

STRONGFamilies®

Executive Briefing

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This briefing is designed to help you stay current on the latest news, research, cultural trends and popular influences impacting the world of families. It comes as a gift from your friends at The Center for Strong Families. To learn more about joining our collaborative network of leaders discovering innovative ways to create a church culture of intentional families, visit us at strongfamilies.com. **Kurt Bruner** (*Executive Director - Innovation Alliance*)

CHILDREN

Church Attendance Shapes Future Patterns

If someone never attends church before 18, there is only a 21% chance he or she will attend regularly as an adult according to new Ellison Research. If, however, someone attends worship services regularly for a period of time before the age of 18, they have a 55% chance of attending services once a month or more as an adult. Ellison also documented the importance of a child's parents' attendance. Among those in a home where neither parent regularly attended worship services, the chances of regular attendance as an adult was as low as 33%. Children who have one parent attending services occasionally have a 50% chance of regular attendance as an adult. Those with both parents attending services occasionally have a 62% chance of regular church attendance as adults.

See article at:

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/us.study.asks.who.are.the.unchurched/20578.htm>

Separating Boys & Girls Improves Education

In the face of a growing gap between the educational performance of boys and girls, some schools are experimenting with separate classes for boys and girls. A *Boston Globe* article reports on the changes observed in Boston area schools as a result: "Boys still will be boys - and launch their paper planes - but their antics have toned down, teachers said. Girls have stopped preening in class. And both groups appear to be more confident asking and answering questions." According to the *Globe* article, US Secretary of

Education Margaret Spellings broadened federal regulations in 2006 in order to give schools more flexibility to start same-sex programs. "The guidelines dictated that enrollment be voluntary and a substantially equal coeducational class be provided. The number of single-sex programs in public schools nationwide has jumped from three in 1995 to more than 366 today, according to the National Association for Single Sex Public Education."

See article at:

http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2008/05/09/keeping_the_boys_away_from_the_girls/?rss_id=Boston+Globe+-+Front+Page

Churches Reaching Men to Win Children

For years, church observers have discussed the fact that men are less likely than women to be in church. A *USA Today* article, however, talks about how some churches are trying to re-engage with men--specifically in order to reach their children. The article explains how 121 Community Church in Grapevine, Texas was "designed with dudes in mind, from the worship center's stone floor, hunter-green and amber decor and rustic-beam ceilings to woodsy scenes on the church website." It continues: "No pastels. No flowers. No sweet music. No sit-with-your-hands-folded mood." More significant than the specific tactics is the motivation that the high-profile article captured. "I have read that if a child comes to Christ, 12% of the time the whole family will follow," says the church's pastor Ross Sawyers. "If the mom comes, there's a 15% chance the family will. But if the man comes to church, 90% of the time the family will come

along behind. That's the reality, and that's why we do this."

See article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2008-07-23-males-church_N.htm

Higher Fertility Driving Hispanic Growth

Church nurseries are reflecting the growing Hispanic population in America. Beyond immigration, most of that growth comes from the higher fertility of Hispanics already living in America. Hispanics represent 15% of the general U.S. population, but according to recent Census Bureau reports, they represent 25% of children under 5. Pew Research indicates that half of these children are being born to single mothers. Are our children's ministry areas ready to meet the needs of this baby boom?

See article at:

http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/05/08/hispanic_growth_fueled_by_higher_fertility_rates/?rss_id=Boston.com+---+Latest+news

Many Tweens Watching 'R' Films

More than 2.5 million children between the ages of 10 and 14 watch violent, R-rated movies according to a study released Monday in the journal *Pediatrics*. Researchers from Dartmouth Medical School asked 6,522 children to identify movies they had seen among a list of 534 recent films. Within that list, they included 40 R-rated movies with "the most extreme examples of graphic violence." They discovered that an average of 12.5% of kids had seen each movie. Even among tweens who reported that their parents never let them watch R-rated movies, 22.6% had seen at least one. Those viewing the most were tweens with televisions in their rooms.

See article at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-08-04-tweens-violent-movies_N.htm?csp=34

TEENS

Responsible Behavior Up

Compared to teens in the 1990s, today's high schoolers are having less sex, drinking less alcohol, smoking fewer cigarettes and doing fewer drugs. That's according to the bi-annual CDC 2007 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System survey. 46% of high schoolers in '91 said they had never engaged in sexual activity vs. 52% in '07. 15% have had 4 or more sexual partners, down from 19% in '91. In '07, 35% had at least 1 alcoholic drink in the past month vs. 42% in '91. Marijuana use has fallen to 20% from a peak of 27% in '99, while use of methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin and ecstasy is down to 4% in '07. Tobacco use has decreased 50% from '95.

See survey results at:

http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/yrbs/pdf/yrbs07_us_summary_trend_all.pdf

Teens Follow Parent Warnings But Give In When Unsupervised

When it comes to events such as prom and graduation parties, parental guidance has a great affect on a teen's use of alcohol and drugs according to a new survey released by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America and the MetLife Foundation. When parents engage their children in discussions about alcohol and drug abuse the teens follow their parents' warnings. "Only 16 percent of teens whose parents set a zero tolerance policy reported their individual likelihood of using drugs or alcohol," says the report, "whereas 45 percent of teens whose parents didn't set such boundaries reported they were likely to drink or use drugs at prom or graduation parties this year." The survey shows what kind of coercion teenagers get from their peers: "Sixty percent of teens say they feel pressured to use drugs or alcohol 'always' or 'frequently' at prom or graduation events, and 22 percent of teens surveyed report that they are likely to drink or use drugs at these types of celebrations." Teens who learn about the risks of drugs at home are 50 percent less likely than their peers to use them, though less than one-third of teens say their parents are giving them that message.

See article at

<http://www.lifesitenews.com/ldn/2008/jun/08061005.html>

Decline in Teen Sex Leveling Off?

While the CDC study (mentioned above) shows improvements in the area of teen sexual activity over the past decade, it demonstrates some loss in recent gains. During the 1970s and 80s, teen sexual activity grew at a steady pace and brought with it high rates of teen sexual infections and pregnancies. Beginning in the 1990s, the fear of AIDS as well as educational programs (including abstinence training) started bringing those rates down. Recent data from a CDC survey, however, show that the decline in sexual activity among high school students leveled off between 2001 and 2007. In that survey, nearly 48 percent of 14,041 high school students said they have had sex. While that is down from the high of 54.1 percent in 1991, it's one percentage point up from 2005. This finding as well as reports that one in four teenage girls has a sexually transmitted disease and that the teen birth rate has increased for the first time in 15 years has generated concern that some of the ground gained over the past decade may be lost.

See article at: http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/06/04/AR2008060401735.html?nav=rss_print/asection

Still Hope for Purity Pledges

Mixed news on teen sexual activity has made funding for abstinence education a political football. People who are ideologically opposed to the teaching of abstinence have been trying to build a case that it doesn't work and shouldn't take any money away from the billions of dollars currently going to programs focused on condom use. In the midst of that debate, a recent Rand Corporation study supported the value of virginity pledges for many teens. In their finding, only 32% of those who took purity pledges had broken their vows and had sexual intercourse within three years in contrast with 42% who did not make pledges. The report cited estimates that 23 percent of U.S. females and 16 percent of males have made a virginity pledge. "Making a pledge to remain a virgin until married may

provide extra motivation to adolescents who want to delay becoming sexually active," said Steven Martino, who led the study. "The act of pledging may create some social pressure or social support that helps them to follow through with their clearly stated public intention."

See article at:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSN1034611720080610?pageNumber=1&virtualBrandChannel=0>

Religious Youth

Youth around the world are more religious than often assumed. 85% of teens and young adults in a 21-country study described themselves as religious, and nearly half said they were deeply religious. Only 13% said they were not interested in God or faith. The greatest devotion was in countries such as Nigeria and Guatemala where 90 percent pray at least once a day, and India, Morocco and Turkey where 75% do. In France, however, only nine per cent of young adults pray daily, in Russia eight per cent do so and in Austria it's only around seven percent. Youth in the United States were the big exception among Western Industrialized nations. Fifty-seven percent of young Americans say that they pray daily. Ninety percent of Pentecostal Protestants in the US describe themselves as deeply religious.

See article at:

<http://www.christiantoday.co.uk/article/worlds.youth.more.religious.than.reputed/20533.htm>

YOUNG ADULTS

Survey Conflicts with Research on Whether Cohabitation Good for Marriage/Children

Cohabitation is growing in America. Federal data released this summer found that cohabiting couples now account for 10% of all opposite-sex U.S. couples. In 30 years, the country has gone from half a million people living together at one time to 6.4 million. Alongside news coverage of this trend, *USA Today* ran a survey capturing opinions about the effect on family life. "Most people today reject the notion that couples who

live together before marriage are more likely to get divorced," said the article. Only 31% of respondents said living together first makes divorce more likely. When asked about the effect on children living in a cohabiting household, 47% said it makes no difference, and 12% thought it would actually have a positive effect.

But these optimistic survey respondents are, in a word, wrong. This summer, The National Marriage Project released a broad study of cohabitation in America and abroad. David Popenoe, author of the study, indicates that "the evidence is now clear that people who marry after cohabiting (assuming that they are not already engaged or committed to each other when they first cohabit) tend to have a higher chance of breakup." he goes on to say:

Of even greater societal concern, however, should be the negative effects of cohabitation on child wellbeing. More than 40 percent of cohabiting couples today have children, and the percentage is growing partly due to a declining propensity of cohabiting couples to convert to marriage. Cohabiting couples have a significantly higher dissolution rate than married couples, thus putting more children through the stress of family break up and the probable loss of one residential parent. One recent study found that "children born to cohabiting versus married parents have over five times the risk of experiencing their parents' separation." Cohabiting couples also fail to measure up to married couples in many other respects. They tend to have higher rates of child abuse and family violence, for example, and significantly lower incomes.

See articles and reports at:

http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-07-28-cohabitation-poll_N.htm?csp=34 as well as "Census Reports More Unmarried Couples Living Together" (http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/census/2008-07-28-cohabitation-census_N.htm?csp=34) and (http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-07-28-cohabitation-research_N.htm?csp=34) and <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/2008cohareport.html>

Expectations, Nudges Matter in Church Attendance

As researchers continue to look closer at church patterns among young adults, LifeWay Resources has found value in friends/family encouraging church attendance and in churches setting high expectations. Recent editions of *Outreach* magazine reported on LifeWay research that found that 39% of young adults who left church will return if "gently nudged" by parents or other family members and that 21% will do so if they are encouraged by friends or other acquaintances.

See articles about young adults and church attendance in June and July issues of *Outreach* magazine

Betrothal Resurgence?

The *Wall Street Journal* recently took the time to spotlight a movement among some Christian families, particularly homeschoolers, to resurrect the idea of betrothal. In a day of confusing paths to marriage, the article reports on couples in places like Idaho, Illinois, Ohio, Texas, Colorado and Minnesota who are bringing back a more formal approach. Betrothal, the article explains "requires a man and woman to make a binding commitment to marry before beginning any romantic--much less physical--relationship." The article adds that the couple's parents are generally responsible for arranging the match. In this approach, breaking the betrothal commitment is viewed the same as divorce.

See article at:

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120787888985406965.html?mod=weekend_journal_primary_hs

Forgetting To Marry?

In 1970, 79% of 25-year-olds in the U.S. had married. By 2005, only 40% of people that age had married. Joan Frawley Desmond talks about the factors behind this change in a *Touchstone* article called "Unmarried, Still Children." One of her most distinctive observations was that parents are encouraging extended adolescence by showing hyper-caution about their children's

transition into marriage. "Their children are deemed incapable of bearing the weight of marriage," she writes. "Everything must be in place before they can contemplate such a momentous—potentially 'destabilizing'—step." While parental caution about marriage is often based on good intentions, Desmond shows encouraging marital delay doesn't square with the temptations of youth:

A century ago, parents and the larger culture enforced a very different approach to marriage and courtship, one that arose from a profound Christian realism: the understanding that the human propensity to sin easily undermined good intentions and wrought its destructive power in the lives of innocents and evildoers alike.

Desmond stresses that even in the face of challenges, young married couples can be guided by a commitment to the marital vows: Though most young people enter marriage without fully understanding what is ahead, the vows guide them in developing necessary virtues: perseverance, temperance, courage, justice, and humility. The challenges keep coming—sickness, financial difficulties, family crises—and the vows help to lift the spouses over each hurdle.

See article at:

<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=21-05-015-v>

Unmarried = Unchurched

According to a study by Princeton University's Robert Wuthnow, American Churches would have an estimated 6.3 million more young adults today if young people started families at the same rate as 30 years ago. Yet another indication that a decline in marriage & parenting correspond to a decline in faith.

See 8/5/08 CitizenLink report or Wuthnow's book: *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*

MARRIAGE

Unequally Yoked Marriages

Twenty seven percent of married Americans are in religiously mixed marriages Pew Research found in a study this summer. The number goes up to 37% when Pew includes couples who come from different Protestant denominations. Pew found that young people are more likely to be in marriages that are religiously mixed. The report looks at the influence of marriage among other factors that cause people to leave the religious tradition they knew growing up.

See report at: <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-chapter-2.pdf>

Women Want More Children

Meredith Corp. and NBC Universal surveyed women on a variety of issues related to health, finances, career, family life and overall satisfaction. In the area of family life, half of women surveyed said they wanted to make a change in their family life. Having more children was the number-one desire. Even when respondents were divided by Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y, "having children" or "having more children" came out on top. Behind those desires for Xers and Boomers was "adopt/foster a child," which is likely a reflection of where many women are in their window of fertility. Among current mothers in the survey, being home with children was an important issue. 67% of women say "having children" and "staying home with children when they are young" are important lifestyle choices to them; 41% say "staying home with children when they are in their teens" is important to them. Stay-at-home moms are more likely than working moms to place higher importance on being home with children both when they are young (92% vs. 69%) and when they are in their teens (67% vs. 41%). One-third (34%) of working moms with children under 18 say they would be happier if they could be stay-at-home moms versus working moms (This percentage was higher among Gen-X working moms).

See survey at:

<http://www.marketingcharts.com/topics/demographics/wome>

[n-happy-overall-want-more-help-at-home-and-better-sex-5529/](#)

Attending Church Together Keeps Marriages Together

Church attendance is tied to marital fidelity according to a Fuller Theological Seminary study. A press release indicated that attending services can create a strong network of relationships within the church that can provide social support to the spouses. Additionally, attending services means that an individual is more likely to hear religious teaching on marital fidelity and the general importance of marriage.

See press release at:

http://www.ncfr.org/pdf/press_releases/JMF_May_2008.pdf

Divorce Accepted

Seventy percent of Americans believe divorce is morally acceptable according to the Gallup '08 Values and Beliefs Survey. This is a record number--up from 59% in 2000. Divorce topped the poll's 16 ethical issues rated for moral acceptability--followed by gambling, embryonic stem-cell research, homosexuality and abortion. Interestingly, extramarital affairs that are routinely the cause of divorce are at the other end of the list, with only 7% of Americans finding affairs morally acceptable.

See report at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/107380/Cultural-Tolerance-Divorce-Grows-70.aspx>

DON'T MISS THIS

Barna Sees Changes in American Dreams

What do Americans see as their ideal future? The Barna Group recently surveyed a national representative of Americans about their dreams for the future and then compared those answers with previous studies to see what has changed. They found that among the dreams that have grown more important to people are: living with a high degree of integrity (rising from 76% in 1991 to 85% in 2008); having a comfortable lifestyle (jumping from 59% in 1991 to 70% today); having children (an increase of 11 points

since 2000); being deeply committed to the Christian faith (up six points since 2000); and making a difference in the world (from 47% in 2000 to 56% in 2008).

See survey at:

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrowPreview&BarnaUpdateID=301>

Older First-time Dads

Over the past 30 years, the number of first-time fathers over 35 increased by 50 percent and the number of first-time fathers between the ages of 30 and 34 increased by 37 percent. In that same time, there was an 18 percent decline in births to men younger than 30. Those are some of the stats Harry Fisch wrote about in his book *The Male Biological Clock*.

Jeremy Adam Smith looks at some of the reasons for this delay in another book called *Twenty-First-Century Dad*. He cites longer life expectancy, growing divorce rates, and higher rates of remarriage. "Older parents have lives," said Smith, who was 34 when his son, Liko, was born. "They have these lives and they're able to travel, able to engage in recreational activities, and that ends abruptly. That's a direct outcome of having kids later." The upside Smith finds is that "Parenthood usually pushes the old life aside, at least for a time, and casts everything that came before in a new light." "I've interviewed many people who became parents in their 30s and 40s who said that parenthood revealed to them how selfish and silly they had been in their teens and 20s," writes Smith, "and I think that definitely applies to me."

See article at: [http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/06/13/LVQE10PMF5.DTL)

[bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/06/13/LVQE10PMF5.DTL](http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/06/13/LVQE10PMF5.DTL)