



Mr. and Mrs. Courtade: Proud parents of 40 and counting

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hen Connie Courtade and her husband, Jim, look back on their lives together, their memories are filled with children. However, there was a time when they were unsure if they would ever become parents.

As newlyweds, the couple was aware that they would be unable to have children of their own; neither knew what the future would hold, or how their desire for children would be fulfilled. The answer to that question came in the form of the opportunity to be foster and adoptive parents. In 1989, Connie and Jim began to work with Catholic Social Services, now Catholic Charities West Michigan, and since that time, they have cared for more than 40 children. Over the last 20 years, there has never been a time when their home and family did not include children.

“It’s extremely gratifying. Even when we had our roughest times, there has always been something that gets us through,” said Connie, who didn’t become a foster parent until she was 38. “We’ll do this until we can’t any more. When I just can’t get the car seat out of the car, I think is when I’ll be too old.”

Today, the Courtade house remains a hubbub of activity. Three of the couple’s seven adoptive children are grown, but there are still four – ages 7 through 17 – who remain at home. They are also foster parents to a 16-year-old, Brandon, and a baby. Katie, the oldest at home, is a senior in high school. Jason, 11, loves to play video games, something that he shares with his foster brother. Alexis, 9, is a budding gymnast and Jacob, 7, is a busy second



» The Courtades, (from left in front) their foster son Brandon, along with four of their seven adoptive children, Alexis, Connie, Jason, (from left in back) Katie, Jim and Jacob.

By Mary Meehan | Photos by Kathy Denton



>> Jacob (right) challenges sister Katie to a video game.



>> Jim Courtade (left) with sons Jacob and Jason (right).

Frequently asked questions about Foster Care:

>> What is Foster Care?

Foster Care means providing a temporary, substitute, safe, nurturing home to children who have been removed from their parents' care.

>> How do children come into Foster Care?

Children come into Foster Care because they have been neglected and/or abused by their parents or caregivers. The children have been removed by the Department of Human Services and/or Michigan Family Court.

>> What does it mean to be a Foster Parent?

Being a foster parent means meeting the physical, social, educational and emotional needs of the child in foster care. It also includes working with a team of professionals to find the child a permanent home.

>> What is the goal of Foster Care?

The goal is reunification of the child with the birth parents or caregivers. However, in some cases children do not return to their homes and become available for adoption.

Please consider opening your heart and your home...become a foster parent!

For more information about Foster Care and/or Adoption please contact:

Catholic Charities West Michigan
Grand Rapids Area
616.356.6221
Toll free 1.866.271.6796

Muskegon Area
231.726.4735
Toll free 1.877.277.9378



grader. After school each weekday there is a bustle of activity with homework and after-school activities, plus all of the laughter, tears, disagreements and stories of what happened at school that day, that make up family life with young kids.

As a young unmarried woman, Connie gave birth to a child that she placed for adoption. Having experienced the anguish of giving up a child, Connie shares a kinship with the birth mothers of the children she fosters and the children she has adopted. She understands the loss parents may experience.

"I try to be very encouraging to the birth parents," Connie said. "Most often theirs is a case of having had a terrible childhood and they don't know how to parent. We had a foster baby and the mother was working on putting her life back together. I saw her and the child together and knew the mother loved her child. But then she tested positive for drugs. I remember the mother saying to me, in tears, 'Can you believe it? After all that time and I went back to drugs.' I just cried. I knew she truly loved that baby."

Some of the babies fostered by the Courtades have had health care needs resulting from lack of adequate pre-natal care or, in some instances, from drug or alcohol abuse by the mother.

"Foster parents, like the Courtades, are special people with special gifts," said Deborah McCormack, president and CEO of Catholic Charities West Michigan. "They are accepting and caring people who open their hearts and homes to our most vulnerable children. Foster parents are valuable resources who keep our children safe."

As most families do, the Courtades experience the ups and downs of navigating family life.

"On our worst day, when the kids were at their worst, I would just go into their bedrooms and look at them sleeping and remember they are just

children and they are trying to figure things out too."

As members of St. Alphonsus Parish in Grand Rapids, they attribute their faith to supporting and guiding them through the challenges and rewards of parenting.

"Sometimes one of the kids will tell me that they wish they grew in my belly," Connie said. "I tell them that I wish they had too, but God always had a plan for us to be together. If I had been able to have children of my own, we might not have become foster parents and I might never have met them. God planned it this way." ☺