

Spiritual Direction with Adopted People

*Some practical issues in companioning an
adopted person in spiritual direction.*

By

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“I always assumed I had a perfect adoption. In my 30’s I realised the act of adoption is always imperfect. That is, there are consequences to being an adoptee that I am only now becoming slowly aware of. I feel like I am only now ‘growing up’”¹.

Introduction

This work is born from my own discoveries and insights of being adopted, along with seven other adoptees generously telling parts of their stories. It is an attempt to help fellow directors be attentive to the variety of experiences and responses that can be part of the adoptee’s life story. The seven adoptees stories were collected using a questionnaire, which is attached as Appendix one.

The following analysis will attempt to summarise the responses, give some specific implications for Spiritual Direction, while adding some appropriate context from wider related reading. It is important to note that much of the academic work on adoption issues aims to provide a therapeutic, “fix it” model for working with participants of the ‘adoption circle’ (birth mother, adoptee and adopting parents). This is not the purpose in this work. It is hoped that what follows will aid spiritual directors to feel more comfortable, more ‘at home’ with some of the issues related to adoptees, so as to enable them to serve directees who have been adopted more effectively.

Very little discussion of birth mother and adopting parent issues are raised here. This is not to say they are insignificant, rather, beyond the scope of this research.

It is appropriate to give a working definition of adoption. All the adoptees for this research, bar one, had closed adoptions. This is a process where birth parents (usually just mother) legally hand-over the responsibility and privileges of parenting to another – usually a stranger. The 1955 Adoption act stated that contact between birth parents and adoptive parents was unhelpful (at best) or destructive, so an intermediary was involved. This would often have been a social worker from a government department. Any contact or information passing between the three parties (birth parent, child and adoptive parents) was strictly forbidden. The number of this type of adoption in New Zealand was significant, especially between the mid 1950’s through to the early 1970’s. An estimated number of adoptions for the three decades of the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s is 78, 522. Through the 60’s and 70’s around 5% of all live births were given ‘adoption orders’.² In 1985 The Adult Adoption Bill was passed, allowing legal contact between birth parents and their children once they were 18 years of age.

By contrast, an open adoption is one where contact between birth parents and adopted child is encouraged from birth.

¹ Response from interview

² Keith C Griffith, *New Zealand Adoption, History and Practice, Social and Legal*, pg 117.

The Problematic Conception

Most adoptees own the fact that their conception was problematic. Usually they become adopted because the discovery and announcement of their immanent birth was going to cause embarrassment, shame, inconvenience, or even harm to the birth family. To find a solution to this problem, the most significant event that an adopted baby faced was separation from their birthright and genealogy and the handing over to another. “Adoption is a fundamental, life altering event. It transposes people from one location in the human mosaic into a totally new configuration.”³ Although this happens before adoptees have conscious memory, there is evidence to show that babies can ‘remember’ such a significant event through memory of feeling. “The way our world *feels* to us as babies influences our unfolding personality, emotionality and relating styles profoundly, for the long term.”⁴ Most participants in this research had no real awareness of the profound loss, shock or trauma that such a separation causes. However, one or two did:

“I would effectively be born grieving”

“My inner child stayed un-nourished and un-cared for, for decades”

It is prudent for Spiritual Directors to co-operate with the directee at whatever level of self awareness they have.

During sessions, large feelings of loss, grief or lack of care etc may arise. They may not. A director is content to be present with the directee with these feelings when they arise from their ‘unremembered memory’ while not pushing a directee into a scenario that still does not exist for them, at least at this point in time. Indeed, adoptees may never have a sense of such strong emotions.

The New Configuration

Another focus for concern in the adopted’s experience is the success of the ‘new configuration’ – their adopted family. There is much research which says that when babies are separated both physically and emotionally from their birth mothers, recovery *is* possible. There are two basic factors that can affect this recovery – the child’s “own temperament and the quality of the environment in which they are placed.”⁵ This environment needs to be “of a consistent, nurturing {one} to help them recover.”⁶

Many of the respondents remarked on this stability and love:

“My parents are superb.”

“Most loving and best of parents”

³ Sharon Kaplan and Deborah Silvers, *Life long issues in adoption*, http://www.adopting.org/silveroze/html/lifelong_issues_in_adoption.html November 2010

⁴ Robin Grill, *What your child remembers – New discoveries about early memory and how it affects us*, Sydney’s Child, Volume 14, No 4 (May, 2003).

⁵ Elinor B. Rosenberg, *The Adoption Life Cycle – The Children and Their Families Through the Years*, The Free Press, 1992, pg 93.

⁶ Ibid

“I had a good bond with my parents”

“I had a normal childhood.”

“As a young child, thought I was special because of being a little different.”

“My parents had prayed for two years for me! I knew I was very wanted and loved, and chosen.

This was not the same for everyone:

“I think the ways they (adoptive parents) dealt with me, rather than overcoming the initial shock and rejection I’d experienced, in fact ended up compounding it.”

“As a child, adoption was an incredible hurt, as it was an unhappy childhood, so I related all my unhappiness to my adoption.”

Those with positive responses to their growing up years appeared to have had loving and ‘selfless’ parents. That is, parents who were (mostly, as they *are* human) willing and able to put their own grief and needs to one side as they parented. Remember here, that most adoptive parents have experienced their own grief – the ‘death’ of a dream of being able to have their own child.

Those with painful stories talked of parents who seemed to have their own needs at the forefront of their care giving. This has caused added bewilderment to the young adoptee:

“My adoptive parents were not prepared well enough for what an adopted child might be like to deal with... they expected that a child would arrive, and they could make it theirs.”

“Adoption was not discussed. It was an enormous burden.”

How can the Spiritual Director be of support to the adoptee with this issue of dualism? It can help the adoptee to combine the different stages of their journey. The concept of ‘both/and’. Separation, joining and possible re-joining with birth family (*discussed below*) is part of who they are. It makes up their self. A Director is able to provide the place and space for the adoptee to explore the overall picture of their unique narrative.

It is very common for adults dealing with traumatic childhood events to need/want to divide their lives into before and after, then and now, good and bad, either or.

Direction is an ideal place to invite individuals to accept all the chapters that make up the book of their self and to not be critical of any of these chapters – particularly ones that they would rather delete. Here also is an ideal opportunity to be on the lookout for glimpses of God being present. Helping the adoptee to see the places where the Holy One lovingly breathes, whispers, grieves, moves or works, is the privilege of a Spiritual Director.

As one participant noted:

“working with my spiritual director enabled me to see that the traumatic separation and the beautiful welcoming into my family was a ‘both/and’ thing. That is, both exist side by

*side, one does not **cancel out** the other! Just because I was provided with a healthy, caring environment doesn't mean the pain of my birth is lessened, or vice versa."*

Contact with Birth Family Members

Meeting birth family (usually mother) is another experience all but one participant has had. It was a big part of their story. Contact with birth family often gave an "at last" feeling. After decades of knowing – either consciously or unconsciously – that they did not actually fit into their families looks and anecdotes, the discovery of other human beings with similar traits has been huge:

"on some level, something entirely debilitating had been removed or resolved"

*"I felt disconnected with my Adoptive Family history. I had a physical sensation of **realignment** - that something had slipped back into place when I discovered my Birth Mother wanted contact.*

"I discovered for the first time, mannerisms, attitudes and preferences that were me"

"...has been enriching. Has brought more understanding about myself and my background".

There are many 'flip-sides' to contact as well. There is the perceived and/or actual conflict with Adoptive Parents. That is, 'will they feel threatened by this possible connection?':

"my relationship with my parents was very good and I desperately did not want to up-set them."

"it took much planning with a deep unconscious agenda – 'I will make contact when I can cope with another rejection.' Took many years of work till I knew I was safe and brave enough to tell my adoptive parents."

And of course those who have no contact:

"Both (birth) parents are a complete mystery to me, so a sense of longing and disconnection. I don't want to kick out against this, but was always conscious of being different."

A Spiritual Director is able to help bring together what may seem very different parts of their lives – their Birth and Adoptive families. Spiritual Direction could be a very good place to help adoptees see the 'both/and' nature of these two seemingly incongruent stories. Giving them space to contemplate these new similarities – to revel in them even – could be an ideal place to capture God at work.

Part of this contemplation may be the invitation to wonder at and be grateful for these discoveries. As with many significant human responses, we often push them aside so we can get on with our lives. Spiritual Direction can allow adoptees to bring memories, reactions, fears, expectations and the suspense of incompleteness out into the light and then enable *God's* light to bring meaning and truth. It is this truth that sets us free.

Another aspect respondents to the questionnaire discussed was the understanding gained after meeting a Birth Mother:

“My Birth Mother’s story meant I could develop empathy for her.”

“As an adult, when I heard of (birth) mother’s situation, I understood and was able to forgive.”

“Before, she was a black cloud, just an evil, frightening force... but she became human for the first time – she was just like me, scared with no choices – and I was able to forgive her.”

Forgiveness. It is helpful when forgiveness arises from the directee and is not something expected or imposed from others. Forgiveness is such a pivotal message of the gospel. As Tom Wright so beautifully puts it: “Forgiveness is a way of life, God’s way of life, God’s way to life; and if you close your heart to forgiveness – why, then you close your heart to forgiveness.”⁷ A welcoming and safe place to bring this topic out of the shadows is often the place of Spiritual Direction. It may be appropriate to invite the adoptee to take a close look at this issue. Often adoptees feel like they may have gone through the motions of forgiveness – to keep in line with expectations from the church, others and ourselves – but when explored deeply (with care and time) there may be still some unexplored areas. For example, self forgiveness is often ignored and put in the ‘too hard’ basket.

An event that was indicated by only two participants is worthy of mention in the light of this work. This experience provides valuable insights for directors. There was a realisation of (but not acted on) sexual attraction between newly found parent and child. Both times this happened during the very first meeting:

“There was a very scary sexual tension that happened. I had read of this happening in other contexts too. My parent has never seen their partner again, so me sitting beside them meant I looked like, sounded like and was closer in age to the person they had fallen in love with. Nothing physical really happened – just a hug in the car, but I thought, good heavens, this is a parent, not a possible sexual partner!”

“The kiss goodnight was not your normal parent to child kiss. My parent was taken right back to the sexual relationship they had with their partner. I was not expecting this, but neither was I surprised. All night my parent had been telling me how much I reminded them of their partner.”

Spiritual Direction should be an ideal, appropriate and safe place where such an event could be discussed. Directors need to be ready for such discussion. Issues with a sexual aspect are not always easily raised or received. As Sue Pickering describes; “...upbringing, attitudes, experience, teaching or trauma affect our psycho-sexual development.”⁸ Being ‘unshockable’ is a gift Spiritual Direction can offer, so that the directee knows **any** part of their story can be highlighted and that it will be treated with respect, care and holiness.

⁷ Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope* Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007, pg 301

⁸ Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction – A Practical Introduction*, Canterbury Press, 2008, pg 129.

Adoption through the Life Stages

An adoptee will often find that significant events in their lives take them back to a place of deep knowing but not always a similar amount of understanding of the effects of their adoption. “There is a natural ebb and flow as issues related to adoption emerge at significant times and recede at others...adoptees adapt and cope with the challenges throughout the entire life cycle.”⁹ Some of the ‘ebb and flow’ times identified in this research were:

- Entering adolescence (*a common one*)
- Death of a family member or close friend
- Break-up of relationships
- Being part of a long-term relationship
- Having their own children (*also common*)
- Living in a difficult physical environment
- Becoming a follower of Christ

Every interviewee was able to give at least one occasion where being adopted had made a significant impact on an event or where their adoption was highlighted. A couple even noted that it “underpins everything.” The impacts were diverse. For example:

“I can understand other adoptee’s feelings.”

“my lack of any sense of connection left me with very little resilience during a difficult time.”

Another significant time, with a wide range of responses, was with the birth of their own children. Some common responses were:

“Since knowing my Birth Mother, our children now know her, which is a good addition.”

“I attributed every negative feeling I had to being adopted. Having my own children has alleviated this. (Their birth brought) so much relief, joy and gratitude. It has helped me put aside the cynicism and critical thoughts I had about people – always felt people wanted things from me”

Whereas one participant commented:

“The birth of my children incurred great emotional pain, which was the trigger point of my first real reflection and contemplation of what it means to be adopted.”

There is a call here for Spiritual Directors to be adaptable. That is, to never assume that one ‘life stressor’ will trigger one response. Listening with the heart for the stressors and then walking with the adoptee through the layers of their responses is the task of the Spiritual Director.

⁹ Elinor B Rosenberg, *The Adoption Life Cycle – The Children and Their Families Through the Years*, The Free Press, 1992, Preface, x.

Spiritual Direction can offer the directee support in the task of life integration. Spiritual Direction can explore ways in which events (particularly painful ones) can be isolated, (that is put somewhere external for awhile) acknowledged and cared for by themselves and God and then lovingly placed back into the warp and weft of their story. The event still has validity, but the sting or rawness has started to be healed and can remain a part of them without causing harm to themselves and others. I believe this is in part what Jesus meant when he said 'love others as you love yourselves'.

Significant Core Issues

Four particular issues were analysed in this research that seem common to adopted persons are analysed below:

First, Adoptees sense of **self identity** can be harder to grasp than those who are not adopted. There is a sense that their identity is 'out there somewhere' due to gaps in their biological genealogy.

"I am a third family kid- not really a product of either the family that produced me or the one that raised me, and I have to write my own story."

"I felt disconnected from my history."

"When the family stories were told I was never 100% sure that I was allowed to own them for myself, because they were not actually my ancestors were they?"

Secondly, there has been much study to show when babies are separated from their biological mother, healthy emotional **attachment** in other relationships can be harder. "Mourning is incomplete when the bereaved rage at the separation is not worked through... The person remains unable to develop emotional attachments to others."¹⁰ This was often noted by the participants:

"Sometimes I feel I'm starving for intimacy, and I wonder if anything will ever fill up this space."

"I don't give myself to others – 'I don't need you'. I'm very reserved with my children."

"Have been times when I have felt distanced from others, but I have an advantage of knowing why."

Thirdly, another common issue is a sense of **abandonment**. There were a range of responses here, from a strong sense of always knowing and feeling alone, to little or no impact:

"When my spouse went into the garden for a few hours I unconsciously went straight back to that time of being parentless and very alone."

"I was someone who liked being alone, due to my personality, not from any sense of abandonment."

¹⁰ Rita S. Eagle, *The Separation Experience of Children in Long-Term Care: Theory, Research, and Implications for Practice*, American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 64(3) pg 425

Fourthly, an exaggerated sense of **inadequacy** can also be part of an adoptee's story. "The sense of deserving rejection leads adoptees to experience tremendous guilt and shame. They commonly believe that there is something intrinsically wrong with them or their deeds that caused the losses to occur."¹¹ There was strong agreement among those questioned on this:

"I do live with a sense of trying to prove myself."

"I consciously put a lot of integrity into my relationships with women. More so than I think is normal. If the relationship is broken in any way, I am devastated – take it very personally. Goes back to a primal thought that there was a woman who didn't want me, because I wasn't good enough."

"I would use the word fear. I am enormously fearful of being exposed as a fraud."

"I was a person who never thought I was good enough – not sure if this was connected with being adopted. Didn't get this message from my parents, but more from my own thinking."

"No-one can critique me or what I have done without a huge, debilitating sense of being no good at anything."

A common factor in these four issues is loss, or grief. The added difficulty for the adoptee is that this loss happens pre-memory. The young psyche is enormously skilled at protecting the child from any further pain from loss. "We are all biologically capable of a wellspring of spontaneously loving toward...each other. Sometimes this love is blocked by automatic defensive reactions to unresolved, implicitly remembered hurts."¹²

Spiritual Direction can invite adoptees to stop, look and listen to the often silent and yet screaming part of themselves that holds this loss. "One of the gifts we can give our directees is to walk alongside them as they mourn..."¹³ "You are blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you."¹⁴ God longs to be in relationship with His *most dear*.

The space and place of Spiritual Direction seems like an ideal arena for the restoration of these broken parts of an adoptee. The graced Spiritual Director will be able to walk with the directee to deep places, helping them to lovingly look at their losses, care for them, mourn with them and allow God's anointing oil to soothe and heal.

Relationship with and image of God

The last topic to look at in this work is adoptees relationship with God along with their image of God. Once more there was a range of responses, from loving the scripture passage about being adopted into God's family to a constant struggle to reconcile their painful

¹¹ Sharon Kaplan and Deborah Silvers, *Lifelong Issues in Adoption*, http://www.adopting.org/silveroze/html/lifelong_issues_in_adoption.html. November 2010

¹² Robin Grill, *What Your Child Remembers – New discoveries about early memory and how it affects us*, Sydney's Child, Volume 14, No 4 May, 2003.

¹³ Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction – A Practical Introduction*, Canterbury Press, 2008 pg 176

¹⁴ *The Message- the New Testament in Contemporary Language*, Navpress, 1993, pg 18.

adoption story with a God of Love. There were some very strong negative reactions to the images of God I provided, (see Appendix One) along with those who were able to be comfortable with them.

*“God is always Father to me, and I struggle with God being female, that is the caring, nurturing part. God the **Father**, always, cradles me in his hand like a baby.”*

“I see a parallel with adoption and being a Christian – scripture tells us we are adopted into God’s family. I see a positive image of this because of my positive adoption.”

“I had a committed adoptive father who sat on the end of the bed, with his pipe, and told stories of God, and I thought God was like that. There is warmth there. God has always meant warmth.”

“It’s very difficult to actually experience God’s love. Sometimes I think the whole thing must be a have, but then I know people whose integrity I respect and they seem to actually feel and experience God’s love.”

“I have connected my adoption to other relationships and with intimacy but not my faith story.”

“My image of God is affected by having loving and fair parents, making my relationship with him very easy.”

“As I started to understand that I have detached myself emotionally from many of my significant relationships, I suddenly thought one day ‘HELP’ I think I may have detached myself from God!”

“Made it easier to understand being adopted into God’s family. I did it involuntarily once before and it worked out well, now I’m doing it voluntary, so should be fine!”

“I hate all those images. I hate the father one. I spent years seeking God’s fatherhood, but he never showed up. If someone else talked of an intimate relationship with their father god I would be screaming inside ‘shut-up’. I’ve given away my need for him to physically show up. I can now recognise God’s movement in my life, even though it is not an intimate, real, physical experience.

“Mum was caring and nurturing and dad showed his love through actions, so have no problems as seeing Him as loving and nurturing.

There was a strong connection here between the ability to engage with God and the type of adoptive parents they had. That is, those who talked of experiencing God’s love, had already had human experience of love from parents and other adults in their family.

It was as if their brain already had the photographic negative (to use pre-digital imagery!) of love, and they were able to develop it into a photo with God’s definition, colour, even becoming 3D! Those who talked of a desperate void in their sense of God’s love had childhood experiences which left the negative scratched, bent, faded maybe even non-existent. It’s like the negative needs to be re-taken, before development into the photo is possible.

In a sense, Spiritual Direction can be the *dark-room of our God photos*. A directee is able to hang up the very new, still wet developing photos and wait for the images to appear. Waiting is often hard – often avoided. But waiting *with* someone (a Spiritual Director) in the dark-room is less frightening than being in there alone.

A Spiritual Director can ‘hold the hand’ of the adoptee as they find, restore or take new negatives of The Holy One being with them in all the snapshots of their lives. As Sue Pickering puts it, “In Spiritual Direction we walk alongside those who are grappling with the theological, relational, communal and personal implications of a changing view of God and how God works in the world”. She then lists a variety of issues, but the one pertinent to this study is “How do I relate to a God who delights in me like a lover?”¹⁵

What Directing an Adoptee may Resemble

So then, what could providing Spiritual Direction to an adopted person look like? The possibly unhelpful answer is; not unlike Spiritual Direction with a non adopted person! The point being, that a Spiritual Director will have ‘done their own work’ in the way they have prepared for meeting with a directee who is adopted. They will have attended to the ‘basics’ of best Spiritual Direction practise (maintaining healthy contact with God, self, a supervisor, fellow director and directing peers) along with, as David Benner puts it “understanding the dynamics of the soul.”¹⁶ Benner continues; “Spiritual Direction involves the deepest parts of human personhood. The more you know about the psychospiritual functioning of persons, the better guide you will be in the affairs of the soul.... The soul does not have separate compartments for psychological and spiritual aspects of functioning.”¹⁷

This short work has attempted to do just that – look at (to quote Benner again) both “psychological understanding” {and} “spiritual dynamics” of adoptee’s stories. It has provided a glimpse into the psychospiritual – that is the combining of the psychological and spiritual - functioning of a small number of adoptees.

With this observation comes a heartfelt warning. ‘A little knowledge is a dangerous thing!’ This is not a complete study. The worst thing a Director could take out of this work is that all adoptees have the same spiritual and psychological needs. That would be like saying for example, all directees that wear Arran cardigans will present with the same needs!

*“...it’s **my** experience of being adopted. I’d just be wary, from the point of view of your research, of attributing the whole of the damage I experience to the fact of being adopted...”*

“I don’t know if I have successfully worked through all the issues – you never know when they may rare their ugly head again!”

¹⁵ Sue Pickering, *Spiritual Direction – a Practical Introduction*, Canterbury Press, 2008, pg 51.

¹⁶ David Benner, *Sacred Companions – The Gift of Spiritual Friendship and Direction*, InterVarsity Press, 2002, pg155.

¹⁷ Ibid.

There are areas that many adoptees can say they have in common with other adoptees. For example, the separation from biological family to the joining of their adoptive family as an infant. Every participant in this study (except one who was kept within the extended family) knows this as part of their story – their self. But *how* it has shaped, added to, damaged, re-shaped, brought joys and brought pain to their self is different for every one.

It is imperative then **not** to make assumptions, or even worse, make up scenarios, for how an adoptee must feel. Having some understanding of how the deep, inner part of persons function, (and in this case when faced with issues that adoptees commonly have to deal with) will enable the Director to remain open to the adoptees photographic images and how God has provided, is providing and will provide the processing.

Conclusion

When an adoptee finds another adoptee for the first time, there is an unspoken knowing. They know that somewhere in their infancy they were handed from their biological environment to a foreign environment. The way they could have been raised was decidedly altered, and they had no choice in that decision. From then on each adoptee's story is unique. However, the very act of this handing over in early childhood has been proved to have significant emotional consequences for the young child and the way it develops.

The influences of these consequences vary enormously. For example, from this study an adoptee loved the fact that they were *chosen*. It gave them a huge feeling of warmth and love. (This comment was often provided by adopted parents when explaining the origin of birth to their adopted children) But another adoptee could grow up assuming that because their Adopted Parents choose them, this meant that they were originally *un-chosen* (in other words, unwanted) by someone else. Different personalities and external properties for each adoptee allow for different experiences.

There are however four enduring issues discussed in this work where all respondents could say that at least one of them had caused an impact on their adult life. These issues are self-identity, attachment, abandonment and inadequacy. They all bring a sense of loss. In the adoptees case the loss is caused when adults in the adoptees innocent years made life changing decisions about their future.

The participants in this study all had faith stories. That is, an awareness and acknowledgment of God as a part of their narrative. Many had made connections between their adoption and how they saw and related to God, where some had not even thought of it before. Many of those who were sure of God's love and had experienced it, were *ready* to receive it because they had already met with love through the adults in their growing up years. Those who struggled with an image of a tangible God – one who "*show's up*" had reported gaps in their understanding and recognition of love from their formative development.

The implications for giving Spiritual Direction to an Adoptee include awareness of commonalities in their stories and the wide variance in the impact that being adopted has had on them.

This paper attempts to help fellow directors be attentive to the variety of experiences and responses that can be part of the adoptee's life story. It also attempts to provide a general explanation of the adoption process and some of the consequences.

Spiritual Directors (no matter who they are directing) provide a space and place for directees to 'hear themselves', to explore their own unique narrative. That is, they offer an invitation to process, sit with questions and look for meaning along with expanding their relationship with God. A skilled spiritual director can provide a trustworthy, attentive and hopeful environment, one where the directee will be encouraged to see God at work in the everyday through His beauty, truth and goodness, in their self, and in His Kingdom.

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Appendix One: Adoption Questionnaire

Welcome and thank you again for being willing to help me with my research.

I am gaining information through this interview process to complete the last assignment of my spiritual formation programme, training as a spiritual director. My primary focus question for the assignment is “are there any specific spiritual needs of adopted people?”

Please be assured that confidentiality is a given with the comments you are about to supply. Re-worded comments may be used in my assignment to give clarity to a point being made, but there will be no personal information used in my write-up.

If my report is found to be of significant interest to other directees, SGM could want to make it available for public reading through their website.

Please feel free to ‘pass’ on any question, for whatever reason (which you do not need to state). Also, please feel comfortable to say as little or much as you wish.

1. Do you know how old you were when adopted?

Do you know how you were cared for in the interim?

2. How long have you known you are an adopted person?

3. Have you had any contact with any of your birth family?

Can you briefly explain some of the outcomes and experiences of this?

4. Can you comment on your experience of adoption – has it been mainly positive, mainly negative or a mixture for you?

5. If you think for a moment of your life as a time-line, can you indicate where being adopted has had an influence on the highlights and lowlights of your life?

6. Can you outline your ‘faith story’ up to now? Or in other words, how have you known God is, or is not, a part of your life from early memories to present.

7. It is widely accepted that our own image of God and how we relate to God is affected by our very early year experiences. By Image of God, it is meant how we view God. Common images are ‘Father’ ‘Fortress’ ‘mother hen’ ‘rock’ etc.

Do you have any sense that your own images of God may have been affected by being adopted? How?

8. Do you feel that your experiences of, knowledge of, or intimacy with God is related to being an adoptee?

9. Do any of the below strike a chord with you?

a) Sense of personal identity

b) Attachment or Detachment from significant relationships?

c) Abandonment or Aloneness or

d) Inadequacy?

If you answer yes to any of the above, can you explain why?

Have you ever thought they may be connected with being adopted?