



A Child Laughs

PRAYERS
OF JUSTICE
AND HOPE

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INTRODUCTION

A CHILD'S LAUGH

My grandson giggles—
and it's some funny song of mine,
a tickled foot,
a smile mirror to my smile,
the dog's silliness,
the infinitely repeatable humor
of something falling on the floor,
or just the way sunlight
tinkerbelles on leaf
or the shiny car seat buckle.

And I think,
this is what Mary hoped
when she belted
magnificat in second soprano—
not just her precious
and most intimate joy—
one baby, one face smiling down,
but a wild hope,

a wild, almost unimaginable,
a wild and ordinary hope
of a heart
turned inside out—

that whenever one child is laughing,
there be the possibility
for the happy laughter
of every child in the world.

How can we shape a world so that every child will have a reason to laugh?

Isaiah's holy mountain prophecy in Isaiah 11 that names reconciliation between all of God's children and even within the natural world culminates with the image of a toddler playing above a rattlesnake's hole. Mary's song is not so much a lucky-me pregnancy song as it is her recognition, as soon as she carries a child, that justice should extend to all the hungry and the poor. A strange story in 1 Kings 3, often cited as proof of Solomon's wisdom, actually describes a true parent as one who will never find acceptable the death of any child. Jesus agrees, naming his family as the ones who do God's will, insisting his followers put a child in their midst, and even accepting the miraculous generosity of one child's lunch.

This—the longing not just for survival, but for laughter—is at the center of *A Child Laughs—Prayers of Justice and Hope*.

This book of fifty-two reflections was gathered in a community process. Some eighty people offered more than a hundred suggestions of themes or issues or concerns they felt were crucial to hope and justice for all people in all places. Some are very specific: Psalm 78 for Zimbabwe; the legacy of Indian Residential Schools in Canada; gun violence and police militarization in the United States; healing from childhood sexual abuse; compassionate care for species extinction; street ministry. Other themes—like cultural diversity, or living in an overstressed world, faithful anger, or standing up for an all-inclusive God—are more expansive.

We then offered an open invitation to writers to address these themes, and seventy-seven responded. Some overlapped the group that crowd-sourced the issues, though many were new. These writers came from eleven different countries, and many wrote collegially with a partner they had only met electronically. The brief biographical words at the end of each reflection are not footnotes, but a celebration of the possibility of enthusiastic and wonderful community. The writers prayed their way into each subject from personal perspectives, some focusing on a future for all ages, all traditions, all communities, others focusing on issues of childhood or addressing the Christian faith community particularly. Each offering is loosely similar and radically unique. It's no surprise that the most common and independently chosen text was Psalm 139: "you have searched me and known me . . . I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

Fifty-one of these reflections are shaped with a background statement, a personal prayer, a faith community resource, which is often liturgy, and questions for reflection and action. The final chapter is a gathering of single prayers about issues that weren't chosen for more expansive discussion in the book. *A Child Laughs* can be read privately week by week through the year, or as a book to share in a small group during Lent or the summer. It not only challenges thoughts and prayers but also invites action and, we hope, a change of heart.

We are grateful to the original contributors of ideas, the remarkable writers who put up with our herding their wild creativity into some useful conformity, the gifted and supportive folks at The Pilgrim Press who believed in this project, Kris Firth and Rick Porter for their remarkable creative gifts on this volume, our own families who shared their time with this strange global collaborative, and the ever brooding and birthing presence of the Holy Spirit who reminded us again and again not just to pray and work for hope and justice, but also to laugh.

