



One big, happy, praying family

By Roy Hoffman

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The Rev. Kathryn Threadgill, born in Korea to parents she never met — a Korean mother and African-American father — takes it as "God's plan" that she was adopted by a white, Presbyterian couple in Fairhope, Ala., who raised her in a big, loving, ethnically diverse family.

"It's my faith journey," says Threadgill, 27, youth pastor at Government Street Presbyterian Church, thinking back on the circumstances that led her, as a newborn, to Dorothy and Rix Threadgill.

The elder Threadgills, from Baldwin County, had been Presbyterian missionaries in the Congo in the 1960s, then based in Brussels. In their late 20s at the time, unsuccessfully trying to have a child, they decided to adopt.

They got their first baby, Ann, from Vietnam.

Over the course of many years, they went on to adopt 10 more children, from Vietnam, India, Korea and the American South, including mixed-race children.

They have two birth sons of their own in the brood — 13 children in all.

"We're not at the center of it," Rix Threadgill says of his sprawling, diverse family. "God's at the center."

Rix Threadgill, who retired from teaching at Fairhope High School, also served as lay pastor at Memorial Presbyterian Church, an African-American church in Mobile.

Dorothy, a registered nurse, says she stopped practicing professionally with so many children. But her nursing degree came in handy. "With this many children there was always someone sick."

"We just answered the call," says Rix, meaning that, when the phone rang from someone who had a child needing a home, they opened their doors.

That's how Kathryn came to them, they explain.

When an adoption agency in Atlanta got a mixed-race Asian child, the agency feared placement would be difficult. A cousin of the Threadgills, working for the agency, heard of the baby's plight. She told them to call Dorothy and Rix.

Kathryn, who studied Bible and religion at Montreat College in North Carolina — and who went there on a soccer scholarship — said that "the call," to her, has a deeper meaning, too.

She believes her parents were answering "the call" to open not only their doors, but also their hearts, to children from far-flung cultures, some with emotional or other challenges.

"For so many of my siblings," she says, "it was this or nothing."

Her parents, she says, "were able to look beyond skin, beyond color."

Once part of the large, welcoming family, all distinctions were lost for the many children but one — they were "Threadgills."

The family ate dinners together, prayed together, sang together.

They had a round-robin of chores, and enjoyed sports.

"We were our own soccer team," says Kathryn, laughing.

They were taught selflessness, too.

On Saturday mornings, Kathryn recalls, she and her many siblings would be loaded up in the family's giant van to go pick crops for families in difficult straits.

The van would then go from the home of one needy family to another, distributing corn, potatoes, tomatoes.

She remembers one Christmas when her father was dressed as Santa Claus, all the children as elves. She says that, at the time, she was embarrassed by that endeavor.

Now, she says, she realized the ritual was "a God moment," part of her "faith journey" as she looks at the larger picture of her life.

After completing her masters in divinity at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Ga., Kathryn was ordained.

She served briefly with a congregation in North Carolina, then signed on as youth pastor this past summer with Government Street Presbyterian.

Rev. George Sinclair is pastor of the church.

Threadgill draws often on episodes in her family's life — the trials and tribulations of her brothers and sisters, and the many good times, too — to fashion her sermons.

"God's plan starts for us before we're in the world," she says.

"I understand what the banquet of Heaven will look like, with brothers and sisters from all over the world, because of the family I was blessed to be adopted in to."

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