For many students, pursuing one graduate degree can be an all-consuming undertaking. For Ken Gosnell ’06 (Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship and Divinity), a double major was all in a day’s work, and since graduating from Regent, he’s continued to maintain schedule that’s both exhaustive and rewarding.

He’s senior director of national programming at the National Fatherhood Initiative (NFI). He’s just started a new church. He’s assumed the presidency of the Regent Alumni Chapter in D.C. And he and his wife, Shonda, are the proud parents of 13-year-old Carli, 10-year-old Caleb and newborn Kaiden.

Fatherhood is always on Gosnell’s mind. In his capacity with the NFI, he’s in charge of three of the organization’s programs, working with companies across the country to develop father-friendly policies and to provide workshops for companies on how to engage fathers in work-family programs. He also works with correctional facilities to reintroduce inmates to their children and family responsibilities.

“All of our programs are designed to help men learn the skills and attitudes that are essential to help them develop relationships with their children, not only while they’re young, but for a lifetime,” Gosnell explains. “National Fatherhood Initiative understands the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. We partner with organizations across the country to develop materials for fathers—we talk to corporate dads about how to stay involved in the lives of their children while they’re in school. And we are very involved with men in prison, who may need to learn from scratch the skills to become better fathers.”

NFI was born out of a 1993 meeting of prominent thinkers, including a former White House advisor and civil society advisor, to discuss the growing problem of father absence in America. “Our areas of focus have come about because we recognize there’s a lot of father absence,” Gosnell says, “but we
want to help any father who wants to come through the program and learn to be a better dad.”

Gosnell has been with NFI for more than two years. He’d been working at the National Institutes of Health when a friend told him about the organization. “I went to their website and discovered that it reflected a lot of what I had loved about Regent: the concept of impacting our world through Christian leadership. “I’m not sure I had that worldview before I came to Regent.”

When he later learned about an opening for a director in one of NFI’s programming areas, he sent his résumé. “When I called, they told me the position had been filled, but they wanted to keep my résumé on file because they were very interested,” he says. “They said they’d call me if something came up. I thought that would be the end of it.” But just six weeks later, Gosnell got the call. “They said they wanted me to head up their corrections program.” Despite his lack of corrections experience, he was so moved by the organization’s passion and by the impact he felt this organization could have both in America and worldwide, that he took the job. “Two years later, I’ve been promoted to my current position, and I hear stories every week about the impact we have.”

He’s eager to share such stories: “One man I’d been working with, in his mid-60s, recently thanked me for the program. He has a 33-year-old son, and has always thought of himself as a good father, providing for material needs, but never really developing a relationship or understanding the impact he has on his son. After he went through the program, he told me he began to understand how significant he is in the life of his child. He told me he felt like a first-time dad—at 64!”

Another story involves a father who was participating in one of the graduation ceremonies that are held in corrections facilities for inmates who complete the program. “This man told me that when he started this class, he thought he was a mistake. Everything he did in life was wrong, he’d made bad decisions and always seemed to be in trouble. He thought of himself as worthless,” Gosnell recalls. “But from the program, he said he recognized that as a father, he has a mission, and he believes now he can fulfill it.”

This self-doubt is true of many men, Gosnell says. “There are a lot of men, whether they’re incarcerated or not, who feel they’re not worth anything—but when you’re a parent, you’re the number-one person in that child’s life. You’re on a mission, to help your child grow and develop, all throughout life, not just when he or she is young.”

Gosnell talks of another man who visited a colleague to connect her cable. “He saw one of our books on her table, and told her, ‘I love that program! I used to be incarcerated. I went through that program, and it changed my life. I got out three years ago, and I’m now the territory manager for the cable company.’ He’s turned his life around: he went from being incarcerated to having a responsible job and a relationship with his children.”

The impact of such stories—and his own indefatigable spirit—keeps Gosnell going, far beyond a normal workday. He’s just assumed the presidency of the D.C. Regent Alumni Chapter. “I really wanted to give back to Regent,” Gosnell says. “I felt a mission while I was there. The professors were sincere about the investment they were making in the students, and I really appreciated it as I was developing my worldview. I learned to think broader, deeper, more strategically than I ever had before. I felt the time was right.”

Gosnell has started a new church in Maryland, which he named after the Catoctin Mountains in that area. “It’s still small, about 50 people. I have a passion for ministry,” he says. He’s also a prolific writer, contributing to several magazines. (Many of his articles can be found at www.lifeway.com.) He’s open to growth, but hopes more than for greater numbers, that Catoctin Christian Church will impact people spiritually.

The desire to create such a spiritual impact is the thread that runs throughout all of Gosnell’s work and ministry, giving him stamina, energy and a will to succeed.

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