

## Adoption: The Spiritual Journey for the Human Family

**A**t last count, there were an estimated eight million adoptees in the U.S. Add their 16 million adoptive parents and another 16 million birthparents and, even ignoring grandparents and siblings, we have a total of at least 40 million Americans who are members of the adoption triad. Yet, the subject is seldom given a comprehensive hearing, let alone one focused on the spiritual journey required to heal the wounds of separation through reconnecting with our missing and lost parts.

Issues faced by each member of the triad constitute deep-seated emotional questions of natural law, ethics, morals and spirituality.

You are invited to join us in a day-long seminar offering a series of four interactive panel discussions, each including a mix of voices representing members of the triad of a wide variety of ages and experience, professionals and society at large. Along with hearing from authors, mental health practitioners and members of the triad themselves, the church's outlook on these issues promises to be enlightening.

Organizers,

Jarrett Kroll

Carol Schaefer

## Our Sponsors

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### St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church

One of New York City's great landmark churches, committed to powerful worship, unconditional welcome for the seeker, and passionate service to the City.

### American Adoption Congress (AAC)

Through education and advocacy, we promote honesty, openness and respect for family connections in adoption, foster care and assisted reproduction.

### Concerned United Birthparents (CUB)

Supporting those separated by adoption, and advocating for fair and ethical adoption laws, policies, and practices.

### Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

A reliable, unbiased and respected voice for ethical adoption practices that respect all people touched by adoption.

### Manhattan Birthparents

Support group for those living with post-adoption trauma and reunion

### Spence-Chapin Services to Families and Children

Providing adoption and adoption-related services, promoting understanding through counseling and education, and improving adoption's image and practice.

### Unsealed Initiative

Dedicated to New York statewide adoption reform.

## Register online

<http://www.stbarts.org/boxoffice.htm>

## or by phone

at 212-378-0222

Pre-registration fee: \$25

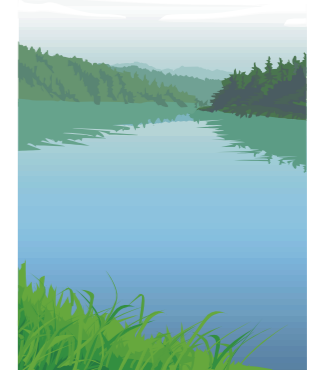
After January 1<sup>st</sup>: \$35

## Scholarships

Thanks to the generosity of Spence-Chapin Services to Children and Families, we have a limited number of scholarships available for those who cannot afford the \$25 fee.

E-mail [jskroll@rcn.com](mailto:jskroll@rcn.com) for details by December 15.

## Adoption: The Spiritual Journey for the Human Family



*An all-day seminar for adoptees, birthparents, adoptive parents, adoption professionals and public policy makers.*

**Saturday, January 21, 2006**

**St. Bartholomew's  
Episcopal Church**

50<sup>th</sup> Street & Park Avenue, Manhattan

Session I:

## Dealing with Grief and Loss

9:00 – 10:30 am

All members of the adoption triad carry the grief of separation and loss – adoptive parents, adoptees and birthparents, even in today's open adoptions – we all carry wounds that can only begin to heal when the grief is acknowledged and validated. We'll explore the spiritual journey required to heal the wounds of separation, reconnecting our missing and lost parts.

### Panelists Include:

- Rev. Thomas F. Brosnan, adoptee, speaker, author, "Strengthening Families"
- Hollee McGinnis, reunited Korean adoptee and policy director, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute
- Carol Schaefer, Author, *The Other Mother: A True Story, A woman's love for the child she gave up for adoption*
- Wendy Wattel, Birthmother in an open adoption



Session II:

## Union and reunion: creating and renewing relationships

10:45 am – 12:15 pm

Reconnecting and reunion are the dream of so many triad members. But reunion brings with it many challenges and seldom offers a smooth glide-path. In fact, early reunions are often referred to as the "roller coaster" where birth-parent and offspring feel like "intimate strangers" as they "walk on egg shells," fearful of upsetting the apple cart. Few adoptive parents can fend off feelings of insecurity and fear when their children first share the news of a planned or actual reunion. Adoptees find themselves having to either keep secrets from their adoptive parents or manage their fears while juggling their own emotions and their new reunion relationship.

Open adoptions, where birthparents stay in touch with their adopted child and adoptive family, present their own challenges for all concerned, as each tries to develop clearly defined roles and to manage evolving expectations.

### Panelists Include:

- Bob Biederman, birth grandfather in an open adoption, *Boston Globe* author of "Dedicated to Emma" (July 2005)
- Michael Colberg, JD LCSW, a psychotherapist focusing on adoption and parent of a 17-year-old in an open adoption
- Lorraine Dusky, birthmother, author, *Birthmark*, and New York State Rep, American Adoption Congress
- Sarah Saffian, adoptee, author, *Ithaka*

**Lunch 12:15 – 1:15pm**

**Featuring Cabaret Duo Natalie Douglas and Mark Hartman!**

A box lunch can be pre-ordered for \$10

Session III:

## History of adoption and adoption law in America

1:30 – 3:00 pm

"...the closed adoption system ... exerts an extraordinarily powerful hold on all members of the triad. It is a cruel task master and demands untold sacrifices. It is merciless in its destructive power" - Rev. Thomas Brosnan

American society has traditionally condemned out-of-wedlock pregnancies and used shame and stigma to control women (who "got themselves" pregnant) and their offspring. Contrary to assertions by those who seek to keep the records closed, no example has ever been produced of any birth mother having been promised (or having requested) confidentiality or protection from her own child.

American adoption law is arcane and rooted in barbaric practices -- such as stamping adoptees' birth certificates with a large red "I" (for Illegitimate) -- that lasted into the 1930's. "Do-gooders' laws" followed, sealing adoption records and bringing with them a cascade of unintended consequences that have brought us to where we are today.

### Panelists Include:

- Fred Greenman, birthfather, lawyer, adoption activist
- Pam Hasegawa, AAC board member who was involved in implementing the recommendations in the federal Model State Adoption Act, and in legislation introduced in New Jersey in the early 1980s and still in process today.
- Elizabeth Samuels, author, professor, University of Baltimore School of Law
- Rickie Solinger, Author, *Pregnancy and Power*, and *Wake Up Little Susie: Single pregnancy and race before Roe v. Wade*

Session IV:

## Society's future impact on adoption law and practice

3:15 – 4:45 pm

Birth records are now available to adult adoptees in Alabama, Alaska, Delaware, Kansas, New Hampshire, Oregon, and Tennessee. In eight other states, open-records legislation has been introduced or is under consideration. New York is one of the most difficult states for searching and, after 20 years of effort, all attempts to pass open records legislation have failed.

Open Adoption is the newest and healthiest form of adoption, but what is it? All open adoptions start with the expectant mother selecting the adoptive parents, but after that? Is it sending a yearly picture of the adopted child to the birthmother, or is it one in which the birth family and the adopted child enjoy an ongoing, in-person relationship? And what are tomorrow's adoption Best Practices?

In 2003, the Canadian Committee on the Rights of the Child concluded that provinces that continue the practice of sealed adoption records are in violation of the United Nations Rights of the Child to which they are signatory. What is the position of the U.S. in relation to this pact, which has been signed by 140 countries but has yet to be ratified by the U.S.?

### Panelists Include:

- Joyce Bahr, Unsealed Initiative (NYS open records Legislative group)
- Ronny Diamond, Spence Chapin Services to Families and Children
- Madelyn Freundlich, social worker and lawyer whose work has focused on adoption and foster care issues
- Adam Pertman, author of *Adoption Nation*, and Executive Director, Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute
- Paul Schibbelhute, President, American Adoption Congress