



Made For Life

A CATECHETICAL AND EDUCATIONAL AID ON
THE GIFT OF CHILDREN AND THE INDISPENSABLE PLACE
OF FATHERS AND MOTHERS IN MARRIAGE AND SOCIETY



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Unique for a Reason

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Viewer's Guide



MARRIAGE

Unique for a Reason



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

MARRIAGE: UNIQUE FOR A REASON

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Msgr. David J. Malloy, STD
General Secretary, USCCB

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This material is intended as a catechetical and educational aid to be used as a resource by a priest, deacon, catechist, or teacher. The video, viewer's guide, and resource booklet form an integrated whole, and as such, complete the proper context of this tool.



Introduction

Fecundity is a gift, an end of marriage, for conjugal love naturally tends to be fruitful. A child does not come from outside as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but springs from the very heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfillment.

– (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2366)¹

The vocation of marriage is a unique call to an *adventure of love and life*, where love is life-giving in a matchless way. Marriage, in its inmost essence as the union of husband and wife, is open to the child. The love between husband and wife – what we call authentic spousal love – is never self-enclosed but remains open to life.² Married love is different than any other kind of love or bond between two persons. In an utterly unique way, the bond between a man and a woman as husband and wife is *made for life*, made for fruitful love, especially for the possibility of receiving the gift of life and becoming stewards of it.

What does this mean? In simple terms, it means that the core meaning of marriage cannot be separated from a consideration of the child and the roles of a mother and a father. Marriage is the fundamental and irreplace-

able pro-child social institution. Just as sexual difference is essential to marriage, so too are the good of the child and the place of motherhood and fatherhood. To leave these out of the equation is to misunderstand the heart and adventure of what marriage is all about.

Openness to children, then, has a major impact on how we view proposals to “redefine” the meaning of marriage. Let’s explain. “Redefining” marriage to include two persons of the same sex in effect proposes to deconstruct and ultimately empty marriage of its most basic elements – man and woman, father and mother, and the child. All these would become simply arbitrary or extrinsic to marriage’s meaning. But the question remains: Is marriage simply about the desire and consent of any two adults or any two people?

This Viewer’s Guide accompanies the video *Made for Life*, the second video in the *Marriage: Unique for a Reason* series. The first video, *Made for Each Other*, examined the meaning of sexual difference and complementarity between men and women and explained why male-female sexual difference is essential to marriage. The second video, *Made for Life*, explores another essential aspect of marriage: openness to the gift of a child, as well as the indispensable place of motherhood and fatherhood. Sexual difference between husband and wife is again crucial here. Men and women – fathers and mothers – matter not only for the beginning of a child’s life, but also for his or her fullest development. In *Made for Life*, married couples discuss the gift of children and the importance of fathers and mothers, and thus give further witness to why marriage is unique for a reason.

In this guide, we proclaim the beauty of marriage as fundamentally *pro-child*, protecting the gift of the child and preserving the vital roles of mothers and fathers. This proclamation, in turn, contributes a vital piece to the local and national discussions about the meaning of marriage. The numbered headings in bold below correspond to particular statements from the married couples in the video. These quotes illuminate three important themes in the video: (1) children are a gift, (2) fathers and mothers matter, and (3) sexual difference matters. The questions provided can be used for personal reflection or for group discussion.

For more information and further resources, including access to other videos in the series, go to www.marriageuniqueforareason.org.

**"Male and female he created them.
God blessed them, saying: 'Be fertile and multiply.'" (Gn 1:27-28)**

[00:15]

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The video begins with an image of little seedlings growing in a healthy bed of soil. These seedlings rely not only on the rich soil and its nutrients, but also on a proper amount of sunlight and water. The seedlings can be seen as an analogy for children. Just as plants need the proper elements not only to begin to grow but also to flourish, children need the proper elements as well. It takes a man and a woman, with God's help, to bring a child into existence.³ It makes sense that if sexual difference is essential for the beginning of life, it is also vital for the caring of that life. Moms and dads matter for the duration of a child's life. Marriage is the institution meant to ensure that a child is welcomed as a gift to be nurtured and raised by the uniquely different love that only a mother and a father can give. Just as a seedling needs the presence of soil, sunlight, and water to grow and flourish, so too a child needs the natural foundation of life and love uniquely provided in the loving marriage of a man and a woman open to the gift of a child.

Discussion questions:

a. In the Genesis passage cited above, God blesses man and woman at their creation and calls them (even commands them) to fruitfulness. What is one reason from the video that this blessing and call to fruitfulness is unique to a man and a woman?

b. Before moving on, discuss the following question: What are two or three reasons you can think of that a child needs a mother and a father?

Children Are a Gift

1. "Being open to children is so foundational.
When you're open to children, you're not just
opening yourself to the possibility of the gift of life,
but you're [also] opening yourself up to your spouse."

[00:23]

Key topics: OPENNESS TO LIFE; LOVE AND LIFE ARE INSEPARABLE

Marriage is made for life. It is a singular institution that brings a man and a woman together as husband and wife, who vow themselves into a union directed not only toward themselves but simultaneously to the gift of new life. As Katie relates, this openness to life is part and parcel of married love, and it is deeply *personal*, that is, it accords with the nature of the human person. Openness to life also accords with the nature of love itself. As the bishops of the United States taught in their pastoral letter on marriage, "It is the nature of love to overflow, to be life-giving."⁴

Marriage is the natural human context wherein a child is properly conceived and welcomed into life as the "supreme gift of marriage."⁵ And in this stance of openness and welcoming, meant to mark every aspect of married love, a husband and a wife grow closer to each other. They share themselves fully with each other, inviting deeper trust and the freedom that comes from each spouse making a gift of himself or herself to the other. Being open to one's spouse and being open to children is one and the same choice and act. As Pope John Paul II taught, "Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother."⁶

In other words, in marriage, *love and life are inseparable*. This is what the Church means when she teaches that the unitive and procreative meanings of married love are insepara-

ble.⁷ In embracing each other, husband and wife embrace their capacity to conceive a child and are called to do nothing deliberate to close part of themselves to the gift of the other. This does not mean that a child will be—or should be—conceived from every act of sexual intimacy. Marriage is not a mechanical factory for the mass production of children. The Church teaches couples in their openness to life to practice responsible parenthood by discerning whether or not they have serious reasons, in keeping with God’s plan for marriage, to postpone becoming a father and a mother here and now.⁸

The inseparable connection of love and life means that husband and wife are called to give everything to each other in their acts of intimacy—including their capacity for fruitfulness. Otherwise, their gift of self would not be total. Being open to each other, open to receiving the gift of the other, and *therefore* being open to life, is not something optional for marriage. Instead, it is at the core of marriage, and only a man and a woman can make the radical promise that marriage entails: “A man and woman united in marriage as husband and wife serve as a symbol of both life and love in a way that no other relationship of human persons can.”⁹ This is why marriage can only be between a man and a woman. Persons of the same sex lack the sexual difference that is the necessary foundation for a husband and wife’s ability to live both “gifts”—the total gift of self exchanged between them in marriage, which includes their openness to the gift of a child.¹⁰

Discussion questions:

- a. *What factors do you think make it difficult today for people to understand that authentic married love involves openness to life?*
- b. *What does it mean to say that “being open to children” at the same time “opens yourself up to your spouse”? How does this help shed light on the inseparability of the unitive and procreative meanings of married love?*
- c. *How are openness to life and sexual difference related? Why is this important for understanding the meaning of marriage?*

2. “You give yourself, then, totally and completely . . . saying ‘I love you so much, I’m going to give myself to you as a gift, and I am open to whatever that brings and whatever God wants.’”

[00:36]

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Key topics: THE UNIQUE GIFT OF SELF IN MARRIAGE; GIFT OF SELF OPENS TO THE GIFT OF LIFE

Katie is speaking here about the very foundation of what makes marriage “made for life”: the total gift of self between a man and a woman as husband and wife. We have already mentioned this gift of self in marriage, but it deserves some more attention. Indeed, every person is called to a generous and sincere gift of self.¹¹ But marriage is a unique instance of self-gift. In marriage, husband and wife give not just part of themselves to each other, but give *all*—their whole person, body and soul. This gift of self in marriage is not something temporary like a loan; it is meant to last for a lifetime.¹² It is a total, lifelong gift of husband to wife and wife to husband.¹³

A husband and a wife’s total gift of self in marriage, with its lifelong permanence, makes their bond absolutely unique and different from any other relationship between two people. Although two persons of the same sex can have an authentic and holy friendship, only a man and a woman can pledge themselves to each other in marriage. Through their sexual difference, only a husband and a wife can speak the “language” of married love—total, faithful, and fruitful self-gift¹⁴—not only with their words, but also *with their bodies*.¹⁵

The couples in *Made for Life* all bear witness to the fact that the gift of self in marriage, which begins with the spouses, does not end with them. As Pope Paul VI taught, married love is *fruitful* because “it is not confined wholly to the communion of husband and wife; it also aims to go beyond this to bring new life into being.”¹⁶ Precisely because husband and wife are “made for each other,” their bond is “made for life,” made for fruitful love and for the adventure of fatherhood and motherhood by being open to the gift of a child.

Discussion questions:

- a. What makes marriage a unique kind of self-gift? How is sexual difference important and, in fact, necessary for this kind of self-gift?*
- b. Is the idea of marriage as a total gift of self appreciated today? Why or why not?*
- c. What does it mean to say that there is an essential link between the gift of self in marriage and openness to life?*

3. "Children are a gift and a blessing."

[01:13]

Key topics: CHILDREN AS SUPREME GIFT;
MARRIAGE AS RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP OF THAT GIFT;
PROCREATION AS PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S CREATIVE ACTION

While marriage includes many blessings, the gift of a child is incomparable. Children indeed are the "supreme gift" of marriage.¹⁷ This is witnessed to both by spouses who rejoice at the birth of a son or a daughter, as Tyrone's words above demonstrate, and by those couples who bear the sadness and pain of infertility or miscarriage. Every child is a gift because every child is a unique, irreplaceable human life. The human person "is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake."¹⁸ In conceiving and giving birth to a child, husband and wife have the awesome responsibility of welcoming a new human life into the world: in fact, a person for whom the world was created, a person for whom God became man, a person called to live with God for all eternity.¹⁹

Because every child is an unrepeatable gift, no one can claim a "right" to have a child. "A child is not something *owed* to one, but is a *gift*. The 'supreme gift of marriage' is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged 'right to a child' may lead."²⁰ The proper attitude of parents toward a child is *joyful receptivity* and awe that the Creator would entrust this new life to a mother and father.²¹

Because the child is always a gift, it would make sense that any consideration of marriage's meaning would take children seriously into account. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Children today are often seen as a "product" to be manufactured or obtained at whatever cost, or discarded at will.²² Pop culture icons show off their children as if they were "trophies." In all of these instances, the child is *used* as an object, not respected as a gift. The proposal to redefine marriage to include two persons of the same sex is a radical instance of "forgetting" the gift of the child. This proposal in effect subverts the most fun-

damental pro-child institution into a self-serving relationship defined in reference to the whims and desires of adults, not the needs of a child, the most vulnerable among us.

Marriage protects the gift that every child is. As the union of husband and wife, marriage is the natural and proper context wherein every child ought to be welcomed as a gift. Children deserve to be conceived in love and received into an environment grounded in the unity between a mother and a father. In this way, marriage is uniquely made for stewardship over life, stewardship of the gift of children. Human experience across every human society attests to the singular role of marriage in keeping together a mother and a father in their shared task of parenting, of being stewards of the gift of new life.²³

The truth that every child is a gift also reminds us that husband and wife are not the ultimate source of life. Instead, every child traces his or her origin directly back to God and can truly call him “my Father.” In the video, Cora and Ernie share the meaning of their son Matthew’s name, “gift of God”; truly every child is a gift of God. “*God ‘willed’ man from the very beginning, and God ‘wills’ him in every act of conception and every human birth.*”²⁴ Every human soul is “created immediately by God—it is not ‘produced’ by the parents.”²⁵ In conceiving and giving birth to new life, a husband and a wife *participate* in God’s creative action.²⁶

This capacity to participate in bringing forth new human life—the capacity to *procreate*—is inscribed within the personal, bodily reality of the human person, created male and female. Only a man and a woman, as husband and wife, have the capacity to welcome the gift of the child as a unique human life who springs “from the very heart” of their marital self-giving.²⁷ As the bishops have explained, “Participating in the creative work of God means participating in the self-emptying or self-giving love of God, the rendering of one’s whole being into a gift.”²⁸

Discussion questions:

- a. What does it mean to say that a child is always a gift, and indeed the “supreme gift” of marriage?*
- b. What are ways in which our society treats children as “products” rather than gifts? What can we do to help recover public awareness that every child deserves to be treated as a gift?*
- c. How does the proposal to redefine marriage to include two persons of the same sex neglect both a proper recognition of the gift of a child and the stewardship entailed by that gift?*

**4. "Since having children, it's been the best reflection
of God's love that I could ever define or try to describe. /
The idea that we were adding on to our family brought great joy."**

[01:44]

Key topics: THE CALL TO WELCOME A CHILD; THE CALL TO BE A CHILD;
HOPE AND JOY FOR THE WORLD

To welcome a child is to welcome hope. Lashawntra and Kevin both attest to the love, joy, and hope experienced when a husband and wife welcome a child. The child stands as a sign at odds with the doomsdayers, those who turn life into constant worry and fretfulness, and counter to the overly self-assured, those who presume upon their own capacities without trusting and hoping in God. The child points to the higher way of hope, beyond despair and presumption, because the child reminds us, by his or her very existence, that life and love are stronger than death,²⁹ and that life is worth living.

How does this relate to marriage? Recall the scene in the video where the wife joyfully announces to her husband that a new little baby is on the way. Marriage, as the union of husband and wife, is the only relationship that, by its very nature, is made to welcome the hope that comes with each new human life, and to connect a child with his or her biological father and mother. The call—the vocation—to welcome a child is uniquely built within the essence of marriage. Husbands and wives who stand ready to welcome children are a decisive witness to joyful hope, despite whatever hardships and sufferings come in this life.

Jesus regularly pointed to the child.³⁰ He knew that the child reveals to us our deepest identity and calling. This may seem ironic, since a little child is helpless, defenseless, and “non-productive” by worldly standards. Even the disciples had a difficult time understanding this at first. The great temptation over the centuries has been to overlook and dismiss the child. And yet remember Jesus’ words: “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like

this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:3-4). All the successes and riches of the world don’t add up to the gift of being a child of God, the fundamental calling that unlocks the meaning of life. We are all called to become children of God (see 1 Jn 3:1), sons and daughters in Jesus, the Son of God (see Gal 4:4-7).

In the presence of an infant, we are reminded that we do not create ourselves, but are given by God, through the help of both our mother and father. The child unlocks for us the beauty of life as a sheer, undeserved, abundant *gift* from our heavenly Father. Life is meant to be lived in hope and in joy. Marriage, as the total, faithful, and life-giving union of a man and a woman, has the distinctive mission to share this hope and joy with the world.

Discussion questions:

- a. Why do you think Jesus places so much importance on becoming like children?*
- b. Why is the birth of a new child a sign of hope?*
- c. How is marriage, through the generous welcoming of a child, meant to show that love, and not fear, is at the basis of our existence?*

5. "We were open to life, whether through . . .
giving birth or through the adoption process."

[02:00]

Key topics: INFERTILE COUPLES; COURAGEOUS WITNESS OF ADOPTION;
OPENNESS TO LIFE ESSENTIAL FOR ALL MARRIAGES

As Kevin and Brenda witness in the video, openness to life has a meaning more profound than popularly recognized today. In the midst of recent attempts to “redefine” marriage, the objection is sometimes raised that there are many husbands and wives who are unable to have children. What makes them different from a relationship between two persons of the same sex, who also can’t have children of their own?

The truth is, there is an unbridgeable difference between a spousal union (a male-female couple united as husband and wife) and a relationship between two men or two women. This difference is sexual difference. First, conceiving a child requires the joint action of both a man and a woman. This intimate participation in conceiving a child is simply impossible for two persons of the same sex. Two men or two women cannot—ever—have a child *together*.³¹

Second, sexual union between a husband and wife is the kind of union *apt for generation*. That is, male-female intimacy is the natural route through which a child comes into the world. There are times when a husband and wife may be unable to conceive a child due to infertility or sterility (for reasons beyond their control) or advanced age. Still, their sexual union remains the *kind of union* that expresses total self-gift and openness to the gift of the child.³² The situation is very different for two persons of the same sex. Even if both are young and perfectly healthy, any sexual behavior between them can never form a true union and will never be able to welcome a new child into the world.

The painful cross of infertility does not mean that a couple’s marriage is not fruitful. As Pope John Paul II taught, “Physical sterility . . . can be for spouses the occasion for other

important services to the life of the human person, for example, adoption, various forms of educational work, and assistance to other families and to poor or handicapped children.”³³ In particular, the Church praises adoption as an expression of “true parental love,” which “is ready to go beyond the bonds of flesh and blood in order to accept children from other families.”³⁴

Adoption, as a response to a tragedy or loss, is never meant to be held up as an “alternative” to the natural family of father, mother, and their children. Instead, adoption “takes its form” from the natural family. There is a difference between generously responding to an abandoned child’s need for a mother and a father, on the one hand, and deliberately depriving a child of a mother and a father by placing him or her in the care of two men or two women.

In sum, openness to life is essential to every marriage. Husbands and wives who are not blessed with children of their own still exemplify the fruitful communion of persons in a way two persons of the same sex never can. This communion, built on the sexual difference between husband and wife, opens the door to adoption and to other generous forms of service while still respecting the beauty of sexual difference, the needs of children, and the indispensable place of mothers and fathers.

Discussion questions:

- a. How would you explain to someone the difference between a husband and a wife who can't have children, and two men or two women?*
- b. What does it mean that sexual union between a man and a woman is the kind of union “apt for generation”?*
- c. Can you think of any married couples who have witnessed to life, without having any children of their own? How so?*

Fathers and Mothers Matter

6. "I believe a mother and father are the building blocks of the family."

[02:33]

Key topics: MOMS AND DADS MATTER; NATURAL FAMILY BASED ON MARRIAGE;
SOCIETY JUSTLY PROMOTES THE NATURAL FAMILY

Steve affirms a basic fact of human existence. Moms and dads are crucially important. *They matter*. Common sense gets this, and the social sciences demonstrate it as well. But there are some today who claim that moms and dads really *don't* matter. The proposal to "redefine" marriage to include persons of the same sex essentially "redefines out" of marriage the mother-father unit, making it irrelevant. This should raise more than an eyebrow.

As the union of husband and wife, a union open from its "very heart" to children,³⁵ marriage has long been recognized as the "foundation of the family."³⁶ The family, in turn, is the "primary cell of human society."³⁷ In saying "yes" to a child, spouses say "yes" to the great ongoing adventure of human civilization. As Pope John Paul II has expressed, with the birth of children, "the 'communion' of the spouses gives rise to the 'community' of the family."³⁸

Marriage is therefore a *pro-child* institution, as mentioned above. It is not just about the satisfaction of adult desires. Marriage is not something private—it's a public institution just as much as it is a personal relationship between husband and wife. The love between husband and wife naturally opens to the child, the family, and the greater society. This openness to life, to the family, and to society is simply not possible for persons of the same sex, who cannot form a spousal union open to the gift of life.³⁹ For this reason, society has, and has always had, a legitimate interest and just obligation toward protecting and promoting the natural family, based on marriage between a man and a woman. The family is the place where the youngest and most vulnerable members of our society are born and

raised. As the “sanctuary of life,” the family deserves to be valued and aided by society.⁴⁰ In fact, a grave injustice is committed when society ignores the meaning and essential place of marriage and the family. Society’s well-being and very existence are bound up with marriage and the family.

Discussion questions:

- a. Does our society treat the family founded on marriage as its “primary cell”? Why or why not?*
- b. What are the rational reasons that a society can give for privileging the natural family based on marriage between a man and a woman?*

7. **"I want [my daughter] to feel secure in her home life, with me as a mom. But I also want her to know that it is so important for her to marry a wonderful Christian man who can guide her family, her future family, and be a wonderful father."**

[03:14]

Key topics: HEROIC WITNESS OF SINGLE PARENTS; CHURCH'S PASTORAL CONCERN; DIFFERENT FROM DELIBERATELY DEPRIVING A CHILD OF A MOM AND A DAD

Emphasizing the deep need every child has to be raised by a father and a mother does not mean that the Church looks down on single parents. Many, many people in our society have experienced the absence of a father or a mother, or the loss of a spouse due to abandonment, separation, or death. The Church reaches out to single parents and their families with pastoral care and acknowledges the heroic efforts they make in providing a stable, loving home for their children.

But it is important to remember that the situation of children being raised by a single parent (due to circumstances as mentioned above) is very different from deliberately depriving a child of a mom and a dad, which unfortunately occurs when children are raised by two men or two women. As touchingly expressed by Elizabeth, single parents *recognize the absence* of a father—or a mother—in the lives of their children. Like Elizabeth, many single parents sincerely hope that their children's future families will have the stable foundation of a husband and wife, a father and a mother. In other words, single parents can honor the importance of sexual difference by acknowledging the unique difficulties their families face without a father or mother. When the needs of children are considered, single parenthood is never held up as an ideal.

On the other hand, persons of the same sex who raise a child are unable to witness to the importance and beauty of sexual difference. Two men or two women who claim to replace a mother and a father sadly neglect and reject the vital role that gender plays in the full development of a child, especially the child's sexual identity as a boy or a girl, and later

as a man or a woman. Homes headed by two men or two women are not a valid “alternative” to families headed by a father and a mother. Two men and two women do not substitute for a mother and a father.

Discussion questions:

- a. How would you explain to someone the difference between a single parent and two men or two women who are raising a child?*
- b. What does it mean that single parents can still “honor” the importance of sexual difference in the lives of their children?*
- c. How can the Church and society best support single parents, while holding up the natural family as the ideal?*

8. “Children need a mother and a father for the balance in their lives . . . and the mirror-image. / All the development that needs to happen from an emotional, mental, physical component . . . only a mother and father can give.”

[04:55]

.....

Key topics: NEED FOR A FATHER AND MOTHER; RIGHT TO A MOTHER AND A FATHER;
UNFAIR TO DELIBERATELY DEPRIVE

The most curious fact about fathers and mothers is that *every child has them*. In other words, it takes a man and a woman—a father and a mother—to bring a new human being into the world. Two men or two women simply cannot do this. So if sexual difference is important—necessary, in fact—for conceiving a child, then it makes sense that sexual difference would also be important for raising a child. In other words, the importance of sexual difference does not end with the conception or birth of a child. Instead, fathers and mothers matter for the full development and flourishing of their children, as Lashawntra observes. Kevin and Brenda also make a significant point. A mother and a father bring balance and ensure that children always have before them someone *similar to* and *different from* themselves. The mother-father unit is the vital context for personal formation. Children need and deserve a mother and a father.

The fact that every child *has* and *needs* a father and a mother is what justifies the assertion that every child has a *right* to be raised by his or her father and mother. In fact, the Church’s social teaching emphasizes that a child’s “first right” is to “be born in a real family,” that is, a family consisting of his or her own father and mother, bonded in marriage.⁴¹ Protecting this right is a basic matter of social justice. As Pope Benedict XVI has taught, “Children from their conception have the right to be able to count on their father and mother to take care of them and to accompany their growth.”⁴²

Fairness, justice, and equality are principles greatly touted but much misused in the marriage debate today.⁴³ One striking example is the “dismissal” of the child. *What’s fair to the child?* This is a question largely missing from the picture, but it should be its centerpiece,

along with what's fair and just to husbands and wives and fathers and mothers. As the bishops have taught, "To promote and protect marriage as the union of one man and one woman is itself a matter of justice. In fact, it would be a grave injustice if the state ignored the unique and proper place of husbands and wives, the place of mothers and fathers, and especially the rights of children, who deserve from society clear guidance as they grow to sexual maturity."⁴⁴ It is a severe injustice to deliberately deprive a child of his or her mother and/or father. Of course, there are sad instances when children are separated from their biological parents: instances of abuse, neglect, or a parent's incapacity to properly care for his or her child. But these examples are exceptions that should make us wince rather than cause us to abandon the norm and ideal: children being nurtured and cared for by the same man and woman who brought them into the world.

It is sometimes claimed that what *really* matters for a child is the presence of *any* two loving, committed adults, regardless of their gender. But there are major problems with this assertion. First, two men or two women are physically incapable of having a child *together*, that is, of becoming father and mother *through each other*. Instead, two people of the same sex must either attempt to adopt a child or contract with a "third party" egg or sperm donor who contributes one-half of the child's genetic material.⁴⁵ This means that placing a child in the care of two men or two women deliberately separates that child from his or her father or mother *in every single case*. Second, such children are denied the benefit of witnessing the relationship between a father and mother. Although the tragedy of the death of a father or mother painfully cuts short the child's experience of the relationship between mother and father, this is completely different from deliberately closing the child off from a mother-father relationship.

The push to legally "redefine" marriage inevitably results in redefining the concept of "parent" from "father and mother" to "any two—or more—adults that care for this child." Children, the youngest and most vulnerable members of our society, are the ones who will suffer most from this disregard for the true meaning of marriage. Children deserve better.

Discussion questions:

- a. Why does every child have a right to a father and a mother?*
- b. Why are attempts to redefine marriage to include two persons of the same sex unjust to children?*

9. "We each have our individual roles. . . / It's not that I don't play with them, but [my husband] plays in a way that I don't. He'll play football with them and tackle them hard, and I'll play football with them and tickle them."

[05:49]

.....

Key topics: MOTHERS AND FATHERS BRING UNIQUE GIFTS; THE DIFFERENCE CONSISTS NOT OF STATIC "ROLES" BUT IN THE WAY A FUNCTION OR ROLE IS CARRIED OUT

Both Jeff and Katie are referring to a simple fact: mothers and fathers are *not* interchangeable. They each bring distinct and unique gifts to the common task of parenting, gifts that help their son or daughter develop into a mature man or woman.

For example, mothers share a unique relationship with their children because only a mother carries the child within her womb. As Pope John Paul II taught, "Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb."⁴⁶ The mother's task of carrying a child in her womb is a privileged expression of her gift of self and shapes her personality to be uniquely attentive to all human life.⁴⁷ In general, mothers have special gifts of communicating with their children and responding to their needs, even those expressed nonverbally. A mother models to her daughter how to carry herself as a woman and shows her son how to treat a woman with respect and dignity.

Every child needs and deserves a father. As the Second Vatican Council taught, "The active presence of the father is very important for [the] training [of the children]."⁴⁸ In general, fathers provide a firm, stabilizing presence that influences their children's choices. For example, boys raised by their own fathers are much less likely to act out on sexual and aggressive drives, while girls raised by their fathers are able to have their femininity affirmed in a nonsexualized way. Studies have shown that boys in fatherless families are more likely to be imprisoned, and girls raised apart from their fathers are more likely to become unwed mothers.⁴⁹

Beyond the distinctive talents and gifts of fathers and mothers, there remains a core difference between them. Only a woman can *mother*; only a man can *father*. Mothers teach femininity in a distinctive and vital way; fathers teach masculinity in a distinctive and vital way. This is not stereotyping. It is acknowledging and celebrating the unique gifts of women and men.

It is crucial to emphasize here that the differences between fathers and mothers are not mere rigid “functions” that each perform, as if “only the father disciplines” and “only the mother nurtures.” Instead, *both* father and mother participate in *all* the tasks of raising children: disciplining, nurturing, teaching, playing, and so on. But they do so *as a man and as a woman*, that is, in irreducibly different ways. The way a mother nurtures her children is different from the way a father nurtures them, and so on. This can be as obvious as the mother’s capacity to breast-feed her children, or it can be more subtle, as expressed by Katie’s quote: both she and her husband play with their sons, but while he tackles, she tickles. *Mothers and fathers are not interchangeable.*

Discussion questions:

- a. What are some ways that your father or your mother contributed in a unique way to your upbringing? If you experienced a broken family environment, how did that affect you?*
- b. What are particular gifts that fathers and mothers bring to their children? Recall the scene in the video that portrays the unique way the father and mother work together to address the behavior of their son, frustrated after losing a soccer game. What gifts are conveyed here?*
- c. Why is the difference between mothers and fathers more than a matter of “rigid functions” that each of them has in the family? How is this important in relation to the promotion and protection of the unique meaning of marriage?*

10. "Studies show so clearly that children raised by a mother and a father do better in school, they're less likely to get involved in drugs or gangs, they thrive in many other areas of life. The state is in the business of supporting that which makes society stronger . . . the family unit."

[06:13]

Key topics: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES; THE ROLE OF THE STATE;
THE IMMEASURABLE IMPACT OF A FATHER AND A MOTHER

The social sciences have done much good in affirming the radical importance of mothers, fathers, and healthy marriages. Multiple studies affirm the benefits for children of being raised by their own father and mother, and they come to the same commonsense conclusion that has been shared by humanity for ages. *Family structure greatly affects children's formation and well-being.* Children are consistently found to grow up happier and healthier in a loving family with their own mother and father.⁵⁰ For example, children raised by their own married mother and father are less likely to experience child abuse, poverty, lack of education, depression, unwed childbearing, and so on.⁵¹ As Pete said so clearly, the state should support families founded on marriage, because the state "is in the business of supporting that which makes society stronger." The evidence of various studies affirms and shows the rational basis of the state's duty to protect the true meaning of marriage.

Still, in an era when the words "studies show" carry often unquestioned authority, we must be careful in our use of the social sciences. Although a well-designed study can shed light on an aspect of human nature and civilization, no study can grasp the whole of reality. Furthermore, some studies can be driven by agendas that greatly influence the data collection, interpretation, and conclusions.

For example, we have already discussed the flaws in the claim that what *really* matters for a child is the presence of *any* two loving, committed adults, regardless of their gender (see number 8, above). Still, this is a popular argument today. As if on cue, some recent studies have claimed that children do fine in households headed by two men or two

women, instead of by their own or an adoptive mother and father. The difficulty with such studies might be manifest in various ways, whether from statistical, sociological, philosophical, and/or theological reasons. It is important to be aware that, at times, some studies may only focus on material and functional values without considering human and spiritual values.

Perhaps an analogy might help here. It is telling that, in the 1970s, experts claimed that “no-fault” divorce would not adversely affect children, a claim both lacking evidence and going against common sense and the nature of the human person. However, social science has since demonstrated the drastic effect that broken and fatherless households have had on children since the time “no-fault” divorce was introduced.⁵² Now again, we hear claims that children will be fine or even better if marriage itself is “redefined.” Since the well-being of children is at stake, it is hoped that scientific studies will not jump to premature or unfounded conclusions, as seems to be the case with some recent studies.⁵³

In the end, the impact of a father and a mother is immeasurable. A father and a mother provide more than just material needs, care, and affection. Not even the best of the social sciences can capture the full breadth of what a man and a woman bring to their children as a father and a mother united in marriage.

Discussion questions:

- a. What does the analogy of “no-fault” divorce and its effects on children teach us about claims that children are merely “adaptable” and flourish in any environment?*
- b. What do you think it means to say that the impact of a father and a mother is “immeasurable”?*

Sexual Difference Matters

11. "The necessity of the difference doesn't end at conception;
it carries on through the whole life of the child."

[08:32]

Key topics: SEXUAL DIFFERENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO MARRIAGE;
THE DIFFERENCE IS THE DIFFERENCE

At the end of *Made for Life*, we come back to the very beginning, back to the foundation of it all. *Sexual difference matters*. And because of this, men and women matter for marriage. Fathers and mothers matter for their children. Families founded on marriage matter for the world.⁵⁴ The contemporary proposal of "redefining" marriage to include two persons of the same sex threatens all of this, and strikes at the heart of what it means to be a human person, a man or a woman.

Let's reflect on Pete's profound words: "It's kind of a beautiful miracle, that from our difference comes a brand-new life." Indeed, childbearing, a deeply personal act meant for marriage, requires sexual difference—that male come together with female to bring about a "brand-new life." Men and women matter—they are essential—to the great adventure of having children.

Only by artificially splitting the human experience of conception, birth, and parenting into separate pieces can we make the claim that mothers and fathers matter only to the conception of a child and not to his or her continuing development. Of course, there are instances when a child is raised apart from his or her biological parents. But this never comes without a cost. Even in the best of adoptive situations, children will still tend to wonder, "What is/was my mom or dad like?" Childbearing and child rearing find their vital coordinates in the sexual difference between husband and wife who open themselves to fathering and mothering.

The difference is the difference. Only a man and a woman can embrace the incredible adventure of marriage, the call to give themselves completely to each other, in a way that is open to the gift of a child. As Pope John Paul II taught, “The logic of the *total gift of self to the other* involves a potential openness to procreation: in this way the marriage is called to even greater fulfillment as a family. . . . *The intimate truth of this gift* must always be *safe-guarded*.”⁵⁵ Jesus came “so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (Jn 10:10). The Church, following the way of Jesus, invites all people to rediscover and protect the unique mission and witness of marriage in service of life.

Discussion questions:

- a. How would you put in your own words the main point(s) of Made for Life?
- b. What does sexual difference have to do with marriage and parenting?
- c. How would “redefining” marriage to include two persons of the same sex radically alter a proper understanding of marriage, children, and the human person?



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NOTES

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana-United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2000).

2. See Pope John Paul II, *Letter to Families* (1994), no. 8, www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_02021994_families_en.html: The union of spouses, “rather than closing them up in themselves, opens them towards a new life.” See also Pope John Paul II, *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 1982), no. 14.

3. See CCC, nos. 2367 and 2398; also see *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 28: God calls husband and wife “to a special sharing in His love and in His power as Creator and Father through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the gift of human life.”

4. USCCB, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2009), 13.

5. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996). All subsequent citations of Vatican II documents refer to this edition.

6. *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 14.

7. For more on the Church’s teaching about the inseparability of the unitive and procreative meanings of the sexual act, see CCC, no. 2366; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51; Pope Paul VI, *On the Regulation of Birth (Humanae Vitae)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1968), no. 12; *Letter to Families*, no. 12; *Familiaris Consortio*, nos. 29 and 32; and *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 11-21. Also see Pope John Paul II’s commentary on *Humanae Vitae* in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (TOB), trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), nos. 118:1-132:6 (audience and section numbers), especially nos. 118:2-6.

8. At the heart of “responsible parenthood” is the prayerful discernment by husband and wife whether or not to postpone pregnancy for “just reasons” (See CCC, nos. 2368-2370; see also *Humanae Vitae*, no. 10). The Second Vatican Council taught that responsible parenthood “involves a consideration of [the spouses’] own good and the good of the children already born or yet to come” as well as consideration of the spouses’ “situation on the material and spiritual level, and, finally, an estimation of the good of the family, of society, and of the Church” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50). Responsible parenthood *responds* to the objective moral order established by God and written into the procreative capacity of husband and wife (see CCC, no. 2368). In this way, responsible parenthood preserves “the total meaning of mutual self-giving” and can mean not only postponing a birth, but also increasing one’s family (CCC, no. 2368, quoting *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51). For more about responsible parenthood, see Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2009), no. 44; *Letter to Families*, no. 12; TOB, nos. 121:1-6; and Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana-USCCB, 2004), nos. 232-234.

9. *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 11

10. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that homosexual acts “close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity” (no. 2357).
11. See *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24: “Man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake . . . [and] can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself.”
12. See *Letter to Families*, no. 11: “The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of the gift: *the gift of one person to another person*” (emphasis in original).
13. See *Letter to Families*, no. 11: “When a man and woman in marriage mutually give and receive each other in the unity of ‘one flesh,’ the logic of the sincere gift of self becomes a part of their life.”
14. In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI lists “the characteristic features” of conjugal [married] love as fully human, total, faithful and exclusive until death, and fecund [fruitful] (no. 9). Pope John Paul II expands upon Paul VI’s description of love by reflecting on how a husband and wife “speak” the message of married love through the “language of the body.” He writes, “The human body speaks a ‘language’ of which it is not the author. *Its author is man*, as male and female, as bridegroom or bride: man with his perennial vocation to the communion of persons” (TOB, no. 104:7 [emphasis in original]). This means that the language of love is *given* to men and women, who are then called to “speak” this language truthfully to each other. The body—as male or female—is essential to “speak” the language of love. Pope John Paul II continues, “[The human person] is constituted in such a way from the ‘beginning’ that the deepest words of the spirit – words of love, gift, and faithfulness – call for an appropriate ‘language of the body.’ And without this language, they cannot be fully expressed” (TOB, no. 104:7).
15. As we saw in the first video, *Made for Each Other*, the sexual difference between men and women is not just a flat “biological” reality or an anatomical detail. Instead, it includes the whole person, body and soul, at every level of his or her existence. As Pope John Paul II explained, the body *reveals* the person. Encountering a living human body is encountering a human person—male or female—who is inseparable from his or her body. See TOB, no. 9:4.
16. *Humanae Vitae*, no. 9 (translation modified). See also *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 16: “The transmission of life is a sublime, concrete realization of this radical self-gift between a man and a woman . . . As mutual self-gift, it is at the same time creative self-gift.”
17. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 50.
18. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24.
19. See CCC, no. 2378. See also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), *Dignitas Personae* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2008), no. 5.
20. CCC, no. 2378, quoting CDF, *Donum Vitae* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1987), II, no. 8 (emphasis in original).
21. One of the reasons modern techniques of reproductive technology, such as in vitro fertilization (IVF), are problematic is because they treat the child not as a gift, but as a product. When the coming-to-be of a child is separated from an act of loving sexual union between the child’s parents, the child’s generation becomes a *technique* to be

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mastered, instead of *gift* to be welcomed as an intrinsic part of self-giving love. As our society's use of reproductive technology continues, we see more and more instances of treating children like products: disposal of "defective" embryos; "spare" embryos frozen for years, even decades; "selective reduction" of "excess" implanted embryos; and so on. A proper and coherent respect for the child as a gift rejects all reproductive technology that separates sexual love from the gift of life, since by doing so the child is reduced to a product, a result of advanced technology.

22. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)*, highlighted the larger backdrop behind the disvaluing of human life: "When the sense of God is lost, the sense of man is also threatened and poisoned. . . . Life itself becomes a mere 'thing,' which man claims as his exclusive property, completely subject to his control and manipulation. . . . Birth and death, instead of being primary experiences demanding to be 'lived,' become things to be merely 'possessed' or 'rejected'" (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1995), no. 22. Abortion and euthanasia are tragic examples here.

23. Various thinkers over the centuries have acknowledged the particular role of the institution of marriage for the sake of children. For examples, see references cited in Brief of *Amici Curiae* U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, et al., *Commonwealth of Massachusetts v. United States Department of Health and Human Services* (January 27, 2011), 17f., www.usccb.org/obj/Commonwealth-of-Massachusetts-v-%20US-Department-of-Health-and-Human-Services.pdf (accessed February 1, 2011). See also Don S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003).

24. *Letter to Families*, no. 9 (emphasis in original).

25. CCC, no. 366.

26. See Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 227.

27. CCC, no. 2366.

28. *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 16.

29. See *Letter to Families*, no. 11: Every new birth is a "*paschal sign*," a sign of the new life of Easter, and reflects "the victory of life over death brought about by the Lord's Resurrection."

30. See Mt 18:1-5, 19:13-15; Mk 9:33-37, 10:13-16; and Lk 9:46-48, 18:15-17.

31. Language is powerful and affects our thinking. We must be cautious, therefore, of accepting the culture's description of two men or two women as "parents." "Parenting" is not gender neutral but means "mothering and fathering." Also, two men or two women cannot really be "parents" of the same child.

32. See *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 14: "The marital union of a man and a woman is a distinctive communion of persons. An infertile couple continues to manifest this attribute."

33. *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 14.

34. *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 93.

35. See CCC, no. 2366.

36. *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 8. See also CCC, no. 2202.

37. Pope John XXIII, *Peace on Earth (Pacem in Terris)*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2003), no. 16. See also CCC, no. 2207.

38. *Letter to Families*, no. 7.

39. See CCC, no. 2357.

40. Pope John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum (Centesimus Annus)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1991), no. 39.

41. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 244.

42. Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Participants at the *Woman and Man: The Humanum in its Entirety* Congress (February 9, 2008), www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/february/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080209_donna-uomo_en.html.

43. The topic of marriage in relation to human dignity and the common good will be examined in a subsequent video. The Church reaches out with pastoral care to all persons with homosexual inclinations and acknowledges the great suffering they can experience. She condemns all unjust discrimination against persons who experience same-sex attraction. Unfortunately, in our culture today, marriage has been artificially spun into an “equality” and “rights” issue, which overlooks the unique meaning of marriage. Those who stand for marriage are sometimes labeled as “bigots,” a label as unjust as it is uninformed. The Church has always been at the forefront of social justice concerns, and she continues to stand for the basic human rights of all people. Indeed there are many ways to protect the basic rights of all people, but “redefining” marriage is not one of them and in fact would take away an essential foundation for the protection of all authentic human rights.

44. *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 22. The needs and rights of the child should be of fundamental concern for every society and community, as is acknowledged in “the principle, recognized also in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, that the best interests of the child, as the weaker and more vulnerable party, are to be the paramount consideration in every case.” CDF, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons* (2003), no. 7, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html.

45. For more information about the Church’s teaching on illicit reproductive technologies, see CCC, nos. 2376-2377; *Dignitas Personae*; *Donum Vitae*; and *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons*, no. 7. For a recent study of the effects of sperm donation on children’s experience of their fathers, see Elizabeth Marquardt, Norval D. Glenn, and Karen Clark, *My Daddy’s Name is Donor* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2010).

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46. Pope John Paul II, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman (Mulieris Dignitatem)* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 1988), no. 18.

47. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 18.

48. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 52.

49. As a poignant example of the impact that a father (or lack thereof) has on a daughter, consider that when girls reside with an *unrelated* male (a stepfather, or mother's boyfriend), they can begin puberty earlier than girls who reside with their biological father. The presumed reason is that exposure to an unrelated male's pheromones (hormones that can stimulate sexual attraction) accelerates a girl's sexual development. For additional explanation and sources, see The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003), 142.

50. For links and references to various studies (some of which are also cited in the note below), see the USCCB's Web site For Your Marriage, "Why Married Parents are Important for Children," foryourmarriage.org/married-parents-are-important-for-children/ (accessed February 1, 2011).

51. Numerous studies can be found that attest to the unique benefit of a healthy mother-father unit for children. For more information and references from different authors and experts in the field (the authors/experts are not necessarily representative of the Church's full teaching on marriage, but they illustrate the breadth of consensus on the importance of mothers and fathers for children), see Kristin Anderson Moore, Susan M. Jekielek, and Carol Emig, *Marriage from a Child's Perspective: How Does Family Structure Affect Children, and What Can We Do about It?* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2002); The Witherspoon Institute, *Marriage and the Public Good: Ten Principles* (Princeton, NJ: Witherspoon Institute, 2008); Elizabeth Marquardt, *The Revolution in Parenthood: The Emerging Global Clash Between Adult Rights and Children's Needs* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2006); Robert P. George and Jean Bethke Elshtain, eds., *The Meaning of Marriage: Family, State, Market, and Morals* (Dallas: Spence Publishing, 2006); W. Bradford Wilcox, et al., *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-Six Conclusions from the Social Sciences* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2005); and Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, *The Case for Marriage* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000).

52. For example, see Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005).

53. A similar caution is voiced in the nonpartisan study directed by E. Marquardt, *The Revolution in Parenthood*, www.americanvalues.org/pdfs/parenthood.pdf (accessed February 1, 2011).

54. See *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 75: "The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family."

55. *Letter to Families*, no. 12 (emphasis in original).

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