

THE LUTHERAN WITNESS

LW

INTERPRETING THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

FROM A LUTHERAN CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

JUNE/JULY 2015

Family

Not Alone

Adopted into Christ
Hannahs in the Pews



LW
THE LUTHERAN WITNESS

Subscribe now



YOUR SYNOD'S
MAGAZINE

Visit the updated site
at witness.lcms.org

Read. Listen. Respond.

 THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
MISSOURI SYNOD

Official periodical of The Lutheran
Church—Missouri Synod
Member: Associated Church Press
Evangelical Press Association
June/July 2015 Vol. 134, No. 6/7

(ISSN: 0024-757X)

© 2015 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.
Reproduction of a single article or column for
parish use only does not require permission of
THE LUTHERAN WITNESS. Such reproductions,
however, should credit THE LUTHERAN WITNESS
as the source. Cover images are not reproducible
without permission. Also, photos credited to
sources outside the LCMS are not to be copied.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations
are from The Holy Bible, English Standard
Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway
Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News
Publishers. Used by permission. All rights
reserved.

Cover image: © Lightstock

Time and again Israel is called on to care for the alien and the stranger, the fatherless and the widow, the least of these, our brothers and sisters. The Johnson family explains why that's still true today.

adopted into Christ



↑ The Rev. Bill and Cammie Johnson smile for the camera with their daughters Maddy (16), Kylie (12) and Molly (18).

photos courtesy William Johnson

by WILLIAM JOHNSON

I'm not sure I can tell you when my wife, Cammie, and I decided to adopt. Some of the story has its roots in Cammie's childhood friend who was adopted from Korea and grew up in central Iowa amid the cornfields. Some of the story began in the stories I grew up with: stories of brave knights who rescue princesses (adoption isn't like that) and of ordinary people who made the choice to do extraordinary things (it's more like that). Ultimately, though, I think it began, as all good things seem to, in water and Word.

Even though Cammie and I grew up with our birth parents, we were adopted in our Baptism. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we were given new names. ("How is this child to be named?") New identities. ("Receive this white garment.") A new family. ("Graciously enlarge and preserve Your family.") "For you did

WE PRAY TO THE GOD IN HEAVEN WHO DOES NOT LEAVE US, WHO DOES NOT FORSAKE US. WE PRAY TO OUR HEAVENLY FATHER AND BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE FAMILY.

not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:15–17).

Adoption is a part of the family story as well. Time and again Israel is called on to care for the alien and the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. We are called to be the ones who care for the least of these, our brothers and sisters. And so we do. And so we did.

We began by attending the first of many training sessions offered through our county Department of Children's Services. The psychological testing, inter-



views and home visits all served to create a picture of us as potential parents, not to qualify or disqualify us, but to find compatible matches between us and the children who needed permanent homes.

Unless you've been through the adoption process, you probably aren't aware there are websites for choosing children. There are search forms to narrow the field by gender, age, siblings or race. These children, precious gifts of God, are cataloged and searchable like commodities. This isn't an effort to dehumanize them; it's a reflection of the immediate and desperate need. When states can't find enough adoptive parents (they never can), they turn to sites like AdoptUsKids (<http://adoptuskids.org>) to find parents who are willing to open hearts and homes and lives.

We learned there is no shortage of parents willing to adopt infants. The number of people willing to adopt older children is much lower. When I see the kids who need homes, I'm always struck by the 17-year-olds. They know there's no hope someone will adopt them (except there is), and they could choose to age out of the system without a family if they wanted. They don't. They know on some visceral level that we're not meant to face life alone. We were created to be in community together. We were created to have family, and they continue to pray for that and dream of that in the face of seemingly impossible odds. Their courage humbles me.

In 2011, we adopted three young ladies. All three came to us through foster care, and all three have stories of the things that brought them into care and their experiences in the foster care system. There have been bumps along the way. There are days when little things provoke big emotions and days when they miss the life they've lost, days when we weep together for time stolen and for days redeemed. There are birthdays and soon a graduation (the first of many). Today we deal more with teenage girl problems than adoptive teenage girl problems. Over the last four years, I've had the honor and privilege of watching these three girls mature into young women and flourish with the stability that comes with having a permanent home.

It's often said that adoption changes a child's life, and it does that, but it changes you as well. The girls have taught me much about life, love, community and grace. I've taught them about faith, hope and algebra. I have gained more than they have.

Day by day we continue to live out this tangible reminder of our own adoption in Christ in the middle of this world of skinned knees and broken hearts. We continue to live and love, to pray and hope. We pray for one another, for families left behind, for children who are still waiting. We pray for open homes and open hearts. We pray to the God in heaven who does not leave us, who does not forsake us. We pray to our heavenly Father and begin to understand what it means to be family.



» Go to www.lcms.org/lifeflibrary to read more on adoption.

» The Rev. William Johnson (bill.johnson@ctsfw.edu) is director of Education Technology at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.