

### **Q & A: Across the Gap**

A mother and daughter answer your questions

By Kate Hall and Elsie Radtke

#### **"Steps" left out**

*Q. My parents don't treat my stepchildren the same as their "biological" grandchildren.*

*How can I convince them they are wrong?*

Kate: You can't convince them they are wrong, but you can help them see that maybe they could be doing things differently. While some people are able to embrace stepchildren and treat them the same as biological children, others just don't see it that way. They really do believe that blood is thicker than water. Explain to your parents that you consider your stepchildren to be just as important as your biological children. Ask them to consider the feelings of you, your spouse, and all the children. If they still do not want to treat them the same, then make sure that your stepchildren are not around when the biological children receive presents, treats, etc.

Elsie: They aren't "wrong." They are just not educated how to do these things. Have a talk with them and help them see that all the children need to feel part of the family whether "bio" or "step." Ask them how you can make this easier for them and listen to what they need, like helping buy gifts or reminding them of birthdays and such.

#### **Two parties too many**

*Q. What do I do with my parents? Since they divorced, they don't want to come to any party the other is at and I am tired of having two birthday parties for each child.*

Kate: Your parents are both adults. Sad as it is that they divorced, it is not up to you to play referee between the two of them. Do not give in to their demands. Offer only one party for your child and tell your parents they can either both come or decide between themselves which one will come. Maybe they have to take turns attending events. It is unfair of them to put this extra burden on you.

Elsie: Being a child of divorced parents puts extra burdens on you. Having two parties is difficult for you and provides over-stimulation for your child. Let each parent know that you love them both, as do the grandchildren, and that they are expected to behave nicely in the presence of the grandchildren. Invite both of them to events and they can decide to either come and behave or stay away. The loss is theirs, not yours, if they opt out.

#### **Invite mom's boyfriend?**

*Q. My mother wants to bring her boyfriend to my baby's baptism, and I think it will make my father feel bad. Can I just tell her no?*

Kate: Although it's your decision whom to invite to your child's baptism, it



*Elsie Radtke is associate director of the Family Ministries Office of the Archdiocese of Chicago and the divorce and annulment support ministry coordinator. She and her husband of seven years, John, have six children between them.*

*Kate Hall is Elsie's oldest child and the children's services manager for the Park Ridge Public Library in Illinois. She and Jon are in their second year of marriage.*



would seem churlish not to allow your mother's boyfriend to come if he is an important part of her life. Presumably, she would like to share events such as these with him. I am not saying that you should ignore your father's feelings, but if you don't allow your mother's boyfriend to come, won't that make her feel just as bad as you think your dad will feel if he does? I say go with inviting the boyfriend. You can be assured your mom will be upset if he isn't invited, while your dad may or may not be upset.

Elsie: Are they a long-term couple? If so, say yes and then tell your dad what to expect. If it is just another boyfriend "passing through," let her know that this event is only for close family.

### **Change of heart**

*Q. I am Catholic and my wife isn't. When we first got married I didn't think it mattered if the children were raised Catholic, but now I find I want them to go to Catholic school, church on Sundays, and receive the sacraments. How do I tell her?*

Kate: People change all the time. You grow and mature in ways you never imagined when you were younger. Explain to your wife that though you believed in all honesty when you first married that you didn't think it would matter if your children were raised Catholic, you now would like this to happen. Talk to her about how your views have changed and why you think it is important. I would speak with a priest too, with both you and your wife in attendance. Keep in mind that this might be a shock to your wife if you have never indicated that you would like to do this. Give her time to process this request.

Elsie: Have a good conversation with her and explain your desires to her. You might point out the good results for children educated in the Catholic school system and how well they do in higher education and in professional careers. Also, the values they learn reinforce what you are teaching at home. It might help to invite her to go to church with you and meet others in the Catholic community.