

Prayer for Children

COVID-19 is a universal crisis and, for some children, the impact will be lifelong.

Preparation: Prepare pictures of children or use the ones below. The picture given below could be used as a centerpiece or kept at the altar. Choose an appropriate hymn which everyone can join in. As the hymn is sung, participants are invited to view the pictures.



Introduction:

When we see children, we see the face of God. Being with children can connect us to the ever present, deeper wisdom of life. Children can give us cause for reflection. We need to facilitate children to grow in God's image and likeness and not according to our desire and concepts. All of us need to recognize that we owe children more than we have been giving them. Children can cause us to wonder and bring joy in our lives. While we try to teach children all about life, they in return teach us the reward of being child like. Children are remarkable for their intelligence, ardor and curiosity, the clarity and ruthlessness of their vision.

Children are not seen as the face of this pandemic but they are at risk of becoming its biggest victims. While they have so far been largely spared from the direct health effects of COVID-19 – the crisis is having a profound effect on their wellbeing. All children, of all ages, and in all countries, are affected, in particular by the socio-economic impacts and challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has created for them. These challenges are four-fold: poverty, survival and health, education and protection. Moreover, the harmful effects of this pandemic are expected to be most damaging for children in the poorest countries, and in the poorest neighborhoods, and for those in already disadvantaged or in vulnerable situations.

Pushing more children into poverty: Currently there are +101.3 million children living in monetary poor and impoverished households, and the ongoing crisis could increase this number by up to 106 million by the end of the 2020, (UNICEF and Save the Children).

Threats to child survival and health: Facing acute deprivations in their access to health care, clean water and protective services, children become the most vulnerable populations on the globe. According to a study covering 118 low- and middle-income countries by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, an additional 1.2 million deaths could occur in children under-five in just six months due to reductions in routine health service coverage levels.

Exacerbating the learning crisis: 188 countries have imposed countrywide school closures, affecting more than 1.5 billion children and youth. More than two-thirds of countries have introduced a national distance learning platform, but almost one third of the world's young people were already digitally excluded. Children's reliance on online platforms for distance learning has also increased their risk of exposure to online sexual abuse material, grooming, live streaming, sexual exploitation, coercing and blackmailing children for sexual purpose.

Risks for child safety: Lockdown has heightened the risk of children witnessing or suffering violence and abuse. Children in conflict settings, as well as those living in unsanitary, crowded conditions such as refugee camps and informal settlements are most vulnerable to abuse. Millions of children live outside of their country of birth as migrants or refugees or are displaced within their own borders. This leaves them at increased risk of violence and exploitation.

Pause and contemplate the reality of children today in the area I live and the children I serve.

Scripture: ***Luke 4:18-19 or Micah 6:8***

Jesus, became human, born as an infant from Mary's womb. He knew the pain of a child of his time. He welcomed children when others rebuked them. He challenged the adult to become childlike. Jesus, called the children to himself and said, "Let the children come to me and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these". Jesus in his mission never neglected children, his mission was an inclusive mission.

Silent reflection

Do such situations disturb me?

Am I a bystander like any other person in the society?

What am I called to do today?

What are my responses?

Am I helpless or unable to do anything for such vulnerable children?

Sharing of reflection

PRAYERS OF PETITION

Leader: We pray for children who suffer from all forms of discrimination, may they find comfort in God's love and care.

RESPONSE: Christ hear us! Christ graciously hear us.

[Repeat response after each prayer.]

Leader: We pray for children who are victims of trafficking and sexual abuse. May they find protection and solace in a caring community.

Leader: We pray for children who are victims of forced labour. May they experience your freedom and new life.

Leader: We pray for child activists, who work for the rights of children. May they find strength and support in bringing freedom and human rights to children

Leader: For all children who have been deprived of childhood experiences. May they experience the love, joy, and fulfillment of childhood.

Leader: For the children who are being born into this world of conflict and violence, for mothers who suffer needlessly. May they find support, comfort, and love.

Concluding Prayer

O God of the Universe, you created us in your own image and likeness, but we humans have walked away from you to live selfishly, seeking position and power that exclude others so as to increase profit and wealth for the few. We have created distance between countries through gross inequalities, war and violence. As a consequence, the vulnerable become the victims, especially children.

Creator God you are excluded from the hearts and consciences of people. Injustice and corruption have crept in, not only in the lives of individuals, but also in the corridors of power and the council rooms of many nations.

We pray, that you Shepherd God may enable us to work towards giving a new face to this unjust world. Re-write the stories of vulnerable children everywhere, and bring hope and joy to their lives and futures. Compassionate God may your grace and mercy enable us to bring justice and reconciliation to those vulnerable people who are cruelly and unfairly treated.

Amen.

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