In my mind, there's no excuse," she says. "My mom had 10 kids, and she stretched a pot of rice with 10 kids. I know somebody can stretch with just a few kids."

Key's parents separated when she was growing up in New Orleans, and her mother returned to Lafayette. Key found herself in foster care with relatives so that she could continue her schooling in the Crescent City. She said she believes it is her duty to give back because of those who helped her.

"They receive self-esteem, and that's real important in a person's life. They're self-motivated," she says.

Pastor Suzanne Key was recently named Foster Parent of the Year. She has fostered 15 children.

Foster mother honored for nurturing kids

By RUTH FOOTE
Special to The Advocate

ST. MARTINVILLE — Since opening her home to a 1-day-old baby in 1976, Suzanne Key has adopted five children and fostered 15 others.

Today she is awaiting the adoption of a sibling group of six to add to her nest. It's a little wonder that the 46-year-old St. Martinville resident, who has been described as "a warm and nurturing person," was honored recently as the "Foster Parent of the Year."

The award was bestowed by the Louisiana Department of Social Services for the Lafayette region, an eight-parish area. Key was honored at the state Foster Parent Conference in Lafayette.

Over the years, Key has been a mother to children from all walks of life — from those who are mentally retarded to those who have aggressive behavior. As a member of the Black Adoption/Foster Care Advocacy Advisory Board, she encourages others to follow her footsteps and consider adoption.

"There are so many children who are homeless," she says. "They're in foster care, but they need something to say that is their own. They need commitment, somewhere where love is and a belonging. They need to know they belong to someone and something."

Key also keeps busy as pastor of the Tabernacle of Hope Church of God in Christ. Key says that her calling has fulfilled her.

"I feel God sent me, and everything He said has come to pass," she says. "He didn't tell me it was going to be easy, and He didn't say it would be hard, but there are so many lives that I touch that I know it must be God's will."

If people prefer not to adopt, Key says that there is still a need for more foster parents to care for youngsters.

"I see them in institutions they should not be in," she says. "They should be in homes where they can get a background, especially the teen-agers. They need homes so they won't grow up into society and think they're nobody. They have to know somebody loves them."

Key said she believes there is no reason not to adopt.

"In my mind, there's no excuse," she says. "My mom had 10 kids, and she stretched a pot of rice with 10 kids. I know somebody can stretch with just a few kids."

Key's parents separated when she was growing up in New Orleans, and her mother returned to Lafayette. Key found herself in foster care with relatives so that she could continue her schooling in the Crescent City.

She said she believes it is her duty to give back because of those who helped her.

Key is especially proud of touching children's lives.

"They receive self-esteem, and that's real important in a person's life. They're self-motivated," she says.