

SPECIAL
POINTS OF
INTEREST:

- Some Catholics Facts on Divorce
- You're Still Mom and Dad to Me
- Children & Divorce

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Newsletter for the

Divorced--Ministry of Compassion

“But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.”
2 Cor. 4:7

Some Facts on Divorce for Catholics:

“The psychological pain of loss of a relationship is great and deep-seated. We as a Church want to reach out and support you in your healing. Relationships and circumstances within your family may have changed, but God’s love for you is ever present and does not come to an end. Grasp the hands of those who reach out to you in loving concern. Extend your own hand to others whom you meet on the road to healing and reconciliation. There is a

home for you within our parishes and communities of faith.”
“Follow the Way of Love,” a Pastoral Message of the U.S. Bishops to Families.

- ◆ Divorced Catholics are not ex-communicated. The Church recognizes that the legal process of civil divorce is necessary to determine civil, legal and financial matters that results from the termination of marriage.
- ◆ Divorced Catholics may receive the Sacraments of Eucharist and

Reconciliation.

- ◆ Divorced Catholics are full members of the Catholic Church and can participate fully in the life of the church.
- ◆ Divorced Catholics seeking to marry are invited to request a study of their previous marriage by their diocesan Tribunal which requires the granting of a declaration of invalidity of their previous marriage.

The children will not be illegitimate if a divorced Catholic is granted a declaration of invalidity of their previous marriage.

You're Still Mom and Dad to Me

A Letter from your Son or Daughter

by William H. Glover, MA

“Divorce is often a war between fathers and mothers. Tragically, children can become the orphans of that war.” This quote is found in Jim Smoke’s book, *Growing Through Divorce*. Without question, this is the last thing that divorcing spouses want. But sadly, with the loss, the hurt, and the anger that the divorce process often engenders in both parties, it is the children that often prove its first casualties.

But how are we to know? How are we to guard against this? We try to be there for them. We are concerned with their understanding and feelings regarding our divorce and what it means to

them. And rightly so! This is very complicated and confusing for our kids...regardless of their age. In this article, we are going to try and take a look at what our children understand and feel regarding our divorce. And just as importantly, we are going to try and understand what they are saying to us as their mom and dad and how we need to respond if we are to keep them from becoming “orphans” of our adult warfare.

It goes without saying that our children are profoundly affected by their parent’s divorce. But how are they affected? What does an infant see and understand? How about a pre-teen? And how does their awareness and understanding

affect them and their behavior?

Infants

Infants are amazingly attuned to their mom and dad’s emotions. They react to the frustration, sadness, and anger that are part and parcel of our divorce. They sense a decrease in our level of energy and our attentiveness to them and their needs. In some cases, with older infants, they may even be aware that mommy or daddy is no longer living in the same home with them.

And, as a result, they may become more irritable as a result of this “loss” in their lives. This may play out as increased crying and fussing, as changes in their eating, sleeping, and daily routines.

(continued on Page 2)

Then the Master looked down and saw a vessel of clay,
Empty and broken, it helplessly lay;
No hope had the vessel that the Master might choose to
cleanse and make whole, to fill and use.
“Ah! This is the vessel I’ve been hoping to find,
I will mend and use it and make it all mine.”

Taken from *A Chosen Vessel*, Anonymous

“Then the Master looked down and saw
a vessel of clay, empty and broken.”



You're Still Mom and Dad to Me

A Letter from your Son or Daughter (Continued from Page 1)

Toddlers

With toddlers, there is no question but that they clearly recognize and understand that mommy or daddy is no longer living in the same home with them. Additionally, they often demonstrate a high degree of compassion for the emotional roller coaster that they see in their custodial parent.

As a result, toddlers may become clingy and have difficulty in separating from one or both parents. They may become standoffish, or even angry with mom and/or dad. Behaviorally, they may take a few steps back in terms of things like potty training or feeding themselves and may return to behaviors, like thumb-sucking, that they had previously outgrown. Finally, toddlers may have some difficulty in sleeping and occasionally even begin to have nightmares.

Pre-School and Elementary Age Children

Pre-school and Elementary age children clearly understand that mom or dad no longer lives in the same home as they do. And it is at this age that they begin to comprehend that "divorce" means that mommy and daddy will no longer be married and live together and that they no longer love each other.

At this age, children will typically blame themselves for the divorce. They often worry about changes in their daily life and can show signs of sadness and loss because mommy or daddy is no longer there. Pre-school and elementary age children often become angry and aggressive toward the parent that they blame for the divorce. They may have nightmares and often engage in a "reunification fantasy" involving mom and dad getting back together and their family being restored to them.

Pre-Teens and Teenagers

Pre-teens and teenagers clearly understand what divorce means and typically struggle with the

changes that it causes in their family and the effect that it has on their lives. As was the case with pre-school and elementary age children, pre-teens and teenagers often blame themselves for their parent's divorce.

At this age, children may feel abandoned by the parent who is no longer living in the home. They may feel like they have to become "little adults" and start worrying about such adult matters as family finances and living conditions. They often feel forced to grow up too soon and, as a result, they may withdraw from long-time friends and activities to focus on their new "responsibilities". In many cases, pre-teens and teenagers begin to act out their feelings of loss and resentment through anger, aggression, bad language and even alcohol and drugs.

What does all of this mean?

How do we translate these behaviors into words that will help us to understand what we need to do to prevent them from becoming the "orphans" of our divorce? Imagine for a moment that your son or daughter could write you a letter. What would it say? And even more importantly, how would you respond?

We can help you with the first part...

Dear Mom and Dad:

I need both of you to stay involved in my life. If you live close by, keep all of our scheduled visits. If you don't live close by, please email me, write letters, make phone calls and ask me lots of questions about what I like and don't like to do. When you don't stay involved in my life, I feel like I'm not important and that you really don't love me.

Please stop fighting and work hard at getting along with each other. Try to agree on matters relating to me and my needs. When you fight about me, I think that I did some-

thing wrong and I feel guilty.

I want to love you both and enjoy the time that I get to spend with each of you. Please support me in this. When you act jealous or upset, I feel like I need to take sides and love one of you more than the other.

Please communicate directly with each other so that I don't have to carry messages back and forth. I want you to talk to each other so that the messages are communicated the right way and so that I don't feel like I am going to mess up.

When talking to me about each other, please say only nice things... or don't say anything at all. When you say mean, unkind things about each other, I feel like you are putting me down and expecting me to take your side.

Finally, please remember that I love you and want both of you to be part of my life. I count on mom and dad to raise me, to teach me what is important, and to help me when I have problems.

Thank you for listening and for being my mom and dad.

*I love you both,
Your son/daughter*

...the second part, how you will respond, is entirely up to you.

#

William H. Glover, MA, Author of Adolescent Owner's Manual. Bill can be reached through his website at www.theadolescentownersmanual.com via email at: mrbill@theadolescentownersmanual.com or phone at 440-670-5554.

Sources:

Helping Children Understand Divorce: University of Missouri Extension. Kim Leon, State Specialist, Human Development and Family Studies; Kelly Cole, Extension Associate. <http://extension.missouri.edu>

Growing Through Divorce, Jim Smoke. Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1995.

Co-Parenting after a Separation or Divorce; Doug Russell, LCSW, Jaelline Jaffe, Ph.D., Rosemary Clandos. <http://helpguide.org>



Dear Mom and Dad:



Parenting Plans and Schools

By Judge John P. Quinn



One of the primary responsibilities of the Domestic Relations Court is to resolve disputes concerning the allocation of parental rights and responsibilities. The Court is obligated to make a decision in the best interest of the child in a case where the parents may strongly disagree about what arrangement is best for the child.

The Ohio Revised Code provides for the right of a parent to propose a plan for shared parenting. The plan must provide a detailed statement of the rights and responsibilities of each parent. Domestic Relations Court recognizes that a child needs to have a healthy relationship with both parents.

There has been a steady growth in parents adopting shared parenting plans in which the rights and responsibilities of each parent are spelled out in detail. With the growth of shared parenting has come a search for ways to increase time spent with the child by both parents.

A solution that is used by the parties or the Court is to use the child's school as the drop-off or pick-up point for the exercise of parenting time. For example, weekend parenting time, instead of being from Friday at 6:00 p.m. to Sunday at 6:00 p.m. would be from Friday after school to Monday Morning. Some parents use a week on/week off plan using the school as the exchange point.

make a decision in the best interest of the child

There are several advantages to this arrangement. It provides for additional opportunities for both parents to interact with teachers and counselors. Also both parents have the responsibility for seeing that the child is prepared and on time for school in the morning.

Parenting arrangements utilizing the child's school are helpful where there is a high level of conflict between the parents. The dilemma presented in these circumstances is how to manage the interaction between two parents when the level of conflict results in arguments or fights in the presence

of the child. Schools provide a neutral site that is familiar to the child.

The Judges of the Summit County Domestic Relations Court have met with administrators, teachers and counselors in many of our school systems to provide information to the schools and to receive feedback from the school personnel. The reaction from the schools has been positive.

Parents or school personnel who are interested in obtaining more information may contact Judge Quinn at 330-643-2080 or jquinn@drcourt.org

Judge John P. Quinn is with the Summit County Domestic Relations Court.

Schools provide a neutral site that is familiar to the child.

Fulfilling the Promise to Parent after Divorce

By William H. Boomer

As painful as divorce is for couples, it can be even more difficult on their children. Long-term divorce researcher, Judith Wallerstein, discovered some children can struggle for ten, twenty or more years. Many couples divorce without anticipating this. Thus, parents must soberly consider the difficulties their children will face and avoid divorce if at all possible. A

decision to divorce has to include a plan to honor the covenant commitment to cooperate as parents and care for their children before, during and after divorce.

Couples who do this best honor the other parent and free their children to honor both of their parents. They assure their children they are not at fault and keep them out of the middle of conflict. (Cases where an abusive parent is a cause of the divorce may

require limits and safeguards.) They resist the dual temptation to blame the other parent or give into self-condemnation over marital failure. Instead, they humbly turn to God in prayer for grace, fortitude and wisdom in parenting.

Wise single parents recruit a support network to assist them. Family, friends, coaches, teachers, schools and parishes can all be part of this network. (continued on page 5)

Featured Divorce Ministry Support Group: SPARK (Single Parents and Raising Kids)

*Support
spiritual needs
by helping
members see
their Church as
an instrument
of healing.*

SPARK at St. Basil, Brecksville, Ohio was started in 2005. SPARK was a response to the St. Basil evangelical committee's desire to reach out to the divorced. The focus of SPARK has been to support single parents, whether the parents are divorced, widowed, or never married.

SPARK provides a place for single parents to find resources and receive peer support to address the unique financial, emotional and practical problems affecting single parents. During the monthly meetings we have safe and fun

activities for the children while the parents meet. Open to all single parents regardless of parish or faith. SPARK provides opportunities to:

- ◆ **Meet and share experiences with other single parents and their children;**
- ◆ **Engage in wholesome activities with other families;**
- ◆ **Learn more about parenting, including emphasis on the demands of being a single parent;**
- ◆ **Provide a network of friends and support as well as adult social activities, and;**

- ◆ **Support spiritual needs by helping members see their Church as an instrument of healing, by providing opportunities for prayer and spiritual experiences to nourish personal and communal growth.**

SPARK is an (ecumenical) program run through St. Basil Catholic Church located in Brecksville, Ohio.

For further information on their monthly activities, please see their website at www.basilthegreat.org, or call Laurie Malone at 440-877-9553.

Reflection Prayer

**I seek
your
healing
spirit to
heal their
hearts.**

Divorced Parents Prayer

Lord, in this silent moment with you, I seek a miracle for our lives and a joyful spirit.

Broken hearts, crushed dreams and divided hearts within a divided family were things I did not want my children to know. Being haunted with these memories of the past, I am now left to parent alone. As I strive to listen to the pains of my children, I seek your healing spirit

to heal their hearts. As I try to guide and discipline, I ask

for your knowledge to raise them to become healthy adults that will help to fulfill your plan for them on this earth. Help me to teach them your ways by instilling in me to become a good example of a parent. Give me a heart to be able to model the art of forgiveness. In this moment that I am sharing with you, Lord, forgive me and my spouse for the failure of our marriage.

As we walk this road together as a divided family, please bless both of us with a loving and forgiving spirit that will help us to overcome our differences for the good of our children. Unify our hearts

and bestow upon us the grace of wisdom as we continue to be committed to our children in learning how to co-parent together. And, Lord, despite the fact that our children will experience a divided childhood trying to live between two homes and two worlds, help them to become children of faith and love.

The Department for
Marriage & Family Ministry



Children and Divorce

by Carol Petro, LSW

Children are often the forgotten victims of the devastation of divorce. It is estimated that every year, parents of over 1 million children divorce.



Their world becomes filled with feelings of insecurity, anger, guilt, fear, rejection, fantasy denial, parental loyalty conflicts, adapting to life in two households, as well

as feeling that they caused the divorce. This can be a time of great conflict and confusion for children. Research on children of divorce suggests that divorce can have a negative impact on children whereby it shakes the foundation of their life and faith.

Parents can help their children when both parents become committed to them and work out a good co-parenting relationship. Both parents need to focus on giving their children a good childhood. Parents need to assure the children that both mom and dad will always be there for them. They also need to know

what their children are feeling as well as what they need to help them deal with the pain and upheaval in their lives.

Many of the children's problems are the result of the troubled family relationships before the divorce. What you do as parents will be the deciding factor on how the children will adapt. It is wise for parents to have the children see a mental health professional during the divorce as well as afterwards to help children of divorce move through each life stage. The followings suggestions can help provide comfort, encouragement and support:

1. Spend time with them
2. Listen to them and be emotionally present to them
3. Children need to be reassured by both parents that they love them
4. Tell them what is going to happen to them: who, what, when and where details for their lives
5. Focus on your child's growth, security, and their grieving process
6. Allow them to express their feelings and emotions

7. Do not put down the other parent; manage your own emotions

Give your children the gift to be able to love both parents.

Give your children the gift to be able to love both parents

Keep in mind that not only does divorce alters their family life, but it can alter the children's after school activities, work (adolescents) and relationships with friends. As a single parent family in reorganizing the family unit, learning how to have family meetings can become a very

effective tool in resolving disputes, feelings of insecurity and bringing organization to the home.

This can help the family's healing process as well as showing children how to resolve conflicts. Provide opportunities to have the children experience God's healing love through family prayer and expressions of faith such as attendance at Mass and the Sacraments. Look at this as an opportunity to teach the children how to love despite life's difficulties.

Do not put down the other parent; manage your own emotions

Carol Petro, LSW is a Marriage & Family Specialist in The Department for Marriage & Family, Diocese of Cleveland, Catholic Charities.

Fulfilling the Promise to Parent after Divorce

(continued from Page 3)

Parishes help with:

- ◆ Reminders that God is close to divorced families
- ◆ Encouraging words for the good work done by single parents.
- ◆ Intercessions and prayers for the divorced and their children.
- ◆ Single-parenting programs or support groups.

- ◆ Understanding and flexibility with the complicated schedules of shared parenting.

Conversely, parishes are unhelpful when they:

- ◆ Act as if divorced families don't exist.
- ◆ Assume all children of divorced families will have serious problems (not all do).
- ◆ Only preach about happy, intact families.

- ◆ Never pray for the divorced.
- ◆ Follow inflexible one-size-fits-all schedules and programs.

Parenting after divorce is difficult but not impossible. Caring parents and parishes can be channels of God's grace that help children navigate the stormy waters of divorce and emerge with faith, hope and resilience for the future.

William H. Boomer, M.A. is the director of the Department for Marriage & Family Ministry, Diocese of Cleveland, Catholic Charities

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The Department for Marriage and Family Ministry's mission is to respond to the needs of families through development of pastoral programs that are administered through parishes and community leaders that focus on the teachings of the Catholic Church on marriage and family issues. In regards to the Separated and Divorced Ministry, the office has developed a collaborative ministry throughout the Diocese of Cleveland for parish districts to share resources and outreach to divorced Catholics. This would include educational programs, retreats, support groups, single parenting groups as well as provide referrals to counselors and other community resources. There are also brochures and materials published by the office to help families. For additional information, please contact Carol Petro, LSW, Marriage and Family Specialist for the Separated, Divorced and Remarriage Ministry at 216-334-2975 or e-mail at clpetro@clevelandcatholiccharities.org.

Leap of FAITH

By Mrs. Patricia Daw

The experience of divorce for families leaves its mark of pain, sorrow, and division. Twenty-one years ago, I experienced the pain of a marriage ending, the sorrow of a dream not realized, and the division of two families. As I reflect on the past, I know my friends were the one who daily gave me encouragement and love. They were the ones who did not judge or condemn. They were the ones who opened their homes and their hearts to my wounded heart and soul.

I am the mother of six children, five of whom, at the time were either adolescent or preadolescent. The days

that followed were so hard for them. (Talk about pain, confusion, and anger!) Again, it was the friends who rallied round, who provided support. It was the coaches, teachers, and neighbors who helped me parent. It was their grandfather, aunts, and uncles who filled in when needed.

All these years later, after family counseling, an inordinate amount of patience, and many prayers, these six children are all healthy, productive adults with mature relationships and happy marriages.

As I begin my fifth year working as an auditor in the Tribunal Office, I know

that my experiences have enabled me to be an empathetic ear to so many as they make the decision to seek a declaration of invalidity. The common thread between their stories and mine enables me to understand their pain, sorrow, and anger. I understand the need for nonjudgmental support.

I am proud to work with a staff who sees their work as ministry to those who have suffered the pain of divorce. Patricia Daw, Auditor for the Tribunal can be reached at the Tribunal Office at 216-696-6525 x3830.

Separated/Divorce Ministry Programs and Resources:

Hope Support Group/Lorain County
St. Joseph Church, Amherst, OH

Hope Workshop dates are:

Mondays, **February 4, 2008—March 3, 2008**

from 7:00-9:00 p.m. in the St. Joseph School Library.

Contact Maria Maldonado – 440-988-2848 ext. 205

Lake/Geauga County

www.divorced-separated.net

Support Group 7-9 p.m.

Sept. 27-Nov. 15, 2007

St. Anselm Church, Chesterland

Pre-registration Catholic Charities at

Geauga County: 440-285-3537, 1-800-242-9755

Lake County: 440-352-6191

Workshops:

November 20, 2007

Dealing with the Holidays

St. John Vianney, Mentor

Summit County

Retreat for the Divorced

Sacred Spaces

Nativity of the Lord Jesus

November 4-December 16, 2007, 6:30-9 pm

Cuyahoga County:

St. Monica Church

Garfield Heights, OH

Separated & Divorced Ministry Spiritual Support Group

Meeting on 4th Thursday of every month

Call 216-662-8685

Single Parent Groups:

SPARK

St. Basil the Great, Brecksville, OH

440-526-1686

SPARK, Summit County

Holy Family, Stow

Meetings are held on the 1st Wed. of the month

9/5/07, 10/03/07, 11/07/07

Contact: Fred Miletti at 330-923-1695

For other groups, please go to website:

www.clevelandcatholiccharities.org/mfm - click on **Divorce Ministry** for support groups that are posted online.

For referrals to counselors in your area, please contact the Department for Marriage and Family Ministry at 216-334-2975.

Recommended Readings:

The Truth About Children and Divorce: Dealing with Your Emotions So You and Your Children Can Thrive

by Robert E. Emery, Ph.D.

What About the Kids? Raising Your children Before, During and After Divorce

by Judith S. Wallerstein

Website that can be helpful: <http://nacsdc.org>

Available from the Marriage and Family Office:

A Candle of Hope is Burning:

Advent Reflections for the Divorced

Call Terese Hardman at 216-334-2978 or

thardman@clevelandcatholiccharities.org