

2016

NATIONAL PARENTS' DAY

Also inside: Global Day of Parents honored at the United Nations



FAMILY FEDERATION FOR WORLD PEACE & UNIFICATION • UNIVERSAL PEACE FEDERATION-USA
AMERICAN CLERGY LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE • WOMEN'S FEDERATION FOR WORLD PEACE - USA • WASHINGTON TIMES FOUNDATION

A Special Report Prepared by The Washington Times Advocacy Department and National Parents' Day Coalition

Parents' Day Proclamation 2007



OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT PHOTO

By President George W. Bush

On Parents' Day, America honors our mothers and fathers for their extraordinary devotion and for the great sacrifices they make to provide a hopeful and

promising future for their children.

The guidance and unconditional love of parents help create a nurturing environment so children can grow and reach their full potential. Parents work to impart to their children the strength and determination to follow their dreams and the courage to do what is right. They shape the character of their children by sharing their wisdom and setting a positive example. As role models, parents also instill the values and principles that help prepare children to be responsible adults and good citizens.

My Administration is committed to strengthening American families by supporting Federal, State, and faith-based and community programs that promote healthy marriages and responsible parenting. Parents are a child's first teachers, and we recognize their critical role in

helping children do well in school. My Administration is committed to helping parents and schools ensure that every child has the best opportunity to learn and succeed.

On Parents' Day, we pay tribute to mothers and fathers and celebrate the special bonds of love between parents and their children. We also express our deep gratitude to parents who serve in the Armed Forces and those whose sons and daughters have answered the call to defend our country. Our Nation is grateful for their honorable service and for the sacrifices family members make as their loved ones work to advance the cause of freedom.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United

States and consistent with Public Law 103-362, as amended, do hereby proclaim Sunday, July 22, 2007, as Parents' Day. I call upon citizens, private organizations, and governmental bodies at all levels to engage in activities and educational efforts that recognize, support, and honor parents, and I encourage American sons and daughters to convey their love, respect, and appreciation to their parents.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twelfth day of July, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

GEORGE W. BUSH

Source: *The American Presidency Project*

Parents' Day Proclamation 1995



OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT PHOTO

By President William J. Clinton

Parenthood is among the most difficult

and most rewarding responsibilities in life. Balancing countless demands, parents must be firm yet loving, protective yet liberating. They are the nurturers of our dreams and the soothers of our fears. They instill in their children, by word and example, the importance of family and community involvement, the value of education and hard work.

Parenting is a serious responsibility. All parents have an obligation to provide for the children they bring into the world. Parents must teach and sustain, helping to empower each new generation to meet the challenges and opportunities of life with confidence.

Today, across our country, parents give their time and energy to ensure a better future for their children. Teaching the lessons

of honesty and caring in a way that no school or government can, America's parents pass on the spirit, values, and traditions that have made our Nation strong for more than two centuries. Whether stepparents or foster parents, biological or adoptive, parents provide the security, stability, and love that enable children to grow up healthy, happy, and strong.

Parents' Day is a welcome opportunity to celebrate the special and powerful bond between parent and child. On this occasion, let us remember and pay respect to those who give us the daily support and loving guidance that lead us to become responsible and contributing citizens.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America,

in accordance with Public Law 103-362, do hereby proclaim Sunday, July 23, 1995, as "Parents' Day." I invite the States, communities, and the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities expressing gratitude and abiding affection for parents.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-first day of July, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twentieth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Source: *The American Presidency Project*

Parents' Day joint resolution in Congress

Bipartisan legislation to establish Parents' Day was filed in the House in August 1994 by Rep. Dan Burton, Indiana Republican, and Rep. Floyd H. Flake, New York Democrat, and 16 other original cosponsors. The measure, which eventually had 223 cosponsors, passed the House on Sept. 30 and passed the Senate on Oct. 4. President Bill Clinton signed the measure — now

Public Law No: 103-362 — on Oct. 14, 1994.

Text of House Joint Resolution 398 in the 103rd Congress of the United States of America:

To establish the fourth Sunday of July as "Parents' Day."

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That

the fourth Sunday of every July shall be established as "Parents' Day" to be recognized as a recurring, perennial day of commemoration.

SEC. 2. RECOGNITION.

All private citizens, organizations, and governmental and legislative bodies at the local, State, and Federal level

are encouraged to recognize Parents' Day through proclamations, activities, and educational efforts in furtherance of recognizing, uplifting, and supporting the role of parents in the rearing of their children.

**The
Washington
Times**

ADVOCACY/SPECIAL SECTIONS

Cheryl Wetzstein
SPECIAL SECTIONS MANAGER

Advertising Department:
202-636-3062

Larry T. Beasley
PRESIDENT AND CEO

Thomas P. McDevitt
CHAIRMAN

David Dadisman
GENERAL MANAGER

Adam VerCammen
DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING & SALES

Patrick Crofoot
SUPERVISOR, GRAPHICS

Special Sections are multipage tabloid products that run in The Washington Times daily newspaper and are posted online and in PDF form on its website. Sponsors and advertisers collaborate with The Times' advertising and marketing departments to highlight a variety of issues and events, such as The Power of Prayer, North Korea's Nuclear Threat, Gun Rights Policy Conference and Rolling Thunder Memorial Day Tribute to Veterans. Unless otherwise identified, Special Sections are prepared separately and without involvement from the Times' newsroom and editorial staff.

'Thank God for good parents'



By Hon. Dan Burton

Why do I think parents are so important?

Because when I was a child, I had an abusive father. He beat me regularly and beat my mother so badly that at times I thought he killed her.

After many years of heartache, we were able to get away from him, but he came after us and kidnapped my mother and threatened to kill her.

My brother, sister and I were sent to a guardian's home. It was tough. Really tough.

But Mom escaped, my father went to prison, and we then started a normal life.

My mother remarried and my stepfather was a great guy. My mother, grandmother and my new father really saved my brother, sister and I.

So I know how important good parents are. I've seen the worst and I've seen the best.

I am thankful every day for a great mom, grandmother and stepfather. Without them, I really don't know how I would have ended up. Thank God for good parents.

.....
Dan Burton, a Republican, is a former U.S. representative for Indiana. He was a lead sponsor of legislation creating the federal Parents' Day commemorative holiday in 1994.

A day to honor 'thy father and thy mother'

BY THE WASHINGTON TIMES ADVERTORIAL DEPARTMENT

"Families are the foundation" of human society, and parents become "the first image of love to our children, and the first image of God to our children," Rev. Keith A. Savage said in 2015, when he and wife Bonita were honored as National Parents of the Year.

For 22 years, Americans have had an annual federal holiday to honor their fathers and mothers — Parents' Day is officially the fourth Sunday of July.

Parents' Day was enacted with bipartisan leadership and strong support in Congress — notably former Rep. Dan Burton, Indiana Republican; Rep. Floyd H. Flake, New York Democrat and now senior pastor of a Queens, N.Y., megachurch; and former D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy.

In the upper chamber, Sen. Orrin Hatch, Utah Republican; then-Sen. Trent Lott, Mississippi Republican; and then-Sen. Joseph R. Biden, Delaware Democrat, helped shepherd the bill, which was signed into law on Oct. 14, 1994, by President Bill Clinton.

"Parents play a crucial role in shaping our lives and the life of our nation," Mr. Clinton said in 2000 in one of his proclamations in honor of Parents' Day.

"We owe our parents — whether biological or adoptive, stepparents or foster parents — a profound debt of gratitude" for their sacrificial efforts, unconditional love and constant devotion, Mr. Clinton said.

"Being a parent is the most important

job in the world," President George W. Bush wrote in his 2001 proclamation. "As we hold a newborn in our arms or embrace an older adopted child, the promise we make in our hearts to love, protect and nurture our children stays with us and their them forever. We are eternally linked to the children whom we are blessed to parent and to the generations before us who helped shape our

projects for needy youths or to uphold the traditional family.

For instance, John and Cheryl Carnwath raised four children and also started an annual fair to connect parents with services and a camp for families. Nebraskans Rev. Don Coleman and his wife, Rev. Ann Coleman, raised five children and led organizations in Lincoln to mentor youth and their parents and stand against

The holiday has often prompted people, from sponsors to couples, to testify to their own parents or offer advice about how to keep their family relations in good health.

"I come from parents who gave birth to 13 children; my parents had fifth- and sixth-grade education," Mr. Flake said at a 1994 event on behalf of the Parents' Day bills. "I can't help but rejoice in having parents who understood that in spite of never having a psychology course ... they nurtured us. They admonished us to take the word 'can't out of our vocabulary," Mr. Flake said, according to a Washington Times news account of the event.

Two of the best pieces of advice for parents are to "eat together" and "talk with each other," even if sometimes people end up talking "at each other," said Rev. Savage, pastor of First Baptist Church of Manassas.

Parents' Day sponsoring organizations today include National Parents' Day Coalition, the Universal Peace Federation-USA, American Clergy Leadership Coalition, The Washington Times Foundation, Women's Federation for World Peace-USA and Family Federation for

World Peace. Judges for National Parents of the Year have included officials from the National Organization for Marriage, Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Georgia, Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregation and Christian Voice.



lives," Mr. Bush said.

Over the years, hundreds of parents have been selected as state Parents of the Year, with some of them becoming National Parents of the Year.

Many honorees had raised both biological and adoptive and foster children, rebounded from unusual hardships, worked for racial justice or helped those with disabilities. Many organized

street violence. Both couples were so exemplary they were both named Parents of the Year 2000.

The 2004 National Parents of the Year were Joshua and L'Tanya Haire, who adopted a child and raised seven, but lost two other children in infancy. The couple went on to establish a literacy project in partnership with their North Carolina church and county public school system.

Exemplary parents in America

12 couples are finalists for National Parents of the Year



Pastor Mark and Edna Abernathy

Mark Abernathy is the senior pastor at Connect Point Christian Center in Snellville, Georgia. His wife, Edna, leads the music ministry. They have been married for 38 years and have one daughter and one grandson.

The couple founded a ministry for young people and one for couples in their church. Their example of a loving, committed marriage provides a healthy example for single and married members of their congregation. They practice fidelity within their marriage and teach that to their members. They also encourage sexual purity before marriage.

Their congregation is multiracial and encourages respect and love for all people. The church, founded by Mark's father, received considerable persecution for this policy, and the church was even firebombed in the 1970s. In their personal lives, their daughter's first marriage did not work out and she recently married a man from another ethnicity.

A graduate of Lighthouse Christian College, Mark served as head of the New Life Christian School in Stone Mountain, Georgia, for 10 years and during that time coached football, basketball and baseball, and led teams to national championships. He served as associate pastor of Connect Point Christian Center before becoming senior pastor in 2004. In 2006, he received the prestigious NAACP award in religious affairs. He consults regularly with executives from various businesses, schools and churches to help create spiritual-based solutions to global problems. Mark is a member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the NAACP, and is also national co-president of the American Clergy Leadership Conference.



Lowell and America Callahan

Lowell and America Callahan of Wheatland, California, have been married for 37 years and during that time they have fostered special-needs children, (adopting four of them) and raised seven biological children. America is currently homeschooling two teenagers and helps a young adult look for a suitable job.

The Callahans are advocates for parents of children with special needs; they assist Spanish-speaking families access community resources and provide translation when necessary. They are devout members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and

live their faith by caring for people less fortunate than themselves. Lowell, who works as a general contractor and air-conditioning mechanic, always gives a generous discount to senior citizens. He grows fruit and vegetables on their property and gives half of it away.

Since 2011, America has been owner-operator of a small business in downtown Wheatland called America's Emporium and Thrift. The store serves as a gathering place for local senior citizens, and if any seniors need a ride to a doctor's appointment, America will find a way to take them there, even if it means closing the store for an hour or two. She passionately believes in the value of sacrificing oneself for the sake of others and has lived her life accordingly.

Both have served as Sunday school teachers and are members of the Wheatland Lions Club.



Apostle Ralph L. Edwards and Prophetess Irene Edwards

Apostle Ralph L. Edwards and Prophetess Irene Edwards have been doing joint ministry for about 40 years, spending much of their time and resources serving those in blighted communities, as well as in prisons, nursing homes and hospitals. During almost 42 years of marriage, they raised three children while dealing with financial, physical and emotional challenges. To date, they have 15 grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

The couple lives in Harlem, New York City, and their church is in Jamaica, Queens, but their ministry takes them to wherever they are needed to spread

God's love, which may be organizing a food program or caring for families that have lost a loved one to violence. They have a heart that wants to serve all kinds of people in all kinds of situations.

The Edwards' deep bond provides a model of fidelity that helps people understand that the family is the basis of true success. Since 2001 they have been leading a seminar entitled, "Marriage Enlightenment: Public Success and Private Failure," that has helped change the thinking of many participants about what constitutes a successful marriage.

In 2004, they became certified as chaplains, and Apostle Edwards later served as New York State director of the United Chaplain International Worldwide Outreach. They also began a church, One Way International Ministry Inc., nine years ago.



Kenneth and Kim Fox-Muhammad

Kenneth and Kim Fox-Muhammad, married for 30 years, returned to Kenneth's home town of East Spencer, North Carolina, to help the struggling community reverse its chronic poverty and high unemployment rate. While raising three children, they launched numerous programs to assist youth and adults, including a drill team, the Respect for Life Community Center and the Empowerment Network, a community development corporation that built a center to assist small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Kenneth and Kim own Muhammad's Business Solutions, offering their business expertise to minority communities. Recently, Kenneth hosted a workshop that recruited more than 45 businesses and individuals to help his town. Since the community lacks a school, library or indoor recreational facility, he is founding a charter school in his mother's honor as well as a community center.

The family places a high value on serving the community, leading by example and obtaining an education. Kenneth is working on a dissertation at Walden University in its Public Policy and Administration program. Kim is graduating in July from the University of Phoenix, as is their eldest daughter. Their younger daughter is attending Strayer University. At times, the couple worked multiple jobs to support their family — Kenneth worked in Abu Dhabi for almost 18 months; Kim is manager of a Family Dollar Store.

Devout Muslims, they are active in their mosque, with Kenneth training the men to be responsible in caring for their families and Kim showing women how to do more with less. Kenneth has also served as mayor of East Spencer and on numerous boards, including the Rowan County Housing Authority.

Exemplary parents in America

12 couples are finalists for National Parents of the Year



Hawaii State Sen. Mike and Carol Gabbard

Mike and Carol Gabbard, married for 47 years, are both public servants and educators. Mike gained state and national recognition for leading the fight against the legalization of same-sex marriage in Hawaii, a battle lost in 2014. He has been a state senator since 2006 and has helped pass numerous bills related to health, public safety, renewable energy and environmental issues.

The couple raised three sons and two daughters, homeschooling all of them. He is Roman Catholic and Carol is Hindu, but both religious traditions are honored in their home. Despite persecution for standing for traditional marriage, Mike received a lot of support from conservative churches and organizations for his efforts to educate people about the significance of marriage between a man and a woman.

Before becoming a state senator, Mike served on the Honolulu City Council (2003-05), where he focused on environmental issues. He has served as the chairman of the Hawaii Senate's Energy and Environment Committee since 2009, the same year he was chosen by the Sierra Club as "Legislator Who Made a Difference." He is a member of the Hawaii Invasive Species Council, the Hawaii Energy Policy Forum and the Hawaii Interagency Climate Adaptation Committee, the latter of which seeks to find solutions to the effects of global warming on Hawaii.

Carol was on the state board of the Department of Education from 2000 to 2004. While their daughter, Tulsi, served in U.S. Congress as the representative of Hawaii's 2nd Congressional District, Mike and his daughter co-founded the Healthy Hawaii Coalition, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting the environment and improving individual and community health.



Pastor Bill and Faye McDonnell

Bill and Faye McDonnell of North Las Vegas, Nevada, have been married 44 years, raised three children and have 11 grandchildren. They have demonstrated their commitment to their faith by continually opening their home to families in need and individuals who are going through hard times. In their own family, the obstacles they have overcome include the loss of a child.

The McDonnells have organized an effort to help people with employment, and led marches to underscore the need for more jobs in the community. They operate a behavioral-health counseling service named Breakthrough

and coordinate an outreach to feed and clothe the homeless.

Bill is known for his compassion and sensitivity to the needs of others, and for always being willing to lend a hand. Faye demonstrates her compassion by feeding shut-ins and bringing water to the homeless.

Bill has risen through the ranks from deacon to pastor and is superintendent of Church of God in Christ in Nevada's 1st Jurisdiction. He serves as administrative assistant to the bishop in that jurisdiction. He is president of Churches of Southern Nevada, an organization of pastors from all denominations designed to address community affairs. Faye, a former administrator in the Clark County School District, works alongside her husband and is state supervisor for women in Church of God in Christ in their jurisdiction.



Daniel and Lakeisha Meadows Ivey

Daniel Ivey and his wife, Lakeisha Meadows Ivey, of Durham, North Carolina, have been married 16 years and have four children, three of whom are adopted.

Lakeisha cares for the children, one of whom is wheelchair-bound, two have feeding tubes, two have ADHD and all three have learning development issues. Daniel works two jobs to support the family. Over 13 years, this couple has been foster parents to 15 children.

Lakeisha is the daughter of Bishop Jerry and Shirley Meadows, previous Parents of the Year. Daniel serves as a church deacon and his wife is a youth leader.



Bishop Alfred A. and Dr. Susie C. Owens

Bishop Alfred A. Owens and Dr. Susie C. Owens of Washington, D.C., have been married 44 years and have two children and six grandchildren. In 1966, Bishop Owens founded Christ Is the Answer Chapel; it merged 10 years later with Mount Calvary Holy Church to form what is now known as Greater Mount Calvary Holy Church, which has a membership of nearly 8,000 people.

In addition to raising their own son and daughter, the Owens cared for and nurtured 53 foster sons and daughters, some of whom became associate pastors at his church.

The church operates a food and clothing bank, and an alcohol/drug abuse program, known as Calvary's Alternative to Alcohol and Drug Abuse. In addition, it runs Calvary Christian Academy, which educates children from infancy to the eighth grade; an HIV/AIDS ministry; an employment service; a prison ministry; and several other outreach and social service ministries. It further operates an outreach facility called the Bishop Alfred A. Owens Jr. Family Life Community Center.

In 1988, Bishop Owens was consecrated a bishop in the Mount Calvary Holy Church of America Inc., and appointed as senior bishop in 2008. He has served as dean of the Joint College of African-American Pentecostal Bishops since 2000 and as archbishop of the Joint College since 2009.



Exemplary parents in America

12 couples are finalists for National Parents of the Year



Andrew and Rebecca Powell

Andrew and Rebecca Powell of Charleston, West Virginia, have been married 20 years and have seven children, ranging in age from 2 to 17. The family has pulled together despite hard times due to Andrew's life-threatening illness of a decade ago. The family now lives with Rebecca's parents.

The Powells lead by living the principles they teach and providing an example of being kind, generous, loving, forgiving, patient and resourceful. Andrew took the boys to help shovel mud in the aftermath of a flood in Clendenin, West Virginia. They also helped build a small home for a man in need.

Andrew is involved in Boy Scouts and his church. Rebecca was president of her church relief society for many years, giving countless hours to helping and coordinating spiritual, emotional and financial help to many in the congregation.



Dr. John and Leah Schaut

Dr. John Schaut of Kenosha, Wisconsin, and his wife, Leah, have been married for 24 years and have four children, including an adopted daughter from China.

When their eldest son was age 3, he went from being a normal talkative child to having speech difficulties that were eventually diagnosed as being due to autism. The family bought a van and toured the nation seeking options for dealing with an autistic child: They attended conferences, read about new research, and listened to a variety of speakers, both parents and professionals. The family bonded

together as they sought effective treatments, and they remained faithful to God and active in supporting a church that is pastored by a parent of a special-needs child.

A clinical psychologist, John arranged his schedule at Veterans Affairs to often enable him to be home at 4:30 p.m. for his family. The couple downsized their housing to afford investment in the needs of their children. Dance lessons and similar activities gave way to focusing on the child with the greatest needs, though the parents strove to spend time with each one. With the help of a support person and a communication aid, their son graduated high school this year.

In addition to supporting a church, the Schauts have invested in summer camps and sponsored children whose families could not afford special-needs camps.



Andrew and Judith Ross

Andrew and Judith Ross have been married for 60 years, raised four children, and have 11 grandchildren.

Andrew was a Hungarian Jewish Holocaust survivor. He was the Army buddy of Judy's brother Phillip, which is how a European Jew and a devout Christian first came together.

About to turn 89, Andrew spent his adult life as a steel company salesman, traveling the highways and byways of America to support his growing family. He was instrumental in teaching many young businessmen the tools of the trade,

especially going the extra mile to care for customers.

Judy served as a member of the DuPage County Board in suburban Chicago (the second largest county in Illinois) for many years.

The couple were instrumental in mentoring many young parents on how to best raise their children from his "office" on the front porch of their humble home, where they still reside today. Andy and Judy have now become each other's caregivers.

Judy's brothers, Phillip and Daniel, were both congressmen from Illinois. The youngest brother, David, was a psychiatrist. Judy's oldest brother gave his life when he diverted his Navy jet from crashing into a populated area.

Their children include Matthew, a brain surgeon who is married with three children; Debbie, an elementary school teacher and mother of five who worked to end the sale of pornography in DuPage County; Peter, an attorney who is married with three children and who served as an U.S. Air Force pilot in Iraq; and John, who is working in the oil fields in Alaska.



Phengchanh and Wilaiwan Soundara

Phengchanh Soundara was born in Laos as the son of a Chinese fisherman and a Lao woman. Abandoned by his father and then orphaned at a young age, he escaped to a Thai refugee camp with the hope of being relocated to the United States. He arrived in the Washington, D.C., area in 1980, attended high school in Virginia, and currently works as a service technician for an equipment-rental company. His wife, Wilaiwan, was born in Bangkok, Thailand; immigrated to the United States in 1986; and currently is a domestic worker. They have been married for 28 years and have two children.

Both parents serve the region's Thai temple by doing housework, serving food to the monks, and performing groundskeeping duties. They also help other Thai people who arrive as immigrants by guiding them to get better jobs through an employment agency called Helping Hands, or by fixing their cars without charge because Phengchanh believes in helping those in need.

Phengchanh imparted the lesson to his children that nothing comes easily and if you have a goal, you have to fight for it. Like other immigrants, he and his wife started from nothing but ended up owning their home and four cars and raising children in whom they instilled the culture and religious heritage of Thailand.



In observance of the United Nations' Global Day of Parents

In 2012, the United Nations passed a Resolution to establish June 1 as an annual day to honor parents. Recently, on June 1, the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, in partnership with Universal Peace Federation, an NGO in Special

Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, hosted an afternoon program, "The Importance of Motherhood and Fatherhood for Integral Development," to celebrate the Global Day of Parents. Excerpts from the presentations from that conference

are included here. The full conference can be viewed at UN Web TV at <http://webtv.un.org/search/the-importance-of-fatherhood-and-motherhood-for-integral-development/4926535575001?term=motherhood> webtv.un.org/



By Archbishop Bernardito Auza

Four years ago, on Sept. 17, 2012, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a Resolution [66/292] proclaiming June 1 to be the annual Global Day of Parents to honor parents throughout the world for their selfless, life-long dedication to nurturing and protecting their children and helping their full maturation as human beings.

Today is June 1. So, dear parents in the room and dear parents throughout the world, Happy Parents Day!

It gives me great joy to welcome you — on this fourth commemoration of Global Parents Day — to this afternoon's Conference on "The Importance of Fatherhood and Motherhood for Integral Development," sponsored by the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations, in conjunction with the Universal Peace Federation.

The importance of moms and dads, and of their joint commitment in raising the next generation, cannot be overstated. The future of humanity depends on the how well moms and dads do in their mission as teachers in forming their children in values, socialization, trust, mutual respect and responsibility, education, hard work, affection, compassion, forgiveness, solidarity and ethical development.

Pope Francis describes the importance of the family in his exhortation, "The Joy of Love (*Amoris Laetitia*)," published last month.

"The welfare of the family," he affirms, "is decisive for the future of the world" (AL 31).

Pope Francis speaks of the crucial importance of mothers, saying that an

authentic feminism should never "negate motherhood" and that "the weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world." Without mothers being mothers, and without an appreciation of mothers as mothers, he said, society would be "dehumanized."

This special capacity for nurturing life, shown particularly in motherhood, is, he states, the "strongest antidote to the spread of self-centered individualism." The mother who "watches over her child with tenderness and compassion," he said, "helps

Pope Francis, however, focuses his reflection not on mothers and fathers in their individual work, but in their harmonious cooperation for the good of their children, each other's good and the good of society.

him or her to grow in confidence and to experience that the world is a good and welcoming place. This helps the child to grow in self-esteem and, in turn, to develop a capacity for intimacy and empathy." For all of these reasons, Pope Francis affirms that motherhood is "essential to society" (AL 173-175).

The Pope likewise speaks of the importance of fatherhood. "A father possessed of a clear and serene masculine identity who demonstrates affection and concern for his wife," Pope Francis says, "is just as necessary [for children and society] as a caring mother." Such a father "helps the child to perceive the limits of life, to be open to the challenges of the wider world, and to see the need for hard work and strenuous effort." (175). Society needs to assist and encourage fathers to remain "close to his wife"

and "close to his children as they grow" (AL 175-177).

Pope Francis, however, focuses his reflection not on mothers and fathers in their individual work, but in their harmonious cooperation for the good of their children, each other's good and the good of society. Their combined service is greater than the sum of their individual work, and their children profit most from their complementary teamwork. Pope Francis says that "love from [both] a mother and a father" is "necessary for a child's integral and harmonious development. ... We are speaking not simply of the love of father and mother as individuals, but also of their mutual love, perceived as the source of one's life and the solid foundation of the family. ... Together they teach the value of reciprocity, of respect for differences and of being able to give and take" (172).

Moms and Dads as co-educators either instill in their children "trust and loving respect" by their affection, example and trustworthiness, or by their failure to provide in this way, leave their children questioning whether their parents "are sincerely

concerned about them" (263). People think and act in a certain way because of what they learned from their early years of development. That's why it's so important to help moms and dads help children during those earliest years build the type of foundation that not only leads to lasting happiness and success of their children, but also redounds to the good of all of society.

For this reason, the Pope exhorts all to work to strengthen parents in providing this type of environment, this "integral ecology" (277), which is the grammar school of human existence. Our event this afternoon is meant to be a contribution toward this aim. Today, we have several speakers who will help nourish our understanding of the importance of motherhood and fatherhood for the integral development of men, women, boys, girls and all of society.

.....
Archbishop Bernardito Auza is Apostolic Nuncio at the Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations.

UN Resolution on Global Day of Parents

The Global Day of Parents is observed on the 1st of June every year. The Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 2012 with resolution A/RES/66/292 and honours parents throughout the world. The Global Day provides an opportunity to appreciate all parents in all parts of the world for their selfless commitment to children and their lifelong sacrifice towards nurturing this relationship.

In its resolution, the General Assembly also noted that the family has

the primary responsibility for the nurturing and protection of children and that children, for the full and harmonious development of their personality, should grow up in a family environment and in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding.

The resolution recognizes the role of parents in the rearing of children and invites Member States to celebrate the Day in full partnership with civil society, particularly involving young people and children.

Good parenting has immeasurable value



By Thomas Walsh

Some social realities are so close, near and essential, they can often be taken for granted. I believe the family, parenthood, moms and dads too often fit in that category. Hence, my appreciation for today's program, speakers, Holy See Mission and this audience.

As the wider United Nations community — which consists not only of Member States but representatives of civil society, including the private sector and faith-based organizations — works toward the Sustainable Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, it's imperative that we seek to utilize all available assets in moving toward that goal... to leverage and bring to bear those assets toward the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The concept of "integral development" has this in mind; namely, it is a holistic and comprehensive approach to development, and I believe calls us to consider or give voice to assets that may have been inadequately appreciated, utilized, perhaps marginalized in the process.

I believe we can highlight and promote some social assets — namely, fatherhood and motherhood — with an aim to giving those assets wider currency, backed by mature advocacy, supported by evidence-based empirical science, and consistent with a widely shared and compelling moral vision.

While fatherhood and motherhood are social facts linked to reproduction, human fulfillment, and the intergenerational transmission of genes, values, traditions, ethics, culture, language, etc., the family and parenthood still needs to be better construed in terms of its existing contributions, and its underutilized potential both for microsocial and macrosocial development.

We could say, in the parlance of

the day, that parenthood, motherhood, fatherhood needs to be woven into a compelling narrative that stands its ground with other competing narratives that sometimes don't give voice to these social assets.

There is no single factor that makes or breaks development. Rather, there's a bundle of factors — all important, each needing its advocates, its arguments for wider inclusion, and its best practices to observe.

In our UPF programs, as our founder stated in this venue in the year 2000 ... "the family is the school of love." This is a motto of UPF.

Is love important to the Sustainable Development Goals? I think so. But maybe that narrative needs to be more forcefully and better written. And that concept of love — just as we might with the concept of justice — be better unpacked and articulated.

The family transmits not only love, but through parents, a wide range of essential or cardinal virtues, capacities, dispositions, attitudes and skills. For this reason, the family and parenting deserve and should be on the agenda of discussions of development. The UN Global Day of Parents was decided by the General Assembly with such an awareness in mind.

Much of the world still aspires

— despite contemporary challenges — and often functions within a standard framework of mothers and fathers and children forming a basic family unit. As such, it behooves us to explore and mine this massive stock of potential for its social assets, its social capital.

Mothers and fathers — we all have them, in some way, shape or form. They can be, at times, both unforgivably destructive and yet irreplaceably productive. We know of the potential for harm poor parenting can bring.

At the same time, good parenting, like good governance in other sectors, is necessary for social, psychological, political, intellectual, civic, moral, spiritual growth. Currently, the NBA playoffs are going on ... a few days ago there was an article in the Wall Street Journal about the high frequency of NBA players who are associated with a relative who is an elite athlete. Fifty percent of the NBA players have a relative who is an elite athlete who, no doubt, mentors them ... and in 25 percent of those cases, [the elite athlete] is a mother or a father.

I'll mention one other article I read, in Scientific American, which talks about "eggshell education." It's talking about ... the Australian Fairywren, a bird. The mother bird sings to the baby bird in the shell in order to teach and instruct the singing, the language, necessary for

survival. So let's think of the concept of "eggshell education."

So let us, through this program, promote high standards of — with a capital letter — Motherhood and Fatherhood, and look at it in terms of good governance, with best practices within the family, and giving voice or advocacy to such.

We can thereby leverage a normative set of practices that lead toward a broader social good, and provide measurable, positive outcomes and impact generations to come.

UPF is honored to be part of this session, and remains committed to contributing to the Post-2016 SD Agenda, working with Member States, including the Holy See Mission, along with the Economic and Social Council and other UN agencies, NGOs and other faith-based organizations. We appreciate this precious, and sometimes scarce, resource of good parenting, good mothers and good fathers.

.....
Thomas G. Walsh, Ph.D., is president of Universal Peace Federation International, which has NGO status at the United Nations. He also serves on the International council of the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations and on the board of directors of the International Coalition for Religious Freedom.

Mothers and fathers – we all have them, in some way, shape or form. They can be, at times, both unforgivably destructive and yet irreplaceably productive. We know of the potential for harm poor parenting can bring.



Family structure, stability both benefit children



By W. Bradford Wilcox

The foundation for my talk today is the World Family Map, a new international effort sponsored by the Institute for Family Studies, Child Trends, Social Trends Institute, and a number of other partners across the globe.

This project is particularly timely because much of the globe is experiencing what scholars call a secondary demographic transition. While the first transition was marked by a rise in individualism, consumerism, and the status of women, the second democratic transition is marked by a retreat from parenthood and a retreat from marriage.... One of the core aims of World Family Map is to determine how this transition is affecting children across the globe.

When it comes to fertility, for instance, the retreat from parenthood has garnered headlines as policymakers from Spain to South Korea scramble to find ways to boost their birthrates. All of this is not surprising given that in about half of the world's countries, fertility has fallen below the replacement level of 2.1 babies per woman.

Falling fertility rates raises alarms because long-term low fertility leads to declines in labor force and increases in the ratio of the elderly who depend on the working-age population. In the words of demographer Nicholas Eberstadt, "These demographic trends portend ominous changes in economic prospects in many developed countries, major increases in public debt patterns, and slower economic growth."

But World Family Map is not just about the number of babies being born — it's also about the nature of the homes that they are being born into and raised within.

It seems that around much of the world a growing number of kids are being born and raised outside of a stable, two-parent home. For instance, we see that about 20 percent of kids in much

of the Americas and in Europe are now being raised in homes without two-parent families; this trend is also evident in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Why does this matter to us around the world? If we turn first to research from North America and Europe, we see that kids who are not raised in two-parent homes are more likely to suffer emotionally, physically and economically.

I have to mention here that I was raised by a single mother, and many kids raised by single moms turn out just fine. But I am also a social scientist, and what I am seeing is that there are increased risks for kids who are being raised in single-parent homes across the globe.

For instance, in the United States today, we see that boys who are raised in homes without their fathers are about twice as likely to end up in prison or in jail by the time they are in their 30s — and that's with controlling for their parents' income and education.

And dads matter for daughters as well: We see in the research that girls who are raised in a home without their father are much more likely to end up pregnant as teenagers.

Then we turn to a more positive outcome ... human capital: We see that kids who were raised in two-parent homes are more likely to attend and graduate from college.

How does this pattern apply to other countries? Data show that in Sweden — a country with a dramatically different welfare regime than the United States — there's also a very strong association with family structure and child outcomes. Kids raised in single-parent homes in Sweden are more likely to face higher odds of suicide and odds of drug addiction, and also more likely to be held back for a year in school.

And turning our gaze to other countries, we see there is also a link between education and family structure in much of Asia, much of Latin America and the Middle East as well. In many countries — Chile to Singapore — we find that kids raised in homes without their two parents are more likely to be held back in school, for instance. This is controlling for parents' education and income.

So how do we understand what's happening here? I will just say briefly that two parents on average have more time and attention to give to their kids and often more money to give to their kids. These families can draw on two networks of kin more effectively in raising their children. They can also give their kids more stability — if you've had kids or care for kids, you know they thrive on stable routines with stable caregivers.

And brings me to my final major point here, which is that I have seen more research on the impact not just on family structure for kids but also the impact of family stability for children. What we're seeing is that kids are more likely to thrive in stable family contexts.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals seek to improve the health of children in countries across the globe, and what our research at World Family Map is suggesting is that there is a connection between family stability and child health for kids across much of the developing world.

For instance, we see that stunting is more common for kids in never-married or divorced families in much Latin America, Africa and Asia. Also, for the most serious outcome here, child mortality, we see that kids of divorced or unmarried-but-partnered families are at least 20 percent more likely to die compared to kids from stable, two-parent families.

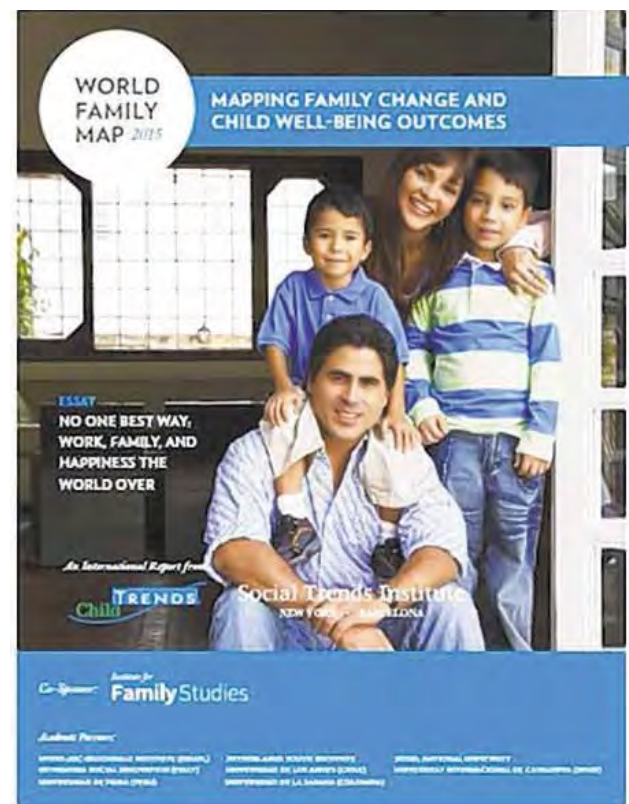
So again what I am suggesting here is when you look at the parent ecology, that it's not just the structure of the family that matters, it's also the stability — and kids are more likely to flourish physically when they have the benefit of a stable, two-parent family context. And in terms of stability, we control our analyses for wealth ... so we don't think money is the primary story here...

I'd like to conclude with some good news.

The first point is that most children around the globe are being raised in a home with their two parents and often their extended kin. I think that's one important piece of good news to know today.

A second point is that most citizens around the globe, as judged by World Values Survey, agree that kids need "a father and a mother to grow up happily." So I think there's a reservoir of support for the two-parent family among most of our global citizenry.

And the third point is that, when it comes to academic research, there is a recognition that kids are more likely to thrive, on average, in a stable, two-parent



context. This quote from Princeton University sociologist Sara McLanahan gives you a sense of this perspective: She says, "A two-parent ideal would ensure that children have access to the time and money of two adults, provide some checks and balances to promote a quality of parenting, and the fact that both parents have a biological connection to the child would increase the likelihood that the parents would identify with the child, be willing to sacrifice for that child, and reduce the likelihood that either parent would abuse the child."

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declared that "the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state." This is because the social and economic wealth of nations depend in no small part on the health of the family.

Families matter. Parents matter. In the face of tremendous change in the family, I think we shall come to see that the path towards continued social and economic and physical progress for the world's children lies in part in protecting the intact family where it is currently strong and renewing the family where it's fragile.

.....
W. Bradford Wilcox, Ph.D., is director of the National Marriage Project and associate professor of sociology at the University of Virginia. He is senior fellow at the Institute for Family Studies and a visiting scholar at American Enterprise Institute.

'Our children need us to talk about hard things'



By Dr. Meg Meeker

I have watched children over the past 30-plus years grow up ... and become a professional listener of parents and children, if you will.

We can intellectualize about what a father should be and what a mother should be, but most importantly, we need to understand it from a child's perspective: When a 3- or 5-year-old or 15-year-old child looks at mom or dad in the evening, standing in the kitchen, what does that child see and what does that child need?

Our children are currently facing challenges that none of us in this room faced when we were growing up.

The average child spends more time on the [media] screen than he or she spends in school. The average amount of time a child spends with a parent is 34 minutes per day.

You add up the numbers and it's pretty clear what is having a very large influence over our children.

I have seen personally, and the research confirms this, a swell in the amount of depression in children, anxiety in children, many other ills....

We are seeing increased violence in television and movies and music, not only the increased frequency but increased intensity...

We also know that children are watching increased intensity and

frequency of sex scenes on television and in the movies. This is a grave concern of mine — particularly because I have treated a number of teenagers — a lot of teenagers — with pain due to sexual activity too early. Specifically, I am talking about sexually transmitted infections ... from children being sexually active far too early with too many sexual partners....

Ladies and gentlemen, our children need us to talk about hard things. ... Our kids are exposed to tremendous dangers out there. We know the answer — and that's the great part about the work that I do as a pediatrician. We have the answers ... research has told us.

A beautiful study called the ADD Health study began a number of years with 90,000 kids in America. And they determined to find out one thing: What is operating in a child's life that keeps them away from all the bad stuff? What keeps them away from sex, drugs and alcohol?

The researchers found something startling: It wasn't peers, it wasn't school programs, it wasn't getting our kids more involved in after school activities. It was something called "parent connectedness."

In other words, again through the eyes of children and teenagers, our kids are telling us, "We need moms and dads in our lives, engaged and available, protecting us, teaching us, and setting us on the right path in life." They wanted it and they are open to it.

The body of research is growing on the positive effects of children who grow up with their fathers — and the negative effects if they don't have them.

... We know that teen boys and girls who live with a father in their home are far less likely to struggle with depression and anxiety, to get into sex, drugs and alcohol early, and they are far *more* likely to get better grades, to finish high school and to go onto college and graduate schools. And these are studies of not great dads; these are

studies that show a dad in the home. His presence protects girls and boys.

Psychologists have also talked about the relationship between the mother and the father -- interestingly, psychologists have thought that a child simply needs a relationship with a mother and a relationship with a father. But what we now know is that the children gain security from the relationship between the two....

We also know a lot about identity formation in children — that strong character development comes from having a diverse exposure of the masculine and the feminine ...

This is because through a child's eyes, when Dad tells a child something it's very different from when Mother tells a child something ...

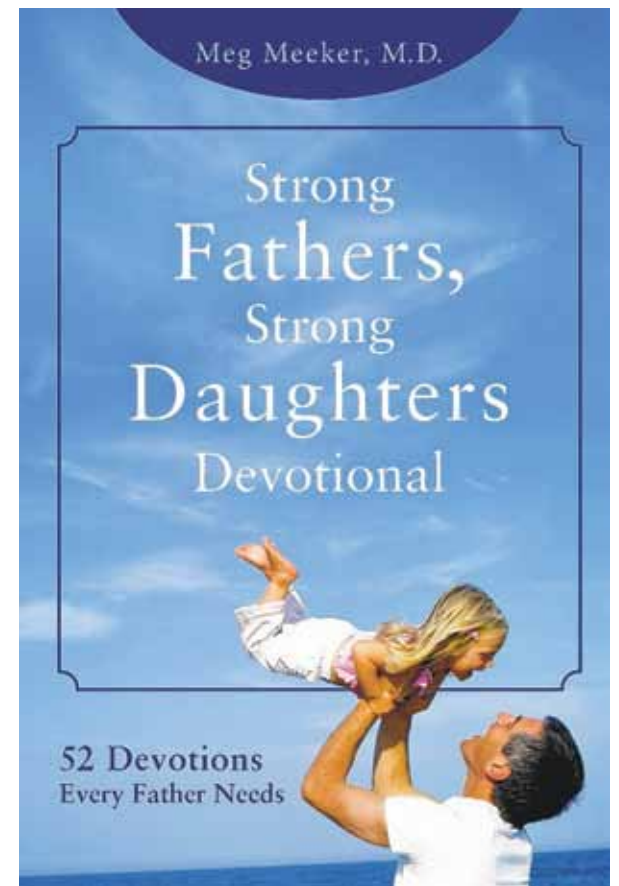
Another factor that is proven to strengthen children and their sense of value is faith. Believe it or not, research says that God is good for kids. And there is a lot of research on that ...It is the moral structure? In part. Is it having a faith community? In part. Is it because you have responsibility and accountability? Is it because you have a Higher Power that you believe is good and that you relate to? Probably all of those things.

But as a pediatrician who wants to do my best for children, I can't ignore the faith factor with my children.

I have literally watched thousands of kids grow up and my personal experience affirms all of this research that I just talked about ... I believe very strongly that the fullest opportunity that a child has to develop a strong

identity and a sense of value as a person is to have the diverse exposure of a mother and a father and a faith, because then you have a complete picture for a child: the masculine and the feminine.

.....
Meg Meeker, M.D., (megmeekermd.com) is a best-selling author and leading authority on parenthood, children and



teen health. She has a pediatric practice in Traverse City, Michigan, and is assistant clinical professor at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine. She is married and has adult children and two grandchildren. Her latest book is "Strong Fathers, Strong Daughters Devotional: 52 Devotions Every Father Needs."

Motherhood transforms women in lasting, beneficial ways

By Cheryl Weitzstein

To the mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters and other women who have loved and nurtured children with a mother's heart, today is intended to recognize your care and investment in our new generations.

We were all born completely helpless, but with a will to live. That we lived is because someone — usually our mother

— put us first, ahead of her many other tasks or desires.

In honor of the Global Day of Parents, I would like to address three areas where I think we can find sincere common ground as we think about mothers.

The first point is that during pregnancy, women give even to the bone for their unborn children.

A baby cannot come into being without the all-important sperm of a man and its precious chromosomal contents

— but virtually every other part of the baby is created, literally, from the body of his or her mother.

During pregnancy, a woman's entire cardiovascular system is readjusted. Blood and oxygen nourish the developing fetus, placenta and uterus — so the woman's oxygen consumption goes up and the amount of blood pumped every minute by her heart slowly increases by up to 50 percent. Her kidneys work harder to filter an increasing volume

of blood — this is a major reason why mothers see the insides of so many bathrooms during pregnancy.

Breathing is now being done for two — and it gets harder as the pregnancy progresses and the baby and placenta squeeze up to the rib cage....

A woman even gives to the bone for her unborn child: Growing babies need calcium for their bodies, and will take it

» see **MOTHER** | C11

The importance of being ‘Father’



By Brian Caulfield

I will start with the words of the world’s most popular father — our Holy Father Pope Francis:

A father helps the child “to perceive the limits of life, to be open to the challenges of the wider world, and to see the need for hard work and strenuous effort” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 175).

Pope Francis has a way of grasping the essence of an issue and putting it in terms we can all understand. This quote, written after the two synods on the family, sums up quite nicely some of the best scholarship on the nature of fatherhood, and resonates with commonsense experience. Well, at least my own experience.

Let me explain with a personal anecdote. One summer, when I was 8 or 9, we rented a bicycle that was way too big for me. With the best of intentions, no doubt, my dad plopped me on the seat,

held me up as I strained to reach the pedals, gave a push and off I went, down the block, swerving nervously. Good thing there was a fence at the end of the street to break my fall!

My mother, with ears set to the precise frequency of the screams of her three boys, was at the window in a flash, and began yelling at my dad, who stood impervious to any maternal fears or even human reasoning. (This was well before mandatory safety helmets.) Looking back at dad, I saw his proud smile saying, “That’s my boy, he gave it his all,” and knew that I — and the masculine world I was learning to inhabit — would live to see another day.

That was my father. Chances are, with different details, your father was something like that, too. Blame it on hormones, the differences between male and female brains, nature or nurture, Mars and Venus, or a gift from God who made them male and female. The nature of fatherhood is so familiar and universal that Pope Francis inscribes it into a document meant for the faithful, across nations, societies and cultures....

We may ask today whether Pope Francis’ words about fathers are meant to describe more of an ideal — a caricature from the past — than a current reality. Later in his exhortation, he talks about “a society without fathers” and the symbolic absence of the father figure. Indeed, there are many pressures today acting against fatherhood, the most troubling of them being the simple fact that so many children now do not have consistent contact with their dad, due to divorce, separation, incarceration, or child abandonment.... Today, 41 percent

of U.S. children are born to a single mother; and upwards of 40 percent of marriages end in divorce.... This is bad for the kids involved, and can’t be good for our society over time, despite the many stories of children from broken homes making a success in the world and heroic moms raising good kids on their own.

Yet despite the huge ache of father absence at the heart of our society, there is very little talk about the problem, and no conscious, sustained effort to find a solution....

There is, I suspect, ... a general feeling that fathers are expendable. Sure, a mother and father together raising their children is ideal, but if anything goes wrong in the mix, the father can be cut out....

Yet the benefits of fathers to their families are so obvious ... Children who do not have a father in their lives have much higher rates of:

- Dropping out of school and delinquency
- Anti-social behavior
- Poverty
- Running afoul of the law
- Early sexual activity and teen pregnancy

There is a problem, and dad is at the center of the solution....

To conclude, I will focus on what I know best, my experience as editor of Fathers for Good, an initiative for fathers and their families by the Knights of Columbus ... to provide guidance to men as they seek to live out their vocation to fatherhood in a culture that is not always open to the unique attributes of masculine virtue.

The mission of the Fathers for Good is summed up well in the name: First, once a man becomes a father, once he generates new life, he is a father for good; there is no giving back that gift. [And secondly] most men — and I think deep down, all men — when they do become a father, want to be a good father. There is an innate desire, given by God the Father, for all men to be a good father....

We welcome wives as equal partners on this path, taking for our own the quote attributed to the late Father Hesburgh, longtime president of Notre Dame: “The greatest gift a father can give his children is to love their mother.”

Indeed, in this beautiful mess of life and love called the family, we highlight the positive, while never downplaying the many problems and pitfalls inherent in the human condition. We teach what the Catholic Church teaches, not so much as dogma, but as the common sense of the ages that will make us happy. We hold up love — self-giving, self-sacrificing love that is the greatest gift of one person to another — as the very attainable human goal for all marriages and families.

As St. John Paul II said, “The future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.” With these words in mind, it is worth our best efforts to form the next generation of good fathers.

.....
Brian Caulfield, who is married and the father of two sons, is editor of Fathers-forGood.org, sponsored by the Knights of Columbus Supreme Council. He edited the 2013 book, “Man to Man, Dad to Dad: Catholic Faith and Fatherhood.”

MOTHER

From page C10

from their mothers’ bones and teeth unless she adds calcium to her diet.

We all know about all the other incredible changes that take place in a woman’s body before birth, during birth and after birth. It is indeed a miracle, and we all can say thank you to our mothers for those extraordinary days of self-sacrifice that led to our having life.

My second point about motherhood is that it often transforms women in lasting and beneficial ways.

For anyone who has been in Babyland, there is a perception that women get a little ditzy around child birth — they are forgetful, they get “porridge brain,” “pregnancy brain,” etc. After all, one study found that primary caregivers — i.e., mothers — can lose 700 hours of sleep in their baby’s first year. The expert who told me that added that anyone with that kind of sleep deprivation can go from

“Sleepy to Dopey” pretty quickly.

So there is some truth to the “pregnancy brain,” but research also suggests that a woman’s brain fully recovers from pregnancy with a remodeled brain that has lasting cognitive improvements.

Mothers enter what can be called a school of love — with classes every hour on how to create growing experiences, handle unexpected changes, manage expectations.

In other words, becoming a mother is a strengthening experience for many women: They become faster, more aware, more courageous and more resourceful. After all, they are preparing for the mother of all multitasking experiences: raising a child.

For example, in studies of rats, mother rats and “virgin” rat were put in mazes with food at the end. Scientists watched to see which rats were the quickest to find their way to the food. The mother rats dramatically outperformed the virgin rats — in fact, the mother rats who had two or more pregnancies were faster than the rats who had given birth only once.

In an interview I did some years ago with Katherine Ellison, author of the book, “The Mommy Brain: How Motherhood Makes Us Smarter,” she said science had indicated that there were “five attributes of a baby-boosted brain.” These were: an enhanced perception, and greater sensitivity in smell, vision, hearing and physical contact. “Mom radar,” Mrs. Ellison put it.

Mothers enter what can be called a school of love — with classes every hour on how to create growing experiences, handle unexpected changes, manage expectations. Among the lessons mothers teach children are how to share, be

industrious, respect themselves and others, and be bold and confident in life. Mother often provide a spiritual example and devotion and love of God. And importantly, they cultivate compassion and love for others...

But of course the major way that motherhood adds value to society has to do with raising children to be successful adults.

As Dr. Brad Wilcox has found, both mothers and fathers want their children to succeed, but they approach parenting differently: Mothers tend to be more verbal, affectionate, predictable, comforting — while dads bring excitement and challenge into kids’ lives: It’s like dads challenge kids to get out of the nest, while moms try to make children feel at home in the nest.

.....
Cheryl Wetzstein, formerly a national news reporter, is manager of special sections at The Washington Times

Staying plugged in to our children in the digital world



By Deborah MacNamara

The digital age has reshaped the landscape in which we are raising our children. While our new tools and technologies allow us to do things we could only once dream of, it has also changed the conditions under which we care for our children. What is the impact of the digital age on parenting and child development? In order to answer this question we will need to ask what comes with these new tools and whether they are what our children need to realize their full human potential.

Many parents today are raising the first true digital natives despite being digital immigrants themselves. The challenge lies in being able to lead our children into this age instead of just following them.

Many children now have unprecedented access to information, entertainment and connectivity — especially to their peers — but is this what our children really need? If the goal is to raise them to be socially and emotionally mature global citizens who are resilient and adaptive, then the answer is no, this is not what they need. Furthermore, these things are proving to make parenting more challenging and have the capacity to adversely impact the conditions under which our children flourish.

I have spent many decades considering human development, as a faculty member at the Neufeld Institute, working alongside internationally respected, clinical and developmental psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld and physician and addiction specialist Dr. Gabor Mate, co-authors of “Hold Onto Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers.” I have helped parents in my counseling practice make sense of the digital world and the implications for raising their kids, as well as managing problems related to it. I have addressed the importance of play in

young children’s lives and the pressures of technology in my book, “Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (Or Anyone Who Acts Like One).” I have also aided educators in considering technology and its impact on student/teacher relationships, as well as guided university students in forming educational plans and career goals to meet the demands of a digital age.

But this issue is important to me on a more personal level because I am also the mother of two children who are both entering their adolescent years.

I remember when I gave my 7-year-old an iPad to try out for the first time. It really was love at first sight as she enjoyed watching video clips and playing games. It was only two weeks later, in the middle of a warm embrace as I put her to bed one night she told me, “Oh Mommy, your hugs are still better than technology time.” I was stunned by her comment and wondered how had my seven-year relationship with her become comparable to 14 days of minimal technology time.

The problem facing parents today is that we do not have cultural tradition to guide us.

As Canadian environmentalist David Suzuki stated, it takes societies anywhere from 100 to 200 years to develop the cultural rules and rituals around the use of new tools. We don’t have this type of time when it comes to raising our kids, so we will need to find another way. We will need to become conscious of the conditions conducive for healthy development by turning to developmental science, attachment science, neuroscience, as well as parenting intuition and insight.

The greatest need our children have, that must be met for healthy development to unfold, is that of human attachment. Attachment is how we fulfill our children’s hunger for contact and closeness and is the single most important factor that influences the trajectory of their growth. Every child needs at least one strong, caring, emotionally available adult to feel they belong to. Attachment for a child is about who they feel they are the same as, who they are loyal to, who they want to be significant to, cared for, as well as share their secrets with. The answer to what our children need most of all is love.

But the key issue here is that it is

actually not how much we love our children that matters most, but whether they have given their heart to us. Children do not follow parents or learn from teachers they are not attached to. You cannot protect, preserve or be a guardian for a child’s heart that has not been entrusted to you for safekeeping...

What is clear is that our relationships with our children cannot be displaced or replaced by all that comes with this new digital age, but there are clear signs we are being challenged to hold onto our kids.

I watched as my 14-year-old niece became peer-attached and clung to her phone as the lifeline that preserved her connection to friends.

As I comforted my niece, I asked her if she knew the No. 1 rule when she felt this way, and she said no. I told her that she needed to hold on to someone who wasn’t lost and confused about who she was. I asked her, “Are your friends lost and confused?” to which she replied yes. I asked, “Is your boyfriend lost and confused?” to which she replied yes again.

I then asked her, “When you look around here today, who is not lost or confused about you?” She looked at me and said, “You.” And it was then that I felt I had reentered her life once more. I asked her who else, and she looked at her mother and said, “My mom.” And with that, I left them to have a conversation.

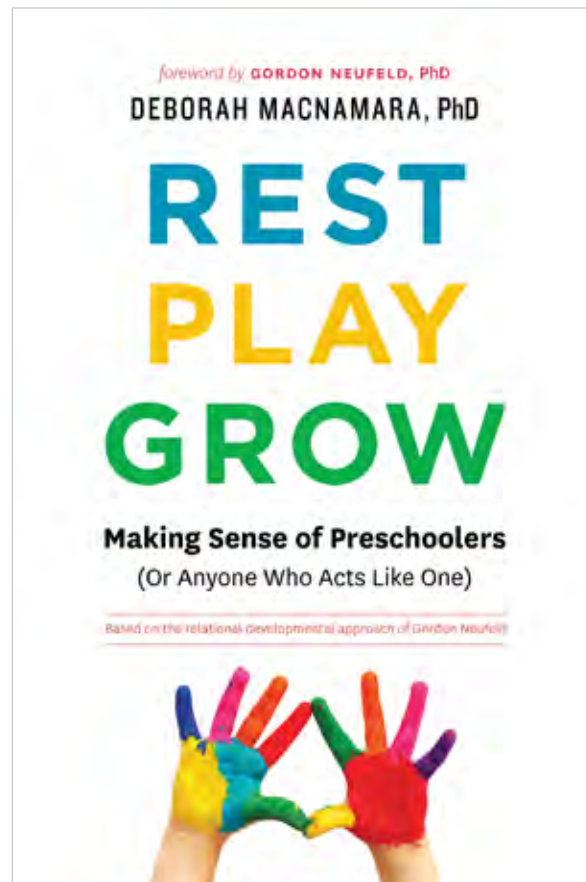
Later on, my sister told me they talked at length and my niece cried for some time. After telling her mother about all the things that were not working in her life, she looked at her surprised and said, “Mom, I never thought you would understand what I was going through or that you had gone through some of this too.” Separated from her phone and her peers, we, the adults in her life, were once again able to reclaim a foothold in her heart.

What is clear to me is that we need to find a way to hold onto our kids in a digital age, as there is no turning back and this is the world they will inherit. We need to lead our children into this new age and introduce them to their new tools and technologies when they are ready and mature enough to handle all that comes with it...

We cannot send our children into the digital world empty-handed with only their technological tools in tow. Maturity is the prerequisite for true digital citizenship, and

to that end, parents are still the best “devices.”

.....
Deborah MacNamara, Ph.D., is on faculty at the Neufeld Institute in Vancouver, Canada and in private practice working with parents based on the relational and developmental approach of Gordon Neufeld, Ph.D. She is the author of “Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (Or Anyone Who Acts Like One).” Please see www.macnamara.ca for more information or www.neufeldinstitute.org.



We took her on a camping trip as an extended family in order to reclaim a foothold back in her life.

In realizing the campground didn’t have any cell coverage, she told her mother it was going to be so boring trip because she couldn’t talk to any of her friends. Despite being surrounded by her village of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents, she longed to be elsewhere.

On the third day of the camping trip, I came across her and her mother in conversation. My niece was sobbing and my sister said my niece felt lost and confused.