



Christian Adoption Services FAQs about Initiating an Adoption Search in Minnesota

Search and reunion will have a significant impact on your life, as well as on the lives of many others. Questions, and a wide range of emotions – excitement, anxiety, fear and impatience to name a few – are normal and to be expected.

Who may initiate and adoption search?

Please refer to the **For Your Information** sheet. Christian Adoption Services can provide assistance to adopted adults, birth parents, and adoptive parents of minor children whose adoptions were facilitated through our agency. Our staff is available to help you sort through your questions and to work with you through each step of the process. Contact Christian Adoption Services at 701-237-4473 or Destrie@CASadoption.org for further information or to set up an appointment to talk about your request.

Can I search for both of my birth parents?

We only search for a birth parent if (s)he was **legally** identified as the birth parent (257.55). **Therefore, we can always conduct a search for your birth mother.** We only conduct a search for a birth father if he signed paternity affidavits or was adjudicated in court. We can check the file to let you know if this is an option. The fee that you pay covers the cost of one search.

What happens if my birth parent does not want any contact with me, or if the search reveals that (s)he is deceased?

If your birth parent initially does not desire contact, we would encourage her/him to think about it further and we would attempt to provide support/resources to the birth parent. If a firm decision for no contact is made, we would attempt to gather updated health history from your birth parent and provide that information to you, along with any other information your birth parent may provide. If your birth parent is deceased, we would attempt to contact a close relative if you desire contact with a relative. Also if birth mother is deceased you may want to consider petitioning the court for your original birth certificate.

I have a health problem and I am wondering what to do to get updated health information from my birth family?

We can check the file for any health history, which had previously been recorded. We can also search for your birth parent (legally established birth parent). We request that your physician provide us with a list of specific medical questions as well as a statement as to the medical urgency of the request. Requests deemed urgent **by your physician** are given priority.

How do I get a copy of my original birth certificate?

If you were born in Minnesota your original birth certificate is at the Minnesota Department of Health. If you are 19 years of age or older, you may submit a “Search for Affidavit of Disclosure” form, to find out whether your birth mother has given permission for the birth certificate to be released. If the Health Department has her permission on file they will release the birth certificate to you. Download this form from the Health Department web site at www.health.state.mn.us and link to “birth records after an adoption.”

I am not sure which agency handled my adoption or the placement of my child, what do I do?

You should write Minnesota Department of Human Services, Adoption Unit, P.O. Box 64944, St. Paul, MN 55155. Include your date of birth and your adoptive parents' names. If you are a birth parent you need to include the child's date of birth and the birth mother's name at the time. You will then be referred to the correct agency.

How does CAS search and how do you contact my birth parents? (or son/daughter)

We utilize many different computer databases, as well as public records and other resources such as newspapers, historical societies, vital records, etc. We attempt to reach the person directly if possible. We contact a family member only if it becomes necessary, and we do not violate any confidentiality in this process. When we locate the person for whom we are searching, we contact him/her by phone. We present your request for contact and offer much support throughout that phone call.

If my birth parent (or son/daughter) refuses to have contact with me, or cannot be found, will my search fee be refunded to me?

No, the fee is not refunded, as it covers the costs of conducting the search, but is not contingent upon the outcome.

If my birth parent (or son/daughter) wants contact with me, what are my options?

Some of this depends upon what information you have decided to release to this person on your Release of Information form included in the search packet. The other party will also make decisions regarding preferences for contact. The CAS staff is able to facilitate contact if needed, by forwarding letters, and/or helping to arrange phone calls, meetings, etc. for those who are not yet in direct contact with one another.

I would like to search for my siblings, is this possible?

Yes, when we are acting on the request of an adopted individual to disclose identifying information about a genetic sibling, or acting on the request of a genetic sibling to disclose identifying information about an adopted individual, we must determine if either individual knows the identity of a living mutual birth parent. If either individual knows the identity of a living mutual birth parent, no disclosure may be made unless that parent is first notified.

What can I find out?

Non-identifying Information

This is a written summary that provides information about the birth family of an adopted adult that was contained in the agency file at the time the adoptive placement was made. It includes physical descriptions, education, interests, and other non-identifying information. The fee for this service is \$35 per hour.

Identifying Information/Search

If you want updated medical information, or if you want contact with your birth family/adopted adult, you can request that the agency search for the birth family member/adopted adult to see if they are willing to provide information and/or are open to contact with you. If they agree, you and your birth relative can choose to correspond through the agency or you may agree to exchange names, addresses and phone numbers and correspond directly with each other. An agency representative is available to help you consider which kind of contact is best for you and to assist in facilitating a first meeting. The fee for this service is \$35 per hour.

****When returning all required forms to CAS, a payment of 3 hours of work (\$105) must be submitted. The remainder of the fees shall be paid in full prior to receiving a non-identifying report, updated medical information, and/or contacting the subject of the Search. The 3 hours that are initially paid will be**

considered prior to receiving a final bill.**

What do I do first?

It is important to consider in advance how initiating a search will affect you and others.

Some questions for consideration are:

- Why do I want to search at this time?
- What do I hope to find?
- Will I be able to accept disappointment if my expectations are not met?
- Am I open to the changes/challenges that I might encounter?
- Am I willing to consider that my birth relative's expectations may be different than mine?
- Do I have a supportive person or support system to help me process my feelings?

While there is no guarantee what the outcome of your search will be, thoughtful preparation will help you create realistic expectations and a positive experience, even if the result is different than what you expected. There are many excellent books and on-line resources available to assist you in preparing to search. Many of these resources recommend recording information, thoughts and feelings about the process in a journal.

How do I start a search?

If you know the agency that handled the adoption, contact them for an explanation of the process and the proper forms to initiate a search. If you do not know the agency that handled the adoption, contact Minnesota Department of Human Services, Adoption Unit, P.O. Box 64944, St. Paul, MN 55155.

If you request non-identifying information, you will usually receive a response within a month. If you request information that requires a search, we have a minimum of six months to make a complete and reasonable effort to locate your birth relative. The outcome and length of time varies with each search.

If your birth relative is located, he/she will be informed that he/she may either consent or deny disclosure of identifying information. If your birth relative consents, our agency will work with both parties to help you consider what type of contact you desire. If your birth relative denies disclosure, we will not be able to provide you with any identifying information.

Christian Adoption Services
2360 7th Ave E #1
West Fargo, North Dakota 58078
701-237-4473
Destrie@CASfamily.org

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Birth mothers and Birth fathers (birth fathers named on the original birth certificate, adjudicated, or willing to acknowledge paternity in writing if previously named within the file) have a right to request:

1. A copy of any document they signed for the agency, including the Agreement Conferring Authority to Place Child (“surrender”)
2. Non-identifying information about the adopted person’s family and file check for updates
3. Updated non-identifying information about the adopted person’s placement; the adoptive parent can refuse this request on behalf of the adopted person under 19 years of age.
4. To have contact with the adoptive parents whether directly or with the agency as an intermediary. The adoptive parents can refuse this request.
5. To have contact with the adopted person 19 years of age or older, either directly or with the agency acting as intermediary. The adoptive person can refuse this request. The knowledge or consent of the adoptive parents is not required.
6. A copy of the original birth certificate available from the Minnesota Department of Health, Section of Vital Statistics to the birth parents named on the original birth certificate.
7. A birth parent* can sign an affidavit of disclosure or non-disclosure (revocable at any time) of the original birth certificate information. This affidavit is filed with the Minnesota Department of Health. If an affidavit of disclosure is filed, the original birth certificate information will be given directly to the adopted adult, if it is requested from the Minnesota Department of Health. Birth parents can also indicate on the affidavit whether or not they give consent to have their address directly released.

Adoptive Parents have the right (for themselves or on behalf of the adopted person under 19 years of age) to request:

1. Non-identifying information about either birth parent, including file check for updates.
2. Updated non-identifying information about either birth parent*. The birth parent can refuse this request.
3. To have contact with one or both birth parents, either directly or with the agency acting as intermediary. The birth parent can refuse this request.

Adopted persons at least 19 years of age have the right to the following without the adoptive parent’s knowledge or consent:

1. Non-identifying information about either birth parent, including file check for updates
2. To request updated non-identifying information about either birth parent.* The birth parent can refuse this request.
3. To have contact with one or both birth parents*, either directly or with the agency acting as intermediary. The birth parent can refuse this request.
4. To request a copy of the original birth certificate from the Minnesota Department of Health, Section of Vital Statistics. The request can only be granted if Birth parent(s)* have filed an “Affidavit of Disclosure,” with the Health Department.
5. Adopted Adults born or placed on or after Aug. 1, 1982 may request updated identifying information, pertaining to the birth parent named on the original birth certificate, from the placing agency. If there is no affidavit of objection on file from the birth parent(s), the agency will provide the last known name and address, date and place of birth of the birth parent(s) to the adopted adult.

Other persons at least 19 years of age born to either birth parent have a right to request:

Information about or contact with any other child born to either birth parent* who is also at least 19 years of age. The other person can refuse this request. The consent of the birth parent(s)* is also required if either child knows the identity of the birth parent.

Medical Information

The agency will make a diligent effort to transmit any medical information that may affect the mental or physical health of genetically related persons. This information is provided to the adoptive parent until the adopted person reaches 19 years of age, at which time the information is provided directly to the adopted person.

Death and Terminal Illness Notification

Adoptive parents of a child under the age of 19 years of age, or adopted persons age 19 or older, who wish to be notified of the death or terminal illness of a birth parent, must inform the adoption agency of this desire, and must keep the agency informed of their current address and telephone number. Then, if the agency receives

verification of the death or terminal illness of the birth parent, this information will be passed on.

A birth parent who wishes to be informed of the death or terminal illness of the child who was adopted, must notify the adoption agency of this desire, and must keep the agency informed of their current address and telephone number. Then, if the agency receives verification of the death or terminal illness of the child, this information will be passed on.

Petitions and Court Orders on Confidential Records

Confidential records include sealed original birth certificates, agency adoption records, and court adoption files.

If a birth parent is deceased, cannot be located, has signed an affidavit of non-disclosure, or has failed to file either an affidavit of disclosure or non-disclosure on the original birth certificate, the adopted person has the right to petition the court for a court order releasing the requested information. A birth parent may file an affidavit objecting to disclosure of information about himself/herself only. The agency may also communicate with the court about the status of the case.

The law provides for the right of any party to the adoption to petition the court for release of identifying information for "good cause." "Good cause," is determined by the court ruling on the petition. The petitioner does not need an attorney to petition the court, but simply writes a letter of petition "pursuant to Minnesota Statute, Sec.259.31" to the judge explaining what information is requested and the reasons for wanting that information.

Adoptive parents and adopted persons have the right to know which court finalized the adoption. Birth parents can petition the court in the county where court termination of their parental rights occurred, or the court in their county of residence.

General Information

1. The agency has the right to charge reasonable fees for providing information or search assistance. Further, the agency has the right to require that the fee be paid in full before service is provided.
2. It is the client's responsibility to clarify his/her service needs, respond promptly to agency correspondence and to be timely with fee payments.
3. The client has the right to be given a reasonable time frame in which search will be completed.
4. If the client is dissatisfied with the services received, the matter should be discussed with the worker assigned to the case. If this does not result in a satisfactory solution to the problem. The client should contact the worker's supervisor. If there still are service concerns, the client should contact the Adoption Unit, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 3rd Floor, 444 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, Minnesota, 55155-3811.

Another Resource

The International Soundex Reunion Registry is available to persons over the age of 18, and there is not a charge to register. It is not a search service, because it is a passive system; it only works if both parties are registered. The International Soundex Reunion Registry is not affiliated with Minnesota's public or private adoption agencies. Their address is:

ISSR - P.O. Box 2313
Carson City, Nevada 87902
Phone number (775)-882-7755

*Note: *signifies the birth mother and/or birth father named on the original birth certificate, adjudicated, or has acknowledged paternity. The legally established birth parent.*