me. It was only when I was an adult that I realized I was born after the war so my father couldn't have died in it. However, I still believed that my parents were dead.

When I was about thirty, my mother came to me all teary and nervous and handed me a sheet of paper with a name and a telephone number on it. She explained that she was giving me the name of my birthmother who was alive and living in Brooklyn. She thought that I should call and ask her if she had taken Thalidomide when she was pregnant with me. This was a time when the effects of Thalidomide were in the news and my mother was worried for my health. I was shocked. I asked her why she had lied to me and she said, "You kept asking about your birth mother. We just told you she had died so you would stop asking." I never called my birth mother. For some reason, I just couldn't. Even after my parents told me the truth, I was always terrified that I would die in childbirth.

2. What, if any, impact has being adopted had on how you see yourself?

Being adopted had a huge impact on how I saw myself. First, I never looked like anyone else in my family. I remember hearing family members whisper to my parents that they were so lucky that I turned out to be a "good one." Another family member

commented on my parents' bravery in adopting a child because they had to take whatever they got in me. I always saw myself as if there was something wrong with me. Being told that being adopted is special and you have to keep it a secret was very confusing to me. I developed a profound sense of shame. Not only did I have to keep my adoption secret and hidden, I had to hide the unacceptable parts of myself. As an adult, I realize that one of the reasons my parents wanted to keep my adoption a secret was because they were having difficulty dealing with their own feelings about infertility.

3. What, if any, impact has being adopted had on your relationship with others (family, friends, community)?

No one outside the family knew or admitted to knowing that I was adopted. However, everyone in my family knew I was adopted. They knew my mother wasn't pregnant and understood that I was adopted when I arrived as an infant. I was never aware of being treated differently but I was very aware of comments on how lucky my parents were that I wasn't a freak. Although I was accepted as one of the family, I always felt like an outsider.

I do remember that when my mother would get really mad at me and scream at me she would say that she was calling the police to take me away. I was terrified because I thought they really would. As an adopted child, I was always aware that having been relinquished once it could happen again. I wasn't sure how secure my place was in my family.

4. Do you and/or your family intentionally celebrate or affirm your adoption? If so, how?

No, we hid my adoption rather than celebrate it.

5. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, whose eyes penetrate yours and see you?

It's very difficult to answer but the immediate thought that came to mind was my mother. Since becoming an adoptive parent myself, I've often thought that I understand her so much better. She was flawed but she loved me deeply and completely. She is the one who sees through the windows of my soul.

6. What impact, if any, has being adopted had on your relationship with God?

I did see myself as part of my parents. They were Jewish and so I was Jewish. I know there were times when I was an adolescent that I asked my parents if my birthmother was Jewish and they always said that they thought she was Jewish. My parents were not highly observant and I guess I just didn't think much about God.

7. What impact, if any, has being adopted had on your relationship with your faith community? Have you felt welcomed, invisible, discounted, embraced, connected, disconnected?

The fact that I was adopted was hidden from my faith community. My parents were semi-observant. They had a definite Jewish identity. Like many other Jewish parents, their biggest fear was that I would grow up and marry a Christian. We celebrated Jewish holidays but I was never bat-mitzvahed. I did go to Hebrew School as a child and learned the Bible stories. We always fasted on Yom Kippur and ate matzo on Passover.

My adoption was hidden and it never came up as an issue in my faith community. Religion did become an issue for my daughter Anna who was adopted from China. I had Anna converted when she was a baby. When she became a teen-ager, I wanted her to go for bar-mitzvah lessons but she said, "I'm not really Jewish. My birthmother wasn't Jewish." I replied that she was more Jewish than I was because I didn't know if my birth mother was Jewish or not and I didn't have a conversion certificate. Anna does have a conversion certificate.

8. How, if at all, does your faith community celebrate and/or affirm adoption?

I know that I was supported as an adoptive parent by several Rabbis that I knew. As an adoptee, I didn't feel any support but that is because my adoption was completely hidden from those outside our family.

9. What wisdom would you like to share with your faith leader and faith community regarding your adoption journey? How might your faith leader and faith community affirm and/or celebrate adoption?

I think it is important to make Judaism fun and meaningful to children. My own Rabbi was very supportive of my daughter and encouraged me to convert her early so that she would grow up with no doubt of her religious heritage. I would like to know more about Bible stories that connect to adoption.

10. Where, if at all, have you experienced the Sacred in your adoption story?

I experienced God when I adopted my own daughter, Anna. When they put Anna in my arms, for the first time I knew there was a God. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that this baby came from God.

APPENDIX D
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptee: Debbie

Date of Interview: Thursday, February 19, 2009
Place: Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Baldwin, New York
Occupation: Social Worker

1. Please tell me about your adoption story.

If I can believe my parents, they knew a doctor who had a patient who was pregnant. The birthmother didn't want to keep her child and my parents wanted to adopt a baby. This doctor arranged a private adoption. The doctor came to dinner at my parents' house when I was sixteen years old. It was an awkward evening. I had many questions for him but everyone pretended like it was just an ordinary dinner. My parents knew I had questions. I'm sure he knew I had questions but no one said anything. After dinner, I walked him to his car and I asked him what he could tell me about my birth family. He said that after I was born, my birthmother married my birthfather and they had children together. I don't know why he told me what turned out to be a blatant lie. The result was that I always wondered if every family I saw driving by in a car might be my birth family. I felt that they were complete and I was the only missing link. It just wasn't the truth, as I would later find out. As a social worker, I am a big advocate for always telling the truth to adopted children. No matter how horrific the birth circumstances of any child, there is an age-appropriate way to tell the truth. Not telling the truth contributes to mistrust and all kinds of problems for the adoptee.

I was adopted when I was a baby by my parents who were Jewish. There was some kind of baby-naming ceremony but mostly we were non-practicing. My Grandparents, however, were Orthodox. I went to Jewish sleep away camp for seven years. I learned Hebrew in college and was active in Hillel. I even went to Israel when I was seventeen but I was more interested in friends and other activities than in studying for my Bat-Mitzvah.

People would often tell me, "You don't look Jewish!" I struggled as to how to integrate that information with my identity. I knew I looked Irish far more than I looked Jewish and yet I was Jewish. As an adult, I sought to officially convert to Judaism. I needed to confirm to myself that I really was Jewish.

When I was an adult, one of my five birth sisters went looking for me and found me. She did remain with a relative of my birth mother and found a copy of my birth certificate in a box somewhere, which included the names of my adoptive parents. She called the house where they lived all their lives and we connected. Later through her, I met my remaining birth siblings and finally, my birthmother. After I met my birth sister, I cut off from her for a while until emotionally ready to re-connect. I think at first when you meet your birth family, there is a "honeymoon" period of sharing information and then you need some space to process what has happened. When I saw baby pictures of my siblings and compared them to my own, I was stunned by the resemblances. But I think for me there was a kind of "survivor's guilt." I had by far the best childhood of any of my siblings. Some of my siblings were raised in abusive situations. They embraced

me as a long-lost sister but I was the daughter of my adoptive parents. For example, one of my birth sisters invited me to Texas for Christmas. How could I explain I don't even celebrate Christmas and even if I did, I was spending the holiday break with my Aunt and parents in Florida?

Meeting my birth family was very important to me. It helped me put the pieces together. Now, there are no gaps. It made me feel more whole, more connected, like there is solid ground beneath my feet. After I had my own children, it felt even more important. Not knowing would have been like denying my children a piece of their history.

2. What, if any, impact has being adopted had on how you see yourself?

I always felt like a bit of an outsider in my own life. It was very painful. I grew up feeling a bit of an alien. My parents are Jewish and people would always say to me, "You don't look Jewish!" I would reply, "Yes, I know I have the map of Ireland on my face." It turned out that my birth family was Irish and Polish Catholic.

I remember later seeing a picture of my birthmother on her First Communion Day. She was wearing the white dress and had a crown of flowers in her hair. I could tell where her forehead was scrunched just the way I scrunch mine when I am concentrating. It's those little pieces of identity that tear at your heart. As an adoptee, you feel like a part of you is missing. I think people underestimate how important that is.

3. What, if any, impact has being adopted had on your relationship with others (family, friends, community)?

I always felt like an outsider. My parents were very supportive of me and I have wonderful relationships with extended family; however the subject of adoption was not discussed. My parents were Jewish but non-practicing. There was some kind of naming ceremony after I was born. I went to Jewish sleep-away camp for seven years. I learned Hebrew in college and was active in Hillel. I even went to Israel when I was seventeen. I was never Bat-Mitzvahed. My friends and other activities were more important to me at the time.

4. Do you and/or your family intentionally celebrate or affirm your adoption? If so, how?

Adoption was a taboo subject for me growing up. I could never bring up adoption to my parents. My Mom would cry and I would feel…"Oh no, I did this to her!" I never even told my parents that I met my birthmother. It would have devastated them."

5. If the eyes are the windows of the soul, whose eyes penetrate yours and see you?

The first person I met who looked like me was my birth sister. She went looking for me and found me. We met for the first time in a restaurant and ordered the exact same meal! There was a mirror on the wall in that place and we couldn't take our eyes off the mirror. We kept saying, "Don't you think we have the same forehead?" We were

mesmerized by the family resemblances, the tiny pieces of identity we found in each other. We even attracted attention. When we explained what was happening, the whole restaurant was amazed.

6. What impact, if any, has being adopted had on your relationship with God?

It gave me a hunger to be officially recognized by my chosen faith. I always felt a little bit like an outsider and so I needed to "officially" become an insider. Nevertheless, I think the gift in being adopted is that I am more sensitive to those who are feeling rejection, loneliness or isolation. As a social worker, I feel deeply for the kids who "don't fit in". I wonder how many adoptees there are like me who chose caring professions to help others who feel like they don't fit in.

Something else is that I think being adopted makes you stronger especially in situations that you can't control. The experience of being out of control is fundamental in the adoptive experience. You couldn't control the circumstances of your birth and adoption. Of course, life presents us with many circumstances in which we are out of control. I relate deeply with the serenity prayer, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

7. What impact, if any, has being adopted had on your relationship with your faith community? Have you felt welcomed, invisible, discounted, embraced, connected, and disconnected?

Initially, I felt invisible, discounted and disconnected. I went to my Rabbi to explain that I wanted to officially convert to Judaism. He gave me a list of Rabbis to contact to help me on that journey. The first Rabbi I met said simply, "No." The second Rabbi said, "I don't have time to do this properly." Another Rabbi from a strict Orthodox sect said, "I don't know how to do this." Still another Rabbi from a strict Orthodox sect in Long Beach said that I could become a Noah-hide. I asked him what that was because I had never heard of a Noah-hide. He said Noah-hides had to follow 613 laws rather than 10 and that they were official supporters of Judaism but not officially Jewish. I was a fan of the 49'ers at the time and I said, "Rabbi, that would be like telling Joe Montana that he couldn't play with the 49'ers. Instead, he would have to take a seat way, way, up in the bleachers and that's the closest he would ever get to playing on the team." I explained to him that I wanted to be officially Jewish so that there would be no question when I was married or when I was buried. He said that he was sorry but he couldn't help me. Yet another Rabbi told me I had to go to Israel and join a Kibbutz for women. Finally, I went back to my Rabbi and said, "I give up. I'm just going to be a shicksa." My rabbi said, "No, don't give up. Just try this one more Rabbi."

At long last, I found a Rabbi sympathetic to adoptees at Kehilith Jeshrun in Manhattan. For one year, I trained with a Rabbi in the city. We studied Hebrew and read the Scriptures and had debates over the meaning of certain passages. I read books on how to keep a kosher house and even visited a Hasidic festival. Finally, the Rabbi felt I

was ready for the Mikvah. Three Rabbis waited outside the room. One woman stayed in the room with the pool to make sure that not even a hair on my head stayed above the water (you have to go under three times). I had strep throat and a fever of 102 F but nothing could have kept me from those waters. After the Mikvah, the Rabbi's were singing with joy and cheering. There were three copies of my official conversion papers. I received one copy, the Rabbi kept one copy and a third copy was sent somewhere in Israel.

8. How, if at all, does your faith community celebrate and/or affirm adoption?

Unfortunately, not so much. Of course, there are exceptions. I finally found a Temple in Manhattan where there was a support group for adoptees and adoptive parents and there was a great deal of sensitivity to families like mine.

9. What wisdom would you like to share with your faith leader and faith community regarding your adoption journey? How might your faith leader and faith community affirm and/or celebrate adoption?

I understand the three strikes law of the conversion process. Conversion is meant to be difficult. You are to turn someone away three times before accepting him or her for conversion, but I think we need to be more sensitive to the needs of adoptees. For someone like me to be rejected was very painful. I was raised Jewish and the experience of being turned away added to painful feelings of alienation.

I think also it would be helpful for Rabbis to include illustrations and stories of adoption in sermons so that adoptees and adoptive families can recognize themselves even as they learn about their faith. I would ask Rabbis to show interest in adoptive families and to include them as really belonging in the faith community.

10. Where, if at all, have you experienced the Sacred in your adoption story?

As part of my conversion process, there came a time when I had to take a new name. I chose to keep my first name Devorah or Deborah which is Hebrew but to add as my middle name Miriam. Since I was a female, I couldn't take the name Moses but I wanted to embrace the story of Moses as also in a way my story. Moses was born into one faith and raised in another. I felt a sense of connection to Moses and, of course, to Miriam. This is my true identity. After my journey to meet my birth family and become officially Jewish was complete, I felt more whole, more connected and like I finally had solid ground beneath my feet.

Also, I saw God's sacred timing in my adoption story. Things happened that were just too much of a coincidence. For example, when my birth sister found me, she called the home of my adoptive parents (where they had lived for 30 years) on the day before they were moving out and the phone was going to be disconnected with no forwarding number. If she had not called that day, we might never have met. The same was true with my birthmother. I had fallen out of touch with my birth siblings and I got back in touch right before they were about to meet with my birthmother for the first time. She died soon after. Had I not called when I did, I may not ever have met her. God was in the timing, helping me find my way.

APPENDIX E
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptive Parent

Adoptive Mother: Mary
Date of Interview: March 1, 2009
Place of Interview: Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Baldwin, New York
Mary's Occupation: Pre-School Director and Teacher

1. Please tell me about the journey that led you to adoption.

We were not able to conceive a child and so contemplated adoption for many years. We had many disappointments. We put in an application at Lutheran Social Services and then the whole agency burned to the ground along with our application. We looked into international adoption and were discouraged by the expense and the long wait. Finally, a friend suggested that we contact the Talbott Perkins' Agency in New York City. The timing was incredible. We called and they had a class starting the very next week. We enrolled and before we even finished the class, we received a child. We finished the class with Ryan in a baby carrier.

2. What motivated your choice of adoption process?

We chose to foster to adopt for several reasons. We had very little money. The expense of adoption was a deterrent to us. Initially, I rejected the idea of being a foster parent. I wanted a child for so long that I didn't want to take a child away from someone else. I knew what it was to ache for a child and I didn't want to be the cause of that pain for another mother. However, the Social Worker at Talbott Perkins' explained that we needed to trust them. We could be a pre-adoptive foster parent for a child that had no chance of going back to their birth family for very good reasons. We were told that the child would be non-white. We responded that we didn't care if the child was pink, green, or polka-dotted...we just wanted a child. We were also told the child would not be an infant but that turned out not to be true.

3. What impact has adoption had on your family? ...extended family?...community?

My brother and sister-in-law adopted first, about four years prior to our adoption so the way was really paved for us. Also, I had a foster brother growing up so my parents were familiar with foster parenting and adoption. Besides, my parents were desperate to become grandparents.

The adoptive experience was a bonding one for our marriage. It brought us closer together as we participated in classes and learned about others and ourselves. One of the miracles of adoption was my husband's willingness to really open up. He was initially resistant to the idea of adoption but after we got Ryan he put his arm around me one day and said, "Thank you for pushing me. I would never have done this without you."

Ryan's homecoming was so quick that we didn't have time to tell that many people. When the folks on our block found out we had a baby, there was an endless stream of visitors all bearing gifts. We went from having nothing to having everything

we might need and then some. One of my friends gave us the book What To Expect in Your Babies' First Year? I read it cover to cover in one night.

The whole experience of adoption really opened our hearts and minds to different family structures, different ethnic backgrounds, cultures and life-styles. After our experience of adoption, we had a wider sense of family and community. The folks in our foster parenting class really became our family. They even gave us a surprise baby shower.

4. What impact, if any, has your experience as an adoptive parent had on your relationship with God? ...your relationship with your faith community?

The adoptive experience had an enormous impact on my relationship with God. After trying for so long to have a child, I became very distraught about not becoming a mother. Finally I prayed, "God, if you don't want me to be a mother, then please take this desire from me." While I was praying that prayer, I heard a voice say gently as clear as a bell, "Trust."

When Ryan came so quickly and so swiftly, I knew it was the answer to my prayers. After all those years, we filled out our application in December and we had a child by February 24th. God had designed everything and had chosen us to be parents for this child. The whole experience strengthened my faith in God's compassion and in God's ability to answer prayer—to know and grant our heart's desires.

5. What role, if any, have religious rituals played in your experience of adoption?

Baptism was so important for our family. Not only did God claim Ryan in baptism but God also named Ryan. Baptism solidified our relationship and our new family. We gave him the name Ryan Francis. Ryan means "little king." He is the king of our hearts and he is God's child, the son of a Heavenly King.

6. What was or is your greatest joy in your adoption experience?

Our greatest joy was meeting such amazing people in our foster to adopt parenting class. They were like a family for us until the agency closed after 911. We finished our last two classes with Ryan right there with us. They even gave us a baby shower. They were just the most amazing people.

7. What was or is your greatest sadness in your adoption experience?

As I came to know Ryan's birthmother, I realized that she too was a victim. First, she was a victim of her family who abused her and then she was a victim of the system who continued the abuse. She was retarded and had been institutionalized for part of her life. All of her children had been taken from her. I couldn't understand why the court forced her to have visitation with a child she and they knew she could never care for. In a way, that was cruel.

8. What was or is your greatest fear in your adoption experience? If your fear was resolved, how so?

My greatest fear was meeting Ryan's birthmother. I was so terrified that I thought I would literally throw-up. We had court mandated visits with her, which started when Ryan was two weeks old and continued for two years. It was really rough. The caseworker told us she had a criminal record. They suspected her of killing another child in her care. There was a SSN number but no baby. They never charged her because there was no proof. We were told she was very angry and that was true. After the court terminated her parental rights, it was easier for us in some ways. Still getting to know her was important. I developed compassion for her over time.

9. What, if anything, surprised you in your adoption experience?

I was surprised that I experienced post-partum depression. The social workers from the agency came in a livery cab and dropped off Ryan. They came. We took pictures and then they left all in about twenty minutes. One hour before we had no child and suddenly we were parents of an 8-day-old infant. It was overwhelming. When my doctor told me I was experiencing post-partum depression, I objected, "But I didn't give birth!" The doctor explained that didn't matter. He told me our lives had changed profoundly. We were exhausted and we needed to grieve the loss of some aspects of our old life. Medication also helped.

10. What impact, if any, has your adoption journey had on you as a person created in the image of God? Have you changed or grown in any way as a result of your adoption journey?

The adoption experience impacted my faith enormously. I grew in openness to many different kinds of people and different family structures. My son has special needs and I am even now trying to start a faith-based school for children with special needs.

11. Where, if at all, did you experience a sense of the Sacred in your adoption journey?

God was in every aspect of my adoption journey. I learned a deeper trust in God and in myself. It took me a long time to bond with Ryan completely. That's because of who I am. I tend to guard my heart but when I bonded with Ryan at last it was completely and deeply. One day Ryan asked me, "I know my birth mother is my birth mother but what are you?" I replied, "I am your chosen mother. God chose me and your Dad to be your parents." I believe that and so does Ryan.

12. What wisdom would you want to share with your faith leader or faith community as an adoptive parent? How might your faith community affirm and celebrate the adoption journey?

What bothers me still is that we don't put the child first. Language creates reality and our language is so discounting. We say adopted child rather than child who is adopted. We say disabled child rather than child with special needs.

When my brother adopted his son Andrew, it took so much for us to really acknowledge this child as his own. That's because there is just so much discounting on the part of society of children who are adopted. We see the child as somehow different or apart rather than truly acknowledging that this child is woven into the fabric of our lives. This is our child, adopted or not

The language around adoption is so sloppy. We say things like "adopt" a highway. Such a use of adoption minimizes the impact and meaning of adoption. I resent it. There is so much in Scripture about the depth and meaning of adoption. As Christians, we have no excuse for this.

I began to realize how lacking our faith language is for parents who adopt. The only term is really "adoptive parent." When my son asked me what I was to him, I replied, "I am your chosen mother. God chose me to be your mother." I like this so much better. I want the Church and my faith community to affirm this truth.

APPENDIX F
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptive Parent

Adoptive Mother: Merris
Date of Interview: February 22, 2009
Place of Interview: Home of Adoptive Mother in Brooklyn, New York
Profession: Early Childhood Teacher

1. Tell me about the journey that led you to adoption.

Adoption was in my mind for a long time. In my first year of teaching in 1986, I became friends with one of my parents who had one birth child and one child in my class adopted from Chile. I thought I would get married and adopt a child but when that didn't work out for me, I decided I still wanted to be a Mom. I began to pursue seriously the idea of adoption. I attended APC meetings in Manhattan. (Adoptive Parents' Committee) They helped me think through the many different kinds of adoption available and what would work best for me as a single parent. The paper work took about a year. Anyone who thinks there is no such thing as labor when it comes to adoption is wrong. Adoptive parents face an arduous workload of paper work and many hurdles to cross before receiving a child.

2. What motivated your choice of adoption process?

I attended a panel discussion at an APC meeting. The forum consisted of three birthmothers who had given up children for adoption. They shared a little bit about their decision-making process and what they wanted for their children. Each one of the birth mothers said they wanted a mother and a father for their baby. I understood that and felt if I were in their place I would want that also for my baby. As a single parent, I couldn't provide that so I began to look at other options. I visited an adoption agency in the city (Spence Chapin) and the social worker there advised me to visit a group of parents who were meeting who had adopted children from China. I went to the gathering and met many single moms who had adopted little girls from China. I learned about the story of Chinese daughters whose families could not keep them because of the one-child law in China. As a single woman, I felt I had something to offer to these unwanted little girls. I am a pre-school teacher. I have time, knowledge and a heart full of love to share. I was eager to adopt from China. Also, I live in a diverse community (Brooklyn) and teach at an extremely diverse and quality elementary school in Brooklyn. An Asian child would feel at home in my community.

3. What impact has adoption had on your family? ...Extended family? Community?

Everybody in my family was very supportive and excited about adoption. My sister who had also been a single parent because of a divorce helped me prepare my house to welcome a baby. I have two sisters and one brother. My Dad was waiting right there at the airport when I got off the plane with Amanda. They told us that our children

might be uncomfortable with men for a while because they were cared for only by women in the orphanage but this wasn't true with Amanda. She went right to my Dad and smiled at him. My Dad likes to say, "She's adopted us as quickly as we adopted her."

Adoption has actually extended my family. The families who traveled together with me to China to receive our children have stayed in touch. We have a reunion every year and everyone attends. We share parental concerns and help each other. We shared a very intimate experience, the birth of our children into our hearts through adoption. Last year, we traveled back as a group to China to visit the orphanage where we first met our children. We took our children (now twelve) with us. It was an incredible trip for us and for our children. We visited the Great Wall and many historical and cultural places of interest in China. We want our daughters to be proud of their cultural heritage. Amanda loved visiting the Pandas best and actually having her picture taken with a Panda. Not long after the trip, one of the fathers in the group died suddenly. We all mourned and came together to support the Mom. In many ways, our children are like siblings or cousins. We, also, are family to one another.

4. What impact, if any, has your experience as an adoptive parent had on your relationship with God? ...your relationship with your faith community?

My Father is a Reformed minister and I play the organ at his church. The congregation was very supportive and excited for me. I grew up deeply immersed in the Christian faith. Adoption, for me, was healing.

I don't talk about this very often but I had an abortion when I was a young woman. The fetus was about 9-10 weeks. At the time, abortion was only legal in New York and California. Afterwards, I was very hard on myself. The New York Times Magazine did a story on the steps of a fetus. I learned that at nine weeks, the infant's brain is being formed. I was devastated and couldn't forgive myself for what I had done. I grew up knowing that when we confess our sins, God forgives us. Maybe God had forgiven me, but I couldn't forgive myself.

Later in my life, I had a lot of problems with my ovaries. I had cysts and endometriosis. The doctor said that I should have my ovaries removed but then he wouldn't do it because I was so upset about the idea of not being able to have children. He told me, however, that my chances for ever conceiving a child were very slim. I began to feel that God was punishing me. Over time, these painful feelings eased and I realized that God had forgiven me.

When I adopted Amanda, I felt in my heart that God had forgiven me and given me a new life to love and cherish. Adoption for me was the confirmation of a spiritual healing that had already begun. Not only had God forgiven me, but God trusted me to be a Mom.

5. What role, if any, have religious rituals played in your experience of adoption?

I always wanted Amanda to grow up in the church like I did, to be baptized and confirmed. Amanda was baptized when she was about one year old. It was her first public welcome into God's family and into my own family. My Dad baptized her at his church and afterwards, we all went out to dinner at a local restaurant on Staten Island. My brother served as Amanda's Godfather.

6. What was or is your greatest joy in your adoption experience?

My greatest joy was watching all the developmental changes. I knew I really wanted to adopt an infant so I could experience all the changes and amazing growth of a child's development. Another joy was a rich parents' network in our China group. We shared concerns and joys. Our children play together and in many ways have grown up together.

7. What was or is your greatest sadness in your adoption experience?

My greatest sadness was realizing that you don't always do everything just right. As a parent, you make lots of mistakes. For example, I wish I had taken off more time from work when Amanda came home. I just took the standard maternity leave instead of taking off a year. You can never get that time back.

8. What was or is your greatest fear in your adoption experience? If your fear was resolved, how so?

My greatest fear is that I would be negligent and there would be a catastrophe.

9. What, if anything, surprised you in your adoption experience?

I guess I was surprised by how fast children grow. It seems like just yesterday that Amanda was a baby and now she is a teen-ager. Also, the bonding between mother and child surprised me. I always heard people talk about it. It is a very deep and powerful feeling.

10. What impact, if any, has your adoption journey had on you as a person created in the image of God? Have you changed or grown in any way as a result of your adoption journey?

As I said earlier, I became more deeply aware of God's forgiveness and healing. I suppose I've changed in that I am far more careful how I phrase things. I don't want to pass on my fears or influence how my child views the world. I want to be open and positive with Amanda.

11. Where, if at all, did you experience a sense of the Sacred in your adoption journey?

I would have to say I experienced the presence of God in joy. The people in my China group talked about the "goofy" smiles that were on our faces as we walked around China holding our babies. We were all intoxicated with joy. I know I definitely felt that I was in the middle of a dream, a fantasy. I felt ageless and full of joy.

12. What wisdom would you want to share with your faith leader or faith community as an adoptive parent? How might your faith community affirm and celebrate the adoption journey?

My faith community was very welcoming and affirming of my adoption journey but then again my Dad is the pastor. I think it is important to use images of adoptive families in sermons and even in pictures in religious books. The story of Moses is helpful and there are lots of images of adoption in the New Testament.

APPENDIX G
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptive Parents

Adoptive Mother: Cynthia
Date of Interview: February 5, 2009
Place of Interview: Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Baldwin, New York
Cynthia's Profession: Attorney

1. Please describe the journey that led you to adoption.

I knew I was infertile when I got married. My doctor was just keeping me on an even hormonal level in case I wanted to try to get pregnant. Finally, my doctor said to me, "You can either spend twenty thousand dollars trying to have a child through egg donation or you can adopt and definitely have a child. It's your choice. Is it about being pregnant or parenting a child?" For me, it was definitely about having a child to love. My husband was open to any path I chose to have a child.

2. What motivated your choice of adoption process?

I went to an adoption conference and was exposed to so many different kinds of people, different kinds of adoptions. There was a lot to choose from. After the conference, a lawyer came up to me and told us that if we were serious about adoption she could help us. As an African American couple, we were told the process would be fast. There were many African American babies available for adoption. We met with the lawyer in December, filled out the paper work in January and got a call that there was a baby for us in February. It happened very fast. We chose a closed adoption. I was thinking about an open adoption but Julian was not ready for that.

3. What impact has adoption had on your family? ...Extended family? Community?

This adoption has shown me how important family is, really important. I couldn't believe how our family welcomed Jessica. They didn't treat her any differently because she was adopted. Her Grandmother has pictures up of her just like all of her other Grandchildren. If anything, it was almost like our family didn't believe we really had adopted. They said, "If she's adopted, how come she looks so much like you?" My husband's son from a prior marriage, Mark, wrote a story of how lonely he was until Jessica came into the family. Mark was so good with Jessica when she was a baby and he is still a wonderful big brother. He welcomed her with open arms. He loves to play with her and even helps me take care of her.

4. What impact, if any, has your experience as an adoptive parent had on your relationship with God? ...your relationship with your faith community?

You hear Bible stories about how if you wait on the Lord, God will answer your prayers. I know the story of Sarah and how she wasn't able to have a child. God promised her a child and she laughed. For me, the whole adoption experience was such a

faith-building experience. I can say to people and I do, "Look, how God answered my prayers." I tell people about my adoption journey and it makes them feel more confident in God's care. I just look at Jessica and I know God answers prayers.

I feel an incredible sense of connection with my faith community because it really is a family for us. The first card I got when we adopted Jessica was from a Church member. I didn't even know there was such a thing as an adoption card until I got it in the mail. An older woman told me in Church one day, "Don't worry! You're going to get a baby. I've been praying for you." The very next week we got the call that Jessica was about to be born.

Because our process went so quickly, we didn't have anything for the baby. Gifts from congregational members just started flowing into our home. One elderly woman gave Jessica a white doll. Jessica loved that doll even though it was white. Julian and I talked about it and we said, "This church is Jessica's family and it is all races of people so why shouldn't she have a white doll."

5. What role, if any, have religious rituals played in your experience of adoption?

Jessica's baptism was also a celebration of her adoption. I felt it was very personal for her. My friends who came were amazed that Jessica was mentioned in the sermon. It was evident to them how much the Church loved Jessica.

6. What was or is your greatest joy in your adoption experience?

My greatest joy was and is having a child to love. Our adoption process went overwhelmingly smoothly. Everything in our adoption just kind of fell into place, like it was meant to be.

7. What was or is your greatest sadness in your adoption experience?

I think society in general likes laughing at new mothers. People laughed at my diaper bag and all the stuff you have to lug around. People laugh when you are anxious as a new mother. It is just so unnecessary and it really doesn't help.

8. What was or is your greatest fear in your adoption experience? If your fear was resolved, how so?

I was very tense during the time period when the birth mother could change her mind. That fear resolved itself when the time passed and we knew Jessica was officially our baby.

9. What, if anything, surprised you in your adoption experience?

I didn't realize how having a baby changed your life. I was overwhelmed at first. Even without childbirth, I feel like I went through post-partum depression. Now I understand why God made women pregnant for nine months. You need time to adjust

and slow down and prepare for the arrival of a baby. Our process went so fast that we didn't have time to prepare.

10. What impact, if any, has your adoption journey had on you as a person created in the image of God? Have you changed or grown in any way as a result of your adoption journey?

I became aware that God trusted me to care for this child. God sent His Son to earth to be cared for by human parents. It was actually during the baptism, I felt a rush of sacred responsibility. God trusted me with this baby and now I am giving this baby back to God.

11. Where, if at all, did you experience a sense of the Sacred in your adoption journey?

I found out on Ash Wednesday that Jessica was about to be born. We got a call on Wednesday that a baby would probably be born on Friday. They asked, "Do you want this baby?" We said, "Yes, of course." It throws your world into a tailspin. We went to Babies 'R Us on Friday night and spent seven hundred dollars on baby equipment we had to have. Lent is about giving up, challenging yourself to grow spiritually, and making room for God, returning to the Sacred. Adopting Jessica brought new meaning to the Lenten season for me.

12. What wisdom would you want to share with your faith leader or faith community as an adoptive parent? How might your faith community affirm and celebrate the adoption journey?

We have felt incredibly embraced by our Church. My friends were amazed when you mentioned Jessica in your sermon on her baptismal day. Making the service personal was very welcoming for her and for our family.

The wisdom I would pass on to other people is not to assume that just because we are adoptive parents, we don't struggle like other parents. Even though I didn't go through childbirth, I struggled with post-partum depression. I was overwhelmed with the care of a newborn just like any other mother.

One woman in our Church goes around saying to visitors, "We have adopted children here. See that child over there. She's adopted even though you can't tell. We love everybody." I knew this woman's heart is in a good place but someday I have to tell her she is making me uncomfortable. Adoption is personal and no child should be pointed out as being different.

Women in the congregation made Jessica blankets. I feel all those blankets were made with love. When I put those blankets over Jessica and tuck her in bed at night, I feel like the love of God is over her, shielding her and protecting her.

One word of advice for clergy, never assume how a family came together. One day a guest pastor came because you were on vacation. He was playing with Jessica before the worship service began. He inserted into his sermon about waiting on God that in life you had to wait just like Jessica's mother had to wait nine months for Jessica to be born. Everyone laughed and he was confused about why the congregation laughed. They

laughed because they knew our story, even though he didn't. They knew we didn't have to wait nine months for Jessica. After the worship, I was going to explain it to him, but then I just didn't bother.

APPENDIX H
Adoption Questionnaire
Adoptive Parent

Adoptive Parent: Sarah
Date of Interview: February 8, 2009
Place of Interview: Manhattan

1. Please tell me about the journey that led you to adoption.

I was an only child who always wanted to have six kids. I always thought I would get married and have children. I thought I would have one kid biologically and then start adopting. When that didn't work out for me and I realized I would either have a child as a single parent or give up my dream of being a mother, I began to pursue adoption. I thought I needed meaning and purpose in my life. I wanted to adopt a child because I wanted to give back and do something meaningful with my life.

2. What motivated your choice of adoption process?

Initially, I started working with a lawyer toward a private domestic adoption but I began to feel uncomfortable about the process. I didn't like putting together all kinds of information to impress a birth mother or entice her into giving her child to me. Also with a private domestic adoption, I knew there was a chance of getting a boy. As a single mother, I felt I would do a better job raising a little girl. Then, I saw a piece in the New York Times Sunday magazine about adoption from China. There was this picture of a little girl from China who had been adopted by an American family. I can still remember the picture today. She was wearing a red dress and I thought, "God, I want a baby like this one." I contacted the Spence Chapin Adoption Agency in Manhattan where I live and began the process for an international adoption from China. I knew that many little girls were being abandoned in China because of the one-child rule. I adopted Anna when she was six months old.

3. What impact has adoption had on your family? ...Extended family...community?

I am an only child and so I don't have a lot of extended family. My parents were thrilled. Before my father died, he lived with us for a while and he and Anna became very close. I was adopted but there was so much secrecy surrounding my adoption. With Anna everything is very open. I think it was good for my parents to see that.

4. What impact, if any, has your experience as an adoptive parent had on your relationship with God? ...your relationship with your faith community?

When I adopted Anna, I joined the Temple on the corner, near where I live in Manhattan. I was raised Jewish but was non-practicing; however, when I had Anna I wanted help in raising her with values. I wanted Anna to learn to be a kind, compassionate person and I felt that religious instruction would help teach Anna values.

The Temple had a nursery school and I enrolled Anna there. Judaism was fun and meaningful for her and for me. The children dressed up for Purim and visited a matzo factory at Passover. One year, the Rabbi dressed up as cookie monster for Purim! Anna thought he was wonderful. There was a mitzvah chart in Anna's classroom and the students got a check mark for doing a good deed such as helping another child or being kind. For years, I could get Anna to do just about anything by telling her it would be a mitzvah. Being an adoptive parent brought me closer to my faith community. Even though I wasn't Bat-Mitzvahed, I wanted Anna to have that experience.

5. What role, if any, have religious rituals played in your experience of adoption?

When I adopted Anna, I lived in a building with highly observant people. Two of my next-door neighbors were Orthodox Rabbis. You are Jewish if your birthmother is Jewish and I knew Anna's birthmother wasn't Jewish. I had Anna converted when she was about eighteen months old. My Rabbi encouraged an early conversion. I was nervous that Anna would develop a life-long fear of the water. In the Mikvah, you let the baby loose on her own in the water just for a moment. My two neighbors who were Orthodox offered to help with the conversion but I wanted my own Rabbi. My Rabbi brought two other Rabbis but they were women Rabbis and that means that Anna's conversion wouldn't be recognized by the Orthodox community. If Anna went to Israel to live or if she married an Orthodox man, she would have to be converted again even though she has a conversion certificate. But the truth is that Anna wouldn't have been converted if it were not for one of the women Rabbis. Anna was hesitant about the water. The one woman Rabbi had young children of her own and she coaxed Anna into the water.

Right now, I am trying to convince Anna to study for her Bat Mitzvah. Recently, she said to me, "But I'm not even really Jewish. My birthmother wasn't Jewish." I am adopted also but never went through a conversion experience. I was able to say to Anna, "You are more Jewish than I am because I don't even have a conversion certificate."

6. What was or is your greatest joy in your adoption experience?

Everything! I had no idea how great it was going to be. I had never felt such joy. Of course, I felt exhausted at times taking care of a baby. But mostly, I felt overwhelmed with happiness. I would look at other mothers and think, "Oh my God! Motherhood is the best kept secret!"

7. What was or is your greatest sadness in your adoption experience?

I used to rock Anna to sleep every night and sob. I was holding this little baby and I couldn't bear the thought that she was six months in the orphanage without anyone to rock her to sleep. You know your own suffering and you accept it but for your child to suffer is agony. It took me a long time to get over this sadness. For a year, I would

always cry when I rocked Anna to sleep. I don't know. Maybe I was crying also because of my own experience.

8. What was or is your greatest fear in your adoption experience? If your fear was resolved, how so?

I had a lot of fears but not all about the adoption itself. My fears were more about becoming a mom. I used to work twelve to thirteen hours a day. I worried that I would come home and be too tired to pay attention to the baby. I thought, "What if I am too selfish to be a good mother?"

9. What, if anything, surprised you in your adoption experience?

One major surprise and great joy was my relationship with other families who adopted children from China. I joined FCC (Families with Children from China) and developed close ties with my adoption group at Spence. When I was growing up as an adopted child, I never forgot how alone and different I felt. I knew it would be better for Anna to know other families like ours. What I didn't realize was how much it would mean to me. My China group has stayed close. I feel I have a community of parents I can turn to for support and companionship.

10. What impact, if any, has your adoption journey had on you as a person created in the image of God? Have you changed or grown in any way as a result of your adoption journey?

I used to be a workaholic, totally dedicated to my job. But after Anna came home, I stopped working. I was fortunate enough to have enough savings to do that. I loved being with her and just wanted to spend my time with her. The experience of adoption and motherhood changed me. I wasn't the kind of person that went all ga ga over kids. After having Anna, I began to enjoy being with a child, not just Anna, but other children too. Adopting Anna and raising her opened me up to the joy and wonder of experiencing life through the eyes of a child.

I was always taught that all people were created in the image of God but adopting Anna helped me go deeper with that knowledge. Anna was five when 911 happened. We live in Manhattan and it affected us deeply. I told Anna, "The only way people could do this to one another is that they don't understand everyone is a child of God."

11. Where, if at all, did you experience a sense of the Sacred in your adoption journey?

That was the most amazing thing. I told my Rabbi that when I looked at Anna, I thought to myself for the first time, "Now, I know there is a God. This baby came from God." There was no doubt in my mind. All my life I felt sorry for myself. Nothing seemed to work out for me especially in the way of relationships. But after Anna came

home, I no longer felt sorry for myself. God had given me this incredible gift. I can't explain it but I just know Anna is the child I was always meant to have. God always intended Anna and I to be together. If I had to go through all that pain and loneliness to get to this point in my life, that was all right with me. Anna's adoption was the one time in my life that I really felt I saw divine intervention. From the moment I saw Anna and they put her in my arms, I felt the presence of God. Now, I struggle. I doubt. I think this is normal, but there was never any doubt in my mind that Anna came from God.

12. What wisdom would you want to share with your faith leader or faith community as an adoptive parent? How might your faith community affirm and celebrate the adoption journey?

My Rabbi was very supportive of me as an adoptive parent. He was scholarly and shy but also a parent of young children. He made Judaism fun and meaningful for me and for Anna. My Rabbi encouraged me to convert Anna early. I was afraid she would develop a life-long fear of the water but he assured me as a parent that she would not. He was Anna's Rabbi from about seven months to the age of five before he moved to another synagogue.