

The Archdiocese of San Francisco
OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

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August 2, 2006

Dear Father,

As you recall, in response to the Vatican directive regarding adoption, I issued a statement in March clarifying that we fully accept the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage and family life and stating that we would review our adoption program to determine how we can continue to best serve the needs of these vulnerable children.

At my request, a working group was formed consisting of Catholic Charities CYO Board members and staff as well as moral theologians. For the past four months, our working group has been reviewing the current adoption program of Catholic Charities CYO. During that period the group has kept at the forefront of their discussions the clear mandate which I gave them: design a program that will effectively assist the large number of children trapped in our foster care system in a way that is compatible with both Catholic moral teaching and the requirements of civil law.

I believe that the proposals submitted by the group, which I have approved, do precisely that, and in a manner that promises to provide substantially greater breadth, reach and numbers than we have been able to accomplish in the past. In part, this greater outreach arises from new opportunities provided by the Internet for opening the minds and hearts of potential parents to the need for loving adoptive homes for children in genuine need. This expanded outreach arises from the realization that in our own parishes we have a greatly underutilized resource to reach out with the call of Christ to find caring families for these most vulnerable children in our midst. As a whole, our proposal reflects a belief that Catholic Charities CYO can make the most effective contribution to helping the greatest number of children trapped in the foster care system by shifting its focus from direct placement to education, outreach, information sharing, and linking inquiring families to the county and private agencies that can take them the next step on the pathway to adoption.

Thus Catholic Charities CYO will undertake two specific and wide-ranging initiatives to promote adoption of at-risk children. The first initiative is our involvement with the California Kids Connection, a collaborative effort in conjunction with Family Builders By Adoption, a non-profit based in Oakland, and the State Department of Social Services, to develop and use Internet

technologies to stimulate interest in adoption throughout the state. The second is the development and implementation of a program to make our parishes ongoing centers of information and formation about adoption needs and opportunities.

In making these recommendations, we have concluded that it will not be possible to continue Catholic Charities CYO's present role in direct adoptions. This conclusion arises from the ever-increasing conflicts between our obligations to Catholic moral teaching and the prescriptions of civil law and licensing. To reiterate, Catholic Charities CYO will not be involved in individual home studies, specific family/child matches, adoptive placements or finalizations.

The collaborative involvement of Catholic Charities CYO in the California Kids Connection will consist of staff who will be the first contact for prospective parents after they view the California Kids Connection site. They will respond to calls from prospective parents and ask technical questions of prospective parents to determine where they are in the adoption process, for example, "Do you have a current home study?" "Are you working with an adoption agency at this time?" They will provide information on the adoption process and provide information to callers regarding local adoption agencies. They will provide referrals to agencies for any other preparation needs prospective parents may have, refer inquiring prospective parents to appropriate county workers, and follow up calls to agencies to assure that connections were made with inquirers.

In addition, an adoption preparation coordinator will be responsible for increasing the visibility of children and youth throughout the state who are waiting to be adopted. These efforts, although not related to direct adoption work, will increase the number of children on the California Kids Connection website, and will allow families searching for children to have access to profiles and photographs of thousands of children to consider for adoption.

Catholic Charities CYO proposes to work with the pastors and parish staffs of the Archdiocese to develop and implement a program that will communicate to our parishioners the immense need for adoptive families for at risk youth, encourage parish families to consider whether they might be able to open their hearts to such a child, and provide information and guidance for those families who signal an interest. Such a parish program could be particularly productive because it would place the call to consider adoption within the

liturgy where Christ's call to love and sacrifice is uniquely enfolded. This program will include the following elements:

- The identification of twelve parishes from throughout the Archdiocese that would be willing to participate in a pilot program promoting adoptions.
- In collaboration with pastors and parish staffs of these parishes, the design of a presentation could be made effectively to parish communities during the Sunday liturgies. This presentation could speak to the overall questions of adoption, but should certainly focus upon adopting children presently in the foster care system within the Bay Area.
- The provision of follow-up information and support for those families in each parish who show an initial interest in adoption. This follow-up would come from parish volunteer leaders working with Catholic Charities CYO staff.
- The creation by Catholic Charities CYO staff and the pilot program parish representatives of an ongoing communications strategy which would include information packets that would go to all parish families, information about the resources of California Kids' Connection, and parish bulletin announcements.
- The expansion of this pilot program to reach all Archdiocesan parishes, through a corps of volunteers recruited from and rooted in the parishes who would promote ongoing education regarding adoptions for at risk children.
- Pilot program to begin July 2007.

I thank you for your patience and prayers as we deal with these challenging issues, and I thank all those at CC/CYO and the members of the working group who have brought us to this promising moment. Please pray for the success of these new Archdiocesan initiatives to serve the adoption community in a manner faithful to Church teaching.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

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Most Reverend George Niederauer
Archbishop of San Francisco