

Why do adopted people wonder about their biological origins, or children created from sperm donors search out the person who engendered them, as well as their half-siblings?

Rather than merely biological artifacts, moms, dads and siblings are part of our identity. Every person has a right to be part of a family, to be born to a mother and father united in marriage.²

Marriage Defined

Due to the confusion about marriage today, many struggle with expressing marriage so that its truth and goodness are evident. This is what marriage is and does:

Marriage unites a man and a woman with each other and any children born from their union.

This fact can only be recognized and not changed (Catechism §1601-1603). It expresses procreation, complementarity, motherhood and fatherhood, irreplaceability, kinship, and the good of the spouses and children. It even includes the potential for the heartbreak of infertility. *Not every married man and woman has children, but every child has a mother and father.*

This reveals why marriage has been recognized by every culture, society, and religion, each within its own sphere of interest or knowledge. In law, *marriage creates the sole civil institution that unites children with their mothers and fathers and provides the only authority to promote it for the common*

good. The Church provides a deeper understanding of this same reality which was elevated to a sacrament by Christ's total self-gift to us on the cross, and by the understanding of His relationship with His bride, the Church.

The Beauty of Marriage Revealed

In marriage, a man and woman freely choose to become irreplaceable to each other. This choice prepares them to receive the gift of a new life that has the same value and dignity as their own. The child is irreplaceable to them and both are irreplaceable to the child. Marriage begins the circle of irreplaceability we call the family.

The same is true for adoption. Marriage prepares the man and woman to receive that child into their circle of irreplaceability, permanently substituting for the mother and father the child lost.

When considered through the eyes of the child, marriage is beautiful. To rebuild a marriage culture, the truth about marriage must be restored and promoted so that more men and women choose to enter into the marital union as the foundation for their families.

As an imperative of social justice, public policy, education, entertainment and media all need to promote the importance of men and women marrying before having children.

William B. May is author of *Getting the Marriage Conversation Right, a Guide for Effective Dialogue and President of Catholics for the Common Good, an apostolate for evangelization of culture* (www.ccgaction.org).

¹ Dwight Longenecker, "The Risk of Faith," The Veritas Series (New Haven, CT: Knights of Columbus Supreme Council, 2008), <http://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis332.pdf> (accessed May 17, 2013).

² *Donum Vitae (Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation)*, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (1987).



SECRETARIAT OF PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 Fourth Street NE • Washington, DC 20017-1194
Tel: (202) 541-3070 • Fax: (202) 541-3054
Website: www.usccb.org/prolife

LIFE MATTERS: EXPLAINING THE REALITY OF MARRIAGE TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS



The true meaning and purpose of marriage has become clouded over the last 40 years. This confusion has influenced why and whether young people marry. While we understand marriage as a sacrament, it's critical we learn to use non-religious language to explain it to our children and friends in ways that properly convey its truth and beauty.

In reality, marriage unites a man and a woman with each other and any children born from this union.

Polls show most people think marriage is merely the recognition of a committed loving relationship principally for the benefit of the spouses. However, marriage is much more. Responsible negative influences include no-fault divorce, which makes marriage conditional on the happiness and fulfillment of adults, and the separation of sex from procreation and marriage.

The breakdown of marriage has reached crisis mode. Today more than 50 percent of births to women under 30 occur outside marriage. According to sociologists, the increased numbers of children in poverty, in fatherless homes, and who experience abuse and neglect all relate to changing attitudes about marriage. The phenomenon of the breakdown of marriage has spread rapidly into the segment known as Middle America and is now touching nearly every extended family.



Efforts to reverse these current trends should be an imperative of social justice for every citizen, and a primary concern of every parent. Who would choose that their grandchildren should be deprived of mothers and fathers united in marriage, or that their own children should grow up to be single parents?

Rebuilding a Christian culture – and in this case, a marriage culture – does not start with judging others but with our own conversion. Conversion is a journey, not a destination. That journey is essential to the New Evangelization and the reason Pope Benedict XVI declared the Year of Faith.

To evangelize the culture, starting in our own families, it is crucial to study and transmit the teachings of the Church about love, marriage, and sexuality to our children, but to also present them in non-religious terms that reveal their truth, beauty and goodness. No matter how well they know the Catechism, young people are vulnerable to accepting conflicting ideas that seem reasonable and appealing.

Many now only accept Church teaching that correlates with their own experience. Building a deeper faith and increasing confidence requires testing and verifying what she teaches.¹

Verifying the Reality of Marriage

Remember, things aren't true because they are in the Catechism. *They are in the Catechism because they are first true.* Church teaching does not create reality; it gives us a deeper understanding of it. Marriage as an integral part of God's plan for creation is a reality that can be verified without the benefit of revelation. *“Father... for although you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned you have revealed them to the childlike,”* Jesus said (Lk 10:21). Looking at marriage from the perspective of the child within us reveals its truth.

The child has the right to be ... brought up within marriage: it is through the secure and recognized relationship to his own parents that the child can discover his own identity and achieve his own proper human development. The parents find in their child . . . the permanent sign of their conjugal union, the living and indissoluble concrete expression of their paternity and maternity.

Donum Vitae, no. 1

Our own experience informs us. We all have a desire to know, be connected with, and loved by our own mother and father regardless of our relationship with them. This experience of God's plan for creation has been stamped into our very nature.