

DOES THE SHAPE OF FAMILIES

# Shape Faith?

*Challenging  
the Churches to  
Confront the  
Impact of  
Family Change*



A REPORT TO THE NATION FROM FAMILY SCHOLARS

Institute for American Values



# DOES THE SHAPE OF FAMILIES SHAPE FAITH?

---

*Challenging the Churches to Confront  
the Impact of Family Change*

**THE AUTHORS ARE GRATEFUL TO** the scholars who participated in this project and the Lilly Endowment for its generous support of this work. During the course of this project we were deeply saddened to lose two great scholars to cancer, this project's senior advisors—and mentors to many of us—Don Browning and Norval Glenn, who died in 2010 and 2011, respectively. To the extent that this humble offering can honor Don and Norval, we wish to dedicate this report to them. The authors also wish to thank W. Bradford Wilcox for participating in the consultations and guiding our questions and Institute for American Values research associate David Lapp for his careful assistance.

*Design by Alma Phipps & Associates.*

*© 2013 Institute for American Values. No reproduction of the materials contained herein is permitted without written permission of the Institute for American Values.*

*ISBN# 978-1-931764-37-7*

***Institute for American Values***

*1841 Broadway, Suite 211*

*New York, New York 10023*

*Tel: 212.246.3942*

*Fax: 212.541.6665*

*Website: [www.americanvalues.org](http://www.americanvalues.org)*

*E-mail: [info@americanvalues.org](mailto:info@americanvalues.org)*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>About the Authors</i>	7
<i>About the Senior Advisors</i>	7
<i>Commissioned Papers and Resources for the Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith? Project</i>	8
<i>Executive Summary</i>	10
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	14
<b>2. THE NEW SCIENCE ON HOW THE DECLINE OF MARRIAGE IMPACTS THE CHURCHES</b>	
Family Structure and Child Well-Being	15
Parental Divorce and Offspring Religious Involvement	16
Role of Parents	19
Role of Congregations	21
<b>3. THE DEPTHS OF DIVORCE IN THE INNER LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	
The Second Silent Schism	23
Is God Like a Parent?	24
On Being	29
Three in One	30
<b>4. IS DIVORCE NOBODY'S BUSINESS?</b>	
The Divorce Culture	32
Bystanders to Divorce	33

<b>5. WHY TEACHING CONGREGANTS HOW TO HAVE A “GOOD” DIVORCE WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM</b>	
The Idea of the Good Divorce	36
New Findings on Good Divorce and the Marriages of Grown Children of Divorce	38
New Findings on Good Divorce and Religiosity of Grown Children of Divorce	39
<b>6. TODAY IT’S NOT JUST DIVORCE</b>	
Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing and Cohabitation	40
Reproductive Technologies	41
<b>7. GROWN CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AS THE BROKEN LEADING EDGE—AND WHY THE CHURCHES MUST GET THIS RIGHT</b>	43
<i>A Plan for Congregations—A Mainline Protestant Pastor’s Reflections</i>	
<b>BY AMY ZIETLOW</b>	
Introduction—How I Came to This Question	45
1. Story Matters	47
2. Adult Role Models Matter	51
3. Being Genuine Matters	56
4. Holy Space Matters	59
<i>Recommendations for the Churches</i>	63
<i>Study Guide</i>	67
<i>Endnotes</i>	76

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**ELIZABETH MARQUARDT** directs the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values in New York City and is editor of FamilyScholars.org. She has written extensively on the inner lives of young people and is principal investigator of the Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith? project.



**AMY ZIETTLOW** is affiliate scholar at the Institute for American Values, an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and a contributor to the *Huffington Post* and *The Atlantic* online on faith, families, dance, and death and dying.



**CHARLES E. STOKES** is the Roy F. Bergengren Fellow in Thrift and Generosity at the Institute for American Values and a scholar in residence at Samford University. He holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of Texas at Austin.



## *About the Senior Advisors*

**DON BROWNING** was the Alexander Campbell Professor Emeritus of Ethics and the Social Sciences at the University of Chicago Divinity School.



**NORVAL D. GLENN** was the Ashbel Smith Professor and Stiles Professor in American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin.

# COMMISSIONED PAPERS AND RESOURCES FOR THE DOES THE SHAPE OF FAMILIES SHAPE FAITH? PROJECT

Scholars participating in the Lilly Endowment-funded project titled “Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?” met at two consultations in Austin, Texas, and in Chicago that were hosted by the Institute for American Values, the University of Chicago Divinity School, and the University of Texas at Austin. At these consultations scholars presented and discussed their papers, many of which have subsequently been published. The citations for the papers are listed below.

*Further scholarly and practical resources, including links to the papers, a documentary film, study guide, literature review, and podcasts with scholars and practitioners are available at <http://www.centerformarriageandfamilies.org/> .*

**MELINDA LUNDQUIST DENTON**, “Family Structure, Family Disruption, and Profiles of Adolescent Religiosity,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2012): 42–64.

**CHRISTOPHER G. ELLISON, ANTHONY B. WALKER, NORVAL D. GLENN, AND ELIZABETH MARQUARDT**, “The Effects of Parental Marital Discord and Divorce on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults,” *Social Science Research* 40, no. 2 (2011): 538–51.

**M. CHRISTIAN GREEN**, “‘There but for the Grace’: The Ethics of Bystanders to Divorce,” excerpted in *Propositions* 8 (New York: Institute for American Values, 2012): 1–7.

**CHRIS KIESLING**, “An Attachment Theory Approach to Narrating the Faith Journey of Children of Parental Divorce,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 16, no. 4 (2011): 301–13.

**MARY ELLEN KONIECZNY**, “‘All of a Sudden You Don’t Fit’: Clergy and Congregational Responses to Divorce and Marital Conflict,” presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Religious Research Association Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD, October 29, 2010.

**ANNETTE MAHONEY, HEIDI WARNER, AND ELIZABETH KRUMEI**, “Broken Vows and the Next Generation: Recognizing and Helping When Parental Divorce Is a Spiritual Trauma,” *Counseling and Spirituality* 29, no. 2 (2010): 99–126.

**RICHARD R. OSMER**, “The Church ‘Taking Form’ in Mission: Reimagining Family Ministries within the *Missio Dei*,” in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography, ed. Pete Ward (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012).

**ANDREW ROOT**, *Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010).

**JULIE HANLON RUBIO**, “Divorce and the Faith of Children: A Challenge for the Church” (forthcoming, 2013), as a chapter in an edited volume.

**CHARLES E. STOKES**, “Subversive versus Discursive Cognition after Parental Divorce: Evidence from the Religious Lives of Children of Divorce,” unpublished paper.

**JEREMY UECKER AND CHRISTOPHER G. ELLISON**, “Parental Religious Characteristics, Parental Divorce, and the Religious Lives of Young Adults,” unpublished paper.

**SORCHA BROPHY WARREN**, “Narrating Divorce in Protestant America,” unpublished paper.

**ROBIN JOHNSON WARRINGTON AND STEPHANIE BODDIE**, “‘Necessity Is Laid Upon Us’: Marriage and Divorce Among African Americans and the Black Church Response,” unpublished paper.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It's time for people of faith to talk about the impact of divorce on the next generation.

Given that about one million children in the U.S. each year experience the divorce of their parents, there has been strikingly little attention given to how growing up in a divorced family might shape the religious identities and faith journeys of young people.

This lack of understanding has serious implications for the health of the churches. One-quarter of today's young adults are grown children of divorce. How this generation approaches questions of moral and spiritual meaning—and what choices they make for themselves and their families with regard to religious identity and involvement—will undoubtedly influence broader trends in the churches.

*Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?* represents a major effort to examine and understand the religious and spiritual lives of young adults who experienced parental divorce. Sponsored by the Lilly Endowment, and based at the Institute for American Values, the project involved consultations held jointly with the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Chicago Divinity School. In the process, a team of scholars reflected closely upon recent research and initiated fresh inquiries, which resulted in thirteen new papers commissioned for this investigation.

We have learned that when children of divorce reach adulthood, compared to those who grew up in intact families, they feel less religious on the whole and are less likely to be involved in the regular practice of a faith. In one national study, two-thirds of people from married parent families, compared to just over half of children of divorce, say they are very or fairly religious, and more than a third of people from married parent families currently attend religious services almost every week, compared to just a quarter of people from divorced families.<sup>1</sup>

Yet this overall picture can mask important differences. Some individuals from divorced families eventually become much more religious in the wake of their parents' divorce, while others become much less. And as young adults, children of divorce are surprisingly likely to feel that they are more religious now than their parents ever were.<sup>2</sup>

Scholars find that the greatest predictor of the religious lives of youth remains the religious lives of their parents.<sup>3</sup> Parents play a vital role in influencing children's religious lives after divorce, particularly in a culture in which congregational engagement and other forms of civic involvement are no longer as normative as they once were.<sup>4</sup> Recent research shows that divorced fathers are especially influential in whether their children will continue to have a life in the church.<sup>5</sup>

It is also becoming clear that grown children of divorce stand at the leading edge of a generation that considers itself "spiritual but not religious." Yet they form a kind of *broken leading edge*, with spiritual stories quite often characterized by loss or suffering. Having perhaps turned to God for solace and hope, they may think of themselves as spiritual persons, but they report more difficulty practicing a faith within religious institutions.

Some of their discomfort may lie with earlier experiences in congregations. In the same national study mentioned above, of those young adults who regularly attended a church or synagogue at the time of their parents' divorce, two-thirds say that no one—neither from the clergy nor the congregation—reached out to them, while only one-quarter remembers either a clergy member or congregant doing so.<sup>6</sup>

If we dig deeper into the inner lives of children of divorce, we learn even more. Scholars observe that children of divorce experience a disruption of the "domestic church" of their home.<sup>7</sup> If they become alienated from formal religious practice they can experience a *second silent schism* in their lives—the first being the rupture of their parents' marriage, and the second being the rupture of the child's connection to a congregation and even to a life of faith.<sup>8</sup>

A substantial body of scholarship supports the idea that children's early images of God arise at least in part from their lived experience with their own parents, a kind of "spiritualization of attachment."<sup>9</sup> When religious traditions teach that

God is like a father or mother, they reinforce early God images that children might develop.<sup>10</sup> So, scholars ask, what happens to children's concept of a protective father God if they do not know their fathers? How is belief in a loving mother God shaped when a mother goes through a difficult divorce and is unable to be a stable force for her children?<sup>11</sup>

New findings also challenge the idea that teaching congregants how to have a "good divorce"—in which parents stay involved in the child's life and minimize their conflict with one another—offers much panacea. In one study, grown children of what might be called "good divorces" (where divorce ends a low-conflict marriage; approximately two-thirds of divorces)<sup>12</sup> often compared poorly even with those who grew up with unhappily married parents.<sup>13</sup> Another new paper finds striking differences in religious experience when comparing those who reported that they were raised in happy, intact marriages with those who reported that their parents had an amicable or good divorce.<sup>14</sup> The authors found, for example, that those raised in happy, intact marriages were more than twice as likely to attend religious services, compared to those raised in good divorces. And, those raised in happy, intact marriages were more likely to report an absence of negative experiences of God, compared to those raised in good divorces.

Recent analyses also reveal, surprisingly, that compared to those whose parents had a good divorce, women whose parents had a "bad divorce" characterized by high conflict were more likely at the time of the study to report that they themselves were in a good quality, lasting first marriage.<sup>15</sup> It is possible that those whose parents had a high-conflict divorce are able to blame this on one or both of their parents' hopeless relationship skills, while those whose parents had an amicable divorce that nevertheless resulted in turmoil for the child may come to distrust the institution of marriage. If two people can get along well but cannot manage to stay married, how, the grown child's thinking might go, can I trust that I will stay married if I take that leap?

The health and future of congregations depends upon understanding, reaching out to, and nurturing as potential leaders those who have come of age in an era of dramatic social changes in family structure. The suffering felt by children of divorce may actually offer a pathway toward healing and growth, not only for themselves but for the churches.

In addition to highlighting the most recent scholarly work on the subject, this report offers extended reflections from a mainline pastor who has ministered to many youth and families. It closes with recommendations for pastors, youth ministers and youth sponsors, parents, children of divorce (young and grown), church members, and marriage ministries. Many more resources are available at <http://www.centerformarriageandfamilies.org/>. We invite you to visit the webpage, share your thoughts, and join the conversation.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

A serious knowledge gap has existed about how a child's family structure, such as whether a child grows up with married parents or divorced parents, impacts his or her religious formation. This gap has had significant implications for clergy and lay leaders in congregations, as well as scholars who study sociology of religion, theology, ethics, and religious formation.

In the study of children's moral and spiritual development, most of the notable resources were either written before divorce was widespread or continue implicitly to assume that children have an intact, married-parent family structure.<sup>16</sup> Even contemporary authors writing on moral or spiritual issues continue at least implicitly to assume that children have an intact family experience, often focusing instead on other sites of socialization such as schools, peers, or faith communities. Yet, while these sources of influence are certainly important, none are as primary and formative in a child's experience as the family.

This lack of understanding about the moral and spiritual lives of children of divorce has serious implications for children and young people and for the health of the churches. Divorce has been widespread in the U.S. for decades. Although the divorce rate has stabilized, it shows no signs of declining; at the same time, trends in unmarried childbearing are rising. One-quarter of today's young adults are grown children of divorce. How this generation of young people and the next approach questions of moral and spiritual meaning—and what choices they make for themselves and their families involving religious identity and involvement—will strongly influence broader trends in religious formation and the future of the churches.

## 2. THE NEW SCIENCE ON HOW THE DECLINE OF MARRIAGE IMPACTS THE CHURCHES

### *Family Structure and Child Well-Being*

Given that about one million children in the U.S. each year experience the divorce of their parents, and that more than half of children born to women under age 30 are now born outside of marriage, the religious identities and experiences of young persons growing up without their two married parents are a pressing concern for the health and future of families and congregations.

Most books and articles about children of divorce have tended to focus on the social or economic consequences of divorce, often showing the links between divorce and serious childhood problems such as poverty, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, early sexual activity, and teen pregnancy.<sup>17</sup> For example, a major study by E. Mavis Hetherington examined more than a thousand divorced families over three decades and found that 20 to 25 percent of young adults from divorced families experience “long-term damage”—serious social and emotional problems—compared to 10 percent of young people from intact families.<sup>18</sup>

But there is so much more to learn beyond what we might call symptoms lists. Among researchers, Judith Wallerstein was a pioneer in examining the more subtle, psychological effects of divorce on children and young people. By getting to know a sample of children of divorce extremely well, Wallerstein painted a detailed and sensitive portrait of the way divorce shapes the inner lives of many children—whether or not they develop severe, diagnosable symptoms. One of her books showed that divorce has a “sleeper effect”: its worst symptoms often appear when children of divorce leave home and attempt to form intimate relationships and families of their own, but do so with much less ability to trust and little idea of what a lasting marriage looks like.<sup>19</sup>

The proliferation of varieties of family structures in recent decades means that nothing church leaders accepted as true about families can still be taken for granted. Because it has been widespread for decades, divorce is something we are finally starting to learn a great deal about, including how it shapes the religious identities and faith formation of young people from divorced families—the topic of this report.

### *Parental Divorce and Offspring Religious Involvement*

We now know that when children of divorce reach adulthood, compared to those raised in intact families, they feel less religious on the whole and are less likely to be involved in the regular practice of a faith. One important study by Leora E. Lawton and Regina Bures found that Catholic and moderate Protestant children of divorce are more than twice as likely to leave religious practice altogether, and that conservative Protestants are more than three times as likely to do so.<sup>20</sup> In a new analysis of data from the General Social Survey, sociologists Jeremy Uecker and Chris Ellison found that parental divorce most impacts the religious identity of offspring, including religious disaffiliation and switching.<sup>21</sup>

In a national study conducted by Norval D. Glenn and Elizabeth Marquardt, and reported in Marquardt's *Between Two Worlds*, two-thirds of people from intact families (families in which parents got and stayed married), compared to just over half of children of divorce, say they are very or fairly religious, and more than one-third of people from intact families currently attend religious services almost every week, compared to just a quarter of people from divorced families.<sup>22</sup> There is also a large difference in church membership. Almost two-thirds of people from intact families compared to just under half of children of divorce say they are currently a member at a house of worship.<sup>23</sup>

Even a cursory look at childhood involvement in faith communities turns up striking differences. Young people from intact families are much more likely to say that they attended religious services regularly as children, with almost three-quarters saying they attended every week or almost every week, compared to just over half of children of divorce. People from divorced families are only half as likely as those from intact families to say that they attended services frequently throughout childhood.<sup>24</sup>

Yet this overall picture can mask important differences. Some individuals from divorced families eventually become much more religious in the wake of their parents' divorce, while others become much less. And grown children of divorce are surprisingly likely to feel that they are more religious now than their parents ever were—twice as likely as people from intact families to feel that way about their mothers and also much more likely to feel that way about their fathers. As one evangelical pastor interviewed by Notre Dame sociologist Mary Ellen Konieczny observed, "Sometimes divorce is such a hard thing that they (the children of divorce) turn to God for help and healing."<sup>25</sup> Other growing children of divorce might turn to congregational life from a place of loneliness or suffering, such as one participant in the Glenn and Marquardt study who said that as a teen church became the place where he "felt safe and like [he] belonged."<sup>26</sup>

Some studies trace the different paths children follow before and after their parents' divorce.

Melinda Lundquist Denton of Clemson University, analyzing data from the National Study of Youth and Religion, examined the religious starting points of youth to determine whether a parental breakup has different effects on youth depending on religious experience prior to the breakup.<sup>27</sup> She found that "it appears as if the experience of parental breakup in adolescence triggers an increase in the odds of religious change, whether that change is a move toward or away from religion."<sup>28</sup> She continued: "An interesting aspect of these findings, however, was that while a parental breakup was associated with religious change, the type of religious change was not unidirectional. Parental breakup was significantly associated with movement to religious profiles characterized by both more and less religious engagement."<sup>29</sup>

In one paper, Professors Mark Regnerus of the University of Austin at Texas and Jeremy Uecker of Baylor University explore the context in which religious transformations occur.<sup>30</sup> Using data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, they found that family structure is more significant for adolescents' religious decline than for religious growth. Youth in single-parent families are more likely to report a decrease in church attendance and to say that their religious faith is less important when compared to those from intact, two-parent families. Adolescents in other alternative family forms are also more likely than their counterparts from intact families to show a decline in church

attendance, but, at the same time, they are more likely to show an increase in private religiosity.

In summary, while family change might predict an adolescent's decision to abandon religion, it is more difficult to predict an increase in religiosity. Thus, Regnerus and Uecker write, "it may be helpful to think of positive religious transformations and conversions (involving sharp growth in religiosity) and religious apostasy (i.e., losing religion) as two separate entities, each with its own set of mechanisms and patterns. The presence of the one has little in common with the absence of the other."<sup>31</sup>

Drawing on a study of 274 students at a Midwestern state university whose parents divorced within the previous five years,<sup>32</sup> Professor Annette Mahoney of Bowling Green State University and her colleagues Heidi Warner and Elizabeth Krumei theorize that parental divorce can be a spiritual trauma. They suggest that parental divorce would be "experienced as a spiritual trauma depending on how much a child interprets parental divorce as threatening and damaging to the core spiritual values he or she holds."<sup>33</sup> In particular, interpreting one's parents' divorce as a "sacred loss" or "desecration" intensifies the suffering felt by children because such an interpretation can "turn faith into an added source of suffering."<sup>34</sup> The following quotations from study participants exemplify such feelings:

*My family was very religious growing up and when the divorce happened, I lost that religious framework in my life. I saw my family as a sacred entity and then it was shattered.*

*I felt the vows that they made before their families and God were violated and they now meant nothing.*

*I am Catholic and I believe in God. I went through a divorce when I was 5 years old with my real dad and now I am going through another with my mom and stepfather at age 20. I believe God has a plan but it is hard to convince yourself [of] that at such tragedy.<sup>35</sup>*

Overall, Mahoney, Warner, and Krumei found that college students who see their parents' divorce through a "negative spiritual lens" say that they felt greater distress.<sup>36</sup>

While there are a diverse range of theories about why the adult offspring of divorced parents are less likely to be religiously involved than their peers from intact families, little doubt exists about the correlation or connection. Sociologist Charles E. Stokes of Samford University, a co-author of this report, summarized the literature this way:

*Over the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century two of the most monumental societal transformations in the United States are the significant increase in the number of children growing up with divorced parents and the decline in religious participation among adults. Some scholars have suggested that the declines in marriage and religious attendance are related. Much of the early research linking religious decline with divorce suggested that the erosion of religion as a source of normative authority undermined the institutional support for marriage. More recent work, however, such as that by sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox, has pointed the causal arrow in the other direction, contending that the decline of marriage—marked by widespread divorce, but also including increases in non-marital child-bearing, cohabitation, and later ages at first marriage—has contributed to lower levels of religious affiliation and participation.<sup>37</sup>*

## *Role of Parents*

Melinda Lundquist Denton writes that the greatest predictor of the religious lives of youth is the religious lives of their parents: “Youth with highly religious parents are much more likely to be highly religious themselves, while youth whose parents are disengaged from religion are more likely to be disengaged as well.”<sup>38</sup> She suggests that to the extent that married parents are religiously engaged, they may provide more effective religious socialization than a single-parent family.<sup>39</sup> “Two-parent families,” Denton continues, “may also be better able to support religious practices such as religious service attendance and engagement in a religious community.”<sup>40</sup> Overall, the literature on family structure and religious socialization suggests that youth who live with two parents may be more likely to identify as religious than youth who live in households with an alternative family structure.

Parents also play a vital role in influencing their children’s religious lives after divorce, particularly in a culture in which congregational involvement and

other forms of civic involvement are no longer as normative as they once were. Uecker and Ellison find that the role of parents appears to be strong and growing in importance in determining the religiosity of offspring.<sup>41</sup> They write that what seems to be most important is whether a child's parents identify as religious at all, and whether they have been religiously active. Parental divorce seems to matter most when it comes to issues of religious identity. Outcomes affected by parental divorce most often occur in the areas of disaffiliating from religion and switching to another religion.<sup>42</sup>

Glenn and Marquardt suggest that one reason grown children of divorce appear overall to be less religious might be that they are less likely to recall finding sources of religious and spiritual guidance within their families. For example, they are less likely to say that their parents encouraged them to practice a religious faith. Just over half of grown children of divorce versus almost four-fifths of individuals from intact families agree, "My mother encouraged me to practice a religious faith." That difference is even greater when it comes to fathers, with about one-third of grown children of divorce saying their fathers encouraged them to practice a religious faith compared to about two-thirds of those from intact families.

Glenn and Marquardt also found similar, striking differences in the area of prayer. Far fewer than half of children of divorce but more than two-thirds of those from intact families agree, "My mother taught me how to pray." Slightly more than one-third of children of divorce while slightly over half of those from intact families said that they often prayed with their mothers. Similarly, fewer than one-fifth of children of divorce but almost half of those from intact families said their fathers taught them how to pray; and fewer than one-fifth of grown children of divorce versus well over one-third of those from intact families said they often prayed with their fathers.

The national survey conducted by Glenn and Marquardt also showed that children of divorce are at least twice as likely to say that they doubt the sincerity of their parents' religious beliefs—a feeling that not only indicates skepticism some have about their parents' religious beliefs but also hints at a deep lack of respect some have for their parents. Nineteen percent of children of divorce compared to 9 percent of their peers from intact families are skeptical of their mothers' religious beliefs, and 27 percent of children of divorce compared to 14 percent of those from intact families say the same thing about their fathers.

Overall, as reported by Elisa Zhai of Miami University and colleagues in an analysis of the Glenn and Marquardt data, the link between parental divorce and lower likelihood of the grown children's regular practice of a religion appears to be significantly explained by lower levels of father's involvement in the religious lives of these children.<sup>43</sup>

In a separate study also using the Glenn and Marquardt data, Zhai and colleagues find that adult children of divorce are much more likely to identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious."<sup>44</sup>

Taken together, these findings highlight the powerful role that parents, particularly fathers, play in influencing the future religious practices of their children. When parental divorce dissolves the marital bond, the attachment to religious institutions seems to be disrupted for many children. While they may continue to think of themselves as spiritual persons, children of divorce appear to have a more difficult time practicing their faith within the sanctuary of traditional religious institutions.

### *Role of Congregations*

Other reasons for the overall decreased religiosity of grown children of divorce may be found within congregations themselves. Penny Edgell of the University of Minnesota is among the scholars who have observed that congregations may be more welcoming to two-parent families, making it easier for such families to engage in congregational life.<sup>45</sup> For example, in Glenn and Marquardt's study, of those young adults who regularly attended a church or synagogue at the time of their parents' divorce, two-thirds say that no one—either from the clergy or the congregation—reached out to them during that critical time in their lives, while only one-quarter remember either a clergy member or congregant doing so.<sup>46</sup>

Mary Ellen Konieczny has addressed how congregations talk about marriage in ways that might leave them unprepared to address divorce. She writes, "Some cultures of marriage based in a religious interpretation of the companionate ideal of marriage do less well at responding to marriages when they fail."<sup>47</sup> This is the case, she says, because the companionate ideal focuses more or less exclusively upon the couple, making congregations less able to see how

marriages and families are embedded in larger social settings such as religious communities.

This view of marriage as a private or what some have called “soul mate” relationship can also affect how or whether a couple reaches out if they are in distress.<sup>48</sup> Konieczny writes, “Ironically, congregations are conceived of as too familiar or too close a space in which to reveal one’s intimate troubles with a partner.” As the head pastor of a six hundred-member mainline Protestant church explained to her, “There’s a lot of times people don’t want their pastor to know the truth of what’s going on in their life. . . . I’ve had people come and be truly honest with me and tell me things, and then I never see them again. Because I see them every Sunday, and they don’t want to sit in church knowing that I know the truth. . . . Somebody coming in and saying, “We’re having marital problems” is a very rare experience.”<sup>49</sup>

### 3. THE DEPTHS OF DIVORCE IN THE INNER LIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

It's important not to stop at the surface. If clergy and lay leaders want to address in a meaningful way the trend of family fragmentation that is weakening faith communities, a primary task will be to seek to understand the inner lives of those who grew up with divorced, unmarried, or remarried parents.

#### *The Second Silent Schism*

When a marriage comes apart, a child's way of life is split in two, with consequences for the child's relationships with people within the family and beyond. Julie Rubio of St. Louis University writes that children from fragmented families experience disruption of the "domestic church" of their home. Catholics, she writes, understand families as domestic churches because it is in the home in which most children first engage in Christian practices.<sup>50</sup> With their parents, children pray at meals or bedtime, read stories, and ask questions about the nature of God and the meaning of life. In homes, they celebrate religious holidays and sacraments and participate in family traditions. When divorce affects families, these practices can be more difficult to maintain. In fact, some studies show that family practices are more closely linked than family structure to strong faith in adulthood, but intact families are more likely to have the stability necessary to maintain these practices.<sup>51</sup> Along with feelings of brokenness and struggles with trust, the loss of a stable environment for religious practice may partially explain lower levels of connection to religious institutions and religious faith among young adults who do not grow up in intact families.<sup>52</sup>

Children can also experience a rupture in their congregational lives. Annette Mahoney and her co-authors note that the resulting alienation from a life of faith can represent a second, silent schism in the child's life—first there is the rupture of the marriage of the child's parents, then there is the rupture of the child's connection to a congregation and even to a life of faith.<sup>53</sup>

## *Is God Like a Parent?*

### **ATTACHMENT THEORY**

Attachment theory can provide insight into how divorce challenges the inner lives of children. Chris Kiesling of Asbury Theological Seminary helps us understand some of the concepts.<sup>54</sup> Attachment theory was introduced by John Bowlby in the mid-twentieth century as an alternative perspective to psychoanalytic understandings. Taking a bio-evolutionary approach, Bowlby proposed that a behavioral system evolved in infants and primates that provided protection from predators and other dangers. When an infant or small child experienced a threat, this behavioral system compelled “proximity-seeking” with the primary caregiver, insuring a greater likelihood of protection and chance of survival.<sup>55, 56</sup>

Bowlby proposed that through a gradually building series of interactions, generally between mother and child, an attachment bond begins to form.<sup>57</sup> Through this bond, the child begins to expect certain kinds of responsiveness and availability of the caregiver. Once a child begins to have these expectations, whether consciously or unconsciously, something more than the sum of parent-child interactions emerge. For the child, these patterns of relating acquire representational meaning. These interactions become the “data” the child uses to model interactions with others, shaping, for example, the degree to which the child perceives himself or herself worthy of love, care, and protection.<sup>58</sup> Internalization of these patterns can then guide the child’s future behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses in other social interactions.

Bowlby described the effects that this internal working model can have and offered this example: “A man who during childhood was frequently threatened with abandonment can easily attribute such intentions to his wife. He will then misinterpret things she says or does in terms of such intent, and then take whatever action he thinks would best meet the situation he believes to exist. Misunderstanding and conflict must follow. In all this he is unaware he is being biased by his past experience as he is that his present beliefs and expectations are mistaken.”<sup>59</sup>

Bowlby and subsequent attachment theorists believe that all human beings are influenced by their attachment bonds, but whether these influences are for good or ill depends on the quality of the attachment bond within a particular

relationship,<sup>60</sup> or how capable one is of recognizing whether one's internal working model is an accurate predictor of another person's behavior and response.

## **ATTACHMENT THEORY AND IMAGE OF GOD**

As the Commission on Children at Risk noted in their report *Hardwired to Connect*, a substantial body of scholarship supports the idea that children's early images of God arise at least in part from their lived experience with their own parents, a kind of "spiritualization of attachment."<sup>61</sup>

When religious traditions teach that God is like a father or mother, they reinforce early God images that children might develop. Insights into the connection between a child's experience with parents and perceptions of God go back at least as early as Sigmund Freud, who famously argued, in works like *Totem and Taboo*, that a person's image of God is that of an exalted father, and that religion arises from an Oedipus complex. For Freud, this connection implied that the idea of God is merely a projection of our own infantile fantasies and that religion is meaningless.

However, other scholars since Freud have argued that acknowledging some connection between our formative experiences with our fathers and mothers and how we conceive of the idea of God does not have to imply the nonexistence of God or the rejection of religion. For example, object relations theory modified Freud by suggesting that a child's orientation to parents is born out of the fundamental need to be recognized and loved.<sup>62</sup> As discussed, attachment theory also offers insight into how we first develop bonds and how our experiences in early, primary relationships shape our approach to other relationships, including with the divine.<sup>63</sup>

Rubio writes that Christians have long used parental metaphors to affirm the idea of a loving, personal God who sustains life. Adults try to give children something they can understand by connecting God's love to a parent's love.<sup>64</sup>

So, Rubio asks, what happens to children's concept of a protective father God if they do not know their fathers? How is belief in a loving mother God shaped when a mother goes through a difficult divorce and is unable to be a stable force for her children? If, as theologian Bernard Cooke writes, "it is primarily in loving and being loved that we begin to grasp the incredible truth that we

are loved by God,” what happens to children’s faith when someone they love has left?<sup>65</sup> What happens when to be with one parent by definition means *not* being with the other? Her questions suggest that as they grow up children of divorce could fall away from faith.

But perhaps something different can happen. Can children who have experienced suffering early in life be *more* open to religion?

In *Between Two Worlds*, Elizabeth Marquardt mapped some of the paths that the faith lives of children can follow in the wake of parental divorce. There was Angela, who articulated deep spiritual questions, and was drawn to faith, but was repelled by the overly simplistic responses to her deep questions as a child.<sup>66</sup> And Melissa, who found that a God she could not see and touch was too much like her own father, who lived on the opposite coast and did not respond to her letters.<sup>67</sup> And Ashley, who as an adult continued visiting churches once a month, looking for a place where she might feel a sense of belonging, yet still not trusting that anyone could really understand her.<sup>68</sup> And Allison, who respected what she saw of her husband’s faith and wanted it for her son, but felt like she was “going through the motions”—outwardly practicing faith, but not really feeling it.<sup>69</sup>

Or there was Michael, who as a teen started going to church with his best friend’s family following his own parents’ divorce. For him, a growing sense of God’s closeness filled the void after his father married another woman. God, said Michael, “became that father who never leaves and is always there.” In the Glenn and Marquardt study, of grown children of divorce who stayed in touch with both parents after the divorce, 38 percent agreed with the statement, “I think of God as the loving father or parent I never had in real life,” compared to 22 percent of those who grew up with their married parents.<sup>70</sup> Had Glenn and Marquardt surveyed all grown children of divorce and not only those who stayed in touch with both parents, this percentage might well have been higher.

In his paper, Chris Kiesling discusses research supporting the idea that when a human attachment figure is lost, the perceived relationship with God can become an appealing alternative.<sup>71</sup> This shift is pronounced in monotheistic religions, especially Christianity, because the belief in a personal God with whom believers maintain an interactive relationship is central to its doctrine, as evidenced in part through the attachment forming behavior of prayer.<sup>72</sup>

Kiesling invited seminary students to respond to a semi-structured interview that asked about the quality of their relationships with each parent before and after their parents' divorce, and their perceptions of how that divorce might have impacted their own faith journey. Perhaps not surprisingly—given the journey that culminated in a felt call to ordained ministry—seminary students who experienced their parents' divorce tend to be more like Michael, above, finding in God a parent figure they did not have in daily life. Kiesling shares the following anecdotes about Miriam, Veronica, and John:<sup>73</sup>

*Miriam's father worked on the stock market and decided when she was young to buy land in a foreign country. In order to establish citizenship, her father lived in said country away from the family for six months out of the year. This gradual drift finally culminated in a letter of divorce that was sent through the mail to Miriam's mother. . . . Describing the years in which her dad became distant and left, Miriam said, "I was just so hurt and looking for a father figure that I was so excited when I discovered God could be that for me. It always made a huge difference when I would think of God as my father because it would fill in that hole. . . . I still don't feel like I have a father, he is still so distant . . . and so I just look to God for that."*

*In a similar way, Veronica turned to God to provide the safe haven that was absent in her household. In telling the story of her family system, she remembered her dad being very controlling and her mother coping via prescription drugs and withdrawing. Compiling stressors left Veronica largely uncared for and precipitated the divorce including: her mother wrecking the car and breaking her hip and her father's brother committed suicide. When asked how her parent's divorce shaped her faith, Veronica responded, "It actually brought me closer to God—where else was I going to go, everything else was falling apart. God was the only place left."*

*John grew up in a family that became chaotic and violent with his dad's abuse of alcohol. John would huddle in his room with his sister until the noise one night grew unbearable. John went downstairs and got between his parents. Every day after being pinned that night to the wall, John would go home after school in fear not knowing what the night might bring. One of the few religious memories John recounted was being baptized at ten years old. He hoped that his baptism would make everything*

*fall into place—his dad would stop drinking and everything would be glorious. When it didn't take, John wondered if maybe he was responsible. After all, when he came out of the water he followed a young girl in front of him whose wet robe revealed the leopard panties she wore and caught his attention. Despite his baptism seemingly being ineffectual, John felt the church had something to offer, something he had seen in a few, an aunt for example, and that would make life whole. Life then became a quest for this wholeness—“to find the God that I hoped would resolve the problems,[the God] that seemed so far away.”*

*John narrates the next decades of his life by saying that the spirit of fear transformed itself into a spirit that he would never be good enough, never measure up. For thirty years he tried diligently to construct a life that would bring wholeness. Until one day at church, the preacher stepped from his pulpit toward where John was sitting, looked at John and quoted a passage from Scripture that said, “I did not give you a spirit of fear but a spirit of sonship by which we cry out ‘abba, father.’ John said that in that moment he knew who his father was, that he received in that moment a full measure of God’s mercy such that life has never been the same.”<sup>74</sup>*

Other family members such as grandparents, stepparents, or aunts or uncles can also be important in the developing God images for children of divorce. Quoted in *Between Two Worlds*, Angela recalled: “My stepmother is a woman who believes in God so sincerely. I admire her for having so much faith and for always trying to do the right thing—and say the right thing and feel the right thing—because of the obligation she believes she has to God.”<sup>75</sup>

Among the seminary students Kiesling interviewed, three cited grandparents as pivotal in their faith development. Sherry mentioned a Brad Paisley song, “The Man You Didn’t Have to Be,” when remembering her grandfather. While Sherry’s mother tended the family store, Sherry’s grandfather would care for her. He took her on vacation and gave her opportunities that her mom could not give Sherry. Erik said he thought of his grandparents as his parents. He went to their house in the morning to eat breakfast and returned there after school for an early supper. Veronica stayed after school each day with her grandfather. He helped her with her homework and instilled in her a sort of “fear of God,” even though he “never yelled, never raised his voice, and never spanked.” John talked about an aunt whose spirituality was so attractive that he longed to

know more about it. His longing brought him to church, where he eventually had a life-transforming encounter.

## *On Being*

In his research, contributed as a paper to this project and also published recently in a new book, *Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being*, Luther Seminary professor Andrew Root writes that “the church might better serve the world and those millions of young people experiencing their parents’ divorce if we could witness to the reality that divorce at its most primary level is an issue of ontology. It is an act that leaves us feeling unreal, lost, as though the world is unreliable.”<sup>76</sup>

Root argues that as a society we tend to see the experience of children of divorce through the lens of epistemology—for example, that the most important thing is for the child to know the divorce was not his or her fault—or structure, for example, that after divorce we should provide children with after-school programs and well-enforced child support laws. While acknowledging the importance of both these perspectives, in his work Root develops an ontological approach to the problem of children of divorce. That is, for those who experience their parents’ divorce, the most fundamental problem—and the greatest source of suffering—occurs at the level of their very being. Using the social theory of Anthony Giddens, theological anthropology of James Loder, and philosophy of Martin Heidegger, Root argues that questions such as “Who am I?” and “How can I *be* at all, now that the people who are responsible for my very being are no longer together?” shape the inner lives of these young people.

Root quotes from the journalistic account of Stephanie Staal, author of *The Love They Lost*, who, Root feels, expresses the ontological insecurity he seeks to describe when she reflects on what she calls “the night of revelation”:

*[T]he night when I learned of my mother’s affair . . . in my mind . . . is that night of revelation when my family abruptly came undone, even though my mother didn’t actually move out for another year. That night, in the span of minutes, my entire belief system was shattered. And sometimes when the phone rings late at night or someone walks into the room with a stricken look, I feel the same icy tingle I felt so many years ago, as if my*

*body has programmed itself to receive the unexpected jolt. That's how deep the memory lies for me.*<sup>77</sup>

Root observes that “the memory is as deep as her being itself, for in hearing the news of her family coming ‘undone,’ the dependability on which she *is* (has her being) is thrown into question.”<sup>78</sup>

Root writes about one young woman, Loretta, who remembered, “Dad was saying things like ‘I never, ever loved your mother. I don’t know why I didn’t get out of this sooner.’ . . . and that was really painful, because it was like he was saying, ‘I wish you’d never been born.’ That was the implication behind that.”<sup>79</sup>

Root’s understanding reveals new strategies for faith communities and youth ministry. Young people experiencing the divorce of their parents need a community of being, which could be a church and youth group, for example, in which their ontology can be upheld. This community of being ought not only remind them of their importance to the group and help them identify as loved in the community, but should also, through participation, suffer with them in their loss of being and accompany them in the despair of ontological insecurity.

### *Three in One*

Rubio elaborates on a Catholic understanding of marriage that points to the loss of wholeness children of divorce can feel.<sup>80</sup> The Catholic tradition holds the position that a validly contracted marriage between two baptized Christians is indissoluble. The claim is not that marriage *should not* end but rather that it *cannot* end. Once marriage begins with vows and is sealed with intimacy, the two persons become one flesh (Gen. 2:24). Although historically the focus has been on the couple’s vows, the tradition also gives attention to the well-being of children. Early Christian thinker John Chrysostom wrote that husband and wife fully become one flesh when they conceive children. In his view, “The child is a bridge connecting mother to father, so the three become one flesh, as when two cities divided by a river are joined by a bridge. And here the bridge is formed from the substance of each.”<sup>81</sup>

This theology recognizes in spiritual terms the biological reality of children and the lived experiences of parents who find that in having children they are

“giving flesh” to their own union. Even more so than in sexual intimacy, during which spouses become one flesh for a short time and then part (even as their feelings of unity may endure), when a child is conceived the child is a one-flesh union of his or her parents that cannot break in two.

Theologically, then, children whose parents divorce experience brokenness because the parental unity that they embody has been ruptured. Children can be distraught because they identify not just with each parent separately, but with their parents’ union. Children’s bodies say, “My parents gave themselves to one another.”<sup>82</sup> Although their parents no longer wish to live together, the child’s existence testifies to their union.

## 4. IS DIVORCE NOBODY'S BUSINESS?

### *The Divorce Culture*

Is divorce nobody's business? In 2000, an ideologically diverse group of social leaders, some religious and some not, came together to examine this question. They wrote: "After [decades] of widespread divorce, many Americans see marriage as too personal to be a proper matter for public concern or intervention. Even family members, clergy, and children are often not seen as legitimate stakeholders in the success of a marriage. For if marriage is just a word for two adults who have managed (or not managed) to create an emotionally satisfying personal relationship, how can any outsider legitimately second-guess their decision to divorce?"<sup>83</sup>

"We do not share this limited conception of marriage," they wrote, and continued:

*A good marriage is not just a good private relationship, and married couples are not in a sealed bubble, immune from the influences of others. Though marriage is intimate and personal, marriage also has an inherently public side. Marriage is what lovers do when they want to bring their relationship out of the private realm of personal emotions and make it a social fact, visible to and recognized not only by the couple, but also by friends, family, church, government, and the rest of society. Good marriages are made, not born, and they are most likely to be made in a society that understands and values marriage as a shared aspiration and key social institution, not just a private affair of the heart.*<sup>84</sup>

In that decade, social critics such as Barbara Dafoe Whitehead argued that America has embraced a "divorce culture," in which adults' self-expression trumps other, older virtues that celebrate the obligated self.<sup>85</sup> Among the mainline churches, practical theologian Don Browning brought together colleagues and launched the Religion, Culture and Family Project. This project reengaged rich canonical and Western sources on marriage, family, and children from

a largely liberal, critical perspective that sought to renew a contemporary “familism.”<sup>86</sup> Scholars today such as ethicist M. Christian Green continue to develop this line of concern.

### *Bystanders to Divorce*

In her paper, “‘There but for the Grace’: The Ethics of Bystanders to Divorce,” Green reflects on the effects of family transformation—particularly the divorce revolution—on bystanders at the individual and cultural levels. The perspective of the bystander has been well-developed in law, she writes. In that arena, bystanders to the injuries of others can sue for emotional distress. The concept is also routinely discussed in human rights law with respect to mass violence, notably genocide. In the field of ethics, Green argues, the bystander perspective has been neglected but holds promise.

Green recalls that growing up during the 1970s and 1980s, her generation saw a steadily increasing number of divorces among the parents’ generation. Even for those whose parents remained married, like hers, the divorce revolution raised quandaries. Green was among those seemingly unaffected by the experience of family disruption. Yet she remembers that even as she sought to comfort friends whose parents had parted, she also felt one should not console *too* much, as divorced families were increasingly seen as just another family form.

Later, when the first divorces began to occur in her own circle of now-grown friends, Green found herself “bristling” at this privatized view of marriage and divorce. She had been a bridesmaid at some of these weddings and felt herself to be in some sense a stakeholder. But such a perspective seems odd and unwelcome when marriage is conceived of as a purely private matter.

Reflecting upon her own experience, ethical sources, social theories, and social science on the effects of divorce prompts Green to ask such questions as: “Do those who witness a divorce experience a ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ moment? Does this witness produce bystander anxiety or something like survivor’s guilt? How might witnessing the family disruption of others affect the bystander’s own worldview when it comes to normative images of marriage, family, society, and self?”<sup>87</sup>

Green highlights a recent article, “Breaking Up Is Hard to Do, Unless Everyone Else Is Doing It Too,” in which social scientists Rose McDermott, James H. Fowler, and Nicholas A. Christakis examined longitudinal data from the well-known Framingham Heart Study. They found that “attitudes toward divorce flow across social ties,” spreading between and among siblings, and even across the looser ties of friends and coworkers, to the extent that “divorce should be understood as a collective phenomenon that extends far beyond those directly affected.”<sup>88</sup> The authors suggest their study raises questions about “whether there is an ‘epidemic’ of divorce and, if so, whether there is a role of social contagion in the ‘epidemic.’”<sup>89</sup>

Green writes that while most research on social networks and divorce is “concentrated on person-to-person effects, particularly those related to parent-to-child intergenerational transfer of risk [of divorce],”<sup>90</sup> McDermott, Fowler, and Christakis found significant relationships in divorce status between individuals extending up to two degrees of separation. They write: “A person’s tendency to divorce depends not just on his friend’s divorce status, but also on his friend’s friend.” Further, “a divorced friend or family member who lives hundreds of miles away may have as much influence on [a person’s]...risk of divorce as one who lives next door.”<sup>91</sup>

Some of the study’s discrete findings are particularly interesting for purposes of assessing bystander impact, Green notes. People with a divorced sibling were 22 percent more likely to get a divorce. Neighbors who live within twenty-five meters do not appear to affect each other. But in an era in which many Americans spend more time at work than at home (i.e., there is less socializing with the neighbors), it is significant that people with a divorced coworker are 55 percent more likely to get divorced than those without a divorced coworker.<sup>92</sup>

Green suggests that this spread of divorce has introduced a kind of cultural trauma. In the growing field of traumatology, the focus of inquiry shifts from the individual to the cultural level. While the field’s leading researchers tend to focus on particular historical events and phenomena that have mass effects—war, terrorism, genocide, natural disaster, economic depressions, mass migration or unemployment, or massive population depletion through disease, famine, and civil conflict—the definitions and measures of cultural trauma invite reflection, Green argues, on how the “divorce culture,” particularly when seen as having effects on bystanders, might fit.

Green acknowledges that, when it comes to divorce, some might respond that bothered bystanders possess an overactive, meddlesome imagination regarding the private decisions of others. But by bringing research on divorce into conversation with rich, emerging bodies of work on social contagion and theories about cultural trauma, bystander effects, Green argues, prompt reflection and may inform how we respond to children of divorce.

## 5. WHY TEACHING CONGREGANTS HOW TO HAVE A “GOOD” DIVORCE WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM

If we accept that divorce is hard for children, and that it shapes their religious identities and experiences even as it challenges faith communities, what ought we to do? One popular cultural idea is to advance the idea of the “good” divorce.

### *The Idea of the Good Divorce*

The idea of the good divorce is attractive to many. Some divorced parents are reassured because it suggests steps they can take to try and protect their children if they must end a very bad marriage. Others feel it suggests they can end a marriage that might be good enough but not fully satisfying and still do right by their children. Family court judges welcome the idea because they want to make arrangements that, whenever possible, keep both parents in the child’s life, and they want to minimize conflict between those parents. Therapists like it because they want to help families and working towards a good divorce gives them a role in teaching parents how to divorce. Social observers, including journalists, academics, and opinion leaders, like the idea of the good divorce because it promises to absolve some of the anxiety our society has about divorce. What really matters, the experts say, is how the parents get along after the divorce, not the divorce itself.<sup>93</sup>

The concept of the good divorce is often treated as a new idea, yet it has been around for some time. The term was coined by Constance Ahrons in 1994 when she published *The Good Divorce: Keeping Your Family Together When Your Marriage Comes Apart*. Ahrons wrote that it is possible for couples to achieve a good divorce by setting clear rules governing post-divorce interactions. These rules prevent unnecessary conflict and allow both parents to stay

actively involved in the children's lives. If parents can achieve a good divorce they will not have a damaged divorced family but rather a thriving "binuclear" family—another term Ahrons coined—and the children will be fine.

The premise of the good divorce sounds logical. Surely, if divorce does happen, it is better for children not to lose significant relationships entirely, nor to be drawn into bitter, unending fights. However, when you talk to the children themselves, you find that the popular idea behind the good divorce—that the quality of the divorce matters more than the divorce itself—is actually an adult-centered vision that does not well reflect the growing child's experiences.

While a good divorce *is* better than a bad divorce, it is still not *good*. No matter how amicable divorced parents might be, and how much they each love and care for the child, their willingness to do these things does not resolve the situation that a child's world is now divided in two.

In the Glenn and Marquardt study, grown children of what might be called good divorces often compared poorly even with those who grew up with parents in unhappy marriages, so long as the marriage was low-conflict (as are approximately two-thirds of marriages that end in divorce). Some observers say that that a good divorce and a happy intact marriage are about the same for kids. As one reflected, "A good divorce, a good marriage, it matters not."<sup>94</sup> But the Glenn and Marquardt research revealed that a good divorce is far worse for children than a happy marriage.<sup>95</sup>

In a recent article in *Family Relations*, a leading scholar on children of divorce, Paul Amato, and his colleagues Jennifer B. Kane and Spencer James published a new study, "Reconsidering the 'Good Divorce.'"<sup>96</sup> They analyzed data from 944 post-divorce families, finding that children from families that could be considered to have good divorces scored better on two indicators: behavior problems and closeness with their fathers. Yet these children "did not score significantly better than other children on 10 additional outcomes." The authors conclude that their paper offers only "modest support for the good divorce hypothesis."<sup>97</sup>

## *New Findings on Good Divorce and the Marriages of Grown Children of Divorce*

In other recent analyses of the Glenn and Marquardt data, Professor Glenn looked at the outcomes for grown children of divorce with regard to their own marriages. He suspected that “bad divorces” (that is, those in which parents continued to have a lot of conflict) would be associated with poor marital outcomes for the grown children. Such relationships would model poor relationship and conflict resolution skills and might give children the impression that good male-female relationships are almost impossible to attain.

Yet, to his surprise, Glenn found something quite different. Separate results for males and females showed no statistically significant relationships for males but moderate, statistically significant *positive* estimated effects of “bad divorces” on the marital outcomes of female offspring. In other words, compared to those whose parents had a good divorce, women whose parents had a bad divorce were more likely at the time of the Glenn and Marquardt study to report that they were in a good, quality, lasting first marriage.<sup>98</sup>

Glenn cautioned that as with any counterintuitive finding from one study, this finding needs to be replicated by additional research before it is regarded as anything more than suggestive. However, he noted that it is consistent with findings indicating that children are harmed more by divorce if their parents had a low-conflict marriage than if they had a high-conflict one.<sup>99</sup> If parents have a low-conflict marriage and subsequently a low-conflict and amicable divorce, children may be more inclined to lose confidence in the institution of marriage than if the parents engage in destructive behaviors before and after the divorce. In the latter case, the failure of the parental marriage can be blamed on the parents themselves rather than on the institution of marriage. Conversely, if nice people with good relationship skills cannot make a marriage work, then there is little reason, this line of thinking might go, to be optimistic about having a good marriage yourself.<sup>100</sup>

Of course, there are other possible explanations. For instance, victims of a nasty parental divorce may tend to be unusually motivated to avoid marital failure, or parents who have amicable relations with one another but nevertheless decide to divorce may on average place relatively little value on marital permanence and may transmit that attitude to their offspring. While there is no way

of explaining this finding with certitude, it does offer insight into the experience of young persons of good and bad divorces as they embark on their own marriages.

### *New Findings on Good Divorce and Religiosity of Grown Children of Divorce*

In analyses with Glenn and Marquardt of their survey data in a paper commissioned for this project, Chris Ellison of the University of Texas at San Antonio and Anthony Walker of the University of Texas at Austin found striking differences in religious experience between those who reported they were raised in happy, intact marriages and those who reported their parents had an amicable or good divorce. For example:

- The odds of religious attendance are more than twice as high for those raised in happy, intact marriages compared to those raised in amicable divorces.
- Those raised in happy, intact marriages have the lowest levels of religious disinterest, compared to those raised in amicable divorces.
- Those raised in happy, intact marriages are more likely to report an absence of negative experiences of God, compared to those raised in amicable divorces.
- Those raised in happy, intact marriages are somewhat less likely than those raised in amicable divorces to identify as “neither religious nor spiritual.”
- At the same time, when it came to frequency of prayer activity there were no observable differences when it came to family background.<sup>101</sup>

Ellison and his co-authors conclude that it appears that those from divorced families are no less interested in finding meaning, truth, or a connection with God or the transcendent than their counterparts from intact, happy marriages. However, those from divorced families do appear considerably more skeptical that established religious institutions or traditions can help them in that quest.

## 6. TODAY IT'S NOT JUST DIVORCE

Much of this report focuses on divorce, mainly because several decades into the divorce revolution social scientists and other scholars have now had ample opportunities to study the effects of divorce.

### *Out-of-Wedlock Childbearing and Cohabitation*

But divorce is far from the only form of family change in America today. As Melinda Lundquist Denton notes, children in America are spending less and less of their childhood in two-parent homes and are experiencing an increasing number of family transitions as their parents move in and out of marriages and cohabiting relationships.<sup>102</sup> By the time they turn 15, 40 percent of children in the United States will confront the dissolution of a parent's marriage or cohabiting relationship, and more than 8 percent will experience three or more maternal coresidential relationships.<sup>103</sup> Robin Warrington of the Simmons School of Social Work and Stephanie Boddie, until recently of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, add in their paper that, today, an African American child is three times more likely to be born out of wedlock than a white child and, on average, will spend only six years in a two-parent family, compared with fourteen years for a white child and thirteen years for a Hispanic child.<sup>104</sup>

A team of family scholars recently released *Why Marriage Matters*, a report on marriage in America, and argued that it is now cohabitation—not divorce—that is driving rising rates of family instability.<sup>105</sup> As the lead author, sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox, noted, “In a striking turn of events, the divorce rate for married couples with children has returned almost to the levels we saw before the divorce revolution kicked in during the 1970s. Nevertheless, family instability is on the rise for American children as a whole, in part because more couples are having children in cohabiting unions, which are very unstable.”<sup>106</sup> In fact, report results indicate that by age 12, 24 percent of children born to married parents will experience parental divorce or separation, while 42 percent will experience a parental cohabitation.<sup>107</sup>

Cohabitation, they report, is a fragile family form, with children born into cohabiting unions much more likely to experience a parental breakup compared to those born to married couples. The report finds that in the U.S. the breakup rate is 170 percent higher for children up to age 12 who were born to cohabiting couples, compared to those born to married couples.

Wilcox and his colleagues report that, compared to those from intact, married families, children from cohabiting households are more likely to suffer from a range of emotional and social problems, such as drug use, depression, and dropping out of high school.

Cohabitation can also be more dangerous for children. Federal data show that, tragically, children are at least three times more likely to be physically, sexually, or emotionally abused in cohabiting households, compared to children in intact, married parent homes. The study of the religious and spiritual experience of these children is at best in its infancy.

## *Reproductive Technologies*

Recent research on religious experience within more newly-visible family forms, such as those in which a child is conceived via sperm donation, suggests that the spiritual pathways of the growing children could be distinctive and surprising. The Commission on Parenthood's Future, chaired by Elizabeth Marquardt, a co-author of this report, released *My Daddy's Name Is Donor*, a study of a representative sample of young adults who were conceived via sperm donation and born to heterosexual married couples, single mothers by choice, or lesbian couples.<sup>108</sup> The study examined the identity, kinship, well-being, and social justice experiences of these young people and included several questions about the respondents' religious identity currently and as children.

The survey team asked respondents "What religion if any were you raised in?" and "What is your religious preference today?" Interestingly, 36 percent of donor conceived persons said they were raised Catholic, compared to 22 percent from adoptive families and 28 percent raised by their biological parents. By contrast, persons from adoptive or biological families—and especially those from adoptive families—were far more likely to say they had been raised in a Protestant denomination.

Today as adults, donor conceived persons are also much more likely to say they are Catholic. About a third of donor offspring—32 percent—say Catholicism is their religious preference. By contrast, according to this survey, their Catholic-raised peers from adoptive families or raised by biological parents appear more often to have left the Catholic Church. As adults, 15 percent of those from adoptive families and 19 percent of those raised by their biological parents say that Catholicism is their religion. As adults today, 32 percent of donor offspring say that they are Protestant, and nearly one-quarter of all three groups say their religious preference is “none.” Finally, 6 percent of donor offspring say they are Jewish.

So, according to this study, while a minority of donor conceived persons do appear officially disinterested in religion, the majority are religious. The study also found that donor conceived persons are more likely than their peers raised by adoptive or biological parents to report experiences of hurt, confusion, and loss with regard to their families of origin and their usually unknown sperm donor biological fathers.<sup>109</sup> Although these young people are in the pews, apart from a couple brave voices like Reverend Mark Diebel and blogger Stephanie Blessing, there currently there seems to be little acknowledgment of or curiosity in faith communities about these young people’s experiences.<sup>110</sup>

## 7. GROWN CHILDREN OF DIVORCE AS THE BROKEN LEADING EDGE—AND WHY THE CHURCHES MUST GET THIS RIGHT

The health and future of congregations depends upon understanding, reaching out to, and nurturing as leaders those who have come of age amid increasing family fragmentation. As we have seen in this report, when children of divorce grow up they are less likely to be involved in or leaders of faith communities. As children, too often they experienced a second silent schism: the first occurred when their parents parted, the second was a rupture in their life with the church. As adults, even and perhaps especially those from good divorces are more likely to distrust the institution of marriage and the institutions associated with religion. These young and mid-life adults report more experience of loneliness as children. Those who walk a life of faith appear more likely to report that suffering is a part of their spiritual journeys.

But it may be that such suffering is a pathway toward a kind of healing, not only for grown children of divorce and others who experienced the breakup of their families, but also for faith communities. For example, Julie Rubio writes that knowing suffering or brokenness can put people in touch with their need for God, community, and religious practice. Those who have experienced brokenness in their families of origin may have had early experiences of the imperfection and frailty of human beings. They may be open to the idea of a God who loves unconditionally, a community in which to seek meaning, or a practice that engages them with more universal truths. Rubio points out that some contemporary theologies claim that people who have suffered offer special insight into faith. “Liberation theologies,” she writes, “look to those marginalized by race, class, and/or gender for deeper understanding of scripture.”<sup>111</sup> Members of L’Arche communities, she notes, look to the disabled for wisdom.

Reflecting upon all the papers commissioned for this project, it is clear that some from divorced families come to faith with a special depth and need. Yet it also seems possible that some individuals are willing to wrestle for so long that they develop the qualities of leaders. But in order to find a faith community and even perhaps become leaders, first they have to be welcomed.

No one is saying this will be easy. As one mainline Protestant pastor told Mary Ellen Konieczny about families marked by divorce, “It’s just really hard to minister to them in meaningful ways because in lots of ways, they’ve checked out of the community.”<sup>112</sup> A Catholic priest said with evident frustration, “We have a lot of divorced kids [*sic*] in the school. Unfortunately, we never see their parents. . . . Divorced people are not in our church. They send their kids to our school because God forbid they would send them to the public school, [and] they often have a little bit more money. They don’t come to church and they’re Catholic.”<sup>113</sup> A mainline Protestant pastor, noting that there are no children of divorce in the youth group, said, “It might be that we ostracize people who are divorced and have kids.”<sup>114</sup>

As Jeremy Uecker and Chris Ellison noted, in an age in which so many other institutions—bustling neighborhoods, extended families, good schools—seem increasingly absent from so many children’s lives, parents have become more important than ever in determining the quality of a child’s life. When parents do not involve their children in an active life of faith, churches seem bewildered about how to reach them.

The frustration and apparent sense of helplessness on the part of church leaders are all the more striking when one considers that churches have long been primary custodians of the marriage tradition.<sup>115</sup> As the institution of marriage appears to weaken, is there really little more that churches can do besides watch or wait for a child to appear at the sanctuary? Of course not. The decades-long phenomenon of family change in America—with so many young people having grown up without their mother and father in their daily lives—is a call to faith communities.

# A PLAN FOR CONGREGATIONS

## A MAINLINE PROTESTANT PASTOR'S REFLECTIONS

---

BY AMY ZIETLOW

### *Introduction—How I Came to This Question*

When I arrived at the University of Chicago Divinity School to begin training for the ordained ministry, I was decidedly sheltered from divorce. Growing up in the mainline Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as a preacher's kid—my mother is ordained—with parents who married straight out of high school and whose long-term marriage I blindly took for granted, my level of awareness and sensitivity to children of divorce was superficial at best. Then I met Elizabeth Marquardt. I remember distinctly the moment I took notice that she was asking questions quite foreign to me that were vitally important to the communities and families I would one day serve as pastor. It was a late afternoon during a class on pastoral care and one of our ministry class cohorts was opining on the assigned text for the day. This particular classmate routinely used male language for God (He, His, Father), which often irked my feminist sensibilities. As he concluded, Elizabeth spoke up and asked, "I don't mean to be rude, but I notice that you use the term "father" for God a lot and I wonder which father you want me to think of when you use that term: the father who was married to my mother until I was three? The ex-stepfather who died when I was a teenager? My second stepfather?"

In the silence that followed and during countless classes to come, the depth of her question and the questions she would go on to raise about the moral and spiritual development of children of divorce etched themselves into my heart and shaped the way that I thought about youth ministry, catechetical preparation for the rites of baptism, communion, or confirmation, preaching, and pastorally supporting the families in the Lutheran congregation I served as associate pastor for four years, and then in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation where my husband served as pastor and I served as youth sponsor with junior high and high school youth. As I entered the sanctuary; stepped into the pulpit; sat on worn yet comfy couches in brightly decorated youth

rooms; opened *The Good News Bible* in confirmation class; ate “dipped cones” at Dairy Queen while discussing a “Statement of Faith”; prayed through tears in late night prayer circles during a mission trip; listened quietly to the fears, frustrations, and existential dilemmas of teens in my office; learned that texting was the best way to have in-depth pastoral discussions; and ultimately laughed and served alongside teens and their families in everyday life, I worked to remain sensitive to the unique story and life experience of children of divorce.

As a pastor and youth group leader, I have had children of divorce involved in every type of youth programming the church has offered, from weeklong service trips to weekly youth group meetings to catechetical classes in preparation for baptism or confirmation. I have often wondered if our faith programming and outreach was as sensitive to children of divorce as it could be, and so I turned with interest to reading these recent papers written by family scholars addressing family structure and religious formation. These works offer a diverse glimpse of what children of divorce receive from churches that is helpful and not so helpful, and also point the way for churches to renew their commitment to thinking about how pastoral care, religious education, and youth group ministries can better support children of divorce.

Several observations from the papers shape my recommendations regarding youth ministry and supporting children of divorce. In brief:

- 1. STORY MATTERS:** Youth ministry and education already focus on hearing and telling one’s life story through the lens of a commonly shared faith story. Incorporating the youth’s often confusing and painful story of divorce should be a priority for pastors, youth leaders, and religious educators.
- 2. ADULT ROLE MODELS MATTER TO YOUTH:** Each of the papers in its own way echoes a key finding from *The National Study of Youth and Religion*:<sup>116</sup> “The single most important influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents.”<sup>117</sup> Divorce complicates the critical role modeling that parents play for their children, highlighting the importance of adult mentors in congregations. Faith role models of all ages and relationships, ranging from grandparent-types to peers to big brother and sister-types to pastors, can witness to the trauma of divorce in a young person’s life, can support the divorced parents in

being the faith role models their children need, and potentially help faithful youth who become faithful adults.

**3. BEING GENUINE MATTERS:** When it comes to role models and mentors, youth don't care what age you are, what you look like, or what you do for a living—they care that you are genuine. One way to express genuineness is through engaged and active listening. As the study reported in *Between Two Worlds* suggests, children of divorce tend to be early moral forgers, which can be perceived by some adults as precociousness. One of the most important tasks a pastor or youth leader can do for children of divorce is to create a safe environment to doubt, question, search, pray, struggle, and find hope, grace, and truth on their own terms. If you cannot listen openly and entertain the questions of a young person, then you will most likely fail.

**4. HOLY SPACE MATTERS:** The church building can be a gift to a child of divorce and his or her parents. The sanctuary, the youth room, the gym, even the pastor's office can be a refuge and home. A congregation can discern how to create hospitable space in which a young person can find stability and safety over the years, especially during significant events, like baptism or confirmation, a wedding or a funeral. Even though many of these events may be joyful, they can be quite stressful for children of divorce, whose lives are often lived quite literally "between two worlds." These events cause those compartmentalized worlds, the "mom's house" and "dad's house" identities, to collide as their divorced parents and any new stepparents or parents' partners gather in the sanctuary.

## 1. *Story Matters*

*Mary Ellen never joined the Lutheran congregation I served as associate pastor but she often attended weekly confirmation classes and youth group meetings. A sixth-grader whose parents divorced when she was a toddler, Mary Ellen spent weekdays with her working mom who lived down the street from the church and with her dad on the weekends. Having befriended several members of the confirmation class at school, she first came*

*to a youth lock-in with a friend. When she realized how close she lived to the church, she started walking over after school before confirmation class on Wednesdays and hung out with me in my office (which was also the church sacristy) until class started. I learned not to leave any preparations to the last moment so that I could be present to her as she sat casually on the floor, surrounded by robes and liturgically colored paraments, and told me about her day.*

*As class time approached she'd reluctantly stand and say, "Well, I guess you all better get started..." until one day I asked if she'd like to join us. The rest of the class, for whom weekly confirmation class was considered a unique form of Lutheran torture, thought she was nuts, but she gladly came and asked all kinds of questions. She knew faith through the eyes of the Catholic church and her questions helped the Lutheran young people hear their story with new ears and helped them clarify why they do what they do and why they believe what they do about God. In that class, all their stories of life and faith began to be their own and new understandings of God emerged.*

As people of faith, our identities are shaped by who we are in the light of God's story of grace and mercy. The teen years may be the time when we first begin asking how our faith story shapes our life story on our own, without the story of our parents dictating what we think. Part of why I first became involved with youth ministry lies in my belief that youth tend to be particularly open to asking questions about spiritual meaning and practice and want to make sense of their life story in the light of a greater purpose that faith provides. This observation is supported by Uecker and Ellison, who write that "adolescence and young adulthood are typically considered to be the time of the life course characterized by the most religious change. Most 'conversion' experiences are thought to occur from ages 13 to 16, and on average religious participation declines precipitously as adolescents age and transition to adulthood."<sup>118</sup>

This search for meaning frequently begins in early youth when traditional rites of passage like baptism or affirmation of baptism, often called confirmation, occur. These rites often include a preparation period, which involves religious education that focuses on scriptural and doctrinal study and mentorship from the pastor as well as other adult lay leaders. A key element of this preparation

period is creating space for young people to think about faith beliefs and practices for themselves, apart from their parents, and to ready themselves to be public as adult members of the church. The goal of these rites of passage is to strengthen the connection between the young person and the church and to offer an opportunity to own the faith narrative as the normative lens in his or her life story. This time of preparation and life storytelling may be the first time that this young person articulates his or her existence and purpose in the light of faith.

Although none of the papers address these particular rites of passage directly, they do touch on how divorce disrupts and thus shapes a person's ability to create meaningful connections, individually and communally. Using Heidegger's idea of *Dasein* or "Being," Andrew Root argues that divorce throws into turmoil the life story, and thus identity, of the child. The child "now must figure out who he or she will be in the future, and who he or she will be in light of the broken union of those responsible for his or her *Dasein*. . . . For identity to provide ontological security, it needs to provide some continuity in one's biographical narrative."<sup>119</sup>

When a young person with divorced parents sits on the floor of your office and talks about her day, she may be wrestling with questions of personal identity that her peers with intact families are not. The image that Chris Kiesling draws shows how a parent's divorce can become a wound that needs to be incorporated into the life story of a child: "Attachment theory images divorce more like a wound that a tree suffers, yet still continues to grow around it, taking into itself the wound suffered. Development, following something like divorce, may subsequently branch in many directions depending on subsequent attachments and adjustments to one's representational model, but all of the branches can be traced back to a common root."<sup>120</sup>

I thought of how during confirmation classes each youth met with a faith mentor and wrote a "Statement of Faith" that incorporated doctrine and the ways that he or she had seen God working in his or her personal and family life story. In the light of these papers, I would encourage mentors and pastors to invite a young person to think specifically about his or her parents' divorce in the context of writing his or her faith life story. Thus, the preparation for these rites of passage can provide an opportunity to explore how the story of this youth has been shaped by parental divorce, and to support this young person

in writing a story of hope that incorporates the pain and loss of the divorce into his or her identity.

Root and Kiesling reminded me that the church has many children of divorce preparing for baptism or confirmation and attending Sunday school or youth group meetings who may feel adrift and wounded. What better place for children of divorce to be than the church? This place and people proclaim that you matter to God and that through baptism you are claimed by and connected to God and the people of God eternally, as in, “N., child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.” I was encouraged by Root’s final words to the church: “The community of the church cannot eliminate the deep ontological fractures that occur when divorce strikes, but it can, in its communal life, stand with and for these children, bearing their brokenness. In this way it can hold them together, by whispering in words and deeds, ‘Your pain is beyond comprehension, and you suffer, but know that we share your suffering. You are not alone. You may have lost the union in the community that created you, but you are secure in the community that knows a power that brings life out of death, a power in which isolation gives way to belonging.’”<sup>121</sup>

**IN KENDA GREASY DEAN’S BOOK** *Almost Christian,<sup>122</sup> one of several books that reflect on the National Study of Youth and Religion, she offers a four-step process of thinking about story in the light of disruptive life experiences, such as divorce. She uses the term “teaching towards transformation,” which I imagine as the process of telling one’s personal story in the light of a collectively-held faith story. She writes “Teaching towards transformation typically involves four distinct moments: 1) a disorienting dilemma; 2) critical self-reflection on our prior assumptions; 3) discourse that puts into words the insights derived from our critical reflection; 4) action.” Her steps remind a youth mentor that asking a child of divorce to tell his or her story is a practice in gaining faithful insight into how God sees us in the midst and in the aftermath of a disruptive life event, one that calls us to action.*

## 2. *Adult Role Models Matter*

*Kevin grew up in the congregation where I served as youth sponsor. His parents divorced when he was young and he alternated living with his mother and father every other week, with Sunday evenings the transition day between homes. Weekly youth group meetings also landed on Sunday evenings. Because only his father continued to attend church and make worship and youth group attendance a priority for him, Kevin missed every Sunday when he was at his mom's house. When we planned fun outings or service projects, the other youth sponsor and I tried to keep in mind when Kevin would be with us. He often brought a calendar with him in order to check to see if he would be able to attend an event or take a leadership role in a project. He hated to let the group down due to his absence.*

*This routine continued for many years until Kevin turned sixteen. He shared with the group during the sharing of joys and sorrows that he sat down with both his mom and his dad and told them that since he could drive himself he would be going to youth group every Sunday night from now on. His father was expectedly happy and his mother acquiesced. Kevin's peers at youth group cheered and gave him high fives. The other sponsor and I gave him hugs and told him how proud we were of him.*

*I couldn't help thinking that at sixteen Kevin was making adult decisions concerning the diverse value systems presented by his divorced parents' homes in ways that the other teenagers in our group from intact families did not have to make. He had to choose youth group over the wishes of his mother. Quite a heavy decision. Thankfully, Kevin had role models in his father, his pastor, his youth sponsors, his grandparents, and aunts and uncles who attended church with him who could be a "communion of saints" for him—cheering Kevin on in his walk of faith but also encouraging him to continue to be connected to and in conversation with both his parents about his faith.*

The time of preparation for a rite of passage like baptism or confirmation as well as participation in youth group meetings, mission trips, and camp are intended to provide opportunities for young people to develop their life and faith story and strengthen their connection to the multigenerational faith community. Ultimately, however, all the family scholars' papers stress that the first

people youth observe and mimic in faith behavior are their parents. Uecker and Ellison show that “most parents most likely will end up getting religiously of their children what they themselves are.”<sup>123</sup> Uecker and Ellison highlight that having parents, both mothers and fathers, who model consistent belief and practices of faith provide something that I think all parents, pastors, and youth leaders desire for young people: a safe place to seek and struggle and find God and meaning within worship and the spiritual practices of a particular faith community. I think of the spiritual song, “Jesus, be a fence all around me every day.” Uecker and Ellison call this fence a “sacred umbrella”:

*Having two parents share the same religious perspective may help constitute a “sacred umbrella”—Smith’s variation on Berger’s idea of a sacred canopy defined as the relatively small reference group or relational world in which a religious belief system makes sense and is perpetuated or strengthened. Growing up with a nonreligious parent or religiously heterogeneous parents may undermine the plausibility structures that uphold childhood religious beliefs. The issue of weakened plausibility may come to the fore as young adults develop their own, independent religious commitments.*<sup>124</sup>

In terms of modeling faith practices like forgiveness, Kiesling uses the powerful example of Belinda, a pastor’s kid, whose father went to prison several times during her childhood for various offenses. She learned how to relate to her father by following the example set by her mother: “I learned from mom that you don’t look at someone and see their mistakes or sins, you look at them for who they are. I saw my mom give forgiveness as a child . . . if she could forgive, I could forgive my dad.”<sup>125</sup>

The primary role of parents as faith mentors and models can be compromised for children of divorce. As caring church members we may be tempted to try to step in as substitute parental figures for children of divorce, but these papers stress that other adults in the congregation may have far more impact on the future lives of young people by *directly* supporting the faith practices of divorced parents. For example, Uecker and Ellison share a startling discovery about the role of fathers in the faith life and development of children of divorce. The findings from Zhai et al., suggest that “fathers may matter more than mothers for religious development from adolescence to young adulthood.” The authors write:

*For four of the six outcomes—religious identity, spiritual identity, religious service attendance, and frequency of prayer—it is paternal religious characteristics that remain significant in the final models. For a fifth outcome—disaffiliation from religion—having a father with no affiliation seems to matter more than having a mother with no affiliation, though both appear to be important. This certainly does not mean that mothers’ religiosity is unimportant for long-term religious development; nor does it necessarily mean that fathers matter more than mothers in an absolute sense. This does suggest, however, that as young adults develop a religious identity apart from their parents, or as their religious identity changes, their father’s religious characteristics become more important than their mother’s—with whom their childhood religious identity most closely aligns.<sup>126</sup>*

These observations about the powerful role of fathers in the faith life of their children should inspire pastors and youth leaders to pay close attention to the fathers of their youth, especially children of divorce. Do pastors provide support, informally or formally, to fathers—including divorced dads? Based on this research, a frank one-on-one conversation with a father, or creating a men’s Bible study that specifically recruits divorced dads, could perhaps positively shape the future faith life and practice of their children.

Although pastors may agree that supporting divorcing parents, especially fathers, is a good idea, they may also be wondering what to discuss with a divorced father or mother. As a pastor and youth leader, I found the typology offered by Melinda Lundquist Denton to be especially helpful in shaping discussion with divorcing parents. She suggests:

- Define what their current faith practice, as parents, looks like.
- Define what type of faith practice they would like for their children.
- Acknowledge that in times of stress, faith practice level tends to change.
- Due to the divorce, what changes are happening in their faith lives and in the lives of their children?
- Define what level of faith involvement they would like to have and thus like their children to have.<sup>127</sup>

Denton builds on the research she conducted earlier with Pearce that identified “five unique profiles of religiosity among adolescents . . . the Abiders, the

Adapters, the Assenters, the Avoiders, and Atheists.”<sup>128</sup> Her chart is helpful and can be used with divorced parents or in support or Bible study groups that include divorced parents.<sup>129</sup> I can also see using this typology with high school youth, who could analyze the faith life and practice of their family, themselves, and their hopes for their future selves.

<b>THE FIVE A'S</b>	
<i>Abiders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have highest probability of giving most religious response to each of the standard measures of religion: belief in God, exclusivism, prayer, attendance, importance of faith, close to God</li> </ul>
<i>Adapters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Believe in a personal and involved God</li> <li>■ High personal religious practice and salience</li> <li>■ High service to others and thinking about life</li> <li>■ Not very exclusivist</li> <li>■ Variance in public religious practice</li> </ul>
<i>Assenters</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Tend to believe in a personal God</li> <li>■ Feel somewhat close to God</li> <li>■ Faith not likely to be very important in life</li> <li>■ Not exclusivist</li> <li>■ Practice occasionally</li> </ul>
<i>Avoiders</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Express some belief in God, but often a distant impersonal God</li> <li>■ Low levels of religious belief and salience</li> </ul>
<i>Atheists</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Do not believe in God</li> <li>■ Highest probability of giving the least religious response to every question</li> </ul>

As I read Denton’s typology, I thought of how Mary Ellen Konieczny questions the role that pastors may play in counseling divorcing and divorced couples when she writes, “most couples, however, avoid seeking help from clergy until, in all practicality, the marriage has ended. . . . Formal support for spouses and children of divorce, where it exists, occurs through referral to professional therapists rather than as an integrated congregational program.”<sup>130</sup>

As a pastor, I have often felt that couples having problems came to me or went to a counselor in order to be able to say, “Our marriage is so bad, we even talked to the pastor, and even that couldn’t save it.” But, truth be told, most pastors are not marriage counselors and tend, as Konieczny confirms, to be compassionate but implicitly support societal views of divorce.

However, when I read Denton’s typology I recognized that talking with a divorcing or divorced couple about their faith beliefs and practice, their hopes for the faith lives of their children, and how their concrete faith practices as parents directly impact their children’s future in faith are matters about which pastors can confidently counsel couples. They can remind couples that “when the disruption of a divorce [occurs] the tendency would be for the individual [both parent and child] to change groups . . . [and the child] will model their parent over time.”<sup>131</sup> From a compassionate standpoint, pastors can help create a care plan for the faith life of the couple as well as for their children. They can help identify adult mentors in the church who can support the family in reaching their goals for worship attendance, prayer life, Bible study, acts of service, and stewardship. Pastors and youth leaders are well positioned to identify appropriate adults, from twentysomethings to grandparents, who might mentor and support a child of divorce.

As I reflected on the importance of adult non-parental role models for children of divorce, I thought of how M. Christian Green focuses on society as witness to the trauma of divorce and the impact on children of divorce despite our belief that marriage is a private affair. She writes that “the bystander ethic challenges us to recognize the interdependency of our needs, decisions, and choices of others in ways that are not always direct or obvious and which are sometimes morally ambiguous or ambivalent.”<sup>132</sup> A mentor and role model to a child of divorce becomes a bystander to the trauma of divorce—the “wound” of divorce to use Kiesling’s term, the “ontological break” of divorce to use Root’s term, the “change in religiosity” that can follow divorce to use Denton’s term. What a powerfully prophetic role a pastor, youth minister, or adult mentor can play for a child of divorce in honoring the reality and impact of divorce on this young person’s life.

**CHRISTIAN SMITH AND MELINDA LUNDQUIST DENTON** report in *Soul Searching*, another book reflecting on the National Study of Youth and Religion, that “highly devoted teenagers tend to have highly devoted parents who are married and well educated. They are more likely than other youth to say their parents love, accept, understand, and closely monitor them—all of which contribute to adolescent well-being.”<sup>133</sup> They also point out, “Religious congregations and other religious organizations are uniquely positioned in the array of social institutions operating in the US to embrace youth . . . [and] to strengthen ties between adults and teenagers. This could only be good for all involved. But it will not happen automatically. It will require intentionality and investment.”<sup>134</sup>

### 3. *Being Genuine Matters*

*Several years ago, I found the attendance of our high school youth beginning to lag at Sunday night youth meetings. I sent e-mails, the church mailed calendars and reminder postcards, and I made phone calls, but attendance remained spotty and sporadic at best. Our church’s pastor, my husband, went to a national church assembly and happened to converse with some campus ministers who suggested that this generation of teenagers is a “text” generation. Because I had the cell phone numbers of all youth group members, he encouraged me to experiment with texting members on Saturday afternoon or evening about the youth group meeting the next day.*

*At the time, texting was not my primary mode of communication, but I had a new smart phone that was less cumbersome to use than the old flip phone. I began by texting each member a personal message, sharing the theme for the night and asking if he or she would attend the meeting. In the following weeks I included a discussion starter question and found that even when a member couldn’t attend—frequently, for those members living in joint custody situations—we often got into long text discussions about the question or theme, which I then shared and incorporated into discussion at the meeting. Including an absent member’s thoughts helped*

*solidify that every member matters, but also showed the youth that I do actually care if they respond.*

*It would have been easier to send a mass text reminder, but after a few weeks I was so glad that I went with the personalized messages. At youth group one night, one teen asked another member if I had sent him the same message that I had sent to her. He was able to confirm that I had not and everyone in the room confirmed that mass texts were just like junk mail. I learned that this generation genuinely cares if I as the adult youth sponsor specifically invited him or her to the meeting. I started sharing in my texts why I thought they might care about this week's theme, or a specific question or scripture story I would like them personally to consider. When we started reading C.S. Lewis's The Screwtape Letters, I included a quote with a prayer each week. Although I still prefer face-to-face interaction, I found that if I wanted a genuine mentor relationship with our youth, I had to adapt my methodology.*

As I thought about the role that adult mentors can play for children of divorce, I turned to the family scholars' papers for guidance on what would be most helpful to tell an adult mentor. I have seen firsthand that faith mentors can have great power, which can be quite humbling to the adult. Youth are watching the actions and words of faith mentors all the time and will most likely incorporate those words and actions into their own lives, as Christopher G. Ellison, Anthony B. Walker, Norval D. Glenn, and Elizabeth Marquardt's paper stresses. They write, "in classical social learning theory, learning occurs when children observe the actions or hear the words of others in any medium or format and actively incorporate those observations into their own behavioral repertoire."<sup>135</sup> To serve effectively as a role model—these words of advice echo throughout the family scholars' papers—adult mentors must be genuine.

When youth attend worship or youth events they will not only be observing those around them, they will also be highly attentive to the integrity of their mentors and peers. Concerning this point, I was drawn to Christopher Ellison, Anthony Walker, and Norval Glenn's examination of the data that connects the level of conflict of the married or divorced parents to the level of worship attendance, finding that "children from amicable divorces are the least likely to attend church."<sup>136</sup>

In reading this finding my mind jumped to integrity and my observation that children are highly critical of disingenuousness and hypocrisy. Ellison, Walker, and Glenn's research seems to show that faith is a launching pad for children of happy marriages and faith is a comfort to children who experience genuine conflict, pain, and disappointment, but amicable divorces are confusing and random. Youth will go to church because they are confident or they are struggling, but not when they are in-between. Mentors must face the challenge that youth may be feeling apathetic in the face of an amicable divorce. They are "wounded" and "ontologically" adrift, and for what reason? A mentor who can assess the type of divorce that has been experienced can then create a care plan for each youth. Part of the plan will likely be creating a safe place to listen.

The church's ability to listen supportively comes under scrutiny in the papers, including that by Charles Stokes. He summarizes his findings: "Children of divorce felt alienated and/or awkward in church or synagogue. They had precocious questions that were rarely answered and sometimes belittled. But for those (few) children of divorce who made authentic connections in church and whose doubts and questions were welcomed, an enduring home away from home was found."<sup>137</sup>

The current situation can be discouraging, but hope exists. Most pastors, youth ministers, and mentors I have known genuinely want youth to find that the church can be a home away from home. Perhaps by disciplining ourselves calmly to examine the questions and frustrations of a young person, we can remember and teach that young person that God welcomes our adult questions and frustrations all the time. In my texting experiment with our high school youth, I was often humbled by the vulnerable and thoughtful questions posed about situations they were facing or a scripture we were reading. Through these texts we could have conversations sporadically, extending over a day or even a few days. I often found that I could be more present to a youth one-on-one on my phone than I could in the midst of all the talk and energy of the entire group at a youth meeting. Texting provided a way to invite tough questions and to practice attentive listening.

I close with Julie Hanlon Rubio's strong encouragement to Catholic teachers that ties our patient practice of listening to the long-term strength of a young person's faith:

*Catechists cannot afford to be afraid or indifferent. They need to make room in their classes for questions, exploration, and explanation that are relevant to the new situation in which faith is not inculturated in the same way and thus cannot be taken for granted. Children need space to ask questions about why rituals are done a certain way, about the strange stories of Jesus and the saints, about why we call God father or mother when human parents can sometimes fail their children. Catechists ought to embrace the challenge of honest religious conversation. Without it, children will be left with a faith that will not hold up over time.*<sup>138</sup>

**KARA POWELL AND CHAP CLARK** write in their book, *Sticky Faith*, about ways to encourage the faith of young people to “stick” for a lifetime. They write that “the greatest gift you can give your children is to let them see you struggle and wrestle with how to live a lifetime of trust in God.”<sup>139</sup> Modeling genuine faith in the midst of hardship can be the greatest gift parents give their children. Powell and Clark explain: “As parents, the last thing we want is for our kids to experience pain. But as Paul writes in Romans 5:3–4, ‘Suffering produces perseverance, perseverance, character; and character, hope.’ I wish it weren’t this way, but suffering is one of God’s primary avenues of growth and identity formation. . . . *Sticky Faith* is not a faith that avoids struggle or even dormant seasons. *Sticky Faith* is giving our kids the best we have to offer as they pursue who they are as a person, in community and in Christ.”<sup>140</sup>

#### 4. Holy Space Matters

*Robert, June, Jeremy, and Sara decided the colors for the youth room: each picked and painted one wall pink, one purple, one blue, and one with “graffiti” art of scripture verses picked by each youth member . . . No one knew how well Katelyn could sing till we spent eight hours in a cramped, un-air-conditioned van filled with snacks, pillows, Bibles, and bags . . . Amanda was the first to whisper thank you for her family and friends in a room full of bunk beds and air mattresses as a late-night conversation recounted the different people we’d met and the places we’d been on a service trip . . . In a cramped church kitchen, Ian taught us how to make*

*the perfect scrambled eggs, beaming with pride as he replicated his mom's techniques, which started us all sharing how each person's family cooks and eats at his or her house . . . At 3:00 p.m. each day our group heeded the call of Ms. Audrey to join her on her back porch to eat ice cream sandwiches and discuss life, during a break from gutting moldy drywall in her house . . . Some of my favorite memories of watching the faith of young people evolve happened at worn tables where we ate and learned to play "Mexican Train" dominoes and prayed together. Holy space matters.*

One of the gifts congregations can offer to young people is the gift of holy space. A congregation is a steward of a building that creates sacred space for several different but interrelated goals:

- for *worship* in its sanctuary and preparation areas, like a sacristy
- for *education* in its auxiliary rooms, ranging from the pastor's study to Sunday school classrooms to youth group recreation rooms
- for *fellowship* in its meeting hall, kitchen, and any outdoor spaces

For a child of divorce, the church can be a stable place to find welcome and sanctuary in the form of worship, sacraments, music, study, meals, and fun, but modeling that the church is also a safe and sacred space where we cope with loss and discern ongoing shifts in identity through the lens of faith can and should begin with parents. As all the papers written for this study have stressed, children are especially likely to turn to the church as a place of refuge and strength if their parents do, too.

A congregation can use their space for a divorce support group. For example, Sorcha Brophy-Warren writes about the use of the support group DivorceCare in a mega church: "The church, then, is a space wherein you can receive support from people who understand how important marriage is, and will work to preserve the integrity of marriage, rather than attempting to get help from those who will "simply give one unscriptural advice like say, 'Oh, dump the guy,' or 'Dump your wife.'"<sup>141</sup> The church provides an environment within which you can restore your moral value system and move forward. It can be a space of wisdom and advice that offers understanding of what kind of institution your marriage was and all that might have been good about it.

DivorceCare's curriculum is aimed at evangelical churches, with a structure that could be used as a guide for other traditions. Brophy-Warren quotes an

individual who has participated in DivorceCare as saying, “In DivorceCare . . . they learn genuine biblical wisdom, begin to heal from the trauma of the divorce experience, and start to orient their lives in a new, more Godly direction.”<sup>142</sup>

Seeing a parent turn to the church for healing and hope after a divorce can help encourage a young person to do the same. With mentors who can acknowledge that a youth’s experience of divorce will be different from a parent’s, a space of listening and growth can be created.

In my experience, having a “Youth Room” has been critical in helping young people create sacred space that is their own and not defined by their parents or by who they were as children in the church. In every congregation I’ve served, and even stretching back to when I was a youth, we had our own room that we used for meetings and Sunday school. We have donated couches for a lounge feel and younger kids can’t wait to hang out in the cool Youth Room. At the congregation I served in which the youth designed a wall of scripture graffiti, each new member couldn’t wait to add their quote when he or she got to be a high school senior. As adults they would point out their signatures and reminisce about fun times in youth group.

That room was a safe space. A congregation witnesses to their commitment to young people and their faith formation by setting aside sacred space for them. The space can help support programming and serve as an incentive for parents to make attending youth group meetings and functions a priority.

Conversely, pastors and lay leaders are wise to recognize that holy space can also be a stressful space for children of divorce of any age. Congregations host significant, once-in-a-lifetime rituals such as baptism, confirmation, graduation Sunday, weddings, funerals, and the annual celebration of Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. For some children of divorce, having their divorced parents and any new stepparents gathered in one place for significant events like these produces anxiety, because they anticipate their parents’ potential arguments and their own inner conflicts.

Most pastors and youth ministers are already aware of and sensitive to this uncomfortable, potentially volatile situation, and most likely will feel anxiety about it as well. However, the family scholars’ work reminded me that even in amicable divorces, where volatile conflicts are not expected, these rituals can

still hold stress and anxiety because the split worlds of the child of divorce will collide and interact. Regardless of any tension or amiability between ex-spouses and new parent figures, children of divorce may be negotiating what version of themselves to be, the mom-version or the dad-version or something else—and everyone will be looking to them to bridge the differences, since they are the reason everyone has gathered together in the first place.

On a positive note, the church also provides holy space where a child of divorce can witness long-term marriages. As many of the scholars show, part of the legacy of divorce makes itself known when the child of divorce matures and seeks out a marriage partner. Children of divorce find that they do not know how a long-term marriage functions and they wonder if they can stay married. The church remains one of the most powerful intergenerational gathering places in society. Congregations provide space where countless married men and women from newlyweds to those with young children to empty-nesters to retired couples come to worship, serve, and fellowship with each other. Married couples in congregations might consider getting involved in youth ministry or education as a way to mentor young people in what long-term marriage looks like. For a child of divorce, seeing how the institution and covenant of marriage can work over a lifetime can be what gives them the confidence to get and stay married themselves.

In the end, these family scholars reminded me that the church plays a vital role in speaking hope to those grieving divorce and in modeling enduring relationships to children of divorce. Through story, mentors, and genuine engagement, congregations can create holy space for children of divorce to hear and see that marriage matters.

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CHURCHES

The authors of this report would like to close with recommendations for pastors and youth leaders, parents, children of divorce, and church members.

## *For Pastors and Youth Ministers and Youth Sponsors:*

- Create safe space for children of divorce.
- Listen and allow children of divorce to question and struggle for meaning when it comes to faith.
- Be a faith role model.
- If married, be a marriage role model. The young people you serve are watching how you interact with your spouse and live out your marriage promises.
- Divorce shapes the life story of a person and so should be addressed in discussing a person's life story and when writing a confession of faith.
- Be genuine and listen. Use all available mediums to do so.
- Know that acknowledging the trauma or wound of divorce in a young person's life can be a prophetic role that opens a space for healing and hope.

## *For Parents:*

- If you want your child to be a faithful adult, you should strive to be a faithful person as a parent.
- It is likely that your children ultimately will practice their faith in a way similar to the way you do. They will tend to mimic your worship attendance patterns and will be involved in outreach, giving, and fellowship at similar levels to yours. Do you want your children to reflect your current level of worship attendance and overall involvement in a faith community?
- The religious behavior of both mothers AND fathers matter. Even if you are divorced, your children still see you as a couple, and they will watch and

mimic the behavior of both mother and father. A father's behavior may have even more sway than a mother's in impacting the faith of a child.

- Your child's experience of the divorce is different from your experience of the divorce. What helps you cope will most likely differ from what helps him or her cope. When a mentor acknowledges and supports your child in talking about whatever pain he or she feels due to the divorce, you might feel threatened. Remember that your child is dealing with a loss that is out of his or her control, and his or her story and coping is not about you. You are always the adult in the family. If you need to cope with your child's reaction to the divorce you will need to seek support from other adults.
- Your divorce impacts your child until death parts you. Remember that your child may feel like different versions of himself or herself in each of your respective households. When you come together, your child may be struggling to reconcile different expressions of himself or herself and may be worried about disappointing one or both of you.

### *For Children of Divorce (Young and Grown):*

- God sees you and cares about you and your family.
- The church cares about you and your family. The church will not allow the divorce of your parents, or any loss or gain in life, define who you are. The church will strive to be a place where you can be defined by faith and not by what happens to you in life.
- Your story is important and the divorce of your parents may be an integral part of that story. We care about how you make sense of the divorce of your parents in the light of your faith.

### *For Church Members:*

- The church is one of the few intergenerational places of community left in society. Acting as a big sister or brother in Christ, aunt or uncle in Christ, or grandparent in Christ could make all the difference in the faith life of a child of divorce. For several participants in Christopher Kiesling's study, the role of grandparents, church members, and youth ministers proved pivotal in their faith development.<sup>143</sup>
- Be REAL and listen.

- Children of divorce tend to be “early moral forgers,” which means that their questions and concerns are not necessarily a sign of precociousness. Instead, they have had to grow up quickly and are trying to make sense of adult concepts and choices with the tools of a child. Help them feel safe to question and learn by listening and encouraging them to talk.
- If married, be a marriage role model. Remember that your marriage may be the positive role model that inspires a child of divorce to nurture a lifelong, healthy marriage someday.

### *For Marriage Ministries:*

- One of the most profound ways that we can support children of divorce is by helping there to be fewer children of divorce in the first place. It is more important than ever for churches to reflect deeply on their role as custodians of the marriage tradition, and to engage actively in preparing and strengthening congregants and people in the community to have healthy, lasting marriages.



# STUDY GUIDE

**WELCOME!** This study guide is intended to help you navigate the research and resources related to the report *Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith? Challenging Churches to Confront Family Change*. The report reflects the culmination of a multi-year project funded by the Lilly Endowment and released by the Center for Marriage and Families at the Institute for American Values that brought together a cross section of social scientists, ethicists, family scholars, and theologians to conduct new research on the moral and spiritual lives of children of divorce.

## NOTE FOR STUDY GUIDE LEADERS

The resources you will need for the study can be downloaded for free at the website “Divorce+Faith: The Next Generation,” found at <http://www.centerformarriageandfamilies.org/shape-of-families/>. During each lesson, you will need a copy of the report *Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?* and access to the *Between Two Worlds* documentary, available at the above-listed web address.

The study guide follows a four-part structure that echoes the section of the report titled “A Plan for Congregations: A Mainline Protestant Pastor’s Reflections.” Each lesson can be catered to your group as you see fit. Keep in mind that talking about divorce can be *vulnerable* for those participating and you may need to adjust which questions you discuss based on the needs of your group. We hope that this study guide assists you in exploring and assessing your own family of origin as well as the families in your faith community and helps you imagine how our faith can shape all families for good.

## LESSON 1: STORY MATTERS

**A. OPENING PRAYER:** *God of story, you shape our individual life narratives in your image and redeem the steps of our journey with your Good News. May we find courage to speak the truth about our families, even when touched by the pain and loss of divorce, knowing that you hold our words and experiences in your hands. Amen.*

**B. WARM-UP QUESTION:** Name your favorite storybook family from childhood. How is that storybook family like or different from your own family in childhood?

**C. SCRIPTURE:** Isaiah 43:1–7

**D. WATCH:** *Between Two Worlds* documentary segment 0:00 to 7:35.

### E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- i. How did your parents meet? Are your parents divorced? Remarried? Never married? Still married?
- ii. Rank your families' religious practices:  
*Worship attendance:*  high  medium  low  
*Prayer:*  high  medium  low  
*Serving others:*  high  medium  low  
*Giving:*  high  medium  low
- iii. How does your current practice of worship attendance, prayer, serving others, or giving compare to your parents'?
- iv. What did you learn from the stories shared in the *Between Two Worlds* documentary section?
- v. "One-quarter of today's young adults are grown children of divorce. . . . It is also becoming clear that grown children of divorce stand at the leading edge of a generation that considers itself 'spiritual but not religious.' Yet they form a kind of broken leading edge, with spiritual stories often characterized by loss or suffering" (pp. 10–11). Who are the grown children of divorce in your faith community? How would you describe their stories?

vi. How might the verses from Isaiah inform and shape our response to the stories of children of divorce?

vii. What opportunities do young people in your faith community have to tell their story? Sunday School? Confirmation or Baptism classes? Youth Group? How might you help a child of divorce incorporate the story of his family into his or her faith story?

**F. FAITH IN ACTION:** Does your congregation have a library? If so, are there spiritual resources for children of divorce available? Does your surrounding community offer support for divorcing couples or children of divorce? Consider creating a resource book for your congregation of resources available in the community as well as in your library.

**G. CLOSING PRAYER:** *God of love and companionship, you are always by our side in times of joy or suffering. As you gather your children from the ends of the earth, may we follow your example and gather those who are lost or alone in our own communities. May our hearts be tender and our patience long as we seek to hear stories of pain and loss—especially those stories of divorce—in our faith family. Amen.*

**H. FURTHER READING:**

*Links to papers and articles available at:*

*<http://www.centerformarriageandfamilies.org/shape-of-families/>*

i. Pages 10–11, “Executive Summary,” and pages 45–47, “Introduction—How I Came to This Question,” in *Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?*

ii. *Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* by Andrew Root

iii. “An Attachment Theory Approach to Narrating the Faith Journey of Children of Parental Divorce” by Chris Kiesling

iv. “Lessons From American Girl Dolls: The Divorce Generation,” by Amy Zietlow, *The Atlantic*, 1/18/2013

## LESSON 2: ADULT ROLE MODELS MATTER

**A. OPENING PRAYER:** *God of our ancestors, we read with wonder the names of those who have gone before us in faith. Reading the scriptures we cannot fail to see that faith is passed down through generations. Especially in families of divorce where lines of connection may be frayed or fractured, may we be empowered as a church family to pass on the beliefs and practices of the faith to the next generation. Amen.*

**B. WARM-UP QUESTION:** Name an adult faith role model for you. Do you have both a male and a female faith role model?

**C. SCRIPTURE:** Luke 15:11–32

**D. WATCH:** *Between Two Worlds* documentary segment 13:46 to 20:11.

### E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- i. Several scholars note (from the National Study of Youth and Religion) that “the greatest predictor of the religious lives of youth is the religious lives of their parents.” How does that quote relate to your faith and the faith of your parents? When did you feel that your faith was your own?
- ii. One scholar in the report writes that “Christians have long used parental metaphors to affirm the idea of a loving, personal God who sustains life . . . [W]hat happens to children’s concept of a protective father God is they do not know their fathers? How is belief in a loving mother God shaped when a mother goes through a difficult divorce and is unable to be a stable force for her children” (p. 25)? Do you imagine God to be like a parent? How are your parents different from who God is? How have your life experiences impacted your attachment to God as a parent figure?
- iii. Which character in the Prodigal Son story is most like you? Most like your mom or dad? How does the poem “Prodigal Dad”—shared in the *Between Two Worlds* documentary—change how you read this parable? Why might a child of divorce interpret the story that way?
- iv. “Scholars observe that children of divorce experience a disruption of the ‘domestic church’ of their home. If they become alienated from formal

religious practice they can experience a second silent schism in their lives—the first being the rupture of their parents’ marriage and the second being the rupture of the child’s connection to a congregation and even to a life of faith” (pp. 10–11). What does the second silent schism look like in your faith community? Are there children, youth, or adults who have experienced not only the rupture of their parents’ marriage but a rupture with the congregation? How might we name that rupture pastorally? How might we respond to that rupture?

**F. FAITH IN ACTION:** Prayerfully inventory your friends and family members. Who are the grown children of divorce? Have you heard their story and how their family has shaped their faith? Consider having coffee or a meal with a friend and offer a safe space to hear their story.

**G. CLOSING PRAYER:** *Parent God, you stand on the horizon of life and watch for our return, no matter how far we may roam. May we know your deep desire to be connected to us through grace and love, and may we share that good news with those who feel lost and invisible, especially the children of divorce in our lives. Amen.*

**H. FURTHER READING:**

- i. Pages 19–21, “The Role of Parents,” and pages 24–28, “Is God like a Parent?”, in *Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?*
- ii. “An Attachment Theory Approach to Narrating the Faith Journey of Children of Parental Divorce” by Chris Kiesling

## LESSON 3: BEING GENUINE MATTERS

**A. OPENING PRAYER:** *God of truth, you call to us to live in the moment and be fully present to one another. May we be open to adjusting how we reach out in faith to the needs of those around us, especially the children of divorce in our faith community. Amen.*

**B. WARM-UP QUESTION:** What is your preferred mode of communication? Face-to-face? E-mail? Phone? Text? Social Media? Why?

**C. SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 137:1–6

**D. WATCH:** *Between Two Worlds* documentary segment 7:36 to 13:45.

### E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- i. “[O]f those young adults who regularly attended a church or synagogue at the time of their parents’ divorce, two-thirds say that no one—from the clergy or from the congregation—reached out to them, while only one-quarter remembers either a clergy member or congregant doing so” (p. 11). How do you, personally or as a faith community, reach out to children experiencing the divorce of their parents?
- ii. In the *Between Two Worlds* documentary, we hear that “after the divorce it’s no longer the parent’s job to rub together the sharp edges of their two different worlds, instead the rough edges of their different worlds rub together in only one place—the inner life of the child. They feel and act like little adults.” How might the psalmist’s words about the Israelites in exile, longing for home, help us understand the “early moral forgers” that children of divorce often become?
- iii. “While a good divorce *is* better than a bad divorce, it is still not good. No matter how amicable divorced parents might be, and how much they each love and care for the child, their willingness to do these things does not resolve the situation that a child’s world is now divided in two” (p. 37). Does the church believe there is such a thing as a “good divorce?” How can the church respond to the idea of the “good divorce” when most children will say that divorce is never good? When might a divorce be best for children? How are high-conflict and low-conflict marriages

different? How might the needs of children be different in each type of marriage or divorce?

iv. A scholar in the report writes that “children of divorce felt alienated and/or awkward in church or synagogue. They had precocious questions that were rarely answered and sometimes belittled. But for those (few) children of divorce who made authentic connections in church and whose doubts and questions were welcomed, an enduring home away from home was found” (p. 58). How do you and your faith community honor precocious questions?

**F. FAITH IN ACTION:** Who are the children of divorce (of all ages) in your congregation? Commit to praying for them and their families each day in the coming week.

**G. CLOSING PRAYER:** *God who welcomes all questions, we know that whenever we call on your name you are there. As we wrestle with how to allow faith to shape the families in our community for good, may we be inspired to speak truth and create spaces where honest sharing can occur, especially for children of divorce who are longing for relationships of authenticity. Amen.*

**H. FURTHER READING:**

- i. “How Good for Children Is the ‘Good Divorce’? Surprising Findings on Educational Attainment and Marital Success” by Norval D. Glenn
- ii. “The Effects of Parental Marital Discord and Divorce on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults” by Christopher G. Ellison, Anthony B. Walker, Norval D. Glenn, and Elizabeth Marquardt

## LESSON 4: HOLY SPACE MATTERS

**A. OPENING PRAYER:** *God of space and time, we are your people, connected to one another in faith, hope, and love. Open our hearts and minds to the stories of suffering in our midst, especially those of children of divorce. May our church family be a sanctuary and safe place for them to know God's love and care. Amen.*

**B. WARM-UP QUESTION:** Think back to your childhood church. Where was your favorite place to go in the church building?

**C. SCRIPTURE:** Hebrews 12:1–2

**D. WATCH:** *Between Two Worlds* documentary segment 20:11 to 26:09.

### E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- i. A scholar in the report writes, “Do those who witness a divorce experience a ‘there but for the grace of God go I’ moment? Does this witness produce bystander anxiety or something like survivor’s guilt? How might witnessing the family disruption of others affect [our own] worldview” (p. 33)? How are we witnesses or bystanders to divorce? What does that mean in your faith community? How might you safely acknowledge the pain of divorce in your faith community, without being intrusive or “nosy”?
- ii. The report notes that in one study the future religious and spiritual identity, religious service attendance, frequency of prayer, and disaffiliation from religion of young people followed the example of their father more closely than their mother (p. 53). How did your father express and practice his faith? How does your faith community support the faith lives of fathers?
- iii. Review “The Five A’s” typology on page 54 that measures a person’s level of religious belief and practice. Where do you fall? This scholar emphasizes that a time of stress will often cause a move between these levels. How might you use this tool with couples, families, or young people facing a time of change, like a divorce, graduation, marriage, etc.?

iv. Read the report recommendations on pages 63–65. Which recommendations resonate with your faith community or with you personally? How might you interpret or live out one of these recommendations in your faith community?

**F. FAITH IN ACTION:** How does your congregation support families with young children? What are the practical needs for respite and spiritual renewal of the mothers and fathers in your community? What might you do (a financial gift, a gift of time or talent) that could help strengthen a mother or father you know?

**G. CLOSING PRAYER:** *God of reconciliation and courage, when families experience divorce around us we often struggle with what to say and how to respond in love. May our faith community be a place of welcome for anyone experiencing brokenness in their relationships. Lead us and guide us to be a place of healing and wholeness, especially for children of divorce of all ages. Amen.*

**H. FURTHER READING:**

- i. Pages 32–35, “Bystanders to Divorce,” and pages 51–56, “Adult Role Models Matter,” in *Does the Shape of Families Shape Faith?*
- ii. *Between Two Worlds* by Elizabeth Marquardt
- iii. “‘There But for the Grace:’ The Ethics of Bystanders to Divorce” by M. Christian Green
- iv. “Family Structure, Family Disruption, and Profiles of Adolescent Religiosity” by Melinda Lundquist Denton

# ENDNOTES

1. These findings from the National Survey on the Moral and Spiritual Lives of Children of Divorce, co-investigated by Norval D. Glenn and Elizabeth Marquardt, were first reported in Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2005). See the religion findings in chap. 7, “Child-Sized Old Souls,” and the summary of the data reported in app. B, 199–226.

2. Ibid.

3. Melinda Lundquist Denton, “Family Structure, Family Disruption, and Profiles of Adolescent Religiosity,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51, no. 1 (2012): 43.

4. Jeremy Uecker and Christopher G. Ellison, “Parental Religious Characteristics, Parental Divorce, and the Religious Lives of Young Adults” (unpublished paper, 2011).

5. Jiexia Elisa Zhai, Christopher G. Ellison, Norval D. Glenn, and Elizabeth Marquardt, “Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement among Young Adults,” *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2007): 139–40.

6. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 155.

7. Julie Hanlon Rubio, “Divorce and the Faith of Children: A Challenge for the Church” (forthcoming, 2013).

8. Annette Mahoney and colleagues write, “Thus, parental divorce can precipitate a second silent, yet quite painful, dissolution—namely a schism between the child and his or her faith community of origin.” Annette Mahoney, Heidi Warner, and Elizabeth Krumei, “Broken Vows and the Next Generation: Recognizing and Helping When Parental Divorce Is a Spiritual Trauma,” *Counseling and Spirituality* 29, no. 2 (2010): 3–4. The paper is published in French and available at <http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=23940066>. The English translation of the abstract (available at <http://www.counsellingandspirituality.com/english/results.php>) reads:

*Recent national surveys show that older youth who have experienced parental divorce tend to disengage from organized religion but feel as close to God as peers from intact families. In this paper, we offer a conceptual model and concrete guidelines to help adults engage in sensitive, yet direct, dialogues with older youth about the spiritual dimensions of parental divorce. Based on a recent line of empirical research on the role of religion and spirituality for post-divorce adjustment, we argue that parental divorce can be experienced as a spiritual*

*trauma where the event is interpreted as a sacred loss and desecration, and can also trigger painful spiritual struggles. Yet youth can also draw upon adaptive religious/spiritual methods to cope with the transition. We illustrate these psychospiritual processes using quotes from a study of college students who had experienced a parental divorce within the prior five years. We end with a list of questions that parents, pastoral counselors, clergy, and mental health professionals can draw upon to explore the intersection of faith and divorce with adolescents.*

9. The Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2003), 27–28.

10. Chris Kiesling, “An Attachment Theory Approach to Narrating the Faith Journey of Children of Parental Divorce,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 16, no. 4 (2011): 308, 311.

11. Rubio, “Divorce and Faith of Children.”

12. Paul R. Amato and Alan Booth, *A Generation at Risk: Growing Up in an Era of Family Upheaval* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 220.

13. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, app. A, 193–98.

14. Christopher G. Ellison, Anthony B. Walker, Norval D. Glenn, and Elizabeth Marquardt, “The Effects of Parental Marital Discord and Divorce on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults,” *Social Science Research* 40, no. 2 (2011): 538–51; see abstract.

15. See Norval D. Glenn, “How Good for Children Is the ‘Good Divorce’? Surprising Findings on Educational Attainment and Marital Success,” excerpted in *Propositions* 7 (New York: Institute for American Values, 2012), <http://www.centerforpublicconversation.org/propositions/2012-04.pdf>. The complete working paper is available at <http://familyscholars.org/2012/04/02/how-good-for-children-is-the-good-divorce/>.

16. The literature on children’s moral and spiritual development gives virtually no attention to the question of family structure and how growing up in a different kind of family, such as a divorced family, might influence children’s moral and spiritual development. Some of the primary authors on children’s moral development include Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, Robert Coles, and Carol Gilligan. The field of children’s religious or spiritual development is more diffuse, but can include Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung to James Fowler and, again, Robert Coles, as well as other, less well-known scholars. The theorists of moral development are often required reading in degree programs that train professionals who work with children and young people. Yet in this field, with the exception of Coles and Gilligan, the major works are decades old. Most were written when one could assume that most children grew up living with their married mother and father.

17. W. Bradford Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters: Thirty Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, 3rd ed. (New York: National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia and Institute for American Values, 2011).
18. E. Mavis Hetherington and John Kelly, *For Better or For Worse: Divorce Reconsidered* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002), 228.
19. See, for example, Judith S. Wallerstein, "The Long-Term Effects of Divorce on Children: A Review," *Journal of the American Academy of Child Adolescent Psychiatry* 30, no. 3 (May 1991): 353. For a culminating publication resulting from Wallerstein's ongoing work, read Judith Wallerstein, Julia Lewis, and Sandra Blakeslee, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study* (New York: Hyperion, 2000).
20. Leora E. Lawton and Regina Bures, "Parental Divorce and the 'Switching' of Religious Identity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 40, no. 1 (March 2001): 106.
21. Uecker and Ellison, "Parental Religious Characteristics."
22. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 155–56.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 154.
25. Mary Ellen Konieczny, "All of a Sudden You Don't Fit': Clergy and Congregational Responses to Divorce and Marital Conflict," presented at the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and Religious Research Association Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD, October 29, 2010, 14–15.
26. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 149.
27. Denton, "Family Structure, Family Disruption."
28. Ibid., 54. Denton categorized the five types of adolescent religiosity she found, as is reproduced in the chart on page 54 of this report.
29. Ibid., 59.
30. Mark D. Regnerus and Jeremy E. Uecker, "Finding Faith, Losing Faith: The Prevalence and Context of Religious Transformation during Adolescence," *Review of Religious Research* 47, no. 3 (2006): 217–37.
31. Ibid., 232.
32. Mahoney, Warner, and Krumei, "Broken Vows and the Next Generation."
33. Ibid., p. 11 of authors' English language draft submitted for project.

34. Ibid., 2, English language draft.
35. Ibid., citing Warner, "Understanding Parental Divorce."
36. Mahoney, Warner, and Krumei, "Broken Vows and the Next Generation," 16, English language draft.
37. W. Bradford Wilcox, "As the Family Goes," *First Things* (May 2007), <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/04/as-the-family-goes-14>.
38. Denton, "Family Structure, Family Disruption," citing J. A. Erickson, "Adolescent Religious Development and Commitment: A Structural Equation Model of the Role of Family, Peer Group, and Educational Influences," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31, no. 2 (1992):131–52, and Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
39. Denton, "Family Structure, Family Disruption," citing Scott M. Myers, "An Interactive Model of Religiosity Inheritance: The Importance of Family Context," *American Sociological Review* 61, no. 5 (1996): 858–66; Regnerus and Uecker, "Finding Faith, Losing Faith"; Zhai, Ellison, Glenn, and Marquardt, "Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement"; and Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*.
40. Denton, "Family Structure, Family Disruption," citing Randal D. Day et al., "Family Processes and Adolescent Religiosity and Religious Practice: View from the NLSY97," *Marriage and Family Review* 45, no. 2 (2009): 289–309, and W. Bradford Wilcox, "Family," in *Handbook of Religion and Social Institutions*, ed. Helen Rose Ebaugh (New York: Springer, 2006), 97–120.
41. Uecker and Ellison, "Parental Religious Characteristics."
42. Ibid.
43. Zhai, Ellison, Glenn, and Marquardt, "Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement," 139–40.
44. Jixia Elisa Zhai, Christopher G. Ellison, Charles E. Stokes, and Norval D. Glenn, "'Spiritual, but Not Religious': The Impact of Parental Divorce on the Religious and Spiritual Identities of Young Adults in the United States," *Review of Religious Research* 49, no. 4 (June 2008): 379–94.
45. Penny Edgell, *Religion and Family in a Changing Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
46. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 155.
47. Konieczny, "All of a Sudden You Don't Fit," 17.

48. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead and David Popenoe, “Who Wants to Marry a Soul Mate?” *The State of Our Unions 2001* (New Brunswick, NJ: The National Marriage Project at Rutgers University, 2001).

49. Konieczny, “All of a Sudden You Don’t Fit.”

50. Rubio, “Divorce and Faith of Children,” referring to Florence Caffrey Bourg, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

51. Rubio, “Divorce and Faith of Children,” citing Day et al., “Family Processes and Adolescent Religiosity.” See also Zhai, Ellison, Glenn, and Marquardt, “Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement,” which shows the importance of parental efforts to engage in the religious formation of their children.

52. Rubio, “Divorce and Faith of Children.”

53. Annette Mahoney writes, “Thus, parental divorce can precipitate a second silent, yet quite painful, dissolution—namely a schism between the child and his or her faith community of origin.” Mahoney, Warner, and Krumei, “Broken Vows and the Next Generation,” 4, English language draft.

54. Kiesling, “Attachment Theory Approach.”

55. Ibid., citing Lee A. Kirkpatrick, “An Attachment-Theory Approach to the Psychology of Religion,” *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 2, no. 1 (1992): 3–28.

56. Kiesling, “Attachment Theory Approach,” citing Malcolm L. West and Adrienne E. Sheldon-Keller, *Patterns of Relating: An Adult Attachment Perspective* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994).

57. Kiesling, “Attachment Theory Approach,” citing Kirkpatrick, “Attachment-Theory Approach.”

58. Kiesling, “Attachment Theory Approach,” citing West and Sheldon-Keller, *Patterns of Relating*.

59. Kiesling, “Attachment Theory Approach,” 303, citing Brooke C. Feeney and Joan K. Monin, “An Attachment-Theoretical Perspective on Divorce,” in *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, ed. Jude Cassidy and Philip R. Shaver (New York: Guilford Press, 2008), 934, 935, 957.

60. Kiesling, “Attachment Theory Approach,” citing West and Sheldon-Keller, *Patterns of Relating*.

61. Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect*, 27–28.

62. Kiesling, "Attachment Theory Approach," citing John McDargh, "God, Mother and Me: An Object Relational Perspective on Religious Material," *Pastoral Psychology* 34, no. 4 (1986): 251–63.
63. Commission on Children at Risk, *Hardwired to Connect*; see nn. 81 and 83, p. 58.
64. Rubio, "Divorce and Faith of Children."
65. Ibid.
66. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 140–42.
67. Ibid., 142–44.
68. Ibid., 145–47.
69. Ibid., 148–49.
70. Ibid., 150.
71. Kiesling, "Attachment Theory Approach," citing Kirkpatrick, "Attachment-Theory Approach."
72. Kiesling, "Attachment Theory Approach," 308, citing Pehr Granqvist and Lee A. Kirkpatrick, "Religious Conversion and Perceived Childhood Attachment: A Meta-Analysis," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 14, no. 4 (2004): 223–50.
73. Kiesling, "Attachment Theory Approach," 308, 310.
74. Ibid., 310.
75. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 141.
76. Andrew Root, *Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 139.
77. Stephanie Staal, *The Love They Lost: Living with the Legacy of Our Parent's Divorce* (New York: A Delta Book, 2000), 59, cited in Root, *Children of Divorce*, 48.
78. Root, *Children of Divorce*, 48. Emphasis in original.
79. David Royko, *Voices of Children of Divorce* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000), 63, cited in Root, *Children of Divorce*, 54.
80. Rubio, "Divorce and Faith of Children."
81. John Chrysostom, "Homily 12: On Colossians 4:18," *On Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Press, 1986), 76, cited in Rubio, "Divorce and Faith of Children."

82. Rubio, "Divorce and Faith of Children."

83. From *The Marriage Movement: A Statement of Principles* (New York: Institute for American Values, Religion, Culture and Family Project, and Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education, 2001), 8; available at <http://www.americanvalues.org/pdfs/marriagemovement.pdf>.

84. Ibid.

85. Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

86. See publications from the Religion, Culture and Family Project at <http://divinity.uchicago.edu/martycenter/research/rcfp/projpublications-index.htm>. See also, Don Browning, "How Inclusiveness Became Elitist: Reflections on the Presbyterian Report on Families," [www.AmericanValues.org](http://www.AmericanValues.org), May 13, 2003, [http://www.americanvalues.org/html/how\\_inclusiveness\\_becomes\\_elit.html](http://www.americanvalues.org/html/how_inclusiveness_becomes_elit.html).

87. M. Christian Green, "'There but for the Grace': The Ethics of Bystanders to Divorce," excerpted in *Propositions* 8 (New York: Institute for American Values, 2012): 3, <http://www.centerforpublicconversation.org/propositions/2012-07.pdf>.

88. Rose McDermott, James H. Fowler, and Nicholas A. Christakis, "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do, Unless Everyone Else Is Doing It Too: Social Network Effects on Divorce in a Longitudinal Sample Followed for 32 Years," cited in Green, "'There but for the Grace,'" 5.

89. Green, "'There but for the Grace,'" 5.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. McDermott, Fowler, and Christakis, "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do," cited in Green, "'There but for the Grace,'" 5–6.

93. From Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 14: "References to the good divorce abound. A therapist says, 'A lot of times it's not the divorce itself that bothers children, but the level of conflict, or being caught in the middle.' An academic expert opines, 'Rather than discourage divorce per se, we, as a society, need to encourage more humane divorce.' An expert writes, 'The problem is not so much with divorce itself but with the different ways men, women, and children experience divorce and react to it.' A holiday article in *Newsweek* titled 'Happy Divorce' featured divorced families who put their conflicts aside in order to spend Christmas together as a family. It said researchers 'have known for years that *how* parents divorce matters even more than the divorce itself.'"

94. Cited in Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, 16.

95. Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds*, app. A.
96. Paul R. Amato, Jennifer B. Kane, and Spencer James, “Reconsidering the ‘Good Divorce,’” *Family Relations* 60, no. 5 (December 2011): 511–24.
97. Cited in *ibid.*, abstract.
98. Glenn, “How Good for Children Is the ‘Good’ Divorce?”
99. *Ibid.*, 6, citing Amato and Booth, *A Generation at Risk* and Paul R. Amato, “Good Enough Marriages, Parental Discord, Divorce, and Children’s Well-Being,” *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law* 9 (Fall 2001): 71–94.
100. Glenn also adds: “There are theoretical reasons for thinking, and some empirical evidence indicating, that lack of confidence in marital success inhibits marital commitment and thus is conducive to marital failure.” Glenn, “How Good for Children Is the ‘Good’ Divorce?” 7.
101. Summarized from Ellison, Walker, Glenn, and Marquardt, “The Effects of Parental Marital Discord.”
102. Denton, “Family Structure, Family Disruption,” 42, citing Andrew J. Cherlin, “American Marriage in the Early Twenty-First Century,” *Future of Children* 15, no. 2 (2005): 33–55; Andrew J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (New York: Knopf, 2009); Cynthia Osborne, Wendy D. Manning, and Pamela J. Smock, “Married and Cohabiting Parents’ Relationship Stability: A Focus on Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 5 (2007): 1345–66.
103. Denton, “Family Structure, Family Disruption,” 42, citing Cherlin, *Marriage-Go-Round*.
104. Robin Johnson Warrington and Stephanie Boddie, “‘Necessity Is Laid Upon Us’: Marriage and Divorce Among African Americans and the Black Church Response” (unpublished paper, 2011).
105. Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters*.
106. W. Bradford Wilcox, quoted in “New Report: Cohabitation, Not Divorce, Is Now Linked to Rising Rates of Family Instability in America,” news release, Institute for American Values, August 16, 2011, <http://www.americanvalues.org/pr/20110816.pdf>.
107. Wilcox et al., *Why Marriage Matters*, 6.
108. Elizabeth Marquardt, Norval D. Glenn, and Karen Clark, *My Daddy’s Name Is Donor: A New Study of Young Adults Conceived Via Sperm Donation* (New York: Institute for American Values, 2010), 69–70.

109. Ibid.

110. Elizabeth Marquardt and Stephanie Blessing, “The Other Half of the Debate: Calling the Churches to Recognize the Experience of Donor Conceived Persons,” paper presented at Trinity International University, Deerfield, IL, July 2011. See Stephanie Blessing’s blog, *My Father’s Daughter*, at <http://donorchild.blogspot.com/>. For an illuminating recent contribution, see Mark H. Diebel, “Human Nature and Truthfulness in Adoption and Donor Conception Practice,” *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* (Spring 2012): 1–12. For more narratives, see the stories available at AnonymousUs.org, a project founded by Alana S. Newman.

111. Rubio, “Divorce and Faith of Children.”

112. Konieczny, “All of a Sudden You Don’t Fit,” 24.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid., 15.

115. For discussion of faith communities as custodians of the marriage tradition, see Council on Family Law, *Marriage and the Law: A Statement of Principles* (New York: Institute for American Values and Institute for Marriage and Public Policy, 2006), 13.

116. “The National Study of Youth and Religion (conducted from 2002 to 2005) is the most ambitious study of American Teenagers and religion to date, involving extensive interviews of more than 3,300 American teenagers between the ages of thirteen and seventeen (including telephone surveys of these teenagers’ parents) followed by face to face follow-up interviews with 267 of these teenagers. The study also involves an ongoing longitudinal component that has so far revisited more than 2500 of these young people to understand how their religious lives are changing as they enter emerging adulthood.” This description of the survey is taken from Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26.

117. Ibid., 29.

118. Uecker and Ellison, “Parental Religious Characteristics.”

119. Root, *Children of Divorce*, 61–62.

120. Kiesling, “Attachment Theory Approach,” 307.

121. Root, *Children of Divorce*, 122.

122. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 183.

123. Uecker and Ellison, “Parental Religious Characteristics.”

124. Ibid.
125. Kiesling, "Attachment Theory Approach," 10.
126. Uecker and Ellison, "Parental Religious Characteristics," citing Zhai, Ellison, Glenn, and Marquardt, "Parental Divorce and Religious Involvement."
127. Denton, "Family Structure, Family Disruption," 46.
128. Ibid.
129. Ibid., 47.
130. Konieczny, "All of a Sudden You Don't Fit."
131. Denton, "Family Structure, Family Disruption," 54, 43.
132. Green, "There but for the Grace."
133. Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 108.
134. Ibid.
135. Christopher G. Ellison, Anthony B. Walker, and Norval Glenn. "The Effects of Parental Divorce on the Religious and Spiritual Lives of Young Adults: Do They Vary by Levels of Parental Conflict?" *Social Science Research* 40 (2011): 538–51.
136. Ibid., 19.
137. Charles E. Stokes, "Subversive versus Discursive Cognition after Parental Divorce: Evidence from the Religious Lives of Children of Divorce" (unpublished paper, 2011).
138. Rubio, "Divorce and Faith of Children."
139. Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 31.
140. Ibid., 41, 45.
141. Sorcha Brophy Warren, "Narrating Divorce in Protestant America" (unpublished paper, 2011).
142. Ibid.
143. Kiesling, "Attachment Theory Approach."

## About the Institute for American Values

The Institute for American Values, founded in 1987, is a nonpartisan organization devoted to research, publication, and public education on issues of family well-being and civil society. By providing forums for scholarly inquiry and debate, the Institute seeks to bring fresh knowledge to bear on the challenges facing families and civil society. Through its publications and other educational activities, the Institute seeks to bridge the gap between scholarship and policy making, bringing new information to the attention of policy makers in the government, opinion makers in the media, and decision makers in the private sector.

---



### ***Institute for American Values***

*1841 Broadway, Suite 211*

*New York, New York 10023*

*Tel: 212.246.3942*

*Fax: 212.541.6665*

*Website: [www.americanvalues.org](http://www.americanvalues.org)*

*E-mail: [info@americanvalues.org](mailto:info@americanvalues.org)*