



# A Child Laughs

PRAYERS  
OF JUSTICE  
AND HOPE

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## C O N T E N T S

- Introduction . . . xi*
- 1 **Faithful Anger**, Sharon A. Benton . . . 1
  - 2 **Claiming Wholeness in a Broken and Violent World**,  
Kerry L. Greenhill . . . 5
  - 3 **The Political Is Personal**, Richard Bott . . . 10
  - 4 **Full Inclusion of Those with Intellectual and  
Developmental Disabilities**, Vince Amlin . . . 14
  - 5 **In the Image of God: God's People with Mental Illness**,  
Dee Ledger . . . 18
  - 6 **Compassionate Care for Those Who Are Chronically Ill**,  
Jamie L. Spriggs . . . 24
  - 7 **Visiting the Garden: Addressing Addiction**,  
Jeanne Marie Westcott . . . 28
  - 8 **The Carrier and the Carried: Redefining Disability**,  
Trish Harris, Rosalie Sugrue . . . 33
  - 9 **When Roles Reverse: Parenting Parents**,  
Judy K. Brandon . . . 40
  - 10 **A Tender Listening Presence at the End of Life**,  
Carol S. Tippe . . . 43
  - 11 **Beyond the Binary: Queering *Imago Dei***,  
Angela R. Combs, Thandiwe A. Dale-Ferguson . . . 48
  - 12 **Gender Inclusivity: Changing Laws, Changing Hearts**,  
Eliza Buchakjian-Tweedy, Karoline M. Lewis . . . 54
  - 13 **Dismantling Racism: The Power of Privilege**,  
Devoree Clifton Crist . . . 59

- 14 **Cultural Diversity: Loving Every Element of It, for God’s Sake,**  
Luz Berrios-Taveras, Susan Phillips . . . 64
- 15 **Gun Violence and Gun Control in the United States,**  
Shelly Davis . . . 69
- 16 **Standing Up for an Inclusive, Justice-seeking God,**  
LL Kroouze DuBreuil . . . 73
- 17 **Soldier’s Heart: Reaching Out to Veterans and Their Families,**  
Sharyl B. Peterson . . . 76
- 18 **Meeting Jesus: Human Rights behind Bars,**  
Stephen G. Price, Barbara Wass VanAusdall . . . 81
- 19 **Authorized Violence: The Militarization of Police,**  
Leslie Carole Taylor, Marvin K. White . . . 87
- 20 **Mercy Instead of Sacrifice: The Expendability of the Death Penalty,**  
Thea L. Racelis . . . 91
- 21 **Human Trafficking: Talitha Kum, “Little girl, arise!”**  
Cody E. Maynus . . . 96
- 22 **Gather the Children,** Penny Guy . . . 101
- 23 **The Context of Care: A Dangerous Assumption,**  
Erica Fairbrother, Lynne Frith . . . 106
- 24 **Sustainable Resilience: Abundant Life in Connection  
with Nature,** Elena Huegel . . . 113
- 25 **Safe Spaces: Healing from Childhood Sexual Abuse,**  
Lucy Brady . . . 118
- 26 **Teaching Consent: Empowering Choice for All People,**  
abby mohaupt . . . 123
- 27 **The Weeping Womb: Life’s Limitations with  
Female Reproductive Health Issues,** Michelle L. Torigian . . . 127
- 28 **Extreme Violence against Aboriginal Women and Girls in  
Canada: Prayers for Those Who Die, Prayers for Those Who  
Grieve, Prayers for Those Who Kill,** Jane A. Willan . . . 132

- 29 **Indian Residential Schools in Canada: Facing a Horrible Truth,**  
Patti Rodgers, R. Matthew Stevens . . . 135
- 30 **Silenced Histories: Rediscovery, Celebration, and Mourning,**  
Cleo D. Graham, M. Elizabeth Waters . . . 142
- 31 **Returning Rights to Indigenous Peoples,**  
Nancy Arthur Best, Frances E. Ota . . . 147
- 32 **Prayers for the People and the Land of Israel and Palestine,**  
Wendy Adams and Mark Braverman . . . 151
- 33 **Mercy and Truth, Justice and Peace for Zimbabwe and Africa,**  
Lance Muteyo . . . 156
- 34 **Children and Migration,** Rafael Vallejo . . . 160
- 35 **The Invisible World of Migrant Agricultural Workers,**  
Todd J. Jenkins . . . 164
- 36 **Snappy Meals from a Crock Pot System: Issues of Labor Justice,**  
Eric C. Jackson . . . 168
- 37 **Sanctuary: Adequate Food, Shelter, and Safety,**  
Arlene L. Drennan, Laura Martin . . . 173
- 38 **Street Ministry: Outside Our Pews,**  
Quentin Chin, Becky Crane . . . 178
- 39 **Commodification or Communion: Land, Animals, and  
Ecosystems in Our Food Chain,** Michael S. Mulberry . . . 184
- 40 **“Just” Water,** Detlev Knoche, Marian P. Shearer . . . 189
- 41 **Living Relationally in a Culture of Acquisitiveness,  
a Time of Dramatic Inequalities, and a Fragile Creation,**  
Dan Gansch-Boythe, Kathryn C. Smith . . . 194
- 42 **Packing It All In: The Social, Economic, and  
Environmental Impact of Tourism,** Maria Mankin . . . 198
- 43 **Waste,** Lina Toth (Andronoviene) . . . 202
- 44 **Sustainable Change: Caring for the World We’ve Got,**  
Terri McNamara . . . 206

- 45 **Species Protection in the Midst of Mass Extinction,**  
Shantha Ready Alonso . . . 209
- 46 **Rhythm and Balance: Living in an Overstressed World,**  
Katherine Burgess . . . 213
- 47 **Equal Access to Technology and Internet,**  
Daniel Ross-Jones . . . 218
- 48 **On Being Outside of the Norms: Accepting a Spectrum  
of Behaviors on the Journey and as a Journey,**  
Mary A. James . . . 222
- 49 **The Wonder of Discovery:  
Encouraging the Evolution of Education,**  
H. Rebecca Lockwood, Diane E. Lockwood Wendorf . . . 226
- 50 **Protecting a Child’s Sense of Self in a Fast-changing World,**  
Jessica McArdle, Gayle A. Murphy . . . 231
- 51 **Lifting the Burden: Seeking Self-worth in a Culture of Shame,**  
McKenna E. Lewellen, Lindsay Popper . . . 236
- 52 **Fearfully and Wonderfully Prayed**  
**Simplest Beauty,** Carolyn Venema . . . 240  
**Justiça Ambiental/Environmental Justice,**  
Luiz Carlos Ramos . . . 242  
**Reprise,** Laura Martin . . . 243  
**Let Me Live,** Eyingbeni Hümtsoe . . . 244  
**To Test or to Educate: That Is the Question,**  
Elaine S. Gaetani . . . 246  
**The Mitten Tree,** Arlene L. Drennan . . . 247  
**A Prayer for Young Children Who Must Take Care of Parents,**  
Cathy Hasty . . . 248  
**Oração Pelos Jovens/Prayer for Young People,**  
Luiz Carlos Ramos . . . 250

**God's Love of All, Regardless of Sexual Orientation,**

Gerardo C. C. Oberman . . . 253

**On Bended Knee,** Maria Mankin . . . 256

**Psalm of Resurrection for a Son in Prison,**

Barbara Wass VanAusdall . . . 258

**After Disaster . . . (originally, Christchurch after the Earthquake),**

Beverley L. Osborn . . . 260

**A Prayer for Equal Pay,** Michelle L. Torigian . . . 261

**Money in Politics,** Richard Bott . . . 262

**A Prayer for Voting Rights,** Michelle L. Torigian . . . 264

**Prayer for Refugees: A Prayer from Germany,**

Detlev Knoche . . . 266

**A Prayer of Confession for My Part in Terrorism,**

R. Matthew Stevens . . . 267

**Súplicas e Intercessões/Supplications and Intercessions,**

Luiz Carlos Ramos . . . 269

**Not in My Image,** Laura Martin . . . 272



## 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.

