



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**EYE ON THE CAPITOL**  
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### **Growing a Culture of Life**

By Barbara Sella, Associate Director

Nurturing the culture of life is the work of many hands. Some prepare the soil, others sow the seeds still, others harvest.

Four years ago, three midwestern families boarded a plane in Chicago as strangers and returned from an orphanage in Calcutta a week later as an extended family.

Linda traveled with her nine-year-old daughter. Preeti is a generous, affectionate child who also happens to be profoundly deaf and cognitively impaired. For years she begged her parents to give her deaf sister with whom she could sign and play. Since there are waiting lists in the United States for parents wishing to adopt deaf children, Linda and her husband looked again to India, where Preeti was also born. There they chose Seema—a baby with a dazzling smile who could not hear.

Virginia and David have four nearly grown sons. Hearing that an infant girl was in need of surgery, they opened their arms. Tiny and frightened, Amy was the only child about whom the orphanage staff seriously worried. On the return flight she simply clung to Virginia and cried.

Jessica and Tom have three older daughters and a five-year-old son, Ramesh, adopted from the same orphanage to which they were returning. Ramesh has no feet. They were severed in a road accident that killed his birth mother. Jessica and Tom returned to Calcutta to bring home Ramesh's crib mate, Rajan—a lively, highly intelligent five-year-old who has a shunt that drains fluid from his brain to his stomach.

Every year the three families exchange Christmas cards with pictures of their growing children. Once a year they reunite in Chicago, where they reminisce, laugh, and celebrate the adventure of love they all share.

The children are flourishing. Seema has recovered most of her hearing but she still signs with Preeti. Rajan has successfully undergone surgery to replace his failing shunt. Ramesh has prosthetic feet that allow him to run and ride a bike. Amy has changed the most. She is radiant and confident, alternately charming and bossing her older brothers.

The three families exchange stories of other children. Of the boy with cerebral palsy whose American parents have enabled him to attend university and the toddler with malformed limbs who was adopted by two American doctors. Of the homeless girl found wandering the streets of Calcutta who finally found a home in the U.S.

These and other stories of children born with disabilities and embraced by loving families are stories of hope. They remind us that human life is precious beyond measure and that joy can be found in the most unexpected ways. They remind us that there are families willing to reap what others have sown.

But the culture of life requires other hands as well. For not all of us are able to care for orphaned or relinquished children, much less for those with special needs.

What all of us can do, with our voices and our votes, is prepare the soil that makes more adoptions possible. All of us can urge our elected officials to support legislation that gives families financial support for adoption and provides truly affordable health care to all, so that more families can successfully raise children with special needs. All of us can contact our legislators with new ideas to promote adoption.

In 1 Cor: 24-25, St. Paul reminds us, “God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another.”

Growing the culture of life means that all of us must cultivate concern for the other, especially the most fragile among us, so as to help make their bodies—and the body of Christ—whole.

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