



# common lot

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*Journal supporting and strengthening the mission of the  
Worship and Education Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries,  
and United Church of Christ Women in Mission.*



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# common lot

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## Sharing our common lot



by Deborah Bailey  
Minister for Women's Concerns

*Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.*

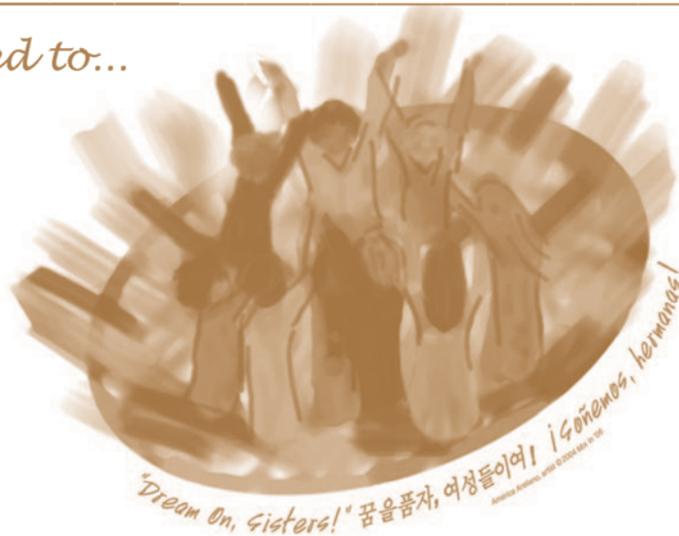
—MATTHEW 5:5

**T**HIS ISSUE OF **common lot** offers reflections on the plight of children in our society, both in the United States and globally. For over forty years, the United Church of Christ has affirmed public policies that generate and distribute resources to provide all people — especially the most vulnerable, our children — with the potential to live full lives. In a 1987 pronouncement, “Fulfilling God’s Covenant With All Children”, General Synod 16 called on the UCC to intensify its long-standing commitment to economic and social justice through support of specific policies which help, empower and sustain all children, particularly those children most in need.

You will probably recognize the above scripture text as a portion of the Beatitudes or as I like to think of them, the Be-attitudes. What is our “attitude of being” toward this fragile population? Is that not what this Matthew text is suggesting? “Blessed are the meek”... who are more vulnerable and innocent than our children? “...for they will inherit the earth.” However, we must ask ourselves what is the legacy we both provide and leave them?

This issue of **common lot** offers but a glimpse at some of the critical issues facing our children today. Currently in the United Church of Christ many local churches are involved in the God is Still Speaking initiative. As we consider the needs of one of the most vulnerable segments of our world, our children, it is imperative that we ask the question, if God is Still Speaking, what is God saying and how well are we listening?

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# Encountering creation, strengthening faith

June E. Boutwell

EVERY YEAR, thousands of children, young people and adults have their faith affirmed and strengthened in one of the 60+ outdoor ministry sites in the UCC. Others attend camp or retreats at other facilities. This connection with creation and the formation of a “new” community is a critical component in the formation of caring, concerned, faithful people of all ages.

The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA Committee on Outdoor Ministry has developed a theological mission statement that helps us understand the importance and impact of outdoor settings in faith formation.

*At camps, conferences and retreats, people of all ages engage in experiences that deepen and sustain their faith. Many Christian leaders, both lay and clergy, past and present, recognize the significance of outdoor ministry experiences in their faith formation and active participation in the church. There is a vast cloud of witness to the powerful influence of outdoor ministry in faith development.*

Outdoor ministry experiences offer occasions to move away from the chaos and busyness of everyday lives to a place apart. Within this sacred space people are invited to explore their faith and their ministry. Through casual conversations, Bible study, playing, group experiences of community, individual times of prayer and meditation, singing, and worship, people celebrate relationships with others, with God, and with creation. <http://www.ncc-cusa.org/nmu/mce/outdoorminbrochure.pdf>

The American Camp Association is currently engaged in the largest research study of camper outcomes ever conducted in the

United States which has collected longitudinal data from 92 selected sites covering both religious and secular ministry settings. More than 3,400 families from around the country participated in the study funded by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. Materials published on their web site [‘www.acacamps.org/parents/’](http://www.acacamps.org/parents/) confirmed that camps build skills necessary to prepare campers to assume roles as successful adults. Parents, campers, and camp staff independently reported growth in areas such as self-confidence, independence, making friends, exploring and learning new activities, and spirituality.

Campers confirm this growth experience with 96% surveyed in the research group saying camp helped them make new friends, 93% got to know kids who were different, 92% experienced self-esteem, and 74% were able to do things that were initially fearful.

An overview of the benefits of camp on the ACA website states that “the camp experience enriches lives and changes the world.”

*Camp provides children with a community of caring adults, who nurture experiential education that results in self-respect and appreciation for human value. All of the outcomes—self-identity, self-worth, self-esteem, leadership, and self-respect—build personal competencies. These personal competencies are reflected in the four “C’s” of the camp community: compassion, contribution, commitment, and character! For years, campers’ parents have reported that when their children return home from camp they are more caring, understand the importance of giving, are more equipped to stand up for what they know is*



**Camp provides children with a community of caring adults, who nurture experiential education that results in self-respect and appreciation for human value**

right, and are willing to be more responsible. These are the qualities that will help build a successful nation and a civil society.

Children are at less risk at camp where they have a sense of community, develop intergenerational relationships, and learn through first-hand experiences. Trained, caring adult role models help children feel loved, capable, and included. Camp helps children grow by providing a supervised, positive environment that has safety as a primary commitment. Camp professionals have enormous power in conveying simple teachable moments . . . special moments of passing experiences touched by the human spirit.

Parents want the best opportunities for their children. They want them to have whatever it takes to be happy and successful—good health, ability to get along with others, thinking and problem-solving skills, a good self-concept. Children need resiliency skills: self-esteem, life skills, self-reliance, and prosocial behaviors. The camp experience offers a nurturing environment away from the distractions and, in some cases, hostile environment of the city.

The NCCUSA outdoor ministry theological mission statement details benefits related to faith formation.

Through outdoor ministries programs, campers:

- Open their eyes to God’s presence in their lives in new ways.
- Discover and understand God’s call to them.
- Renew and refresh their life and ministry
- Experience joy in the community of believers.
- Rejoice in the beauty and amazing detail of God’s creation
- Find a still place where they can listen to and for God.
- Become committed to their responsibility to care for the earth.
- Explore the riches in the diversity among God’s people.
- Practice living in community with God, others, and nature.
- Return to the everyday world transformed by their time away.

Jesus routinely sought out a quiet place in the countryside near him. Sometimes he brought the disciples along to nurture their faith and encourage them in their faith formation. If we seek to follow Jesus and become more faithful disciples, outdoor ministry can be a powerful tool and experience in nurturing this growth in God’s children of all ages.

For more information on UCC Outdoor Ministries go to [www.oma-ucc.org](http://www.oma-ucc.org) or contact your conference office.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Recall a sacred space that is part of your faith story. What is the significance of that place in your understanding of your relationship with God and the larger community?
2. When was the last time you experienced God’s creation and offered praise and thanksgiving for this gift? Take a moment to do that now.

### PRAYER

Dear God, We thank you for the wonderful time we’ve had this week and for bringing us together under you, just as you brought together the people at Pentecost. Help us to keep our faith even when people make fun of us, and help us to do what we think is right. And help us to keep the friendships that we’ve made this week. Amen.

**Kristen Zukowski**

*DayBook for New Voices, August 13, p134*



# Family is not just those you are born to

Laurel Slater Jacobs

**G**ROWING UP with gay parents, I never struggled with who loved me or if it was the “right kind” of love. I grew up in a stable, loving home, where despite the typical “triumphs” and “tragedies” of a step-parent family, happiness was a constant. My mom and Lynn have been partners since I was nine. Twenty years later, they remain a committed couple who has loved and supported four amazing children into adulthood.

When I was a junior in college I owned an old Subaru. It was my first car, and I had saved for what seemed like an eternity to buy it. I had owned it for a little less than a year when I went to visit my former college roommate for spring break. While driving from college in Massachusetts to her home in Pennsylvania, the car broke down on the New York turnpike. After calling Mom and Lynn in tears to ask what to do, I finally managed to make it off the highway with the assistance of a tow truck. I was in the middle of nowhere, my car was in a garage, and my friend’s house was still hours away. I stayed in a hotel and waited for my friend to pick me up the next day. Scared and disheartened, I must have called Mom and Lynn a dozen times that night for reassurance. The following day, my friend picked me up and I spent the week in Pennsylvania.

When it came time to head home, the mechanic who worked on my car said I was ready to go for the bargain price of \$400. My friend drove me back to the “middle of nowhere”. I picked up the car, handed over my credit card and was on my way. I managed to get about 50 miles into my return trip when the car broke down for a second time. I called the garage, and the mechanic said he would send the tow truck back out to pick up the car. Hysterical, I again called Mom and Lynn. Nearly six hours later, they joined me at the interstate hotel I had secured for the night. Leaving the car in New York, we headed back to Massachusetts where I was due back at school.

A few days after I returned to school, the lousy mechanic I had entrusted my car with said it would

be another \$700 for repairs. After much debating, we decided to cut our losses and send the title to the mechanic in lieu of the repairs.

The couple of weeks that followed were tough. In addition to feeling like I had been taken advantage of, the car I had saved and worked for was gone. In the fall I was to start my senior internship full-time, for which I needed transportation. I also needed to get back and forth to work in order to pay for said education.

I headed home to Maine for Easter weekend. Still heartbroken, I also had a stress-induced case of the shingles to top things off. Saturday morning, Mom and Lynn said they were heading out for a drive. They asked if I wanted to join them. Still feeling blue and physically uncomfortable, I declined. Besides, a quiet day at home was a welcomed feeling by then. A few hours later I heard the garage door open and a car horn outside. As I looked out the living room window, Lynn was in the driveway parked in a maroon Volkswagen Jetta. I went outside and soon realized the car was for me. Lynn had taken her savings and bought me a car to replace the one I had lost. She knew how hard I had worked for my first car, and knew that I would not be able to afford another. She did not want me to go without.

**W**hile quite a financial gesture, this memory has never been about the material nature of a car. For me, it is about love. It is about loving someone enough to go without, so they don’t have to. You see, family is not just those you are born to. Family is those who love you like family and supports you in times of good and bad. I have countless memories of times of joy, times of happiness, and our family motto, “making the best of it.” My mother and Lynn have always set an example of familial love with grace, strength and dignity; an example I take to my own marriage. I’ve never struggled with who loves me, for over twenty years I’ve known.

  
**Familial love  
with grace,  
strength and  
dignity**

# Living in uncertainty

Revs. Barbara and Charles Purinton

**T**HIS IS A STORY told many times over, as the Vermont Guard and soldiers all over our country continue to be mobilized. Each story is personal, as our spouses and children, our neighbors and friends experience disruption in every aspect of their lives. We share part of our story with you.

Charlie joined the Vermont Army National Guard as a Chaplain in 1982. Our children, Malcolm, Pamela and Caitlin grew up attending Family Day activities at the various armories that Charlie served as chaplain. They knew he would be away for a weekend a month, and then there were the longer trips for Annual Training and schooling.

Caitlin, our youngest, had the opportunity to attend summer camps run by the Vermont Army National Guard Drug Demand Reduction Program. She spent some summer weeks at National Guard Armories learning physical training and many life skills from the Guard volunteers as well as local fire and rescue companies. We were not surprised when Caitlin decided to enlist in the Vermont Army National Guard when she was a student at Mount Mansfield Union High school. She soon joined in the weekend drills with her unit, the 86th Brigade, which was also the unit that Charlie serves as chaplain.

The summer after her graduation at MMU, Caitlin left for her Basic Combat Training at Fort

Leonard Wood, in Missouri. We drove to her graduation and were able to see her for a couple of days before she headed off to Fort Huachuca, Arizona, for her Advanced Individual Training (AIT) as an Intelligence Analyst. Caitlin graduated from AIT in March of 2003 as the Distinguished Honor Graduate.

Returning home to Vermont, she looked into colleges and settled on Maine College of Art in Portland, Maine. She loved art school and contemplated a future path of seminary for Religion and the Arts, and possibly the chaplaincy. We were glad to be able to see her once a month when she drove her 1963 VW back from Maine for her guard drills. But then, things changed. A deployment to Bosnia became likely for their unit, and Caitlin began to travel to Troy, NY for extra training with the unit here. We made arrangements for their possible deployment in June of 2004.

**T**hings changed again. The Bosnia mission was cancelled, and we learned that another mission might happen within the year. As things escalated in Iraq, Vermont Guard members began being called up to service, and we knew it was probably only a matter of time until it reached the Purinton home. The 86th Brigade was put on alert in June and the alert extended in September. It was comforting to think that Charlie and Caitlin would at least be on the same mission. We grew accustomed to living in uncertainty and at the same time having to go ahead and live life as best as we could. We took out our loans for college and Caitlin returned in August for her second year, hoping to finish out her sophomore year.

The call came on October 15. We had to call Caitlin at school and tell her that she had to leave immediately to come home and get ready for deployment. What an emotional time. Not only was it a challenge for her to simply stop in the middle of a semester and leave friends and roommates but we had to start figuring out what to do about the college tuition and loans and taking incompletes in her courses. And then there was the uncertainty of



**One of the most difficult parts of this whole journey is the uncertainty and lack of information**



whether or not Charlie was going on this mission. It turns out that he is not, at this time, being deployed, so we deal with one leaving and more waiting.

One of the most difficult parts of this whole journey is the uncertainty and lack of information. We simply wait for the next piece of information and adapt accordingly, changing schedules at the last minute to attend briefings, or welcome Caitlin's siblings home for a visit from their year in California. Our lives have changed since last year's Bosnia alert. We have reordered our priorities, and making time to be with each other has become most important. Family has traveled from other states to gather in support, and Caitlin's high school classmates drove from New York and Massachusetts to share a bonfire evening at our home. We celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas and even a birthday dinner for Caitlin's 21st birthday in February. We feel held.

Saying goodbye was difficult. Not knowing exactly where Caitlin will be is harder still. Phone calls become lifelines even for a brief bad connection. We need to encourage our daughter to learn and grow from this experience, to do her best, and to look forward to a return to family and college in 18 months. Barbara sleeps with the "Caitlin Bear" dressed in army uniform as she sends prayers of protection in the night. Charlie continues to work with each successive call up and waits for his own.

We know, like other families of soldiers who are being deployed that we are in for a long haul. We can only hope that events will stabilize in Iraq and in other parts of the world. We can only pray that our loved ones are safe and that their mission will not call upon them to participate in violence directed at them or others. We

can also find ways to work to mend the world. What are those ways? I don't know. But I do know that another family will be focusing on sending light and healing to the Middle East.

Waiting is the hardest. I want this to be over.  
A movement towards peace  
Instead of this incessant waiting.

How does a minister  
Be a mom  
Be a spouse  
Be a person to those she loves who are being  
sent to war?

How does she pastor her people  
When all she knows is uncertainty  
And fear?

And yet it is our faith  
That must hold up  
Bear up  
Offer up  
Hope and courage and above all  
Love.

God's love.  
O you who knew us before our limbs were knit  
together  
In our mother's womb  
Hold us still.  
Amen

---

*Rev. Dr. Barbara Purinton is pastor of the Richmond Congregational UCC Church in Richmond, Vermont. She has served there since 1989. Rev. Charles M. Purinton Jr. is a Chaplain LTC with the Vermont Army National Guard, and also the Education Services Officer. They have three children, Malcolm (24), Pamela (22) and Caitlin (20), as well as their granddaughter Makeda (2).*



# God is still speaking through shared stories

Carolyn Landers Pettigrew

**W**HEN JESUS CHRIST walked among us, He had many spiritual truths that He wanted to share. He could have chosen to demonstrate those truths through divine uncton, transmit them by purely spiritual means, or lecture about them in lengthy orations. Instead, Jesus Christ chose stories as a method of instruction and encouragement.

The disciples needed inspiration to pray, and Jesus gave it to them in the story of a persistent widow and an unjust judge (Luke 18). Desiring to illustrate God's deep love for those people who were far away from God, Jesus Christ told tales of lost items—a coin, a sheep, a wayward boy. Children, trees, fields, leaven in bread all made excellent subjects for stories that defined the kingdom of Heaven. Stories and parables were Jesus Christ's frequent choice to instruct, teach, guide and direct His listeners.

Much of the wisdom of God is given to God's people in story form. From the biographies of the patriarchs in Genesis to the New Testament parables told by Jesus Christ, stories provide the lessons and offer the practical application of the tenets of Christian theology. Similarly, sharing our own stories with the children in our lives offers us the opportunities to share what God has done in our lives, teach the fundamentals of the Christian faith, assist children in making connections between faith and life, and illustrate the evidence of God's dealings with humankind. In addition, sharing our stories is a natural and loving way to feed and tend to the spiritual lives of our children.

The Bible encourages Christians to share our stories with one another, including our children, for many reasons. First, sharing our stories of what God has done for us encourages other Christians in their efforts to walk with God. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those God redeemed from trouble," declares Psalm 107, "And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of God's deeds with songs of joy (vs. 2, 22). Sharing our stories offers us the opportunities to give God thanks and praise for our Creator's goodness and mercy and gives children opportunities to witness our praises. Sharing our personal stories uplifts and reassures children who might be going through difficult times in their lives personally, at home or in school.

**Sharing our personal stories uplifts and reassures children who might be going through difficult times in their lives personally, at home or in school**



II Corinthians 1:4 reminds us that God "consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God." Telling the stories of the difficulties that we have endured and the ways in which God's presence enabled us to overcome these obstacles comforts and encourages others, especially our children.

Second, sharing our stories with one another is a vital means of instructing children in the doctrines of Christianity. Christians, in II Thessalonians 2:15, are exhorted to "stand firm, and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter. Whether it is a story that showcases our strengths or remembers our weaknesses, discussing the lessons that we have learned or wish we had known from God's

Word fulfills Colossians 3:16's "teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; . . ." command.

The writer of II Timothy celebrates the impact of sharing one's own experiences with God and teaching others to believe in God as the author notes the influence of a godly mother and grandmother on Timothy. The writer chronicles the passing down of a heritage of faith, "I am reminded of your sincere faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you" (II Timothy 1:5).

This preacher urged this "son in the faith" to "Rekindle the gift of God that is within you" and "Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (II Timothy 1:6, 8-9).

While the writer presents Timothy as an example of successful sharing of faith and beliefs, the Bible holds up another group of people as a striking contrast. Moses and Joshua served the Israelites mightily, yet the generation that followed them did not know the testimonies of God's power and deliverance. The results were disastrous. Judges 2:10-12 recounts the process and the effects, saying, "Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them, who did not know the Lord or the work that the Holy One had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of God and worshiped the Baals; and they abandoned the Lord, the God of their ancestors, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt; they followed other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed down to them; and they provoked God's anger."

A lack of knowledge of the favor and miracles of God led these people into bondage and defeat at the hands of their enemies (Judges 2:14). Sharing our stories of God's will is a valuable means of teaching our children, loved ones and others about God and God's Word. To this end, Psalm 145:4 insists that



**Sharing our stories of God's will is a valuable means of teaching our children, loved ones and others about God and God's Word**

"One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts."

Third, sharing our stories teaches our children the ways in which God interacts with humankind. Stewardship of creation, environmental responsibility, codes of ethics and behavior all appear in the stories of God's dealings with people. "On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness" (Psalm 145:5-6).

Frequently, those people whose lives were impacted by Jesus Christ told their testimonies to others. Paul repeatedly shared his Damascus Road experience, which marked his conversion and call, and gave him credibility with his listeners. Jesus Christ healed two blind men, who went on to "spread abroad his fame in all that country" (Matthew 9:27-31). When Jesus Christ healed the Gadarene Demoniac, the local citizens "asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear. So he got into the boat and returned." (Luke 8:37). The man who had been delivered wanted to leave too, but Jesus Christ asked the healed man to remain in his hometown and share the goodness of God with everyone there. Jesus Christ returned and, "The crowd welcomed . . ." as a direct result of their healed neighbor's testimony (Luke 8:40). In each case, sharing their personal stories allowed each of these people to show others the character of God.

How should we share our stories? Initially, we should pray and ask God to keep us in remembrance concerning the Holy One's interventions and influence in our lives. A very effective tool in remembering God's mercies is a "thanksgiving journal" in which we chronicle answered prayers or things for which we are thankful. We can also teach our children to keep a "Thanksgiving journal" and set aside special times for sharing our journal entries with each other. We adults can also record our growth and progress in times of struggle and maturation as we create a "journey journal" that contains the lessons that we have learned as we walk with God. These learnings can form the foundation of the stories that we share with our older and middle school children when similar occasions and situations present themselves.

In addition, we should prayerfully watch for opportunities and open doors to share our stories with our children. Timing is crucial, as is favor with the children we know and relate with.

As the opportunities arise, we need to ask God for discretion, sensitivity, wisdom, and understanding that will guide us as to the when, with whom, and how much we share. i.e., “teachable moments.”

While many people think of sharing their stories on a grand scale, the vast majority of open doors will come in one-on-one situations. The children (grands, nieces and nephews, in church school etc.) with whom we come in contact may well need “feeding” through the encouragement, instruction that our stories contain. Sensitivity and discernment will assist us in knowing when and what to share.

Jesus Christ shared the parables. These stories showed basic Bible truths in ways that His listeners could understand and accept. The Bible contains the stories of men, women and children who were changed, helped, and loved by God. These stories nurture, edify, instruct and enlighten. Sharing our own stories encourages, teaches and educates the children in our sphere of influence, while building and reinforcing our own Christian faith.

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*The Reverend Carolyn Landers Pettigrew serves as Minister for Children and Families, Worship and Education Team, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ*

## mark your calendar

June 9–11, 2005  
SOUTHERN CONFERENCE  
WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

June 10–12, 2005  
MICHIGAN WOMEN'S GATHERING

October 21–23, 2005  
SOUTHERN REGIONAL  
WOMEN'S EVENT

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How is your own Christian faith nurtured by the sharing of your stories with the children in your life?
2. What are the implications of allowing the children in your life to grow up without hearing the stories of your faith journey?
3. How is God still speaking through our stories?

## PRAYER

Hey God, How are you? I'm doing OK. I know that, for me, you have been true to your word and have been there for me in times of need or just when I felt like talking. It is hard to believe that I cannot see you, touch you, or know that you are really there, but you are still such a big part of my life. You give me strength and the will to do things I never thought I could do. My faith in you helps me through each day, good and bad, because I know you will always be there to listen and that you will never judge me or lose faith in me if I do something wrong. You guide me through life year after year and I know that you will never leave my side. You will always be the only true and constant thing in my life. You are the one thing that I know I can go back to for guidance and reassurance. I thank you for giving your only son, so that I may live. Lastly, I thank you for my friends and family who support me each day and for keeping all of us safe and protected. In Jesus' name I pray.

SEANA CLARK

*DayBook for New Voices, January 12, page 7*



# Smiling Sheep

Margaret Slater

“HERE IS A NEW WORD from Andy! GRIM—is the way you feel when you are not sad enough to cry, happy enough to smile, angry enough to scream. It feels just like it sounds—grrrimmm!” This quote is a favorite quote of mine that comes from a book called *A Smile From Andy* by Nan Holcomb. It is the story of a little boy with a disability who just wants to belong to his community and is caught in a web of anxiousness that leaves him GRIM most of the time. The story goes on to tell about Andy making new friends and finding a place for himself. The story is written for kids but surely applies to many of us in the church.

What does it mean to belong? Belong v.: 1) to feel and be a part of, 2): to enjoy a sense of contribution, value, self-worth, 3) to truly believe one is a natural and equal part of the whole, 4): comfortable, safe, cared for, welcome. Scripture tells us that we all belong to God and I hope and pray that the day will come when all of God’s people will belong in our churches. ‘Cause we are still at the GRIM stage when it comes to children with disabilities in our congregations. Many kids with disabilities do not feel welcome or included, let alone feel like they really belong.

Why would many kids with disabilities feel like they don’t belong? Well, I think that there are probably as many reasons as there are disabilities. I think we look at children with disabilities with pity, with fear, with a sense of otherness, with compassion, and with a sense of not knowing what to say or do. We are uncomfortable and unsure and we pull away from the real child in our midst. We are also afraid that some how meeting this child’s needs will cost too much—of ourselves, our resources, and our ener-

gy. We look good when we have kids with disabilities in the congregations, but we are not quite sure what to do with them and about them. I am painting a rather grim picture and this is not true for all congregations, but is an accurate assessment of many of our attitudes.

Can these attitudes change? Sure they can, we simply need to learn more about kids with disabilities. We need to look in our own mirrors and examine why disability might scare us. We need to do our homework and use available resources that help. And, we need to ask kids what they want and need from God’s church. We need to discover the gifts

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you belong? Where do you want to belong? Is there a difference?
2. What do you know about children with disabilities?

## PRAYER

Not all dreams involve being naked in math class

I have a dream

to belong

I have a dream

to help others belong

I have a dream

to keep those who belong from frowning on those who do not

I have a dream

to keep there from being any who do not belong

I have a dream

to belong

*A Smile From Andy*, Holcomb, Nan , Jason & Nordic Publishers, PA, 1089

*DayBook for New Voices*, January 15, p9

## RESOURCES

UCC Disabilities Ministries provides free resources on inclusion and accessibility. Call ext 3838 or [www.uccdiseabilitiesministries.org](http://www.uccdiseabilitiesministries.org)

Look for *Any Body, Everybody, Christ’s Body*, a congregational study on inclusion....coming in July 2005 from the UCCDM.



that all kids, including kids with disabilities, bring to our congregations.

When my brother John and I were little we used to attend Vacation Bible School at my Protestant Nana's church. It was a real treat and a rare event for us Catholic kids fifty years ago. My Mom still has a sticker covered picture of the 'The Good Shepherd' that John created so long ago. He had been given 7 smiling and contented sheep to place in Jesus' arms. They didn't all fit, so he placed the final one smack on the top of Jesus' head. Our family all

laughed and this indignant 4 year old informed us that all the sheep belonged to Jesus and he had room for them all!

If we are called by a still speaking God to feed Jesus' sheep then we must learn twenty-first century skills and develop twenty-first century attitudes towards kids with disabilities in our congregations. We can see that kids, all kids, have fewer grrrimmm days and know that they belong to God and to us. Then we can all belong and smile about being included in Jesus' arms...or where ever we fit.

## Young and Generous

June E. Boutwell

**M**ANY OF US are familiar with some version of Proverbs 22:6, "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray." (NRSV) I learned this as "Raise up a child in the way you would have him/her grow." When Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep, part of his instruction is to be a steward for the household of Jesus, the extended family that was a part of Jesus' ministry.

If we wish to raise lifetime stewards who answer Jesus' call to "feed my sheep," we must start with our youngest. But we need to reclaim the deeper, holy sense of stewardship as the responsible care and management of creation entrusted to us in Genesis. There are four important principles to raising lifetime stewards—Start Early; Make It Real: Just Ask; and Acknowledge the Gift.

**Start Early**—Like any habit, if stewardship is cultivated early, it will grow stronger as a child matures. Often church school offering is an administrative activity done during the children's message or when taking attendance in the classroom. It has no meaning or significance. It is merely money given by parents to put in the plate or basket. The giving of money and time in serving need to be emphasized as acts we engage in because we love Jesus and our neighbor. Parents can let children carry the offering envelope or put it in the plate. I have seen four and

five year olds helping at the food bank pushing boxes with just a few cans in them along the floor to get them to a packing station. They know they are being good helpers and love being part of a community or family project.

**Make It Real**—Money is an abstract concept for children so we need to make it real for them. I served a church in which the church school offering was collected during classroom attendance and was a \$70 general income line in the annual budget. The trustees agreed that we could make this a mission offering. We selected three projects a year.

The congregation had a long standing commitment to Heifer Project International during the holidays so that became the fall mission project. Then we would choose a local ministry project and a wider church project such as One Great Hour of Sharing or a Church World Service project, one for winter and one for spring. The church school schedule was changed to include a gathering time where we prayed together, learned songs and collected the offering. We used one wall to represent in a colorful, graphic fashion the dollars collected. For One Great Hour of Sharing, we used a fish taped to a string for each dollar collected. The youngest could appreciate the cumulative effect as the wall filled up and the older children, who were learning math, could add up how much was represented by our wall

  
**They began to have a sense of the larger scope of giving and their part in the ongoing story**

display. We worked with the missions committee to select the mission projects and enhance the awareness and giving in the congregation.

We presented information appropriate to the children's learning level, using pictures and repeated simple phrases to reinforce the focus of the project. Even a small child can understand that one dime buys one baby chicken. By the end of the first year, the church school mission offering totaled \$600 with increased congregational giving as children became mission interpreters for their parents.

**Just Ask**—The teens and young adults of this generation are people who want to change the world. Many are also gifted with abundant resources which they are willing to share if we just ask. Mission trips and service projects are among the most enthusiastically supported and successful activities in youth and young adult ministry. By the time young people are in middle school or junior high, they can understand the concept of supporting the faith community and serving others as a call to discipleship.

We sometimes give confirmands their offering envelopes or ask them to fill out pledge cards as members of the church but we don't do a very good job of asking them to support the church. Ask your teens if they will help out by giving up purchasing one CD or one movie rental a month and giving the money to the church. No, it is not an ongoing commitment, but young people want to contribute to the well being of the community and are willing to make a one time gift as individuals or a youth group to help support and strengthen the ministries of the congregation.

**S**tewardship is often about the annual budget and our young people often witness stress and tension around this process. We can help them (and adults) to understand that our care and responsibility is for the whole of creation which includes the local church budget as well as working for justice and being disciples offering our time and talents as well as our treasure. Indeed many of our youth programs do a lot of fundraising to support their programs and mission trips. How do we interpret this giving to the church and world as stewardship?

**Acknowledge the Gift** We are taught as children of a provident God, to give thanks. One way to make it real for all ages is to especially thank children and young people publicly for their gifts of time, talent and treasure. The church school mentioned above would have an intergenerational congregational wor-

ship at the end of each mission project lifting up the project and specifically the amount given by the church school and dedicated the money as part of the liturgy of offering our gifts. Even the youngest children took pride in their part in helping and the older children and youth began to have a sense over the years of the giving of the church school (and the church as a whole) from year to year. They began to have a sense of the larger scope of giving and their part in the ongoing story. And will retain that sense of giving even as they leave their communities of nurture and move into new, mature lives.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do we "make it real" for our young people?
2. How often do we ask for or acknowledge the gift?

### PRAYER

Dear God in Heaven,  
You have blessed me with love.  
You have blessed me with health.  
You have blessed me with opportunities to be  
all that I can be.  
And I thank you.

Please let me remember those who are not loved  
Please let me remember those who are not well.  
And let me serve you by being a friend to them  
who have so much less than me.  
Let me serve you by providing those who have  
so little with my help, my time, and my caring.  
Please continue to give us a chance to spread  
your word to others so we might all become a  
more caring world of people.

**ASHLEY MILLER**

*DayBook for New Voices, August 22, p138-9*

### RESOURCES FOR RAISING UP STEWARDS

"God's Gifts, My Gifts" by Sandy Lueschen,  
United Church of Christ Resources

*Beyond Leaf Raking: Learning to Serve/Serving to Learn*, by Peter L. Benson and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, Abingdon Press

*Growing Up Generous: Engaging Youth in Living and Serving*, Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, et al, Alban Institute

# Justice for women

Loey Powell

I AM WRITING THIS on World AIDS Day. This issue of Common Lot focuses on children and today I am reminded of how children are affected by this pandemic. In 1998, I visited Uganda prior to the Decade Festival of Churches in Solidarity with Women, an initiative of the World Council of Churches. Uganda has developed some of the most effective HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention programs among the African countries since the early 1990's when nearly one-third of its population was infected with HIV. Uganda's leaders engaged every possible means to combat the epidemic and by 2000 the infection rate was less than ten per cent.

We spent several hours at a school run by the women's organization of the Anglican church in Uganda. The campus was situated on the side of a hill overlooking a lush valley. Nestled in the valley was a school for the children of wealthy families and it bore all the marks of privilege we have become accustomed to here in the United States: a gated entrance and long driveway leading to modern facilities far from the road, and well kept grounds. The Anglican school welcomed students from poor families who lived in the barrio on the other side of the valley, a neighborhood of cramped substandard homes. Many of the children who live in this neighborhood have been orphaned by AIDS. They have lost their parents, their grandparents, their aunts and uncles to the virus. They wander the streets, trying to find something to eat, trying to make some money. Older children are raising their younger siblings.

We met with a group of these students who come to the school three times a week for special classes. Along with the basics of reading and writing, they learn hygiene practices and have a chance to bathe and to wash their clothes. You see in their eyes that they know so much more than they should at their young and tender ages.



There is a wariness deep inside but also a glimmer of hopefulness that maybe, just maybe, they can be kids again. Even for a few hours while they are at the school.

Millions of children in Sub-Saharan Africa are without adult family members because of HIV/AIDS. Women and children around the world comprise the fastest growing population group for rate of new infections. In the U.S.,

African American and Hispanic women are those most affected with new rates of infection. Studies have shown that many women cannot negotiate safe sex practices with their partners, including husbands, thus putting them at risk for infection. When children come into the family with both parents infected, they are vulnerable to being left alone if their parents do not have access to treatments that slow down the progression of HIV. Often they become the primary caregivers for sick parents at very early ages.

When women become ill, children are at risk unless there are sufficient resources within their extended families to care for them. Childhood becomes a myth, a dream, for millions who must find ways to stay alive at age 12, or age 9, or even age 6.

In the U.S., women and children are the largest category living in poverty. Without universal health care, without jobs that pay adequately, without access to affordable childcare, children are being left behind. What if we saw these factors within our own country as being similar to the threat posed by HIV/AIDS in other countries when it comes to understanding why children are failing in schools, dropping out, running away, having sex and getting pregnant as pre-teens, joining gangs (and girl gangs are on the rise in many cities), and struggling with depression and attention deficit disorders? What if we understood that children are put at risk because the policies of our government are making it very difficult for

their parents to make a living?

What if we could envision a world where all children were safe from hunger, safe from violence, and given the opportunity to develop all the wonderful gifts God has given them? Wouldn't we have to ask what is happening to their parents, too?

HIV/AIDS is a global pandemic. It is also a preventable disease. If we use all our will and methods known to stop the spread of HIV, we could wipe it out forever. But it will take unified effort on the part

of all nations to do so. So can we do the same with those things in the U.S. that make it almost impossible for adults caring for children to succeed at providing for their families? Are these things - the policies that line the pockets of corporations and the upper crust of the wealthy - not also preventable if we but find our voices and raise them on behalf of those who need us to speak for them the most?

In my mind, to do so would be to truly advocate for family values.

## *Public education is a moral issue*

Janice Resseger

**P**ROVISION OF EXCELLENT PUBLIC education for all children is a moral issue. Today when much political debate is being waged on values, we in a church that proclaims, "God is still speaking," must be prepared to explain how the values of our faith herald a better world. Jesus calls us to, "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep." *John 21: 15-17* As an expression of our love for him, Jesus would surely expect us to create a moral society that provides for the basic needs of its children, especially when our most affluent nation in the world can afford to make protection of children a priority.

Reading the bible, we must make the metaphorical leap to modern times. In Jesus' agrarian metaphor, feeding the sheep is providing the means to life itself. Formal educational institutions did not exist for children in biblical times, but today the means to life would have to include children's intellectual nurture as the path to their participation in an information society. Half a century ago, President Harry Truman updated the list of basic human needs: "All Americans, whatever their job, or whatever their income—wherever they live or whatever their race or creed—are entitled to a good education, good medical care and a decent place to live."

Today's conversation about public education centers on the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the 2002 federal education law that has substituted the

role of watchdog for the federal government's formerly supportive posture. NCLB now drives education reform through conditioning federal contributions on rapidly rising standardized test scores. Ironically, while law's name, "No Child Left Behind" proclaims that no sheep be left to starve, the law's implementation blocks educational opportunity for the most vulnerable lambs and blames the shepherds who are themselves caught in its thorns and brambles.

NCLB is being criticized (and should be criticized) because, in a climate of federal tax cuts for the rich and the overwhelming expenses of the Iraq War, the federal government has not yet provided enough money to pay for its requirements. States and local school districts are being asked to make enormous investments in curriculum re-design, testing, and teacher training without federal funding to pay for federal mandates. The clearest example is Title I funding. Two years ago, for FY 2005, NCLB authorized \$20.5 billion for Title I, yet the '05 federal budget proposal includes only \$13.34 billion. The federal government has spent far less than promised for NCLB's implementation every year since its passage in 2002.

NCLB tests students every year and reports the data by race, ethnicity, income level, disability status, and English-language-learning status. The



**A moral society would model generosity, compassion and justice**

desegregation of data by race and economic level is to demand that schools serve all groups of children even those groups who have traditionally been marginalized, and yet the federal government is failing to do its part to help school districts reach precisely those children the law says it is designed to serve. A report by the Harvard Civil Rights Project, decries that, “NCLB identifies schools as needing improvement largely on the basis of a school’s demographic characteristics rather than a school’s contribution to student learning. The federal adequate yearly progress rules do not consider how students performed before they came to a school, how long they were there, or what difference the school makes in improving student achievement.”

The disparate impact falls most heavily on the big city school districts. By the winter of 2004, poor schools in New York City made up 69 percent of all schools in New York state that had been sanctioned; poor schools in Chicago constituted 66 percent of sanctioned schools in Illinois. Large, diverse school districts are held to more targets because they are likely to enfold students in all of the many demographic subgroups which must each make “adequate yearly progress.” One child may count several times if, for example, she is Hispanic, disabled, an English Language Learner, and financially disadvantaged, as may be the case when the majority of segregated minority schools serve families living in poverty.

NCLB requires school districts to set aside Title I money that has traditionally been budgeted for remediation. Set asides will pay transportation costs for children who are now allowed to move from “failing” schools to other public schools and for “supplemental” services provided in the private market.



The law merely assumes there are ready seats in high achieving schools.

NCLB introduces a rigid regimen of annual standardized tests in reading and math. Critics have raised concern about: emotional pressure on children; extreme pressure on English language learners who must take standardized tests in English before they learn English; exacerbating drop out rates especially for children who are retained in grade; discriminating against children in poorly funded schools who are held to the same standards without the resources of their more privileged peers; increasing pressure to intolerable levels for educators; and driving a focus on basic reading and math and accompanying disinvestments in art, music, and even the social sciences. Newspapers have reported school districts’ quietly dis-

charging to GED programs and alternative schools adolescents whose test scores are likely to bring down the school and district averages. And many worry that a test-driven curriculum ignores the need to celebrate students’ culture, racial-ethnic identity, and native or heritage language.

NCLB makes unreasonable demands on rural school districts that are handicapped by low salaries and limited capacity. NCLB requires teachers to be licensed in every single subject taught, while a rural teacher may by necessity be doubling up to teach

life and physical sciences, even though the teacher’s certification is in biology.

Philosophically, NCLB radically reshapes public education policy in the language of business, by which it demands that public school teachers become increasingly efficient at producing better and more uniform products, as demonstrated in standardized test scores. The law adopts performance accountability standards and rapidly growing production targets.

While NCLB adopts a philosophy of business, it ignores the learnings of entire academic disciplines traditionally thought to be relevant for public education—anthropology, psychology, and sociology. NCLB neglects students’ language and culture; it “motivates” through punishing educators in contrast to accepted learning theory; and it fails to contextualize schools in terms of the poverty, racial segregation and other socio-economic factors that touch the lives of many students whose test scores lag.

While NCLB ignores the broader cultural and social context for schools, it assigns blame to particular schools, particular school districts, and public school educators. Sanctions and punishments for “failing” schools and vouchers that allow students to “escape to” other “more successful” public schools are remedies that locate all the problems inside the school, not outside in society. The law’s ranking and rating of schools discredits our nation’s urban schools and at the same time encourages families with means to move farther into suburbia to avoid “failing” schools. In this way the mechanisms of the law are feeding racial and economic segregation in metropolitan areas.

People of faith are called to challenge the new education law that makes federal support for the education of our nation’s poorest children conditional on their posting high test scores despite the meager resources our society has heretofore provided for their education. A moral society would model generosity, compassion and justice.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the concerns of the chemistry teacher’s prayer with the assumptions of the *No Child Left Behind Act* described in the article.
2. How does Jesus’ call to “feed my sheep” connect metaphorically to the role of public education? Do you think people understand civic responsibility differently than they did a generation ago? Two generations ago?

## PRAYER OF A CHEMISTRY TEACHER

There is a wonderful moment when you see that a young person has grasped something new. In chemistry I ask students to understand concepts they cannot see. They must gain their insights regarding an invisible world through metaphors and models. Attempts to express new ways of seeing, whether through art, music, poetry, math, or technology, only succeed when another connects with those ideas insights. “I get it!” need not be shouted; it is written on the face.

To be a part of the “ah-ha” moment is a blessing.

ROBERT YOUNG,

*Day Book for New Voices*, p. 191.

# Walking on Sacred Ground

The tapestry of the land is as diverse as those who live and care for it. The writers of the 2005 Mosaic share their stories and believe that persons can and do walk on sacred ground wherever they are. In the unit lessons of the *Walking on Sacred Ground* Mosaic participants have the opportunity to learn more about the value of farming as well as experience life in small towns and rural churches. Whether active in agriculture or not, the land has touched us, and made us sisters in Spirit.

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# Welfare reform and the UCC

Pat Conover

*When Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'If you love me, feed my sheep,' he didn't say, 'only the sheep who dwell in the green pastures.' He didn't say, 'only the sheep whose mothers please us by acceptable behavior.' He didn't say, 'only the sheep whose fathers have good jobs and mothers come to PTA.' He didn't say, 'only the sheep whose parents make smart choices.' He didn't say, 'only the sheep that have two parents in the pen.' He just said, 'If you love me, feed my sheep.*

—Jonathan Kozol in the keynote address to General Synod 22,  
Providence, Rhode Island, July 5, 1999

JONATHAN KOZOL would likely have identified welfare reform as a plan to feed only the lambs whose parents “make smart choices.” It is a program designed to force parents into the workplace, but it has been far less concerned with the needs of children. For a significant part of the past fifteen years, welfare reform has in one way or another been the focus of much of the UCC’s legislative work on children.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the two most prominent UCC children’s legislative objectives became protecting children’s needs during welfare reform and establishing a coordinated and substantial program of federal support for child care. By mobilizing advocates, the religious community was a significant partner in both the child care and welfare reform advocacy efforts. The UCC built an advocacy network of 17,000 contacts, collaborated with denominational Washington offices and other larger religious and secular advocacy coalitions, and also helped build an ecumenical contact list managed by Interfaith Action for Economic Justice. Religious partners contributed signifi-

cant staff support for both the religious and the larger coalitions, and denominational staff from the UCC presented congressional testimony to challenge the concept of the culture of poverty and speak against the hostile stereotyping of welfare mothers. Faith communities supported the voices of organizations of welfare mothers speaking on their own behalf.

The 1996 welfare reform legislation was a decidedly “insider” process that ended in a complex compromise that is not a model of good legislation. Welfare reform redefined the goal of welfare. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), a law whose goal was to protect children, was changed to a program focused on driving welfare parents into low-income employment—with little concern for what happens to the children. The UCC’s role was significant at the time of the final vote. While many religious bodies finally gave in and agreed to an interim reform led by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) and finally to the TANF compromise between President Clinton and Congress, the UCC and the low-income



Plight of Our Children

  
**Most low-income families have one-or-two employed members, and they have demonstrated the desire to get better jobs through training, education by high-participation in a wide array of programs**

groups opposed it to the end.

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is a fundamentally wrong approach to dealing with the welfare needs of children in poverty. While always supporting the idea that one of the best paths out of poverty is through parents' employment, the UCC has continued to advocate for giving low-income parents education and training, and for removing barriers to employment, without doing injury to the children in their families. TANF has reduced direct subsidies, fragmented programs to support children, and failed to produce adequate and affordable child care for the mass of poor children whose parents are now required to be in the workforce.

Moving into employment or better employment was a major path out of poverty and off welfare during AFDC, and it is not much different under TANF. Despite the stereotypes and myths, the evidence continues to be that low income people want actual work. Most low-income families have one-or-two employed members, and they have demonstrated the desire to get better jobs through training, education by high-participation in a wide array of programs. Then, as now, the evidence is that many people enter poverty and then leave either by losing and then regaining employment, or by losing a marriage or committed relationship and then reestablishing such connections with another. Even many of those with multiple barriers to employment have shown that with adequate support they too are able to climb the ladder into employment.

The sharp drop in the welfare rolls has resulted from three factors: the dramatically improving economy of the late 1990s with a sharp increase in employment; the procedural difficulties and sanctions that make it hard to get on or stay on the TANF; and the continued decline in the value of cash subsidies during AFDC subsequently under TANF in many states. But even when job seekers receive excellent preparation, they are too frequently frustrated at the end by lack of employment opportunities, or by employment opportunities with such low pay and poor benefits that workers cannot be lifted out of poverty even when they work full time. Furthermore, programs to support education, train-

ing, and the removal of barriers to employment are expensive, more expensive in some cases than just sending a welfare check.

At the same time religious advocates were frustrated by the outcome of welfare reform, they were instrumental in passing the Child Care Block Grant (CCBG), now called the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), that created a new major federal program—part entitlement and part dependent on annual appropriations. CCDBG is very significant for having established child care as a major federal program, despite that its scale and funding are inadequate to support the number of children of mothers now forced by welfare reform into the workplace.

Since the original passage of the CCBG, faith based child advocacy has contributed to the improvement of the program and the expansion of funding, though funding is still far short to produce services required by children in families affected by welfare reform. While child care is a much larger issue than merely child care for TANF recipients, faith community advocacy has pressured to improve child care for TANF recipients as a major legislative priority in ongoing negotiations over TANF reauthorization.

There is more to do. Where is the caring and energy to respond directly to the leading of the Holy Spirit who can let us once again see the hopes and opportunities found in the faces of low-income children—so easy to overlook, so easy to ignore, and yet so ready? When Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'If you love me, feed my sheep,' he didn't make it conditional. He just said, 'If you love me, feed my sheep.'

#### PRAYER

Dear God,  
 We pray for peace in our world.  
 We pray for unity and acceptance among those who are different.  
 We pray for others, who need your guidance in their lives at home, at school, or at work.  
 But most of all, we pray for your presence in our lives. Amen.

**Andrea Kautz**

*DayBook for New Voices, August 30, page 142*

# Fulfilling God's covenant with all children

## The role of a general synod pronouncement

Paul Sherry and Pat Conover

ON THE 29TH OF JUNE, 1987, delegates to the 16th General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirmed a major pronouncement on the well-being of children entitled, *Fulfilling God's Covenant with All Children*. Now, seventeen years since the pronouncement was affirmed, Paul Sherry, former President of the United Church of Christ, and Pat Conover, former UCC Washington Office Legislative Director, consider its role in the life of the UCC since 1987. They also consider a more serious question: are children better served in the year 2004 than was the case in 1987?

**PAT:** My first major responsibility with the Office for Church in Society of the United Church of Christ (OCIS) was to write the pronouncement, *Fulfilling God's Covenant With All Children*. The pronouncement led to an OCIS programmatic emphasis that spawned hearings across the United States. Yvonne Delk, then the executive for the Office For Church in Society, initiated the children's emphasis, contributed to it intellectually, and became a passionate spokesperson. Paul Sherry, during his tenure as UCC President, led a church-wide effort, *Creating a World Fit for All God's Children*.

**PAUL:** In Isaiah 44:3-4, God reaffirms the covenant with the people of Israel and gives special attention to the inclusion of children in the covenant: "I will pour down rain on a thirsty land, showers on the dry ground. I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring and my blessings on your children. They shall spring up like a green tamarisk, like poplars by a flowing stream." In this scriptural context the pronouncement calls our congregations to reach toward full involvement of our children in congregational life, including worship and ministry: "Ample opportunity should be given to children to share in the central worship life of the congregation, and attention should be given to their full inclusion in the koinonia of the congrega-

tion. Children are not merely to be served by the congregation; they are fully a part of the congregation."

Our church's response to this call has been significant. Many of our congregations are reaching toward full involvement of our children in congregational life, including worship and ministry. In ever-increasing numbers of churches, children are being asked to share in helping lead worship, serve on church committees, and participate in congregational outreach ministries. This enriches the lives of our children and deepens their involvement in the ongoing life of the church.

**PAT:** The pronouncement's statement of Christian Conviction parallels, but does not copy, the nine basic rights of children as identified by the United Nations: the right to develop spiritually, intellectually, physically, socially, emotionally and culturally; the right to the resources necessary for such development; the rights of children with specific disabilities; the right to love and understanding; the right to protection from cruelty; the right to be protected from exploitive labor demands; the right to free public education; the right to play and laughter; and the assertion that children should be raised to take pride in their own culture and to respect the culture of others.

After the pronouncement passed, intense discussion ensued with other UCC instrumentalities about the degree of priority given to children as contrasted to work under the banners of equality for women and overcoming racism. It became evident that the causes of child poverty reflect the oppression of women as well as the deadly effects of racism.

**PAUL:** The "Call to the Conferences and National Bodies" focuses primarily on issues of public policy that impact children. The UCC has worked diligently to support a wide range of the pronouncement's public policy directives and there have been some victories. Unfortunately, however, the victories have been far too few.

**PAT:** In the late 1980s and early 1990s the two most prominent children's legislative objectives became the establishment of a coordinated and substantial program of federal support for child care and protecting children's needs during welfare reform. The UCC built an advocacy network in that era of 17,000 contacts, including a list of 2,000 child advocates committed not only to individual action but also local church involvement, and our denomination also helped build an ecumenical contact list managed by Interfaith Action for Economic Justice.

The UCC and other denominations were also organized for action through a coalition of their Washington offices and through larger religious and secular advocacy coalitions. Denominations and various religious partners contributed significant staff support for both the religious and the larger coalitions. For example, one widely distributed statement of religious leaders concerning welfare reform had sign-ons from 47 national leaders of different religious bodies. The National Council of Churches, especially through its Washington Office, was a significant player in getting such a broad sign-on as well as in communicating with state and local ecumenical bodies.

The UCC helped the religious community to earn a place as a significant partner in both the child care and welfare reform advocacy efforts. For example, I was called to a hearing on welfare reform to give major congressional testimony where I challenged the concept of the culture of poverty that was being used by opponents to justify punitive changes in the welfare program. We spoke against the hostile stereotyping of welfare mothers in our role as religious advocates and by supporting the

### PRAYER

Hold me close  
Wipe away my tears  
Until the sun rises  
Over the hill again  
I pretend to be strong  
I don't know what strength  
Is or what anything is anymore.  
Because I'm falling  
Falling  
Falling  
Wrap your arms around me  
And hold me so close that  
I can hear your heartbeat  
In my ear  
Make me forget everything  
Forget my tears  
Forget everything except you  
Except you  
Look into my eyes  
Under the sky that's filled  
With fragments of fading stars  
And keep me close to you  
Close to you and  
Look into my eyes  
Until you forget what  
Color they are and you  
Can see my soul and  
Love me  
Fall in love with me  
Hold me close  
Wipe away my tears  
Until the sun  
Rises over the hill again.

### ANTOINETTE PUDVAH

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voices of organizations of welfare mothers speaking on their own behalf. I also spent considerable staff time negotiating the church and state aspects of the legislation that became the Child Development Block Grant (CCBG).

Despite that, welfare reform was a decidedly "insider" process with great cross-pressures and it ended in a complex compromise that is not a model of good legislation. Church advocates were able to help protect the most basic church and state principles that the UCC has long fought to uphold. I would never have been invited to that insider role without the effective organizing and advocacy of our faith-based coalition on children's concerns.

**PAUL:** Recent data on the state of our children is daunting. According to a recent report of the Children's Defense Fund, "One in six children in the United States lives in poverty. One in eight (9.3 million) children have no health insurance. Three out of five children under six are cared for by someone other than their parents on a regular basis. Only 31 percent of fourth graders read at or above grade level. An estimated three million children were reported as suspected victims of child abuse and neglect. Almost one in ten teens ages 16 to 19 is a school dropout. Eight children and teens die from gunfire in the U.S. each day (one child every three hours)." And if one were to cite

figures for the state of children world-wide, those figures would be more devastating still. The policy directives adopted by the 16th General Synod, at least as pertinent today as in the year 1987, largely remain unfulfilled. We have a long way to go if we are to build a world fit for all our children.

# “A child without health care is a child in a world of hurt”<sup>1</sup>

Barbara T. Baylor, MPH, Minister for Health and Wellness Programs

MY GRANDSON of 18 months wanted desperately to be born, to come into this world. He wanted to be born so badly that he tried to come early - too early! My daughter struggled to keep him inside her by being hospitalized and on bed rest for most of the nine months. And still, my grandson was born healthy about 3 weeks shy of his due date. Now that he is here, he is a happy little boy, exploring everything, taking it all in. But I wonder about the kind of world we are creating for him, leaving for him. I wonder about his future well-being. He doesn't realize yet that this world is not always kind and gentle, especially to children. If my grandson knew that the platitude we are so often fond of touting: “Children are our future”, holds no real meaning by many policy-makers, perhaps he would have not been so eager to make his entry into the world. How can we say we are for children, when social programs that assist low-income families, women and children are put on the chopping block or dropped completely? How do we feed the sheep and tend these little lambs who are not yet sheep?

The circumstances and conditions under which a baby is born have lifelong implications. A child whose mother receives little or no prenatal care is far more likely to experience chronic health problems than other children whose mothers did receive prenatal care. An infant born into a family that is poor faces considerably greater risk of not reaching his or her full potential.<sup>2</sup>

However, we also realize that the economic and social policies of a nation and the political realities equally impact and may have lifelong implications on a child's life. One of the ways that society measures

the progress and success of a nation is by how well we take care of our children to insure our future. We look at key indicators in health, economic, social and education well-being of children. According to the latest report from America's Children: Key

National Indicators of Well-Being 2004, the health of our nation's children has improved in many areas but increases in overweight, infant mortality and low-birth weight represent major challenges. Mothers who lack health care insurance are less likely to seek and obtain prenatal care which may contribute to low-birth weight babies, which in turn may contribute to infant deaths before their first birthday. In fact the Children's Defense Fund records that every 19 minutes a baby dies before his first birthday or 76 babies each day. If children are vital to the future of America, it behooves us to invest more in them. We must make changes in some of the social, political and economic policies of our nation.

How can we tend to these little lambs when we allow the marketing of fast food, snacks, and beverages to children in communities and schools? The increase in food marketing to children has contributed to the rise in obesity of

our children which makes them more vulnerable to chronic illness such as diabetes, high cholesterol, heart disease and high blood pressure. The prevalence of overweight children in America has increased sharply since 1980. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), currently 16 percent of children and teens ages 6-19 are overweight, an increase that has more than doubled.



**A child whose mother receives little or no prenatal care is far more likely to experience chronic health problems**



<sup>1</sup> Title taken from the Center for Healthcare Reform, Orange, CA

<sup>2</sup> “The Right Start” 2004, Douglas W. Nelson, President of the Annie E. Casey Foundation ([www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart/](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/rightstart/))

This societal problem affects adults as well (65% of adults are overweight or obese). It jeopardizes the future for all, but especially children.

How can we feed the sheep when levels of environmental contaminants in the air, water, food and soil lead to increases in asthma and other respiratory diseases, childhood cancers and other conditions that impact the health and well-being of children.<sup>3</sup>

How can we tend and feed the lambs when we allow the giant tobacco industry to continuously target and market its deadly product to our children addicting them early and sending them to an early death. In fact according to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, over 2,000 children become regular smokers every day, approximately 730,000 new underage smokers every year. One-third of them will die prematurely from a tobacco-related disease. How are we feeding the sheep when Congress votes to deny the Food and Drug Administration from regulating tobacco products and who passed a tobacco buyout which would take away funds from the State Children's Health Insurance Program to pay for it!

How are we tending the sheep when the former Surgeon General, David Satcher, in his report on Children's Mental health (January 2001) stated that the nation is facing a public crisis in mental health in children and adolescents. One in ten children suffer from mental illness severe enough to cause a level of impairment and fewer than one in five receive needed treatment because our institutions and systems are not meeting their needs and because families lack health insurance. The report also states that 21% of nine year olds and above have a mental disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Hyperactivity or Bipolar disease.

We certainly are not feeding the sheep when one in eight or nine million children under 19 years of age are without health insurance, 90 percent have at least one working parent. According to the Children's Defense Fund, each day 1,707 babies are born without health insurance. What does it mean for a child to have no medical home? It means not seeing a doctor as needed in order to prevent an illness from beginning or worsening. It means not getting the necessary life-saving immunizations. It means not receiving well-baby check-ups as they

move through growth stages. Studies show that children without health insurance miss more school than insured children, and that their classroom performance is impaired. How are we tending the sheep and the lambs when the President has allowed \$1.1 billion in The State Children's Health Insurance (SCHIP) funds to be withdrawn from the states and returned to the U.S. Treasury? The Children's Health Program was designed to help children in working families with incomes too high to qualify for health assistance and too low to afford private family coverage. The President had made statements about the need for expanding children's health coverage, but has allowed his Administration to withdraw these funds which could have provided health coverage for approximately 750,000 uninsured children. In addition, 200,000 children are likely to lose health coverage and many more needy children who are not yet enrolled in SCHIP will be denied coverage. The loss of these funds will prevent low-income children from receiving the health care they need. We will certainly have sicker children because of this.

*What does it mean for a child to have no medical home? For a child with a chronic illness it means sitting in fear and sadness on the sidelines and it means suffering that could have been avoided. There is always immediate cost, but the cost of neglect also lasts a lifetime.<sup>4</sup>*

When Jesus asks Simon Peter, "Do you love me?" He responds three times to Simon Peter by saying, "Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep." "Feed my sheep." Today Jesus is still asking us, "Do you love me?" "Then, take care of my children, these precious little ones." "Tend to their needs." "Protect them." "Provide for them." "Love them." "Feed them." "Make the children the highest health priority."

#### PRAYER

Lord, thank you for our health and healthcare. Let us see clearly that a nation with the will to provide every child with health care can achieve this. Grant us hearts with such a firm commitment.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> America's Children and the Environment: Measures of Contaminants, Body Burdens, and Illnesses ([www.epa.gov/envirohealth/children/](http://www.epa.gov/envirohealth/children/))

<sup>4</sup> Center for Healthcare Reform, Orange, CA

<sup>5</sup> "Ibid."

# Children in poverty

Pat Conover

**P**OVERTY is a loaded word today in the United States. You are invited to set aside your preconceptions about what children and families in poverty are like, to consider their resources and accomplishments, to consider their broad diversity, to consider the multiple tracks in and out of poverty, and to consider the many institutions that help and hinder children in poverty. Children in poverty are not only diverse as individuals and in their family and community circumstances, but they are also diverse in terms of the institutional and social realities they face as they figure out who they are and how they choose to live their lives.

According to the most recent 2002 Census Bureau numbers, 12,133,000 people 17-years-old or younger in the United States live in poverty. These young people comprise 16.7 percent of all children in the United States, down from about 39 percent in 1959. 11,646,000 poor children live in families, and the rest are in institutions, or on their own, or in various informal living circumstances. The number of children in poverty increased by nearly half a million from 2001 to 2002.

The Census Bureau adjusts its definition of poverty annually. In 2004 the official poverty level was \$15,670 for a family of three and \$18,850 for a family of four. Over 14 million people lived in families with incomes below half of the official poverty measure; in fact the average family in poverty had an income more than \$7,000 below the official poverty measure. A minimum-wage worker cannot escape poverty through full time work in the United States, because at \$5.15-an-hour, a full-time worker toiling 40 hours for 50 weeks will earn only \$10,300 a year before taxes. While costs for food and clothing have remained relatively low and consistent, costs for housing and transportation are highly varied. Families with incomes above the official poverty line who have high housing or transportation or health costs can face financial circumstances substantially more severe than some families below the official poverty line. Access to various government benefits mitigates some of the costs for some families. The Earned Income Tax Credit is one

of the most important federal subsidies for workers at or below poverty.

Most children in poverty live in families with one or more employed members. In 2002 only 10 percent of families in poverty had no workers, 30 percent had one worker, and 60 percent had two workers. While some of those counted as unemployed did not have formal employment, many nonetheless contributed family income through informal employment such as child care and unpaid work in family farms or businesses. Some children have jobs that contribute to the family income.

**H**ere are important employment realities. Approximately two million people, such as farm workers, work in jobs that pay less than the minimum wage. Much employment is seasonal. Many low-income jobs are designed to be part-time so that employers can avoid paying health care or other benefits. Many part-time workers would like to work full-time, and many low-income workers have more than one job. The costs of employment such as clothing and transportation can amount to a significant part of paid income. For low-income workers the cost of child-care, especially formal child care centers, is prohibitive. Low income jobs are the least likely to have health care, benefits, or paid vacation or personal days to take care of family needs. Low income workers are the least likely to have material investments such as a car to help them improve their situations. One significant reason for becoming poor is injury or illness, and one of the paths out of poverty is regaining health or retraining for different employment.

Of the 7,229,000 families living in poverty in 2002, 3,052,000, 44 percent were married couple families. Single parent families are more likely to be in poverty. Divorce or the death of a spouse, is among the common paths into poverty particularly for women. Other families cope with poverty by forming households without a married couple, households where the distribution of income and the care of children



Plight of Our Children

can be highly varied. Most single parent households are headed by a woman. Since women are more likely to be employed in low-paying jobs than men, gender inequality in employment is a significant cause of poverty for children. Poverty in single-parent households may be influenced by the payment, or non-payment, of child support. Not uncommonly, the non-custodial parent is in an institution, is incapacitated, or is very young or otherwise marginal to the workforce.

While in some situations marriage can become a path out of poverty, it is not reasonable to expect that marriage will be a universal solution to poverty or that mere counseling will eliminate poverty by promoting marriage. Many women in poverty who are caring for children have themselves been the victims of sexual and/or physical abuse. Furthermore, such women are often struggling mightily to pay the bills and hold their families together. Even when there are not additional issues of addiction or mental illness or various physical and mental handicaps, those most likely to become married as a solution to poverty are people who became poor because of divorce or those who have other social, family, or personal resources that might make remarriage more likely.

### How Can Our Nation Help Children Overcome Poverty?

Here are two strategies:

The first is to help parents earn more income through improving access to employment. One goal is to improve the income and benefits associated with employment by increasing the minimum wage, increasing the benefits available to workers, providing tax-based support for low-income workers—such as child care and health care, protection of overtime pay, and provision of unemployment insurance for low-income workers. Another goal is to prepare parents who are workers and potential workers to obtain better jobs that can lift them from poverty, and numerous federal, state, local, and private programs further this strategy. Positive employment strategies view low income people as a great resource of work potential for the economy, assume that such should be adequately rewarded, and that the government should invest in various programs to strengthen the labor. Welfare reform is a punitive twist on the employment approach because it withholds benefits in an effort to force parents into greater work efforts. Derived from the myth that poverty is embedded in a culture-of-poverty, welfare reform assumes that poor peo-

ple are resistant to work.

The second overall strategy is to provide a variety of supports and opportunities directly for children so that they can grow up and be able to lift themselves into productive lives. This strategy was at the heart of the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC), a strategy totally subverted and lost in the change to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program that emphasizes time limits and sanctions to force parents into the work force, with little or no concern for what happens to the children in such families. Programs to expand opportunity include public education and a wide range of other efforts: subsidized child care, health care, pre-school education, programs that combat child hunger, zoos, libraries, and a mix of recreational, social, and safety activities.

There are also programs for children struggling inside or outside of their families: through the criminal courts, various health and anti-mental illness programs, adoption and foster care programs, and an array of counseling and youth programs. Services are subsidized for children with special health needs and a mix of psychosocial needs, some of whom are institutionalized but not necessarily cut off from their families.

Of all the institutional strategies for helping children escape poverty and make their own way in the world, none is more important than public schools. The biggest problem for public education as an anti-poverty strategy is that most public schools get the great majority of their financial support from local property taxes, and not surprisingly, most children in poverty live in communities with a low level of tax-based support for their public schools. Fundamental inequality of opportunity is a major barrier to the strategy for helping children to escape poverty through their own efforts.

#### PRAYER

until the sun stops to shine  
 you have always made me belong  
 you are who holds my hand  
 to guide me through my day  
 and to help me understand  
 what life may bring along the way  
 you are my God my only one  
 and you show me that dreams can come true  
 so thank you God for everything  
 I know I will always love you

KATE NUSCHKE

*DayBook for New Voices, August 31, page 143*

# Feed my lambs

Ann Hanson

**I**REMEMBER the kitchen table in the home in which I was raised. It was rectangular and had this chrome edge to it. Sometimes when the conversation got boring—or when it became uncomfortable, I would run my thumbnail along the chrome, hoping that I could block out whatever was going on. Funny what you remember from your childhood.

Dad sat on one end of the table, Mom at the other, my older brother across from me and my younger sister beside him. Next to me there was always an extra chair. I can remember the variety of people who would sometimes sit in this chair. Often there were adults—people who came into my parent’s lives—not just people they knew, but often the stranger who might have come into my Dad’s garage with a broken-down auto. They needed to eat and Dad knew where dinner was being served...

More often than not, the chair was filled by a child or a youth. They were friends of mine (or my brother or sister) and once in awhile they were children from a migrant family who did not have enough money to buy the school’s lunch.

This kitchen table and the people who surrounded it taught me quite a bit about who I am called to be as a follower of Jesus. Oh, I didn’t know it then, but I now realize the example of hospitality and care my parents always extended to the ‘other.’ No one was excluded from our table. And, the meatloaf was always large enough to go around.

So, quite literally, my parents taught me in their own way, how to put Christ’s words into action: “Feed my lambs.” “Tend my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.”

How does this relate to the ministry to which I have been called? The ministry of human sexuality no less? As the person in the national setting of the United Church of Christ who is called upon to promote sexuality education in the context of a faith community, I can compare what education we are providing our children and youth (through *Our Whole Lives—Sexuality and Our Faith*) to the government-sponsored ‘abstinence-only-until-married’ education that often times uses fear tactics, shame and

medically inaccurate information to try to control youth.

The typical ‘abstinence-only-until marriage’ program excludes information that literally might save the lives of many of God’s children. These programs do not include information that is so life-saving to all our children – including our gay, lesbian and bi-sexual children. Sexual orientation cannot be discussed in these ‘abstinence-only’ classes. It is our moral responsibility to provide information to ALL God’s children.

In contrast, the values of *Our Whole Lives* (responsibility, sexual health, self worth, justice and inclusivity) are incorporated into each of its lessons. In addition, each question asked is respectfully answered, and youth are given accurate information on protection against unintended pregnancy.

*Our Whole Lives—Sexuality and Our Faith*, the comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality resource for children and youth developed by the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association, meets every characteristic of effective sexuality and HIV education programs.<sup>1</sup> Douglas Kirby, a respected evaluator of sexuality programs, stresses comprehensive education, including basic, accurate information about sexuality, including the misuse of sexuality; well-trained teachers; practice with communication, negotiation, and refusal skills; and activi-



**It is our moral responsibility to provide information to ALL God’s children.**



ties that address social pressures that influence sexual behavior. It's important to note that *Our Whole Lives* does teach and consistently reinforces a clear message that abstinence from sexual intercourse is the only 100% effective method of preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases; however, it also provides complete and accurate information on contraception and disease prevention.

Many churches and people raising children and youth are ambivalent about whether or not to teach comprehensive sexuality to their loved ones. This is somewhat understandable because we are living in a country where healthy discussions of sexuality are few and far between. In the meantime, we are bombarded with unhealthy messages about sexuality each and every day—from TV, the internet, and other news outlets.

In the largest human sexuality survey ever conducted with youth closely related to faith communities, editors report over and over again that our youth are begging for accurate information. Concerns about sexuality are high on the list of most of our teenagers. In those churches that are incorporating comprehensive human sexuality into their ministry, youth express gratitude. In the Executive Summary of *Faith Matters: Teenagers, Sexuality, and Religion*,<sup>2</sup> one of the key findings is this: Youth from congregations which provided young people with information about contraception and sexually transmitted diseases reported no instances of pregnancy or sexually transmitted disease. Youth from those congregations were not any more likely or less likely than other youth in the study to have had sexual intercourse. And, much to my delight, *Our Whole Lives* is lifted up many times as the best sexuality resource available for faith communities.

I believe if we are to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ seriously, we need to literally feed all our lambs, as was modeled around my kitchen table, and figuratively—we need to listen to what our children and youth are saying. And, have the courage to not be afraid.

<sup>1</sup> Kirby D. *Emerging Answers: Research Findings on Program to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*, Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.religiousinstitute.org/matters.html>, Faith Matters Christian Community, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> DayBook

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. In your faith community, are youth routinely asked about what their needs, hopes and desires are?
2. Give an example of when you, your family or your faith community welcomed the stranger to sit at your table.

## PRAYER

*The following prayer touched me deeply.*

### A Prayer for Teens in Pain<sup>3</sup>

Dear God,

Please bless those who are in the dark,

They are unable to see,

The wonderful things in life,

You've made for those like me.

They have hatred for their bodies,

Hatred for their lives,

They are drowning in this hatred,

It may even make them die.

They come home and down a bottle of pills,

Or cut their innocent wrists.

They are crying out for help,

As they shake their angry fists.

Scared of who they really are,

Too afraid to change.

But if someone doesn't aid them soon,

It may be too late.

So, God, please let them know you're here,

You can help them see the light.

Because living life is so much fun,

They need a reason to fight.

Amen.

**HEATHER WEHR**

# Child care

Pat Conover

**W**HEN THE UNITED STATES was mostly rural and mostly agricultural there was no such thing as “child care” as a political issue. Children were raised by their parents. The big issue was public education, children leaving their homes to learn to read and write.

In the cities, lower income women worked but there was little broad concern for their children. But during the Second World War many women went to work for the first time in the war effort and in the factories. In the 1970s and 1980s, middle-class women began taking on more-and-more employment and the need for child-care was “discovered.” Once it became politically accepted that the children of families where parents were employed needed some kind of child care, the question became what the role of government would be.

A mix of local, state, and federal regulations and subsidies began to be created. Following some horror stories and advocacy by a wide array of groups interested in children, the Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) was created in 1990 as the first attempt at a comprehensive federal child care program. It replaced several previous federal programs. The CCDBG was vigorously resisted by those opposed to “big government” and by social traditionalists who argued that child care would destroy the family and that mothers should stay home instead of going to work. Both groups fought against federal funding of the CCDBG. They also opposed regulations to protect children, enriched programming, and requirements for better trained teachers. They continue to oppose the expansion of subsidies, increased protective regulations, quality enhancement, and programs to improve the pay and benefits of child care workers. It remains a tragic irony that many child care workers can’t afford child care for their own children just as many lower income health care workers can’t afford health insurance.

In addition to the direct subsidy programs through the CCDBG, additional funding for child care for higher income parents was created through the Child Care Tax Credit. In 2004, the need for child care, as well as the need to upgrade the quality of child care, remains substantial. Child care continues to be a major expense for working families. Tuitions for center-based child care are higher than tuitions for community colleges in many places. While costs remain high, child care workers are

among the lowest paid employees in the United States. That makes turnover high and morale low—a core problem for quality. The expansion of public school Kindergarten and pre-Kindergarten, and the presence of Head Start programs, which combine child care with health care and social services, and new initiatives in after-school programs, have upgraded the quality of child care for some children. But programs for infants and toddlers, for children with special needs, and for families where parents work unusual hours, remain particularly difficult. The wealthy in the United States tend to avoid the challenges of child care by hiring “nannies,” often paying much more to care for a single child than is paid to a lead teacher in a child care center with far more responsibilities.

**S**ocial attitudes continue to affect American child care. Today when 79 percent of American mothers of school-age children work outside the home along with approximately two-thirds of mothers with children under the age of six, many in our society deeply believe that child care should remain a personal and not a public responsibility. And without acknowledging the overwhelming challenges they face in the search for affordable, available, reliable, enriched child-care, many women judge themselves personally inadequate when they are unable to locate an acceptable program. Society also judges poor women for their frequently inadequate arrangements, without acknowledging that ability-to-pay a significant chunk of money is the key variable.

In the United States child care continues to be patched together as though the majority of women stay home with young children, and women themselves help keep this myth alive by pretending that childcare can be easily managed with a little ingenuity and a sense of humor. Our assumption in the United States that child care is a private transaction with parents in control may be the central female expression of American rugged individualism. In fact, for middle-class professional women, locating and keeping child care may be the most daunting challenge of early parenthood. For poor women, required by welfare reform laws to be in the workplace, finding childcare is a necessity that too often results in settling for a custodial situation that worries the mother and may leave a child in an unsafe or unstimulating environment day after day.

The argument that mothers should stay home is no longer often heard, but it continues to affect public policy around child care. Some continue to ignore the evidence of waiting lists to argue that plenty of child care is available and that informal care by neighbors and relatives can pick up any slack. Through a kind of magical thinking many continue to argue that welfare parents can work longer hours and that many more welfare parents can be forced into work programs, without any expansion in child care accessibility or quality. President Bush has proposed the restructuring of Head Start into a state block grant program that focuses on academic readiness alone and need not continue the rich mix of services and parental involvement.

How important is it to raise children well? The issues of child care are still as simple as that.

## PRAYER

God, I pray for all the orphans of the world—that you'll send someone to hold them and love them—even if only for a little while. And I pray that you'll help us to do what we can to work for a world in which all children have the love and nurture and basic things they need. And please, God, wherever Fania is, let her know that she is loved, and that I think of her a lot. Amen.

EMMA CATLETT-SIRCHIO

*DayBook for New Voices, July 12, page 117*

# How will we be judged?

Rev. Sala W.J. Nolan

**D**O NOT IMAGINE that children are untouched by crime or the criminal justice system that seeks to address it.

This year, four girls ranging in age from 13 to 17 filed suit in Columbus, Ohio against officials of the Scioto Girls Prison because they were denied access to attorneys after they had been physically and sexually assaulted by prison guards. Their allegations are part of a federal lawsuit claiming that Ohio's Department of Youth Services routinely denies young people access to legal support when they are assaulted, beaten, or given improper medical care.

One of the girls alleges that she was sexually assaulted by a guard, and as a consequence, was placed in a special unit on suicide watch. Other girls report injuries including a ruptured eardrum, a broken arm, and serious bruises. Some allege they were threatened with retaliation if they reported the abuse, and one reports she was told to identify her injuries as self-inflicted.

The people of our world who are most likely to be victims of violent crime—rape, robbery, murder, and assault—are children and teenagers. On average over the last 25 years, juveniles were involved in one fourth of serious,

violent victimizations.

Children are victimized by people they know. About one in five child murders is committed by a family member, while homicides of older children aged 15 to 17 are most likely to be committed by a friend or acquaintance.

The people most likely to be left in poverty by the incarceration of the wage-earners is their children.

In 2002, students age 12 to 18 were victims of about 88,000 serious violent crimes at school, and about 309,000 away from school. In any given year over the last decade, between 7% and 9% of students in grades 9 through 12 reported being threatened or injured with a weapon (such as a gun, knife, or club) on school property.

Children also commit crimes. Delinquency offenses are acts committed by young people that, if they were committed by an adult, could result in criminal charges. In 1999, U.S. courts handled nearly 1.7 million delinquency cases. In the years between 1990 and 1999, the number of drug law violation cases that were adjudicated increased by 169%, and weapons offense cases increased by 32%.

According to many researchers, adolescents in the



**May our  
faith be made  
visible by such  
encouragement  
of youth that  
crimes against  
them begin to  
dissipate**

criminal justice system have significantly higher rates of mental disorders than youth in the general population.

Some mental health professionals have estimated that up to 19% of incarcerated youth may be suicidal.

International law prohibits the use of the death penalty for crimes committed by people younger than 18. Youth who commit serious and violent crimes are vulnerable to adult punishments. Many who are convicted of serious crimes are housed in adult facilities.

We all know stories of the girl who picks out a dressy gown—not for her wedding, but for her funeral—and of the boy who never plans for what he can become because he cannot even imagine living long enough to grow up.

If we think of the children of our communities as “them” and “other” we will create a world of division. If we allow our children to be poor, to have no choices, to do without education or nurturing, then we will create a world of scarcity in which nothing can flourish.

Our country is at war, and its economic resources are diminishing. The first fiscal casualties in the homeland are social services and education. In our history, forms of punishment have been severe, and visited upon our most vulnerable. Is the use of our children in prison so very different today than in earlier times? Any civilization is judged by the way it treats its young and its old. How will we be judged?

Times of scarcity breed poverty, and poverty affects families. Lack of education affects not only the individuals who are deprived of it, but our larger communities and our ability to stand honorably in the world. If we continue down a path of neglect, deprivation and mass incarceration, we will only intensify this cycle. In the end, we will be pressed to build more and more prisons to hold people who are less and less equipped to live well in the world.

God is still speaking to us, telling us to nourish and protect our young. Let our witness be the well-being of our children. May our faith be made visible by such encouragement of youth that crimes against them begin to dissipate. May the desperation that leads our youth to commit violence dissolve in the presence of our constant, practical love and care. These, the least of us, are also our future.

Facts on crime victimization and characteristics of crimes are available through the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics and are available online at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bis/>.

The U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs also offers information on juveniles in the justice system through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), which publishes an annual fact sheet on juvenile court statistics.

Resources are available online at [www.ojjdp.ncirs.org/oistatbb/openpag.asp](http://www.ojjdp.ncirs.org/oistatbb/openpag.asp).

For more information on the case of sexual abuse and denial of due process at Scioto Girls Prison, see the Columbus, Ohio Dispatch of November 17, 2004 (<http://www.dispatch.com>), and the Cincinnati Enquirer of July 30, 2004 (<http://www.enquirer.com>).

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When children are punished by incarceration, what do they become? What skills have they learned that they bring with them when they re-enter the community at large?
2. Prevention is more effective in teaching children than prosecution can ever be. How can we engage effectively with the children and youth of our neighborhoods, our churches, our families, our acquaintances? What do we model for our youth by our behavior? What do we teach? How do we express our love and hope for our youth in ways that bring them courage and strength?

## PRAYER

O, Creator,  
 Loving Light and Power,  
 what world have we made ourselves  
 to live in?  
 Broken families, broken homes,  
 Broken promises, broken hearts,  
 Broken windows, broken bones,  
 Broken light broken by broken trees.  
 Lift us up, God,  
 each one of us a broken child  
 with broken dreams,  
 and into our broken bodies  
 breathe.  
 Heal us with your moving Spirit,  
 private music and silent words  
 whispered softly to the heart.

**GABRIELE S. CHASE**

*DayBook for New Voices, April 22, page 66*

# Women in international mission

## An Interview With: Tim Colvin Living and working in South Africa

by Ana Gobledale

**I** FIRST MET Tim and her husband, Larry, in Texas, when Tod and I slept in their living room for a week! We were on missionary deputation and the Colvins were our hosts. I have since visited Tim, Larry and Katie in Gaborone, Botswana, and now can picture them at Kuruman, the oldest continuous Christian mission in southern Africa—sitting perhaps on the very bench where David Livingstone proposed to the daughter of Robert Moffet! I feel honored to be a colleague in international mission with Tim!

Instead of creating an article out of the responses I have received from my email interview, as I have in previous issues of *Common Lot*, I've decided to let you read the responses as the missionary has written them. So now, I'd like to introduce Tim Colvin, missionary with Global Ministries, and invite you to read on and get to know her better.

Ana



### Where are you from, and what's your family background (church, etc)?

I'm from a small town in west Texas that looks exactly like the edge of the Kalahari Desert where we live now. When I went away to college, I vowed never to move back to dusty, dry, bare west Texas. Sometimes I think God plunked me down in the Kalahari out of spite! The eldest of 5 children, I grew up in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) where my grandfather sat next to me in the pew and my grandmother kept her eye on me from the choir.

### What work do you do now?

I currently serve as pastor of a congregation in the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA). The church, in a so-called "coloured" township, is located in the Northern Cape province of South Africa at the edge of the Kalahari Desert. The town of Kuruman is built on a spring that provides 20 million litres of water every day so this really is an oasis in the desert. It is quite green and lush with all kinds of fruits and vegetables, though the growing season is not year round since the winters are really cold.

The town of Kuruman, like most towns in South Africa, was divided into townships during the apartheid era. Kuruman itself was for whites, Mthibistad was for blacks, and Wrenchville where we live was for coloreds (racially mixed). Those communities still exist today, though the white community is slowly becoming integrated. We are the only whites in Wrenchville.

We live in my church's manse. Serving the church is a 24/7 job so living in the manse, rather than at the mission where Larry works, allows me to be available to the people and to keep up with what's going on in the community in which my members live.



### You have an interesting first name, "Tim." Where did it come from?

I was named for a college friend of my mother. Though I never met the woman, I think we must be the only women with this name. I've always enjoyed it. It serves as a nice ice-

breaker when meeting someone new.

When we first arrived, many reacted in horror when they found out we lived in the colored community. “Aren’t you afraid?” Actually, we are not and never have been afraid during our time in southern Africa. I know bad things happen here, but don’t they happen everywhere?

The church had been vacant for 2 years when I arrived. They struggle to pay a minister a full-time salary. One of our goals while I am here is to get them strong enough to call their own minister. The congregation had hoped for an intern to serve them part-time but were totally shocked to discover their new “predikant” was not only a woman, but a white American who speaks English! (The people here speak Afrikaans.)

**What experiences as a child, or people who influenced you as a child, helped to lead you to your commitment to the church and to mission?**

A jolly round Sunday School Superintendent used to welcome every child to church each Sunday morning, calling us by name and making us feel as if he had been waiting especially for us to walk through the door. It was a place I knew I was welcomed and embraced no matter what. That has been my model for ministry. To me that is God’s grace in action.

**Share any significant events in your faith journey that will help the women of the church to better understand your call to international mission.**

I served as Associate Minister for 9 years at Downey Avenue Christian Church, among many retired missionaries and church leaders. Every Wednesday, I joined The Quilters for lunch and listened to Bertha Gilchrist and others talk of their days in the mission field, experiences that I still find unbelievable. When I joined the mission staff of Global Ministries, I told them it was their fault for influencing me as they had! From these women—and their husbands—I gained a sense of mission that my ministry had been missing.

**What happened to make you consider international mission?**

My husband and I both served in local churches but had always talked about working overseas so when we found ourselves ready to relocate at the same time, we sent our applications to Global Ministries. We trusted that if it was what God wanted, it would happen. God must have been waiting for those applications because we were asked to leave for Africa within weeks.

**Share a story from your current work or life situation or share a time when you met Christ/God face-to-face.**

On the first Tuesday of each month I deliver home-bound communion to my sick and elderly church members. One day I offered to take one of the older women with me on my “rounds”, as she doesn’t get out very much. The first person we visited was her cousin, who turned 100 on 4 January. He is blind and doesn’t hear too well but his mind is still sharp. We began talking to him as we entered the front door and by the time we came to his bedroom, he knew there was someone with me. The cousin kept talking to him as her old legs took her slowly toward his bed. Finally he recognized the voice of the woman he had not seen in many years. The look of joy on his face was priceless, as was the very animated conversation that followed. As we shared the bread and cup, we thanked God for the fellowship and for God’s spirit that moved the woman to venture out of her house that day. Since then home-bound communion has become a social event for older members of our church who climb into Reverend’s car every chance they get and spend the morning laughing and telling stories with their childhood friends.

**What is the most rewarding part of your work?**

Discovering that local church ministry—as the sole pastor—is not so bad. And discovering that I enjoy preaching!!

**What is the most challenging aspect of your work?**

Discovering that local church ministry can be a real pain in the—neck, and that sometimes I’d just as soon not have to preach. I think it’s one of those love/hate things.

**What spiritual disciplines strengthen you in your work and daily life?**

Prayer and meditation; also visiting with my church members keeps me in touch with what I’m about and why I do what I do.

**Where else have you served with Global Ministries?**

Our first assignment overseas was in Botswana, where my husband, Larry, and I worked at a theological college. I tended the library full of old, dated books “graciously donated” by retired ministers, and tutored

Old Testament students in the distance education program. After 2 1/2 years of that, we were invited by the Botswana Synod of UCCSA to serve as coordinators of the HIV/AIDS ministry, which we did for 2 years. Both assignments allowed us to travel extensively throughout the country and see things many life-long residents of the country never saw.

### You have 2 daughters. How has this impacted your decisions to live and work internationally?

One of our considerations when we applied to be missionaries was the future of our children. Micky was finishing high school and Katy was ready to start school. The timing was good for a change and we wanted both girls to have a broader world view that living overseas can provide. Micky joined us shortly after we arrived and spent a year in Botswana, a “gap year” for her before going back to Chicago to work and live. It was a good experience for her and one that continues to have an impact on her life. Arriving in southern Africa at 5 years old, Katy was like a sponge when it came to picking up languages and customs. She has adapted to our changed lifestyle better than any of us, whether we live in a so-called “colored” community, a neighborhood of “black” people, or entertain friends from Norway in our home. She is truly a child of the world with a sense of community and family that causes her to claim brothers and sisters in 4 different countries and 3 continents. Try explaining that to a teacher on parents’ night! She has just turned 12 and is looking forward to going to boarding school next year. My only regret is that, due to the loooooong plane rides between the US and Africa, neither of the girls enjoys traveling, much to the dismay of their parents.

### What’s your favorite Bible verse?

“Oh, gosh, that really depends on the kind of day I’m having. Often Psalm 55:6 comes to mind. “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.”

It is usually followed at some point by verse 16.

“But I call to God, and the Lord saves me.”

But lately Proverbs 3:5 has served me well. We are already contemplating home leave next year and

this verse provides reassurance for me.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

### What’s your favorite hymn or chorus?

A chorus I’ve learned since being here in South Africa is

As, as jy net glo, alles is moontlik, as as jy net glo.

Dumela fela, tsothe dirogile, dumela fela.

If, if you believe, all things are possible, if, if you believe.

It is always sung in Afrikaans, Setswana, and English.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Tim’s grandparents played an important role in her early church life. How does your church encourage and support grandparents and grandchildren participating together in the life of the church?
2. What Bible passage “serves you well”?
3. Visiting parishioners is an important part of Tim’s ministry, and now for others in her congregation. When was the last time you “ventured out” to pay a visit to a home-bound parishioner? How might your church grow in the area of home visitation?
4. Many children, like Katy, live with their Global Ministries missionary parents around the world. These children, sometimes called “Third Culture Kids” are “transplants”, yet are at home where they live. Whom in your community is a “transplant”? How can you help them feel more “at home” in your community?

### PRAYER OPPORTUNITIES

1. Katy, Mickey and other children of missionaries serving Global Ministries.
2. Grandparents serving as faith role models for their grandchildren.
3. Tim and Larry in their ministry in Kuruman, South Africa
4. The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA), our International Partner Church in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Mocambique.

# HIV and AIDS, children in harms way

Rev. Mike Schuenemeyer

**A**T THE AGE OF 10, Kennedy Arinda, of Kenya, lost both of his parents to AIDS. His home is in Kibera, a slum in Nairobi, where 1 in 5 people is infected with HIV. Thousands have already died there, leaving behind some 50,000 orphans. Three of Kennedy's aunts have also died of AIDS, leaving his grandmother to care for 12 grandchildren.

Carina is a teenager who performs in a theatre group which stages performances about AIDS for teenagers and street children in Guatemala City, Guatemala. "In the community there was this young boy who had AIDS," she recalls. "He died three years ago." The boy went around in a gang that used injected drugs and when they shot-up, they shared needles. That is how he became infected. Carina said, "When he told the rest of his friends, his friends left him. That is what hurt him the most." In Guatemala it is estimated that 67,000 children and adults are infected with HIV, and more than 30,000 children have been orphaned by the disease.

Shuanmiao Village is in the rural area of the Henan Province of China. It has a population of about 3,300, of whom more than 800 are infected with HIV. In 2003, a story about HIV in Shuangmiao Village aired on the national Chinese television, revealing for the first time what many rural parts of China are facing. The TV report includes the story of a 14 year old boy who has already lost his father to AIDS. His mother is also sick and cannot get out of bed. She is concerned how he and his brother will manage when she dies. The 14 year boy is overwhelmed by the responsibility he has had to bear and worries he will never finish Jr. High.

HIV (human immuno-deficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), which damages the body's defense system. People who have AIDS become weaker because their bodies lose the ability to fight all illnesses. It is transmitted through the exchange of any HIV-infect-

ed bodily fluids. Transfer may occur during all stages of the infection/disease. HIV is found in blood, semen (including pre-ejaculate fluid), vaginal secretions and breast milk.

By 2004, some 2.1 million children under age 15 were living with HIV/AIDS, most of whom became infected during their mother's pregnancy, during birth or through breastfeeding. In fact, 600,00-800,00 newborns were infected with HIV in 2004, most through mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

More than 15 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Four out of five of them live in sub-Saharan Africa (Global Movement for

Children, [www.gmfc.org/hivaids](http://www.gmfc.org/hivaids)). It is not an exaggeration to say that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is unraveling decades of progress for children throughout the world, but especially in the countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

At the XV International AIDS Conference (Bangkok, Thailand, 2004), UNICEF Executive Director, Carol Bellamy said, "It is a tidal wave of children who have lost one or more of their parents," adding, "It has the possibility of destabilizing societies quite dramatically." (Baragona, *VOA News*, 7/13). When you listen to the stories and study the data, it becomes clear how HIV exposes and exploits the vulnerability of the poor and the powerless. Children, especially girls, and women, are in harms way.

**E**ach time Jesus asks the question, "Do you love me?" Peter answers, "Yes, Lord. You know that I love you." And each time Jesus replied by calling on Peter to do something about it, saying, "Feed my lambs" or "tend my sheep" or "feed my sheep." We need to hear both the question, response and Jesus' charge to do something in the context of a world with HIV. We need to hear it in light of what is happening to poor women and children who are so profoundly affected by this pandemic.



**More than  
15 million  
children under  
the age of 18  
have lost one  
or both  
parents to  
AIDS**

Our Christian faith compels us to put love into action in response to HIV. Nothing short of a global response will enable us to turn the tide on HIV/AIDS and it will need to be on a scale the world has never before experienced. Everyone has a role to play in addressing the needs of children in the HIV/AIDS pandemic because everyone can do something about HIV where they live. Educate, advocate, donate, these are the love-in-action words for effective response. Everyone has something to learn, something they can do and something they can give to the cause.

Effective response requires not only addressing HIV/AIDS, but also addressing the conditions that create risk and vulnerability. Poverty, gender inequality, economic insecurity, war, lack of education, and the lack of access to treatment and care contribute significantly to risk and vulnerability, especially for children. In such conditions, the choices are often limited to doing what it takes to survive. This is the culture in which HIV thrives and it is wiping out an entire generation of people together with their children.

The good news is that hope abounds despite the enormous difficulties of this dread disease and its effects on children. Hope abounds because where people care there is hope. Hope abounds because difficult as it may be, we can address the conditions that create risk and vulnerability. Hope abounds because transmission of HIV is preventable. Hope abounds because there are proven and affordable ways to treat all those who are infected, adding not only length, but quality to their lives. Most of all, hope abounds because it is God's will that we bring an end to HIV and AIDS in the world and people are responding to God's call to join the effort.

**WORLD  
WIDE  
AWARENESS**

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How does poverty make children so vulnerable to the spread of HIV?
2. What makes affordable treatment and care critical to meeting the needs of children affected by HIV?
3. In what ways do you feel called to respond to the "love-in-action words," "educate, advocate and donate." What are you called to learn, do and give in the effort to respond to needs of children affected by HIV and AIDS?

*Learn more at these web sites:*

[www.ucc.org/hivaids](http://www.ucc.org/hivaids)

[www.globalministries.org](http://www.globalministries.org)

[www.gmfc.org/hivaids](http://www.gmfc.org/hivaids)

[www.unicef.org/aids](http://www.unicef.org/aids)

[www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

## PRAYER

Dear God,  
We're walking for people who need our help.  
Step by step, all around town we walk with  
old folks and kids,  
families and grandparents,  
singles and doubles, and many dogs, too.  
Please let it be sunny and let the walk go well.  
Today, we walk for people with AIDS and HIV.

We're sorry that so many people have AIDS.  
We wish there were a cure.  
We pray that someday, a cure will be found.  
Someday there will be a cure,  
and people will survive this illness.

We ask that you  
help and comfort the people who have AIDS  
and HIV.  
Help them to get better so they may live their  
lives in peace  
without having to worry about their health.  
We pray these people will live long and happy  
lives.

Bless this walk and everyone here today.  
Amen.

*DayBook for New Voices, October 5, page 167*

# *The empowerment of children: “Let the children come” into our hearts*

by Debra Frantz

**I** SUSPECT, based on my own very protected upbringing in rural Ohio, that all children as they grow toward adulthood feel burdened at times by their powerlessness. The necessity of depending on adults to remedy the injustices they encounter can be very frustrating for children. It seems that each successive generation of children sometimes feel unheard by the adults who care for them. Children are not children forever—there is but a brief opportunity to hear and respond in ways that validate the experience of the child and engage them in creatively working with adults toward a safer, fairer world with opportunities for each person to join in creating abundance for all.

Through my experience as Program Associate in the Southern Asia Office of Global Ministries I have vicariously encountered many children whose experiences of powerlessness are shocking in their contrast to my own experiences. While I simply had to grow into the rights and responsibilities of adulthood in North American society, many of these children have no reason other than faith to hope for the miracles of sustenance, health care, schooling, opportunity for future employment, freedom to choose the future they want, or remedies in the face of profound injustices. As Jesus said “Let the children come,” let me bring a few of these children into your consciousness and invite you to encounter their experiences of powerlessness and the dreams they cling to in spite of the difficulties they face.

There are many ways that children can feel powerless, but perhaps the most profound are the experiences of fearing for the safety of your family and of being forcibly separated from your family. Both these experiences are disturbingly common among the children of Myanmar. Children in Myanmar are routinely stolen or “contracted” under the pretense that they will be given education and employment. These children may be used as manual laborers on road and

railway construction projects or in government agricultural work. Girls are often taken to work in brothels - some as young as 11 or 12 years old. Children are forcibly conscripted for service in the military and work as porters carrying supplies until they are big enough to carry a gun. An estimated 10 million children, throughout the world, are forced sex workers to reimburse a debt contracted by their parents. Three hundred thousand children around the world are serving in the military—seventy thousand of them in Myanmar. One young boy, Aung Tin, told of being forced into the military, given a gun even though he did not know how to fight and then being beaten by his commander because he fought so badly.<sup>1</sup>

**I**n some parts of the world it is a profound disadvantage to be a girl—or to be the parents of a girl. Girls are considered to be burdens, because a dowry must be provided to arrange a marriage for her. Sometimes these dowries are worth more than a family’s annual income. In India, approximately 7% fewer girls than boys are born. Those girl fetuses are aborted (or girl babies are killed) to avoid the burden that a daughter represents. When a family has insufficient resources to provide opportunities for all their children, the boys are sent to school and the girls are sent to work. A 12-year-old girl wrote: “People think that girls are spoiled by getting educated, so after primary education they stop their daughters from going to school.”<sup>2</sup> Children, whose parents cannot afford the cost of school, are sent to work in agricultural fields or brick kilns for long hours (and little pay) to help support their families. An 11-year-old boy wrote: “My body is too small to carry the huge bundles of cloth, but that is my job and I have to do it. If I drop the bundles then I am beaten by my employer. When I am working with the embroidery machine I am always

<sup>1</sup> “Join the Army or Go to Jail”, Burma Issues, February, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Pakistan’s Most Vulnerable Children Speak to the UN Special Session, May 7th - 9th, 2002, by Save the Children, Sweden, 2002.

hurting my fingers with the different needles.”<sup>3</sup>

Young girls often have no choice in who they marry, but are given in arranged marriages to husbands they do not know. There is no consideration of the girl’s wishes, hopes or dreams. In rural areas, marriage by age 14 is common because unmarried girls who go to work in the fields are considered fair game for sexual assault by men of the upper caste families, but married girls are generally left alone. Married girls then go to live with their husband’s families. For many this is the beginning of a life of abuse. Seventeen-year-old Rehana wrote: “I am soon going to marry a person I have never seen. I feel very unhappy because girls are also human beings and should be consulted in matters of marriage.”<sup>4</sup>

While the pain that this powerlessness causes girls is obvious, adults often don’t see the burden that inequality of the sexes places on boys. The expectations that boys will be productive and successful are often enormous. A 14-year-old boy named Sharif wrote “I am working in a motor mechanic workshop and I also go to evening school. I cannot carry on both these tasks, but my parents say I am a boy, not a girl, and I have to be strong.”<sup>5</sup>

The experiences of these children challenge those of us who feel our faith requires us to work for justice and human rights. How can we as individuals and communities of faith live out our faith in ways that can help empower children around the world to dream and to work toward fulfilling those dreams? Global Ministries, through its partnerships, missionaries and volunteers around the world, is working on your behalf to create reason for hope and opportunities for education, training and empowerment for children. There is much to do, but as a member of a United Church of Christ you already are involved. Thanks! We encourage you to get even more involved by choosing a country, an issue, a Partner or missionary to follow through visits to the Global Ministries website and communications with Common Global Ministries Board Members and national staff. Your participation matters!

<sup>3</sup> Pakistan’s Most Vulnerable Children Speak to the UN Special Session, May 7th - 9th, 2002, by Save the Children, Sweden, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Pakistan’s Most Vulnerable Children Speak to the UN Special Session, May 7th - 9th, 2002, by Save the Children, Sweden, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Pakistan’s Most Vulnerable Children Speak to the UN Special Session, May 7th - 9th, 2002, by Save the Children, Sweden, 2002.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Because the experience of powerlessness gives us insight into the experience of the children in this article, please reflect on when you have felt particularly powerless. What was it like? How has that experience affected your life?
2. Which of these stories most affected you? Why? How can you welcome these children into your awareness and express your compassion and your faith creatively in the light of their circumstances?
3. Empowering women and children is a common objective in the projects and programs that Global Ministries supports through our relationships with partners around the world. What would you like to see us do? How can you help us and support us in doing the work you envision?
4. Jesus also invited us to become like children. How might we become more like these children in ways that will enable us to serve God better?

## PRAYER

A  
single  
tear falls.  
a lonely heart  
breaks without a  
sound. the sun’s light  
fades, the fire dies out.  
yet in this hour, a new flame,  
a new fire, a new love, is found.  
the sun rises once more, chasing the  
night away. The birds sing happily as  
the rays of light caress their wings.  
and in that minute, a child sees  
such beauty as never  
before. a tear.

J. S. PRICE

*DayBook for New Voices, February 17, page 29*

# Welcoming children from around the world to Columbus, Ohio

Mary Kuenning Gross

*In every neighborhood, all across our country, there are good people insisting on a good start for the young, and doing something about it. — Fred Rogers*

**A**LL ACROSS OUR COUNTRY the growth in newcomer population has an implication in our neighborhoods and public schools as we welcome children who need English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction.

Consider these facts:

- One in five children under age 18 in the US today is the child of an immigrant, and immigrant children are the fastest growing segment of the nation's population of children.
- Four of five children born to immigrants in the US are US citizens.
- Twenty-six percent of children in immigrant families live in linguistically isolated homes where no one over age 14 has a strong command of the English language.

## One Neighborhood

On November 22, 2004, I visited with Dr. Brenda Custodio, an ESL Coordinator on special assignment with the Columbus, Ohio public school district. She took me on a tour of the Mifflin Welcome Center, told me about their program and its history. Many refugee children attend this school since Columbus is host to a growing refugee population.



The Mifflin Welcome Center is a “school within a school” at the Mifflin International Alternative Middle School, serving grades 6–8. There are 120 students in the ESL program at the Mifflin Welcome Center. Mifflin has eight teachers and eight teacher assistants. The teachers are certified as Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and for those seeking accreditation, classes are offered by Ohio State University in the evenings at the Mifflin Welcome Center.

The students who attend the Welcome Center must first take an assessment of their knowledge of the English language. Children born in other countries, have a parent who was born in another country and children who live in situations where English is not spoken at home are identified for this testing. These children have been in the US less than a year, may be refugees and may have no literacy in their birth languages. The student's English knowledge is assessed on a scale of 0 to 100. 0 to 5 is the lowest class and 5 to 10 is the next group.

**T**hese children are also given a health screening. They must test negative for tuberculosis prior to admission. Some may suffer from post traumatic stress disorder. It can be difficult to identify learning disabilities in children who speak other languages. Mary Donovan, ESL Program Coordinator, said that a child could have a hearing loss due to bomb blasts or untreated ear infections. Hearing loss can impair a child's ability to learn. In one example, hearing aids provided to such a child at the school helped him to learn.

The ESL program in

Columbus began 25 years ago with tutors for students from Vietnam and Cambodia. Kenneth Woodard started the ESL program in Columbus in cooperation with Ohio State University and currently supervises it. With subsequent arrivals of refugees, class size grew to the point that as a tutor, Custodio had 40–50 students. Then the tutors were allowed to become teachers. Just five years ago, there were 17 ESL teachers placed in 13 schools to serve 500–600 students.

In 2004, the Columbus public schools serve 2,800 ESL students from elementary through high school. There are 96 ESL teachers and 98 bilingual teaching assistants within 50 schools. The numbers of ESL students continue to grow rapidly. Dr. Custodio said of the 1,400 kids tested between April and October 2004, ninety percent of those are now ESL students.

**W**ith the arrival of the Somali students which began in 1996, came the need to develop a more specialized program to socialize students new to American schools. “When Somalis arrived in public schools, we had kids who had never been in school before,” explained Dr. Custodio. The Somalis had been in refugee camps or in Eastleigh, Nairobi, Kenya but they were not allowed to go to school because they were not Kenyan citizens. “The refugee youth up to age 18, didn’t know how to write their name, how to hold a pencil, never read a book, never been in school. They were not used to sitting in a classroom all day. School was a new experience.” Placing them directly into a regular classroom could be disastrous because they could not understand the teacher. Such frustration leads to a high drop-out rate. “So we came up with a program to help integrate them into school,” Custodio explained.

Needing a model for a “newcomer school,” a delegation from Columbus visited a school in Minneapolis, Minnesota with a bi-lingual program for its Somali students. However, the refugee and immigrant population in Columbus is more diverse. So, the ESL model was adapted for schools in Columbus. The composition of the student population in the ESL program in Columbus is 50% Latino, 35% Somali with a total of 82 other ethnic and language groups.

At the Mifflin Welcome Center children attend a double period of ESL instruction and sheltered instruction in math, science and social studies. The



**We are with a growing diversity of youth from around the world. The best investment we can make is in the life of a child.**

students get materials at their level of English comprehension designed to build their vocabulary. The program runs for one year, unless an additional year is needed for some students. There are three such welcome centers in Columbus; a middle school, high school and a vocational school, though none at the elementary level.

**T**o help new Somali Bantu refugees enroll their children in school, the Mifflin Welcome Center has a Parent Community Liaison who visits the refugees in their homes providing an orientation, social services and encouragement for the parents to participate in ESL classes. The Somali Bantu refugees began arriving in Columbus in 2004. A big problem for the Bantu is illiteracy. Historically, the Bantu were slaves in Somalia and as an oppressed group have had little to no access to an education. The Welcome Center is well suited to provide acculturation to the children of these new arrivals. It is difficult for the Somali Bantu to find employment and adjust to life in the US with limited work skills, but they are survivors. Early intervention with the children will help.

Donovan noted the promising development of a Diversity School and Community Relations Program through which 30–35 teachers will be trained as Diversity Master Teachers. They will be placed in 16 Columbus schools as part of a plan to educate about and learn from diversity.

Custodio wants people to know how needed these programs are for newcomers. The program is expensive, due to the small class size and the assignment of a teacher and teacher assistant to each class. And yet, it makes a great difference for a student to have attended a Welcome Center prior to attending a regular school.

Over the past two years. I’ve had the privilege of serving on the United Church of Christ Public Education Task Force. It was fascinating to see, in this one example, how a public school district committed resources to help prepare immigrant and refugee children through an ESL program designed to help integrate some of the most vulnerable children into an academic environment. God is still speaking in the amazing way the program was developed to welcome these children. We are blessed with a growing diversity of youth from around the world. The best investment we can make is in the life of a child.

## Your Neighborhood

Find out what's being done in your local school district. Where can you help? Perhaps you could volunteer to read books to young, immigrant or refugee children. You could volunteer with an after school program to help students learn English, or with other homework subjects. If working with kids isn't exactly your thing, how about helping their parents learn English?

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can we as a church community and as volunteers, help assist children from other countries adjust to life in the US while still honoring their cultural heritage?
2. How can we support schools in the development of innovative programs to welcome children of the world and help them overcome language barriers?

## PRAYER

What is a voice?

A voice can be soft or loud.

A voice can be shaky, yet determined.

Voices can speak in languages such as Spanish, English, German, Chinese.

A spoken voice may not be understood by the world as a whole.

Our language barriers

at times alienate brothers and sisters throughout the world.

Fortunately we all speak the language of silence.

Silence can be so loud it is deafening, yet it can be so peaceful as to lull one into a moment of prayer.

God, help us speak through silence.

Voices can be small, large, Spanish, English, Chinese.

Voices can be unique, and voices can share beliefs that are.

Please help us learn that no matter how silent a person may be, there is no such thing as a nonexistent voice.

**ELENA MERTUS**

*DayBook for New Voices, June 15, page 99*



# A victorious Iraq

Nuhad Tomeh

**W**HEN I VISITED an elementary school here in Baghdad today I was greeted by the following morning greeting, “Sabah al Kheer wa Sabah al zouhour le Iraqona al mansour.” Good morning and a rosy morning to our victorious Iraq.

The children of Iraq ages 6-12 who were born under the UN Sanction and for the last 2 years have been living under war, have one basic concern, to be safe and secure, know peace, and live a life without bombs exploding around them.

As I talked with the children in Baghdad I asked the question, “What is the main thing you see happening in your city?” The answer which came almost from all, “we want to be safe, feel secure go to school without fear and without our parents feeling worried about us. To have a normal peaceful life so we can continue our studies and fulfill our dreams of becoming doctors, nurses, teachers, and engineers.”

**Alia**, a 7 years old girl said, “I want to go visit my friends and play with them after school, but I can not because I must be home by 5:00 p.m.”

**Maro** 9 years said, “I want to sleep without the fear of the noise from the helicopter roaming around my neighborhood. I cover my head with my pillow so I won’t hear the terrible noise.”

**Amer** 11 years said, “I wish to go to the zoo in Baghdad which just re-opened but my parents say it is not safe; not because of the lions, but the unsafe streets. Some children have been kidnapped for a ransom. Usually the kidnapers ask for a lot of money.

**Khlalad**, 12 years old, wants to become a computer specialist but he says, “how can I do so if I can not finish my school? Many times the classes are interrupted and I am concerned about finishing my program on time. We hope by January the situation will be safer because now it is not safe and we are always afraid to move around. We are scared of car bombs and rockets coming from every where and sounds of machine guns all over.”

**Nabil**, his friend Walead, and his sister Violet, 12, 10 and 7 all have been expelled from school because they were not able to attend school for many days, one year of their schooling is gone.

The children of Iraq have one basic concern, safety, security, peaceful streets and neighborhood, this is how Iraq will become victorious over violence and wars. What is the future of the country and the church?

Church leaders are very much concerned about the future of the little ones remembering the words of Jesus to Peter saying, “feed my sheep,” and, “if you have not done it to the little ones you have not done it to me.”

*Nuhad Tomeh is the Associate General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, Iraq Relief Program living in Baghdad.*



## PRAYER

Dear God,

Help us in the days ahead. Help us at school. Take care of the soldiers in Iraq. Help them in battle and help them on their way home. Save the people of the world. Amen.

**ANONYMOUS #3**

*DayBook for New Voices, February 10, page 25*

# Serving children at the family village farm, Kasam, India

William H. Armstrong

**O**FTEN, someone with the desire to feed God's lambs is not able to do it and needs the help of others. And sometimes, those others need help themselves if the lambs are to be fed. On a farm in rural India, with the help of many people around the world, lambs in need are being fed.

Staff members of the Family Village Farm at Kasam, near Vellore, India, are all too familiar with people unable to feed their children. Commonly, a parent who cannot care for one or more children comes to the Farm looking for help. A spouse has deserted the family or is unable to work or has died. The remaining spouse may have no income or may work only as an unskilled laborer and cannot provide the things the child needs: food, clothing, health care, education. For those parents the Farm is literally a godsend, salving the pain of parting with their children with the knowledge that the children will now be in the loving and healthy environment the parents so desire for them.

The Farm's staff tries to create a home for the children, or as its constitution quaintly puts it, "the nearest possible approximation to family life." The older children live in cottages, with a housemother and two older "grandparents"—some of the "lonely aged" who have no relatives or friends to care for them in their old age. The three generations living together not only approximate a family for the children but also provide a living for the adults, who might be destitute themselves if it were not for the Farm.

Parents who have children at the Farm are invited to visit them on "Visiting Day," the first Sunday of each month. On those days, "the campus is speckled with little groups of men and women sitting with their children under the shade of a tree, or on the doorstep of one of the cottages." Parents who can bring home-cooked food, candy, and flowers to share with the children.

Dr. Pauline King, a United Church of Christ missionary, began a shelter for children in her own home in 1969. But the number of needy children was so great that in 1973 land in the village of Kasam was leased from the Church of South India. The Family Village Farm was established there to fulfill Dr. King's dream of bringing three generations under one roof.

Today the Farm has 149 children. There are eight cottages, each with eight to ten children. Children under five are housed in a separate nursery and the older boys in a hostel nearby. A large, modern English-language school serves not only these children but also 580 day students from twenty-five other villages. The school is well-equipped, providing the students with a library, computer room, and science laboratory, and places for music lessons, plays, and a variety of sports.

The Family Village Farm is a working farm, providing food for the residents and vocational training for the children who will not go on to higher education. The farm includes a dairy, a poultry farm, a feed mixing unit, and an orchard. Surplus farm products are sold locally to help fund the Farm, as are products of a garment-making unit and a bakery.

A major sponsor is the Child Sponsorship Program of Global Ministries, a common witness of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. Through the Child Sponsorship Program, churches, church groups, and individuals sponsor 103 children who live at the Farm, providing each child's food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education for \$30 a month. It is one small way of helping others feed the lambs that have no one else to feed them.

Ask yourself: Is there one child anywhere you can help—with gifts of money or warm clothing or tutoring or simply with hot chocolate and a listening ear? None of us can care for the whole world—nor do we need to; that is safely in God's hands—but God may be able to use you to care for one child, somewhere, somehow.

## PRAYER

"God, I pray for all the orphans of the world—that you'll send someone to hold them and love them—even if only for a little while. And I pray that you'll help us to do what we can to work for a world in which all children have the love and nurture and basic things they need."

Emma Catlett-Sirchio

*DayBook for New Voices, page 117*

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