

Prayer Focus — November 2007

A fatherless generation.

I want to begin this Prayer Focus by thanking you for your prayers, not only for my time in the USA but also for the Community during my absence.

The two days spent in Massachusetts with Jeff and Marjean Marks (New England Concerts of Prayer movement) and with an equally wonderful group of people over on the western seaboard in Seattle (attending an annual residential, organised by the International Reconciliation Coalition), had a common thread running through them for me. This was a continuation of each of my previous visits to the United States over the past four years – a profound connecting in my spirit with the wound in the spirit of the North American Indian peoples, much of it afflicted on them through the influx of Europeans over the past 400 years. As I mentioned in the Appendix of my book “Heal Not Lightly”, we have had a significant part to play in this wounding, often, sadly to say, in the name of God.

Do pray with us as a Community and for others in the USA and Canada, as we seek to understand what God is wanting out of this. One thing seems almost certain - I will be back sometime in the next year for at least one gathering for reconciliation and healing regarding a particular historic wound, which God highlighted during my time there.

Before going to America, God lead us during one of our prayer times to prayer around the theme of “the fatherless generation”, here in Ireland. I realise also, how applicable this is to the many Native American people. Sociological studies regarding children who have either never known a father (i.e. born into a single parent family) or who have grown up without a father (i.e. now absent through separation or divorce), can manifest itself in a range of different ways: binge drinking, self-harming, depression, suicide, low self esteem, bullying, a deep yearning to know who they are. These studies have also shown that so much of our identity and self-worth comes from the father figures in our lives.

Regarding this, Barnardos has found that absent fathers need to be drawn back into the children’s lives. Their Chief Executive reports – “Recent research has shown that greater engagement of fathers in the care and rearing of their children, particularly in the early and pre-teenage years, can result in many social, educational and psychological benefits for children. These range from better social skills, fewer emotional and behavioural difficulties, better school performance and less chance of getting into trouble with the law.”

Here are some more startling statistics to help you with informed praying:

- Three out of every 20 marriages end in divorce, with a record number of terminations granted by the courts last year According to the annual report of the Courts Service, 2,929 couples were granted a divorce last year.” (*Irish Examiner*. 16/07/04)
- In the four years from 1999 to 2003 the divorce rate increased by 26pc with a rise of 15pc between 2002 and 2003.” (*Irish Independent*. 16/07/04)
- Recent research by the Iona Institute in the Republic of Ireland shows: a five-fold increase in marriage breakdown over the last 20 years; that co-habitation has risen six-fold over the past decade, from 31,298 people in 1996 to 189,240 in 2006, making it the fastest growing family unit; the number of lone parents is up 80% since 1986 ... with 190,000 lone parents in the country. (*Irish Times*. 14/0907)

- The number of divorces registered in Northern Ireland hit a record high last year – with almost 2,600 couples deciding to split. This statistic came to light after it emerged that up to 20 million people throughout the UK are living with the effects of divorce or separation Of all the couples married in the mid 1980's, one in six were divorced by their 20th wedding anniversary. (*Belfast Telegraph* 29/06/07 & 12/09/07)
- In the Irish Republic there are now 150,000 single parent families, with over 50% of them with at least one child under the age of 15. (*Irish Times*. 29/12/05)
- [This year] six times as many children were born outside marriage than in 1980 The latest EU population figures reveal one-in-three Irish births were outside marriage. Our rate of 31% is 1% higher than the EU average. (*Irish Examiner* 2/9/04)
- Children in Britain are increasingly likely to live in single-parent families nearly a quarter (24%) lived with just one parent last year – treble the proportion recorded in 1972. (*Belfast Telegraph*. 11/04/07)

Alongside this is the incredible knowledge and reality that God is standing in the midst of these statistics, wanting to be a Father to them - children, parents and partners alike. None of us has grown up with a perfect father and none of us who are now fathers ourselves have been perfect either. At best, we are a mere reflection of the perfect Father. I am so thankful that He is there for me. A contemporary worship song puts it like this – “Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist without the knowledge of your parenthood and your loving care.” He is the only one who can minister into the depth of these deficits, and yet He will also be looking for many of us to be spiritual “fathers” and “mothers” to this generation, when in their thousands they will be coming into a living relationship with Him in the coming years.

Here are some scriptures to meditate on and use alongside the statistical information above to pray for this “fatherless generation”.

- “Sing to the Lord, sing praises to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds – his name is the Lord – and rejoice before him. A father to the fatherless Is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:4-6.)
- “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.” (read in context – Galatians 3:26 – 4:7.)
- “You have received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:15-17.)
- “As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.” “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing and I will receive you.” “I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6: 16-18.)

Harry Smith

For your prayers.

Since our last Prayer Focus, due to a number of personal and family circumstances – including the illness of Naomi’s mother – Jeremy and Naomi are moving on from Community. This is a huge move for them, but they will be continuing to live at the Renewal Centre over the next number of weeks as they look for appropriate housing, etc. Do pray for God’s blessing on them for the contribution they made to Community life over the past year and also for them and their children, Alison, Amy and Ben that they may know His leading, peace, provision and wisdom at this time.

Continue to pray also for a much needed Cook to work alongside Valerie and for more people to join Community or come as short-term Helpers.