The church and fatherlessness

By Chaplain Sharon J. Reives

In his article "*Why the church must care about fatherlessness*," George R. Williams states that approximately 25 million children will go to bed in a home where their biological father does not live. That represents a staggering 30 percent of all the children in the United States. Williams further states that the United States is a world leader in fatherlessness. Those statistics alarmed and arrested me, and reminded me of a *Newsweek* magazine article which was first published Dec. 7, 1992 titled, "*Dear Dads: Save Your Sons*," by Christopher Bacorn. I have never forgotten the words of this article. I have often quoted excerpts from it for Father's Day services at church. God is concerned about what is happening to the fatherless, and we should share that concern. The Armed Forces Fathering Initiative encourages us to get at the root of the problem and build healthy fathers. Subsequently, I share Bacorn's article in its entirety:

Dear Dads: Save your sons

"I had seen a hundred like him. He sat back on the couch, silently staring out the window, an unmistakable air of sullen anger about him. He was 15 and big for his age. His mother, a woman in her middle 30s, sat forward on the couch and, on the edge of tears, described the boy's heartbreaking descent into alcohol, gang membership, failing grades and violence. She was small, thin, worn out from frantic nights of worry and lost sleep waiting for him to come home. She had lost control of him, she admitted freely. Ever since his father had left, four years ago, she had had trouble with him. He had become more and more unmanageable and then, recently, he had hurt someone in a fight. Charges had been filed, counseling recommended.

I listened to the mother's anguished story. "Are there any men in his life?' I asked. There was no one. She had no brothers, her father was dead and her ex-husband's father lived in another state. She looked up at me, her eyes hopeful. "Will you talk with him?" she asked. "Just speak with him about what he's doing. Maybe if it came from a professional… " she added, her voice trailing off. "It couldn't hurt."

I did speak with him. Maybe it didn't hurt, but like most counseling with 15-year-old boys, it didn't seem to help either. He denied having any problems. Everyone else had them, but he didn't. After half an hour of futility, I gave up.

I have come to believe that most adolescent boys can't make use of professional counseling. What a boy can use, and all too often doesn't have, is the fellowship of men-at least one man who pays attention to him, who spends time with him, who admires him. A boy needs a man he can look up to. What he doesn't need is a shrink.

That episode, and others like it, set me thinking about children and their fathers. As a nation, we are racked by youth violence, overrun by gangs, guns and drugs. The great majority of youthful offenders are male, most without fathers involved in their lives in any useful way. Many have never even met their fathers.

What's become of the fathers of these boys? Where are they? Well, I can tell you where they're not. They're not at PTA meetings or piano recitals. They're not teaching Sunday school. You won't find them in the pediatrician's office, holding a sick child. You won't even see them in juvenile court, standing next to junior as he awaits sentencing for burglary or assault. You might see a few of them in the supermarket, but not many. You will see a lot of women in these places-mothers and grandmothers-but you won't see many fathers.

So, if they're not in these places, where are the fathers? They are in diners and taverns, drinking, conversing, playing pool with other men. They are on golf courses, tennis courts, in bowling alleys, fishing on lakes and rivers. They are working in their jobs, many from early morning to late at night. Some are home watching television, out mowing the lawn or tuning up the car. In short, they are everywhere, except in the company of their children.

Of course there are men who do spend time with children, men who are covering for all those absentee fathers. The little league coaches, Boy Scout leaders, Big Brothers and school teachers who value contact with children, who are investing in the next generation, sharing time and teaching skills. And there are many fathers who are less visible but no less valuable, those who quietly help with homework, baths, laundry and grocery shopping… fathers who read to their children, drive them to ballet lessons, who cheer at soccer games. Fathers who are on the job. These are the real men of America, the ones holding society together. Every one of them is worth a dozen investment bankers, a boardroom full of corporate executives and all of the lawmakers west of the Mississippi.

What would happen if the truant fathers of America began spending time with their children? It wouldn't eliminate world hunger, but it might save some families from sinking below the poverty line. It wouldn't bring peace to the Middle East, but it just might keep a few kids from trying to find a sense of belonging with their local street-corner gang. It might not defuse the population bomb, but it just might prevent a few teenage pregnancies.

If these fathers were to spend more time with their children, it just might have an effect on the future of marriage and divorce. Not only do many boys lack a sense of how a man should behave; many girls don't know either, having little exposure themselves to healthy male-female relationships. With their fathers around, many young women might come to expect more than the myth that a man's chief purpose on earth is to impregnate them and then disappear. If that would happen, the next generation of absentee fathers might never come to pass.

Before her session ended, I tried to give this mother some hope. Maybe she could interest her son in a sport: how about basketball or soccer? Any positive experience involving men or other boys would expose her son to teamwork, cooperation and friendly competition. But the boy was contemptuous of my suggestions. "Those things are for dorks," he sneered. He couldn't wait to leave. I looked at his mother. I could see the embarrassment and hopelessness in her face. "Let's go, Ma," he said, more as a command than a request. I walked her out through the waiting room, full of women and children, mostly boys, of all ages. Her son was already in the parking lot. I shook her hand. "Good luck," I said. "Thank you," she replied, without conviction. As I watched her go, my heart, too, was filled with a measure of hopelessness. But anger was there too, anger at the fathers of these boys. Anger at fathers who walk away from their children, leaving them feeling confused, rejected and full of suffering. What's to become of boys like this? What man will take an interest in them? I can think of only one kind… a judge."

On this Father's Day weekend, let's remember the words of Hosea 14:3, "For in you, the fatherless finds compassion."

Byrd Elementary School recognizes volunteers

Richard E. Byrd Elementary School volunteers make their selection from a light lunch buffet provided during the school's Volunteer Appreciation Tea event held June 1. The volunteers were recognized for the help they provided during the school year.

Story and photo by Nancy Turner,
Richard E. Byrd Elementary School Public Affairs

The staff at Richard E. Byrd Elementary School held a volunteer appreciation tea event June 1, in the school's information center. Volunteers received certificates and flowers as well as verbal recognition and gratitude from staff members for their help during the 2010-2011 school year. Following the recognition ceremony, the volunteers and staff enjoyed a light lunch and dessert.

"Those who can do, do. Those who can do more volunteer. Volunteers are love in motion," Byrd school Principal Gwen Baxter-Oakley said during her opening remarks.

Following opening remarks, each Byrd teacher presented a certificate of appreciation and a flower to the volunteers and personally recognized them for their valuable contribution to the school during the year.

Among the many contributions made by the volunteers were creating and updating school and community bulletin boards, organizing and running after-school activities and clubs including Bingo Night, Polar Express Fun Night, Field Day, Dr. Seuss and Valentine's Day events, Starlab, D.A.R.E. graduation, Spanish Club, Soroban Club, Odyssey of the Mind clubs, decorating the stage for the winter and spring concerts, chaperoning field trips, making popcorn for students weekly, and much more.

The parents and community volunteers recognized are: Deletha Batten, Yumiko Bean, Mayumi Burns, Paul Burns, Takako Cooper, Master-at-Arms 1st Class David Cruz, Jessica Cruz, Laura Curci, Vincent Curci, Joshua Dawes, Meredith DiCostanzo, Ana Gonzalez, Christine Falvo, Yuka Haynes, Tsuneronri Ishiguro, Arlene Jones, Alawn Jordan, Iveth Mendenhall, Ruth Merritt, Master-at-Arms 2nd Class Patricia Mitchell, Eimi Ringling, Zullu Saldana, Ashley Sanders, Tomoko Shay, Soon-Ok Skinner, Toshiko Tsuyuzaki and Makiko Yoshida.

Following the volunteer recognitions, Byrd school staff and volunteers enjoyed a light lunch of finger sandwiches, vegetables and dip, and fruit with cake for desert. The appreciation tea was a mere token for the valuable service of the volunteers. The volunteers greatly enriched the school experience for the students during the school year. Their service to the school was an invaluable contribution to the educational experiences of Byrd students.

Energy Saving Tip of the week

NAVY / MARINE CORPS
ENERGY EFFICIENCY

When leaving your quarters, turn off all lights and appliances including your porch light.