

## **Catholic Charities' Search and Reunion Policy**

**Our Mission:** Catholic Charities recognizes that adoption is a lifelong process. Our post-adoption program offers a continuum of services that respects the relationships among the adoptee, the birth parents, and the adoptive parents. In all circumstances, confidentiality and our clients' best interests are our primary concern.

### **Catholic Charities Serves:**

- **Adopted persons** - all individuals who were adopted through Catholic Charities in the Boston Archdiocese of Massachusetts and all other agencies for which Catholic Charities now maintains the records.
- **Birth parents and siblings** of persons adopted, as stated above.
- **Adoptive parents** of adoptees that are still minors, as stated above.

### **How Massachusetts Law Guides Catholic Charities' Services:**

Catholic Charities' policies and procedures comply with Massachusetts General Law c.210 section 5D governing the release of adoption information.

The law specifically addresses the exchange and disclosure of adoption information, both identifying and non-identifying, that an agency holds in its records. It states that an adoptee cannot request, without parental consent, non-identifying information before they are 18, and identifying information before they are 21. It states that identifying information cannot be released without a signed consent from a birth parent or an adoptee. It also states that a birth parent's release needs to be at least 30 days old before identifying information is released. However, it does not address or preclude the agency from utilizing that information to locate or contact any member of the adoption triad and inquire as to their wishes regarding contact. If permission is granted, it must be in writing. If permission is not granted, either because the person cannot be found or the party has declined to grant permission, release of identifying information is prohibited by the above law.

Siblings and other family members are not addressed in the statute and therefore have no legal standing to information separate from the birth parents. Confidentiality, with all its rights and responsibilities, belongs to the birth parent(s) and the adoptee, and only they or a court of competent jurisdiction may waive their rights.

In accordance with this, siblings who were not themselves adopted and other family members who wish to receive information or initiate a search cannot do so unless the birth parent is deceased. In which case, the birth parent's death certificate and documentation from the inquiring party, demonstrating the relationship to the birth parent, must be furnished.

In all cases, the decision to proceed with a search to locate someone is the discretion of the agency. It is also Catholic Charities' policy to attempt to notify all parties who have a signed release on record to determine if they still want to release identifying information, unless the release clearly indicates that prior notification is not required.

## **What We Offer**

### **Adoptees**

- Adoptees can update their birth family/adoptive family's files with personal information and their wish for contact with their birth parents if their birth parents were to contact us. There is no cost for this.
- Adoptees who are 18 or older can request that their birth family/adoptive family's records be reviewed for a signed release. There is a \$25.00 fee for this.
- Adoptees who are 18 years or older can request only medical information contained in the record. The cost for this service is \$50.00.
- Adoptees who are 18 or older can request non-identifying information from the file, including all background information that is in the record, and copies of medical or psychological reports relating to them. The background information would be documented in summary form. The cost for this is \$150.00.

Adoptees can request a search for their birth parents providing they are 21 years or older, or have their adoptive parent's permission.

- When a search is requested and there is no consent to release identifying information in the record, the Adoption Department's clinical team will determine whether to grant such a request. If the request is approved, Catholic Charities will make all reasonable efforts to locate the identified individual and will act as an intermediary to determine whether that person is agreeable to contact. The agency will discuss search-related issues and concerns with either party as needed. If the identified person is agreeable to contact, Catholic Charities will facilitate contact between the two parties. The parties will be responsible for the nature and extent of continued communication. The fee for up to five hours of work on each birth parent search is \$250.00. Additional work will be billed at \$50.00 per hour.
- When a search is requested and there is a consent in the record but the information is not current, Catholic Charities will attempt to locate the identified party to establish their current disposition. If the identified person is agreeable to contact, Catholic Charities will facilitate contact between the parties. The fee for up to five hours of work on each birth parent search is \$250.00. Additional work will be billed at \$50.00 per hour.
- When a search is requested and there is a current release in the record, Catholic Charities will notify the parties involved and facilitate contact as requested. The fee for this is \$150.00.
- If an adoptee has the identity and whereabouts of their birth parent, they can request that an adoption professional make the initial contact. Catholic Charities will verify the information that is provided, and contact the birth parent to determine if they agree to contact. The agency will discuss search-related issues and concerns with each party and facilitate contact. The cost for this service is \$150.00.

### **Birth Parents**

- Birth parents are encouraged to update their file with personal information and their disposition regarding contact with the child they placed for adoption. There is no fee for this.
- Birth parents can request that their record be reviewed for a release from the adopted child. The fee for this service is \$25.00.
- Birth parents can request non-identifying information regarding the family that adopted their child. The background information would be documented in summary form. The fee for this service is \$150.00.
- Birth parents can request a copy of their birth parent record. The cost for this is \$25.00.

Birth parents can request a search for the child that they placed for adoption providing that their child is at least 21 years of age or older.

- When a search is requested and there is no consent to release identifying information in the record, the Adoption Department's clinical team will determine whether to grant such a request. If the request is approved, Catholic Charities will make all reasonable efforts to locate the identified individual and will act as an intermediary to determine whether that person is agreeable to contact. The agency will discuss search-related issues and concerns with each party as needed. If the identified person is agreeable to contact, Catholic Charities will facilitate contact between the two parties. The parties will be responsible for the nature and extent of continued communication. The fee for up to five hours of search work is \$250.00. Additional work will be billed at \$50.00 per hour.
- When a search is requested and there is a consent in the record but the information is not current, Catholic Charities will attempt to locate the identified party to establish his/her current disposition. If the identified person is agreeable to contact, Catholic Charities will facilitate contact between the parties. The fee for up to five hours of work is \$250.00. Additional work will be billed at \$50.00 per hour.
- When a search is requested and there is a current release in the record, Catholic Charities will notify the parties involved and facilitate contact as requested. The fee for this is \$150.00.
- If the birth parent has the identity and whereabouts of the child that they placed for adoption, they can request that an adoption professional make the initial contact. Catholic Charities will verify the information that is provided, and contact the adoptee to determine if they agree to contact. The agency will discuss search-related issues and concerns with each party and facilitate contact. The cost for this service is \$150.00.

### **Adoptive Parents**

- All services available to the adoptee are available to adoptive parents on behalf of their minor child(ren). Any request for a search for contact with birth parents will be reviewed by the clinical team in the Adoption Department to identify the appropriateness of the request. Additional services may be recommended in conjunction with the search services. See the Adoptees section for the fee schedule.

### **Siblings and Relatives**

- The agency will provide the following services to siblings and other relatives only if the birth parent is deceased. In order to establish this, the sibling or relative will need to provide an *official copy of their parent's death certificate, and an official copy of their own birth certificate. The only exception to this is when the sibling was placed for adoption, and is looking for another sibling placed for adoption. In these cases, the birth parent does not need to be deceased.*
- A sibling or other relatives, as long as the birth parent is deceased, can update the related file with information about themselves and their wish as to whether they would want contact with a sibling if that sibling was to contact us. There is no cost for this.
- A sibling or other relative, as long as the birth parent is deceased, can request the related file be reviewed to see if their adopted sibling has signed a release that is on file. There is a \$25.00 fee for this.

A sibling or other relative can request a search for an adoptee provided that 1) the adoptee is at least 21 years of age, and 2) the birth parent is deceased.

- When a search is requested and there is no consent to release identifying information in the record, the Adoption Department's clinical team will determine whether to grant such a request. If the request is approved, Catholic Charities will make all reasonable efforts to locate the identified individual and will act as an intermediary to determine whether that person is agreeable to contact. The agency will discuss search-related issues and concerns with each party as needed. If the identified person is agreeable to contact, Catholic Charities will facilitate contact between the two parties. The parties will be responsible for the nature and extent of continued communication. The fee for up to five hours of search work is \$250.00. Additional work will be billed at \$50.00 per hour.
- When a search is requested and there is a consent in the record but the information is not current, Catholic Charities will attempt to locate the identified party to establish their current disposition. If the identified person is agreeable to contact, Catholic Charities will facilitate contact between the parties. The fee for up to five hours of work is \$250.00. Additional work will be billed at \$50.00 per hour.
- When a search is requested and there is a current release in the record, Catholic Charities will notify the parties involved and facilitate contact as requested. The fee for this is \$150.00.
- If the sibling or other relative has the identity and whereabouts of the adoptee that was placed for adoption, they can request that an adoption professional make the initial contact. Catholic Charities will verify the information that is provided, and contact the adoptee to determine if they agree to contact. The agency will discuss search-related issues and concerns with each party and facilitate contact. The cost for this service is \$150.00.