

Children represent a demographic that has been under pressure for a long time.... Routinely, we hear such troubling expressions as child labor, child sex trafficking, children soldiers, child slavery, street children, child malnutrition and so on.....

Underlying most of the evils that endanger (and often destroy) the lives of children worldwide, is the abject poverty in which over one billion of them live.

It is the awareness of this troubling reality and the conviction that Christian faith can play a role in alleviating it that motivated the choice of the theme Children and Poverty as an area of focus of the Grounds Institute for the 2012-13 academic year.... Our hope was that our exploration would bring to the surface some of the ways in which Christian faith might confront this horrible state of affairs with the desire to transform it for the betterment of the children of the world....

May this slim volume be used greatly by God in the fight against the scourge of poverty that afflicts so many children of the world.

Introduction

Dieumeme Noelliste and Elisabeth Nesbit

Chapter One: Toward a Biblical Theology of Children

M. Daniel Carroll, R

Chapter Two: The 4/14 Window: It's Time

Dan Brewster

Chapter Three: The Role of the Church in Helping Children Out of Poverty

Therese McGee

Chapter Four: Fighting Child Poverty in Haiti: Compassion International and the Local Church

Ricot Saint Paulin

Chapter Five: God's Call to Charity: Local and Global

Lillian Gitau

Dr. Noelliste is Professor of Theological Ethics at Denver Seminary. He also serves as the Director of the Vernon Grounds Institutes for Public Ethics.

Dr. Nesbit is Assistant Professor of Counseling at Denver Seminary, and maintains a counseling and generational management consulting practice in Littleton, Colorado.

Children and Poverty

Noelliste & Nesbit

CHILDREN AND POVERTY

Christian Action Against Child Poverty



DIEUMEME E. NOELLISTE AND
ELISABETH A. NESBIT, EDITORS

CHILDREN

and Poverty

Christian Action Against Child Poverty

Dieumeme E. Noelliste and

Elisabeth A. Nesbit, editors



GROUND'S INSTITUTE
OF PUBLIC ETHICS

General Editors of the
VGI Monograph Series:

Dieumeme E. Noelliste and
M. Daniel Carroll R.

Titles In The Series

1. Evangelical and Social Responsibility
2. Christians and Political Engagement
3. Justice and Healthcare
4. Thinking Christianly About immigration
5. Caring for our Father's World

*© Copyright 2013 by Denver Seminary's Grounds Institute of Public Ethics
All rights reserved.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of contributors.....	i
Introduction.....	iii
<i>Dieumeme Noelliste and Elisabeth A. Nesbit</i>	
Chapter One:	
Toward a Biblical Theology of Children.....	1
<i>M. Daniel Carroll, R</i>	
Chapter Two:	
The 4/14 Window: It's Time.....	22
<i>Dan Brewster</i>	
Chapter Three:	
The Role of the Church in Helping Children	
Out of Poverty.....	40
<i>Therese McGee</i>	
Chapter Four: Fighting Child Poverty in Haiti: Compassion	
International and the Local Church.....	78
<i>Ricot Saint Paulin</i>	
Chapter Five:	
God's Call to Charity: Local and Global.....	93
<i>Lillian Gitau</i>	
The Vernon Grounds Institute of Public Ethics.....	105

LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. M Daniel Carroll R. (Rodas) is Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Denver Seminary and Adjunct Professor at the Seminario Teológico Centroamericano (SETECA) in Guatemala City, Guatemala where he taught before joining Denver Seminary in 1996. He is the founder of IDEAL, the Spanish- speaking leadership training program at Denver Seminary.

Dr. Dan Brewster is Director of Holistic Child Development at Compassion International where he has worked for 28 years. Prior to his present position, he served as Compassion International's area Director for Africa and Advocacy Director for Asia. A resident of Penang Malaysia, Dr. Brewster travels widely for the purpose of planning and monitoring child and family development and relief projects.

Dr. Therese McGee, a Clinical Psychologist who resides in the city of Chicago, is a member of the twenty thousand member Apostolic Church of God where she has been involved in many of the church's programs that have sought to help struggling families gain a foothold in the economically difficult environment of Chicago's south side. For ten years Dr. McGee served as Director of the Residential Program at Lydia Home, a Chicago based Christian agency that works with traumatized, abused and neglected children and adolescents. Presently, Dr. McGee is Director of Performing Art Therapy, a private practice that offers trauma therapy in community settings.

Ricot St Paulin, of Haiti, is Communications manager for the Compassion International's program in Haiti. He has been with Compassion for nearly 10 years during which he has served in many positions. His two most recent ones are Field Communications Specialist and Sponsor and Donor Services supervisor.

Lillian Gitau, a native of Kenya, is a Child Protection Technical Advisor and the Global Coordinator of Interventions for Compassion International. In her current role, she has participated in the creation of a global strategy for Highly Vulnerable Children and has spearheaded the development of a specialized Child Protection and Foster Care curriculum for use by child caregivers.

INTRODUCTION

Children represent a demographic that has been under pressure for a long time. The mere mention of some of the situations with which the word child or children is associated gives us a sense of the seriousness of their plight. Routinely, we hear such troubling expressions as child labor, child sex trafficking, children soldiers, child slavery, street children, child malnutrition and so on.

If we pause to think for a moment about the cause of these horrendous situations that children experience, one prime suspect comes to mind: poverty. Underlying most of the evils that endanger (and often destroy) the lives of children worldwide, is the abject poverty in which over one billion of them live.

It is our awareness of this troubling reality, and the conviction that Christian faith can play a role in alleviating it that motivated the choice of the theme “Children and Poverty” as an area of focus of the Grounds Institute for the 2012-13 academic year. But in choosing to turn the spotlight on this broken aspect of our world, our intention was not to merely describe something that is evident to us all. Rather, our hope was that our exploration would bring to the surface some of the ways in which Christian faith might confront this horrible state of affairs with the desire to transform it for the betterment of the children of the world. In this respect, a more accurate description of our theme is “Christian Action Against Child Poverty.”

This is the fifth volume of the Grounds Institute Monograph Series and it contains the reflection of some of the most thoughtful and committed advocates of the cause of

children of our time. Our examination of the theme was very involved. It detained our attention for the duration of the year and took place, for the most part, in the three activities that the Institute stages every year, namely, the Kent Mathews Lectures, the Rally for the Common Good, and the Salt and Light Seminar. Furthermore, the exploration was conducted in venues as near as our own Denver Seminary campus and as distant as Haiti and Kenya, and involved the participation of such indefatigable child advocacy organizations as Compassion International and Cru.ⁱ In addition, the effort received the support of several churches of the greater Denver metropolitan area including Restoration Christian Fellowship, the Potter's House of Denver Rising Star Missionary Baptist Church, and Tha Myxx Church. To all these defenders of the cause of the vulnerable children of our world we say a hearty "thank you". We are especially grateful to Compassion International for its participation in sponsoring both segments of the Salt and Light Seminar-- Salt and Light Colorado Spring and Salt and Light Haiti.

In the first chapter, biblical theologian M. Daniel Carroll R. surveys the biblical canon in search of insights for a biblical theology of children. Carroll locates the primary anchor for this task in Scripture's affirmation of the value of children that is expressed in the concept of the fatherhood of God and the doctrine of the incarnation, in which God himself assumed the status of a child. But parallel to this recognition of the high status of children is the biblical account of the many risks to which children are constantly exposed, and God's relentless action to combat these dangers. According to Carroll, it is this divine activism that God's people need to emulate in their effort to alleviate the suffering of the children in the world.

In many ways, Dan Brewster's chapter builds on Carroll's biblically based apologetics for child advocacy, but takes on a main thrust which is missiological. Through a combination of sociological and biblical analyses, he seeks to show that, in addition to promoting the wellbeing of children, a children focused ministry can yield significant evangelistic dividends. He points out that, sociologically, children have been shown to be more receptive to the gospel, and biblically, there is evidence that they can be effective agents of mission.

Following these more theoretical chapters, the next three contributions take us into the realm of practical action, on the local as well the global scene. Focusing on her hometown of Chicago, which has experienced a spate of teenage violence in recent times, clinical psychologist Therese McGee introduces us to a range of measures her own church has adopted to lift children out of poverty. Of particular significance in McGee's argument is her contention that strategies to combat child poverty cannot aim at children alone; they must alter the situation of their parents and the conditions of the social context in which they are situated.

Moving literally across the globe, Ricot Saint Paulin and Lillian Gitau offer detailed accounts of what Compassion International is doing in Haiti and Kenya, respectively, to attack the problem of child poverty in these lands. In Haiti, Saint Paulin shows that Compassion's approach is many pronged, focusing their primary interventions in the areas of child survival, child development, and leadership and skill development. For her part, Gitau stresses the value of supporting children in their educational development.

The Grounds Institute expresses sincere gratitude to all the authors for their contributions to this volume. It is

particularly grateful to Dr. Elisabeth Nesbit of the Denver Seminary counseling department for joining Dr. Dieumeme Noelliste in the editing of the monograph. May this slim volume be used greatly by God in the fight against the scourge of poverty that afflicts so many of the children of the world.

Dieumeme Noelliste and Elisabeth Nesbit

ⁱ Formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ.

Chapter 1

TOWARD A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CHILDREN

By M. Daniel Carroll R.

Introduction

The media are filled with the many problems that families, and children in particular, face today. To open the newspaper, or watch a news report on the television, or over the internet is to be hit with wrenching stories of the impact of poverty on the home life and education of little ones, physical and emotional abuse in the home, divorce, child pornography, gang violence and more. Indeed, the topic of this volume is children at risk— that is, those who are the actual or potential victims of such circumstances.

Sometimes what is lost in a focus on those destructive situations, though, is the happiness of bearing and raising children. Surely, it is there that we must begin, as that grounding provides perspective to the negative realities that we see all around us. The recent arrival of His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge caught the attention of the world, and the joy of the British royal family was shared by everyone. That event was a good reminder of the wonder of childbirth and the delightful beginning of parenting. The innocence and unconditional love of our children, the steps toward creating a family, and the learning curves of fathers and mothers—even if single parents—are all part of our common humanity. Is there something special that the Bible might contribute to this?

Marriage, family, and the raising of children are consistently important topics within Christian circles. How-to books, videos and glossy magazines on an array of pertinent topics fill Christian bookstores and online sites. Seminars and conferences on these topics populate church and community calendars every year. These publications and activities demonstrate the constant need that believers have for a faith orientation to raising children, and they also reflect the significance of the family and children in the Bible.

This chapter will briefly survey some of the biblical material concerning children, dealing in turn with the Old and New Testaments.¹ This overview will look at the value God places on children, which, from a Christian perspective, is the basis for championing their worth and their importance for his people and the world. This chapter will place this teaching within the context of family life in the ancient world. That context of long ago, like today, could be a dark place. The Bible, in other words, also is aware of the dangers children face. A comprehensive theology of children must present both the positive framework that God has regarding children, as well as grapple with those tragic realities which many of them experience.

Contributions from the Old Testament

Children and the Creation Mandate

A theology of children should start with Genesis 1. There, in that “good” creation (the term “good,” *tôb*, occurs seven times), humans are told to “be fruitful and increase in number” (1:28 NIV; cf. 1:22). In this verse, children are included in the blessing of God. They are part of a bountiful earth teeming with energy

under the sovereign care and control of God, who graciously grants to humanity the privilege of participating in the giving of life.

Children, then, are a “good” gift from God, and bearing them is intertwined with what it means to be human. Procreation is one of the tasks embedded in our nature. It is not surprising, therefore, that we witness throughout history a universal drive to have children that crosses all cultures and ethnicities. In the Bible, though, sons and daughters are more than just the fruit of this physical order of things; they are celebrated literally as godsend (Gen. 17:15-16; 21:6-7; Ps. 127, 128). They are a source of joy and a gracious responsibility entrusted to humanity by God. So, and again this is not surprising, not to have children could be then—and can be now—devastating to a family. There were practical reasons for this in ancient Israel, which will be explored below, and there would have been doubts as to whether the inability to have children might be a judgment from the LORD (Gen. 16:2; 30:1-2; 1 Sam. 1:5-6). Barrenness continues to be an emotional and social burden on many women today.

Genesis opens with the mandate to have children, and this theme is foundational to the rest of the book.² In fulfillment of the command to multiply and fill the earth, the unfolding story presents the growth of the human seed from the original couple in the garden and the birth of their first children (Gen. 4:1-2) to the expansion of humanity to different points of the compass in the Table of Nations (Gen. 10). Within this broad human seed is the particular seed promised to Abram (whose name is later changed to Abraham) through whom the world will know God and be blessed. The hope is that from that aged patriarch would come many descendants (Gen. 12:2; cf. 13:16;

15:5; 17:5-6, 15, 20-21; etc.). But that divine word continually faces obstacles. Several accounts in Genesis describe problems in having children for the patriarchal line (the cases of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel) and inappropriate ways of seeking offspring (such as through Hagar, 16:1-4; Tamar's ruse in 38:8-30). But, the book does close with growth in the chosen line. Jacob has twelve sons, each with their own families, and at least one daughter.³ Finally, from among the descendants of Abraham there would emerge a still narrower seed, the royal seed from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:9-10), from whom one day would come David and ultimately the Messiah. In sum, from the very beginning of the biblical narrative children are central to the unfolding plans of God for all of humanity and his people.

Another component of the Old Testament view of the importance of children is the metaphor of God as father of his people. He loves them, provides, protects, rebukes, and disciplines them (e.g., Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; Ezek. 16:1-7; Mal. 1:6). The LORD also is presented as a tender mother (Isa. 46:3-4; 49:13-15; 66:12-14). One possible interpretation of Hosea 11:3 is of a mother gently teaching a toddler how to walk. The LORD, therefore, is the divine parent. Israel is God's son (Exod. 4:22; Deut. 8:5; Hos. 11:1); they are his children (e.g., Isa. 1:2; Jer. 3:19; Hos. 11:1), and Jerusalem his daughter (e.g., Isa. 52:1-2; 62:11; Zeph. 3:14; Zech. 9:9). The child-parent relationship is one of the important ways to express the LORD's relationship with Israel. On the one hand, parents in Israel would have had a model in God's commitment to them as their father and mother; ideally, on the other hand, children in Israel would see that their earthly parents' expectations for respect and obedience mirrored those that God had for the nation.

Children within the Home in Ancient Israel

Up to this point the discussion has been primarily theological. This section now turns to describe, in broad brushstrokes, what family life probably looked like in ancient Israel. This would have been the world into and within which children would have grown up. It was a setting very different from what most people today experience in our post-industrial, technologically advanced, largely urban and suburban Western societies.

Israel was overwhelmingly a peasant culture in Old Testament times.⁴ Perhaps up to ninety percent or more of the population lived in small towns or in villages made up of a cluster of houses of extended families. Each extended family (called the *bêit- 'āb*) would have been organized under a male head (and his wife) and would have included their sons and their families and living grandparents, as well as any servants or resident foreigners that may have made up the household. These would have been small communities with roles defined by the needs for planting, tending, and harvesting crops, the care of flocks and draft animals, the fabrication of clothes and other items for daily use, and the production and preservation of food. Much of the terrain required the removal of stones, and soil fertility varied by region; hills sometimes had to be terraced to maximize use and help water retention; and rainfall was seasonal and determined by location. Tasks within these family settlements would have been assigned according to gender and age. Life was very hard, even precarious. This is the setting that largely defined the value of children and within which the nature of childhood in Israel should be understood.

Another indicator of difference with modern culture was the imprecise language related to children. The two most common Hebrew terms in the Old Testament for a child are

na'ar (feminine *na'arâ*) and *yéled* (feminine *yaldâ*). The difficulties in trying to define these words is exemplified by the fact that *na'ar* is not limited to a set age span. It can refer to the unborn (Judg. 13:5-12), an infant (Exod. 2:6), a child who has been weaned (1 Sam. 1:24), a boy (Gen. 44:30-34), and a young adult (Gen. 34:19; 1 Kgs. 3:7; 11:28). *Yéled* also has wide range of meaning. It, too, can refer to the unborn (Exod. 21:22), newborns (Exod. 1:17-18), those of weaning age (Gen. 21:8), and to young men (1 Kgs. 12:8, 10, 14; Dan. 1:4, 10-17; Ruth 1:5). What was it, then, that determined when one would leave these labels behind and move on into full adulthood?

In contemporary societies childhood is conceived as having a particular age limit. This boundary line is connected to certain psychological and emotional maturity levels, social involvements, or when a young person might be able to work. Accordingly, generally speaking, the stages of childhood are conceived of as infancy (0-18 months), early childhood (18 months to 3 years), and full childhood (3-11 years). At age twelve children are thought to move into adolescence. These markers, of course, are culture-dependent. In ancient Israel, the life cycle of a child had a different framework.

After birth, circumcision was decisive for the male, as it marked entrance into the covenant community and was a sign of membership (Gen. 17:10-14; Lev. 12:3). On several occasions the Old Testament speaks of the transition from the stage of a nursing infant to the time of weaning as a significant moment (Gen. 21:8; Exod. 2:9; 1 Sam. 1:22-24). From a very young age, children would have been incorporated into the activities of the *bêt- 'āb*, being taught to care for animals, gather firewood, and other chores (cf. 1 Sam. 17:12-18). Boys and girls would have been apprenticed, as it were, by their parents and relatives into

any number of age-appropriate and necessary tasks to ensure the functioning (and perhaps survival) of the extended family. Existence was labor intensive, and children's assistance was a necessity. Childhood, then, was a distinct slice of life, but it was linked to the responsibilities of contributing to the economic well-being of the family. High infant mortality rates—it is estimated that half died before the age of five from disease and malnutrition (and occasionally war)—required multiple births per couple. These stark realities help explain, in part, the weight of the stigma at that time of being childless or barren (e.g., Gen. 16:1-2; 30:1).⁵

As boys assumed their place in that culture, they would have been set within a hierarchical family system, where they were to carry on the family name through their own families and inherit property to continue to work the lands of the *bêt- 'āb*. Daughters would grow into the age of marriage and motherhood (perhaps as soon as with the onset of menstruation), but their possible contribution to a continuing family line now would pass to her husband's *bêt- 'āb*. Marriage, then, was a major marker for passing out of childhood, and the days of being a youth to adulthood.

Clearly, economic and social factors influenced the bearing and raising of children. This fact, however, does not reduce children in Israel solely to a cost-benefit analysis. They were essential; nowadays, children are sometimes considered an optional luxury, or, in more tragic circumstances, an unwanted burden. Truth be told, economic variables go into the consideration of starting families today as well. Yes, children were needed for survival in that ancient context, but, as mentioned earlier, several passages in the Old Testament indicate that they also were a source of tremendous

celebration. The harsh environmental realities of that ancient world did not eliminate the enjoyment of having little ones.

The Education of Children

A biblical theology of children underscores their value before God and within the complex concrete realities of family life. It also must consider issues related to their education and socialization into the faith community. That is, a theology of children must involve reflection on what the Bible says about raising them.

To begin with, there was to be respect for parents in the home. In fact, this familial mandate is one of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16), and, as Paul says, it is the first commandment with a promise—the promise of divine approval and blessing (Eph. 6:2). That this respect was to include the father as well as the mother is reinforced by the call in Proverbs to heed the advice of both (Prov. 1:8). The seriousness of this call to honor parents is evident especially in the law of the public punishment in extreme cases of a rebellious child, where disobedience threatens the covenant community (Deut. 21:18-21).⁶ Accordingly, the Old Testament speaks of the importance of disciplining children (e.g., Prov. 3:11-12; 13:1, 24; 22:15; 23:14) and the need for them to respond well to such instruction. This stress on discipline is in keeping with God's objective in choosing Israel to be a people of his own. One of the reasons God created Israel was that he might have a holy seed, a people set apart for him (Mal. 2:15).

As discussed earlier, the education of children would have included training in the trades and chores for family and community survival (and for the boys perhaps, too, the basics of fighting in combat). More significantly, the elevated position of

parents meant that they also were charged with inculcating into their children the history, the familial and socio-ethical values, and the belief system of Israel. Old Testament legislation stipulated several settings for fulfilling this responsibility. First, the weekly gathering of the family for the Sabbath provided a regular time for rehearsing the people's story (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15). The Law also established various annual feasts, where families would participate at the central sanctuaries to remember God's mighty acts (Lev. 1-7, 23; Deut. 16). Children are specifically mentioned on several occasions as one of the groups that are to attend those meetings (e.g., Deut. 29:11; 31:12; cf. 1 Sam. 1:3-4; 2:19-21).

These activities were propitious moments for imparting the essentials of Israel's foundational convictions (Exod. 12:24-27; 13:8, 14-16; Deut. 4:9; 6:4-9, 20-25; 32:46-47). These rituals were what virtue ethics calls "practices"—that is, those recurring communal performances that embed within participants a certain character commensurate with a community's beliefs and ideals. In ancient Israel these attitudes would have included, among others: trust, compassion, courage, and love of God and neighbor. These virtues underlie the counsel of the book of Proverbs that are directed at the "son" and which are reflected in its portrayal of the wise person and of the industrious woman (31:10-31).

These life skills—both the pragmatic tasks for the *bêt- 'āb* and the transcendent worldview of the covenant—were the core curriculum of the education of children. They would prepare Israel's next generation for the challenges of their individual lives and as heads of their own families, as well as groom them to be contributing members of the larger society.

Children at Risk

There is still the matter of dealing with the plight of children from the biblical text. The Old Testament offers realistic snapshots of the many kinds of troubles that children around the globe and across the centuries always have suffered.

We begin with orphans.⁷ Orphans were a widespread reality in the ancient world, but they are envisioned principally as fatherless children. Fathers would have died from old age, disease, or battle. In addition, children could be sold as debt slaves and be separated from their families (e.g., 2 Kg 4:1; Neh. 5:4-5). The absence of the male head of the family was significant. Strong male hands were needed to till the land, harvest crops, and protect the family from enemies, criminals, and wild animals. Gone, too, would have been the person usually assigned to lead the religious life of the family. For these reasons, widows are mentioned along with orphans as a vulnerable group within society (as also are the poor and the resident foreigners).

The troubling circumstances of widows and orphans is apparent in several Old Testament narratives. In two cases prophets sustain them in miraculous fashion (1 Kgs. 17:8-24; 2 Kgs. 4:1-7). In a couple of instances children are taken in and raised by others: Moses by Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2) and Esther by Mordechai (Esther 2:7, 15). Other parts of the Old Testament address the unfortunate life of orphans, too. One of the ways Job defends his integrity is by recounting his merciful acts toward widows and orphans (Job 29:12; 31:16-23). The prophetic literature denounces the abuse of widows and orphans, which is a characteristic behavior of the wicked (Isa. 1:17, 23; 10:1-2; Jer. 5:26-29; 7:5-7; 22:3; Ezek. 22:6-7; Zech. 7:8-10; cf. Ps. 94:6).

On the positive side, the Old Testament Law (and other ancient law codes as well) contains ordinances designed to protect orphans. A number of charitable laws were meant to furnish food. Widows and orphans were to be allowed to glean at harvest time (Deut. 24:19-22; cf. Ruth 2), and a special tithe was designated as another means of provision (Deut. 14:28-29; 26:12-15). They were not to be taken advantage of in legal proceedings because of their low estate and socioeconomic vulnerability (Deut. 24:17-18; 27:19). Poverty can marginalize the poor, including widows and orphans. It is not insignificant that they were to be included in the annual feasts, such as those of Weeks and Booths. These feasts were family focused (see Deut. 16:9-15), and to involve widows and orphans would allow them to take part (perhaps in their poverty this was difficult) and accompany and share with other families (and give those families the opportunity to demonstrate their faith concretely), even as they celebrated God's provision and redemption. Ultimately, these laws were a reflection of the very heart of God. The LORD loves the widow and orphan and is their defender and fatherless (Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; Ps. 10:12-18; 68:4-6 [MT 68:5-7]; 146:9).⁸ Israel was to learn from his graciousness toward the needy in their midst and never forget its own mistreatment in Egypt (Deut. 24:17-18; cf. Ezek. 16:1-7). God and history were to be their twin motivations to treat the widows and orphans with compassion and justice.

In the Old Testament, the misery of children was not limited to the experiences of orphans. There are accounts of tensions swirling around children that would have made their daily life unhappy. Mothers within the same household competed for the affections of their husband or had rivalries because of barrenness, surely with repercussions for the home

environment and relationships between the children and between them and some of the other adults (see Sarah and Hagar, Gen. 16; Rachel and Leah, Gen. 29-30; Hannah and Peninnah, 1 Sam. 1). There also are cases where desperate women in terrible circumstances fought over the lives of their children (1 Kgs. 3:16-28; 2 Kings 6:24-29). Sadly, in some instances children suffer death for the sins of their parents (cf. Exod. 20:5). Note the fate of families in the rebellion of Korah (Num. 16:27-32) and the sin of Achan (Josh. 7:25-26), and the vengeance of the Gibeonites on Saul's sons (2 Sam. 21:1-9). There would have been many thousands of children, too, affected by the terrible cruelty of Judah's and Israel's wars (again note 2 Kg. 6:24-29), the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians and Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Lam. 1:5, 16; 2:11-12, 19; 5:13), and the long treks into exile in Mesopotamia.

In sharp contrast to these severe conditions of so much woe is the prophetic picture of a very different future beyond the wars and exile. One day, the book of Isaiah declares, there will be a time of peace and plenty. This is a familial hope, where homes will be built and enjoyed, and farmlands tilled and harvested (Isa. 65:17-25). Children will not die young, and, in one of the most powerful lines in Scripture, nor will God's people again "bear children doomed to misfortune" (v. 23 NIV). No more children at risk.

Conclusions

What this short survey of the Old Testament material regarding children plainly reveals is that procreation and children are part of the divine plan for humanity and that God cares about these little ones. I say this in a very broad sense. Obviously, there are ramifications for other related discussions concerning childless

couples, artificial insemination, abortion, and more, but the topic of this booklet is specifically children at risk in our society.

There are several relevant principles to be drawn from the Old Testament. Our starting point is Genesis 1, which reveals that children matter for our humanity and to the LORD himself. God presents himself as a divine parent and his people as his children! That opening chapter of the Bible and the parenthood of the LORD make clear that children have infinite value.

A second point is that a theology of children has its pragmatic dimension. In ancient Israel, economics and social needs were linked to bearing and raising children. This is an inescapable reality today as well. If in ancient Israel the context for children was agrarian, with its many pressures and particular challenges, how might we understand the place of children in our world? How should we adjudicate socio-economic realities with the joy of having and nurturing children in the twenty-first century? Couples wrestle with such issues, for which there are no easy answers. But, these decisions about having children also should be coupled with the mandate to bear children and provide God with a holy seed; they should appreciate as well the incomparable joy that children bring. Too often in our society children are reduced to a commodity determined more by career tracks and selfishness.

A third component of a theology of children concerns how to raise them properly. Hence, the centrality of their education in the Old Testament. Training for daily life and the faith continue to be important. Education must concern both dimensions. In regards to establishing its religious foundations, Israel's laws facilitated several venues and opportunities to communicate their history and faith to their children. This was

to occur in family gatherings and community events, at meals and through periodic rituals. The application for today comes in the form of a question: What mechanisms are Christian families and churches (locally, regionally, and nationally) setting up to train up the next generation in the ways of the LORD? Is that education relevant to careers and the issues of daily life, and how is Christian faith to be woven into a global vision for that life?

Finally, a biblical theology of children should grapple with the plight of children in a fallen world. The Old Testament does not idealize human life. It presents its unfairness and cruelty, and the prophets teach us that injustice must be condemned. The voice of God must be heard in the public square! Then, as now, children bear the awful consequences of abandonment or the death of parents; they experience disease, hunger, and war. The Law responded to these needs through a set of regulations. Personal misfortunes sometimes require systemic solutions, and that ancient legislation provided solutions appropriate to that context. This, of course, leads to the question of what kind of actions for our day and age might deal suitably with the issues that make children vulnerable in today's society? At the very least, to follow the Old Testament's lead, churches should consider how they might develop and support programs to minister to disadvantaged children as part of their mission in the world. What of neighborhood programs of service and outreach—after school tutoring, guidance for parenting, advice on family budgets, recreational opportunities, drug and alcohol counseling, and English as a Second Language classes? International efforts include those of child sponsorship programs, such as those of World Vision, Compassion International, and Food for the Hungry that reach literally

millions of underprivileged children. Helping children at risk through concrete initiatives has biblical and theological grounding.

Another step would be to reflect on how to communicate this biblical perspective beyond the walls of churches to the broader society. If the Old Testament provided legislation at the social level, could not Christians consider supporting and participating in systemic solutions, too? Might not individual Christians and congregations advocate for certain legislation or social programs for needy children? Should not a Christian voice be heard in discussions concerning the rights of children to healthcare, education, food and nutrition, and housing? If God cares for all children, especially the vulnerable ones, how might his grace extend to society in general, at home and abroad, through his Church?

Contributions from the New Testament

To move on to the New Testament is to enter into a different world than that of the Old. The Gospels concern much of the same geography, but much had changed politically, socially, economically, and religiously in Palestine since the return from exile centuries before.⁹ The account of the book of Acts and the epistles expand the Bible's purview to Asia Minor and then Greece, Rome and other parts of the Roman Empire. A full treatment of children at that time would compare and contrast Jewish and Christian views of children with those of the Romans and Greeks.¹⁰

This section, however, limits its presentation to two features of the New Testament material. Much of what the New Testament teaches is in continuity with the Old. Two new components are Jesus' interactions with children and the use of

the child metaphor to refer to followers of Christ. As in the case of the Old Testament, the field is well served by excellent resources, and readers are encouraged to consult them for more details.¹¹

Jesus and Children

The most striking revelation in the New Testament is that God himself took on human flesh and appeared as a helpless infant. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke offer portraits of the pregnancy of his mother Mary, his birth and presentation in the Temple of Jerusalem, the visit of the Magi from the east, and the flight with his parents to Egypt to escape the massacre of male babies ordered by Herod (Matt. 1-2; Lk. 1:26-2:39). We are also provided a scene of Jesus as a boy of twelve interacting with the teachers of the Law in the temple courts (Lk. 2:41-51). The text says that Jesus grew physically and spiritually (Lk. 2:40, 52). This one, who was God's son (e.g., Mk. 1:11; 9:7; 13:32; 14:36; 15:39 and parallels), also was the son of human parents, who passed, as all children do, through infancy, childhood, and adolescence, perhaps even learning his father's carpentry trade (Lk. 4:22).

In his ministry Jesus healed children who were sick and raised some from the dead (Matt. 9:18-19, 23-25 and parallels; 17:14-18 and parallels; Jn. 4:46-54). While his disciples tended to ignore children or wanted to shoo them off as a nuisance, Jesus took those opportunities to explain that their kind of trust and innocent belief should characterize all who desired to come to him (Matt. 18:1-5 and 19:13-15 and parallels). There is no doubt that Jesus plainly loved children. It makes sense that it is the children who greet him and shout "Hosanna!" at his triumphal procession into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:16).

Jesus extended the Old Testament concept of God's people being his children to his followers. Yet, whereas the Old Testament understood this in a corporate fashion (except for the king, who individually was designated as God's son),¹² Jesus now makes it possible for individuals to enjoy that privilege (Jn. 1:12-13); being a child of God became a metaphor for discipleship. At the same time, this new family arrangement was to supersede earthly commitments, but that loyalty has the guarantee of great reward (Matt. 8:18-22, 12:46-50, 19:29 and parallels).

Children in the Epistles

Believers often gathered in homes (Acts 2:46; 20:20; Phm. 2), so children would have been present during teaching and fellowship times. In terms of the teaching on children, the epistles concentrate on order in the home—that is respect for parents, which continues that Old Testament emphasis (Eph. 6:1-3; Col. 3:20-21; cf. 1 Tim. 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6; 2). This call for respect, of course, does not give license for inappropriate and counterproductive actions (Eph. 6:4).

The New Testament writers, as does Jesus, refer to disciples and to the recipients of their letters as children. On the one hand, all believers are children of God. They have been adopted into the family of God and can now call him "*Abba*"; as the LORD's children, they also are heirs of his promises (Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:1-7).¹³ As the father of believers, God disciplines his people, again following an Old Testament theme (Heb. 12:5-11; cf. Deut. 4:36; 11:1-2). On the other hand, Paul presents himself as the spiritual father of several congregations (1 Cor. 4:14-15; Gal. 4:19; 1 Thess. 2:11), and John affectionately calls

his readers his “dear children” (1 Jn. 2:1, 18, 28; 3:7, 18; 5:21; cf. 3 Jn. 4).¹⁴

Conclusions

The New Testament stands in continuity with the Old Testament in regards to the respect for parents. It also underscores the value of children, but the added emphasis comes through the person of Jesus. First, the Son of God and second Person of the Trinity was born a baby and raised as a human child. That the Godhead would appear as a baby and go through what children go through speaks volumes of how much God cherishes children. This care and concern was made tangible in Jesus’ ministry as he treated sick children and raised some from the dead. Those who claim to follow Jesus can do no less than show compassion to these little ones, too. He has left us an example. It is left up to individual Christians, families, churches, and denominations to discern how to embody that love to children at risk, who lack the necessities of life or guidance or education or medical treatment... the list could go on.

The second and final lesson from the New Testament for a theology of children actually is a reorientation of perspective. Usually, a theology of children concerns their worth and what can and should be done *for* them. Jesus turns this on its head. He points out that children *can teach us* about trust and faith. They are models of the sincere follower. Perhaps that fact can add a dimension to thinking about believers as children of God. Yes, we can cry out “*Abba*”, but perhaps we might learn more about what it means to be God’s child and he our father by paying attention to children and learning to love again with our first love.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to present succinctly some of the biblical teaching on children in order to establish several fundamental principles for a theology of children. In summary, these include the mandate to have children as a good gift from God, the significance of children demonstrated by the familial metaphors utilized throughout the Bible to express God's relationship with his people, the incredible revelation that God arrived among us as a child, the value of respect within the home, and the need to educate children for life and to raise them properly in the faith.

The Old and New Testament also portray the sad realities that children experience because of the loss of their parents, poverty, disease, and war. The LORD in the Old Testament and Jesus in the New make it clear that the Triune God loves these vulnerable and victimized little ones. This love is expressed tangibly, whether directly by miraculous interventions of some of the prophets and Jesus or through practical legislation designed to ensure provision, protection under the law, and inclusion and participation in public (religious) ceremonies. In other words, theological principles are given teeth; they are not left in the abstract.

A full theology of children will contain both the divine ideals and God's heart concerning children and the various biblical engagements with the hard parts of life (denouncing injustice, charitable acts, and legislation). Our hope is that this chapter can contribute in some small way toward formulating such a theology, one that will reflect the revelation of the Old and New Testaments and be relevant for the church and today's society.

¹ Biblical studies on the family include Leo G. Perdue et al, *Families in Ancient Israel*, The Family Religion and Culture Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R., eds., *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003); David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek, eds., *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); Terence E. Fretheim and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, eds., *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008); Rebekah Miles, "Children," in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. J. B. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), pp. 134-37.

² Desmond T. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), pp. 100-9, *passim*.

³ Only one daughter is named in Genesis: Dinah. Other passages suggest that Jacob had other daughters (37:35; 46:7).

⁴ See especially Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013). Also note Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), pp. 40-49; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), pp. 337-53; Naomi Steinberg, *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 51 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, Press, 2013). Pertinent chapters in the sources cited in endnote 1 also are helpful.

⁵ Note, for example, for the custom of having a handmaiden bear an heir in Genesis 16. See John H. Walton, Genesis," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. idem (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), vol. 1: 67-68, 86-88.

⁶ For a careful treatment of this problematic passage, consult Caryn A. Reeder, *The Enemy in the Household: Family Violence in Deuteronomy and Beyond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).

⁷ M. Daniel Carroll R., "Orphan," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, eds. D. W. Baker and T. D. Alexander (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), pp. 619-21; David L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands? Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), pp. 189-95.

⁸ This view of the worth of a child was diametrically opposed to some of the abominable practices of the surrounding cultures, such as the sacrifice of children to the gods that is denounced throughout the Old Testament (Lev. 18:21; 20:2; Deut. 12:31; 2 Kgs. 16:3; Jer. 19:4; Ps. 106:37-38).

⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 8–86.

¹⁰ See C. S. Keener, “Family and Household,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, eds. C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), pp. 353-68. Topics include, e.g., the respect for parents and their affection for their children, and the exposure and abandonment of unwanted children.

¹¹ In addition to the relevant chapters in the sources cited in endnote 1, see S. C. Barton, “Child, Children,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. J. B. Green, S. McKnight, and I. H. Marshall (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), pp. 100-4; D. L. Stamps, “Children in Late Antiquity,” in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, pp. 197-201.

¹² 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 2:7.

¹³ Jesus is also called the believer’s brother (Heb. 2:11-12).

¹⁴ The use of familial language is ubiquitous in the epistles, where believers are called brothers and sisters in the faith.

Chapter 2

THE 4/14 WINDOW: IT'S TIME

By Dan Brewster

Introduction

In 1996 I wrote a paper called “The 4/14 Window: Child Ministries and Mission Strategy.” It was published as a chapter in *Children in Crisis*, one of the fine books in a series on meeting children’s needs by Dr. Phyllis Kilbourne. As a Missiologist, I was building of course, on the powerful concept of the 10/40 Window, which did so much to change the focus of missions over the past 2 decades. In my chapter, I noted and developed the central premise of the ‘4/14 Window’ – that most people who will ever come to Christ, will do so between the ages of 4 and 14 – and developed the early evidence.

In the intervening years, much evidence has accumulated. It has become clear that the 4/14 Window is not just a catchy phrase, but a true window of receptivity – an established fact. People *do* tend to come to Christ while they are young, while the ‘clay’ in their lives is still soft and impressionable. Indeed, in the US, there is only a 6 percent chance that the decision will be made after the age of nineteen.¹

While that window of receptivity has always been there, children and young people have not always been featured prominently in church ministry and mission strategies. Missiologists focus on people groups and strategies for reaching

out to Muslims, Hindus and others, but children and youth tend to be ignored.

Fortunately that is changing. Many key Christian leaders in all aspects of ministry are now acknowledging this historical omission in their plans and strategies. Dr. Luis Bush, who coined the term 10/40 Window, recently hosted a conference in NY with more than 300 leaders from 70 countries, with the purpose of reaching the 4/14ers and equipping them to be agents of transformation for their generation.

Global leaders of the Church and Mission need to 'lift up their eyes and look around' (Isaiah 49:18) regarding potential and possibilities of children and youth, and to challenge, encourage and equip them to use their gifts and energy as agents in transforming the world.
And it is time.

It's Time to Take Children and Youth Seriously

Children are all around us. Every human is or was once a child. Children are the neediest and most numerous people group on the planet. Never in history have we had so many children among us and never have so many of them been at great risk. Children aged 15 and under comprise one-third of our world's seven-billion people. In developing countries children make up nearly half the population.

The Church today may not be looking for the children, but they wouldn't have to look far to find them. Children are no remote or obscure people group. They are found²

- In all countries, in all socio-economic categories and among people of all cultures.

- In all communities: in its families, its schools, its markets, its playgrounds....
- In marginalized subcultures: children with special needs, in prisons...
- In 'at risk' situations where circumstances increase the likelihood that they will not have the opportunity to hear the gospel.
- In resistant circumstances: children who have been harmed or neglected by those representing the Christian faith.

Climate Change

While the church has always done an 'OK' job of caring for children in the church. But we have not always understood our role and responsibility for those outside the church. And we have often not understood children in the context of global evangelism and mission. Understanding children and youth as perhaps *the* key strategy for church growth, for missions and for furthering the kingdom, is a very new idea.

The reality of the '4/14 Window' may be the fuel that provides new 'wind in the sails' for the church ministry and mission in the 21st century. An emphasis on children and youth could be a re-energizing focus comparable to the 10/40 Window.

And it is happening. The last decade has witnessed a 'climate change' in attitudes and openness to children and their role in the church and in mission. There is only a slight breeze in some quarters, but everywhere the winds are gaining strength.

Open the 4/14 Window, to feel the climate change upon us – a climate change we can all believe in.

It's time.

It's Time to Read Scripture with 'the Child in the Midst'

One thing that will bring about that climate change is a rediscovery of children in Scripture. Some Christian leaders think the Bible says very little about children. However, as they begin to read Scriptures with "the child in the midst," they see that children are not just *present* but *prominent* in Scripture. Indeed, there are more than 1500 references to children and childhood (and parenting and training, the orphan, etc.). Very often, children and youth are found playing crucial roles in the outworking of God's plans.

Whatever the realities of a child's life, God regards them as precious. To Him, they are:³

- A sign. Children are God's blessing (Psalm 127:3) and are missed when not part of the covenant community.
- A symbol. Children are illustrations of the relationship God wants with adults (Hosea 11:1, Matthew 18:2-3).
- In need of teaching. They are to be treasured and taught both in the community and home (Deuteronomy 6, 11).
- Worthy of protection. God is on the side of the vulnerable (Psalm 68:5; James 1:27). When children are neglected, abused, or victimized, God grieves. Jesus strongly advocates for their protection (Matthew 18:5-6, 10).
- Worshipers. Children are designed to praise God (Psalm 8:2). Praise is not something they will learn to bring

when they are older – it is their role now. Children give praise to Jesus even when adults reject him (Matthew 21:15).

- Agents of God's mission. Children are not only the ones who follow, but the ones whom God sends to lead (Isaiah 11:6). God chooses children as key figures in the biblical narrative: Isaac, Moses, Samuel, David, Naaman's wife's maid. God chooses to enter this world not as a king, rabbi or high priest but as a baby.
- Examples. Jesus uses children as examples of the humility and dependence that the Kingdom of God requires of adults (Matthew 18:4).
- Unconditionally loved. Jesus has a blessing for children brought to Him: no demands, no challenges, not even a story (Matthew 19:13-15)!
- A focus in His ministry. Jesus heals children (Luke 7, 8) and welcomes them (Mark 10); He uses children as examples of humility (Luke 18:17); He warns of judgment for those who harm children (Matthew 18:5-6, 10); He values them: (Matthew 18:12-14).

For years Christian leaders have read Scriptures and never noticed the children. One can get very lofty degrees in theological institutions and not *see* much less *reflect on* the wealth of biblical material focusing on children. And yet some of the most significant acts and revelations of God came through them. Their faith and obedience was often central in the outworking of God's purposes.

There are vast new vistas of understanding and wisdom awaiting church and missions leaders who re-read Scripture *with the child in the midst!*

It's time.

It's Time for Meaningful Theological Reflection on Children

A rediscovery of children in Scripture will inevitably lead to more theological reflection on children and childhood. Just as Liberation Theology, and African, Asian and Feminist theologies have changed our paradigms, so *Child theology* has the potential to cause a fundamental ground shift in the way our generation - - and perhaps future generations -- understand the Bible. African theologies have a place, but not all people are black. Feminist theologies have a place, but not all of us are women. "Liberation theology" here in Latin America certainly had its place. But not all of us are marginalized. One starting point for 'child theology' not shared by any other 'theologies' is that, at one time, each one of us was a child.

Further, while many people don't realize it, children are not only present, but very prominent in Scripture. As we will see, they have a very key role in the unfolding and manifesting of the Kingdom which Jesus came to establish here on earth. As we begin to interpret Scripture differently, seeing the children, Child Theology may open new territory for the church and the seminaries and theological institutions that teach it.

We must tread carefully, of course. Many who are aware of the significance of children (including myself) are activists. We see their pressing needs and the potential of children and youth, and we urge aggressive, purpose driven action on their behalf. We are usually not given to patient, rigorous theological

reflection. But Christian action and interventions on behalf of children should be well grounded in theological soundness. Theological reflection can serve a necessary and constructively critical function within the growing movement. If we value activism because it gets things done, and devalue theological reflection because it is time consuming and difficult, neither our practice nor our theological foundations will be secure. The foundations of our practice will be suspect and ultimately vulnerable in the rough and tumble of critical scrutiny.

Old Testament Themes

That being said, it is easy to identify potent theological themes for exploration. Brief mention of some here will only hint at the nuggets close to the surface, and of the riches which lie beneath.

One theological insight that is easily overlooked is in Psalm 8:2, bookended between the towering anthems of the majesty of His name, (vv 1 and 9).⁴ “From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger” (Psalms 8:2). Too often the first part of this verse has been dismissed as polite but quaint – ‘Oh, isn’t that sweet!’ But, in doing so, we may fail to see the truth that children and infants are not just consumers or future adults, as much of society then and today would like to view them. Rather, they are specifically ordained and designed to praise God and His glory. This is their true nature and purpose. This is how God sees them, and how we ourselves must view children.

Even this though does not end the mystery and depth, for we see too that in some way even the cries of infants have a role in silencing Satan. This stunning insight alone should

warrant close attention by scholars and theologians, for that after all, is the ultimate of our life in Christ.

As a second towering theme is God's care for the fatherless and the orphan.

- God hears the children crying (Genesis 21:17-20).
- God's command to care: "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked" (Ps 82:3-4).
- Throughout Scripture God is unmistakably saying "Don't touch my precious children!"

God models His expectations for the well-being, protection, provision for, and training of children. In this we learn about who God is, and what He expects of His people.

Another consistent theme in the OT is that of the child as a *sign* of the coming kingdom which Jesus will inaugurate in the New Testament. In the dreary and hopeless ugliness of Isaiah's (and our own) sinful and hypocritical world, God gives a sign. And He specifically says that this is a sign – something to take note of. *'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel'* (Isaiah 7:14).

Astonishingly, in response to that ugliness and hypocrisy, it is not a new David or warrior or wise priest, who is promised. The people would have expected any of those. But it is a *child* on whose shoulders the government will rest! And this is no accident; for in the dependent, humble vulnerability of a child, we see the astonishing features of the coming unique and unexpected *upside down* Kingdom that that child Jesus will eventually proclaim.

The intensity and depth of these and scores of other passages and themes regarding children and childhood in the Old Testament cry out for closer and long overdue scrutiny by our best theological minds. And they set the stage for similar wonders and reflection for thoughtful readers of the New Testament.

New Testament Themes

In the New Testament, our attention is drawn to the narratives which recall and develop the themes we saw in the Old. The first is the birth of Jesus, the incarnation. It is surely no accident that as the NT curtains rise, the Redeemer comes wrapped in swaddling clothes. Matthew provides explicit linkage to the Old Testament prophecies as he quotes the passage from Isaiah about the virgin and child (Isaiah 7:14).

The immensity and wonder of this mystery is profound, but so inadequately grasped in even the deepest of our common Christmas reflections. How can the almighty God dwell in a human being, much less in a baby in a lowly manger? “From God’s point of view there is no problem, but it shakes our preconceptions. A baby is small, weak, dependent and vulnerable, lacking education, training, and even language!

“Yes!,” says God, “and you must learn to look and find me in these ‘little’ things, in the little ones. You must learn to move from the palaces and encounters with the powerful and the learned, to the wisdom and the grace of the manger and the child.”⁵ The ‘hopes and fears of all the years’ are *still* met in thee tonight.

There are many of incidents involving children in the life of Jesus, and in each we see the love, care and respect that Jesus always afforded the children. He models caring for the

children and they are attracted to him. His teaching by story and sign is equally accessible to children and adults.”⁶

Here again, as we look deeper we see that children are a key to understanding the central teaching of Jesus, that of the Kingdom. Children are powerfully illustrative of the *already* and *not-yet* aspects of the kingdom. The kingdom is *here* and *now*, but it is also *there* and *not-yet*. How so like the child! The child is here and now, not just randomly thrown together, but each one carefully knit together by God's own hand while still in the womb; each one, even now, precious in His sight. But the child is also not yet. Each one also a bundle of potential and possibilities, awaiting the unfolding of God's purpose in his or her life. How very like the kingdom! Surely we understand the kingdom more fully when we understand the child, and more fully grasp the child as we reflect on the kingdom.

Finally, one cannot touch on the theological issues of the child in Scripture without noting the supreme challenge and warning of Matthew 18:3. In response to the disciples' *theological* argument as to who would be the greatest in the dawning Kingdom, **Jesus places a child in their midst**. He warns that unless they changed and became like little children they would not even get there – never mind being the greatest! *What if Jesus was serious?* What if he is just as serious today? Many wise and learned seem blind to this possibility in this central teaching in the ministry of Jesus.

This brief overview only hints at the wealth of insight to be gained as we read and think theologically about children. Even with this small sample we can perhaps understand why the church and theologians may have overlooked some of these passages and themes – they are so radical and threatening to the status quo! But Christian leaders today need to do as Jesus

did – place the child in the midst -- of our theological arguments and our biblical interpretations.

It's time.

It's Time: To Think Strategically about Children and Mission

We have noted that most people who will ever make a decision to follow Christ will do so as a child or a young person. This is the basic premise of the “4/14 Window.” It is no longer just a catchy phrase, but an established fact, and one which is now being understood and deployed in mission circles around the world.

Viewing missions as an adult orientated pursuit, and underestimating the importance and the contribution of children in the Mission of God, we are ignoring the most fruitful mission field. The reality of the 4/14 window means that any serious mission strategies will include careful, appropriate efforts to reach these groups.

However, just because children and young people are remarkably receptive to the gospel, doesn't mean that our missiology and our approaches can be shoddy or careless, juvenile or childish. Just as any of us view our children as belonging to our own faith, so we must respect the fact that children and youth in all cultures and religions are part of caring families, and religions, and cultural traditions. If anything, we must be even more creative, caring, and cautious, and more sensitive and thoughtful as we seek to make the 4/14 Window a more intentional part of our mission strategizing. Two biblical reflections will help to highlight the potential of mission *to* children.

Now I know... The familiar story of Elijah and the widow of Zerah provide a helpful clue to the missiological importance of ministry to children. You know the story. The widow responds to Elijah's request for bread, and God continues to replenish the oil and the flour daily. When son of the widow dies, she first lashes out at Elijah, expressing both her grief and her guilt (v. 18). Elijah too is grief stricken, (v. 20) but takes immediate action: Elijah says, "Give me your son" (v. 19). God responds to Elijah's prayer and *identification* with the woman's concern -- stretching himself out on the boy, hand to hand, chest to chest, and mouth to mouth -- restoring the boy to life.

Thinking missiologically, our attention is drawn to verse 24: "*Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth"*" (v. 24). This woman has been seeing a miracle take place in her home every day while Elijah stayed in her home. Or, if you will, a 'relief and development' program was taking place in her own home every day. But it is *only* when the prophet addresses a need closest to her heart -- the life of her son - that she sees and understands that Elijah is truly a man of God and that he speaks the truth.

Significantly, it is precisely this understanding -- getting people to the point where they too must exclaim, "*Now I know, that there is only one true God,*" that is the object of the Mission.

Moreover, it is important to note that for those of us in the child care business, this same dawning understanding is still a common experience today for Christian workers caring holistically for children around the world. Any of us can relate

incidences where our care for or attention to the needs a child has been the key to unlocking an unbelieving parent's heart.

Remove the Curse

Another indicator of the missiological significance of children may be inferred in the prophetic warning in the last verse of the O.T. "*He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else, I'll strike the land with a curse*" (Malachi 4:6). When walking the slums of any major city, it takes neither imagination nor deep theologizing to see that the land is stricken with a curse. We also intuitively observe both theologically and practically that removal of the curse is bound up in the restoration of the damaged relationships between fathers and children.

While global development efforts may alleviate some of the suffering, we know that food and medicines will not remove a curse. Blankets and clothing will not remove a curse. Nor even will education and employment remove a curse. For a curse is a *spiritual* thing and its removal demands a *spiritual* intervention. It is turning the hearts of the fathers to the children – holistic mission -- and the consequent turning of the hearts of the children to their fathers, which will turn this curse into a blessing.

Children as Agents for Mission

Let us not leave the impression that our missiological interest in children is only because they are the most receptive of 'people groups.' They are also very effective *instruments* and *agents for* mission. A brief biblical note is illustrative. In the story of the leprous Naaman, (II Kings 5:2), it is a little girl who recalls the prophet of God in Israel, and who encourages Naaman to see

him. The little slave girl, a captive far from home might have been bitter or resentful in the home of the very General responsible for her captivity away from her family. But she simply and wistfully says to her mistress, “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! (2 Kings 5:3).

The King of Aram wanted to elevate the little girl’s suggestion into something of an international crisis, or at the very least an international economic and political transaction. He prepares an embarrassment of wealth to be delivered to the King of Israel, somehow thinking that can induce the king to cure Naaman. The king of Israel is dumbstruck and appalled, convinced that the King of Aram is provoking a quarrel.

Elisha steps in to defuse the situation, and through a messenger, makes a modest suggestion to Naaman. The important and powerful Naaman is insulted that Elisha does not personally attend to him, nor give him some ‘great’ thing to accomplish. But finally, in following the little girl’s suggestion, and Elisha’s unpretentious regimen, Naaman’s leprosy is cured.

And here is the fun part. Note that now Naaman too has that most important of spiritual *and missiological* understandings – that same “*Now I know*” experience. “***Now I know,***” he declares, “*that there is no God in all the world except in Israel!*” (v.15).

How important it is for mission leaders to grasp the reality and significance of the agency of children in their strategies and plans for effective mission!

It's time!

It's Time: For High Level Reflection on Children in Seminaries

Equipping Christian workers to care for needy children may be the single greatest challenge and opportunity for seminaries and Bible schools in the coming decade. Many seminaries are approaching this not as a new fad or diversion from other worthwhile training, but as the best way to achieve what they have already set out to do – equip the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world.

Beyond just responding to the Scriptural mandate, real-world relevance demands that seminaries equip students with a mindset to understand and care for children.

Today more than 50 seminaries have begun or are planning courses or programs which will ensure that their institutions produce leaders who understand the significance of the Church's holistic ministry to children, and who can influence others at all levels on behalf of those children.

There are many vital reasons for Christian theological institutions to consider programs to equip leaders and practitioners for Children at Risk (CAR) ministry.

- Children feature prominently in Scripture, always with a consistent message to protect and nurture them to become what God intends.
- Christian theological institutions are the “production line” for developing the leaders for the next generation. Equipping Christians with that mindset through seminaries and Bible colleges is key to developing the care-givers as well as advocates, teachers and leaders on behalf of children.

- Moreover, it is clear that relevance in the “real world” demands that seminaries equip students to care for CAR. Including programs on holistic ministry to children will ensure that these institutions produce leaders who understand the significance of the Church’s ministry to children in poverty, and who can influence others at all levels in their countries on behalf of those children.

Experience shows that providing programs on holistic ministry to children can have a revolutionary effect on students and on the institutions themselves. Dr. Sunny Tan, the Academic Dean of Malaysia Baptist Theological Seminary says:

Not only has this program transformed the lives of many students, but the seminary itself has changed. The key leaders in the seminary have a new vision for the strategic significance of children in their own equipping and mission strategies.

It’s time!

It’s time: To Harness the ‘Clean Energy’ of Children and Youth

Children and young people thrive on challenges. But much of what passes for children’s ministry in churches today is geared to entertaining rather than equipping or challenging them. We must ask, what are our children not doing and not learning while they are being entertained? Dr. William Damon answers this question by noting that

contrary to what some adults think, they really do not need to come home after their six-hour day and ‘cool

out' in front of the TV. They do need to have their energies fully and joyfully engaged in worthwhile pursuits. ... Activities that children gain satisfaction from, and accomplishments that children are proud of, relieve rather than induce stress. Activities that provide genuine services to others are ideal in this regard.⁷

He further notes,

By systematically underestimating the child's capabilities, we are limiting the child's potential for growth. In withholding from children the expectation to serve others... we are preventing them from acquiring a sense of social and personal responsibility. We are leaving the child to dwell on nothing more noble than gratifying the self's moment-by-moment inclinations. In the end, this orientation is a particularly unsatisfying form of self-centeredness, because it creates a focus on a personal self that has no special skills or valued services to offer anyone else. Paradoxically, by giving the child purposes that go beyond the self, an orientation to service results in a more secure belief in oneself.⁸

Children and youth really can "Do Hard Things." Dr. Bambang Budijanto notes, children and youth represent an enormous untapped pool of influencers with sensitivity to the voice of God and willingness to do His bidding. God can and does use children and young people—their prayers, their insights, their hands, and their feet—in changing the hearts of humankind. They represent

‘clean energy’ to transform the world.⁹ Global leaders of the Church and Mission need to tap into this new, ‘clean energy.’ They need to elevate their thinking about the potential and possibilities of children and youth, and to challenge, encourage and equip them to use their gifts and energy as agents in transforming the world.

It's time!

¹ George Barna, *Transforming Children into Spiritual Champions*. (Ventura, Ca. Regal Books, 2003), 34.

² Wendy Strachen and Simon Hood, eds. “Evangelization of Children.” Lausanne Occasional Paper # 47. 2004. 12.

³ Adapted from Wendy Strachen and Simon Hood. Op. Cit. 11,12.

⁴ I am indebted to Keith White’s article “A Little Child Shall Lead Them -- Rediscovering Children at the Heart of Mission.” Paper presented to the Cutting Edge conference, (De Bron, Holland. 2001) for these thoughts on themes of children in the Old and New Testaments.

⁵ Keith White. 5.

⁶ Keith White. 4.

⁷ William Damon, *Greater Expectations* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks. 1995), 84.

⁸ William Damon. 61.

⁹ Bambang Budijanto, “Children, The ‘New’ Energy for 21st Century Mission. Edinburg 2010 – Study Theme 5.” 2009. (Unpublished Mss.) 10.

Chapter 3

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN HELPING CHILDREN OUT OF POVERTY

By Therese McGee

Introduction

In the Fall of 2012, Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, noted that

16.1 million children -- more than one in five -- live in poverty in the richest nation on earth and 7.3 million live in extreme poverty according to the new census poverty data. Children under five are our poorest age group with one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers -- who did not choose their parents -- poor during their years of greatest brain development.¹

We think of poverty as something that happens in other countries, “third world” countries or “poor countries.” Churches and church organizations raise considerable funds to help relief efforts across the world. Those efforts are laudable. Yet, as Jesus told us, we have the poor right here with us (Matthew 26:11).

As a society, Americans struggle with this reality. We may deny our own poverty, wanting to see America as the land of opportunity, the place for the American Dream. We may paint the poor in negative terms, resenting the help that our

government gives. This is not a new struggle for America. In the 1920s, Langston Hughes wrote “God to Hungry Child”:

*Hungry child,
I didn't make this world for you.
You didn't buy any stock in my railroad.
You didn't invest in my corporation.
Where are your shares in standard oil?
I made the world for the rich
And the will-be-rich
And the have-always-been-rich.
Not for you,
Hungry child.²*

When I first read this poem, I was concerned that Langston Hughes’ was disrespecting God. But then I realized that Langston was not insulting God. He was challenging us to reflect on our own attitudes. We are Christians, and it is our hearts’ desire to be aligned with God. The dilemma is not that God thinks this way, but do we? Do we value business, corporations, and economies more than hungry children? As Christians, we know that this is what God says:

Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?’ ... The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’ (Matthew 25:37, 40 NIV)

God has said to us: Help the least of these.

Langston Hughes was not insulting God. He was making it startling clear that we who love God must not buy into ways of thinking that would cause us to turn our backs on the least of these, on children in need. As Christians, we are people who are concerned about our relationship with God. We want to be in harmony with God. We want to see people as God would see them. So we must be concerned about the youngest, the weakest, and the most incapable of taking care of themselves in our society.

Why Are Children Poor?

As we contemplate how to help poor children in our society, the obvious question arises: Why are children poor? The answer to this question is simple: Children are poor because adults who should have provided for the children, have not provided for them, for whatever reason. Children don't get jobs. They don't manage their money. They depend on adults.

So the second question, which is far more complex, is this: Why have the children not been cared for? This is the Lets-Have-a-Seminar-with-8-Experts question. This gets into the complexities of why families are poor, why neighborhoods are poor, why some struggle generation after generation and still seem unable to take advantage of the opportunities in this society. If we are to help children in poverty, we cannot think just in terms of children. We must become comfortable with helping their families, their communities, and their local economies.

Poverty is a complex issue, involving multiple factors, including

- Macroeconomic issues
- Fragility in the family
- Individual decisions
- Culture, justice, and moral issues

I spent a major portion of my childhood and adolescence in poverty. The issue of fragility in my family was that my mother was seriously mentally ill at a time when there were no medications and no effective treatments. Still, we were actually all right economically until 1958 when there was a recession. My father lost his job, and then he made a series of decisions that resulted in him leaving us. My brothers and I then lived in poverty.

I think there are elements of this that happen in a lot of families. Macroeconomic issues can keep a family down or cause a functioning family to sink. A family with a fragile factor, such as physical illness, mental illness, substance abuse, or poor education, may sink even when an economic downturn is not so severe. In a devastating economic downturn, like the recent recession, even families that considered themselves stable and secure have been shocked to see how easily they lost their economic security³.

I cannot ignore that people make decisions, sometimes good decisions, and sometimes poor decisions, which send a family in one direction or another. Yet I hesitate to place too much emphasis on individual decisions when many people are unable to access quality education, there are not enough jobs for our population, and the influences of racism still stifle

opportunity in our society. Our individual decisions can be greatly constrained by resource availability.

What pulled my brothers and I out of poverty was that we did well in school and managed to do well in our careers. As adults, we supported my mother who never became able to support herself in a capitalistic society. While my brother and I might pat ourselves on the back for our efforts, in fact, there were resources available to us. We were young during the time of the Great Society, and the government supplied scholarships and grants for us to go to college, so we were not burdened by student debt. Though there were dips in the economy, we worked our careers in a time of relative economic stability and growth. As white people, we did not carry the additional burden of racial discrimination that would have limited our opportunities.

We must understand that children are poor and families are poor due to multiple factors, including factors additional to those that I have identified above. Addressing certain issues may help some families, but other families may need other types of help. I say this not to discourage, but to help us understand that we must be thoughtful, creative, and flexible as we attempt to help children and families who have a limited participation in our society due to a chronic lack of resources.

Who Can Help?

Poverty is complex. Making a difference to poverty requires a complex effort. In our society, we have various domains where action can be taken:

- Family & social networks,
- Church,

- Social Agencies,
- Government, and
- Business.

If they are available, extended family, friends, and neighbors can be critical in helping struggling families. Government has a particular role in influencing macroeconomic issues, as does the business community. Furthermore, government can provide the large accumulation of resources required to turn very needy families and their communities around. Social agencies administer government programs and can be critical in bringing needy families into a circle of resources and professionals.

In this article, however, my focus is the church, particularly the local church, and what a local congregation can do that makes a difference to a child in poverty. As a case study, I will examine the efforts of the Apostolic Church of God, an African-American congregation on the south side of Chicago. I use them as an example. I do not want to imply that only this church is making a difference. Many churches are making creative, fruitful efforts, and I commend them as well.

The Apostolic Church of God

From its beginning, the members of the Apostolic Church of God were familiar with poverty. The church was founded in 1932, in the depths of the Depression, in one of the poorest sections of the south side of Chicago, at a time of deep racism in America. Even so, the congregation managed to establish itself. The pastor, Walter Clemons, had a business supplying salt to the stockyards in Chicago. He used the proceeds of his business to support his fledgling church.

In the early 1950s, the congregation bought an old church building in a neighborhood that they thought was a good neighborhood. The neighborhood is called Woodlawn, and it is just south of the University of Chicago. In 1958, Walter Clemons died, and by 1960, a young new pastor, Arthur Brazier, came to lead the congregation.

In the 1960s, however, Woodlawn was declining rapidly. Racism and city politics had severely hurt Woodlawn. Poverty and gangs had taken over the neighborhood. Buildings were deteriorating. The schools were severely overcrowded. Many people of the community considered the police to be corrupt and the gangs to be the heroes. Pastor Brazier and the pastors of several other churches in the area sought to make a difference by forming The Woodlawn Organization (TWO). Pastor Brazier played a major role in this work. He was president of TWO during the 1960s. It was a tumultuous time, and the neighborhood continued to decline.

Despite the neighborhood, the church grew rapidly in the 1970s. Dr. Brazier was an amazing teacher. He preached about grace, transformation, and the Prodigal Son. It was, and is, a powerful message, that God can turn your life around. Many people came, were baptized, received the Holy Spirit, and joined the church. I came to Apostolic during this time.

So here was a congregation in an old building in a dangerous neighborhood. The church held 200 people when it was jam packed. In 1975, the congregation was up to about 500 members. Financially, the church was stable. They decided to build a new church. And here was the amazing thing, the step-out-on-faith decision. They looked around a crime-ridden, dilapidated neighborhood and decided: This neighborhood needs this church.

It was not my generation who made the decision. I was only in my early 20s. It was the generation before me who had the vision to use their resources to make a difference to poor families. This was the generation who had grown up under the poverty and deep racism of the Depression. They had fought in Europe and Asia in World War II. They had returned to fight in their own country for civil rights: the right to vote, to have a job, to check into a hotel, to eat in a restaurant, to live in a decent neighborhood, and to send their children to good schools. This remarkable group of people bought land about a block from the old church and built what looked like a nice suburban church, right next to a 12-story slum building. People were throwing beer cans on the roof of the church, and the church members were inside praising God.

And God blessed. People kept coming. We outgrew our new church. Just about the time we couldn't take the chaos in the 12 story building, the city of Chicago came, moved everyone out, and tore down the building. We expanded. In the 1990s, we built a larger church building on the same property. By then, the congregation numbered past 15,000. In the 2000s, we added on a banquet hall. In 2007, we built a family center, with a gym, a music room, a dance rehearsal space, classrooms, and a game room.

All of this happened in a neighborhood that continues to need help. It is better now than it was in the 1960s or 1970s, but the recession has hit hard in areas like this. Our church programs continue to be needed in the Woodlawn community. We have not "solved" the problem of children and poverty, but we have made an enormous impact on many families.

How Can We Help Poor Children Through Ministry?

- Transformation
- Direct help
- Job supports
- Education supports
- Stabilize Relationships

Be Ye Transformed

The most important help a church can offer is spiritual and transformative. As Christians, we are all about transformation. We must never downplay the importance of this. I started to make this my last point, then I thought, No, this has to be the starting point. We must preach hope. We must preach grace. We must let children and their parents know that God is able, no matter what the circumstances, no matter what hardships they are facing.

When people live in poverty, it is easy to become demoralized. The church must offer encouragement. The church must let people know that God is in control. The Bible is replete with themes of deliverance: Moses leading his people out of Egypt, Joshua leading his people into the Promised Land, Gideon delivering his people with his 300 soldiers, and most important of all, Jesus delivering our souls.

No other domain can offer spiritual transformation – not government, not business, not social agencies. This is the church's critical role, our unique contribution: that we speak to people about the power of God to impact their lives, not just their economic lives, but their entire lives. I do not mean that we should preach a prosperity gospel. Rather, we should preach the Gospel with confidence that the Lord will provide for

His people in all the ways that they need provision – spiritually, emotionally, relationally, and economically.

In our preaching and our programs, we must be inclusive. We must be conscious that a significant percentage of the congregation is struggling financially. It is us, not them. We must be cognizant that dealing with the economic realities of our society is a struggle for many. Such inclusivity begins at the pulpit and then translates into whatever programs the church chooses to offer. If the poor are that pitiful bunch over there that we deign to help, we will not only be ineffective, we will be destructive. We must recognize that help is a two-way street. There may come a day when the “middle class” has hit the economic downturn, and now it is the “poor” that are doing the helping. When we love and care for each other, as brothers and sisters, we not only help, but we share our sorrows and struggles in the light of God’s love, grace, and redemption.

I say this about preaching, with the realization that what is said over the pulpit reaches parents (which is important), yet does not typically reach children and adolescents very well. They don’t tend to listen to preaching. But the same principles of inclusivity, encouragement, hope, and deliverance can carry through in the activities and programs that we offer to young people in our churches.

I imagine that a reader would think, “Isn’t a message of inclusivity, encouragement, hope, and deliverance good for all young people (not just the poor)?” Of course it is. I emphasize such a message for children who have lived in poverty because they are more likely to feel excluded, discouraged, without hope, and in need of deliverance. The Christian message is a message of hope. The Hope of Salvation is a helmet. It protects our heads, our thinking, our ability to plan and move forward.

We must not underestimate the power of the Gospel message. Certainly, we must not underestimate the power of God in people's lives.

Direct financial help

- Benevolence
- Financial Counseling
- Money management
- Feeding the homeless
- Food pantry

From its beginning, Christian churches have directly helped people; the Acts of the Apostles describes helping the poor. At Apostolic Church of God, we call it "benevolence." The church employs a full-time staff member whose entire job is to talk to people who show up at the doors of our church in need. She doesn't simply hand out money but instead sits down with people and helps them to assess their own situation. She helps them consider what decisions they need to make and also helps them connect with available government or community programs. We have a strong program for helping the homeless, as well, as our Feeding the Homeless group goes into the community to provide food and clothing for those in need.

Many churches have food pantries, clothing drives, and other direct help efforts. Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL, has a particularly large food bank, with over 2000 volunteers, feeding over 17,000 families in a year, in 50,000 visits to the food bank. Families generally come from a 15-20 mile radius, although there are some families that come from as far as northern Indiana, over 60 miles away. A retired salesman manages a team of "gleaners" who gather and

distribute the food. In a year, Willow Creek will have distributed 4 million pounds of food, worth \$10 to \$12 million retail. Major food stores in the area donate about half of the food. The rest is supplied by the Chicago Food Depository at deeply discounted prices. Willow Creek is able to give a family \$200 worth of food at a cost of \$4. They also provide clothing, optical and dental services, health services, legal services, financial services, and even car repair for poor families⁴.

Job supports

- Career Development Ministry
- Child care
- Social network

Direct help for the poor is good and beneficial as it can be a rescue for a family in crisis. If possible, however, it is better and more long-term to help families to support themselves. Based on 2007 data from the Census Bureau, Meyer and Wallace have reported that a foremost factor in poverty levels is whether an adult in the household has a full-time job for the entire year⁵. In 2006, such households showed a poverty rate of 4.2%, versus a poverty rate of 47.2% for households in which the primary adult was not working. More recent reports indicate a rise in “working poor,” citing a higher incidence of low paid workers who are still below the poverty level despite having a full-time job⁶. Still, the media’s constant attention to the unemployment rate speaks to the importance of the availability of jobs, obtaining a job, and keeping a job if we are to pull children out of poverty. We may think of this as an economic/societal issue and not a spiritual/church issue, but I submit to you that one

very effective way that churches can help poor children is to support their parents obtaining and keeping jobs.

In 2007, the Brookings Institution published a report on the New Hope Project, a job support program that was piloted for three years in the late 1990s in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The program worked with individuals to identify their barriers to employment, helped them to obtain jobs, and then provided supports such as counseling, mentoring, child care, and transportation so that they could maintain those jobs. While the program showed remarkable success in reducing poverty among the participants, it was an expensive program. It did not continue because of funding issues⁷.

A church can provide job supports less expensively and with real benefits to the congregation and the community. For over 20 years, Apostolic Church of God has offered a Career Development Ministry which maintains a database of job listings in the local area, and a database of resumes. The ministry is staffed by volunteers and the computers are provided by the church. The ministry also offers seminars and workshops on writing a resume, interviewing skills, entrepreneurship, and other job skills.

Once someone has a job, the church can support that as well. A major issue is child care. Lydia Home, a Christian social service agency in Chicago, offers a child care program where they have made a conscious effort to take advantage of state supports for day care, so that low income families can afford it. Apostolic Church of God provides children's programs after school and in the summer. During the Chicago teacher's strike in the Fall of 2012, church members who were retired teachers volunteered to provide a full day school program, a critical

factor for parents to continue to work while their children were out of school.

The church social support network also can be critical for steady employment. One particularly effective group that provides such support has been the Apostolic Church of God men's choir, the Brotherhood Chorale. In a paper for the University of Chicago, Quiles has described the networking impact of the choir.

The membership of the group includes Vietnam veterans, Ph.D.'s, doctors, lawyers, stock brokers, consultants, real estate agents, janitors, mechanics, entrepreneurs, carpenters, bank managers, teachers, engineers, graphic designers, and a host of careers ranging from low income jobs, to well paying trades, to management level positions. Only a handful are unemployed, and the other men work to help them get jobs. ...

This choir provides social and emotional support for the members. Members report having a sense of looking out for your brother, being a part of a group, much like a fraternal organization, in order to encourage each other. The older men share their life experiences with younger men through testimonies and experiences they have overcome throughout the rehearsals on Monday nights, and sometimes before special performances.⁸

On the south side of Chicago, African American men have an unemployment rate above 25%.⁹ Thus, a successful network of men who aid each other's employment efforts is

critical to the economic well-being of their families and children.

Education, Divorce, and Poverty

Other findings by Meyer and Wallace concern how poverty levels are impacted by education and by relationship stability.¹⁰ Families in which the primary breadwinner had a college degree showed a poverty rate of 3.5%. With a breadwinner who had just a high school diploma, the poverty rate was 14.8%, while the poverty rate was 31.4% when the breadwinner did not have a high school diploma. Married couples showed a poverty rate of 5.9%, while single parent families showed a poverty rate of 14.7% when male headed and 32% when female-headed. Female headed households with no high school diploma showed a poverty rate of 51.4%. It should be noted that these data were collected before the economic downturn of 2008-2009.

If a person has a college degree, the chances of being poor are low. If a person is married, the chances of being poor are low. Of course, a lot goes into getting a college degree, and a lot goes into staying married. Yet we can see from these statistics that supporting education and supporting stable relationships makes a difference to the economic viability of our families. We can make a difference in these areas through the efforts of our churches.

Educational supports start with a clear vision that education is a priority, and that the church is a community who says education is important at all levels. For nearly 40 years at Apostolic Church of God, we have had some form of tutoring program for elementary through high school students.

We also have a multi-faceted program to help students prepare for college, choose a college, and pay for college. The college programs include ACT prep classes, college fairs at the

church, a week-long church-sponsored college tour, and a college scholarship program that is funded by church member donations. In the past four years, we have given over \$275,000 in scholarships to over 150 students, with individual scholarships ranging from \$500 to \$3000. We do not expect to pay all college expenses, but we want to help. Importantly, we want the students to know that there is a community of people at home who want them to succeed.

In June the church has a Baccalaureate Service for everyone who is graduating, from kindergarten through post-graduate studies including law degrees, graduate school, and medical school. It is a celebration of accomplishment and an encouragement to move forward. Even our current pastor, Dr. Byron Brazier, participated as one of the graduates when he received his doctorate in 2000 and his wife Mary Brazier participated when she received her Master's Degree in 2010, sending the message that we are all working to move forward.

Members of the church are deeply involved in the Woodlawn Promise Zone, a community program to improve the quality of education offered in the public schools in Woodlawn. Dr. Byron Brazier has formed the Bishop Arthur M. Brazier Foundation, which seeks to improve education in Woodlawn and the surrounding communities. The Foundation is also coordinating efforts to improve economic resources and opportunities in those communities, to improve health and human services, and to improve public safety, thereby improving the lives of all of our families.

Maintaining Stable Family Relationships

Children need parents. The more we can do to help people stay together in a Godly, healthy way, the better off our children will

be, emotionally and financially. Young couples need help and we must teach our young people the skills for maintaining relationships. The rise in single parent homes has increased the likelihood that young couples may not have experience with people who have stayed married. Those who have managed to have long-term, successful marriages need to be examples and advisors to younger couples. Our relationships matter not only to us and to our own children, but also to younger couples who are seeking models for their relationships. How we treat each other, how we disagree, and how we support each other are important models to those around us. As young couples strive to learn the give and take of healthy relationships and the skills to manage the ups and downs of a marriage, they need to know that it is in fact possible to stay married and still love each other even after many years.

Apostolic Church of God offers various marriage supports. Trained counselors provide marriage and family counseling at the church, as well as pre-marriage classes. A ministry called Covenant Partners offers prayer groups, marriage retreats, activities for married couples, getaway weekends at local hotels and resorts, and even an affordable cruise for church couples. These activities provide places where experienced couples can encourage younger couples. Some of our younger couples have made great use of Facebook to encourage and support each other.

We need to spread the word that it is possible to have a long-term marriage. Whether this is done through church programs, classes, mentoring, or counseling, the important factor is that we raise the priority of having thriving marital relationships that form the fabric of a healthy family environment.

When It Is Difficult to Help: The Impact of Trauma

For eleven years, I worked with the Residential Therapeutic Program at Lydia Home in Chicago and for nine of those years I was the director of the program. We served children ages seven to seventeen who were placed in the program by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. We had room for 41 children, boys and girls, and we rarely had less than 39 children. The children lived at Lydia Home, typically for one to two years, because they had emotional and behavioral problems so severe that they could not live in a foster home. Nearly all the children were from very low income families. More than 95% had experienced severe trauma – physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, and even starvation. Many children had witnessed terrible violence; some had seen their siblings, their mothers, or their fathers killed. Some of their histories were so heartbreaking that it was difficult to imagine that they could recover. Yet again and again we saw children heal and recover. It took time, tremendous patience, and very intentional efforts by caring, skilled adults, but most children made amazing progress.

Working at Lydia Home, I became familiar with the behavioral and emotional characteristics of children who have experienced trauma. As I worked with the youth ministries at Apostolic Church of God, I saw various young people with similar behaviors and emotions, usually not as severe, but symptomatic of having endured serious trauma. Recent studies by Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have documented that the incidence of childhood trauma is remarkably high in the U.S., so high that we

can expect to encounter traumatized children, adolescents and adults in our churches.¹¹

Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studied the frequency that adults report having had traumatic experiences as children, what the studies term “Adverse Childhood Experiences” or “ACEs.”¹² Researchers asked adult respondents whether they had experienced, as children, any of the following: verbal, physical, or sexual abuse, living with a mentally ill household member, living with a substance-abusing household member, having a household member in prison, having parents who were separated or divorced, or witnessing domestic violence. The CDC study included 26,229 respondents across five states. Their data showed that 59% had experienced at least one of these Adverse Childhood Experiences, 37% had experienced more than one, and 9% had experienced more than five ACEs. The study goes on to report that as ACEs increase, so does the incidence of alcohol abuse, intravenous drug use, teen pregnancy, depression, and attempted suicide. Those with more than four ACEs were far more likely to smoke, to be obese, and to have poor health. These statistics are extremely alarming, and the studies do not even consider the incidence of bullying, gang activity, and street violence.

The CDC estimates that:

- More than 740,000 children and youth are treated in hospital emergency departments as a result of violence each year—that’s more than 84 every hour.¹³
- The total lifetime cost of child maltreatment is \$124 billion each year.¹⁴

- More than 3 million reports of child maltreatment are received by state and local agencies each year—that’s nearly 6 reports every minute.¹⁵

The impact of childhood trauma is so devastating to individuals that trauma has been cited as a “fast track to poverty,” as well as a leading cause of early death.¹⁶ But how do we get from trauma to such dire consequences?

Effects of Trauma on the Brain

The human brain has an extremely long time course of development. While some capabilities are determined by genetics and hereditary, a great deal of what we call intelligence and talent is shaped over time by experience, education, and training. Patterns of how to relate to others are laid down in infancy, childhood, and adolescence. How to think, how to respond emotionally, and how to handle situations are learned as children grow and mature.

Martin Teicher, Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, has described the effects of trauma on brain development. When a child lives in an abusive, traumatizing environment for years, the child’s brain is shaped by the chemistry of the anxiety and stress associated with trauma. Severe trauma causes delayed development and alterations in brain structures that underlie emotional control, physiologic regulation, anxiety, and learning.¹⁷ The result can be devastating to that child’s ability to function in society. I would like to talk a bit here about the specifics of the neurophysiology, so as to give the reader an appreciation of the complexity of the impact of trauma.

Behind the forehead is an area of the brain called the frontal lobe, prefrontal cortex, or PFC. This area is responsible for “executive function” – planning, judgment, motivation, identity, and control of impulses and emotions – characteristics associated with good maturity. The PFC is not fully developed until a person is in their early 20s. With respect to automobiles, we as a society have policies that take into account the developmental time course of the PFC. We do not let young people drive until they are 16, and we have restrictions on their driving until they are 18. Car insurance rates are high until age 25, when the PFC is likely to be fully developed. Trauma causes a slower than normal development of the PFC. Neuroimaging studies show that traumatized individuals show decreased activation in the PFC, meaning young people who have been traumatized are likely to have much worse judgment and self-control than non-traumatized young people.¹⁸

Trauma also has major impact on lower areas of the brain. Because of trauma, the area responsible for fear and anxiety (the amygdala) becomes hyperactive, so that the child functions in a state of fear within most environments, causing him to expect and react as if social interactions will be threatening. This heightened state of constant anxiety (fight or flight) is likely a significant contributor to incidents of increased aggression, in that the child or teen expects that he is under threat and must take effective action to defend himself on a continual basis.¹⁹

Trauma slows and hinders the development of areas that are responsible for bonding, attachment, learning, and the internal regulation of emotions and energy. Trauma can result in the child being “physiologically dysregulated,” meaning he is hyperactive, has trouble maintaining focus, gets excited easily, and cannot

calm down once he gets excited. His emotions swing to extremes and he can escalate very quickly. Attachment mechanisms can be severely affected by trauma, causing the child to struggle with trusting anyone, forming relationships, and maintaining the relationships he does form. He also has trouble with memory and learning. The memories of the trauma can be very vivid; at the same time other memories may be spotty or missing, making it difficult for him to make any sense of his own experiences.²⁰ In light of all these other contributing factors, his ability to learn academic material can be severely impaired, and reading levels are often severely impacted.

So now we have a young person who has poor judgment, has trouble thinking things through, is quick to get angry and upset, who cannot control his emotions and his impulses, has limited options, and thinks he is in danger much of the time. He does poorly in school, and he has difficulty in most social situations. He is likely to be excluded from the normal activities that help young people to develop – sports, school activities, church activities, cub scouts, etc., because he is difficult for adults to handle and he often disrupts the program. All of this as a result of trauma on the brain.

Fast Track to Poverty

How the trajectory of trauma becomes a fast track to poverty lies in the traumatized young person having limited options for gaining a place in the society. With increasing ACEs, the chance of drug and alcohol abuse increases, as well as the chance of early pregnancy. Having been expelled from normal youth activities, he or she may identify as “bad” or a “loser.” Poor decision making abilities and poor skills lead to low paying jobs,

unemployment, and even choices which can result in incarceration. Poor decisions affect physical health as well, shortening lifespan.²¹ It is easy to see how the effects of trauma can fall on subsequent generations. Working at Lydia Home, I often saw children whose mothers' and fathers' trauma histories were very severe and, sadly, had greatly impacted their abilities to parent their children. Unfortunately, we were called numerous times to take children to the funerals of parents who died in their 30s or 40s, after very difficult lives.

Given the high incidence of childhood trauma in our society, we can expect that in our churches we will deal with traumatized children, adolescents, and adults. In our discussion of children and poverty, it is important that we appreciate that we will encounter families in which trauma histories have had a major impact on the economic resources of the family, as well as the emotional dynamic in the family relationships. Such a family may not readily respond to an opening up of educational or employment opportunities because they are so burdened by the sequelae of a traumatic past. Traumatized children may present a major challenge in a typical Sunday School class because they, more than other children their age, have difficulty learning, paying attention and sitting still. Traumatized teens are very likely to be excluded from the teen choir or the youth activity night because their poor social skills cause conflict in the group and their volatile emotions are too difficult for youth workers to handle. Yet these are young people who are in great need of what the church has to offer.

Resilience

There are those who are resilient in the face of trauma. We all know highly functional people who have powerful testimonies

of how they endured hardship and yet became successful in work, in church, and in their family life. What are the factors that allow such success despite trauma histories that should result in terrible failure? How can the church foster those factors and thereby foster resilience? The following factors seem to matter when it comes to successfully overcoming adversity and recovering from trauma:

- Connections/attachment to competent and caring adults in the family and community
- Self-regulation skills
- Motivation/ability to be effective in the environment
- Cognitive skills
- Positive view of self
- Faith and Hope
- Belief system that allows one to make meaning of adversity²²

Froma Walsh has particularly emphasized that belief systems have a powerful impact on resilience. She notes the role of faith and hope in overcoming challenges. She recognizes that belief in God gives a family a way of making meaning out of adversity and bringing a sense of coherence to lives that have been broken by crises and tragedy. Furthermore, she recognizes that we learn from adversity, and persevering through great difficulty can be transformative.²³ As Job said, “But He knows the way that I take; When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10 NKJV)

Christians and their church communities have a unique and powerful role in helping those who have experienced

trauma. The instilling of hope begins the healing process, and healing is brought to completion by the meaning that one makes of adversity. There are clinical interventions that help trauma, but without hope a person may entirely refuse the help that is available. As individuals heal, they may struggle with how their trauma affects their understanding of existential issues: How could this happen? What is the meaning of life given my hurt and pain? Where was God when I was suffering? Even children, as young as 10 or 11 years old, ponder and struggle with these issues. There are questions only God can answer. But we can tell a hurting young person that God will not waste their suffering. There are things that they know through their struggle that God will certainly use in their lives.

The ARC Framework

Researchers from the Trauma Center at JRI, in Brookline, MA, have proposed a clinical model that suggests interventions to foster resiliency and recovery from trauma. Their ARC Framework provides intriguing ideas about how to help ameliorate the confluence of symptoms seen in traumatized children.²⁴ “ARC” stands for Attachment, self-Regulation, and Competency. The ARC Framework points out that trauma impacts relational factors, physiologic regulation mechanisms, as well as cognitive factors. For each factor, they identify components that contribute to improving function. As clinicians working with traumatized children at Lydia Home, we found that the concepts included in ARC stimulated our thinking and helped us to explore strategies to address behaviors, emotions, and the physiological effects of trauma. The ARC framework

also may help us to see how to help traumatized children and adolescents who come to our churches.

For example, with respect to attachment, Blaustein and Kinniburgh point out that a contributor to bonding, attachment, and a sense of belonging is participation in routines and rituals. By routines and rituals, they mean the “how we do it” that families have – what the family does for Christmas or Thanksgiving, how they celebrate birthdays, or how they process grief when a family member dies.²⁵

The design of our worship services, our church music, and our style of congregating constitute routines and rituals that give us a sense of belonging to our church communities. Congregations are ideal places for promoting belonging through routines and rituals. Weekly services, celebrations of holidays, concerts, and special events all add to the sense of community and inclusion.

The question is how inclusive we are willing to be as we carry out our services, programs, and activities. If our services are designed by a small, select group, and only the “good” children are allowed to be in a choir or play an instrument, then we are including only those who already belong. Are we willing to pull in and make a place for the more difficult child or the more problematic teen? It will take more patience to include that child. More adults will likely be needed for young people who struggle. We may fear that the end product will not be as “professional.” I contend, however, that the reward for inclusion is great. God is glorified when a praise service is led by a teen who has profound reasons to praise because God has brought him through very difficult circumstances.

The ARC model has many components that address trauma and adversity, more components than it is practical to

discuss here. I would, however, like to consider a few components that have direct relevance to church environments. Blaustein and Kinniburgh discuss the importance of “caregiver affect management,” meaning that adults must have good management of their own emotions. Adults who are able to maintain emotional control feel more stable and safer to children, which allow children to safely bond with those adults. Children who have been abused become particularly anxious when adults seem out of control, and are therefore even more in need of adult emotional stability.

A key to adults maintaining control is having enough adults involved in the activity or program so that adults do not become stressed, overwhelmed, and impatient. Adults need time to regroup, to discuss problems and strategies, and to get emotional support from other adults. If adults spend a lot of time yelling at the children, the adults are probably not getting the support they need.

Adults need training in how to work with children, especially children who have experienced trauma. Often this is ignored in churches, and any willing adult is quickly put to work. The result is a stressful experience for the adult and the child, with adults walking away, saying “Youth ministry is not for me.” At Apostolic Church of God, I teach a class for ministers on Congregational Care. One module of the class is working with youth. I assign readings from the works of experts in the field, which discuss issues on how to counsel teens.²⁶ I also invite my husband, Bob McGee, who has over 30 years’ experience ministering to teenage boys, to come speak to the class. Bob talks about the importance of empathy, genuineness, judgment, love, and courage when working with young people. He cites 2 Peter 1 as a guide for those in the church who work with youth.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. (2 Peter 1:5-7)

Bob invites the ministers to begin by simply saying hello to the small clusters of young people that gather in our hallways after church services. Bob tells the ministers, “Get to know them. They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” This seems to be a simple concept, but how many have begun youth ministry by jumping into a large group and trying to facilitate a program without knowing the youth. When the youth group includes young people who have been victims of abuse or neglect, adults must understand the effects of trauma. Training on how to interpret young people’s emotions and behavior, as well as how best to intervene, is essential to being effective.

A characteristic of traumatized young people that is particularly difficult for adults is the emotional volatility and dysregulation that keeps a troubled youth from harmoniously cooperating with the group. All young people have energy levels and fluctuations that can be challenging to adults. As noted above, trauma can cause young people to be “dysregulated,” meaning that their energies are more volatile than is normal for their age. When they get excited, they can be hyperactive, and they can have trouble calming down or moving on to the next activity. They can be anxious and easily become defensive.

In the ARC Framework, Blaustein and Kinniburgh discuss how to help children and teens learn to regulate their energy and their emotions. A very effective intervention that helps to heal and develop the regulatory mechanisms in the brain is participation in rhythmic movement. That is, moving to music and rhythms develops those areas of the brain that allow young people to regulate themselves. Thus, dance, drumming, and active choirs help develop the physiological mechanisms that give young people self-control over their emotions and their energy. Rhythmic activities with a group help young people to co-regulate, that is to coordinate themselves and be in synchrony with other youth and adults.²⁷

Performing Art Therapy

In 2006, we began a program at Lydia Home which we call Performing Art Therapy (PAT). We utilize drama, dance, yoga, drums, and choir to help young people gain better self-control, and to help them co-regulate with others in a group. We also include exercises from Sensory Motor Arousal Regulation Treatment, which specifies interventions designed to work on the physiological dysregulation associated with trauma.

Performing Art Therapy capitalizes on the healing effects of rhythmic movement. The choir includes clapping and plenty of movement as the children sing. The drums encourage young people to be in rhythm with one another, working together to produce a compelling sound. We engage the young people in various kinds of dance, depending on the preferences of the

group. The younger girls enjoy praise dance, while the older girls and the younger boys prefer Zumba. The teenage boys have developed amazing routines using a combination of Step, Hip-hop dance, and rap music.²⁸

The drama classes incorporate breathing techniques and body awareness exercises that are commonly used in teaching drama to children, but those techniques have been altered to accommodate the clinical needs of the children. With non-traumatized children, such exercises may constitute a quick five minute warm-up at the beginning of a class. With traumatized children, breathing techniques and body awareness exercises are powerful interventions on which we spend extended periods of time to help the children to gain physiologic control. Breathing techniques and exercises that emphasize bodily sensations have a very direct impact on physiologic regulation mechanisms.

The drama sessions also encourage the surfacing of the young people's concerns and expressions of their reactions to past trauma. As they write scripts, monologues, and poems, they tend to gravitate toward topics that they struggle with emotionally. Many sessions have segued into group therapy sessions in which they process issues of grief, anger, and the perplexity of why and how they were hurt. The script writing also works heavily on the children's language and reading skills, giving them better tools for expressing themselves. The results of PAT have been extremely encouraging. At Lydia Home, we saw

- Reductions in aggression levels
- Reduction in conflict among young people

- Reduction in conflict between young people and staff
- Decline in young people running away
- Improved school performance

In 2006, less than 25% of the children at Lydia Home were in regular schools. Most were placed in therapeutic day schools, special schools for emotionally disturbed children. By 2008, over 80% of the children were able to attend regular public schools. The difference was that they were better able to accommodate themselves to the rhythms of the classroom, to be active when the class was active and to settle down and cooperate in quieter activities. They were better able to cooperate with teachers, and to interact without conflict with other children. From time to time, there were problems, but the behavioral problems were less severe and could be handled in a regular school.

In most churches, we are already doing rhythmic movement. Choir, drums, musical performance, and praise dance are common church activities. These are all activities which foster child development and promote emotional healing, as well as good physiologic regulation. Apostolic Church of God has a mime group in which the children do tremendous emotional expression in synchrony with musical rhythms. Interestingly, the adults who work with the mimes have been particularly successful in working with children who come with some emotional distress.

To include in our church activities children who have been traumatized takes patience and understanding. Certainly there are young people who are traumatized to the extent that clinicians are required to design treatment if the child is to heal. Those children should receive clinical services. At the same

time, churches can be places that provide additional healing experiences for our young people. Likely inclusion of troubled youth will require more adult involvement. The adults will need more training and support so they can better handle any behavioral or emotional issues that arise. However, if we as Christians want to help our young people to be whole, we ought to rise to this challenge to include those that have endured adversity and trauma.

Creating Community

At one point when I was very impressed with how the children at Lydia were making progress in our performing art therapy sessions, the drama teacher said to me, “It’s not just the drama, or the dance, or the choir. We are doing this in a context of community. We have a lot of adults encouraging kids, and helping them to discover their gifts.” The drama teacher was right, it is not just the presence of proven interventions that benefit these young people, it is the presence and involvement of community alongside these young people.

The children at Lydia Home do two big performances per year, one in August as a culmination of the summer classes, and one in February to celebrate Black History month. The performances are largely internal events. Whoever is performing at that moment is on the stage, while the rest of the children and the various adults are the audience. Adults who care about the children are invited – family, residential staff, therapists, mentors, and school teachers.

We cheer for everything. We are not concerned that the performances are “good” in a theater critic sort of way. We are excited that a child who at one point could barely lift his head to

speak is now on stage giving a soliloquy. We are thrilled that a boy who once was expelled from foster homes, school, baseball teams, and the cub scouts, is now an integral part of a play, prompting others to say their lines. We are so impressed that a girl who once could not control her impulses for even a moment, is now able to dance a complicated routine with six other girls, coordinating each movement to match theirs. You cannot imagine our joy.

Whatever interventions, programs, or policies we implement, we must not forget the critical need for young people to connect and attach to competent and caring adults in the family and community. Clinicians cannot provide such connections. Once the patient is doing better, the patient is discharged from treatment. Schools do not provide such attachments. The school year ends and the students move on. Churches can provide a continuity of community that carries a child to adulthood. Churches can support and include the multiple generations of the family.

Can our churches be such communities? Can our churches be places where we know our young people? Can we be congregations where we celebrate our young people's progress and their strengths? Can we include the child and the family that is struggling? Can we include them even when they have difficulty responding to the church's efforts?

In the abstract, it may be easy to say yes to these questions. Actually making a difference is more difficult. It will require thoughtful consideration of the mission and the prevailing cultures of our churches. There are thorny problems that will be resolved only by the power, grace, and wisdom of God. I am certain, though, that there is a tremendous need and

that God will bless the efforts of any congregation that chooses to make a difference.

The Least of These

The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

(Matthew 25:40 NIV)

When God took on flesh, when the Word became incarnate, He chose to come as a child born into humble circumstances. He grew up in a dusty town that later rejected him (Luke 4:28-29). The political powers of the day, the Romans, Caesar, and Herod, had great wealth, which they chose to spend on palaces, leaving the people poor. But the Savior did not choose to be born in their palaces.

The Greatest of All chose to come to us as the least of these. By His example, Jesus elevated the child in poverty to a position of great value and great promise. As followers of Jesus, we must be concerned about the child in poverty. The Gospel has made it clear that as Christians we must not be complacent about the plight of those who are in need.

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. (James 2:15-17 NKJV)

In whatever city, or town, or neighborhood, or church community that you reside, likely there are children and families

who struggle. Let us be generous, creative, and intentional about being a help to the poor that are with us.

¹ M. W. Edelman, "Ryanomics Assault on Poor and Hungry Children", *Huffington Post*, September 14, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marian-wright-edelman/ryanomics-assault-on-poor_b_1885851.html.

² M. W. Edelman, "Ryanomics Assault on Poor and Hungry Children", *Huffington Post*, September 14, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/marian-wright-edelman/ryanomics-assault-on-poor_b_1885851.html.

³ Sojourners. *The Line*. The movie, online. Washington D.C., 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200 , 2012, <http://thelinemovie.com>, accessed April 2013.

⁴ Willow (2013) Our Story <http://www.willowcreekcarecenter.org/about-us/our-story/>

⁵ D.R. Meyer and G. L. Wallace, "Poverty Levels And Trends In Comparative Perspective," *Changing Poverty, Changing Policies*, ed. M. Canclan and S. Danziger (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 39-41.

⁶ Sojourners. *The Line*. The movie, online. Washington D.C., 3333 14th Street NW, Suite 200 , 2012, <http://thelinemovie.com>, accessed April 2013.

⁷ H. Bos et al., "New Hope: Fulfilling America's Promise to "make Work Pay"", *The Brookings Institution* (2007): 10-11.

⁸ S. Quiles, *Exploring the Need for Research On Middle Class African American Men Ages 45-65* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2013), 7-8.

⁹ M. Leahy, "Old Obama Acquaintance Voices South Side's Disillusionment with His Former Ally," *Washington Post*, August 6, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-08-16/politics/35493822_1_barack-obama-south-side-valerie-jarrett.

¹⁰ D.R. Meyer and G. L. Wallace, "Poverty Levels And Trends In Comparative Perspective," *Changing Poverty, Changing Policies*, ed. M. Canclan and S. Danziger (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2009), 39-40.

¹¹ "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (mmwr): Adverse Childhood Experiences Reported by Adults --- Five States, 2009," Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention, December 17, 2010,

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5949a1.htm>.

“Injury and Violence Prevention and Control,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013,

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/index.htm>

¹¹.

¹² “Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (mmwr): Adverse Childhood Experiences Reported by Adults --- Five States, 2009,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 17, 2010,

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5949a1.htm>.

¹³ “Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System (wisqars),” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, December 7, 2011, accessed December 7, 2011, <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/index.html>.

¹⁴ Fang et al., “The Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment in the United States and Implications for Prevention”, *Child Abuse and Neglect* 36, no. 2 (February 2012): 156-65,

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/01452134/36/2>.

¹⁵ “U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration On Children, Youth, and Families. Child Maltreatment 2008,” Administration for Children and Families, November 1, 2011, accessed November 1, 2011, <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cm08/summary.htm>.

¹⁶ V.J. Felitti, R.F. Anda, and D. Nordenberg, “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults. the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ace) Study”, *Am J Prev Med* 14 (1998): 245-58.

“Washington State Family Policy Council: A Family, Community, State Partnership Families Thrive with Us,” Family Policy Council, October, 2012, www.fpc.wa.gov.

“Ace Course” (lecture, Washington State Family Policy Council online), accessed April, 2013, <http://www.fpc.wa.gov/acecourse.html>.

¹⁷ M. Teicher, “Wounds That Time Won’t Heal: The Neurobiology of Child Abuse”, *The Dana Forum on Brain Science. Cerebrum* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 5-7, accessed April, 2013,

<http://www.dana.org/news/cerebrum/detail.aspx?id=3378>.

W.J. Cromie, "Childhood Abuse Hurts the Brain", *Harvard University Gazette* (May 22, 2003): 1, accessed April 30,

2013, <http://news.harvard.edu/gazette/legacy-gazette>, accessed 4-30-2013.

¹⁸ B.A. Van der kolk, "Clinical Implications of Neuroscience Research in Ptsd", *Acad. Sci* 40, no. 1 (2006): 4-5.

¹⁹ M. Teicher, "Wounds That Time Won't Heal: The Neurobiology of Child Abuse", *The Dana Forum on Brain Science. Cerebrum* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 11-12, accessed April, 2013, <http://www.dana.org/news/cerebrum/detail.aspx?id=3378>.

B.A. Van der kolk, "Clinical Implications of Neuroscience Research in Ptsd", *Acad. Sci* 40, no. 1 (2006): 2-4.

²⁰ M. Teicher, "Wounds That Time Won't Heal: The Neurobiology of Child Abuse", *The Dana Forum on Brain Science. Cerebrum* 2, no. 4 (October 1, 2000): 8-9, accessed April, 2013, <http://www.dana.org/news/cerebrum/detail.aspx?id=3378>

B.A. Van der kolk. "Editorial Introduction: Child Abuse & Victimization", *Psychiatric Annals*, 35, no5(2005), 374-378, 477.

B.A. Van der kolk et al., "Disorders of Extreme Stress: The Empirical Foundation of a Complex Adaptation to Trauma. J. Traumatic Stress", *The Journal of Triaminic Stress* 18, no. 5 (2005): 396

B.A. Van der kolk, "Developmental Trauma Disorder: Toward a Rational Diagnoses for Children with Complex Trauma Histories", *Psychiatric Annals* 35, no. 5 (2005): 401-8.

B.A. Van der kolk, "Clinical Implications of Neuroscience Research in Ptsd", *Acad. Sci* 40 (2006): 1-17 .

K.J. Kinniburgh, M. Blaustein, and J. Spinazzola, "Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency", *Psychiatric Annals* 35, no. 5 (2005): 424-30.

²¹ V.J. Felitti, R.F. Anda, and D. Nordenberg, "Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults. the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ace) Study", *Am J Prev Med* 14 (1998): 245-58.

"Washington State Family Policy Council: A Family, Community, State Partnership Families Thrive with Us," Family Policy Council, October, 2012, www.fpc.wa.gov.

²² M. Blaustein and K.M. Kinniburgh, *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), 35-41.

“Washington State Family Policy Council: A Family, Community, State Partnership Families Thrive with Us,” Family Policy Council, October, 2012, www.fpc.wa.gov.

Walsh, F. A Family Practice Framework: Innovative Practice Applications. *Family Relations*, 51:130-137, 2002, pp. 134-135.

²³ F. Walsh, “A Family Practice Framework: Innovative Practice Applications”, *Family Relations* 51 (2002): 130-37.

²⁴ K.J. Kinniburgh, M. Blaustein, and J. Spinazzola, “Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency”, *Psychiatric Annals* 35, no. 5 (2005): 424-30. M. Blaustein and K.M. Kinniburgh, *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), 35-41.

²⁵ K.J. Kinniburgh, M. Blaustein, and J. Spinazzola, “Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency”, *Psychiatric Annals* 35, no. 5 (2005): 424-30. M. Blaustein and K.M. Kinniburgh, *Treating Traumatic Stress in Children* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2010), 94-95.

²⁶ J. McDowell and B. Hostetler, *Handbook On Counseling Youth, a Comprehensive Guide for Equipping Youth Workers, Pastors, Teachers, Parents* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1996).

²⁷ E. Warner et al., *S.m.a.r.t.: Sensory Motor Arousal Treatment* (n.p.: The Trauma Center at JRI, 2011), 3-7.

A. Cook et al., “Complex Trauma in Children and Adolescents”, *Focal Point* 21, no. 1 (2007): 4-8.

C. Kisiel et al., “Evaluation of a Theater-Based Youth Violence Prevention Program for Elementary School Children”, *Journal of School Violence* 5 (2006): 9-36, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://www.haworthpress/web/JSV>.

²⁸ E. Warner et al., *S.m.a.r.t.: Sensory Motor Arousal Treatment* (n.p.: The Trauma Center at JRI, 2011), 26-40.

Chapter 4

FIGHTING POVERTY IN HAITI: COMPASSION AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

By Ricot Saint-Paulin

Introduction

Maryse is 10 years old. Because her father is unknown and her mother mentally ill, at age 1, she was given into the care of an elderly aunt. In this new home, in the extremely impoverished Delmas slum of Port-au-Prince, Maryse suffered abject brutality. She was abused, starved and rejected by the very people who were supposed to protect and love her. Maryse's future – like that of too many of our country's innocent children – was bleak at best.

But today Maryse, attending a church-based Compassion Child Development Center, is transformed. Because of a Compassion supporter's timely intervention, in 2007, this fragile young child was moved into the home of a loving, Christian young lady who is providing well for Maryse's emotional, social and physical needs.

Although her learning pace is slow compared to other children – a clear indication of the serious impact of the abuse she suffered – Maryse is a child learning to discover life. There is a world of difference between this child dejected and abused in 2007 and this new Maryse, who can now smile and show altruism toward others. (She takes pleasure in sharing with children the candies she has received as a reward for

performing a song for a group of visitors to her Compassion center.) And with a budding musical talent, she easily goes from one song to another.

Maryse loves the people with whom she lives, and her last medical checkup shows that she now enjoys good health. The staff of her Compassion center reports that she is learning new habits to replace the bad ones acquired in her former neighborhood, where incest, violence and hatred prevail. She loves the company of other children and shares good relationships with the people around her. From an environment of violence and hopelessness, Maryse is now in an environment that makes her face shine upon the hope of a better tomorrow.

The Compassion Mission

Maryse is a typical example of the children Compassion Haiti seeks to reach with our mission to “release children from poverty in Jesus’ name.” Compassion is the largest child development agency in Haiti, ministering to children from before birth through young adulthood. Its holistic approach to child development makes Compassion a unique organization, offering full and balanced life opportunities for releasing children from their spiritual, economic, social and physical poverty so that they can develop into responsible, fulfilled Christian adults.

Since 1968, Compassion has touched the lives of more than 150,000 children all across Haiti. Almost half this number has already completed our program. And today, about 78,000 are receiving assistance for a better future through 260 local church-based Child Development Centers. Many former Compassion-assisted children, who started out like Maryse, are now successful Christian adults, filling leadership positions in

public and private institutions, effectively serving both their local communities and their country.

Haiti – the Reality

Compassion continually strives to reach and serve even more children in Haiti, where 80 percent of the population lives on less than \$1.25 per day and the unemployment rate is 40 percent.

Even before the devastating earthquake of January 2010, Haiti's health situation was already one of the most dire in the region. Life expectancy averages only 62 years, and the child mortality rate is the highest in the Americas. According to UNICEF, one-quarter of the babies in Haiti are born underweight, and up to 29 percent of children under age 5 show signs of chronic malnutrition. Tragically, 19,000 children under 5 die every year in Haiti from malnutrition-related and other preventable causes. In addition, 47 percent of Haitians have no access to healthcare, and the country has only 5.9 doctors, 5.9 nurses and 6.5 health practitioners per 10,000 inhabitants.

Currently, only about half of Haiti's primary-aged children are enrolled in school, and less than 2 percent of children will finish secondary school. As a result, almost 50 percent of all Haitians over age 15 are unable to read or write. Many children drop out of school to work at whatever jobs they can find to earn a little money for their poor families. More than 20 percent of children between the ages of 5 and 14 are involved in child labor – many in hazardous, even life-threatening conditions.

It is in this context of great need that Compassion's ministry is making a difference in Haiti – one child at a time – through four core programs: the Child Survival Program, Child

Development Through Sponsorship Program, Leadership Development Program and Complementary Interventions Program.

Compassion's Core Programs

The Child Survival Program

The Compassion Child Survival Program was launched in Haiti in 2003. This program reaches out to expectant mothers and primary caregivers of young children under the age of three. Since infant mortality is extremely high in Haiti, the first priority in promoting effective child development is ensuring that children survive the early years when they are more vulnerable to disease and malnutrition.

Today, the Child Survival Program, operated by 65 partner churches all across Haiti, serves nearly 3,100 babies and their mothers. Children in the program receive nutritious food supplements such as milk, cereal and vitamins. They also receive appropriate vaccines, even the expensive ones not provided by the government. Pregnant mothers in the Child Survival Program are provided prenatal care and have access to medical assistance. They are also educated about childbirth and infant care.

Program caregivers are taught how to prepare nutritious meals, monitor proper hygiene and encourage developmental activities that their children need in order to grow physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Program caregivers also receive mosquito nets and basic hygiene supplies to protect their children from malaria and illnesses related to poor sanitation. Classes in literacy, as well as income-generating skills like sewing, are also offered to help caregivers better provide for their families.

The Child Development Through Sponsorship Program This program is the most far-reaching and oldest of Compassion's core programs. It enrolls children between the ages of 3 and 9, and works with them until they reach the age of 20. Since 1968, this hallmark Compassion program has enabled thousands of children from poor families in Haiti to have access to education, healthcare and developmental activities conducted for them at church-based Child Development Centers. Today, 75,000 children are participating in the program, administered by 260 local church partners.

The Child Development Through Sponsorship Program is based on a curriculum developed by Compassion and adapted to the unique culture and needs of Haitian children. Each age group has its own customized program, including lessons and activities that children need in order to reach standard development milestones for their age.

Compassion trains and equips our local evangelical church partners to administer the curriculum. Children enjoy attending Compassion center activities where they eat nutritious meals and snacks, learn the Word of God, sing worship songs and study such important basics as hygiene, academics (e.g., math, science, language) and good manners. They also attend a variety of non-formal education classes for life enhancement, such as floral design, cooking, embroidery, music, computer skills and photography.

Compassion Haiti also works to build and enhance the relationship between children and their sponsors – a vital development component. The relationship with his or her sponsor creates a sense of self-esteem in the child, as well as hope and the determination to achieve success. Children feel valued when they receive letters, pictures and gifts from their sponsors – things that are not common to everyday Haitian life.

The Leadership Development Program

Launched in Haiti 15 years ago, the Leadership Development Program provides outstanding graduates of secondary school and our Child Development Through Sponsorship program the opportunity to pursue a university degree. But this is much more than a scholarship program. It is a program designed to impact the student as a whole person. In addition to pursuing professional degrees, throughout their university experience students also undergo a rigorous, extracurricular program of Christian leadership training developed by Compassion.

In Haiti, it is a challenge for young people to attend university. Through the Leadership Development Program, more than 200 young people have had the privilege of attending the most prestigious post-secondary institutions in Haiti. Students in the program are divided into “care groups” through which they have the opportunity to develop their talents and strengthen their leadership skills. Each care group elects a president, and based on a calendar of activities developed by the group, they meet together to pray, share knowledge based on their fields of expertise and brainstorm important topics related to life as a Christian young person.

The students also split into small groups and go to different Compassion centers to make educational presentations to the children, provide tutoring and raise the children’s awareness of the importance of striving for a successful life centered on Christ. Because of the skills they acquire in the Leadership Development Program, graduates are very competitive in the job market. In fact, among the 200 students who have graduated from the program, since it began in 1998, more than 70 percent have already found employment and are putting their Christian leadership skills to use to better their communities and country.

The Complementary Interventions Program

Helping children in poverty become all they can be in Christ is the mission of Compassion Haiti. The three programs described above are the foundation of that mission, serving children in need from before birth through university. But throughout their journey on the Compassion development path, children often hit exceptional roadblocks that are not covered by the Child Survival, Child Development through Sponsorship or Leadership Development programs. That's why, in addition, Compassion provides other benefits termed "Complementary Interventions." These special interventions are intended to complement the other three core programs and increase children's ability to get the most from them.

Some of the complementary interventions recently undertaken in Haiti include the following:

Computer Labs. Ten computer labs have been provided for Compassion centers in ten different cities for use by the staff and children. This special intervention will help children acquire basic computer skills and be more competitive in the Haitian job market.

Goat Distribution Program. Goats have been distributed to the caregivers of Compassion-assisted children of more than 80 centers. This income-generating activity empowers the caregivers to better provide for their children's needs that are not covered by Compassion assistance.

Water Project. Wells and water systems have been constructed at more than 60 centers. This intervention is important in Haiti, where 31 percent of the population has no access to safe water. It helps eliminate health problems among the children caused

by the consumption of non-potable water. It also encourages good hygiene practices in our centers.

Health Facilities/Latrines. Unbelievably, only 17 percent of Haitians have access to adequate sanitation facilities. Through Compassion, more than 50 latrines have been built at centers located in areas with exceptionally poor sanitation. These sanitary latrines go a long way in improving the health of children in the benefiting communities.

Psychomotor Equipment. Psychomotor equipment has been provided to more than 40 centers. This intervention enables the centers to provide recreational and gymnastic activities for children and youth, which positively impact their physical and emotional wellbeing.

Sewing Laboratories. We have established sewing laboratories in many of our Child Development Centers. The purpose is to help older youth and caregivers learn vocational skills that will help them become economically self-supporting.

Promoting Child Advocacy

As a child development ministry, Compassion is very involved in child advocacy, a subject that has become a strong program component in the organization. In Haiti, one of the most effective ways to fight against child abuse and the *restavèk*¹

¹ *Restavèk* is a Creole expression from French meaning “one who stays with.” It may refer to any child staying with a host family, but usually refers specifically to those who are abused. The United Nations considers it a “modern form of slavery.”

problem is through child advocacy activities. These activities are designed to raise a general awareness of the need for children to have access to influences and services that benefit their lives (education, childcare, proper parenting, etc.).

Each year on Children's Day, Compassion Haiti sends staff members to non-partner churches to present sermons and conferences for leaders and members about the plight of the country's children. This annual activity bears fruit as many churches have agreed to introduce activities on behalf of children in their congregations, as well as demonstrate a deeper commitment to their wellbeing.

Key partner church staff members also are provided an online course of training in child protection and pastoral duties towards children. In addition, this course is taught at Northern Christian University for new church leaders, encouraging them to be passionate child advocates. Finally, a Compassion-sponsored program is broadcasted frequently on Haiti's largest Christian radio station, which advocates for the rights of children.

The Response of Compassion and the Local Church to the Earthquake

No discussion about the work of Compassion and the local church on behalf of Haiti's poor is complete without a look at our response to the devastation of the earthquake on January 12, 2010. This quake killed more than 300,000 people, destroyed tens of thousands of buildings and left more than 1.5 million people homeless. Still today, Haiti is reeling under the weight of this disaster.

In the first critical days following the quake, Compassion Haiti sought to locate and support the families of every

registered child in the affected areas. Compassion was one of the first agencies to provide immediate disaster relief, quickly delivering medical supplies and treatment, packages of food staples and water, and tents and tarps for temporary shelters for families connected to our programs.

After the initial disaster relief activities of providing emergency medical care, nutrition and shelter, Compassion shifted to a long-term view of recovery in Haiti. The goal was to lay a foundation that would holistically revitalize the people and lead to a better future.

Implemented in 2010 and still operating today, the three key long-term strategies include the following:

Pastor Encouragement and Vision Casting. This strategy is an effort to encourage and equip Haiti's pastors and church leaders to stand up, expand social actions in their neighborhoods, and lift up a prophetic voice to the people. Compassion provides these pastors and church leaders with educational and sermon materials, counseling and conference support.

Long-Term Food Security Through Income Generation. This strategy provides employment opportunities for families suffering a loss of income and, thus, food security. To date, more than 600 business-startup loans have been provided and more than 1,000 parents have been trained in income-generating activities.

Church Partners Reconstruction. The most ambitious of the three, this strategy seeks to rebuild the ruined facilities of Compassion partner churches centered in or close to the quake's epicenter of destruction. So far, the facilities of five of the 29 partner churches targeted for this intervention have

been reconstructed. The remaining 24 are scheduled for completion by December 2014.

Making a Difference – Stories of Hope from Compassion Haiti

There are countless stories of lives forever changed through the ministry of Compassion and the local church in Haiti. Here are just two outstanding examples.

Beguens Theus

Beguens is from La Gonâve. He completed high school and the Compassion Child Development Through Sponsorship program in 1998. After high school, a special grant from Compassion enabled this bright young man to pursue a degree in politics, international relations and public administration at a branch of the State University in Haiti.

After his university studies, Beguens received a scholarship and was selected as one of 29 young professionals in Haiti to attend a post-graduate program of the State University in partnership with United Nations Fund for Population. Through this program, Beguens pursued specialization in population and development. He also later received a diploma in global leadership, from St. Thomas University in the United States.

People in La Gonâve began to notice and admire Beguens – not only for the Christian values he demonstrated, but also for his obvious intellectual capacity. So during the legislative elections in early 2011, the city's churches rallied behind him as a candidate. Beguens won the election and today, as a parliamentarian, he adheres to the Christian values he has acquired at Compassion and is committed to remain a true disciple of Christ in the exercise of his duties.

Before running for political office, Beguens spent time working on the Compassion Haiti staff as a Partnership Facilitator. In this role, he served as the liaison between several individual Compassion Child Development Centers and the national office. He recalls that he had the special opportunity to regularly visit the centers that were under his supervision, saying that the highlight of his visits was his time of interaction with the children. He was encouraged to see faces that showed great hope and excitement. Beguens always took pleasure in sharing about his past life with the children to create in them the incentive to also be a success in life.

Today, Beguens is an influential leader. In his parliamentary role, he serves on a commission responsible for anti-corruption and the promotion of ethics. “Corruption in the government system here is like a scourge, and I am going to work hard to eradicate it,” he says. He is also working on a project to enable 3,000 children in his hometown to access education. This project, he says, is his top priority because he believes that education is the key to success. As a prolific writer, Beguens expresses his point of view well. He has clearly presented his dreams for Haiti, as well as for the country’s children and the environment, in the several books he has written.

Beguens diligently applies the concept of servant leadership that he learned during his time in Compassion. He loves to serve both children and adults. He always points to his own life as a vivid example of the impact one person can make on a child, because someone changed his life by choosing to be his Compassion sponsor. He emphasizes that when someone supports a child, the way is paved for a congressman or a congresswoman to emerge, or even a president, who will lead the nation to a brighter future. “When you help a child, you shut

doors of prison, delinquency, mediocrity and above all, poverty. You, instead, open doors of blessings, success, positive impact and societal transformation,” he says.

Beguens is proud of how God used Compassion to shape and enhance his leadership character. And he acknowledges Compassion as the benchmark in the field of holistic Christian child development in Haiti. “Compassion chooses to intervene in a specific area, which is holistic child development, and they are successful in carrying it out,” he says.

“Dr. Wright [Beguens’ Compassion sponsor] would have been very proud today to see that little child, whose life he contributed to for years, being today a leader serving his country,” Beguens concludes. “I am a son of Compassion.”

Hern Sony

In a Haitian village of 5,000 people called Grand-Hatte, a mother raised her five children alone after her husband abandoned her. Rising early each morning, she walked to the city to sell her rice, okra and sweet potatoes, even though her children sometimes went without food. Thankfully, Sony, the second oldest child, was accepted into the local church’s Compassion Child Development Center. “The support of Compassion was the only thing my family could lean on. Therefore, even at early age, I took it seriously,” Sony recalls.

It didn’t take long for Sony to become a leader at his Compassion center, planning activities such as camp, retreats, and Christmas celebrations. He also learned how to sew at the center and used that skill to help support his family. Inspired by students from the Leadership Development Program who gave talks at his center, Sony applied and was accepted into the program in 2005. He attended one of the most prestigious universities in Haiti, majoring in civil engineering. Besides being

the first in his family to earn a university degree, Sony learned leadership and character lessons that shaped his future.

I am no more the little shy guy who underestimated what I could become,” he says. “My tutors at the Compassion center always challenged me because they saw in me a leader.

Today, enjoying a good career, Sony generously provides for his family. He pays school fees for his three siblings and two orphaned cousins. He has also built a house for his mother to live in with two of his siblings. He serves as a children’s Sunday school teacher and is responsible for a prayer cell in his neighborhood. Sony also uses his engineering degree to build classrooms and temporary shelters for those affected by the earthquake of 2010, and he is deeply involved in the long-term reconstruction of the damaged Compassion centers. “As an engineer, my responsibility is huge. I am called to save lives through the practice of my profession. Therefore, I am very concerned about the physical reconstruction of Haiti,” he explains.

Sony’s vision for the future involves providing the residents of his hometown with the basic necessities they have long lived without. “Grand-Hatte is a community that needs more schools, health care centers, water projects, employment opportunities, and vocational training centers. I feel I need to do something about that,” he says, “and I will.” Of his experience with Compassion, Sony says, “God has used this organization to transform my life and to make me what He has created me to be. I am so thankful. It’s a life-changing program.”

Conclusion

The work of Compassion has a long standing presence among the people of Haiti. By offering a variety of different programs and services, Compassion seeks to nurture the body, mind, heart, and soul of Haiti's children. Through partnership with sponsors, Haitian children are able to not only experience the love of Christ in their lives, but are given opportunities to in turn share that love with their families and their communities.

Chapter 5

GOD’S CALL TO CHARITY – BOTH LOCAL AND GLOBAL

By Lillian Gitau

Introduction

“Charity begins at home, but does it have to end there?”

Someone once asked me this question, and I found it quite interesting. It got me thinking of the many times I have benefited from the support of people both at home and abroad. Most of all, it got me thinking of what the idea of “home” really is. What and where is home, really? Is it just a fixed location – a house structure, a permanent address? Or is it much more than that?

Consider, for example, the home of Jennifer Gitiri, a young woman who grew up in an urban slum in Kenya. Recalling her childhood, Jennifer says, “Growing up with a single parent in the slum was very, very difficult for me. Really, we lived hand to mouth. If my mum went to look for employment, such as washing other people’s clothes, and came home in the evening with a dollar, that’s what we’d use to buy food to eat that day. But then the next day, if we woke up and there was nothing left to eat, we would just drink a glass of water and go to school.” She adds, “I remember vividly, our neighbor’s child was raped. The child was 10 years old, and these were the kinds of things that I saw growing up.”

For Jennifer, “home” was defined by desperation. It was a hopeless environment, full of challenges and obstacles that seemed impossible to overcome. Tragically, this situation is not unique to Jennifer alone – this is how more than 1 billion children in the world define “home.”

Home for the World's At-Risk Children

In order for us to become part of the solution to global needs, we need to understand the current reality. Truth be told, all children experience some type of risk. In a world of more than 2.2 billion children, about 1.2 billion of them experience poverty-related risks.

Millions of others are at risk from prosperity. Without proper guidance and the instilling of key values, many children of the wealthy have everything to live with, but nothing to live for. Many of these children suffer from a different kind of poverty – spiritual and emotional poverty.

Of course, every child's home should be a warm and loving place, where their needs are met and they are protected and supported in their effort to grow, thrive and achieve their God-given potential. The reality, however, for far too many children includes some disturbing facts:

- More than 6 million children die every year from malnutrition. Most of these are preventable deaths—the child did not need to die.
- Worldwide, more than 400 million children under age 18 cannot access safe water. For these children, each sip of water carries the potential of serious illness, even death.
- Nearly 115 million of the world's children are not in school. The majority of these children are girls.
- Children under age 5 account for 10 percent of the world's population, but suffer from 40 percent of the diseases attributed to environmental factors, such as lack of adequate sanitation.

- In the least developed countries, 30 percent of all children are engaged in child labor, many of them in hazardous condition, often enduring beatings, humiliation and sexual violence by their employers.¹

Hunger, disease, exploitation, illiteracy, extreme poverty – these are the definitions of “home” for many children, certainly including children in the United States and other developed nations. However, these definitions are much more common for children like Jennifer, who are struggling to survive in the world’s developing countries.

Take a moment to think about these facts. You might wonder, “Is there any hope?” “What role can I play?” The great news is that there is hope, and you can be a part of the hope that children in our world today need so badly.

A New Definition of “Home” for Jennifer

Thankfully, Jennifer, a bright girl with great potential, was given the opportunity to experience a different environment – you might say, a different home. She says, “Compassion opened up a project near our home, and for the first time as a young girl I saw hope.”

Jennifer was enrolled in the Compassion child sponsorship program, which was operated by a local church. Soon after, she was linked with the Smart family in the United States, who stepped forward to sponsor her. Describing her experience, Jennifer says, “Compassion provided for everything. They gave me books, and when I was sick, Compassion paid for my medical care. And I’m also thankful to my sponsors, who were very, very encouraging. They wrote letters of encouragement, telling me, ‘You can make it, you can do it, your past should not determine

your future.' I believe my sponsors were God-sent." Because of the new environment that the Smart family provided to Jennifer through Compassion sponsorship – an environment of help, hope, learning and encouragement – Jennifer's talents and abilities had the opportunity to blossom.

Another Story of Help, Hope and Home

I want to share with you the story of another little girl whose situation was much like that of Jennifer's. This little girl was born to a teenage mother deep in the heart of a village in Kenya. Growing up, her life was simple, determined by the boundaries of her surroundings. Yet she was confined by the harsh reality of extreme poverty, which attempted to define her person and her home.

Brought up by her poor grandparents for the first seven years of her life, this little girl's home consisted of a small mud hut shared by the entire family, two cows and a garden where food was grown. Some nights she went to bed hungry, but she thought that was normal. She often fell ill, with all manner of preventable illnesses, but she never saw a doctor. She thought that was normal too. When the time came for her to go to school, she walked 10 miles each day, barefooted, never questioning anything, because she believed that was what normal life was like.

Nothing in the girl's surroundings suggested that life could be any different, much less any better. And nothing made her believe otherwise, except for one person – her mother. Now an adult, her mother had landed a simple job in the city, gotten married and, with the little she had, was determined to give her little girl a chance. She wanted her daughter to have a chance at

a better life, a chance to overcome poverty with all its ills and injustice and, most important, a chance to know the love of Christ.

So, her mother enrolled her in a school where in the fourth grade, she encountered a teacher whose encouraging words would change her life, just as the words from Jennifer's sponsors changed hers.

The little girl started to hear words from this teacher that she had never heard before, words such as "you can make it," "you are smart," "you are beautiful," "your life has meaning and purpose," "you matter." Slowly, the girl started to do something she had never done before – dream. She dreamed about what she could become, about what she could accomplish and the difference she could make.

Through the simple words of her teacher, a whole new world of possibilities began to open up for her. She started to view herself not as a victim of circumstance but as one who would be able to give something back. She started to think of the difference she could make in her life and in the lives of others around her. And this new perspective changed everything. Because of the support of her mother and her teacher, life did not seem so hopeless anymore, and there was an opportunity that it could even be better.

God's Mandate to Care for Those in Need

The stories of this little girl and Jennifer, though unique, have common elements that are played out in millions of children's lives every day, whether they are in the United States, in Kenya, or elsewhere in the world. Perhaps some of these elements are painfully familiar to you as well.

But no matter our background, the fact is that we all have needed someone to support us and help us to be who we are and where we are today. And without that support, our stories today might read very differently.

However, the sad reality is that many children around the world today do not have any support or anywhere to turn. The statistics that I shared above are shocking, and they represent only a handful of the overwhelmingly cruel facts of life that children around the world must endure. Children today, through no fault of their own, are suffering under the harsh hand of poverty, much more than we could ever imagine, and every day, every minute, their lives hang in the balance between life and death.

What will make the difference between these children's living and dying, between their growing up happy and healthy or dejected and ill, between their achieving their full potential and being mired in helpless, hopeless poverty for a lifetime? What will make the difference?

Our obedience to God's mandate to care for them

Turning to our foundation of faith, what exactly might Jesus have felt and done when faced with similar circumstances? Matthew 9:36-38 (NIV) reads, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

I love this Bible verse because it's a beautiful portrayal of hope, of a God who loves and cares so much that He commands us to act. He gives us the charge to take care of the harvest – His people. But so often, when we are confronted by the needs in

our world, we are tempted to feel overwhelmed. We think, “How can I make a difference when the problems are so huge? It would be like adding only a thimbleful of help to an ocean of need.” As a result, too many of us don’t do anything, and we leave it to governments and “others” with greater resources to step up. Still, God clearly calls each one of us, and each one of us can do *something* to meet a need within our areas of influence.

Compassion International’s Mission

It is encouraging to know that many churches and organizations today are giving hope to the hopeless, making a difference in their communities and around the world. The ministry I work for, Compassion International, the one that made such a dramatic difference in Jennifer’s life, has the mission of “releasing children from poverty in Jesus’ name.” Like so many others working for Compassion, I was willing to leave my country of birth to make a new home in Colorado so I could be part of this grand mission.

Compassion is committed to changing the lives of children around the world who experience life-threatening situations. Through partnership with local churches, Compassion helps to rewrite the stories of millions of children, one child at a time, by providing them with a positive and safe environment, a new and different experience and a sense of a better home.

Most important of all, these children are getting to know the love of Christ, becoming transformed for all eternity and securing their home in heaven. Each day, about 400 children in the Compassion program accept Christ as their Lord and Savior, praise God!

Ensuring Child Protection

Specifically, to protect, provide for and develop children living in poverty, Compassion's staff and partners are committed to observing and actively living out the principles of child protection as spelled out in the organization's policies. In addition, a strategy to protect children registered in our program, which is administered by local churches around the world, is followed. This strategy involves the following steps:

A statement of commitment containing an internationally accepted code of conduct is signed by each Compassion staff member and church partner staff member. Their signatures confirm their personal commitment to children and their protection. The child protection statement contains specific guidelines on how to relate and interact with children, thus upholding the dignity of all children.

Local church partners protect the children registered in their Compassion programs by providing a positive and safe environment for them to learn and play. The church partner staff members keep children safe by reducing risks both within and outside the church compound. They also educate children about how to keep themselves safe and how to avoid risks and dangers that surround them.

Mobilizing the active engagement and commitment of responsible adults who surround children to care for and protect them with dignity and respect is a mandate of our church partners. They continuously encourage this active commitment of caring adults in the local community so that each child might receive the individualized attention and support he or she needs. Adults within the church communities are educated

about how to treat children with dignity, respect and integrity at all times.

Interventions for Children at Extreme Risk

The vast majority of Compassion's efforts to keep children safe from situations of vulnerability are preventive. However, when a child experiences extreme vulnerability, Compassion, through the local church, intervenes immediately to help reestablish stability. Immediate response interventions for situations of extreme vulnerability include:

Reinforcing the existing care setting: This intervention aims at stabilizing a child's current care environment, thus preventing transitioning them into a different care environment.

Providing care replacement: For children whose current care settings cannot be reinforced, alternative care arrangements are made.

Legal support: For children who have suffered abuse or exploitation, legal support is provided to secure justice for them.

Compassion's ultimate desire is that each child identified for assistance is known, is loved and is protected. We do this by surrounding children with a caring church community and through a one-on-one sponsorship model, which attacks the very root of poverty that tells children they do not matter, that they are insignificant or invisible. In addition, Compassion's core programs create an environment that encourages family support and community involvement in the lives of children.

You Can Change the Definition of “Home” for Others in Need

So, going back to the question of what “home” really is, what does home look like for us? Is it filled with hope or fear, opportunities or challenges? What home might the Lord be stirring your heart to today? Could the stirring be to reach out to a child in need, an individual, a church, a community or a nation?

One of the key actions we can take is to continue learning about the needs in our own communities and get involved, even as we seek to expand our scope to meet needs globally. Sometimes all we may need to do is give a word of encouragement that makes all the difference in someone's life, just as Jennifer's Compassion sponsors gave to her.

Recalling her family's letters to Jennifer, Sharon Smart says, “When we wrote to her, it was important to let her know that we really cared about her. I just said what a mother would say. You know, “We're so proud of you. We're so proud that your grade card is good and that you've done such a good job.”

Other times, we may have to do a little more, by sacrificing material resources to meet needs. One thing is true, we are never short of opportunities to give and get involved. No matter what we do, the idea is to *simply do something* – it works! As Sharon Smart says, “Compassion gave us the opportunity to reach halfway around the world, to rescue one little girl from whatever the future might have had in store for her.”

Two Children's Future Redeemed

As you may have guessed by now, the little girl from Kenya whom I shared about earlier has grown into the woman writing to you today. Through working for an international NGO, I have found an avenue to speak up on behalf of others going through what I went through. And Jennifer is now an influential human rights lawyer in Kenya, giving voice to the vulnerable and developing policies to benefit the weak and voiceless. She says, "It makes me cry all the time when I think of how far God has brought me – from the ditches of poverty, to this!"

Just like Jennifer's, my own story is one with an encouraging ending. A stranger had enough courage to call out the gifts and talents that she saw in me. That stranger, a fourth-grade teacher, happened to be placed strategically by the Lord in my life's path. She provided a key turning point in my life.

I now have the opportunity to minister to millions of children worldwide through Compassion's programs, the opportunity to speak life and hope to children, calling out the gifts and talents that God has given them.

I believe strongly that there is no such person as a "poor child." An opportunity-deprived life, which creates a sense of hopelessness, makes children believe that they are just as hopeless as their deprived situations. This is a big lie that the enemy is propagating today in the lives of millions of children, and we must stop it from spreading.

My mother stood in the gap to stop this lie in my life, and she is continuing to stop the lie from spreading by making a difference in the lives of other children in her community. While she does not have any form of consistent income or employment, she still finds the resources to cook porridge for children living

in a slum area close to her neighborhood. She does this so that those children can have a chance in life. She does it to enable them to have the strength to attend school. Because my mother is witness that it works! She continues to be my hero.

I thank God for placing such key people in my life, who gave me a chance – a mother who cared and did something, and my fourth grade teacher who cared enough to say something. She may never know how much she changed my life through her kind words.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I ask you to consider again the question that I started with: Charity begins at home, but does it have to end there?

You and I have the opportunity to do something right now. By our obedience to God, we have the opportunity to make a difference in the life of another, to share charity – not only at home but also around the world. So I urge you, before you close this chapter: Decide today to find one simple way to do good for the child at home and the child at the ends of the earth. Whether you ever know it or not, your word, your smile, your gift, your small slice of time can change the path for this child who waits on the other side of your obedience!

¹ <http://www.compassion.com/poverty/poverty-quick-facts.htm>

INTRODUCTION TO THE VERNON GROUNDS INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ETHICS

In every age, God raises persons who not only have a keener sense of his ideals for life in community than their contemporaries, but who also have the courage and foresight to pursue these ideals for themselves and the ability to lead others to do the same. For more than a generation Vernon Grounds has played such a prophetic and catalytic role in the arena of social ethics within the evangelical community. In doing so, he has established a legacy of Christian witness in the social domain that has been hailed by many as epoch-making and pace-setting.

It is to perpetuate Vernon's legacy of a vigorous Christian engagement in the public domain that the Vernon Grounds Institute of Public Ethics was established at Denver Seminary, where he has given a lifetime of dedicated service.

In embracing this task, and keenly aware of Dr. Grounds' lifelong stance, the Institute makes several bedrock commitments. First, it is committed to always anchoring its teaching and position in the Word of God. Second, it will endeavor to remain true to the Christian world view and the evangelical understanding of Christian faith. And, driven by the passion to see these resources brought to bear on social reality with a view to transforming it for the better, it further commits itself to pursuing an ethical agenda that will seek to be as all-embracing as its means allows.

From what has been said so far, it should be clear that VGI's arena of endeavor is social ethics. But it needs to be said

that, in laboring in that realm, its mission is mainly educational. More precisely, what it aims to do is provide an environment, resources and tools with a view to sensitizing, educating and training Christians in a broad array of ethical issues so that they may be empowered and equipped to fulfill the biblical mandate to be “salt” and “light” in a morally decadent world (Matt 5:13-14, Phil. 2:15-16). As used here, the term ‘Christian’ is meant to embrace several groupings: students in training, Christian leaders, lay persons and the broader Christian community.

In the pursuit of this educational mission, VGI intends to imply a variety of delivery modes, including lectures, workshops, seminars, informal discussion, and of its own limitations, VGI welcomes partnership with others who are also interested in a comprehensive and a robust Christian witness in the public square for the Glory of God.

Dieumème Noelliste
Director of the Vernon Grounds
Institute of Public Ethics
Professor Theological Ethics
Denver Seminary