



Dr. Phyllis Ladrigan

Dolly Hinckley

A family, in these troubled times, is a difficult thing to define. The traditional nuclear family is rapidly going the way of the persistent American dream. Changing social dynamics, the escalation of the divorce rate and a decline in religious commitment and societal stability have led to a rising number of 'blended' family groupings that bear little resemblance to their stereotypical predecessor of decades past.

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of the father who leaves the new blended family to visit children still living with his first wife. Smith also cited the financial burden of child support, time spent away from the new spouse (or distractions from the new relationship caused by problems with children), the stress of a child's adaptation to two different households and styles of parenting, the moral objection of non-custodial parents to a former spouse's live-in mate, and the emotional distress caused by a child's fervent wish that his parents reunite. "It could be like civil war," commented one member of the symposium's participatory "audience."

Laurel Smith concurred. "Sibling rivalry is difficult enough in the original nuclear family," she added.

The anger of children, biological parents and step-parents often brings the ingredients of this emotional fricassee to the boiling point. "Just because we can create living things doesn't mean we know how to be parents," insisted Jim Terhune. "Stress is energy. Anger is energy. If we are expending most of our energy on anger, it's almost impossible to be creative."

The key that most often breaks the deadlock of stress and frustration, says

Hinckley, is communication. "The secret of staying in love is communication — sitting down and talking it over, devising strategies for the situations before they arise. The idea is for the couple to agree that they will present a united front."

The "rules" for successful step-parenting are hardly spelled out for us on stone tablets, any more than are the guidelines for grandparents who find their relationships with their grandchildren radically altered by the divorces of their grown children. "There are multiple kinds of kinships that seem to be happening," said Dr. Phyllis Ladrigan during the final hour of the symposium. "It's been said that when a child is born, a grandparent is also born. It's also been said that there's no such thing as an ex-grandparent."

Grandparents, according to Ladrigan, are "the emotional guardians of the young. Grandparents give unadulterated love and caring — and it works both ways. They can be valuable mentors for teaching ethnic heritage and family 'history' to children ... Grandparents' roles are unique. They're similar to parents' roles, because (grandparents) can fulfill parents' roles when parents are not around. They're different because grandparents have been parents, but

parents have not been grandparents.

Grandparents, she continued, are "a future template for children. They play the role of nurturer, pal, 'wizard.' They make bread from flour, take fish out of water, and take their teeth out. As Eric Ericsson expressed it, this is 'generativity' in its most basic form."

Ladrigan feels it's important for the children of divorce to have the continuity of maintaining contact with their grandparents after the marital breakup that so often sunders family allegiances. Unfortunately, many battling ex-spouses put their embittered emotional states ahead of the welfare of children and their grandparents, and the petty desire for vengeance destroys the essential grandchild/grandparent bond.

Laurel Smith cites the pitiable plight of grandparents who are forced to visit day care centers and peer at their grandchildren through glass doors, or those who hide behind bushes in their grandchild's schoolyard in order to see what the child looks like. "They feel they're being cut off from their legacy in their old age," she commented during Ladrigan's discussion.

The "grandparents of divorce" do have some legal recourse in most states, Dr. Ladrigan pointed out. "There are laws in 42

states which grant grandparents visitation rights in many cases," she explained. "The states and the courts are beginning to recognize the benefits of grandparents in the nurturing of children ... Grandparents have always been a vital link in our society. They are family historians, safety valves, the repository for tall tales. They provide sanctuary for children in times of stress, a modeling experience and an enhancement of the child's ability to be effective grandparents two generations hence."

For today's separating and blending families, "two generations hence" may appear to be an interminably long time. Still, as Jim Terhune said in response to a participant's question about an especially thorny problem with a "step-grandparent," time is often all we have to give.

"The child is very resilient," he concluded. "The odds are that the child will heal quicker and better than we do."

If William Wordsworth was as visionary as he seemed, then the child may indeed evolve into something more than "father of the man." Our children, whether from nuclear or blended families or some hybrid we can't yet foresee, are our only real legacy for the future.

Baptism controversy continues

"For an infant to be baptized lawfully, it is required: ... that there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion. If such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is, in accordance with the provisions of particular law, to be deferred and the parents advised of the reason for this," (from "The Code of Canon Law," Canon 868).

Based on this section of Canon Law, Father Thomas R. Statt two weeks ago deferred the baptism of Kevin Michael Sce, the two-month-old child of Greece residents James Sce and Michele King.

On two subsequent Sundays, Sce has in turn demonstrated in front of Our Mother of Sorrows Church at Paddy Hill in Greece, where Father Statt is pastor.

Under the circumstances, Father Statt said the decision for deferral was not a personal

one. Rather, it was determined by his responsibility under Canon Law. "Baptism is more than just a ceremony, it's an initiation into a Catholic Christian community," he said.

Sce said he is confused because Father Statt told him he had to be married by "the state" before baptism would be considered. Claiming there are no set rules to guide him, Sce said he decided to plead his case in public.

The deferral was based on what Father Statt sees as clear indications that the parents are not practicing Catholics.

"By their own admission, neither of them is a practicing Catholic," he said. "He (Sce) said he didn't remember when he was last inside a church ... She (King) said she goes to church maybe once a month."

Sce said he feels he's being judged too

harshly. "I've been a Catholic all my life," he said. "I've had children who have been baptized ... I was even an altar boy when I was young ... I think he (Father Statt) is way out of line on this."

The fact that the couple is unmarried and living together was not the sole reason for the deferral, but rather an indication of their lack of intent to practice Catholicism, Father Statt said. Contrary to what other reports have indicated the couple's marital status "is not the issue, plain and simple," he added.

Father Statt said he would consider the following as some indications of serious intent to practice Catholicism: if the couple changed their own attitudes; demonstrated their intent to raise their other children in the faith by sending them to religious education and having them receive the sacraments; and attempted to gain Church annulments for

both of their former marriages. He noted that King has children by her former marriage and that the children have not been baptised.

When he told the couple he was delaying the baptism of their child, Father Statt said he emphasized this was not a refusal and offered his support and assistance to them in resolving the situation.

"I told him (Sce) that in conscience I could not compromise the principles of the Catholic Church nor the sacramental guidelines of the Diocese of Rochester," Father Statt said. He added that the atmosphere last time he spoke to the couple was cordial and that he was surprised by Sce's demonstration the following Sunday.

Sce and King say they plan to marry next year. "We were going to get married in the

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