

Christie, Markwayne and their five children.



Every Day Is FATHER'S DAY

Adopting twin toddlers was not something Oklahoma Congressman Markwayne Mullin had planned. Happily, plans change.

AS TOLD TO PAULA DERROW

I was standing across from my wife, Christie, at a birthday party we were throwing for her 2-year-old twin cousins. When I saw the twinkle in her eye, I thought, *Uh-oh!* I knew exactly what she was thinking: *We should adopt these girls.* Except we already had three kids of our own—Jim, then 8, Andrew, 6, and Larra, 4, and I wasn't ready for two more.

Crowded house

It was November 2012, and I'd just been elected to the House of Representatives from the state of Oklahoma. The twins—Ivy

and Lynette—were being raised by Christie's great-aunts, both in their 70s, in separate homes. Their biological mother was a teenager. The twins were the most precious, adorable, chatty girls ever. We'd been discussing helping them financially, but until that day, I'd never met them. Neither had our kids, but they were all over the girls!

Later that afternoon, Christie took me aside. "They need a mom and dad *now*," she said. Her great-aunts were worried they wouldn't live to see the girls through their teen years. I understood, but still I pushed back. The aunts were getting

on in years, sure, but they provided loving homes. I just didn't think we could bring the girls to live with us.

The timing was terrible. I'd be in Washington, DC, during the week, commuting home to Oklahoma on weekends, and our lives were busy. We have several businesses, plus we're constantly shuttling the kids to baseball, football and wrestling practices. It was already a lot for Christie, and I worried about how two more kids would affect Jim, Andrew and Larra.

Asking for guidance

But I had another concern: Would I be capable of loving these girls as much as my own children? If we were going to adopt them, I told Christie, I wanted them to feel like our daughters. That's when she asked me to pray about it. I had to laugh, because I knew right then that I couldn't pray to shrink her heart. The only thing I could do was pray to make my own heart bigger.

So I did. I said, "Lord, if you want me to do this, the door has to open." I asked Him to make three things happen: I wanted Him to expand my heart, for my kids to be on board, and to have the support of our extended family. Soon, I went back to Christie. I told her that I now felt willing—if our family was.

A few days later, we all sat down at the kitchen table to talk about Ivy and Lynette moving in. I explained



Ivy (right) and Lynette, now 4.

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COURTESY OF MARKWAYNE MULLIN.

to Larra, "You won't be Daddy's only little girl anymore." She was so mature. She immediately said, "I don't care—they need a mommy and a daddy." Then she ran to her room and began picking out toys to give to the girls. And the boys were adamant too. Later that night, Christie and I talked about how the Lord had blessed us. It was remarkable how easily the kids accepted it. Our parents did as well.

At that point, there was no looking back. Three weeks later, Ivy and Lynette were living with us and the court granted us full custody. From that first night, they felt like they belonged. I remember I hugged one of the girls after her bath. She just smelled so beautiful. *Instantly*, she was my daughter! And all the kids insisted on sharing a room. There are two bunk beds in the boys' room. Jim and Andrew each had a top bunk, the twins slept together on one bottom bunk, and Larra took the other. We found them all in one bed in the morning, snuggled up together.

Of course, there were a few little bumps, and though Ivy and Lynette called us Mommy and Daddy, it was a while before they said "I love you." But soon it was impossible to imagine that they'd ever lived anywhere else. We officially adopted them in August 2013.

I'd been hesitant about how everyone would adapt, but I don't think any other 2-year-olds could have accepted the craziness of our life better: all the traveling, my commuting, or spending 8 hours in the bleachers watching their siblings in a state wrestling tournament. They just roll with it—the Lord gave them that spirit. And Ivy, Lynette and I have developed our own father-daughter rituals too. On weekend nights, I'm the one who tucks them in. I used to shave in the evening, but now I wait, because Lynette loves to rub

my whiskers. And Ivy wants me to give her "noonies," which means rubbing our noses together.

The hardest part for me is missing things during the week. It's not easy, and it gets crazy. Like, at my kids' ballgames, Christie FaceTimes me when the boys are at



Lynette and Ivy (right) in the Capitol Building.

“The only thing I could do was pray to make my own heart bigger.”

bat, then runs to the base alongside them so I can see! But we're lucky—our extended family helps a lot. I'd never want the kids to think that my job was hurting our family. If that ever started happening, I'd be gone from Congress just like that.

Adopting Ivy and Lynette has made me a better father because I'm more appreciative—and protective—of my time with the kids. Like all fathers, I've had to learn to make every moment count. Nothing makes me happier than when we are together. ■

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