

Children are a gift from God

By Rev. John A. Terry

While I have been asked to write this column on the occasion of Father's Day, I confess I have no special expertise about fatherhood, but many year of experience and a story to share. About 3 decades ago this time, the day my father turned 70, I drove to his home to wish him happy birthday, see what he wanted to do that day and ask if I could bring him a little cake.

There was no answer at the door and no reply when I called. I found him where he had fallen hours before. My father died on his 70th birthday. I expected to be sad at his passing, but I did not expect the flood of tears I shed at his passing.

A year later almost to the day my wife and I found ourselves sitting in an office at an adoption agency. We had just returned from vacation and were still fighting jet lag. Months before the social worker told us there were no children available for adoption and they did not know when or if any children would ever be available.

We fought fatigue thinking it would be another wasted meeting until a smiling social worker entered the room, sat down, pulled out a picture and said, "We have a son for you." I had no idea how ready I was to be a father until we were given a son.

A little over a year later I returned home from work and saw a silly grin on my wife's face. Even though the agency told us it would be some time if ever before we could get another child, to us another son was given. It made our life far more complicated and far richer than I ever imagined.

Those of us who have adopted or attempted to adopt can testify to the great difficulty, frustration and expense. It began a year before when, after 5 years of marriage and despite the efforts of medical professional help no child was born to us. We decided to begin the adoption process. It was an exercise in frustration.

My wife sat down one morning and called every adoption agency listed in the Cleveland, Ohio phone book. The response was always the same: "We can't help you." I, thinking I could be more forceful called the same numbers and got the same response: "We can't help you."

We then went to a lawyer who specializes in adoptions. We are on his waiting list. He said it would probably take 12 years. We never did hear back from him. We looked into overseas adoption. It was only a 2 year wait. But it required we had a criminal background check, a complete physical, 2 psychological tests, letters of reference including from a psychiatrist and that we hand over a lot of money. Just about the time we were eligible that program dissolved.

Finally my cousin, who had adopted in another state, gave me the name of a clearing house in Washington, D.C. I called them. They gave me the name of an agency in Columbus, Ohio. I called them. They gave me the name of an agency in Cleveland. My wife and I had both called them earlier with no success. This time I

was told to ask for the “State Listing of Adoptable Children.” These turned out to be the magic words and the rest is history. The reason I tell this story is to make this point: every child, by birth or by adoption, is a gift from God.

I thought adopted biracial children would enlarge the size of our family but reducing our number of friends. I have come to believe that any doors which are closed because of our sons are not ones I want to go through anyway, and being a mixed race family has opened doors of friendship and opportunity I had never imagined.

It is a special gift we received in that our sons do not look like us. It is a reminder that our children, however they became our children, are a gift from God. It has also been a source of confusion and amusement over the years. I am 5 foot 8. My wife is an even 5 foot. Both our sons about 6 foot 2. Elise and I are both white. Our eldest has rich brown skin and our youngest has the physical characteristics of President Obama. It is fun to watch the puzzled looks on people’s faces when they learn how we are family.

Several years ago I learned a great truth about children in the midst of a tragic event. While I was studying to be a minister I was called to a hospital room when the pastor of this family was unavailable. There I met parents whose 15-year-old daughter was dying from a cerebral hemorrhage. As I talked with them they had already accepted her inevitable death. Her mother said to me, “She was given to us as a trust for a little while.”

From that tragedy I learned this truth: All children are given to us by God as a trust for a little while. We never know from day to day or decade to decade what will be. So remember, Dad, that your child, each child is a gift, a trust for a time and if your dad it still with you it is a gift.

I asked one of my sons what advice I should give in this column. He said, “Don’t give any advice. Just tell them to do what you’re doing – take your sons to church, then the car show, then to lunch and enjoy the day.”

My son it is right. I have no special advice except to say that if your dad is around give him a call of call someone else’s dad who has been special to you. If not, you might do what I will do and remember him Sunday in worship. Where you have the opportunity take it. You may think it is just another meeting, but who knows what gift you will receive.