

My name is Reverend Doctor Joelle Henneman, my pronouns are she/her, and I am the senior pastor of the United Methodist Church for All People. I am here to speak against the creation of “Natural Family Month.”

I was adopted as a newborn. As was my dad and my sister. Adoption is the most beautiful gift. My parents welcomed me in to their home even though we were not blood relations. As a child getting ready to enter kindergarten, I went through school testing and my parents were told I would barely graduate high school. Two weeks ago I graduated with my sixth college degree, a doctor of ministry. The only thing that got me to where I am is my adopted parents love.

In the Bible, Jesus is raised by his adopted father, Joseph. In the book of Romans, the Apostle Paul writes that we are given a spirit of adoption—we are brought in to the family of God and loved not because of heredity, but through grace.

As an LGBT+ person, chosen family is my support where I find love, acceptance, and safety. When I am with chosen family I can set down a weight I didn't know I was carrying and be fully known for all of who I am. Chosen family generates the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

As a pastor, there are many people in my congregation who don't fit the definition of “natural family”. People who find bonds deeper than blood and hold together providing a safe, nurturing family.

Please vote no on this bill that lifts up one model of family, while denying so many other forms that provide health, growth, and life.