

Posted on Sun, Jun. 10, 2007

Helping kids closer to home

Church ministry joins alliance with Texas focus

BY TERRY LEE GOODRICH

STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER



Star-Telegram/Stewart F. House

Michael Monroe and his wife, Amy, with their adopted children: from left, Miles, 6; Grant, 5; Carter, 2; and Kate, 2.

When the ministry Tapestry began in Irving seven years ago, its purpose was to help Metroplex families that were touched by the plight of Russian orphans and wanted to adopt them. Tapestry, based at Irving Bible Church, grew into a support system for families that have adopted, helping children from five continents.

Now it has joined with the DFW Alliance, which includes seven other North Texas congregations, to expand its mission again -- this time by offering adoptive and foster homes to Texas children who have been abused and neglected. "People are looking for a support system, and the church is uniquely equipped as a resource," said attorney Michael Monroe, 34, of Coppell, a volunteer who leads Tapestry with his wife, Amy Monroe, 34.

"A lot of the people come because of infertility, but others come because they really feel God is calling them." Prominent Christians have urged believers to consider adoption or foster care, noting that merely condemning abortion does not do enough for orphans. But Michael Monroe said Tapestry and others in the DFW Alliance have no political agenda. "We have diversity in our families. This is not an extension of pro-life," he said. "This is a response to the repeated call in Scripture to care for the orphan."

Answering the call

When they had fertility problems, the Monroes sought God's guidance. Four adopted children later, their goal is to offer a safe place for those weighing whether to adopt, those waiting for children and those who want to help in other ways -- perhaps simply by mentoring or praying. "Not everyone is called to adopt," Monroe said. "We don't push them."

Involving congregations in adoptions makes sense, judging by the National Adoption Attitudes Survey, a June 2002 telephone poll of 1,416 adults. The study was commissioned by the nonprofit Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, based in Dublin, Ohio. Americans tend to think first of foster care or social-welfare agencies in their communities and their place of worship, the survey showed.

Texas congregations of many faiths have begun working with Congregations Helping in Love and Dedication, or CHILD, a faith-based collaboration with Child Protective Services. State legislators created the program in 2003 to find homes for children in need of loving families. "We're seeing really, really good families looking for ways to serve kids, and it makes sense to tap into that," said Peggy Starkey, a CHILD family recruiter and CPS placement worker in Lewisville.

Since the program was created, 158 children statewide have been placed in foster homes and 16 have been adopted, said program specialist Felicia Mason-Edwards of Austin. Christians, Jews, Muslims and Hindus have all helped, she said.

"It's been a little slower than I'd like it to take off, but it's been very well-received," Starkey said. She and two other recruiters have visited nearly 100 congregations in CPS Region 3 -- Tarrant and Dallas counties and 17 surrounding counties -- to tell them about the program, do home studies, make background checks and train interested families. They take a traveling "Heart Gallery" to places of worship, displaying framed photographs and printed profiles of some of the CPS children who are available for adoption. In Region 3, they number more than 1,100 children; there are more than 6,000 statewide.

Emotional, financial help

Tapestry and other such ministries offer educational materials, training sessions and financial assistance for those who need help with adoption expenses. The ministries offer the chance to socialize and hear an encouraging word, too. "About 40 percent of those in Tapestry don't attend Irving Bible Church, but the kids get to be back with family gatherings and a play group for the children that meets once a month," Amy Monroe said. Events include Mom and Moms-to-be Night Outs, Guys Burger Night and a Families in Waiting support group. "We get to share joys and challenges that are unique to us," Amy Monroe said.

That has been the case through their adoptions of Miles, 6, and Grant, 5, both born in Texas and of Mexican heritage, and twins Kate and Carter, 2, from Guatemala. "We know we're not counselors, but we can steer people to professionals that know how to relate," Amy Monroe said. "And we love on that family and connect them with other families going through what they are."

Adoptive parents-to-be Rudy and Annie Garza, both 38, of Bedford, had been unable to have a biological child. They began attending Tapestry meetings in September and through it, they learned of adoption opportunities and attended panel discussions by adoptees, both children and adults. "Our faith is very important to us," Rudy Garza said. "Amy and Michael just opened their lives to us, and it's such a blessing." They expect to adopt a child from El Salvador in 16 to 18 months, they said. "This has helped us on our journey," Annie Garza said.

Some congregations -- particularly those made up primarily of senior citizens -- help in other ways, such as giving showers for adopted or foster children and paying for ballet lessons or summer camp. One church bought a fishing pole for a young man, Starkey said.

Sometimes, adoptees share their stories with Tapestry or other ministry meetings. For adoptee Tessa Kane, 16, of Coppell, a native of India, "Being adopted is the best thing that has ever happened to me. ... God sent that gift not just to my parents and family but to me, so that I would see how much God loves and cares for me."

On many nights, Grant Monroe, 5, climbs onto his father's lap to ask questions about God. Not all of his bedtime queries have simple answers. But "I tell him about his experience being adopted into our family and my experience coming into God's family," Monroe said. "He understands that."

CHILD: Congregations Helping in Love and Dedication

Region 3

Congregations around the state are collaborating with Child Protective Services to help children in need of adoptive and foster families.

1,132 children in Child Protective Services awaiting adoption

92 congregations involved

30 families licensed for foster care or adoption

74 children placed in foster care

4 adoptions

Statewide

6,051 children in CPS statewide awaiting adoption

500+ congregations have seen presentations on the program
158 children placed in foster homes
78 families licensed for foster care or adoption
16 adoptions

Contact: www.dfps.state.tx.us or 512-438-4516
Source: Department of Family and Protective Services

DFW Alliance

Area congregations taking part in adoptive and foster ministries:
www.dfwalliance.org or 972-315-9628

Irving Bible Church, Irving
www.tapestry.irvingbible.org
tapestry@irvingbible.org

Christ Chapel Bible Church, Fort Worth
www.ccbcfamily.org/orphan_care
orphancare@christchapelbc.org

The Village Church, Highland Village
www.thevillagechurch.net
jpace@thevillagechurch.net

Lake Pointe Church, Rockwall
www.lpcadoption.org
adoptionministry@lakepointe.org

121 Community Church, Grapevine
www.121cc.com
rodney.howell@121cc.com

St. Matthew Cumberland Presbyterian Church, Burleson
www.stmattcpc.org
rmcdhill@att.net

Watermark Community Church, Dallas
www.watermark.org
tapestry@watermark.org

McKinney Fellowship Bible Church
www.mcfbc.org
akridges@sbcglobal.net

tgoodrich@star-telegram.com
Terry Lee Goodrich, 817-685-3812