

Column

According to statistics published in *The Washington Times*, 15 million U.S. children, or 1 in 3, live without a father in the home. In 1960, just 11 percent of American children lived in single-parent homes.

In another article published in *Physiology Today*, Edward Kruk, Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of British Columbia, posits disastrous consequences for the lack of fathers in the home. Some of these are: compromised emotional security; increased incidence of behavioural problems; poor academic performance; delinquency and youth crime; promiscuity and teen pregnancy; and problems with future relationships.

At a recent class I was leading, the question was raised as to what the Church could do to help in this crisis. As we were looking at the Apostles' Creed, the natural place to begin was its opening declaration: "I believe in God the Father Almighty."

Might giving more attention to this concept of God as Father be helpful in this current crisis? Not all would agree, but I believe it might.

You may have no one in the home to call Father. Even so, you are not an orphan. God is your father. In the words of the Apostle Paul to the learned men of Athens: "For in him [God] we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28). We are God's children, he is saying.

More than that, God is an ideal Father inasmuch as He loves, provides for, knows your weaknesses and strengths, corrects, guides and is there in good times and bad. Perhaps this is what children in father-less homes should be told: When you feel all alone, look up, rejoice and give thanks. One greater than any human parent cares.

Teaching children to make this affirmation is not the whole answer to today's problem, but it is a beginning. In addition, men in the Christian community should strive to model the divine actions I have just named. They should do this first for their own children but also for all children in their midst.

Put another way, these little ones cannot see their Father in heaven with their physical eyes, but they can see you. Strive to be an icon of the Divine Father.

Of course, there are some in today's world who want to trash "Father" in liturgies and hymns and opt for a more generic designation of the Divine. They would argue paternal language is out-of-date and inherently tinged with oppression and domination.

In response, I would want to agree that oppression and domination are things not to be commended, but tampering with language is not the way to eradicate these vices. What is?

It is through reimagining human fatherhood in light of divine Fatherhood. It is through demonstrating in the church a better way. It is through striving to make each local church what each local home was intended to be: a haven of peace, trust, meaningful work, love and joy.

Let us be about our Father's business!

ALMIGHTY God, our heavenly Father, who settest the solitary in families; We commend to thy continual care the homes in which thy people dwell. Put far from them, we beseech thee, every root of bitterness, the desire of vain-glory, and the pride of life. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness. Knit together in constant affection those who, in holy wedlock, have been made one flesh; turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers; and so enkindle fervent charity among us all, that we be evermore kindly affectioned with brotherly love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.