

BOOK

Supporting adoptive families

The Adoption Network: Your Guide to Starting a Support System, by Laura Christianson (WinePress Publishing, 2007; 112 pages; \$9.99, paper; 1-877-421-7323; www.laurachristianson.com)

Many churches have programs for married couples, singles, teenagers, young adults and divorced people. But rarely will you find a support group for those dealing with the many facets of adoption. Laura Christianson provides a step-by-step process for starting and maintaining a support network for adoptive families, birth parents, foster families and adoptees.

Christianson, an adoptive mother who struggled with infertility, starts with an overview of the need for an adoption network, including some eye-opening statistics showing the scope of adoption in America. But she quickly gets into the practical steps of creating a mission statement, soliciting support, planning a budget and recruiting leadership.

Christianson lists elements of a successful network: a resource library, a mentoring program, an online presence and workshops. She also suggests starting a baby item exchange, developing support groups and a prayer ministry, and educating church leaders and members.

Easy-to-follow worksheets allow the reader to write out an action plan. An appendix of helpful resources is provided. *The Adoption Network* is an invaluable tool for building a much-needed ministry.—*Jeff Friend, a freelance writer in Largo, Fla.*

Support groups help those dealing with the many facets of adoption.



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Reading Paul in an age of pluralism

The Sacred Writings of Paul: Selections Annotated & Explained, by Ron Miller (Skylight Paths, 2007; 171 pages; \$16.99, paper;

www.skylightpaths.com)

In this latest entry in Skylight Paths' Illuminations series, religion professor Ron Miller takes a look at passages from Paul's undisputed letters. After offering up his own thought-provoking translations of Paul's Greek, Miller explains via pastoral annotations what these passages reveal about Paul's theology—particularly Paul's ideas about sin and grace, flesh and spirit, and Jesus as the "atoning sacrifice" for fallen humanity.

This alone would make the book a welcome addition to the library of any lay theologian. But what really sets Miller's book



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apart is his discussion of what he considers Paul's limitations. While respecting Paul's intellect and passionate faith, Miller argues that Paul's ideas not only have hindered the lives of women, gays and Jews, but also have truncated Christian thought on salvation. Miller explores the reasons for such limitations, often by placing controversial passages within their first-century context. By doing so he partially "redeems" Paul, who turns out to be not as anti-women as tradition would have us think. Paul said nothing at all about the contemporary concept of homosexuality, and had a great and abiding love for his fellow Jews.

What Miller cannot re-interpret, however, is Paul's insistence that Jesus is the only way to salvation. This, claims Miller, is a limitation that will forever remain in the Pauline texts.

While Miller's ideas will not sit well with many conservative Christians, others who have struggled with Paul's "my way or the highway" theology may find in them much relief. Here is a way to read Paul that sees him for what he is—a first-century Hellenistic Jew writing out of an overwhelming experience of Christ. And here, also, is a way to celebrate the Christian life without having to belittle the lives and faith traditions of other people in the process.—*R. Dale Smith, graduate of Union-PSCE in Richmond, Va.*