

Average dads hold keys to society's problems

By Victor M. Andino
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Men are being called to service as if there were a war.

It is a war occurring on America's streets, with such combatants as gang members, drug dealers, pregnant teens and high school dropouts.

And the foot soldiers are average guys across the U.S., fighting the battle just by staying home and being responsible fathers. In the latest salvo to promote family values, political pundits, grass-roots groups and sociologists are saying active family men are the solution to many serious problems plaguing American society.

In his new book "The Principle of Fatherhood," (Pneuma Life Publishing, 2001, www.pneumalife.com) motivational speaker Myles Munroe goes so far as to insist that all men bear a responsibility to be fathers to society.

"Man must understand fatherhood, or he will never fulfill himself. Fatherhood is the design and destiny of the male," Munroe writes. U.S. Census Bureau figures released in May showed traditional families disappearing like an endangered species.

The percentage of married-couple households with children under 18 has declined to 23.5 percent of all households in 2000 from 25.6 percent in 1990, and from 45 percent in 1960.

It is the first time, less than a quarter of the households in the United States are made up of married couples with their children.

The good news is divorce and out-of-wedlock births have slowed, the Census

showed.

The impact to American society will likely be deep: showing up in crime, teen pregnancy and dropout statistics.

Experts say the role of the father in a family—taking away nothing from mothers—is often stabilizing to households and critical for a healthy society.

Munroe looks at problems with drugs, unwed mothers, corruption and violence and finds much of it rooted in the absence of fathers.

"Brothers, our nations could be healed right now if every man became a responsible father," Munroe writes.

Randell Turner, vice president of the National Fatherhood Initiative, says good fathers are able to keep families grounded.

"The thing we're learning is, it is not monumental things that fathers do, it is the day to day consistency, dependability and availability that creates a sense of security and stability for the family."

The nonprofit National Fatherhood Initiative, based in Maryland, promotes fatherhood by providing training programs and helping communities set up mentorships. The group links new fathers with experienced dads.

"Fathers don't understand and don't really know how important they are to their children and they don't know why they make such an impact in the lives of their children," Turner said. "I've got to get this message to fathers, because father's need to hear the effects of their absence."

Norm Fikes, acting president of 100 Black Men, said children, especially boys, rely on

the father figure in order to shape their own behavior.

"I think a kid is impacted by not having that male to demonstrate what a man is supposed to be, interacting with women, paying bills, being positive, going to work every day, showing how to express love and being spiritual," Fikes said.

Lewis V. Baldwin says there is a wealth of good images of men to follow in history and religion, starting with the nation's oft-mentioned "founding fathers."

"The image we associate with our founding fathers is that they were not only family men, they were fathers of the nation, they were people who set certain standards and helped shape our nation's history," said Baldwin, a Tennessee minister and professor of religious studies at Vanderbilt University.

He said there are even stronger examples in the Bible.

"Strength, fortitude, honor, courage, perseverance. All of these are images [in the Bible] that are associated with fathers.

"The father is the one who makes decisions, the father is the one children go to get advice, the father is the head of the home, the father is provider. The father is the source of wisdom and lore of a people," Baldwin said.

Munroe, himself a minister in Nassau, Bahamas, said, "the highest honor God can give a man is to designate him a father."

Men across the U.S. are showing that the title means something to them.

Michael Taylor of Seattle was devastated when his live-in girlfriend of three years decided to leave, taking their 2-year-old daughter Jasmine with her.

Despite his anger, he said he insisted on being with his child at least three times a week.

On those days, this full-time investor makes the toddler's breakfast, takes her to daycare and on outings.

"When I think about my relationship with my father and how important it was to me, it's almost like an obligation to be there for her," Taylor said.

"For me it seemed like the best way to assure my relationship with my daughter was to have a strong presence in her life."

That's precisely the message groups such as the National Fatherhood Initiative and 100 Black Men are taking to cities across the United States.

"Every chapter has to have a mentoring feature. We encourage them to be a dad or a father figure," Fikes said.

The NFI brings its outreach to prisons, showing inmates how to be productive dads when they are released to their families.

In his book, Munroe also stresses the need for such grassroots efforts in order to stimulate a national makeover.

"I believe that the church should form the most magnificent and magnanimous adoption agency in the twenty-first century. The way you change a nation is not by attacking the government, but by fathering children and the fatherless. ... Together we are a community of faith in the church that is God's family in which every member supports and cares for every other."

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