



Written by [James Heiser](#) on November 20, 2011

## The State, the Church, & the Future of Foster Care

The exit of Catholic Charities and the Evangelical Child and Family Agency from Illinois' foster care system will have a significant impact on the nature of foster care in that state and will have an immediate effect on hundreds of families. As [Manya Brachear wrote for the Chicago Tribune](#):



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A day after Catholic Charities across Illinois ended its historic partnership with the state, Evangelical Child and Family Agency in Wheaton confirmed that the state did not renew its foster care contract, forcing the transfer of 242 children, 185 families and most of the agency's staff to child welfare agencies in Chicago, Wheaton and Rockford.

"We hope Christian families will not be dissuaded from pursuing foster care because the state is no longer willing to contract with us as faith-based agencies," said Ken Withrow, executive director of the Wheaton agency.

When the Department of Children and Family Services opened its doors in 1965, it asked the Evangelical agency, in operation since 1950, to join the statewide child welfare system, Withrow said.

In short, a religious organization that had been involved in foster care long before the creation of the state agency, which now deigns to oversee such religious organizations, has now brought that service to the children of Illinois to an end, in service of the agenda of the homosexual lobby.

The involvement of Catholic Charities in foster care was even more extensive than that of the Evangelical Child and Family Agency; in the Springfield Diocese alone, 290 foster care cases are being transferred to other agencies.

However, it seems apparent that not all of those individuals previously associated with the Catholic Charities are willing to side with the decision of the dioceses to disassociate from the DCFS. The [Illinois Times reports](#) that several charities have been established independent of diocesan control:

The Peoria diocese is one of two Catholic groups to set up independent nonprofit groups to take over their caseloads. The newly-created Center for Youth and Family Solutions, which the Peoria diocese said has no allegiance to the Catholic church, is in the process of taking over about 1,000 foster care cases from the diocese.

Catholic Social Services of Southern Illinois announced last week that it would quit the lawsuit and dissociate itself from the Catholic Diocese of Belleville, forming a new group named Christian Social Services of Illinois. Interim executive director Gary Huelsmann said the new independent



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group will comply with the civil union law as it takes over the 575 remaining cases handled by the Belleville diocese. That charity previously handled up to 650 cases at a time before DCFS stopped referring new cases to them, Huelsmann said.

In addition, the *Chicago Tribune* reports that Lutheran Child and Family Services (LCFS), which is "affiliated with the conservative Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, amended its policy to comply with the state." The Northern Illinois District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod has, in the past, expressed a measure of pride in the size of the LCFS. In August 2010, the Northern Illinois District issued [a press release](#) announcing the acquisition of Lifelink International Adoption as a subsidiary of LCFS. The release noted that this acquisition "made LCFS the largest provider of adoption services in Illinois," and then trumpeted the LCFS scale of the organization that "now serves 35,000 people statewide through services that include foster care, counseling and food distribution. LCFS is acknowledged by The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod."

Regardless of the decision of various denominations and the charities affiliated with them to either uphold traditional marriage or not, the transformation that is taking place in foster care in Illinois marks a significant development in the relationship of children to the State. A sense of the significance of this transition was noted by Jesse Bogan in early September in [an article for Stiltoday.com](#):

The state oversees the foster care system but contracts 80 percent of the caseload to private agencies, of which many are faith-based....

In light of the new civil union law, the state believes that policy is discriminatory, while Catholic groups claim their religious freedom is being violated.

"We had an effective partnership with the state of Illinois for over 40 years," said Steven Roach, executive director of Catholic Charities for the Springfield Diocese. "Suddenly, we are considered not worthy to care for these kids anymore. We are completely dumbfounded."

Catholic organizations were pioneers in child welfare. Foster care was largely in the hands and budgets of faith groups until agencies like Catholic Charities lobbied for the creation of DCFS in the 1960s. DCFS was overloaded with more than 50,000 foster kids in the mid-1990s, but has been brought in under better control.

As recently as 2007, Catholic agencies in Illinois collectively handled the most foster care cases in the state. In 2010, five of the 15 agencies with the highest performance rankings outside of Chicago were Catholic.

By lobbying for creation of the DCFS, Catholic Charities and other organizations may have unwittingly contributed to the current debacle. The more authority that is given to the state by taking responsibility away from families and churches when it comes to the care of children, the worse the plight of children will be, and the weaker all institutions will be when confronted by the power of the state. For Christians, who — regardless of denomination — believe that church and family are instituted by God, the rising power of the state to seize for itself the divinely given responsibilities of church and home is a tragic development.

For its own part, the state cannot even feign sorrow at its victories over the church and home. Bogan cites the words of DCFS spokesman Kendall Marlowe: "The child welfare system they [Catholic Charities] helped to create is now strong enough to survive their exit." Bogan also notes that Marlowe added "that he would not be so 'sanguine of this transition in 1995.'" Confident in its power, the reigning ideology of the state is being asserted in each domain in which it has solidified its power, and



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those institutions that oppose the state's ideology confront the threat that they will either be driven out of their traditional roles or required to capitulate to the ideology of the state. In various ways, church-affiliated charities that have been involved in foster care in Illinois are making their decision which way they will react to the latest assertion of state power. The impact of such decisions will be felt for generations to come.



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