



The Greenan family is pictured on the day of the baptism of their adopted children from Ukraine, at St. John Vianney in Prince Frederick, Maryland. Pictured in the front row, left to right, are: Dasha, Tatiana, Sawyer, Anthony and Cabrini. In the back row, left to right, are Deacon Jim Caldwell; Fr. Peter Daly; Vicki, Michael, Carolyn and Alex Greenan; Brandon Szalinski (Carolyn's fiance); and Ed Greenan, holding Anya. (Courtesy of the Greenan family)



by Peter Daly

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

March 21, 2023

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

Vicki and Ed Greenan were living a solid middle-class American life, but were looking to grow spiritually and find more purpose in life. They decided to adopt five children, all with special needs, to join their family of four biological children. Once those children were grown, they were again looking for a new mission in life.

I had met them more than 25 years ago when they came to our parish in southern Maryland, and we reconnected for lunch just after New Year's Day in 2019. I remember saying, "Well, you are great parents. Perhaps that is still your calling."

A few months later, they began to host children from orphanages in Ukraine at their home in Virginia. The children came on one-month visits to the United States, with the hope that someone in the U.S. would meet the children and adopt them. The Greenans paid all the expenses for these visits. They even did some special things for the children, like taking them to Disney World.

But at the end of the month, when the little visitors were scheduled to return to Ukraine, parting with them was too painful. So, Vicki and Ed decided to try to adopt. Now in their 50s, they started over with a second family.

The Greenans worked through a Ukrainian-American man from St. Louis named Serge Zevlever, who has helped coordinate adoptions from the Ukraine since the 1990s. Zevlever helped them to start the process to adopt three children: Tatiana (age 5), Anthony (age 6) and Cabrini (age 5).

These children have serious medical needs. Tatiana has spina bifida, hydrocephalus and a congenital heart defect. She is also on a feeding machine, as she is unable to consume enough calories by mouth due to her disability. Anthony has spina bifida.

Cabrini has a severe form of cerebral palsy called spastic tetraplegia. She also has a seizure disorder and is unable to take food and drink by mouth. She is on a feeding machine that goes directly to her stomach. All three of these children are in wheelchairs.

While they are not biologically related, they knew each other in the orphanage. The Greenans originally said yes to all three once she met them in Ukraine. Vicki brought them home to Virginia in July of 2020.

Advertisement

On the trip to Ukraine to pick up Tatiana, Anthony and Cabrini, Vicki heard a great commotion coming from the room adjoining the area to where she was meeting her new children. Two children in the next room, Dasha and Sawyer, heard that their friends were leaving the orphanage.

"You never heard such wailing and crying and sobbing in all your life, as I heard from the next room," Vicki said.

Dasha, now 10, and Sawyer, now 8, are half siblings to Anthony. So, as soon as Vicki and Ed returned to the United States they started putting together the paperwork to adopt Dasha and Sawyer, as well as a third child, Anya, who is now 5.

These three children also have serious medical needs. Anya suffers from fetal alcohol syndrome, which prevented her hands and feet from fully forming. She also has a congenital heart defect. Dasha has cerebral palsy. Sawyer has spina bifida and [Chiari II malformation](#) of the brain stem.

All six children are from the region around Dnipro in southeastern Ukraine. The city of Dnipro, the fourth-largest in Ukraine, was [heavily shelled by Russian rockets in January](#). Dozens of civilians were killed, including six children, when an apartment complex was hit by a missile in one of the deadliest single attacks against civilians since the early weeks of the war.

In June of 2021, when Vicki returned to Ukraine for the final court hearing to authorize her to bring Dasha, Sawyer and Anya to the U.S., she took pictures of Anya's orphanage near Mykolaiv. That same orphanage has since been [bombed](#) by a Russian missile. There also have been [reports](#) of children taken from orphanages in that area by Russian soldiers.



The Greenan children with parents Ed and Vicki at Christmas (Courtesy of the Greenan family)

To do these adoptions took money. Vicki and Ed decided to leave that in God's hands. Ed said to Vicki, "If the money comes together, we will do it." As it turned out, the Greenans sold a piece of property that had been on the market for a while for the exact amount that they needed to complete the adoption of all six children. They took it as a sign.

By July of 2021, all the children were back at the Greenan home in the U.S. Vicki said, "All the stars aligned." People helped out along the way. On the final flight home from Amsterdam, the flight attendant let Vicki sit in first class with her three little children.

A couple of months after all the children arrived, I baptized the children on a September Sunday afternoon at my former parish in Maryland. It was a touching and joyful day. The children all said "thank you" in English. They had happy smiles and looked radiant in white dresses and little suits.

There is a sad codicil to the story. The man who helped organize the adoptions, Serge Zevlever, was killed in the early days after the Russian invasion in February of 2022 in a village near Kyiv, after he volunteered to go out and see if it was safe to come out of a bomb shelter. [News reports](#) said he was killed by Chechen snipers who had rented an apartment in the same building. He was killed Feb. 26, 2022. His concern for others cost him his life.

Recently I asked Vicki, "How has your life been since the adoptions?"

She said, "My life has purpose, every single day! Every diaper, every medical appointment — my life has purpose."

Before we hung up the phone, I said to her, "You know that you saved these children."

"No," she said immediately, "They saved me."