

GROWING *Together*

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MEN! WHAT DO THEY WANT?

In Stores and Streets

Notice it in the stores? Perfume for men: lots of fragrances. Jewellery for men: earrings, necklaces, rings galore.

See it in the streets? Men in the latest Gucci shoes, cargo pants or FUBU sweatshirt.

What's going on? A lot.

From 1989 to 1996, men's clothing sales in North America rose 21%. In the same period, women's clothing sales fell by 10%. What does this say about men today?

In Society

As their role of provider and protector diminishes, men search for purpose and self esteem in ways women have long tried: dressing right, cultivating sex appeal, seeking media attention.

But men in nearly 100 other cultures¹ offer us wisdom here. The Semang people of the Malay Peninsula and New Guinea's Arapesh and Tchambuli peoples. The Mbuuti tribe and the Akas of Africa. The Amazon's Machinguenga people. Around the globe. In cultures where men have healthy and close relationships with their children, they do not affirm masculinity through demonstrations of power and aggression. In cultures where men nurture children, they do not need to prove themselves through sexist language and behaviour nor adopt beliefs in female inferiority based on sacred stories and scriptures. In cultures where fathers show the most affection and responsibility for their children, they give women positions of political, social and religious authority. In these cultures, men are freer to relate to women wholesomely and wholistically.

In our society today, can the image of a male who lovingly cares for our youngest children ever be seen as manly as the ancient hunter? the conquering warrior? the bodybuilders' Mr. Universe? or the Forbes 500 top CEO?

In the Church

Men's and women's expectations of each other often prevent us from expressing who we really are and what we really want or need. Do women want a SNAG (sensitive new age guy) or a chiselled, macho man? Can such qualities exist in the same man at the same time? What kind of man does a family need today?

Some men feel spiritually and emotionally confused. Some fail to make significant male friendships. Others feel liberated by women's movements, yet do not have occasions to share this feeling.

A congregation or parish is a unique place for exploring deeply and compassionately what it means to be a man today. For a congregation or parish already has an environment with a unique sense of hope and trust. A place where men can share their questions, insecurity and points of view with each other. A place where men can come to cherish deeply being a beloved son of God and faithful brother of Christ.

Men's ministry needs to be seen as an urgent, basic part of congregation or parish life. It might start with a monthly men's breakfast. Then, perhaps, get-togethers over a weekend. Hopefully, a men's-only study group will emerge where men can talk with one another from the heart and in the Spirit. In time, meetings could come with women's and other groups in the church – thus building deeper friendships and greater, wider sharing.

With God

To be a male today is to be a unique part of God's creation. But it is a difficult role. The latest fragrances and the newest pants do not define the essence of that role. That dimension emerges only by knowing how we are all called by God to be part of the Body of Christ – where, after all is said and done, there is neither male nor female.

¹ "Close father-child relationships are associated with greater public power and prestige for women in virtually all types of societies." Scott Coltrane, *Family Man* (Oxford Press, 1996), 190.

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