

Family Connections

"Every child deserves a good home." - Sister Catherine Louise

SPRING 2011 NEWSLETTER

The following story is reprinted with permission from *The Southtown Star*, February 27, 2011.

For parental love, this newborn doubly blessed

By Donna Vickroy of *The Southtown Star*
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A child is born and whole worlds change.

Surrounded by her loving family, little Sara Kimberly was snuggled first by her adoptive mom then by her birth mom. Next up was Grandpa and then adoptive Dad, followed by birth Dad and finally back to adoptive Mom.

Throughout the lovefest, the infant slept peacefully. It was the adults who were crying. Tears of joy.

The gathering, an example of open adoption at its best, took place last week at the home of adoptive parents Matt and Diane Dillon, of Tinley Park.

"I'm so happy," Matt said. "We have the

best baby, the best birth parents, we have everything."

Kim Bruckman was only 15 when she learned she was pregnant last winter. Then a freshman at John Hersey High School, the Mount Prospect teen was afraid to tell her dad, worried she'd disappoint him.

"I'm very close to my dad, and I didn't want to hurt him," Kim said.

Upon hearing the news, her father was upset.

Albert Montes, Kim's boyfriend, remembers Jim Bruckman saying, "You've got some explaining to do, son."

But if anyone could foresee a positive outcome from such an unexpected event, Jim could.

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Dear Friends,

Spring in the Midwest provides an amazing variety of experiences for us as residents. No two spring seasons are exactly

alike and just when we think we know what to expect, snow arrives mid-April about a week after we enjoy a beautiful 85° day. In a lot of ways, adoption stories share the same characteristics.

When I look at the story of the families highlighted in this newsletter edition and compare them with any of the other families who have walked through the doors of St. Mary's, I am confident of one thing – no two stories are alike. Adoptive families each have their own path that brought them to the point of making the decision to build their family

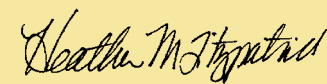
through adoption. We may use general, descriptive terms like "birth parents," but it always comes back to the unique situation involving real people like Albert and Kim or Emmy who make the incredibly loving and unselfish decision to choose a future for their child and themselves that they hope will bring them all closer to who they are called to be.

Tulips, crocuses and buds on the trees slowly come to life, in spite of the challenges they face with the windy, blustery, ever-changing spring climate around us. So, too, the families we serve bring life and build families for children in spite of all the obstacles, all the challenges, that can be a part of the adoption experience. One might look at all the things that could go wrong with adoption, and give up or choose to not even try. But I think about the God who loves us, who can work all things for good, and I look at what is orchestrated

here on a regular basis, and I can't help but be filled with a ridiculous amount of hope and joy.

To all of you who have been with us over the years, I thank you deeply. To all those who are new to us, I invite you to join them in supporting St. Mary's Services to allow us to live out the call of Sr. Catherine Louise to ensure that "every child deserves a good home." Join with us as we continue ushering in hope to the children and families we serve and ultimately to the entire community around us.

Peace,



Heather Fitzpatrick
Executive Director,
St. Mary's Services

Your Giving Makes a Difference

Please keep in mind St. Mary's when you plan your charitable giving. As a nonprofit, child welfare agency, St. Mary's relies on the generosity of donors to support our work counseling birth parents, adoptive parents and providing every child with a good home. Below is a snapshot of how your gifts make a difference to St. Mary's and the women, children and families we serve.

~ **\$25** will help St. Mary's pay for a birth mother's bus, train or cab transportation to and from a prenatal doctor's appointment.

~ **\$50** will assist a birth mother with groceries for one week, including her supply of prenatal vitamins.

~ **\$100** will allow St. Mary's to buy three days of diapers, baby formula and baby clothes during interim care, before an

infant is placed with his/her adoptive family.

~ **\$250** will help St. Mary's assist with the medical bills that are not covered by the insurance of a birth mother who chooses adoption.

~ **\$500** will provide housing support for a birth mother during the last two months of her pregnancy.

Many companies match the philanthropic gifts of their employees. Maximize your gift to St. Mary's by asking your company for information on its matching policy.

To make a gift to St. Mary's, complete the enclosed envelope, call 847-870-8181 or to donate online visit www.stmaryservices.com/give_a_gift.cfm.

VISIT GOODSEARCH.COM

GoodSearch.com is a yahoo-powered search engine which donates half its advertising revenue to the charities its users designate. St. Mary's now is a part of the GoodSearch donation program. This means each time you search the web with GoodSearch and designate "St. Mary's Service," \$.01 will be donated to the agency. With enough GoodSearch visitors, donations to St. Mary's will add up, so we encourage you to use the site for your search engine needs!

ST. MARY'S FAMILIES CELEBRATE

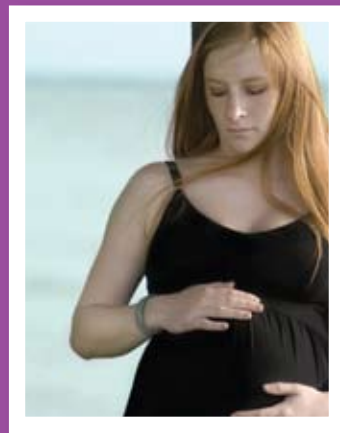
In February, the St. Mary's new Families to Families group hosted a Valentine's Day party at the agency that brought together adoptive families, birth families, staff and board members. Children enjoyed decorating cupcakes, making Valentine's cards, and watching an incredible magician. Adults had just as much fun meeting other parents and catching up with long-time friends.



Families to Families is planning the next event to be held June 17, 2011. Check your inbox for more details in the near future!

ABOUT ST. MARY'S MATERNITY SERVICES

St. Mary's takes great pride in offering unparalleled counseling to pregnant women considering adoption. An unplanned pregnancy can create feelings of being overwhelmed, anxious and stressed. St. Mary's is here to help pregnant women explore their adoption and parenting options using a non-judgmental, individualized and confidential approach. There is no charge for counseling and the agency offers material assistance when needed. If you or someone you know is experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and wants to learn more about adoption, please call 1-888-ST-MARYS. We care. We listen. We're here to help.



ST. MARY'S LAUNCHES E-NEWSLETTER

As another way to keep in touch with adoptive families, birth parents, community members and donors, St. Mary's has launched a monthly e-newsletter. The newsletter includes updates on agency news, including recently placed families and events, as well as key information related to adoption. To receive the e-newsletter, simply email Heather Fitzpatrick, St. Mary's executive director, at hfitzpatrick@stmaryservices.com.

Celebrate Birth Mother's Day

In recognition of Birth Mother's Day on May 7th, we would like to profile one of the many strong and selfless women who have chosen to place a child for adoption through St. Mary's. As a result, they have made a family's dreams come true and now are able to live out their dreams as well. We celebrate and honor these women and mothers everywhere. We give special thanks to Emmy, who was willing to share her story with us here.

Emmy, a Palatine resident, shares her story of adoption and tells us what she's doing now:

What lead you make an adoption plan for your baby?

I was 22 at the time. The situation with the birth father was not healthy and I knew that I couldn't support a baby on my own. I was seven months pregnant when I reached out to The Society to Preserve Human Dignity (PHD) for help. [PHD provides free professional pregnancy and parenting counseling, education and support services.] They referred me to St. Mary's.

I'll be honest, being pregnant and not knowing what I was going to do was really scary. But when I met Cindy at St. Mary's, she really put me at ease and genuinely cared about me and my well being. That made a difference. She came with me to meet the adoptive family I had selected, which made that first meeting a lot easier.

What is your relationship like now with your baby and the adoptive family?

It's great. We talk once every other week. We e-mail back and forth a lot, and they send me pictures, too. I've met their extended family and in a few weeks, they're all coming to my house to meet my extended family. Of course, I get to see my son that day too! I have a really strong relationship with my son's adoptive mom. I can call her if I'm having a bad day, and she listens and gives me advice. She's like another mom to me.

What are you doing now?

I'm a sophomore at Harper College. I was going to become an elementary teacher, but have decided to change my major and study adoption instead. My experience has affected my life so much, and I have a strong passion for helping others in a similar situation. I love sharing my story to help others. Adoption has taught me a lot, including not taking things for granted. I am so happy that I was able to give the adoptive family such a gift.

How did St. Mary's help you the most?

They did a lot. They made sure I was OK during the process and held my hand through the whole thing. Cindy made it about me, and that was big. It's not an easy thing, and I still have bad days, but I remind myself that I did what was right for my baby and me.

What advice do you have for other pregnant women considering making an adoption plan for their baby?

It's not as bad as people make it out to be. It's a selfless act. Think of the child and the child's well-being. If you don't think you can support the baby and give him/her the best life possible, you should consider adoption so your baby can have the life you can't give them. 💜

SECURE ONLINE SERVICES CONNECT THE ADOPTION TRIAD

St. Mary's recognizes the importance of building relationships among birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees (known as the adoption triad), and the different levels of openness that are involved. With this in mind, St. Mary's is now offering clients three new online services: My Adoption Portal, Parent Finder and ChildConnect. While each Web site provides a different service, the overarching goal of all of all three is to assist families through the adoption process, build relationships among the adoption triad, and help St. Mary's provide services more efficiently and effectively.

myadoptionportal.com

My Adoption Portal is a web-based tool to support birth parents, adoptive parents and agencies with the details of the adoption process. It includes a secure electronic record and confidential mail system to help in the communication between parents and the agency. For example, adoptive families can go to MyAdoptionPortal.com to view their case information, and see which of their required documents have been completed, and which ones they still need to finish.

parentfinder.com

Parentfinder.com is a site targeted toward potential birth parents and features adoptive families' profiles and photos. The site connects birth parents with adopting families by providing an online environment for adopting families to share pictures, letters, etc. with birth parents who are considering placing a child for adoption.

childconnect.com

ChildConnect.com preserves the post-adoption connection between the birth parents, adoptive parents and St. Mary's in a secure environment, with special emphasis on providing confidentiality, based on adoptive and birth parents' wishes. The program is based on the concept of a LifeBook that contains letters, pictures, documents and videos that are shared between birth parents and adoptive parents. This program is highly customizable and allows birth parents and adoptive parents to maintain the confidentiality level that was previously agreed upon, and offers an automated function so that information is shared more efficiently and the agency can better track the communication.

For more information about any of these online services, please contact Cindy Anselmo, St. Mary's clinical supervisor, at canselmo@stmaryservices.com.

Meet the St. Mary's Board of Trustees

Several new members recently have joined the St. Mary's Board of Trustees. As volunteers, these individuals take time out of their busy schedules to meet on a bi-monthly basis to bring new ideas, guidance and support to the agency. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank them for their dedication and commitment to St. Mary's work of building loving families – and introduce you to a few of them. Stay tuned to future newsletters for background on the other board members!

Judith Seguy, President



Judith Seguy

"After reading a short note in our church bulletin, I knew that I needed to answer the call for an interim care provider for SMS. I have been an interim care provider for almost

8 years and on the Board for 2 ½ years. I hope to bring a renewed energy to the agency thru my participation on the Board, my enthusiasm for the SMS mission and my desire to educate our community about adoption."

Mark M. Morgan, Board Member

"Over 19 years ago, my wife Jane and I were entrusted with the precious life of a newborn, 75-hour old



Mark Morgan and Family

baby, our eldest daughter, Alex. We've since shared the joys and challenges of parenting her and her younger sister, Bella. We pray that we and our extended families, including 'the St. Mary's family', have succeeded in giving our children the kind of good home every child deserves, especially one of which Alex's birth-families would be proud. They always have been, are now, and will forever be Alex's parents, too, and are full-fledged members of our families. As a Trustee for over 7 years, and former President and Treasurer of the Board, I am SO PROUD OF ST. MARY'S core mission: "To help create loving families, and good homes for our children, through adoption."

Rev. Gary Cox, Board Member

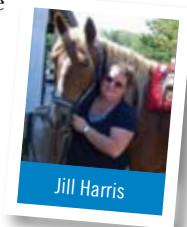
"As a baby, I was adopted through St. Mary's Services. Now, 43 years later, I am an Episcopal priest who serves in two Hispanic congregations in Chicago. Serving on the board is a wonderful opportunity that allows me to come full circle, connecting my own adoption, my support of St. Mary's mission, and the opportunity to expand my ministry with one of the Episcopal Charities and Community Services of the Diocese of Chicago."



Rev. Gary Cox

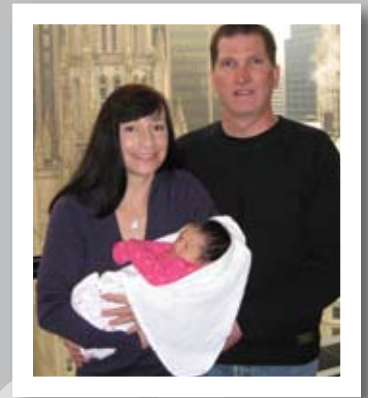
Jill Harris, Board Member

"I grew up in Arlington Heights, less than a mile from St. Mary's Services and never realized it was there until I met Judi Seguy at church more than five years ago. I loved seeing Judi and Bob caring for the infants and children while they waited for their "forever families". My sister and I were adopted as infants and we were always told what blessings we were and what an amazingly unselfish choice it was for a birth mother to make. I am honored to be on the SMS Board. I bring both my professional experience as a business owner and my personal passion for adoption and creating loving families to the table in the hopes of moving SMS into the future as a vibrant and relevant agency."

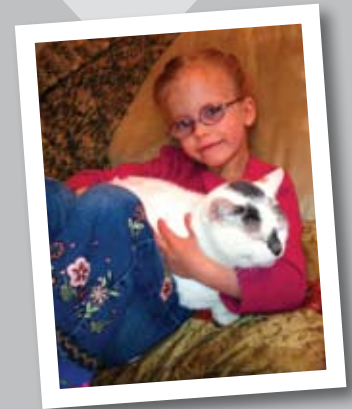


Jill Harris

PAULA AND JEFF
WELCOME ANDREW



TIM AND SUE
WELCOME JADE



MICHELLE AND JOHN
WELCOME VALENTINA
NICHOLE

IN SYMPATHY

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Tugman family, as we remember the life of Kim Tugman – a wonderful wife, mother, and friend.

Save the Dates

Below are the upcoming informational seminars for adoptive families.

SEMINARS

Parenting and Disciplining Your Adopted Child

Saturday, May 14, 2011
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

St. Simon's Episcopal Church Parish Hall
717 W. Kirchhoff Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005

Your Baby's First Year

Saturday, June 25, 2011
9 a.m. to 11 a.m.

St. Simon's Episcopal Church Parish Hall
717 W. Kirchhoff Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005

Birth and Adoptive Families Panel

Saturday, July 16, 2011
9:00 a.m. to 12 p.m.

St. Simon's Episcopal Church Parish Hall
717 W. Kirchhoff Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005

Mental Health and Your Adopted Child

Saturday, September 24, 2011
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

St. Simon's Episcopal Church Parish Hall
717 W. Kirchhoff Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005

Talking to Your Child About Adoption at Different Developmental Stages

Wednesday, November 9, 2011
7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

St. Simon's Episcopal Church Parish Hall
717 W. Kirchhoff Road
Arlington Heights, IL 60005

**November is National Adoption Awareness Month*

**Pre-registration is required. To register, go to www.stmaryservices.com and click on the "Adoption Education" tab or call 1-888-ST-MARYS.*

All seminars are open to the public. There is a \$20 per person fee, to be paid in advance and is non-refundable. This fee does not apply to families that have been accepted into St. Mary's domestic and international programs. Programs are not appropriate for children and babysitting services are not available. One credit given per seminar hour attended.

Cover story continued...

Jim and his wife, Bernie, adopted all four of their children, the two boys from Honduras, the girls from Guatemala.

Though he says he wouldn't change a thing about how their adoption proceedings went, even though it was a closed adoption, the mystery



Matt and Diane couldn't have hoped for a happier ending to their adoption journey.

surrounding his children's birth always has nagged him.

"My boys will never be able to find their birth parents," Jim said. "They were orphans. So their birth dates and names have been fabricated."

Kim and her little sister may be able to track some of their birth information once they turn 18.

As upset as he was upon hearing Kim's news, he refrained from telling his daughter how to handle the situation.

Kim spent most of last summer debating whether or not to keep her baby.

"My dad was with me the whole time," she said. "We grew a lot closer through this experience. Now, my dad is my best friend."

Eventually, Kim and Albert decided to place the baby through St. Mary's Services.

"I knew I was too young to raise a child," Kim said. "But I didn't want my baby to wonder about who her birth mother was. I didn't want her to be like me."

Albert, too, wanted something better for his unborn child. His own father left when he was just 3.

"I want my baby to have a good home with parents who love her," Albert said. "I want her to grow up in a stable environment."

Together, Albert, Kim and Jim met with St. Mary's counselor Cindy Anselmo to discuss their hopes and dreams for the baby and to find an adoptive family.

Albert and Kim, both Latino, initially wanted the child to be placed with a Latino couple, but when they found Matt and Diane, they knew their search was over.

Kim and Albert say they felt an instant connection with the Dillons, who had been trying for years to have a baby and had just recently decided to pursue open adoption.

"We really liked their (scrap) book, too," Kim said. "They reminded me of my own family."

There were too many similarities to ignore.

Both Jim and Matt attended the same grammar school. And both work in the computer field.

Both couples planned to name the baby Sara if it was a girl and James if it was a boy.

And both couples liked the idea of open adoption, which means all parties maintain a relationship with the child.

Since Sara was born in October, the Bruckmans and the Dillons have gotten together several times. The Dillons even had Albert's family over recently.

"Some people seem sad that they were adopted, they wonder about where they came from," Diane said. "We chose open adoption because we didn't want our child to ever wonder who her birth mom or dad was."

Reflecting on the experience, Kim said she knows she made the right decision.

"I get to see Sara, but I also get to go back and finish school," she said. "I'm more mature now. I'm thankful for how things turned out."

Albert, now 19, is enrolled in Oakton Community College. He says he is "a better father than mine was."

Matt, who was nervous at first about becoming emotionally invested in the process just in case the birth parents changed their mind, now says he couldn't have hoped for a happier ending.

And a more joyful beginning. ♥



LAURA AND PHIL WELCOME RYAN

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OUR MISSION STATEMENT



Established more than 120 years ago, St. Mary's Services is a faith-based, non-profit organization that serves women experiencing unplanned pregnancies who are considering adoption and families looking to adopt children. Through personalized counseling, education, supportive resources and adoption services, the agency is dedicated to building loving families.

St. Mary's is licensed by the Illinois Department of Children & Family Services #040234.



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