

ABSENCE ≠ THE HEART GROWING FONDER: THE FATHERING CRISIS IN AMERICA

“Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” It may make sense in a long-distance relationship during a military deployment, but in family life, the aphorism is a swing and a miss! On Father’s Day, it is timely to discuss; because **presence**, not absence is what counts. Estimates ahead of the official 2020 Census data reveal that fewer than 6% of all fathers of minor children are “solo” dads. However, **18.3 million children** live in **father-absent** homes representing 25.1% percent of all children. We have gone from **nearly 90%** of children living with both parents in 1960 to 70%. In the same period, single mothers rose from 10 % to 20%. But even more stunning is the statistic that indicates individuals from father-absent homes are **279% more likely** to carry **guns** and deal drugs than peers living with their fathers. Clearly, this is no mere coincidence.

It is not hyperbole to note that fatherhood is in crisis. In many ways, societal ills highlight the absence of leadership. As the **2020 Census data** emerges slowly, it reveals a treasure trove of useful– albeit **sobering**– information. Take for example the reality of working parents. In 2010, there was only a 2% difference between unmarried (49%) and married (47%) couples in terms of those who both held jobs. But just a decade later, **58.9%** (5.2 million) of opposite-sex cohabiting couples both worked, compared to 47.7% (30.6 million) of married couples. That is a **significant increase** in a decade. Does it surprise you? Demographers interpret data, so I will leave that to them. Still, it is easy to draw some common sense conclusions. If mothers can either stay home or work from home during their children’s early years, it pays huge dividends later.

Our Catholic faith teaches us both that children stabilize a marriage, and that **marriage stabilizes** families. When a child is raised in an intact home, there is a significantly greater likelihood that child will be successful. Why? Because marriage formalizes a relationship, solidifying one’s commitments. Regardless of the oft-repeated mantra– “We do not need a piece of paper to tell us that we are committed to each other”– the fact is, you **do need** a piece of paper to indicate that you have made a **permanent and public** commitment to each other. That is just a fact. The effect of that **public commitment** can be a real difference maker. Additionally, an **active and engaged** father demonstrably provides a more significant contribution towards the future good of his children.

In his 2001 book entitled “Fatherhood,” **Dr. Kyle D. Pruitt** of the Yale Child Study Center posited: “By 6 weeks, a baby can recognize her father’s voice from her mother’s. A quiet and alert baby will pay more attention to the mother’s voice; an upset baby will calm more readily to her father’s voice.” In short, there are innate differences between men and women, a fact that ought to be celebrated, not diminished. The **complementarity** of the sexes is part of God’s plan. Of course, there are single parents (more often, but not exclusively women) who have done a **remarkable** job at parenting alone. They are to be **commended**. By design, men and women are different and have differing temperaments. This will surely spill over to different parenting styles, ones that are complementary to each other. He adds that a “positive father care is associated with more pro-social and positive moral behavior in boys and girls.”

If a little boy scrapes his knee, it is **more likely** that Dad will take it in stride, thinking to himself, “He’ll be more careful next time,” rather than– “Oh my! Is he okay?” This is neither right nor wrong; it represents the different thinking of many dads. Both reactions have value, are formative and have their place. Fathers will tend to stress rules, justice, fairness, and duty in discipline. These themes are not at all absent in mothers, but I suspect they are **especially** found in dads. Fathers

also more likely encourage healthy competition (sorry hockey moms!) because they see how those lessons will come in handy later in life, knowing full well how men treat one another and what they expect. Competition engenders independence and teaches kids about losing. No, not everyone receives a participation trophy! Life does not work like that.

The first Mother's Day was celebrated in 1914, but it was not until June **1966** that **President Lyndon Johnson** officially added Father's Day to the mix by designating the third Sunday of June in their honor. The idea was much older in a local level (1910 A.D.), attributed to a Spokane, WA go-getter named **Sonora Dodd**, who was raised by a single father. She desired to do something in his honor and for all dads. In his proclamation, the President noted: "In the homes of our Nation, we look to the fathers to provide the strength and stability which characterize the successful family. If the father's responsibilities are many, his rewards are also great—the love, appreciation, and respect of children and spouse." May the Lord bless all our fathers in this parish and dads everywhere.

- "I scream for ice cream!" Approximately 150 people (including many families) turned out for our 11:30 Mass at the Sacred Heart Chapel, followed by our **Ice Cream Social** in the back courtyard. I asked the kids to keep an eye out for a mother fox, but no luck there! [Yes, I have seen her once since her kit's rescue!] What a wonderful way to kick off summer! Let's make it an annual event!
- Final details are being worked out in the MN State Legislature. Please contact your representative to support **School Choice**, supporting legislation that would expand Minnesota's existing tax credit and deduction for low- and middle-income families. This would allow their children to attend a school of choice and for parents to receive a tax credit or subtraction for educational expenses.
- The **Presbyteral Assembly** takes place June 21-24 at St. Mary's University in Winona, MN. In the absence of a priest, we will offer deacon-led **Holy Communion Services** in the basement Cana Chapel. Our attendance at the biennial meeting is mandatory. Along with our bishops, we priests endeavor to be productive during this conference. I most certainly sympathize with the inconvenience this causes for daily Mass and confessions, and I ask for your understanding.
- A modern-day **Jonah**? A **Cape Cod** lobster diver claims he was **swallowed** whole by a humpback **whale** and was completely inside its mouth for **30 seconds** before being expelled out when the whale surfaced. He suffered only minor injuries.! I cannot even imagine the thought. In that brief moment, (which must have seemed like an eternity) he was thinking about his family and the two boys (ages 12 and 15) he would leave behind. Thankfully, his breathing apparatus remained functional!
- It's official—the **Minnesota State Fair** is coming back. No restrictions, no limits, effectively back to normal. For some, it matters little. For others, this is fantastic news. The end of our summer will once again have meaning and purpose! ☺

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector