

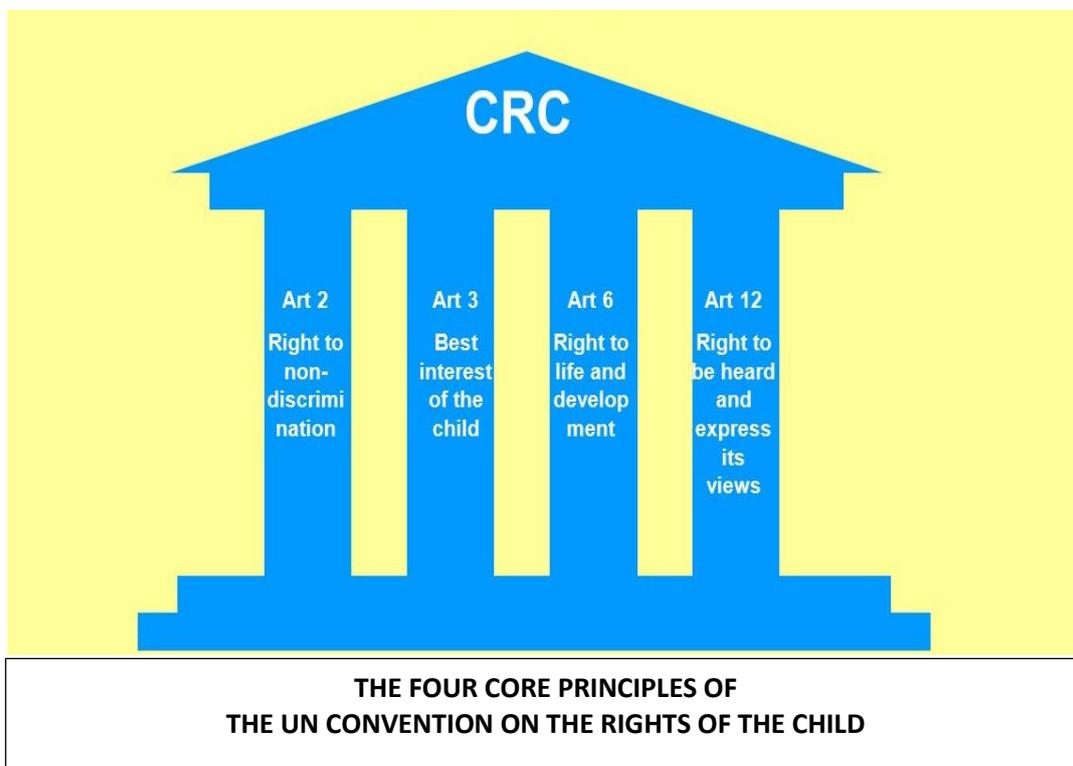
Prayer Network – August 2018: Child Rights

Ambience and setting:

1. *The picture below could be projected onto a screen during the prayer*



2. *A pot containing a tender little plant is kept at the centre.*
3. *Photos/pictures of children and adolescents from your country, of all ages, religions, and in various settings such as family, school, those living on the streets, children in prison, children engaged in substance abuse, children engaged in violence, child victims of rape, happy & sad children, etc., are placed around the pot.*
4. *A print out of the following diagram depicting the four Core Principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, is also placed near the plant (or projected on a screen, after the picture of Jesus with the little children above).*



The person leading the prayer invites the participants to prayer, and says:

“Jesus loves ALL children, irrespective of their race, status or religion, whether they are ‘good’ or even when they are engaged in behavior that may not be good. Every child is precious in God’s sight.”

Beginning Prayer: Lord Jesus, our loving shepherd, you have carved each and every human being in the palm of your loving hands, in your holy image. You have rejoiced in the wonder of little children, asking the disciples to let all the little children come to you. You have inspired us with the parable of the lost sheep, urging us to search for and embrace the vulnerable, the lost and the stray, lifting each one gently on your shoulder, as you shepherd them onwards.

Send your Holy Spirit on each one of us here today, and transform us towards greater levels of commitment to respect the innate dignity and rights of each and every child and young person we interact with. Bless us with the wisdom to seek guidance when we face challenges in this endeavour. Inspire us to follow in your footsteps, and strive persistently towards making a concrete difference in the lives of children, particularly girls and those who are marginalized. Stir our souls as we listen to you speak directly to each one of us.

The facilitator then requests participants to volunteer to read the following passages, while soft instrumental music is played in the background.

- a) **Mark 10:14:** “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”
- b) **John 13:34:** A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so also you must love one another.
- c) **Mathew 25:40:** ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’
- d) **Like 4:18-19:** “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”
- e) **Jeremiah 22:3:** Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.

Poem by Khalil Gibran: *The poem can be read out by a participant, along with reflective instrumental music.*

On Children

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them,

but seek not to make them like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children
as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,
and He bends you with His might
that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;
For even as He loves the arrow that flies,
so He loves also the bow that is stable.

Group Reflection on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: *The facilitator then invites the participants to share a few reflections on the Bible passages and the poem. During the following segment, a few brief statistics or pictures depicting child rights violations in your country may be projected on the screen, or read out to contextualize this statement and highlight key child rights violations that deserve attention. While doing so, examples of violations of the kind that may be addressed by ministries similar to those run/ managed by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd may also be projected, so as to bring this reality closer to home. One of the participants is then invited to read the following paragraphs:*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, often referred to as the CRC, is recognized as a universally recognized global treaty, as it has been ratified by 196 countries, i.e. all countries in the world, except the United States of America, which has signed but not ratified it yet. This treaty provides a global vision for how children are to be treated, laying down principles and minimum standards that are to be adhered to by each government, and by all those who owe a duty towards children, including each one of us.

The condition of children in our country is such that we need to each take responsibility, as citizens, for either silently ignoring their plight, and/or perhaps even violating their rights ourselves.

Now is the time to engage with this treaty with due seriousness, as this is part of our mission and endeavour to be good shepherds – as nurturers, as protectors, as strong advocates for children and their rights.

The four Core Principles are considered as the Soul of the Convention, and provide a framework and touchstone to guide decisions related to children. Let us together read the summary of each of the four Core Principles, that form the pillars on which the other Articles of the Convention are to be applied. And while reading each Article, let us reflect on how we can apply it in our lives.

Group Reading of the Core Principles: *The facilitator leads the group in a collective reading of each of the Articles in the picture containing the Four Core Principles.*

Guided Self-Reflection: *The facilitator then invites the participants to close their eyes and reads out the paragraph below, and the questions that follow, in a quiet, reflective tone and pace. Instrumental music may be played in the background.*

Let us reflect on our own attitudes and behaviour towards children and youth. Let us recall instances where we may not have acted in accordance with Jesus' calling to be a good shepherd, or especially when dealing with challenging situations involving children. Let us search deep within, as to what drives children to engage in rebellious behavior or commit crime, especially

sexual crime - what we are doing or not doing that drives children to such behaviour in the first place? Here are some questions that could help each one of us in this reflection -

1. Do I genuinely love and respect each and every child and young person I am in contact with in a manner that recognizes their innate dignity and personhood? Am I struggling to demonstrate such respect with any particular child/adolescent? Why? *(Pause)*
2. Is there anything in my attitude, language, or behaviour that serves as a barrier to my being an instrument of God's love while engaging with all children and youth in a respectful manner, irrespective of their behaviour or current circumstances? *(Pause)*
3. Is there something that I am either doing, or not doing, that violates the dignity of children as 'person' in their own right? *(Pause)*
4. Do I wish to move towards becoming a really 'good shepherd'? Do I care enough to search for, respect and protect every 'lost' lamb, no matter the challenges such child poses? *(Pause)*
5. Am I really comfortable with treating a child with respect, empowering such child to express his/her views in an enabling environment, and take these views into account with due regard to age and maturity? Or do I see this as undermining my own power and authority? What does Khalil Gibran mean when he says –
 'Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness; For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the stable bow?' *(Pause)*
6. What three concrete changes can I make within my sphere of control that will demonstrate my commitment to respect, protect and promote the rights of children? *(Pause)*

Suggested Action Steps: *The facilitator then reads out a suggested list of Action Steps that could be considered in order to apply the insights emerging from the prayer.*

1. Read the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in order to internalize its vision, the minimum standards and core principles. A one pager summarizing the rights of the child is available here - <https://www.unicef.org/rightsite/files/uncrcchildfriendlylanguage.pdf>
2. Identify how the UN CRC resonates with Jesus' call to love, respect and protect children and young people, and how you can be a good shepherd to children around you.
3. Apply the Core Principles in your daily interaction with children as well as at organizational level, if applicable.
4. Identify steps that can enable you to deepen your understanding and strengthen your skills in working with children/youth who are perceived as being unworthy of love or respect.

Conclusion: The facilitator then concludes the prayer inviting the participants to sing a concluding Hymn, suitable to this theme.

Prayer prepared by: Arlene Manoharan, Mission Partner, Justice and Peace Commission, South West India Province