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Meet Bethany's Adoptive Family of the Year

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Jody Landers recalled a passage from a book -- still locked in her heart -- about an African mother wishing her children would die before she did.

To any parent, Mrs. Landers thought, this is the ultimate nightmare. In that passage, she believes, was a message the Muscatine, Iowa, mother of six and wife to a worship pastor knew was meant for her.

"That poor woman, as long as she was on Earth, knew she could make the best for her children," Mrs. Landers said in a phone conversation. "She felt if her children left before her, then she would know they would be taken care of. But if she died before them, she wouldn't know how they would be looked after. It was a horrible burden this woman carried. That made me realize it was time for us to go forward and add to our family through adoption."

Which is what Pastor Andy of Muscatine's Calvary Church -- and Jody -- did. They adopted fraternal twins from West Africa, Sierra Leone, joining sons Dawson, Gabe, Max and Quincy, making the Landers' home an even happier -- and noisier -- place to be.

The Landers' commitment to the newest members of their family has not stopped with their adoption. The two have been working to raise money for the village where Zeke and Kora were born. Their efforts, and their dedication to bettering the lives of their children, have earned them the 2009 Adoptive Family of the Year by Bethany For Children & Families.

The two will be honored at Bethany's annual Family Awards night at 5:30 p.m. Thursday at Davenport's Radisson Hotel.

"Adoption was a good fit with our family," Mrs. Landers said. "It became the perfect situation for us when we came across Zeke and Kora. They were hits with the the rest of the children, who accepted them immediately. We saw it as a blessing to get the chance to adopt Zeke and Kora. We have rich lives and this just added to it."

Zeke and Kora Landers have been in the United States for about 18 months and the Landers household -- already filled with vim and vigor -- is a rather lively spot. Minor kid spats, washing machine humming for hours at a time and suckers stuck in the strangest of places, are common.

"It is what you might think with six children," Mrs. Landers said. "And that's OK. There aren't too many quiet moments and there are some chaotic times, but that's how life is. We decided this was the path to take and are having a great time."

Though Zeke and Kora are being raised in a Midwestern setting, Mrs. Landers said they always will have the chance to learn the culture they were born into.

"Things are pretty Americanized for them being age 4 and arriving here at 2 1/2," Mrs. Landers said. "We will do whatever it takes for them to know about where they came from and will continue to support efforts to make life better for those in the village where they were born. We have said many times that we are the lucky ones to have Zeke and Kora in our lives."

Bethany's big night also will feature the Leadership Family of the Year, Advocate of the Year and Foster Family of the Year honorees.

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