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Same-sex adoption: One adoptive mother's perspective

Heidi Schlumpf | Sep. 2, 2011 NCR Today

I was on vacation this summer when the news broke about Catholic Charities in Illinois losing state contracts over the agency?s refusal to place adoptive children with same-sex couples [1]. But that doesn?t mean I wasn?t following the story. As an adoptive mother, I have a few insights into the process, having spent five years adopting our two children.

What I learned is that choosing an adoption agency can be one of the most important decisions prospective adoptive parents make. Some make their choice based on the agency?s location, fees or something as random as it coming up first in a Google search. Likely, they learned about it through a personal referral. But often, prospective adoptive parents put quite a bit of thought into choosing an agency. I, for one, had a spreadsheet of dozens of agencies with criteria that included services, cost and estimated wait times.

Whether an agency had a religious background was not only unimportant, it made an agency suspect for us. Often religiously-based agencies came with additional requirements, such as proof of religious belief or church attendance, or with the baggage of proselytizing or problematic adoption attitudes (?Save a heathen orphan!?) Given the Catholic Church's sometimes unfair, but often deserved, reputation for being judgmental, Catholic Charities is probably avoided by a number of prospective adoptive families, besides the same-sex couples who would be automatically rejected.

Adopting can be very difficult, as I chronicled in my book *While We Wait: Spiritual and Practical Advice for Those Trying to Adopt* [2]. Every aspect of your life is scrutinized by social workers, physicians, adoption agencies and governments?in more than one country if you adopt internationally. Some believe that adoption should be easier, not to mention less expensive. I don?t disagree.

But it?s also true that no one has the ?right? to adopt?gay or straight. Today birthmothers have the right to choose the parents of their children, and countries and agencies have the right to exclude individuals and groups of folks from the pools of prospective adoptive parents. Most countries have age restrictions; Korea even has weight restrictions. Of course, a number of countries do not allow single parents or same-sex couples to adopt.

The State of Illinois, however, does not have such limitations. And I am grateful for such openness in my home state, especially as I witness the generosity and love of so many gay and lesbian couples who welcome children of color, older children and sibling groups who can be more difficult to place for adoption.

I'm know Catholic Charities does lots of great work, including adoption-related services. They're wrong, however, on this issue.

Edit: Just to clarify, thanks to a question in comments, I am a heterosexual, married women, who happens to care about the fate of adopted and foster children, as well as the rights of gay and lesbian people.

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[1] http://ncronline.org/news/politics/setback-church-adoption-fight
[2] http://www.amazon.com/While-We-Wait-Spiritual-Practical/dp/0879464062/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1315021665&sr=8-1