

Catholic Courier

DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER, NEW YORK ■ VOL. 106 NO. 16 ■ THURSDAY, January 26, 1995 ■ 75¢ ■ 28 PAGES/2 sections



Adoptive parents Paul and Alice Nation bathe three-month-old Ryan in their Rochester home's kitchen basin before putting him to bed. S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Adoption, foster care offer different kinds of 'families'

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

Ryan Nation watches carefully as Alice Nation walks from the family's living room into the kitchen.

His eyes remain riveted on the doorway until she returns and sits next to him on the couch.

Then his face lights up as only a three-month old child's can when making eye contact with his mother or father.

In this case, however, Ryan's joy surfaces as he looks into his adopted mother's eyes.

Those eyes are familiar to him because he has been with her since he was born on Oct. 18, 1994. Indeed, Alice, the director of Christian formation at Rochester's Holy Family Church, was one of the coaches for Ryan's natural mother in the delivery room.

Dick Marchner of Webster experienced a different kind of joy last fall.

Marchner was asked by a woman who had been in his foster care to give her away at her wedding.

"That's the pay back that you get," noted Marchner, who, in addition to raising three daughters of his own along with his wife, Diana, has served as a foster parent to more than 130 children over the last 22 years. "You meet these kids — they are not a part of your family legally, per se — but there's bonds between us."

The Marchners, as well as Alice Nation and her husband, Paul, have created what are not considered "traditional" families, but which are families none-the-less. Beyond the normal day-to-day stresses and issues involved in most

families, however, adoptive and foster care families have additional difficulties.

Adoptive parents can face potentially large expenses depending on whether they go through an agency, or — as the Nations did — private adoption. Although a sliding scale is available, adoptions arranged through the Catholic Family Center can come to \$6,000. Meanwhile, private adoptions can easily run \$15,000.

And even after an adoption is arranged, one or both of the natural parents can change their minds at the last moment. In New York, a six-month waiting period must pass for an adoption to be considered "official."

Once a couple decides to adopt, they often face a waiting period that can easily span years. Adopting a "special needs" child — an older child, a foreign child, or one who has physical, emotional or behavioral problems — can take 12 to 18 months. For a couple to adopt a healthy, white child, the waiting period can be as long as four to six years.

Private adoptions may take less time, but parents who go this route risk that some details — particularly legal ones — could be overlooked and cause problems down the road.

Meanwhile, adoptive parents face the dilemma of how and when to explain to their children that they are adopted, noted Catherine Brown, adoption supervisor at the Catholic Family Center, 25 Franklin St., Rochester, which handles approximately 20 to 25 adoptions each year in the 12-county Rochester diocese.

"It's just devastating to the child," to learn suddenly later in life, Brown observed. "We

Continued on page 18



Alice, who brings Ryan to work with her, shares a moment with him at lunch time in Holy Family rectory's kitchen.



At 3 months of age, Ryan is beginning to respond to his adoptive father's facial expressions.