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“It’s a walk-along type thing with Bates Place,” Cook reflects. “You want to develop relationships with the people that come here, but when you’re in a relationship, it’s for the long haul. Life happens, and things can get messy. There’s going to be setbacks.”

One of those setbacks arrived in the form of that unplanned pregnancy. At first, Lee told Cook she was sure that an abortion was her only option—that she simply couldn’t go through with the pregnancy.

“It broke my heart that abortion would be the solution to such a huge problem,” says Cook.

Cook continued to pray for Lee to have a change of heart and asked the Bates Place staff and volunteers to do so as well. Blakely, Sr. also told the Bates Place board about the decision Carmillia faced, and its members suspended their agenda to pray for her at one of the board meetings.

Lee, too, went to God to help her make the decision.

“I prayed about it,” Lee remembers. “And I also didn’t have the money for the abortion, so it got to be later in the pregnancy, and by this time, the baby was already kicking and moving. I couldn’t live with the idea of killing that child.”

God worked through the lack of immediate funds and Carmillia’s relationship with Cook to guide Carmillia to a different solution.

Although Cook assured Lee that she would support her no matter what her decision, she also began to share with her an alternative idea — adoption. As the baby stirred within her and a support network formed around her, Carmillia slowly warmed to the idea. With Cook’s help, Carmillia decided to work with Bethany Christian Services, which introduced her to a couple, who had started looking for a child to adopt the very same month that Lee had become pregnant.

“God just put everything together,” Cook reflects.

“Meant to be,” agrees Lee.

The family even wanted an open adoption, an important factor for Lee.

“I knew I wanted to have an open adoption from the jump,” says Lee. “I just feel like even if you’re giving a child away, they should know where they come from. If the kid would want to ask questions about that, I would want her to have the opportunity.”

The family from California came to Michigan to visit a month before the birth. While here, they even attended the Bates Place “Unity in the Community” Pig Roast as Lee’s guests. By the end of that visit, Lee

was convinced that they would be good parents for her child.

“They’re such good people,” she says. “They kind of adopted my whole family.”

Lee gave birth to a daughter, Ella, last June. And although Lee says letting Ella go was one of the hardest things she has ever done, she has no regrets.

“I think I did the right thing,” says Lee. “They take great care of her, send me pictures of her in little pajamas, or in her Angel costume for Halloween. We text a lot, even though things can be busy during the week.”

And Lee continues to do her best to take care of her four other children and keep working which is where this story began. Although Lee still faces many challenges, she says knowing that she has a community of people behind her at Bates Place makes working through those challenges much easier.

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Bates Place Ministries News & Notes



Executive Director, Bryan Blakely, Sr. was chosen by the Dispute Resolution Center of West Michigan as one of its 2014 Peacemaker award winners. Bryan was selected for his efforts to bridge communities together and for the frequent mediation work that takes place through Bates Place. The ceremony took place at the City Flats Hotel in October.



Master of Public Health students from Grand Valley State University and the University of Michigan have been conducting a Food Availability and Procurement study in the Bates Place neighborhood. On October 4, they used Bates Place as the hub for the current phase of the study. Students, with the direction of Dr. Jody Vogelzang, attempted to purchase a “market basket” of 14 staples from 17 different stores, many of which were in the Bates Place service area. The students returned to Bates Place where the food was evaluated for characteristics like freshness, price and packaging. Students also shared their impressions of the overall shopping experience. The study is currently in the analysis phase and more specific data will be available in early 2015. We will share more about the study in an upcoming newsletter.