Neil and Karyn will never forget the joyful moment of embracing their newborn son, Daniel, for the first time last December. He was just 4 hours old when social worker Nadine Behmke of Catholic Charities Adoption Services called them with the good news! A few hours later, they were holding their new son and crying tears of joy!

The proud new parents light up when they talk about their son, now 9 months old. “We had been married almost four years and wanted a baby more than anything,” explained Neil. “It seemed as though we had tried everything to overcome fertility issues and realized adoption was our next option. One day we met Betsy, a temporary baby-care provider with Catholic Charities, at a local park. She was taking care of an infant who was getting ready to be placed with adoptive
parents. After meeting her, a light bulb went off... we were sold on the idea of adopting! I called Catholic Charities Adoption Services the very next morning! We set up a meeting with Nadine, who led us through the process very professionally. She does such a great job straddling the fine line of being an advocate for the birth mom as well as adoptive families. She was great to work with. We were very well informed!"

Karyn continued, “It was suggested that we create a scrapbook portfolio about ourselves...We submitted the scrapbook last April.” In September, one birth mother (a bright 22-year-old woman) looked over their portfolio and requested a meeting. When Karyn and Neil met her, she was already seven months pregnant, and in December they became parents!

“There are many happy endings like this couple's story,” says Linda Smith, Director of Adoption Services at Catholic Charities. “The only reason people choose a plan of adoption for their child,” she explains, “is out of tremendous love... to give their child a life they are not able to provide. I admire people who can make this selfless decision.” Today, birth-parents at least know they have options for communication with the adoptive family available to them, thus easing somewhat this most difficult decision.

If a birth mom can provide a safe, healthy and stable environment for her baby, Linda feels she should choose to parent her child.

Linda has worked with birth parents and adoptive families for more than 30 years and has supervised the program for the past 10 years. The program has been placing infants with adoptive families for better than 90 years! Records actually go back to the 1920’s.

Catholic Charities Adoption agency is licensed by DCF (CT Department of Children & Families) as a child-placing agency. Counseling services to birth parents and adoptive families are provided at four different offices in Connecticut in the towns of Waterbury, New Haven, Meriden & Hartford.

**BABY-CARE HOMES**

The agency is also licensed to approve temporary “baby-care homes” for infants at those times when birth parents/families are struggling with a final decision to either raise their infant or place their child with a permanent adoptive family. Once referred to as “foster homes,” these temporary homes give the birth-parent(s) time to deal with the emotions.

Elizabeth “Betsy” McMahon, of Branford, has been a baby-care provider for Catholic Charities for the past 10 years. “I got the idea from an old college roommate who was doing this” she says, and began working with Catholic Charities shortly after her friend made the suggestion.

Betsy is a practicing lawyer, who may be the only attorney in the state with a bassinet set up by her desk! She and her husband now have four grown children, but when she started as a baby-care provider, all of her own kids were still at home and in school.

“I think it has been a good lesson for my kids. [Especially] realizing that not all babies are planned and to really understand the birth mother's anguish about giving up her baby.” She explains that some of these young moms somehow think they might be doing something selfish, when in fact, they are providing the most giving, thoughtful, loving act they could do for their child. “I think these birth moms really deserve a lot of credit. I respect them so much.”

When asked if she ever gets attached to these babies she has for a short time, she smiles, “No. I've raised my children. It's easier for me because I have no illusions of raising another child. And I love being a part of the placement, whereby I can physically hand over the baby to its new parents. It's a beautiful moment.”

“One thing I can say about why I love working with Catholic Charities and people like Nadine is that they are so respectful of the birth mothers. People like Nadine are so kind and so great with them!” It is estimated that of those babies that are given to temporary baby-care providers, about 20% end up back with their birth moms.

“That's wonderful, too,” assures Betsy, “that's why people like me are here. To give them the time they need.”

Over the last 10 years, Betsy has accumulated all the necessary baby supplies so she is ready at a moment's notice whenever Catholic Charities needs her to visit a hospital. She always talks with the birth mom to assure her there is never a rush and the family should take their time with their decision.” Sometimes she has the baby for a few days, several weeks or even as long as 3 months.

Betsy is always curious about the children after they leave her care, and sometimes she hears from their adoptive families by way of Christmas cards or even Facebook posts.

**ADOPTION**

What type of family does the adoption center look for when placing a baby? Linda says there aren’t the re-
(Catholic Charities) taught us not to fear but to embrace our child’s life...his past, his present and his future.”
- parents Neil and Karyn

strictions there once were, such as ages of the parents. “We basically look for a healthy, stable and loving environment. They must be able to financially and emotionally provide for a child. We also seek families that embrace and respect that a child needs to develop physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually to be well-balanced. Adoptive parents do not need to be Catholic to adopt through the agency.

A good portion of the agency’s work now involves responding to requests of adult adoptees who wish to search for and possibly reunite with their birth parent(s) or siblings. The agency has one part-time staff person who conducts such searches and Linda commented on the many heart-warming reunions that have been successful.

So, what is life like now for Neil, Karyn and baby, Daniel? “Life is good. He’s sleeping through the night now, so we are getting more sleep.” Says Karyn, “I work part time and my husband is a teacher, so there is always at least one of us home with Daniel. He is such a special boy. He loves splashing in the pool and he’s even a frequent flyer, as we fly to Chicago to visit his maternal grandparents often!” Daniel also has his paternal grandparents nearby, who visit all the time and simply adore their first grandson!

“We can’t say enough about Catholic Charities Adoption Services,” says Neil, “They taught us not to fear but to embrace our child’s life...his past, his present and his future. They provided hope for us and yet kept us realistic. They had us 100% ready to become parents.”

For more information about adoption and temporary baby-care opportunities, contact the center at (203) 596-9359.

Catholic Charities is celebrating the opening of an infant-toddler child care program at our Child Development Center at 965 South Main Street in Waterbury. This new full-time program is open to working families with children from six weeks of age and is designed to address the strong need for quality infant-toddler care and education in Waterbury. The program will serve a total of 16 children – 8 infants and 8 toddlers – with one teacher for every four children. This new initiative will allow children to participate in our quality child development program from birth through five years of age, assuring they will be ready to succeed in kindergarten. The first five years of a child’s life are the most critical for brain development, and all Catholic Charities programs are curriculum-based to support developmental milestones which help children reach their full potential. The infant-toddler program is licensed by the Department of Public Health and funded through a partnership between New Opportunities and the Connecticut Department of Education.
VISION: Individuals, Families and Communities will become Healthy, Self-Sufficient and Productive – Thriving in a Just and Compassionate Society.

MISSION: Motivated by Christ’s Social Teachings and Respect for the Richness of Diversity, Catholic Charities exists to Promote the Dignity, Self-Sufficiency and Human Potential of those in need.

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