

## Catholic agency assists couples with adoption of Chinese babies

By Elaine Spencer  
Catholic News Service

EAST PEORIA, Ill. — At 10 months, Bethany Joy Bremer is known for her smile — and she has a lot to smile about these days.

She didn't have much going for her at birth, because she was a girl born in China — where the government usually gives couples just one chance to have a child, and many want that child to be a boy.

Her birth parents abandoned her and she spent the first eight months of her life in an orphanage.

Today she lives with her adoptive parents, Warren and Connie Bremer, and her new brother and sister in East Peoria. She has learned to crawl, sit up and stand with assistance, and her brother and sister sometimes fight over who gets to hold her, their mother says.

In July the Bremers became the first couple to adopt an infant from China with assistance from the Peoria diocese's Catholic Social Service, which recently launched a drive to recruit central Illinois families willing to adopt Chinese children.

The Bremers said that despite the paperwork, travel and expense involved in adopting from China, it pays off for couples eager to adopt.

"We wanted another baby, and we know she didn't have much hope for a future in China," Connie Bremer told *The Catholic Post*, Peoria's diocesan newspaper. "It's well worth it."

The role Catholic Social Service plays in an adoption from China or any foreign country is to conduct the home study, license the home and help the adoptive family complete paperwork required by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, according to Joe Knapp, coordinator of the Catholic agency's adoption program.

Knapp said Catholic Social Service began seeking adoptive



Elaine Spencer/CNS

Warren and Connie Bremer pose for a family picture with their children James, newly adopted Bethany Joy, and Jenna. Born in China and abandoned by her birth parents, Bethany Joy now lives with the Bremers in East Peoria, Ill.

families for Chinese infants after "we started getting information from foreign adoption agencies that an overwhelming number of children — mostly girls — were available in China."

The number of orphaned or abandoned infant girls in China is so great, Knapp said, that agencies handling adoptions from China cannot even estimate how many there are.

Knapp attributes the massive number of homeless baby girls to the Chinese government's family planning policy limiting couples to one child. For cultural, social and economic reasons, he said, many couples prefer that their child be male, and if they have a girl, they may attempt to get rid of her so they can try again for a son.

While many such girls are reportedly aborted or killed at birth, Knapp said numerous others, like Bethany, have simply been abandoned by their birth parents.

The Bremers found out about Chinese adoptions in January of this year, when they spotted a newspaper ad placed by a European adoption consulting agency.

As part of the application process, the Bremers had to

write a letter to Chinese authorities promising to care for the child properly and to teach her about her Chinese heritage.

Adoption of a Chinese infant via an international adoption agency usually costs between \$12,000 and \$17,000, according to Knapp. The fee varies depending on which foreign agency handles the adoption.

"I would say that once the home study is done, you're looking at about four to eight months" before a couple receives an adoptive child from China, Knapp said. In contrast, couples seeking to adopt healthy white American infants via Catholic Social Service usually face a one- to three-year wait, he added.

"We're excited about the possibilities for our families," Knapp said. "This is a real good opportunity for families who have been hoping for a child."

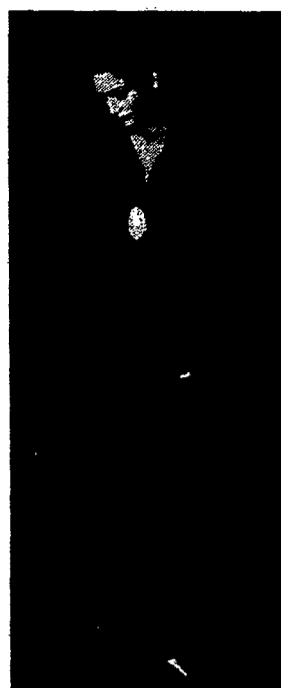
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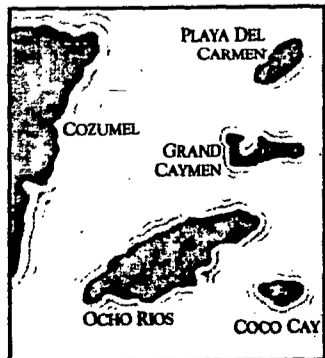
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