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Reverend Jackson meets the Pope in 1999

Leading US black activist Jesse Jackson says he is temporarily withdrawing from public life after admitting he has a 20-month-old daughter from an extra-marital affair.

In a statement precipitated by newspaper reports of the affair, Mr Jackson said it was no time for evasions or denials, and that he was sorry for his actions.

The civil rights campaigner and former presidential contender apologised for his actions and asked for forgiveness.

A photograph published in the National Enquirer newspaper had shown Mr Jackson and his pregnant mistress - a former aide - with President Clinton in the White House in December 1998.

“ I will be taking some time off to revive my spirit and reconnect with my family before I return to my public ministry

Jesse Jackson

The child was conceived when Mr Jackson was counselling President Clinton over the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

Responsibility

"I love this child very much and have assumed responsibility for her emotional and financial support since she was born," Reverend Jackson said.

A spokesman, John Scanlon, said the woman involved had worked in the Washington office of Reverend Jackson's Rainbow Coalition, a progressive organisation fighting for social change.

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A former aide to Martin Luther King, Reverend Jackson has been vocal in his criticism of George W Bush's election victory, saying the Florida election board had prevented black people from voting.

He has also been opposing the confirmation of Mr Bush's conservative nominee for attorney-general, John Ashcroft.

Mr Scanlon said Mr Jackson would honour some of his short term commitments.

Family know

Reverend Jackson said his wife Jackie and children had been told of the love child, and it had been an extremely difficult time for them.

"No doubt, many close friends and supporters will be disappointed in me. I ask for their forgiveness, understanding and prayers," he said.

He asked the public to respect his family's privacy and said he would not discuss the matter further.

Reverend Jackson said he knew the importance of growing up in a nurturing, supportive and protected environment.

" I am determined to give my daughter and her mother the privacy they both deserve," he said.

“
I am father to a daughter
who was born outside of
my marriage
”
Jesse Jackson

“
This is no time for
evasions, denials or
alibis. I fully accept
responsibility and I am
truly sorry for my actions
”
Jesse Jackson

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