

# Marriage critical to black families

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households are more likely to marry, have a higher income as adults and have less births out of wedlock.

"Overall, black men benefit from marriage more than women do," said Malone-Colon at the Sept. 12 conference at the Friday Center.

The rate of black marriage is at a crisis level, according to statistics from the African American Healthy Marriage

Initiative. In 2003, 68 percent of black births were to unmarried women, compared to 29 percent for whites and 44 percent for Hispanics.

"I believe we are at a critical moment in the history of people of African-American descent in this country," Malone-Colon said. "One of the most pressing issues we are facing is the breakdown of the black family."

Another myth is that slavery

and racism are solely to blame for the current low rates of marriage among blacks.

Alan Inman, who served as national director of the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood, said that marriage right after slavery was at a rate higher than it was in the 1970s and '80s. He asked the panel how can blacks raise the issue of racism and give it such an emotional

embrace as an issue when there was such a drive of African Americans in the post-bellum South to get married.

Robert Franklin PhD, a professor of social ethics at Emory University in Atlanta, agreed.

"Suddenly, there was this rush to embrace that which had been forbidden," he said.

Pastor Melvin Hitchens, author of the book "The Black Family and Marriage," commented on the issue of racism.

"It's one of the entities that must be looked at, but it can't be used as a scapegoat for the black community not to take ownership of the issue," he said.

For information or to read the study, go to [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org).

## Ministry helps ex-offenders adjust

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istries." Today that is where Jennings, and FAVAR, Fathers Against Violence and Repeat Offenders, come in. Jennings has partnered with several organizations to provide money, food, clothing, and shelter to ex-offenders when they re-enter society. FAVAR also works with the families of inmates to help prepare them for when their family member is released.

"We know we can't make anyone do something they don't want to, but we try to advise them," Jennings said. "Mainly we try to tell them to give them a positive atmosphere to return to."

The "we" includes Executive Director Geno Dudley, who served 10 1/2 years in prison.

"I heard him over the radio," said Dudley. "I called him the same morning and met with him that same day. Hearing someone who had been through the same things I went through and understood where I was coming from; it's like God ordained for us to meet and work together."

Dudley has been a part of FAVAR Ministries for about seven months, ministering and aiding Jennings with upcoming programs. He said the most important thing they can do is help others. "We both had someone to help us get on our feet when we got out," said Dudley. "Sixty to 70 percent of ex-offenders end up going back to jail because there is no physical help for them. It's

good to give spiritual help, but what if someone needs shoes or a biscuit that's when they need physical help, so they won't fall back into what they know, and end up back in trouble."

In addition to working with Mecklenburg for Opportunities of Re-entry Network, or MOORN, to provide clothing, transportation, and food, Jennings coordinated a job fair specifically for ex-offenders.

"They don't have to worry about lying about having been in prison," said Jennings, "because everyone already knows they have been." It's an opportunity for

them to get in the door, when most doors are automatically shut."

Next up is FAVAR Day on Sept. 30 at the Sugar Creek Park and Recreation Facility. This event is designed to help prepare families mentally and physically for the return of their family members, as well as, how to cope during their absence. For these programs, Jennings is really targeting children.

"It's mainly the kids that get hooked up in gangs, start acting up in schools, and are raised in the streets," he said.

For more information or to volunteer, visit [www.favarministries.org](http://www.favarministries.org).



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FAVAR Ministries founder John Jennings, (center) with Geno Dudley (left) at Lee Andre Carrington at a job expo Wednesday at Grady Cole Center.

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