



Frequently Asked Questions About the Defense of Marriage: The Gift of Children

What does marriage have to do with children?

Children are at the very heart of marriage. The “supreme gift” of marriage, a child (GS, no. 50), comes precisely through the mutual, loving self-gift exchanged between husband and wife. It is only because of their sexual difference that spouses are able to cooperate with God in the awesome adventure of welcoming a child into the world. Marriage is not just about satisfying adult desires, but is a pro-child institution. The community of the family is built upon the communion of the spouses (see LF, no. 7).

Does the Church think that marriage is a mere “instrument” for having children?

Certainly not. The Church does teach that the “proper mission” of husband and wife is having children and raising them (GS, no. 50). But spouses should never “use” each other in order to have a child, and marriages not blessed with children are fruitful through the spouses' mutual gift of self and their loving service to others. A child is neither a product nor a trophy, but a gift - a human person with great dignity and worth. Spouses are not the ultimate source of their children, but are called to receive them lovingly from God by exercising responsible parenthood (which can mean welcoming many children, as well as postponing pregnancy for serious reasons).

What’s the difference between a husband and wife who can’t have children, and two persons of the same sex, who also can’t have children?

Only a man and a woman, as husband and wife, can enter into the two-in-one-flesh communion of persons. Only a man and a woman are able to conceive a child through each other. That is to say, only a man and a woman can be joined so intimately that their bodies work together in the common task of procreation. Even when a husband and wife do not in fact conceive a child (due to infertility, age, and so on), their sexual acts are still the kind of acts by which children are naturally conceived. In contrast, two persons of the same sex may be perfectly healthy, but will never be able to enter a one-flesh communion and thus unite in such a way that a child is conceived.

Why is a child meant to have both a father and a mother?

The fact is, every single child, without exception, does have a mother and a father. Sexual difference between a husband and wife is necessary to conceive a child. But its importance does not end there. Men and women bring unique gifts to the shared task of parenting, that is, of fathering and mothering. Only a woman can be a mother. Only a man can be a father. Each contributes in a distinct and unique way to the formation of children, helping them to understand their identity as male or female. Respecting a child's dignity means affirming his or her need for – and right to – a mother and a father.

What about single parents? These families lack a father or a mother, just like households headed by two men or two women.

A child is meant to be raised by his or her own, married father and mother. But there are times when, due to family tragedies or other unfortunate circumstances, this ideal cannot be realized. The Church acknowledges the difficulties faced by single parents and seeks to support them in their often heroic response to meet the needs of their children. There is a big difference, however, between dealing with the unintended reality of single parenthood and approving the formation of “alternative families” that deliberately deprive a child of a father or a mother, such as arrangements headed by two men or two women. Undesired single parenthood can still witness to the importance of sexual difference by acknowledging the challenges faced by single parents and their children due to the lack of a father or mother. In contrast, arrangements of two men or two women are incapable of such witness and present

motherhood and fatherhood as disposable. These arrangements of themselves contradict the conjugal and generative reality of marriage and are never acceptable. Children deserve to have their need for a father and a mother respected and protected in law.

Aren't children adaptable to many different family forms?

While children can be strong and resilient, it is false to pretend that they are unaffected by their family's structure. Various studies have demonstrated that children suffer from divorce and from lacking a father or a mother. The push for "new family arrangements" overlooks or denies the child's fundamental need for a mother and a father. Moms and dads matter, and the needs of children must not take a backseat to the satisfaction of adult desires.

Don't studies show that children do fine with two "moms" or two "dads"?

Actually, the conclusions of studies that look at children raised by two men or two women are mixed, at best. For example, some of the studies suffer from small sample sizes or view traits such as "flexible gender identity" as positive. It is also important to remember that social science is not equipped to capture the whole of reality. The truths of human nature should be illumined by good science (and the Church enthusiastically encourages this), but such truths do not stand trial to social science, as if they will be disproved. At the end of the day, no study should ignore the dignity of the child and the right of every child to a mother and a father.

What about adoption?

Adoption is a generous response to a child who is in need or abandoned. Mothers and fathers who adopt children witness to the truth that every child is a gift. However, keep in mind that adoption, guardianship, and foster care take their form from natural generation (a father and a mother conceiving, giving birth to, and raising a child) and should never contradict the conjugal and generative reality of marriage. In other words, fathers and mothers matter to adopted kids, too. Placing a child in the care of two men or two women may be well-intentioned, but ultimately deprives the child of that which best serves his or her interests – a mother and a father.

New technology like "in vitro fertilization" (IVF) can enable two men or two women to have a child. Why does the Church teach that this is unacceptable?

No matter how powerful reproductive technology becomes, the fact will always remain that two men or two women can never become parents through each other. They will always depend on the "donation" of someone else's sperm or egg in order to bring about the birth of a child. Children "conceived" in this way are thus always and intentionally separated from either their father or their mother – sometimes even both. Furthermore, using technologies such as IVF means that conception does not take place within the loving embrace of husband and wife, but instead is a dehumanized act of production, a mere "putting together" of the parents' genetic material. No child should be treated as a product. A child deserves to be an act of love, the fruit of his or her parents' mutual, loving self-gift.

USCCB: Issues and Action: Promotion and Defense of Marriage, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/promotion-and-defense-of-marriage/frequently-asked-questions-on-defense-of-marriage.cfm#m1>