



Fostering to adoption

Fienes provide child with needed familial stability, chance for brighter future

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Rev. Hans Fiene and his wife, Katie, have three biological sons, but have always wanted a bigger family. Six years ago, they decided to begin fostering not just to help children in the foster system, but also with the hope that they might be able to adopt through the process.

Four-month-old Levi came to the Fienes last year. He became a Fiene this August.

Rev. Fiene, Katie and their three older sons, John (14), August (11) and Anders (9), had welcomed several foster children into their home before fostering and then adopting Levi. The Fienes knew from the beginning that some of those children were on track to be returned to their families and their role as foster parents was to facilitate that goal. Other times, the placement of the foster

Levi (third from left), enjoys time with his new family of brothers, from left, August, Anders and John.

child was not the right fit and he or she was placed with a different family. With Levi, there was an instant connection.

“The second I saw him, I knew he was my son,” said Fiene, who serves as pastor of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, St. Louis. “There was something there and it was an immediate fit. Of course, it helped that we knew he would likely be available for adoption. The boys were also so happy to have him.

“My kids see this as something that is normal. As Christians, it is a normal thing for us to welcome people into our family that are not genetically related to us and to give of ourselves to strangers. They see that

all these words in the Bible about caring for the fatherless, we actually do it.”

Pastor Fiene said it has been amazing to see what fantastic big brothers Levi’s older brothers are.

“From the second Levi came, they absolutely loved him. To them, he has always been their brother. He has always been their flesh and blood. It has been an absolute blessing watching that happen,” said Fiene.

Pastor Fiene is not just amazed by his boys. He described his wife as his “absolute hero” through the process and said none of it would have happened without her.

“Katie has always had a heart for kids who needed a little more attention and love and care,” he said. “She is an amazing advocate for these kids. I have never come across anyone who is as fiercely devoted to the well-being of kids she has never met before. And now she is a terrific mother to Levi.”

Pastor Fiene knows who Levi’s biological mother is and recognizes “in her own way and in as much as she was capable, she loved him at that point in her life and chose life for him. It’s strange to feel love for a woman who abandoned her child,” he said. “But I do love her. This is the woman who gave life to one of the people I love more than anything in the world. It’s hard to feel anything but gratitude for her for giving life to this baby who is now our baby.”

One reason the Fienes decided to foster as a possible road to adoption was financial. It is expensive to adopt either domestically or internationally. While there can occasionally be minimal costs associated with adopting through fostering, it is essentially free. Another reason was availability. But he still acknowledges that fostering can sometimes be a difficult process.

“The foster system can

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be very frustrating to work with for a whole host of reasons.” Fiene said. “But in the end, it still needs to be done. These kids still need someone to love them and still need someone to care for them. It’s not their fault that the system is a mess. It’s not their fault that the parents aren’t able to care for them for a time.

“These kids in the foster system need a home and there are already a ton of them available for adoption. No one is knocking down the door trying to get them. There are not as many children available through traditional adoptions, which is part of what makes that process so expensive and difficult.”

Some children in the foster system are on track to go back home rather than be adopted. Fiene explains it is important for foster parents to build relationships with the biological parents and to remember that the children belong to those parents.

“This is out of your hands and you have to carry out your vocation as a foster parent as faithfully as you can. You must be careful not to covet someone else’s son or daughter. If God wants those children to be yours, He will give them to you. If He doesn’t, then they are not yours, and you have a different role. That role is to root for the parents.”

Pastor Fiene and Katie continue to stay in touch with the other children they have fostered and their families. They are baptismal sponsors to three siblings they fostered earlier.

The Fienes hope they are not finished growing their family. They plan to become certified to foster in Missouri and trust that if God wants them to take on more children, He will give them to the Fienes.

“Fostering and adopting are like lots of experiences in life,” Rev. Fiene said. “You have to just do it once and then it becomes natural. Once you break through, it becomes easier. Adoption seems like one of the most difficult things in the world, but it’s like anything else — the blessings greatly outweigh the challenges. Just as it is for natural parenting, so it is with foster parenting and adopting.”

Celebrating adoption

November is National Adoption Month, a month set aside to raise awareness about the urgent need for adoptive families for children and youth in foster care. The Children’s Bureau, a federal agency organized under the Department of Health and Human Services, funds National Adoption Month initiatives each November through a partnership with AdoptUSKids and Child Welfare Information Gateway.

While the agencies consider all adoption-related issues important, the particular focus of this month is the adoption of children currently in foster care. The month also includes National Adoption Day, which is observed in courthouses across the nation, where thousands of adoptions are finalized simultaneously.

About 2 million Americans today are adopted. About 150,000 adoptions happen each year, 50,000 through the foster system. The number of children in foster care in September 2019 was 424,000. While some of those children are on track to be returned to their families, the number of those foster children waiting to be adopted was 122,000.

Children’s Bureau Associate Commissioner Jerry Milner, said this year’s National Adoption Month “focuses on the thousands of teenagers and young adults in foster care who still need a



loving, permanent family and a place to call home.”

National Adoption Day, which this year is Saturday, November 21, was founded by a coalition of national partners – the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Issues, Alliance for Children’s Rights and Children’s Action Network.

National Adoption Day began in 2000 when the coalition, along with the Freddie Mac Foundation, organized seven cities to open their courts on the Saturday before Thanksgiving to finalize and celebrate adoptions from foster care. Today, more than 400 cities across the United States and Puerto Rico participate in National Adoption Day. Since National Adoption Day was established 20 years ago, more than 75,000 children in the foster system have been adopted on National Adoption Day.

— Cheryl Hemmer



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