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Church accepts adoption challenge

Tuesday, November 14, 2006

BY CHARITA M. GOSHAY REPOSITORY STAFF WRITER

JACKSON TWP. About five years ago, the Rev. Greg Nettle, senior pastor at RiverTree Christian Church's Portage campus, challenged his members to open their homes to children who need families.

More than 120 responded, adopting children from 12 countries.

At 10 a.m. Saturday, the church at 7373 Portage St. NW will dedicate 12 flagpoles from which will fly flags representing the children's countries of origin.

"It's been an interesting journey for me," Nettle said. "I think God has been doing something in my heart and in the heart of the church. If you read in the Bible, children at risk, on the margins of society, are at the

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heart of God. The more you realize that, the more responsible you are for caring for these kids."

The adoptive families say the experience has increased their spiritual growth. Some belong to Born in Our Hearts, an international support and advocacy group for adoptive families.

Leading the way

Sue McClain and her husband, Brian, were one of the first of five RiverTree families who heeded Nettle's call. They were expecting their third son when they began their adoption process five years ago. They acquired their daughter, Brooke, 1, from Guatemala six months ago.

As other parents nodded in agreement, Sue McClain described the process as a "faith walk." The family's initial, previous attempts to adopt a foreign child were unsuccessful.

"With every adoption, you're going to run into obstacles, but the reward is beautiful," she said. "I wrote an adoption journal for Brooke, letting her know she was loved and how desperately we looked for her."

In 2001, Sonja White and her husband, Brett, adopted Anna, a 10-month-old Romanian girl, who is now 5. They also have two biological sons.

"You look back and think 'I got to be part of this initiate relationship with God through this process,' " White said.

New international protocols have slowed foreign adoptions. In some cases, countries have imposed a moratorium on the process.

"When we got ready to adopt Anna, Sept. 11 happened," White said. "She was in



Jeremiah Baker, 4, sits with his mother, Amy, as she discusses the family's experience as adoptive parents. The Bakers responded to their pastor's challenge to open their home to an adopted child.

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Kazakhstan. I remember the day I woke up to leave. It was difficult to leave my other children. I don't think I could have done it had I been operating outside of God's will."

Adoption challenges

White's sister, Shelley Tuma, was so moved by her commitment that she and her husband decided to adopt a child. The Tumas also have two sons.

"It really wasn't something I ever considered before my sister adopted Anna," Tuma said.

Like the others, the Tumas have encountered obstacles in the adoption process. They have completed paperwork for a girl from Guatemala. Now they must wait.

"Your time and God's time may be very different," Tuma said. "You have to trust that he knows which child should belong to your family."

In Amy Baker's case, she and her husband had to deal with the unique challenges of adopting an older child. Ohio-born son Jeremiah, now 4, was 2 when he joined the family, which also includes two biological children.

"Our other children have been so accepting," she said. "They understand his mom and dad couldn't take care of him."

Baker said the family is working hard to make Jeremiah feel secure and loved.

"With infants, you have a bonding time," she explained. "It takes a little longer with older children to get acquainted. It's answered prayer that gets us through the day and the continued support of our church."

'One church, one child'

The families often meet for mutual support and host social events so the children won't feel singled out.

"God works in your life through the adoption process," White said. "You become the person you're supposed to be."

Noting that the current generation of Americans is the first to be exposed to poverty around the world, Nettle and his wife, Julie, are in the process of adopting a black child. The Nettles, who are white, have an 8-year-old biological daughter.

"I love the African-American 'One Church, One Child' initiative," he said. "If a family in every church would adopt a kid, there would be no kids in the system."

RiverTree is in partnership with Compassion International, Project Care, the Christian Children's Home of Ohio and the Pregnancy Support Center. Wess Stafford, president of Compassion International, will visit Friday and Saturday.

"More than anything, we have to take responsibility for all of these children at risk," Nettle said. "We can't turn a blind eye. Who's going to be blessed the most? We are."

For information, call (330) 494-1860 or visit:

www.rivertreechristian.com

Repository Michael S. Balash

MOMMY'S GIRL Sue McClain, a member of RiverTree Christian Church in Jackson Township, enjoys daughter, Brooke, 1, whom she adopted this year from Guatemala. More than 120 families at RiverTree have adopted children from 12 different countries.

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HOME AT LAST Jeremiah Baker, 4, sits with his mother, Amy, as she discusses the family's experience as adoptive parents. The Bakers responded to their pastor's challenge to open their home to an adopted child.

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Reader's Comments

Ed Norton - 1:13 PM on November 14, 2006

In the print edition of the Repository, dated 14 November 2006, the caption(related to this story) above the photo of Sue McClain and her newly adopted daughter reads: "Answer to a Hail Mary". According to the story, Mrs McClain belongs to a church that is not catholic. While her church is a christian one, non-catholics do not say Hail Marys. A more appropriate caption would have been simply "Answer to a prayer". While this improper(at worst)substitution of religious practices was I'm sure inadvertent, it should have been realized before it passed proof reading muster. I do commend all the families for their adoptions as it was a wonderful act of kindness, regardless of what prayers they may say.

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