

Harmony of Helping Hands

What happens when a Christian comedian, an emerging Christian/Country music artist, and 136 people of faith gather for a fabulous dinner in a picturesque setting with a common purpose? They praise God our Father, enjoy wonderful fellowship and raise more than \$46K to provide a tangible gift of hope to children entering foster care across the state of Tennessee! The Harmony of Helping Hands, held on September 25th at Old Natchez Country Club was a night to remember! Guests were intrigued by Brennley Brown's story of growing up with a foster brother and her beautiful voice singing a variety of Christian and country songs including her hit, "One More Hallelujah," and well-known tunes "You Were Always on My

Mind" and "What a Wonderful World." John Datoy's jokes made the audience laugh, but his sincere remarks about the at-risk children he sees in his role as a youth pastor and the fact that many have been foster children reminded everyone

about the reason for the event. Hearts were touched by Jacqueline's commentary that comes from the unique perspective of leading Tennessee Action Council and also being a new foster parent. Tom Thompson chaired this year's event

and Elaine Lovelace led sponsor recruitment. Many others contributed their time and talents to the event which experienced an amazing growth in attendees from 90 last year to 136. Pastor Josh Huisman, Senior Pastor at Crosswalk

Church, led the opening invocation. Old Natchez Country Club provided an amazing menu with dual entrees of filet and salmon, delicious salad and sides, and desserts (the molten chocolate cake seemed to be the favorite!) Reinhold Holtkamp from Optimara donated centerpieces and Alina Nentwig captured the evening in photographs.

The theme for the evening, "Harmony of Helping Hands," expresses the fact that caring for at-risk children requires the support and commitment of many people with varied skills and talents. In keeping with the theme,

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multiple organizations who work with at-risk children were represented among attendees, including Tennessee Kids Belong, Careportal, DCS (Department of Children's Services), CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), and CPS (Child Protective Services). Members of multiple local faith communities participated as well.

It's not too late to give! We are very close to our goal of \$50K for duffle bags and your contribution will be used for that purpose! Remember, donations can be made by check (mail checks to TAC Helping Hands, PO Box 4011, Brentwood, TN 37024), credit card or stock donation. And you can donate in honor or memory of special people in your life with a unique and meaningful gift—just note this designation on your check or in the "comments" field when making an on-line donation. The link for on-line donations is <https://projectlife4tn.org/helpinghands-dinner-event/> Perhaps the best way to share the joy, energy and commitment of the evening is through a few photographs! Thank you to all those who supported Harmony of Helping Hands this year. We sincerely hope you can attend the event in 2026!



Adoption Awareness Month, November 2025

Fostering and adoption are lifechanging journeys filled with love, growth, and new beginnings. However, many people are still unaware of the challenges, beauty, and importance. By raising awareness, we can inspire compassion, support foster and adoptive families, and encourage others to consider fostering and adoption as a way to expand their families or find ways to support those who do. Here are a few thoughts as we celebrate National Adoption Month.

1. **Realize that not everyone is a called to adopt,** BUT we all can work to create "adoption friendly" and "foster friendly" communities that nurture children and families.
2. **Words matter.** The way we talk about fostering and adoption can shape perceptions and experiences. Positive language emphasizes respect, accuracy, and empathy. For instance, use "birth parents" instead of "real parents," and say "placed for adoption" rather than "given up for adoption." Our intent is to affirm dignity of everyone involved, adoptees, birth-families, foster children, and foster and adoptive families.
3. **Teach** your children and grandchildren about fostering and adoption.
4. **Share positive stories** about fostering and



adoption and encourage thoughtful conversations.

5. **Pray** that God will show you how you can make a positive difference.

The following vignettes tell fostering/adoption stories from three families who are Tennessee Action Council volunteers.

Our International Adoption Journey:

We are blessed to have both biological children and an internationally adopted child. We understand that the love one feels for a child doesn't depend on giving birth. Our daughter, Niki, came to us from Seoul when she was four months old. We are grateful to her birth mother, who chose life and a Korean family, who we will never know, that fostered her in their

home until she came to the USA. It takes a special kind of love to care for an infant for several months and then allow another family, thousands of miles away, to step in as the adoptive parents. Niki arrived in this country happy and healthy. Our family, friends and church immediately surrounded her with acceptance and love.

God had a plan for us and for Niki. As we look back, we realize that God gave us an incredible gift, not only a daughter and a sister

for our sons, but also three granddaughters and a son-in-law whom we love dearly. We are richly blessed!

—David and May Bennett

Our Foster Journey:

Our foster care journey began several years ago, born from both a deep desire to help and a season of personal struggle with growing our own family. Fostering had always been on our hearts, but like many good things in life, it got delayed. First by a home under construction, then the arrival of our twins, then another move and another house needing renovations. Life was busy, full, and at times chaotic. But once the dust finally settled, our home was complete (for now), our kids were a little older, and we were ready to take the leap. In June of this year, we welcomed our first long-term placement. And nothing, truly nothing, could have prepared us for how much our world would shift.

Suddenly, life was full of doctor's appointments, new routines, and learning how to parent a child with a history we didn't yet fully understand. Our biological kids had their own adjustment period, and we found ourselves navigating not just parenting, but also the many visits from DCS, CASA, and other support organizations. We felt overwhelmed, at times isolated, and constantly stretched, emotionally, mentally, and physically, all while trying to hold it together for everyone's sake. But through it all, one thing has become clear: we are not alone. The people and organizations who have stepped in to support us have been a true lifeline. You never realize how much you need a village until you're right in the middle of the storm.

Not everyone is called to foster, but everyone can be part of the journey. Whether through encouragement, donations, prayer, or practical support, you play a vital role. I can boldly say that we couldn't do this without that support.

We didn't become a foster family to expand our household. Our goal is simple: to be a safe, stable, and loving place for a child until they can return to their biological family. We pray every day for their parents, for healing, for change, and for the hope that reunification will someday be possible.

There are heartbreak moments. Like hearing your foster child ask if it's time to go home, knowing that, for now, the answer is no. But there are also incredible, hope-filled wins. Watching them thrive with routine. Seeing them bond with your children, with friends at church, and with teachers and classmates at school. Witnessing trust begin to grow where once there was fear. These moments are everything. Foster care is a marathon. The road is long and full of hurdles. But we celebrate every small victory and trust that these seeds of love and safety will take root, and that one day, when they look back, this child will know they were deeply cared for in a season when they needed it most.

—Sean & Jacqueline McDonald

Our Domestic Adoption/Foster Care Adoption Journeys:

Our adoption journey began as a result of inability to naturally conceive biological children, and a personal unwillingness to pursue IVF. Instead, we put all of our effort (and finances) into domestic private adoption, beginning the arduous process in late summer of 2016. Infant adoption was romanticized by

most we came into contact with, including the agencies we worked with. We were young and naïve, but quickly learned the adoption world is one of industry, wherein the birth mothers ultimately pay the highest price; but that's a soapbox for another time. We did our due diligence to hire agencies and lawyers who were ethical and kind, and all in all had a flawless experience. An expectant mother chose us to be her unborn child's parents, and we worked on forming a relationship with her in the months leading up to his birth.

Our son was born in August 2017, almost exactly a year after we took the first step in the process to adopt. We drove 750 miles, literally through the night, and arrived at the hospital an hour and a half after he was born. This was also the first time we had met our son's precious birth mother face-to-face, and we'll never forget the first words she spoke to us: "go hold your son". That baby boy is now 8 years old and we cannot fathom our lives without him. Now, all of the "no's" we received to our anguished prayers make sense. But let's back up, to when he was about 13 months old...

Here's what we know through experience about the will of God: He'll lay something on your heart and it'll be there, burdening your conscious until you do it. Often, whatever it is doesn't make sense and may even be scary. It'll be there until you move forward in faith, letting Perfect Love cast out fear. That was us, in fall of 2018, when our miracle firstborn son was just over a year old. We had an unexplainable

"A child born to another woman calls me mom. The magnitude of that tragedy and the depth of that privilege are not lost on me."

JODY LANDERS

burden on our hearts to become foster parents. We had no desire to "foster to adopt", rather, we had a strong conviction to bridge the gap between the biological families and their children while protective services were involved. We wanted the birth families to be seen, valued and loved—we wanted to provide access and updates (when safe) on their children, rather than shame, isolation and silence like so many experience. We wanted to show these people what the love of Jesus looks like. God, in His sovereignty, had other plans.

We were officially certified as a foster home on a Wednesday in February of 2019. On the Sunday following, we received our first call for placement, for a two day old baby who was still in the hospital. He came home that Monday, and by six weeks old, his case was moving toward adoption. Our second son was

officially adopted when he was ten months old—which if you know anything about the foster care world, is almost unheard of. That baby boy was our first and last foster placement. (Not counting the teen we kinship care-fostered prior to the adoption of our first son!)

Today, we are raising two sons, who are walking, talking manifestations of the loving-kindness of God. We will never stop thanking God for telling us no to biological children, and foiling our foster care plan. What a great God we serve.

—Marcus and Karyn Perry



Baby Bottle Drive 2025

Many thanks to all those who organized and contributed to this year's Baby Bottle Drives. We had participants from a college campus to a Senior Life Community, as well as our church community participants. We give thanks and appreciation for the following groups:

- **Life 139 Campus Organization** at Union University (organized by a student, Sara Grace Patrick)
Life 139 desires to promote the awareness of the injustices of abortion and inspire positive action and to equip students to defend the value of human life. They also seek to provide support for women facing unplanned pregnancies through partnerships with pregnancy resource centers.
- **Crosswalk Church** (led by Pastor Josh Huisman)
- **Gateway Community Church** (led by Pastor Alan Clark)
- **Everleigh Cool Springs, a 55+ Community** (organized by a resident, Elaine Lovelace)

More than \$9K was raised by these baby bottle drives with more than 200 people participating – funds will be used for Project Life mobile clinics and Helping Hands duffle bags for children entering foster care. We are always looking for new groups to organize and conduct a Baby Bottle Drive. It's easy and fun! TAC supplies the bottles with labels and brochures describing the organization and purpose for the funds. They are like a bank, so coins, paper money and checks can fit through or the top removed to place donations inside. There is also a QR code to scan and electronically donate funds. Donors take a bottle, fill it, and return it. That's it! The organizer collects them and contacts a TAC volunteer to pick them up. Items to create a display table are available including a table cloth and signage as well as a video to show prospective donors. If you are interested in conducting a drive at your location, contact May Bennett to set up a meeting and schedule a time to conduct the drive.

The loose change, cash and/or check you use to fill this bottle will go to support an organization that does all it can to reach mothers facing unexpected pregnancies in an effort to protect the unborn in our own communities. Funds donated provide education, prenatal testing, including ultrasound and counseling, for mothers. Your contribution saves lives! We also provide duffle bags and hygiene supplies to children entering foster care. Please return this bottle so we can continue helping those in need. The QR Code here is an easy way to learn more details about this ministry.

**Tennessee Action Council
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PO BOX 4011, Brentwood, TN 37024**