

## Making a Difference. . . Two Persons at a Time

It was after midnight on a Sunday in October 2015 when COBYS resource parents Jay and Lillian gathered on the floor of their living room with their four children to offer a prayer of thanksgiving.

After tucking in birth children Lane and Makenzia and foster twins Tane (TJ) and Tanaliz, Jay & Lil lay in bed processing the events of the day. After a six-month odyssey that had taken the twins to Haiti and back, TJ and Tanaliz were snug in their bunks in the family's modest townhouse. While the next steps of the journey were still unclear, Jay felt everyone was where they belonged.

"We go to bed," says Lil, "and Jay says, 'All my children are now safe in my home.'"

It was a remarkable statement from a father who a few years earlier wasn't at all ready to consider adoption. And once Jay & Lil had started down that path, they encountered some major roadblocks, including a potential infant adoption that fell through, an illness that put things on hold, and the unusual twist that took the twins overseas.

"Adoption was a passion on Lil's heart for a while and she kept talking to me about it," recalls Jay. "I would say, 'Maybe sometime,' but I wasn't ready."



*Jay & Lil's path to adoption took some unexpected turns, but ended up in a good place. Pictured are Jay & Lil with children (from left) TJ, Lane, Tanaliz, and Makenzia. Photo by Lorida Burkholder, Ad Lib Photography.*

Lil continues, "So I was like if God wants us to adopt a child he will have to lay it on Jay's heart. I'm not going to be pushing for it because I knew it was important for both of us to be on the same page."

The nudge Jay needed came from some good friends who already were COBYS adoptive parents. They knew that Jay & Lil were unable to have

more biological children, and they knew also of an unborn baby who likely would need a home.

In 2014 Jay & Lil enrolled in COBYS resource parent training to prepare. Part way through the training the mother of the infant they hoped to adopt miscarried. They continued with the training anyway.

"We decided it's going to be an open handed thing," says Jay. "We're going to have our hands out and if something is placed there then we'll move forward."

What God would place in their hands wasn't exactly what they had envisioned.

After completing their training, caring for kids was put on the back burner for more than a year as Jay became ill with Lyme disease. Finally, in spring 2015, they were ready to give short-term respite care a try—just offering other resource families a break for a few days or a few weeks.

They took care of a sibling group of three for a weekend in March and thoroughly enjoyed it. "We had so much fun," says Lil. "We were like, 'Yeah, we'll do that again.'" They didn't need to wait long for the next opportunity. Two days later they received a call to take in the twins for a two-week respite, beginning the following weekend.

"Two weeks turned into a month and we got really attached," says Lil.

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## Mission Statement

*Motivated by Christian faith, COBYS Family Services educates, supports, and empowers children and adults to reach their full potential.*

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## Happy Birthday, Baby Jesus!

Our family enjoys some Christmas traditions that have become very meaningful to us.

Sometime around Christmas, my sister's family and my parents gather together in our home. We recently began making up skits that need to incorporate random items that can be found around the house (chosen by people that aren't in that skit). Creativity abounds and laughter ensues! Following a few hours with our immediate family, my extended family arrives for a meal. I really appreciate the opportunity to catch up with family members that I haven't seen often in the past year.

We also host my wife's extended family for a Christmas meal. This year, the group may not be quite as big as other years, but we still are expecting at least 20 people. Again, visiting with people that I haven't seen much (if at all) in the past year is enjoyable and meaningful.

On Christmas Eve, after attending a worship service my family will watch a Christmas show or movie. I likely will fall asleep during whatever we are watching, but I will fall asleep with my heart full because my older two children will be home from college and we will all be together!

I recently experienced a fantastic day in New York City. My wife, Mari, and I took our youngest daughter Alyssa and her friend Lianna for a day trip. (Photo from left: Alyssa, Mari, Mark, Lianna) We walked up and down Fifth Avenue, saw



the display windows at Macy's and Saks Fifth Avenue, and watched the light display on the side of the Saks building. And, of course, we saw the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. Amazing! This one isn't a tradition yet, but I'm hoping it will become one!

And probably my favorite tradition occurs on Christmas morning. My mom and dad come over to our house. We open gifts, eat brunch, and then we recite the Christmas story from the gospel of Luke from memory. (At least we try to. Admittedly, my kids are better at this than I am.) And then we gather around our kitchen table. And on the table will be an angel food cake. And on the angel food cake will be a figurine of Jesus in a manger. And we will sing "Happy Birthday" to Baby Jesus. Because even though I love all the other traditions I enjoy with my family—some secular, some more spiritual—I realize that Jesus' birth is cause for great celebration and rejoicing!

My wish and prayer for you this Christmas is that you are able to spend time thinking about and being thankful for Jesus, God Incarnate.

*Mark Cunningham, Executive Director*



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"They left and we were all like, 'We wish we could have adopted them!' That's how well they just blended into our family."

Not only did the twins leave Jay & Lil's home, they left the country! TJ & Tanaliz had a grandmother who could care for them—in Haiti.

But God was at work even in that. Jay and Lil had spent time in Haiti in mission work—Jay more than three years digging wells and then administering a variety of relief and development and educational work, and the two of them for some of that time after they married. They knew well the area and culture where the twins were going to live, and were privileged to host the grandmother for a meal in their home when she came for her grandchildren. They parted ways, not expecting to meet again. But at the grandma's invitation, they stayed in touch via Skype.

Despite their grandmother's love and commitment, TJ and Tanaliz did not adjust well to life in Haiti. The difference in culture and lack of professional support services proved to be too much to overcome.

Six months later Jay & Lil received a call, asking if they would welcome TJ & Tanaliz back. This time it wasn't just for a few weeks, but potentially for a lifetime, and it required some deep discernment. After a time of intentional prayer they agreed. The twins came back home in October 2015 and were adopted on June 30, 2016.

Jay reflects back, "We can speculate what may or may not have worked, but I feel God's hand was in all of this, and he knew where these children should be."

And TJ & Tanaliz's grandmother

agrees, according to Lil. "She says, 'I don't know why the detour in the road where they came to me first and then finally to you guys, but I know this is where they belong.' And that to us has been such a huge blessing. We love having her as part of our lives."

"She kind of took our biological children as her grandchildren," adds Jay, "so it has been a really neat relationship. I don't think a lot of people get that and I feel it's pretty special."

Of course, in addition to the detours, there also have been some serious behavioral bumps in the road. The twins had some significant issues to overcome, but Jay & Lil have found the support they needed—from COBYS staff, therapists, church,

alone."

Prior to the adoption they found the pre-service training and regular monthly trainings that COBYS provides to be essential. Since the adoption they have benefitted from COBYS post-adoption services. One recent weekend Jay and the boys were able to attend a Christian father-son retreat and Lil and the girls were able to spend a day together doing fun bonding activities that may



**COBYS Adoption Caseworker Melanie Rankin affirmed Jay & Lil's insight and sensitivity to the feelings of their children. Before they adopted TJ & Tanaliz, Jay & Lil planned a treasure hunt for the children that ended with a sign that said: "We want you, Tane & Tanaliz, to be in our family FOREVER. Can we be your forever family?" They said yes.**



and family—both leading up to the adoption and since.

"The first couple weeks are fun," says Jay. "And then the hard stuff hits. And we did have some really difficult things to work through. Honestly," he continues, "as we got into this we didn't know how to do things. And in a lot of ways we still don't know how to do things. But there's support and there are resources to help you. It's a road I would never want to walk

not have been possible without free post-adoption support. Along the way therapists have helped them understand their children's behaviors and how to improve them, and COBYS caseworkers have provided a listening ear and sound advice on how to address situations.

It's now been more than a year since the twins returned, and almost

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## New Program Helps Families Recover from Addiction

COBYS Family Services is piloting a new program in January to help families in which one or both parents are in the early stages of recovery from addiction to substances such as alcohol, heroin, and other drugs.

Celebrating Families! is an evidence-based curriculum produced by the National Association for Children of Alcoholics, whose mission is to eliminate the adverse impact of alcohol and drug use on children and families. The program has three main goals, says COBYS Family Life Education Supervisor Holly Hardin: Family reunification, reducing relapses for people in recovery from addiction, and stopping the cycle of substance abuse in the family so it doesn't get passed on to the next generation.

COBYS is offering this program at the invitation of and with funding from the Lancaster County Children and Youth Agency, who recognizes that addiction is a factor in many foster care placements.

"We had this program on our radar for years," says Holly, "but we didn't have a funding source for it. So when this was requested, we knew exactly what we wanted to do."

Participants currently are being accepted for the initial class, which will meet on 16 Sunday evenings at the COBYS Family Life Center, 171 E. King St., Lancaster, beginning January 22. Each week includes a light supper at 4:30, followed by separate 90-minute classes for parents and children, and a concluding 30-minute activity, where parents and children together can practice what has been presented. Childcare is provided for young children.

One of the strengths of the



program, says Program Coordinator Lisa Stoltzfus, is that it works with the whole family. "It's a chance to reach families that are coming out of a traumatic time and trying to rebuild themselves and make

themselves a strong family unit," says Lisa. Communication, feelings and defenses, anger management, chemical dependency as a disease, and the effects of dependency on the whole family are some of the themes that will be addressed.

To learn more or to register for the program, visit <http://cobys.org/education-opportunities/programs-offered/>. Or contact the COBYS Family Life Center at 717-435-8139 or [education@cobys.org](mailto:education@cobys.org).

If the pilot is successful, COBYS will offer the program four times per year, beginning in July 2017.



**Renn Retires.** Therapist Henry Renn (seated) retired in mid-November after two decades of service in the COBYS counseling program, including several years as supervisor. Henry's service was celebrated at two special events—a November 4 luncheon for counseling staff and a drop-in dessert buffet for all COBYS staff on November 14. "Henry's colleagues will miss his experience and wise counsel," said Supervisor of Counseling Services Dr. Michele Romeo Martin, "and his clients will miss the way he combined empathy with expertise." Pictured with Henry at his retirement luncheon are (from left) Administrative Assistant Sylvia Drennen and therapists Landon Miller, Michele Fry, Rosie Good, Amy Wittmaier, Dr. Martin, Tracy Bosis, and Michelle Sheaffer.



## Another ExtraOrdinary Day

November 18 was another extraordinary day for giving to organizations that serve Lancaster County. Donors gave more than \$7.1 million to 427 nonprofits through the fifth annual ExtraOrdinary Give 24-hour online giving campaign, including \$54,295 to COBYS Family Services.

The overall dollar figure includes a \$320,000 “stretch fund” that is divided proportionately among all organizations and \$51,000 in prizes provided by the Lancaster County Community Foundation, Presenting Sponsor Rodgers and Associates, and other sponsors.

COBYS placed 28th in total giving and again earned a \$1,000 Early Bird prize for being among the first 10 organizations to reach 50 donations.

“We really appreciate the people who are willing to lose some sleep for our benefit,” said COBYS Director of Development Don Fitzkee. “The Early Bird competition gets tougher every year, and this year we just made it.” All 10 of these prizes were



*Ruth Cunningham stopped in at the giving station co-hosted by COBYS at Brethren Village to pick up a whoopie pie, compliments of Zig's Bakery & Café, and say hello to her son, COBYS Executive Director Mark Cunningham.*

snatched up within the first 10 minutes or so after midnight.

While final figures are not yet available, once a match from the stretch fund is applied, the \$1,000 Early Bird prize added, and fees

deducted, COBYS' total take from the day is expected to be about \$55,000, similar to last year.

COBYS donations increased modestly from last year's \$53,830, but did not keep pace with the explosive growth of the event as a whole, which saw giving increase from \$6.1 to \$7.1 million dollars and participating organizations grow from 367 to 427. The first ExtraOrdinary Give in 2012 raised “just” \$1.7 million.

“One of the event's chief benefits,” says COBYS Director of Development Don Fitzkee, “is its ability to attract new donors and spur folks who haven't given in a while to give again.” Among COBYS donations this year were \$3,005 from 25 first-time donors.

Water Street Mission was top fundraiser with a total of \$294,175, followed by Children Deserve a Chance Foundation at \$265,413. These two organizations each earned a \$2,500 Grand Prize for having the most donors.

## Wegman Joins Counseling Staff

Michelle Wegman joined COBYS' team of therapists in mid-November. Michelle is a Licensed Professional Counselor who completed her undergraduate work and earned her Master's degree in Christian Counseling from Cairn University, near Philadelphia. She previously was employed by Family Resource & Counseling Centers, where since 2011 she had served as intake coordinator and provided child/adolescent, individual, and family therapy.

Michelle is an active participant



at Lancaster Alliance Church, where she serves as the Women's Ministry Director.

She and husband, Bob, recently celebrated 10 years of marriage. They enjoy traveling, trying new restaurants, and staying active with their rescue dog.

## Save These 2017 Dates

**Informational/Fundraising Banquet**  
Thurs., March 2, Noon & 6:30 p.m.  
Middle Creek Church of the Brethren

**Wenger Foundation Praise Dinner**  
Thursday, May 4, 6:00 p.m.  
Lebanon Expo Center

**Family Fun Walk**  
Sunday, May 7, 4:00 p.m.  
Peter Becker Community, Harleysville

**Bike & Hike**  
Sunday, September 10, 1:00 p.m.  
Lititz Church of the Brethren

## Landram, Moyer to Join COBYS Board

Two new COBYS Family Services board members were affirmed by the Church of the Brethren (COB) Atlantic Northeast District Conference in October. Eric Landram and Scott Moyer will join the board in January.

Eric earned his M. Div. from Bethany Theological Seminary, Richmond, Ind., and is in his first year as Lead Pastor of the Lititz COB. He earned his bachelor's degree in psychology from Bridgewater (Va.) College and prior to his call to ministry worked nearly seven years as a hospital liaison serving individuals and families coping with and recovering from severe mental health issues.

A native of Virginia's Shenan-



*Scott Moyer*



*Eric Landram*

doah Valley, Eric now lives in Lititz with wife, Heather, and six-month-old daughter, Roslyn.

Scott is a certified public accountant with PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, serving clients primarily on the east coast. A member of the East Fairview COB, he has held a wide variety of leadership roles in his congregation

and has participated in about 20 work camps through Brethren Disaster Ministries, along with several short-term overseas mission trips.

He has a broad range of experience serving nonprofits in board and other roles, including the Manheim Student Loan Fund Association, Manheim Central Foundation for Educational Enrichment, Bible-2-School, Pleasant View Retirement Community, Gideons International, Junior Achievement of Central Pennsylvania, and others.

A graduate of Shippensburg University, Scott lives near Manheim with his wife, Ann.

Concluding service on the board are secretary Pamela Ament, Wendy Egolf, and Beth Roland.

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six months since adoption day. Jay admits that sometimes in the midst of the day-to-day struggles he wondered whether they were making a difference. But in retrospect it's easier to see.

"I think coming out the other side," he says, "it's really exciting to see the positive changes that have taken place."

"In all four of the children," adds Lil. "And in us as adults, as well." Adoption has been a growing experience for their entire family as they have bonded, learned to share, and worked through problems in a healthy way.

"Looking back," Jay continues, "we're at a totally different place now than we were a year ago. For me, that's why we do what we do. We can't make a difference everywhere in the world," he reflects, "but we can make a difference one person at a time."

Lil politely points out that in this case it actually was two at a time.

## Christmas Cheer

The Florin Church of the Brethren on December 5 continued its long tradition of serving an annual Christmas dinner for nearly 200 COBYS resource parents, children, staff, and board members. Following the meal, Jerry Brown and his monkey, Django, provided some light-hearted entertainment, and Florin member Bob Price was a fairly convincing Santa, giving a small gift from the church to each child.



# Managing Holiday Stress!

by Tracy Bosis, LCSW

The holidays are here, and this season is a favorite time of year for many! There is decorating and baking to be done, time to enjoy with family and friends, shopping and gift wrapping to do, worship services to attend. When we add these activities to our already busy lives we can easily feel overwhelmed and stressed when we want to be joyful. When do we find moments to pause for thoughtful reflection on Christ's birth and the miracle of his coming to earth?

Holiday stress is created by thinking about ourselves, our plans, and activities in a rigid or unrealistic way. For the holidays we often want to have a perfectly decorated home, prepare gourmet meals and desserts, give gifts that are carefully selected and expertly wrapped, and have our

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*Give yourself permission to be flexible! Focus on creating a holiday celebration that is peaceful, enjoyable, and meaningful for everyone.*

---

families appear at gatherings in coordinating outfits (and looking happy about it!).

Our expectations for Christmas far exceed the reality of what we actually can do. We become stressed and irritable when we can't create the picture-perfect holiday.

When unrealistic thoughts constantly are going through our minds, our bodies respond by

increasing production of cortisol, a stress hormone that increases blood pressure and heart rate; suppresses our immune system; and disrupts digestion, concentration, and sleep. We feel anxious and even panicky. Clearly, God did not intend for us to carry this level of stress. We and our family members pay the price. So what can we do?

First of all, we have to recognize our unrealistic thoughts and expectations that generate stressful feelings. When we notice such thoughts, we can choose to change them. Instead of thinking, "I must have the house completely clean and perfectly decorated so that it looks like what I see on Pinterest," we can shift to a healthier thought like, "I will clean the rooms that we will use most and have some decorations out by next week." The second thought eliminates that perfectionistic expectation and allows us to feel calm and capable as we complete the task.

Rather than feeling stressed about overspending our budget to buy expensive gifts for everyone, consider a hand-made gift or offer an experience, such as taking the person fishing, camping, or just out to coffee; make a donation to a charity in their name; or complete a



task they need to have done.

Think about what we want our children to remember about us and how we celebrated holidays. Will they remember us as tired and irritable? Or will they recall relaxed times of fun and creative spiritual celebration of holiday/family traditions?

What do we want to remember? A time of thankful celebration, or stress and exhaustion? Purposefully pause to reflect on Christ's birth and his gift to us. Express thanks for his grace. Our expectations and choices about the holidays will create the experiences that are remembered by our family for years to come.

Consider making two lists: The first for the essentials that will make the holidays meaningful, and the second list for things that you would like to do, but may not have time for this year. Give yourself permission to be flexible! Focus on creating a holiday celebration that is peaceful, enjoyable, and meaningful for everyone in the family.

**Licensed Clinical Social Worker  
Tracy Bosis is a COBYS therapist serving clients at both the Oregon and Palmyra Area Counseling Centers.**



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**Quick, open this! Our annual Christmas card is inside and we would feel terrible if you didn't receive it before the holiday. Feeling too busy to bother with it now? Then see page seven for an article on reducing holiday stress.**



## Still Time to Give

COBYS has been blessed with strong giving so far this year. In response to our year-end appeal and through the ExtraOrdinary Give (see page five) in recent weeks donations have been coming in. In this season of giving, we are grateful for all the people who bless COBYS with generous financial support. If you already have given in recent days, thanks!

If you haven't, it's not too late to send your tax-deductible donation. There also are ways other than cash to give.

If you are "of age," you may want to consider giving directly from an Individual Retirement Account. Donors age 70½ or older can transfer



up to \$100,000 from their IRA to charity each year. An IRA rollover is a tax-exempt distribution from the IRA and can be used to meet your required minimum distribution.

If you are interested in thinking beyond 2016, feel free to contact us to explore other ways to give that help us serve kids and families while also helping you meet financial and charitable goals.

Do you want to give, but need guaranteed income now? Consider a

charitable gift annuity. Do you have stocks that have appreciated in value? Consider giving a gift of securities to avoid capital gains tax. Have you been a long-time supporter of COBYS and would like to leave a legacy? Consider including COBYS in your estate planning. Have you already included COBYS in your will? Please let us know.

Contact Director of Development Don Fitzkee at 717-656-6580 or [don@cobys.org](mailto:don@cobys.org) to explore options.

As for this year, if the ball in Times Square is about to drop and you haven't gotten around to giving, you can give online at [cobys.org](http://cobys.org).

When you bless us with financial support during this Christmas season, we are able to bless children and families throughout the year.