

# CALLED TO ADOPTION: GETTING STARTED



*"If the Lord delights in a man's way, He makes his steps firm."*

Psalm 37:23

Most of the first steps toward adoption take place at home in deciding the type of adoption God is calling you toward. Taking time, having open conversations, spending time in prayer and in the Word will all help you determine the path to take toward your child and your future.

Once you have made your decisions, you will need to begin the process of finding the professionals you need to help you. You'll need to find those who specialize in the type of adoption you want.

For instance, if you are pursuing a domestic, newborn adoption, be sure the organization you choose works directly with their own birth mothers and has the support system in place for them. You don't want your adoption coordinator jetting off to work on an international adoption just as your baby is due. Similarly, if you are seeking an adoption internationally, find a professional who has experience working in the country you have chosen, who has good connections, and who can walk you through the entire adoption.

## Public and Private Agency Adoptions

Nearly two-thirds of all adoptions are arranged through some type of agency. Public agencies are licensed and run by the state, county, or city, and are funded by tax dollars. The children they represent tend to be older and may face emotional challenges or disabilities. In public agency adoptions, the identity of the birth parents may not be disclosed. Fees are usually very low or nonexistent, making public adoption a viable option for those who would otherwise be limited due to financial issues.

Private and independent agencies operate differently from public agencies and can be either for profit or nonprofit. Funding comes from the adoptive parents and, in some cases, from limited grants and donations. These agencies bring together birth parents and potential adoptive parents, and they sometimes allow the birth mother to choose who will adopt her child.

It is critical that potential adoptive parents do their homework carefully and thoroughly to be certain that they choose the type of agency best suited to their needs.

## Adoption Agencies

- Public or state adoption agencies tend to cost less.
- Public adoption agencies often do not allow contact with the birth parents or a lot of disclosure regarding the history of the birth family.
- Public adoption agencies usually represent older children or those with special needs.
- An adoption home study is conducted, regardless of the type of adoption you choose.
- Always thoroughly investigate private and independent agencies before selecting services.

### Know the Facts

Before you hire anyone to help you adopt, understand what your adoption professional stands for.

Unfortunately, not all adoption agencies and professionals with Christian names or logos are actually Christian organizations. They may have been purchased by an organization and simply retained the name. Ask for a mission statement or a statement of faith if you aren't sure.

Similarly, remember that if an organization is non-profit or for-profit should not be any determination of its values, nor does it mean that the fees are less or the service is better. State law and accounting practice often determine tax status, as well as how the company can operate in your best interest.

## Licensed Adoption Facilitators

Since the 1980s, adoption facilitators have played an important role in bringing together birth and adoptive parents. They often accomplish the task much more quickly than private or public agencies. Regulation and licensing of adoption facilitators varies from state to state. Ask the individual organizations about their qualifications. It's best to use licensed, registered, and established adoption facilitators.

Birth mothers often prefer working through adoption facilitators because they are able to complete private adoptions, where they relinquish their parental rights directly to the adoptive family, rather than to an organization. They are able to make more decisions about their adoption, their child, and the type of ongoing contact they desire. They are able to complete a more personalized adoption, while still taking advantage of the services available through an adoption professional without any cost to them. It's simply easier to have a customized adoption plan.

In 2008, I worked diligently to help establish the licensing requirements for adoption facilitators in California. After working for so many years and helping thousands of families adopt, this opportunity was priceless. I was the only adoption professional asked to speak before the state legislature about the need for the requirements. What a thrill it was when Governor Schwarzenegger signed the bill into law later that year!

One of the biggest differences between adoption agencies and facilitators is their focus. Agencies tend to be more local and adoptive-family focused since they provide a full-service type package, including the adoption home study to the adoptive family. Adoption facilitators tend to be more birth mother focused and are able to work nationwide. This is often a key to success because the time is spent in caring for women considering adoption, rather than time spent in the field providing home studies for adoptive families.

Adoption facilitators also typically have well-developed referrals they can provide to you for home study and legal services. Because of the differences in focus, facilitators tend to complete more adoptions than agencies and typically work with far more potential birth mothers.

## Private Adoptions

Private, also known as independent, adoptions can take several forms. You may choose to work through an adoption attorney, an agency, an adoption facilitator, or any combination of professionals. While it is possible to find a birth parent on your own, the time and effort involved can be daunting. For that reason, most individuals who opt for independent adoption also choose to use an intermediary of some kind.

The advantages of using intermediaries, such as adoption facilitators or attorneys, for a private adoption include:

- Access to more potential birth parents
- A greater chance of being selected for a child sooner
- Help in handling the maze of adoption paperwork
- Less chance of details being overlooked
- More personalized services for both adoptive parents and birth parents

Remember that services included will vary from one professional to another. Always verify what is included and what is not included.

## Answering Your Questions

### *What does an agency, attorney, and adoption facilitator do? And what do I need?*

Their roles vary, and their expertise is essential to your success. Which professional you select will depend on several factors, including the type of child you seek, your expectations, and the method of adoption you use.

If you plan to adopt a newborn through an open, independent adoption, in most states, you can choose a full-service licensed facilitator who will locate and match you with a birth mother. They should also connect you to and work closely with a qualified attorney. Many adoptive families find this to be the preferable option because of the opportunity for nationwide exposure to birth mothers.

An adoption agency can help with the entire process, however, the wait is often longer due to the focus on birth mothers within their state lines and the time spent providing home study and legal services for adoptive families. Be sure to ask about potential wait times and the number of adoptions completed per year through your local office.

Adoption attorneys will be required for the legal aspect of your adoption and will be retained by you for an independent adoption, or provided for you as part of the agency services if your birth mother is in your state. Get referrals for attorneys when the time comes that you need one and be sure their specialty is adoption.

### *How do I know if the adoption facilitator I'm considering is properly licensed or regulated?*

Many states don't regulate or require adoption facilitators to be licensed. However, in the State of California adoption facilitators are regulated and licensed. It should be as easy as asking your professional for their accreditations with the state.

At our center, Lifetime Adoption, we are even able to work nationwide with adoptive families and birth mothers who live outside of our state.