



Answering the Call to a Sacred Ministry

The Catholic Church professes a consistent ethic of life. As Catholics, we believe in the dignity of all human life and are motivated by the love of Christ to improve the lives of the vulnerable. Currently, more than 14,000 children and youth are in foster care in Missouri, according to the Department of Social Services. On any given day, the National Foster Youth Institute reports there are approximately 400,000 children in foster care in the United States. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls on all Christians to become involved in this ministry, as individuals, families, and a society:

“The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped, and the poor. There are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It devolves then on other persons, other families, and, in a subsidiary way, society to provide for their needs: ‘Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction....’” (2208, quoting James 1:27).

This issue of *Messenger* details stories about foster children, adoptive parents, and how you can embrace the call to care for some of our most vulnerable.

God's Timing

Shelly Sconce was sitting behind her desk at school when a staff email came across her screen. An emergency placement was needed for a sibling group within the South Callaway School District. Shelly texted her husband. Fostering children had been on their hearts previously, but the loss of their 17-year-old son in an icy Super Bowl Sunday car crash had put those plans on hold. Nearly two years later that tug on their hearts persisted, and it came to fruition when her phone lit up with a new message: "Let's do it!"

The siblings were a group of four boys, ages 4, 9, 14, and 16. The staff email mentioned wanting to keep them together. "I see it as God's way of telling me now is the time," Shelly said. Having already raised three children, Shelly thought the process would be challenging, but similar. The math teacher, who loved following formulas, soon discovered it would take a new method to parent four boys who were not used to having rules or expectations.

More than 14,000 children and youth are currently in foster care in Missouri, according to the Department of Social Services (DSS). Caseworkers often add to their workload in order to meet the demand of children needing placement, which leads to a high turnover rate.

"Sadly, they don't have enough people or time to sit down and hold your hand to get things done," Shelly said. "It was trial by fire."

Shelly found support groups on social media, which she said helped her navigate court appearances, visitations with biological parents, a child in rehab, and other unfamiliar territory. It was an emotional roller coaster for her, but also for the kids.

The Sconce Family

"You just have to work with them and ride the roller coaster with them," she said.

Prior to placement, the boys had missed around 60 days of school. Teaching them routines, watching them thrive and develop aspirations have been a highlight for Shelly.

"That's been really the most rewarding to see them really think about life so that they can be successful adults and break the cycle."

Fostering doesn't equal adoption. The goal is always reunification with biological parents whenever possible. In this case, the two oldest boys, now ages 17 and 20, were adopted by the Sconce family. Due to having a different father, Shelly and her husband have legal guardianship over the youngest boys, now ages 7 and 12. She reminds us, life is messy and that's okay.

"Don't be afraid because there are kids that need love. And that's all they want. They don't want things. They just want love."

She went on to say that even if foster children are only placed with you for a brief period of time, you can make an impression on them, create a safety net, and show them love.

"I think God put them into our heart to help grieve and deal with that loss," Shelly explained. "They're not perfect. We're not perfect, but together, we're pretty darn close."

"Don't be afraid because there are kids that need love. And that's all they want. They don't want things. They just want love."

-Shelly Sconce, foster and adoptive mother





SILENT REFLECTION FOR CHILDREN AWAITING ADOPTION

SCRIPTURE:

Matthew 19: 13 -14

PRAYER:

Lord Jesus, you saw in the innocence of children the attributes which make us worthy of heaven—trust, joy, humility, obedience, and faithfulness. Bless all children who are awaiting adoption. They seek love—may they find it in loving parents. They seek stability—may they find a home rooted in faith. They seek acceptance—may their gifts be recognized and nurtured. And may they always know your steadfast love for them and the true joy of loving you.

PETITION TO ST. JOSEPH

Blessed St. Joseph, You welcomed the Christ Child into your home, provided for his daily needs, and helped him to grow in wisdom, age, and grace. Hear the prayers of all children who are awaiting a loving home, and intercede for them before your adopted Son and Savior, Jesus Christ our Lord.

St. Joseph, Guardian and Protector, pray for us.

Thomas

It was during October, Respect Life Month, that MCC staffer Heather Buechter first met Thomas. The 15-year-old has been in state custody for four years and has struggled to find a foster home that would take him. He has been separated from his three siblings. At the time, he was in a residential care facility, which helped him process his emotions. After all, losing your family, home, and everything you've known can be traumatizing. Despite all that, he was willing to chat with me about life. He likes candy, Halloween, crocheting, cross stitching, and sewing - he's good with his hands. That could explain why he wants to be a neurologist when he's older. He can make a lot of money and give some money away to people who need it, he tells me. Before that though, he hopes to get transferred to an individualized supported living (ISL) service. This will allow him back into a traditional high school setting. It also provides him transitional living in a place he can call home, with the benefit of staff assistance.

A Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) Public Policy Priority

Uphold and Strengthen Marriage and Family

Family is the basic cell of human society and the foundation of civilized life. Presently, the institutions of marriage and family are threatened by a culture that no longer values authentic marriage and stable families. The MCC will support legislation and funding for programs that encourage two-parent families and provide assistance to single parents and their children; promote responsible parenthood; assist victims of domestic violence; and, help families who are poor or have children with health problems or disabilities.

"The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family."
(Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2210)



↓ *Scan here
to listen now*



Have you ever wondered what the foster parent process looks like? Hear one mom's journey about feeling called to foster and eventually adopt a group of siblings. Shelly Sconce discusses the surprises and rewards of expanding her family in this episode of MCC from the Capitol.

Dr. Michael Meehan is the CEO of Marygrove, a child welfare agency near St. Louis that helps children, teens and young adults learn how to transcend an abusive past or overcome other life challenges and move toward a brighter future. He discusses how individuals and parishes can get involved in supporting youth and foster families, in this episode of MCC from the Capitol.

Volunteer

Contact your local Catholic Charities to learn more about specific volunteer services needed within their partner agencies.

Become a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteer to work hands-on with foster youth.

Parish Support

Start a support system for foster families in your parish. Host a supplies drive, offer meals, respite care, or social support by creating a small group that meets regularly.

Get Involved



Education

Learn about the efforts taking place in your community including:

- Good Shepherd Children & Family Services
- Marygrove
- The Central Missouri Foster and Adoption Association
- Lutheran Family and Children Services

Donate

Make a donation to agencies that provide foster care case management services or work with foster children.

Join the Missouri Catholic Advocacy Network! (MOCAN)

Join the 10,000 + Catholic Missourians who make up the team of advocates who help the Catholic voice ring through the halls of the Missouri State Capitol. If you want to stay updated on pro-family legislation — or any of the many other legislative priorities the MCC advocates for — you will not want to miss the opportunity to join MOCAN.

If you're already a member, encourage your family, friends, and fellow parishioners to join! As MOCAN grows, so does the Catholic voice in Missouri's Capitol. Visit mocatolic.org or send us an email at mocatolic@mocatolic.org for details.