

Ministering the Fatherless



PHOTO BY CARI HACHMANN/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Seeing fatherlessness affect so many families and young people in the church and community, Rev. Mark Strong created a passion, or a burden within him to address the problem. The Life Change Christian Center pastor has written a book, "Church for the Fatherless," and gears his ministry as a model for one of society's most pressing problems.

Pastor is living example of work for the human family

BY CARI HACHMANN

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Fifty years after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about the solidarity of the human family, Portland Pastor Dr. Mark Strong is a testament of the late civil rights leader's passion to heal and mentor the fatherless.

Not long after a dilapidated grocery store on North Williams Avenue became a new church, the Life Change Christian Center, Strong realized fatherlessness was a growing epidemic in the community.

The pastor was holding hands in prayer with a number of community leaders when he looked up at the circle of familiar faces around him. He began to mutter in his mind, "No father, no father, no father..."

Fifteen of the 20 faces before him, whether they were 20 or 60-years old, white or black, had grown up without an active father figure in their lives, "That's

a problem," he remembers thinking.

At the time, Strong was writing his doctoral thesis on how to improve inner city leadership, but that night he shifted his focus to an issue he saw that held greater magnitude. His thesis eventually became his book, "Church for the Fatherless," a ministry model for one of society's most pressing problems.

According to the National Center for Fathering, an estimated 24 million children (33 percent of the adolescent population) live in a home without their biological father. Further, 63 percent of black children, 35 percent of Hispanic children, and 28 percent of white children are living in homes absent their biological father.

"Seeing fatherlessness affect so many families and young people in the church and community created a passion, or a burden within me to address the problem," said Strong, who earned his doc-

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"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."

—Martin Luther King, Jr.



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