

Vatican official: Fathers should look to Jesus' relationship with God

MANILA, Philippines – The president of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum expressed concern that weakened masculinity around the world is preventing people from grasping Jesus' teaching about his Father.

"Today, the self-understanding of manhood and especially fatherhood is in crisis," said Cardinal Paul Cordes during a Jan. 23 presentation at the Pontifical University of Santo Tomas in Manila.

The Asian church news agency UCA News reported that the German cardinal, who heads the council responsible for coordinating charitable efforts, spoke after officials of the pontifical university conferred on him an honorary doctorate in sacred theology.

Cardinal Cordes cited reports and surveys documenting "weakened male identity."

One of the reports said that 24 million children in the United States live in a home without a father. Cardinal Cordes said that figure was 10 million in the 1960s, according to UCA News.

The report found that, compared to boys who live with their father, boys from fatherless homes are twice as likely to end up in prison, more likely to drop out or be expelled from school, and account for 63 percent of youth suicides and 90 percent of youths who run away from home.

In Europe, the cardinal said, recent trends also "work to diminish masculinity."

Cardinal Cordes offered Jesus Christ's relationship with God the Father as a model for father-son relationships. Jesus spoke with God as a child, in a simple way, intimate and familiar, he said. "Abba," which the cardinal translated as "papa" or "dear daddy" in today's understanding of language, reveals the most affectionate center of Jesus' relationship with God, said the cardinal.

However, he also noted the role of the father as the person who orients and directs the child and contributes to the child's growth in goodness even when it causes the child unpleasantness. Men who are not necessarily biological fathers perform that spiritual fathering role in developing children in ethics and values, he said.

At the reception following the ceremony, he described his own father as a cinema owner and "good cook." He told UCA News, "My mother had more to do with raising me, but my father was involved in disciplining and orienting me."