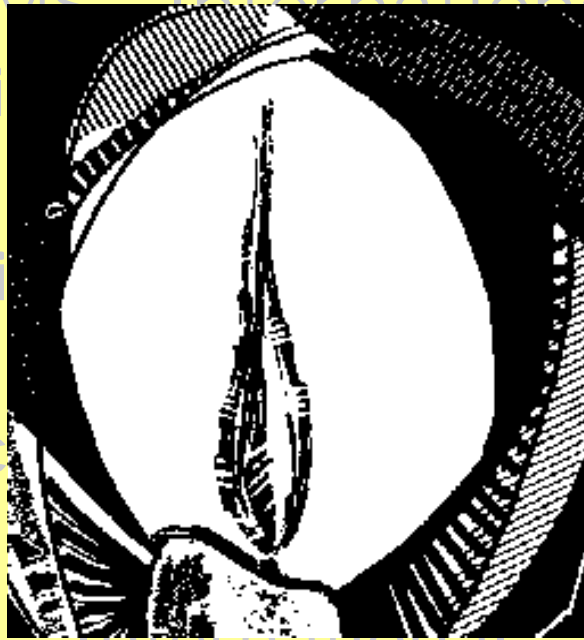


Advent 2008



***Convention
on the Rights
of the Child***

20 YEARS

Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale onlus
Bureau of International Solidarity

Rome 2008

Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale ONLUS
Bureau of International Solidarity
Marist Brothers' General House
Rome, Italy

Advent 2008

This year's reflection commemorates the 20th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the international treaty which sets standards for the protection of children and young people. This text was compiled and edited by Br. César Henriquez, our Child Rights Advocacy Officer in Geneva. We hope this year's reflection will expose all who use it to become more familiar with some of the children's issues and groups that are working for the benefit of children on the international level.

For the past three years Br. César has worked on two fronts in order to advance the work of BIS and the Foundation for children and young people. His first area of work was in Geneva before international organizations. Geneva is home to the United Nations Council on Human Rights and several UN based human rights mechanisms such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee monitors compliance of those nations that have signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In Geneva, Br. César has joined several coalitions and working group that study and research the relevant children's issues such as a violence against children and a child's right to an education.

Br. César's second area of work has been directed within the Institute of the Marist Brothers and its extensive network of lay colleagues around the world. Here, his focus of concern has been to raise consciousness about the Convention, the work of the Committee and the current issues children and young people are facing around the world. Some of you have attended presentations he has given and read our newsletters in which he reported on the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

I want to thank Br. César for putting together this year's Advent text and for his work as our Advocacy Officer in Geneva. He will be finishing his term at the end of November, just as Advent begins. All of us here in the BIS office wish him well in all his endeavors as he returns to his home province of Central America to take up a work which will put him in more direct contact with children and young people. We are confident that the experience of these past three years as the BIS/Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale onlus Child Rights Advocacy Officer has made him an even stronger advocate for child rights.

Br. Dominick Pujja
President/Director
Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale onlus
Bureau of International Solidarity

Presentation

The Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20 1989. It has become the document on international rights most generally accepted by the community of nations, with 193 ratifications. On November 20, 2009, the Convention will be 20 years old. For our part, the Marist International Solidarity Foundation (Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale onlus) would like to join in the celebration of this important anniversary and we are doing so by dedicating this Advent pamphlet to the boys and girls throughout the world, and to all of those who are working to have their rights recognized and respected at every level.

The Advent reflection booklet contains reflections written by people within and beyond our Marist environment, particularly organizations with which we share this task of promoting and defending children's rights in Geneva. In this way, we would like to show our determination to work and unite our efforts in this task which already, for several years, has been carried out by many organisations for and with the children.

The Child's Rights start, mainly, from a need: that of guaranteeing the children the power to grow and to develop integrally as people. When the most fundamental thing for that development is lacking, it is not sufficient to remember that health or education are important for this. It is necessary to demand it. The season of Advent which the Church offers us every year reminds us that justice is part of the project of God for his people, for the whole of humanity.

We hope that this booklet will aid personal and community reflection; that this reflection can nourish our prayer, and that, finally, the Spirit of God received in prayer will move us to action for children and young people around us and in our countries to extend to them words and projects of hope.

Faithful to the foundational intentions of Champagnat, we want to renew our commitment to telling and showing young people how much Jesus Christ loves them; feeling calls to come closer to the rejected, to those whom nobody looks after. Children and adolescents continue to need our presence and our educational action, from the different environments where we are... mainly "where those in material and spiritual poverty await the revelation of Christ" (Cf. Const 83). They expect a better life. We hope with them.

We should not just stand around with our arms folded.

May you have a Good Advent!

Br. César Henríquez
Advocacy Officer
Fondazione Marista per la Solidarietà Internazionale Onlus
Bureau of International Solidarity

For the text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child visit: www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm

Acknowledgments

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Reflections and Prayers

30 Nov	Children and Poverty	Br. Bern Berman (Franciscans International – Geneva)
01 Dic	HIV / AIDS	Ms. Francesca Merico (Caritas Internationalis – Geneva)
02 Dic	Children in Armed Conflict	International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers
03 Dic	Adoptions	Ms. Alejandra Vásquez, Mr Byron Alvarado (NGO Coalition – Guatemala)
04 Dic	Children Wellbeing	UNICEF (Geneva)
05 Dic	Education	Br. Donal Leader (Edmund Rice International – Geneva)
06 Dic	Child Work	Br. Alphonse Balombe (Marist Brother – Africa)
07 Dic	Participation	Ms. Angela Sestrini (Lay Marist – Prov L'Hermitage)
08 Dic	Family	Ms. Ana Saborío (Lay Marist – Prov America Central)
09 Dic	Protection Against Violence	Ms. M ^a Francisca Ize-Charrin, Ms. Imma Guerras Delgado, Ms. Verónica Virga (OHCHR – Geneva)
10 Dic	Children in Care Centres	Br. David Hall (Marist Youth Care) (Marist Brother – Australia)
11 Dic	Rest and Leisure	AVSI Foundation (Italy – Geneva)
12 Dic	No Discrimination	Ms. Ana Paula Da Souza - Point Coeur – Geneva
13 Dic	Children with Disabilities	Handicap International (Geneva)
14 Dic	Refugee Children	Mr. John Kigman (ICMC – Geneva)
15 Dic	Freedom of Expression	Mr. Ulises Centeno and students (Prov Mexico Central)
16 Dic	Children in Conflict with the Law	Ms. Cécile Trochu (OMCT – Geneva)
17 Dic	Trafficking	Sr Hedwig Joëhl (Good Shepherd Sisters – Geneva)
18 Dic	Children and Environment	Ms Sernízia de Araujo Correia and Br. Francisco Magalhães (Distr. Amazonia)
19 Dic	Right to Life	Br Johnson Onyereibe (Marist Brother – Prov Nigeria)
20 Dic	Right to a Name	Mr. Yves-Marie Lanoë (BICE – France)
21 Dic	Children and Media	CRIN - London
22 Dic	Protection against illicit drugs	Mr. Michel Beaulac (Lay Marist – Prov Canada)
23 Dic	Migrant children	Fr. Leonir Chiarello (Scalabrinni International Migration Network – Geneva)
24 Dic	Appropriate direction and guidance	Br. Hank Hammer (Marist Brother – Prov USA)
25 Dic	Adequate level of living	Ms. Jimena Djaura (Lay Marist & NGO Coalition – Brasil)

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30

NOVEMBER

Introducing Franciscans
International

SUNDAY - FIRST WEEK

Isaiah 63,16b-17; 64,1.2b-7. *Oh, Lord, you would rend the heavens and come down*
Psalm 79(80): *Restore us, O God, make your face shine upon us*

1Cor 1, 3-9 *He will keep you strong to the end*

Mc, 13, 33-37: *Keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back.*

ARTICLE 27: CHILDREN AND POVERTY

The gospel of this first Sunday of Advent urges us to be alert because the time will come, when the kingdom of the heavens will be installed and it will be a kingdom of joy and justice.

In waiting for the Lord to come back we are waiting for the one who comes so that everyone has life, and has it fully (John 10,10). The fullness of life is more explained in the gospel of Luke (6, 38). If you give to others you will be given in return. It will be packed down, shaken together, and spilling over into your lap.

This is what we are waiting for when waiting for Christ to come back into this world. To be alert in turn means to already work towards this goal. The promise of life

in fullness can be translated into our contemporary world in a lot of different ways. One way is done by several entities of the United Nations. The text of the 'Convention of the Rights of the Child' (Art. 27,1) says "State Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development". Other statements are the Millennium Development Goals talking about ending hunger and poverty and providing primary education to all children in the world. These are just small steps towards the realization of the promises of the Lord, but they are important steps in working towards a better, more just world.

ABOUT... FRANCISCANS INTERNATIONAL

Franciscans International is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) with General Consultative status at the UN, uniting the voices of Franciscan brothers and sisters from around the world. We operate under the sponsorship of the Conference of the Franciscan Family (CFF) and serve all Franciscans and the global community by bringing spiritual, ethical, and Franciscan values to the United Nations and international organisations.

We closely follow the tradition of Saint Francis and Saint Clare, striving to put Franciscan ideals into practice at the international level. We are guided by the Saints' loving concern for the poor, care of creation, and peacemaking.

Our programmes at FI bring grassroots Franciscans to the United Nations forums in New York and Geneva, influencing international human rights standards and bringing witness to human rights violations.

Website: www.franciscansinternational.org

TEXT

Did you know?

- One in four adults in the developing world – 872 million people – is illiterate. (Oxfam UK – Education Now Campaign)
- More than 100 million children remain out of school. (Source: UNFPA)
- 46% of girls in the world's poorest countries have no access to primary education. (Source: ActionAid)
- More than 1 in 4 adults cannot read or write: 2/3 are women. (Source: ActionAid)
- Universal primary education would cost \$10 billion a year – that's half what Americans spend on ice cream. (Source: ActionAid)
- Young people who have completed primary education are less than half as likely to contract HIV as those missing an education. Universal primary education would prevent 700,000 cases of HIV each year – about 30% all new infections in this age group.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Lord in the anticipation of your return we pray for those excluded from information and therefore the enjoyment of justice. Be with them and send them assistance to improve their lives.

For all the children of the world, that they can enjoy education so that they are able to reach out to their capacities for the building of a more just and sustainable life of all humans.

For the politicians of this world, that they are alert to your return into this world in working for more just structures for peace and the integrity of nature.

For all those responsible in education and formation of children, that they work towards the best of children's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord you told us to be alert because we do not know when you will return into our realities. Let us be attentive to one another and work towards the fullness of life for everyone on this globe. Let us be attentive specially to our future, which is our children, be with them when they still have to suffer. Urge everyone to work towards a better world, so that the children of today can live in hope of a better future for them and their children. Be pray this trough Christ our brother and Lord.

Amen.

01

DECEMBER

*Introducing: Caritas
Internatioalis*

MONDAY - FIRST WEEK

Isaiah 2.1-5. *Come and let us walk in the light of the Lord.*

Psalms 121(122). *Let us go to the house of the Lord.*

Matthew 8, 5-11. *Many will come from the east and the west to take a place in the Kingdom of Heaven*

ARTICLE 24: CHILDREN AND HIV/AIDS

Today, 2.1 million children under the age of 15 years are living with a tiny germ called the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). This virus attacks the body's ability to fight off infections and it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). As a consequence, 290,000 children died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2007 alone; and since the onset of the epidemic, about 13 million children have lost their parents to the disease.

This continues to happen despite the fact that 192 states ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a legally binding instrument recognizing that children have specific needs and their own rights. When the Convention was adopted in 1989, the impact of HIV and AIDS on children was not yet recognized. This is why the CRC has no specific provisions on children's rights and AIDS. Nevertheless, since article 1 of the CRC extends its provisions to all children below the age of 18, and not just to specific groups, also children living with HIV should benefit from the provisions of the CRC. Some articles in the Conventions are of particular importance in the context of AIDS because they refer to non-discrimination, the right to life, the right to health and education. The link between AIDS and human rights also is recognized in all other International Human Rights Instruments, and in various General comments and

Recommendations of the Committees that monitor the states' obligations to protect, respect and fulfill children's rights.

Children and young people are especially vulnerable to HIV, but they also represent our greatest hope for changing the course of the AIDS epidemic. When young people are given appropriate tools and support, they can become powerful agents for change and instruments of hope for children and for other people living with HIV.

Today's liturgy tells us about this hope, which justifies our journey. In the Gospel reading, the Centurion, officially a "non-believer", demonstrated his hope in Jesus' miraculous powers, and that hope indeed was fulfilled.

On this World AIDS Day, our world is challenged to renew its hope in God – who is the source of healing and comfort to so many people, especially children, living with and affected by HIV and AIDS, who can overturn the prejudice, stigmatization, and discrimination directed at those living under the burden of this pandemic, who can enlighten the minds of scientists and others searching for a cure and for preventive vaccines, and who can fulfill the hope and dreams of a dignified life and access to medicines expressed by so many children living with HIV.

ABOUT... CARITAS INTERNATIONALIS

Since 1987, Caritas Internationalis, a confederation of 162 Catholic relief, development and social service organizations working to build a better world, especially for the poor and oppressed, in over 200 countries and territories, has contributed significantly to the global response to HIV/AIDS. One Caritas activity in response to HIV/AIDS involves advocacy on the global, national, and local levels, for more comprehensive laws and policies to assure full access to care, treatment, support and education among those living with and/or affected by HIV.

On the occasion of World AIDS Day, Caritas Internationalis invites you to learn more about the challenges faced by many children living with HIV as they seek access to the life-saving medicines that they need and deserve. On Caritas Internationalis' website (www.caritas.org) you can find much information about HIV/AIDS and, even more specifically, about pediatric AIDS. You also may want to consider joining some of our initiatives to promote access to medicines to treat HIV in HIV-positive children.

TEXT

« I can survive because I have God with me. I can't see God but I believe that God always stays with me and God passes His love to me through Mother Rita, Father Giovanni, Father Siranon, my teachers, my relatives and my friends. I need love, mercy, care and understanding which are the magic pills that I need to take together with my HIV medicines. Are you ready to give me the magic pills ? »

*12 year-old boy, Camilian Social Center of Rayong – Thailand
from: The Bridge of Hope*

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

As people of faith we are called to create an environment of hope and care for and with such children. On this day of reflection and prayer for people and children living with and affected by HIV, let's pray together:

Prayer and reflection of hope for children

I pray for a world where the youth are free,
Free to play with each other without fear,
Free to touch, tickle and to embrace,
Free to be themselves and respected for that.

I pray for a world here the young blossom,
Where potential is harnessed and realized,
Where people's efforts are rewarded,
And where one can fly to reach the sky.

I pray for a world without HIV/AIDS,
I dream of a kaleidoscope of youth,
Who sing a song of praise and not shed tears,
I dream of the fullness of life and no more death.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, help us to reach out with the love of Jesus to those who are suffering because of HIV. Let mercy triumph over judgment. We pray that people with HIV will be treated well, cared for properly, and get the best medicines available.

Father God, it makes us so sad to think of the children who are infected with HIV, or whose parents have HIV. We pray for the children, particularly those who have already lost parents to AIDS. Please comfort them as they go through painful times.

Amen.

02

DECEMBER

Introducing: Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

TUESDAY - FIRST WEEK

Is. 11, 1-10 : *The wolf will live with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the goat*

Psalm 71(72) : *He will defend the afflicted ... He will save the children of the needy*

Luke 10, 21-24 : *I praise you, Father, because you have revealed these things to little children*

ARTICLE 38: CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICTS

In its presentation to the General Assembly in October 2007, Ms Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed Conflict, related a story from her field visits:

"During my trip to the Middle East I met with Palestinian and Israeli children. One boy living in a refugee camp whose father had been killed, whose brothers had been jailed and whose house had been bulldozed told me of throwing stones at Israeli patrols. I spoke to him of Mahatma Gandhi who had said that an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind. He replied, "Madame, not here, here it is an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth until justice is done to the one who started it". Another boy from a different background, however, was part of a group that was trying to fight against violence. After the discussion he playfully nudged me and said "Madame under Secretary-General, why does the UN talk so much and do so little?"

It is not foolish to ask what has been done. Starting from 1996, when Madame Graça Machel, appointed by the Secretary General to conduct a study about the impact of armed conflict in children, we can find several improvements in the way many countries are involved in the fight against this phenomenon: A increased global awareness of situation of children affected by armed conflict; the development and strengthening of international norms and standards for their protection; more consideration of this topic by the General Assem-

bly and on the international peace and security agenda of the Security Council. More concrete, many programs for the demobilization of child soldiers and to support their social reintegration, as well as programs for removal of mines in inhabited zones that has been taken place, strengthening the prosecution of those who recruit children, commit abuses or other harmful practices against them... It is worthy to mention that 118 countries have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child related to the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict. This Protocol compels countries, for example, to take concrete measures to prevent recruitment of children by armed groups.

Nevertheless it is true that thousands of children are still involved in armed conflicts, or affected by many situations of violence. Their situation is severe and unacceptable. Several armed conflicts exist because of political and economical interests. Poverty and exclusion are still among the causes of conflicts in many countries. There are still many challenges to face, but it is possible to say a word of hope for children that are victims of armed conflicts: we can commit ourselves to support initiatives, to participate directly in activities that promote peace, justice and reconciliation. If we have the duty to work for the protection of those that are vulnerable... Are we ready to do so much and to talk a little?

ABOUT... THE COALITION TO STOP THE USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS

The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers was formed in May 1998 by the leading of international human rights and humanitarian organizations. It has regional and national networks in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. The International Coalition has its headquarters in London. The Coalition's International Steering Committee member organizations are: Amnesty International, Defence for Children International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation Terre des Hommes, International Save the Children Alliance, Jesuit Refugee Service, and the Quaker United Nations Office-Geneva. It maintains active links with UNICEF, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International Labour Organization.

Over the last nine years the International Coalition has worked in collaboration with partner organizations to establish national coalitions in many regions of the world. (See www.child-soldiers.org)

TEXT

“Although it is impossible to accurately calculate the number of children involved in armed forces and groups, it is clear that there are many tens of thousands of child soldiers. Child soldiers exist in all regions of the world and, almost inevitably, wherever there is armed conflict.

It is likely that the number of child soldiers is fewer than in 2004 when the Coalition published its last Child Soldiers Global Report. Since then, tens of thousands of child soldiers have been released from fighting forces following peace agreements and demobilization programs in Afghanistan, Burundi, Côte d’Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Southern Sudan and elsewhere. However, in the meantime, conflicts in countries such as Central African Republic, Chad, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan (Darfur) have broken out, reignited or intensified and child recruitment there increased.”

Source: www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Because God is the Lord of the Earth, we hope a world that follows his Law, which is a Law based in Love, in simplicity and Justice. And we pray

Lord, give us the strength of your Spirit

- We want the scourge of poverty and injustice to be defeated.

Lord, give us the strength of your Spirit

- We have seen the suffering in the faces of children victims of violence. We know that we have to give an answer with our action

Lord, give us the strength of your Spirit

- We know that words are not enough

Lord, give us the strength of your Spirit

- You prefer those who are small and simple, those who do not look for power and domination.

Lord, give us the strength of your Spirit

CLOSING PRAYER

Grant us, Lord, to wait with restless hope the coming of your Kingdom. To share the Peace that only came from you, and to collaborate with all those who are committed in the work of Justice. You live and reigns with the Father and with the Holy Spirit... Amen

03

DECEMBER

Introducing: Social Movement for Children and Adolescents Rights in Guatemala

WEDNESDAY - FIRST WEEK

Is 25,6-10a. *The Lord invites to his banquet and he will wipe away the tears from all faces.*

Psalm 22 (23). *I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Mt 15,29-37 *The Lord healed the sick. He was moved by the people's fate and gave them food multiplying the loaves and the fish.*

ARTICLE 21: ADOPTION

From a historical point of view, the issue of adoption has often been faced starting from the adults' perspective. Since its one goal was to give a child to a couple that could have none, one could speak nearly of a "biological" function. The first response of the state to regulate adoptions stemmed from private Law, which for a long time prevented from finding acceptable solutions for the complete development of adopted children.

The evolution and improvement of the international treaties for the protection of Human Rights facilitated a new understanding of adoption, an adjustment of the rules for the implementation and incorporation under public Law. In this ambit it was possible to develop some public mechanisms of protection, so that the focus is not exclusively the need of a couple to have a child, but due consideration is given also to the fact that the new family that will be formed after the adoption may respond to the special needs of the children in relation to their complete development.

Adoption does have a place in the History of Salvation. Let us remember the passage of Moses saved from the water and grown like a child by the Egyptian princess. Let us think of the Calvary: Jesus indicates his beloved disciple as the son of Mary, and he welcomes her in his home as his mother. Adoption can be part of God's plans for the life of certain people. It is therefore necessary that it be successful, thinking not only of the desire of the adults to satisfy the need of procreating, but also and above all keeping into account human dignity and acting in complete and absolute respect of the person's rights.

The commitment to effectively implement this new system is long and troublesome. There is already an international legal framework for adoption; many countries have developed their own laws to regulate it, but an adequate control of the relevant procedures is still necessary. The improvements that we can all see are a light of hope for many children who need a shelter, as well as for couples who, thanks to adoption, can welcome a child at home.

ABOUT... SOCIAL MOVEMENT FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The Social Movement for the Rights of Children, Teenagers and Young people in Guatemala (MSDNAJG) is a large entity including different social sectors, institutions, organisations, networks and other movements, aiming at submitting proposals and petitions for children and young people, founded on certain principles: social co-responsibility, solidarity, respect for diversity, consensus, free participation and representativeness. More than 45 organisation belong to this entity committed to work for children and young people in Guatemala.

MSDNAJG is a civil association, private, no-profit, cultural, educational, apolitical and acting as social support, aiming at gathering in one entity different organisations of the civil society committed and/or interested in the promotion, dissemination, defence and protection of children's rights, in order to contribute to diminish the violation of those rights and influence the organisms of the state for them to further their respect.

MSDNAJG took part in the drafting of the Law of Integral Protection of Children and Teenagers (2002), the regulation of the Centres for Preventive Detention of Youth (2003) and the Adoption Law (2007).

TEXT

“... the best environment for most children to grow up in is within a family, and the adoption by a parent or parents of a child who does not have a family able to look after him or her is a commendable and noble action. Regrettably, in many cases the emphasis has changed from the desire to provide a needy child with a home, to that of providing needy parents with a child. As a result, a whole industry has grown, generating millions of dollars of revenue each year, seeking babies for adoption and charging prospective parents enormous fees to process the paperwork.

The problems surrounding many intercountry adoptions, in which children are taken from poor families in undeveloped countries and given to parents in developed countries, have become quite well known, but the Special Rapporteur was alarmed to hear of certain practices also allegedly occurring within developed countries, including the use of fraud and coercion to persuade single mothers to give up their children.”

Note presented by M. Juan Miguel Petit, Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, according to the resolution 2002/92 of the Human Rights Commission.
UN Document E/CN.4/2003/79

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Let us address our prayer to God, for we are his sons and daughters:

- May the sense of fraternity for everyone defeat all hatred and resentment between people and nations.
- May all those who suffer, especially homeless children, find consolation and strength in people who are close to them.
- May we all, sons and daughters of the one human family, rejoice for the abundance of fruits of the earth, with equal opportunities, justice and dignity.
- For those who consecrate themselves to promoting and respecting the dignity and rights in our societies, may they see their efforts rewarded with fruits of justice for all.

CLOSING PRAYER

O Lord, whom we can call Father and Mother. You invite us into your home to live in fraternity. Enrich your family with feelings of compassion, charity, and a yearning for justice, especially for those who feel lonely or abandoned. May the certainty that you walk at our side on the path of humanity accompany us always. Amen.

04

DECEMBER

Introducing
UNICEF

THURSDAY - FIRST WEEK

Is 26, 1-6.

Let the upright nation come in, she the faithful one.

Ps 117(118)

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Mt 7, 21, 24-27

He who does the will of my father will enter into the Kingdom of God.

ARTICLE 36: WELLBEING OF CHILDREN

What do children need for their appropriate growth as people? During the first months of life, maternal nursing, hygiene and medical care are fundamental to prevent later illnesses. Physical exercise, appropriate nutrition and education will become more necessary in their school years... Each age has its own characteristics and demands attention to particular needs. And each one of them requires the presence of people who offer love, affection and ensure a protective environment for children.

Regrettably, nearly 300 million girls and boys from all over the world are exposed to violence, armed conflict, exploitation and abuse. Many girls suffer from harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child marriage. Many more millions, who are not yet victims, do not receive appropriate protection.

Children should not be victims of any type of exploitation, as affirmed in article 36 of the Convention of the United Nations on Children's

Rights. Protecting childhood means guaranteeing for all of them a life of security and dignity. A protective environment for childhood is one where all people are aware of the importance of taking appropriate care of children, where enough schools and welcoming centres exist to provide qualified attention, where there are spaces for healthy amusement and sharing with friends, where there are laws that sanction those who seek to exploit children, where all members of society collaborate to offer them what they need at each stage of their development.

Today, the reading of the prophet Isaiah gives us a hymn that should be in the mouths of all the children of the world. Just as the people of Israel felt safe because they found their protection in God, all children of our planet should find security in our cities and communities. It is a hymn that invites us to hope and to the commitment of building for them that protective environment which they need.

ABOUT... UNICEF

The United Nations' Fund for Children was created by the General Assembly of the UN on December 11 1946. Better known initially as the UN International Child Emergency Fund (from where come the initials UNICEF), had as its purpose attention to the child of the post-war era threatened by hunger and illness. In 1950, its mandate was widened to deal with the long term needs of children and women in the developing countries from all over the world. UNICEF permanently integrated the system of the United Nations in 1953. In this same year its name was shortened and it then called itself the Fund of the United Nations for the Child. Nevertheless, it maintained its original acronym UNICEF.

UNICEF works for the well-being of the child, through numerous programmes and projects, in 191 countries. It has eight regional offices and 126 offices in countries all over the world, as well as a centre for investigations in Florence (Italy) and a branch for supplies in Copenhagen (Denmark). Its central headquarters are in New York.

Website: www.unicef.org

TEXT

UNICEF uses the term "child protection" to refer to the actions put in place to guarantee the right of the child to survival, growth and development, preventing or acting against violence, exploitation and abuse. Children who lack the care of their parents, as well as children in situations of conflict, are particularly vulnerable to these situations.

Children who are deprived of their rights are at high risk of death, deterioration of their physical and mental health, of contamination by HIV, of receiving a poor education, of lacking housing, of being removed from their place of origin. However, many of these violations are endemic, and are not appropriately investigated or reported.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Reaffirming our obligation to take action to promote and protect the rights of all children and adolescents, let us pray that we will show our commitment to respect their dignity and assure the well-being of all children.

- That in the decisions we take in our communities we keep in mind the well-being of children, without any discrimination. Let us pray

- That in conflict situations, children be protected from all acts of violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination, as well as all forms of terrorism and hostage taking. Let us pray

- For those children, and their families who are victims of the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. Let us pray

- That all of us, according to our circumstances, contribute to the eradication of poverty and lack of education. Let us pray

- That the children may express their ideas and opinions, and that these are listened to and respected as a contribution to the construction of a better society. Let us pray.

- That we may grow in the conviction of the care that we should take of the environment, with its diversity, its beauty and its resources, to guarantee the quality of life of current and future generations. Let us pray

(Based in the document "A world Fit for Children")

CLOSING PRAYER

Tender and loving God, take equal care of all your sons and daughters, instill in us your Spirit so that we may, together with you, look after the well-being of all children. That we may create secure spaces where they can grow as people in peace and freedom. We ask this of you through Jesus Christ, our Lord, whom we serve.

Amen

05

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Edmund Rice International
www.edmundriceinternational.org

FRIDAY - FIRST WEEK

Isaiah 29: 17-24

The eyes of the blind will see

Psalms 26(27)

The Lord is my light and my salvation

Matthew 9: 27-31

Have mercy on us, Son of David!

ARTICLE 28: RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Today's reading from the Old Testament must give us pause. So often we are told that the biblical text sheds light on the human situation. Isaiah 29 catapults us straight into the reality of contemporary Lebanon, a country where the people continue to suffer because of unending conflict, regional political rivalries and inter-religious tensions.

At one time Lebanon was the one country in the Middle East that appeared to be truly a haven, a place protected from the poverty and insecurity that afflicted other countries in the region. Rich folk from all over the Middle East vacationed there. On the Cornice that hugs the Beirut Mediterranean coastline apartments and hotels define the palm-lined avenues and boulevards. Truly a place apart. Lebanon appeared to have realized so well the biblical hope that the country would one day be blessed by God, becoming an "orchard", even a flourishing forest providing shade against the noon-day sun.

In 1975 civil war broke out in Lebanon between pro-Palestinian and Christian forces. This war lasted for fifteen years, ending in 1990. A brief period of peace ensued only to be disrupted by further conflict between Hezbollah and Israeli forces in South Lebanon. Few nations in the world have been as ravaged by war and conflict as Lebanon. Not because Lebanon went to war against another nation. But rather because of internal strife, geopolitical interests and regional tensions.

At the present time almost sixty wars are on-going in different parts of the world, none of them between nation states. These conflicts make the world a violent place. Most of the time it is the children and young people who suffer most. In Lebanon, for example, it is estimated that 55 per cent of all casualties in recent conflicts have been children and young people under the age of 15. If this is the situation in Lebanon one can only guess at the impact of internal conflict in other parts of the world where conflict continues, places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Congo, Burundi, Colombia, Peru, and Sri Lanka.

As followers of Jesus whose hope lies in God's dream for the world, we are challenged this day to express our Advent faith by committing ourselves to work for a better world for children and young people in conflict situations. While access to education is improving for many young people, Save the Children, an international humanitarian NGO working in the field of education, has highlighted the fact that half of all young people who are not in school live in conflict-affected countries. Yet, these poorest of the poorest children and young people received less than one-fifth of funds made available for basic education aid. In Luxembourg, for example, the annual expenditure per child in primary education is \$12,000; in Eritrea and Burundi, two countries affected by conflict, the education expenditure per child is \$24. This is a situation that challenges us and calls us to reflection and action.

ABOUT... EDMUND RICE INTERNATIONAL

Edmund Rice International (ERI) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) committed to working for children and young people who are marginalised because of poverty, lack of access to education, legal status, environmental degradation, digression or involvement in armed conflict. This work involves engagement with the change-makers at the international level in order to bring issues and situations to the attention of the international community at the United Nations in New York and Geneva.

We seek to establish God's dream for the world through the promotion of justice and the liberation of people oppressed by poverty, marginalization and social exclusion.

TEXT

Estimates have it that at least half of the 110 million children receiving no education live in countries where there is or has recently been armed conflict. In 8 of those countries net school enrolment is below 50 per cent, and of the 17 countries in sub-Saharan Africa where enrolment fell in the previous decade, 6 were affected by wars.

Furthermore, of the 14 countries with low gender parity, 2 are still in the throes of armed conflict, 2 are in the process of recovery and at least 1 is involved in a regional conflict or rebellion.

...These situations have been given too little attention to guarantee the right to education in settings where all human rights are violated and opportunities for peaceful coexistence are extremely slender.

Mr Vernor Muñoz, Special Reporter on the Right to Education,
2006 Report to the Human Rights Commission – Now the Human Rights Council
UN Document: E/CN.4/2006/45, parr. 114, 115 and 118

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

For all children and young people who seek life, that people of passion and faith may respond to them in love, solidarity and commitment.

We pray to the Lord.

That we may open our hearts this day to those in our world whose lives are blighted by conflict and wars so that we may recognize in them the face of the suffering Jesus.

We pray to the Lord.

That we may work with people of good will in the countries and situations in which we live to ensure that peace-building initiatives at the international level are supported and implemented locally.

We pray to the Lord.

That as we welcome Jesus the Saviour during this Advent time we may also welcome opportunities to make ourselves more aware of the educational needs of children and young people in conflict situations.

We pray to the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear God, give us strength to walk on your path. Support efforts for peace and reconciliation throughout the world, and help us learn from your mercy and compassion. We pray that no child is marginalized due to poverty, lack of education or neglected care. We want to see the world through new eyes and commit ourselves in the hope of build a better world for all.
Amen.

06

DECEMBER

*Introducing:
Marists in Africa*

SATURDAY - FIRST WEEK

Isaiah 30:19-21.23-26: *You will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help!*

Psalm 146(145): *Blessed is he whose help is God.*

Matthew 9:35–10:1.6-8: *When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.*

ARTICLE 32: PROTECTION FROM EXPLOITATION

The passage of the Gospel shows Jesus to us, moved with compassion on the crowds: he teaches to the crowds, he proclaims the good news to the people and he heals them. Psalm 146 praises the Lord who is the protector of the weak, who upholds the cause of the oppressed, who lifts up those who are bowed down, who watches over the refugees and comforts the widow and the orphan. This biblical message is rightly read together with Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that protects minors from economic exploitation and forced labour. Especially the latter can harm the physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development of the child.

What can we proclaim as hope for children? What more can we tell children during this time of Advent? Let us be inspired by the prophet Isaiah, who says “How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you” (Isaiah 30:19b). Instead of proclaiming hope, let us rather start to listen to the children, wherever each of us is. May our listening be made of tenderness and respect for their conscience. Let us welcome them, listen to them and respond to their search for a sense to their lives. If we can.

ABOUT... MARIST SOLIDARITY

Books for pupils in need (Orore—Kenya)

In Kenya the Marist Brothers of the community of Orore run a primary School called Our Lady of Orore. Orore is a small fishing village of about 150 people who live 15 km from Karungu, on the shores of Lake Victoria, close to the borders of Uganda and Tanzania. In 1996, the brothers built a private school there, where school fees are extremely low. They try to improve educational standards among poor children, who live in a remote place. The region is semi-arid and has few natural resources. Fishing is often the only sure anchor for children. The girls marry early when their education is still poor. In addition, many children are orphans due to AIDS which has spread far and wide in the region.

In such a poor and disadvantaged social context, for young people, education often represents an important means for personal and economic advancement.

The school has never received any contribution from the government and it depends entirely on donations. A micro-project of BIS allowed to buy some school books for the orphans who could not pay the school fees.

TEXT

“One relevant problem today is that more than 250 million children aged 5 to 14 in the world are forced to work. Forms of exploitation vary significantly and they are often very dangerous. But children are forced to do so in order to escape hunger... Some children are ill-treated and that is no longer the case of exploitation, but rather of slavery... is it really a world for children?” (UNICEF)

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- In this time of Advent, let us learn from Mary how to welcome and listen to children, those who speak and those who do not. If we can, let us respond to their requests. Let us pray to the Lord.
- Let us pray especially for children who are exploited in different ways. Let us pray also for those who are exposed to a polluted environment, with no oxygen, in conditions of suffocating heat, or constant humidity, who risk to harm themselves by falls or landslides. Let us pray to the Lord.
- We pray for God to bless and grant his endless grace to all those who respect the rights of children. May they continue to do good deeds in silence. Let us pray to the Lord.
- Let us ask for forgiveness for our different faults towards children. Let us pray for our hearts to change. Let us respect the development of children and young people whom we serve, their special interests and needs. Let us pray to the Lord.
- Grant us, o Lord, to invite children and young people to a dialogue of life, to be in touch with the Word of God and the spirit that acts in them. May we bring with us that good news that reaches the victims and people marginalised by our societies as they seek common happiness. Let us pray to the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER

Thank you, o Lord, for your love for us. Thank you for your love for every child on earth. You know it better than we do: every child, every young boy or girl is different. Every group of children or young people has its own characteristics. Every social and cultural context brings its riches and its challenges to our mission. Teach us to welcome them all, to listen to them and respect their rights, offering them your good news. Thank you Emmanuel.

07

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Marists in Europe
Reflection from Greece

SUNDAY - SECOND WEEK

Isaiah 40:1-5.9-11. *The Lord tends his flock like a shepherd*
Psalm 84(85): *My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord*
2 Peter 3:8-14: *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise*
Mark 1:1-8: *A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord*

ARTICLE 13: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

"My name is Stavroula, I'm 16 years old. I live in Athens in a home for children who have been ill-treated, or abandoned. With my 6 brothers and sisters it is now 11 years that we were found inside a cellar, abandoned by our parents whom we have never seen again.

Our life is not like that of a family, but we respect each other and frequently discuss at "home" with the people in charge. At school I do not have the right to express my opinion. In the class that is what always happens, because I do not have a family, I live differently from the others and the others do not accept my opinion. Was I asked if it was me who chose this situation? What can I do to be listened to, like the others, who live with their families. At "home" they tell me I have to fight to make my voice be heard. But how can I fight against ignorance and rejection?

I know my rights; we have already spoken of them and we often do at "home", but I cannot accept the abusive words of Alexandros, when

I wanted to have a say once, when we were making a decision in our class: "You shut up, you know nothing and your opinion is worthless. Did someone ask you where you wanted to live, they just put you there, that's all". How should I explain that I can express my opinion, that at "home" we live in a place of dialogue and understanding. But neither Alexandros, nor my classmates ever came to see my place".

Stavroula is astonishingly mature. She knows well her rights and she's ready to make her classmates understand them. But she does need a chance. Hasn't the time come to change an educational system founded on "filling young people's heads", to educate teenagers and young people to better understand themselves and respect each other, to develop a serene personality, worthy of being called a "creature of God"?

Stavroula is in the best position to help her friends understand their rights, defend them and promote them.

ABOUT...MARIST SOLIDARITY

A project for gipsy children (Tirana—Albania)

The micro projects of BIS are not reserved only to the Marist Brothers, but to all those who share the mission of the Institute: groups or individuals who wish to act in solidarity with others. This BIS program supports the Community of Sant'Egidio of Tirana, the capital of Albania, in a project for gipsy children.

Gipsies in Albania are extremely poor, partly due to the nomadic life that characterises their culture and partly because of the persecutions that were carried out against them. Their current conditions worsen because of prejudice, marginalisation and the local bureaucracy that penalise the less affluent and less educated. Gipsy children are doubtless the ones who are most affected, because they are not registered at birth, and therefore do not exist for the State of Albania, where they enjoy no rights. This state of permanent social exclusion maintains poverty and encourages crime.

The project aims at promoting the personal and cultural development of the children so that they can be better integrated in the society. The activities are carried out in a centre run by the Community of Sant'Egidio where 50 children are registered at birth, enrolled in primary school and can benefit from support, recreational activities and psychological assistance.

TEXT

“We need to allow children and teenagers to express their opinion, in order to allow them to develop their skills, to have a positive image of themselves and acquire knowledge and competences, in particular in the field of conflict resolution, decision-making and communication, which will help them face the problems that will challenge them in their lives... We need to respect and promote the rights and freedom of expression of children and teenagers, and their opinion must be considered by all the sectors of society involved with them, by paying the necessary attention to the opinions of children according to their age and maturity. The energy and creativity of children and young people must be encouraged so that they may actively shape the environment, society and the world they will inherit”.

From the Document: A World Fit For Children—UN Special Session for Children 2002

A proverb says:
“We did not inherit the earth,
Our children lent it to us”.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- Let us think of a day when children's right to high-quality education is fulfilled.
- Let us thank the Lord for the voices of the youth, who challenge us to leave our sense of apathy.
- Let us work to find the ways to promote a child's right to education.
- Let us work to make the need to be heard rise in the children we walk side by side with.
- Let us dare to let children speak and give a privileged place to their words in our hearts

CLOSING PRAYER

O Lord,
You are the light that gives light to our steps
You guide us towards children and young people.
Our hope rests in You;
Guide the steps of children and young people.
For us they are the voice of the prophet
Who proclaims the return to God, our Father.
Keep watch, so that these “little ones”
Be spared from suffering.

08

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Marists in Latin America
Reflection from Costa Rica

MONDAY - SECOND WEEK

Gen 3, 9-15.20. *I will make you enemies of each other you and the woman.*
Ps 97(96). *Sing to the Lord a new song, because he has done marvels.*
Eph 1, 3-6.11-12. *He chose us in the person of Christ before creating the world.*
Lk 1, 26-38. *Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you*

ARTICLE 9, 10, 18: RIGHT TO A FAMILY

The right of children and young people to a family is based on the principle that everyone needs a favourable atmosphere in which to find security and well-being, indispensable for harmonious and healthy development. Thanks to this, he or she will be able to face life with hope and with illusion, and will give of their best to build a fairer society and become the voice of future children and young people irrespective of their rights.

In Costa Rica, the Code of the Child and the Adolescent is the normative entity that regulates and supports the right of children and young people to a family. Different articles (13, 29, 30 and others), confirm the right of young people to be protected by the State against any form of abandonment or abuse, as well as the obligation of parents to look after the integral development of their sons and daughters who should grow and develop alongside their parents. In the same way, article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child records that States will "ensure the primary commit-

ment of the parents or of those in legal charge of the upbringing and the child's development. In their absence, the State will be responsible for the creation of special places for the care of children or offer the necessary free technical assistance".

We, Marists, cultivate, at all times, respect for the dignity of the person as being the daughter and son of God. And, like the Holy Family, we recognize the value of the family nucleus and we support every struggle, every effort, with a view to creating a favourable atmosphere in which the family is consolidated and the school is a continuation of this. Following the example of Marcellin Champagnat, we commit ourselves to helping the most disadvantaged children and young people, those who do not benefit from their right to a family and who find in our works a place of welcome, where a family spirit exists which is able to create hope and illusion for the future. Mary, Our Good Mother, the Immaculate Virgin, directs us to commit to being "brothers and sisters" to all.

ABOUT...MARIST SOLIDARITY

SEA Project (Asunción - Paraguay)

The Marist Brothers have worked in the barrio of San Ramón since 1992, dedicated to education. They direct the School of the Sagrada Familia there.

During these past years, the Brothers have been able to check that there are students who cannot follow their studies as normal because they are not well nurtured and have health problems.

To solve the problem they have set up the project called SEA (Health, Education, Nourishment) whose objective is to assist the more defenceless boys and girls, offering them nutritional and sanitary assistance by means of:

- *A daily and free service of food (midday lunch) together with social assistance;*
- *A medical team that travels around the barrios, for vaccination and distribution of medicines.*

The Office of International Solidarity of Rome has coordinated actions to make possible the support of this project, thanks to the contribution of the French Marist schools of Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule (Collège Notre-Dame des Victoires), from Aubenas (Collège Immaculée Conception) and from Saint-Étienne (Collège Notre-Dame de Valbenoîte).

TEXT

In the same way that Marcellin, when he was founding the Marist Brothers, thought particularly about the less favoured young people, our preference should be for those excluded from society, and those who, because of their material poverty, suffer deficiencies in health, family life, schooling and education in values.

In The Footsteps of Marcellin, 54.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- Today we celebrate the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the woman full of the grace of God. We ask that all the boys and girls of the world may enjoy a healthy and stimulating atmosphere, in which their families develop their human values and welcome divine grace into their lives.
- For those who, with their hearts hardened by hate and ambition, disrespect the fundamental rights of children and young people, may the love of God reveal to them the needs of others and may they meet people who show them the way to find solidarity.
- For the fathers and mothers of all the Marist families, that, aware of their role as the primary educators of their sons and daughters, they may grow in the esteem and appreciation of their children, directing them to faith in Christ, in whom they will reach all fullness.
- For all the children and young people of the world who do not enjoy the stability and warmth of a family. May they find in people and in shared Institutions, the alternative of testimony, faith and hope in their lives.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, in these days of preparation for the feast of Christmas we give you thanks for your love, for your mercy.

Make us sensitive in the face of the needs of others, especially for the need of love and protection experienced by children and young people who do not have a family or who, having one, do not find in it the respect for their rights nor the conditions to grow up to be healthy.

Strengthen us in our conviction to fight from our own situation for the promotion of humanity and for the freedom of those who are excluded.

Give us more strongly the gift of love to open our heart and our hands to so many children and needy young people. May our commitment not be fixed in beautiful resolutions, but rather may it flourish in concrete expressions of solidarity, like Mary. Amen.

09

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Office of UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights

TUESDAY - SECOND WEEK

Isaiah 40,1-11.

God comforts his people.

Psalm 95(96).

The Lord will judge the world in righteousness and in his truth.

Matthew 18,12-14.

Your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

ARTICLE 19: PROTECTION AGAINST VIOLENCE

Article 19 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child provides for the obligation of all States Parties to take "all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child".

193 States, almost the entire international community, have ratified the Convention, thus committing to this obligation. However, the UN Study on Violence against Children presents a comprehensive picture of the horrific scale of violence against children. Although widely condemned, violence against children remains widespread and hidden. Its invisibility is due to several factors, among which societal acceptance of violence plays a crucial role. In many societies, there exists a tendency to regard children not as fully fledged human beings, but as "mini human beings with mini human rights".

This makes children particularly vulnerable to violence and fosters impunity for violence against them.

As the High Commissioner for Human Rights said, the Convention "has brought about an understanding that children are not the property of parents or guardians, nor objects of generosity or goodwill, but are rights-holders, just like adults". This understanding is essential if children are to be effectively protected from violence and must guide all efforts to this end.

The soon to be appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General on violence against children will be a high level advocate who – with the support of all stakeholders – shall promote the change of attitude, which is needed for the effective implementation of article 19.

ABOUT...OHCHR

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) represents the world's commitment to universal ideals of human dignity. We have a unique mandate from the international community to promote and protect all human rights.

The OHCHR supports the work of the United Nations human rights mechanisms, such as the Human Rights Council and the core treaty bodies set up for: monitoring State Parties' compliance with international human rights treaties, promoting the right to development, coordinating United Nations human rights education and public information activities, and strengthening human rights across the United Nations system.

We work to ensure the enforcement of universally recognized human rights norms, including through promoting both the universal ratification and implementation of the major human rights treaties and respect for the rule of law.

OHCHR Website: www.ohchr.org

TEXT

“In every region, in contradiction to human rights obligations and children’s developmental needs, violence against children is socially approved, and is frequently legal and State-authorised.”

“Protection of children from violence is a matter of urgency. Children have suffered adult violence unseen and unheard for centuries. Now that the scale and impact of all forms of violence against children is becoming better known, children must be provided with the effective prevention and protection to which they have an unqualified right...”

“Children are tired of being called the future. They want to enjoy their childhood, free of violence, now!”

Reference Website: www.unviolencestudy.org

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- Because violence against children still happens everywhere, we want to engage in the promotion of “well-treatment” for each child, each adolescent, for each person. Give us the strength of your Spirit to proclaim and to act: we want to participate in the work for justice and peace.
- With all those men and women who work to console those who suffer: we want to participate in the efforts for justice and peace.
- With the community of nations that are committed in dialogue for protection and promotion of Human Rights: we want to participate in the efforts for justice and peace.
- With many organizations that promote development, education and solidarity: we want to participate in the efforts for justice and peace.
- Lord, we believe that your Kingdom is made of love and compassion. Together with you: we want to participate in the efforts for justice and peace.

CLOSING PRAYER

Oh, God,

you created man and woman in your image and in your likeness, for all of us have the same dignity.

Help us to see in every person by our side, a brother, a sister, and to build together a better world, so that none of your children, especially the little ones, will be lost, but enjoy a life in dignity.

Amen.

10

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Marist Youth Care
(Australia)

WEDNESDAY - SECOND WEEK

Isaiah 40, 25-31. *The Lord gives strength to the weary.*

Psalms 102(103). *Bless the Lord, my soul.*

Matthew 11, 28-30. *Come to me, all you who are burdened.*

ARTICLE 25: CHILDREN IN CENTRES

« *There's no place like home. Is that what you think? What makes a home?*

Christmas in my family was very sad. We lived in a rented house, in a very poor area in the outer suburbs of Sydney. It was not like the pretty pictures you see on Christmas cards, where everyone loves one another; food and presents are shared. Christmas in my house was very different.

There was never enough money for presents, sometimes not even enough for food. There were never any visitors, but that was probably a good thing as mum and her boyfriend often drank too much alcohol and got into big arguments. These often resulted in violence towards me.

Christmas was to change for me when I was removed from my family, to live in a shelter

centre run by Marist Youth Care. It took me some time to adjust, but for the first time in my life I felt safe.

Even though I miss my mum, I now have a happier Christmas day. After putting up the tree and decorations, I share a delicious meal with the staff and other young people who live in the house. This meal was donated by a local business.

By the time I go to bed at night, gifts have been shared, much fun has been had and I've telephoned my mother to wish her a happy Christmas.

On this Christmas night I will sleep peacefully.»

Amelia, 14 years old

ABOUT...MARIST YOUTH CARE

Marist Youth Care was established in 1994 to promote and manage the expanding social welfare works of the Marist Brothers of the Sydney Province. The Marist Brothers have been caring for disadvantaged youth in Sydney since 1896 when they were invited to manage St. Vincent's Boys' Home at Westmead.

The Marist network of services in Western Sydney includes:

Short term crisis accommodation for adolescents; Medium to long term independent living skills programs; Intensive out of home services for adolescents; Community placements for young people; Medium term family restoration programs; Family and school conferencing service; Restorative Justice programs for schools and Adult disability residential program.

In the light of the Gospels and in the spirit of St. Marcellin Champagnat, the founder of the Marist Brothers, the Agency works in the interests of disadvantaged people in our society to promote personal growth and community development.

Marist Youth Care respects the prime role of the family in the nurturing of young people and works to establish and restore family relationships where possible. Our social welfare works address needs in society without discrimination

MYC Website: www.maristyc.org.au

TEXT

“There are 36,000 homeless young people in Australia looking for a bed for the night. Only half of them will be fortunate enough to be accepted into emergency accommodation. The other half will be turned away because services are full.

The reasons behind youth homelessness vary. For about 50%, it's a breakdown in their relationship with their parents or step parents. Most experience financial difficulties and find it hard to get a job. Some have mental health issues, while others suffer sexual or physical abuse and lack emotional and physical support.”

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Lord God, mother and father of us all
Advent is a time of waiting and Christmas is a
time for gifts
You know how eager we are to get started on
our lives
We ask you to gift us with patience and guide
us on our way.

R: Lord show us your way

We ask you for the **gift of vision**
Help us to see beyond our current situation
Help us to see the road ahead clearly
Help us to recognize and avoid the traps on the
way

R: Lord show us your way

We ask you for the **gift of forgiveness**
Others have let us down in the past
Let us not repeat their mistakes
Let us forgive them and give us the courage to
move forward

R: Lord show us your way

We ask you for the **gift of love**
Help us to love others despite having been hurt
Help us to allow others to heal us with their love
Let us share your love with all those we meet

R: Lord show us your way

We ask you for the **gift of hope**
When we feel that the situation is hopeless
Help us to hand things over to you
And to wait in faith for your next direction

R: Lord show us your way

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord,

This Christmas we pray that all people receive the gifts of forgiveness, love and hope. We particularly pray for all the children and young people in our world who are not with their families. May they sleep peacefully this Christmas in your care.

Amen

11

DECEMBER

Introducing:
AVSI Foundation

THURSDAY - SECOND WEEK

Is 41, 13-20. *I, your Lord, your redeemer and the Holy One of Israel.*
Ps. 144. *The Lord is merciful and forgiving; slow to anger and rich in mercy.*
Mt 11, 11-15. *No-one has been born greater than John the Baptist.*

ARTICLE 31: RIGHT TO REST AND LEISURE

Enjoyable activities (playing, relaxing, art and hobbies) are an important part of everyone's life, and this applies in a special way to children. Children and adults need time to relax both physically and mentally. In the early years of life, opportunities for rest and relaxation are necessary elements for appropriate physical, mental, social and spiritual development. This is why the Convention of Child's Rights lays down, in its article 31 that the States will "respect and promote the child's right to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and they will create appropriate opportunities, under conditions of equality, for participating in cultural, artistic, recreational life and for relaxation."

Although children's games can seem trivial, they have very great educational potential. Through play, children connect with others, they learn rules, they face difficulties and new situations, they make decisions, they react to stimuli... we can affirm that games create a space where children can learn how to grow, to discover and develop capacities which will be of great use to them in their life.

What prevents children from enjoying those spaces for recreation and relaxation? The lack of places where children can play and have a good time together with other children or the insecurity that exists in these spaces; the lack

of centres for teaching music and art in their diverse expressions; the fact that many children are forced to work from an early age; poverty; the application of new technologies that do not promote team games or creative thought. It is inadmissible that many children are still deprived of cultural and recreational activities, when we know the benefits that they will bring to them.

Today the reading of the prophet Isaiah speaks to us of a promise made by God to Israel and uses an image that evokes abundance and peace, in a situation where the people are threatened by their enemies. God is near his people, and the prophet's voice announces what the people need. Could we not be, in this time of advent, the prophets who announce and promote spaces of amusement and play for children who suffer solitude, sadness, and abandonment? The Christmas for which we are preparing is an opportune time for us all to experience the happiness of knowing that God has become a child among us. It is a time of rest, of recreation, of enjoying family and friends. Many children are expecting toys that will entertain them. How good it would be if there were always smiles on the faces of all children at this time... and every day of the year! How can we work together to make this a reality?

ABOUT...AVSI FOUNDATION

The AVSI Foundation is a non-governmental, non-profit organization, created in 1972 and involved in more than a hundred projects of cooperation and development in 39 countries of the world.

At the moment, AVSI has a presence in Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia, operating in the sectors of health, hygiene, attention to the child in situations of adversity, education, professional formation, recovery of marginal urban areas, agriculture, environment, micro companies, safe nourishment, information and communication technologies.

Our mission is the promotion of the dignity of people through projects of cooperation for development, with particular attention to education, according to the guidance of the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Website: www.avsi.org

TEXT

"... Together we will build a world in which girls and boys will be able to enjoy their childhood, a stage of games and learning, in which they will receive love, respect and affection, in which their rights will be promoted and protected, without any form of discrimination, in which their security and well-being will be fundamental and in which they will be able to grow up healthy, in peace and with dignity."

*"A world fit for children ",
declaration of the of United Nations' General Assembly of October of 2002, No. 9*

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Let us pray like children who have confidence in their parents. God is good to us, his sons and daughters, and he promises us his closeness and protection. We appeal with confidence, saying

R / Look at us with tenderness and receive our prayer

- For the Church, a community which welcomes everyone. That there never be any lack of spaces for happiness, serenity and peace giving the feeling of being a family, all of us children of God who is our Father and Mother. Let us pray
- For the families, the first places where children grow and experience love. That there will always be people who support and stimulate them, who love and understand them. Let us pray
- For the children who practice music and/or sport. That they may make other people happy through their achievements and pass on messages of hope and strength. Let us pray
- For the child workers, who "gamble with their lives" in the streets or in their work places. That people respect their right to play and recreation, and that measures be adopted to guarantee their access to a life in dignity, together with their families. Let us pray.

- For the schools and teaching centres. That they never lack spaces of rest and recreation for children and adults, where we can all experience what it is to be educated and grow in life, and not just to rise in social status or have a title. Let us pray
- For all the boys, girls and adolescents of the world. So that they can enjoy their childhood, that stage of games and of learning, always receiving love, respect and affection and that their rights be promoted and protected, without any type of discrimination; so that their security and well-being are supreme and that they can grow in health, in peace and with dignity. Let us pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Grant us, Lord God of all, that we may never lack the peace and the kindness that come from You. That boys and girls everywhere in the world can play, have a good time; and that this helps in their integral growth as people. May they learn how to love the beauty that is expressed through art and with their own creativity they will pass on messages of fraternity, justice and peace. Grant us what we ask of you on behalf of your Son, Jesus Christ, the Lord for whom we are waiting. Amen.

12

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Point Cœur Association

FRIDAY - SECOND WEEK

Isaiah: 48, 17-19. If you had known how to obey my commands.
Psalms 1: The Lord watches over the way of the just.
Matthew: 11, 16-19. This generation has not heeded John or the Son of Man.

ARTICLE 2: NO DISCRIMINATION

The best thing that we can give to children who are ill-treated is to bestow upon them a look of love which respects their dignity, a look that can overcome all the contempt of which they were the innocent victims.

This is what I have been able to experience in the Point-Cœur of Argentina through Damien, 11 years old, already steeped in drugs. Damien comes from a family in which all his uncles sell and use the drug. His mum worked as a prostitute and left young Damien with his aunt. He was a violent child.

One day he found out that children could come to play and have a good time in our Point-Cœur. He came once, then kept returning, and his favourite game was to make us lose patience with his terrible violence. When he saw that we were not afraid of him and that we liked him for himself, as a fully-fledged person, he began to respect us and became our friend.

For me, Damien is a carrier of hope.

ABOUT...POINT CŒUR

Points-Cœur is a Catholic movement of compassion and consolation involving the most rejected children and men throughout the world. It offers young people, called Friends of the Children, an opportunity to give one or two years of their life to God and to the most forsaken among men, through sharing the life of a particularly underprivileged district, within a small community.

Founded in 1990 by Father Thierry of Roucy, s.j.m., Points-Cœur has been recognized, since April 2000, as a private association of supporters by Mgr. Karlic, then archbishop of Parana (Argentina). With the passing of the years, Points-Cœur has become a real movement for a culture of compassion, not only lived out in shanty towns, but also in families, in the world of work, in the scientific world, etc.

Today, the action of Points-Cœur also unites people, countries and situations where misery is most hidden. Thanks to its consultative status in the UNO, it works to have the rights of people recognized.

Website: www.heartshome.org

TEXT

"The only criterion of success that God gives to men is love. Also for us, to serve the little ones, to love them, as God loves them, with their sufferings, their hatred, their criticisms; it is to go beyond indifference and to accept being wounded; it is being a presence which is really respectful of the liberty of others.

In every encounter, we experience a mysterious exchange. Through the service of listening, we reveal to the poor their dignity. And we, in return, discover the truth of who we are: the poor among the poor. "

Father Thierry de Roucy, founder of Points-Cœur

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- Let us ask the Lord to show us how to be true witnesses of the Good News for all the children of the world, while respecting their customs, their culture and their education.
- In spite of the sufferings we may encounter and which might overwhelm us, let us ask the Lord to welcome and to bring to the children, in every circumstance, the joy of hope.
- Grant us Lord, the grace to be attentive, to look with compassion towards every child, be he harsh or smiling, tender or distant.
- We ask of the Lord the grace for every child to discover his infinite dignity so that he can affirm his identity as a person through his culture and his education.

CLOSING PRAYER

May this Advent be for us a deep interior journey.

May our mind, heart and soul then become a charming nursery in which the Lord will be able to be born, and a marvellous place where He will be able to grow.

This is what our life should be, our Advent: waiting for the one our heart loves, first in each of us, then in those whom we serve.

Amen

13

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Handicap International

SATURDAY - SECOND WEEK

Sirach 48 :1-4, 9-11. Elijah will return.
Ps 79(80). O God, bring us back. Let your face shine on us and we shall be saved.
Mt 17, 10-13. Elijah has indeed come, but they did not recognize him.

ARTICLE 23: CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

According to United Nations statistics, more than 500 million people experience some form of disability, be it physical, mental or sensory. We may not know precisely the number of children who live with disabilities, but we do know, on the other hand, that within our social settings such children are to be respected, accepted and fully incorporated. Just like their peers, disabled children want to play, to dream, to learn and to be loved.

Along with our being open to disabled children and welcoming them, we need to say loud and clear that, like other people affected by disabilities, such children are not "defective" creatures. Disabled children are as dear to us as the other children in our entourage. Indeed, we must remind ourselves that if we do not cherish the rights of disabled children, or if we refuse to give them the opportunity to take part in building up society according to their abilities, we thereby force them to live on the margins of life, in social isolation and in loneliness.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks with regret about the people of his time who did not recog-

nize John the Baptist as a God-sent messenger. Jesus' words also challenge us to have "our eyes open and our hearts attentive," ready to recognize in every person, especially in those who are disabled, the image of God who reveals Himself to those who are prepared to encounter Him.

On May 3rd of this year, the Convention on the Rights of the Disabled will come into effect. The Convention has been ratified by twenty-seven countries, with another hundred countries ready to affix their signatures. Governments which sign onto the Convention commit themselves to certain duties. In effect, the duties would guarantee respect for the rights of disabled persons, including disabled children.

Today, then, would be a perfect occasion to pray for children who have disabilities of whatever kind. In addition, we could spend a few moments getting to know the Convention and working together to change attitudes which block full recognition of the disabled as normal, participating members of society.

ABOUT...HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL

Handicap International is a solidarity organization, an international association specializing in the field of disabilities. It is non-governmental, non-confessional, under no political obligations, and not for profit. Handicap International gets involved in various fields which touch the lives of the disabled, so as to assist them and support them closely in attaining greater autonomy.

Since it was begun in 1982, the Handicap International has gotten involved in development programs in nearly sixty countries. It has also taken an active role in many emergency situations. The network of eight national bodies (Germany, Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USA) works ceaselessly to raise money, to co-manage projects and to make widely known the principles and the activities of the mother organization.

Website : www.handicap-international.org

TEXT

Did you know that... ?

- *The principal causes of disabilities - war, sickness, poverty - can be prevented?*
- *Disabled children run the risk of living in poverty, of being victims of discrimination, abuse or neglect?*
- *From its first appearance in 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the first treaty which, based on international law, had a specific reference to disabilities?*
- *Despite what has been established in Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, many disabled children find that they are denied the right to education, to health services and rehabilitation, to acquiring work skills, and to having recreational opportunities?*
- *Constructing buildings which have facilities for the disabled, adds only a one percent increase to the overall cost of the buildings?*

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Today, let us pray for our own handicaps:
Lord, in this time of Advent, help us to overcome . . .

- ... the blindness which blocks our perception of the other person as brother or sister;
- ... the inertia and passivity of the world which blocks us from making a commitment to building a world which will be a more just and peaceful place in which to live;
- ... the paralysis which affects our countenance, preventing us from smiling at those whom we encounter every day along the path of life;
- ... the deafness which inhibits our hearing the voices of those who suffer from famine, sickness and grave social problems;
- ... the dyslexia of conscience which hinders our reading the signs of the times and the salvific plan which you, Father in heaven, have revealed through such signs;
- ... (One may add personal intentions.)

CLOSING PRAYER

Most gracious Father, remove from our hearts those forces which prevent us from believing in your love and mercy. Grant us your grace, so that during the time of Advent, we may choose to "make straight the ways" which lead to you. May we walk with serenity and strength as we try to attain a fullness of blessing for all people. Amen.

14

DECEMBER

Introducing:
International Catholic
Migration Commission

SUNDAY - THIRD WEEK

Isaiah 61, 1-2a.10-1
Psalm: Lk 1, 46-50.53-54
1 Tes 5, 16-24
John 1,6-8.19-28

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the captives
My soul glorifies the Lord
Be joyful always; pray continually
Among you stands one you do not know

ARTICLE 22: REFUGEE CHILDREN

Among those who on a moment's notice
and against all they could possibly have imagined
had to run for their lives
from the country of their birth
in a frantic escape in the middle of the night...

Among those crossing an international border
with no papers and no welcome
leaving everything except what they could carry
not looking back at the killing and the dead...

Was one recently married couple
with a baby they had not planned
a vulnerability they had not expected
and but one certainty:
the baby would die if they stayed...

A baby, the story is clear, that needed to be saved
in order to save;
that perhaps needed to cross a border in such hard-
ship in order to say,
"When I was a stranger, you welcomed me;"
No less than God's hope for a troubled world
--and no accident:
undocumented Jesus,
of Egypt,
refugee.

It is always important to ask: what does it really
mean for us that our God and Saviour came to us as
a human being? It is also important, however, for us
to ask what it really means, and carefully consider,
that this Son of God was a refugee, whose life was

threatened - and then saved.

In the Jewish tradition, to save a life is to change
the world. In the Muslim tradition, to save a life is to
save the world. In the Gospels, Jesus says to us:
when you save a life, you save ME.

What does that say about hope for children and
young people who are refugees? As Pope Benedict
XI describes in the first line of his recent letter *Spe
Salvi*, it is in hope that we are saved.

Sometimes we find and feel that hope ourselves;
often it comes from or together with others. "*From
the hope of people touched by Christ, hope has
arisen for others living in darkness;*" the Holy Father
writes, and it is a "*trustworthy hope.*"

In today's readings, St. Paul—who himself had just
been forced to leave the country to which he was
writing the letter—is clear: "He who calls you is trust-
worthy; therefore he will do it." "Never cease pray-
ing," St. Paul continues, and "do not stifle the Spirit."

Around the world, in camps, capitals and courts, the
Church and many local, national and international
organizations work every day for better responses to
refugee needs and hopes. Positive progress in UN
human rights treaties and institutions that focus on
children, families, refugee protection and resettlement
are examples of great hope, hope in action. Church
groups and people of faith are also signs of hope:
living with and accompanying refugees in struggle, in
hope, directly, individually; each name known, each
life precious.

ABOUT...ICMC

The International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC) serves and protects the needs of uprooted people, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants, regardless of creed, nationality or ethnic origin. Jesus Christ told his followers to "*welcome the stranger*" (Matthew, chapter 25). The work of ICMC is inspired and guided by this Gospel imperative.

ICMC advocates for durable solutions and rights-based policies directly and through a worldwide network of 172 member organizations. ICMC have operations in 30 countries of the world, including Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan and Turkey.

ICMC's expertise and core programming consists of refugee resettlement, return and reintegration, local integration, work with extremely vulnerable individuals, counter-trafficking and rescue, NGO capacity-building, technical cooperation and government institution-building, emergency response and advocacy.

Website: www.icmc.net

TEXT

The United Nations reports that nearly 15 million people today are refugees forced to live outside their own countries, more than half children and teenagers. 10 million of them have been waiting 15 years or more in “temporary” settlements. Just last year, another 26 million men, women and children were uprooted by wars or natural disasters, displaced either within their own countries or in neighboring lands.

While a small number will be permitted to re-start their lives in new countries, most will at some point be able to return home. Many will need—and receive—the assistance of their own governments and the international community.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Advent is a time to prepare for prayers to be answered, to recognize that God’s promise is not empty; that faithful waiting is rewarded. The response to today’s prayers of the faithful is:

Lord, send us the hope that saves.

- Today’s readings confirm God’s repeated promise to liberate those in captivity. For all among us and for all in the world who are refugees; for victims of human trafficking and others tricked or trapped in the slavery of our day; for migrants and others in detention or prisons, especially those who have been completely forgotten, and for all who love, visit and work for them, *let us pray to the Lord.*
- Lord, help us to see with our own eyes how hope saves, including among so many former refugee children and young people, whose hope and often long waiting have been redeemed. For all among us and for all in the world who are waiting: waiting and working for war to end, for economic change, health care and even weather that is needed to sustain life, and for decision-makers of all kinds to hear the cry of the poor for dignity, for justice, for solidarity, *let us pray to the Lord.*
- In the Gospel today, John the Baptist points us humbly and directly to the One who is Hope. May we learn to look for the One who comes to us, calling us his own; may our lives too, point humbly and directly to Him, giving

hope to others as well. That all among us and all in the world who are able to help, help; who are able to pray, pray without ceasing; and who are able to share hope do so with whoever may be sick, lonely or in despair; struggling with addiction, family crisis, unemployment or poverty, *we pray to the Lord.*

- Lord, we give you thanks for holding us close, for giving us hope, and for all your blessings. We thank you for our parents and families; our Church and church leaders; our friends, teachers, co-workers and communities. We thank you for the opportunities to serve you and others, especially the most vulnerable. Transform us all, Lord, into communion; help us to welcome one another; to remember that we are, indeed, each other’s home. *For this we pray*

CLOSING PRAYER

Sweet Jesus, brother and companion, we trust to you our lives and our loves, our heartaches and hopes. Always dependent on you, we turn to you in a special way when we are lost, abandoned or rejected; we cling to you when all seems against us. Refugee Son of God, have mercy on us and all who are not sure of their next step, their next home, and on all those who offer hope. And may we ourselves be hope and mercy when it is our turn to respond to those around us who are in need and wilderness.

Amen.

15

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Marist in Latin America
Reflection from Mexico

MONDAY - THIRD WEEK

Nm 24,2-7.15-17a *A star shall advance from Jacob*
Ps 25(26) *Let me know your way, O Lord*
Mt 21,23-27 *Where was John's baptism from?*

ARTICLE 14: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

When a young person places their hands upon their chest in the expression of prayer, when they look heavenward, when they tell you that God is their friend, when they look up to you - whether as father, mother, teacher, priest, religious - taking you as their hope, their all, their ideal, their model, we must not allow others to destroy or devalue what is most valuable in the human person: freedom.

Today, through the Word of God, children are asking us, by what authority do we exercise an influence upon their consciousness? By what authority do we destroy their thinking, their very childhood? We cannot answer them by saying that our authority comes from our being adults, if in fact our way of living is ever more distant from the truth, if our behavior limits, frustrates or judges others, if we see only what suits us and makes our lives more comfortable.

The right to freedom of thought, of conscience

and religion, recognized even in Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, calls upon us to act so that no belief be imposed. The article acknowledges the possibility of forming the child's consciousness in full freedom, being open to the world, to others and to the environment. In our own day, freedom of conscience can make a contribution to the recognition of the man-woman equality. If we respect such matters, we will assuredly build a worthy kind of life.

Nowadays we have to revitalize our faith; we have to hear what our hearts are saying; we have to remember our childhood. To take but a few moments of reflection and follow it up with a kind of false repentance is not adequate, if I am not interiorly committed to children. To imagine that God will show me his ways each morning is insufficient if, as day draws to a close, I realize that I have not followed him.

ABOUT...MARIST SOLIDARITY

Project for Mexican Social Organizations (Guadalajara, Mexico)

Jalisco is one of the thirty-one states which comprise the United States of Mexico. Jalisco's capital is Guadalajara, whose citizens represent, at the present time, more than 50% of the State's total population of 6,322,200. The spectacular growth of the city's population in recent years is at the root of new social problems which the local government has been unable to resolve. In light of such a situation, the role taken by social organizations is seen as very important. In order to make the role more efficacious, the Mexican Institute for Community Development (IMDEC) has set up a plan called "Form to Transform."

The plan envisages making it easier to create an organizational system at the very heart of which thirty-one social activities of Jalisco State would be able to expand and collaborate. The plan envisages: formative activities, sharing of information and IMDEC is a Mexican institution which has been in action for forty five years, assisting education and local development. The Marist Brothers fully support IMDEC's activities.

BIS is supporting a micro-project which covers the printing costs and looks after the guidebooks which will be handed out to organizations which take part in the final program stages of IMDEC.

TEXT

In Mexico, a voting process in which children were involved was set up for the first time by the Federal Election Board (IFE) at the time of the 1997 federal elections. The most recent voting process took place from June 19 to 23, 2006 in the schools. Almost three million children and adolescents voted upon what actions ought to be taken to improve the community aspects of their schools. The two actions which received the most votes constitute an object lesson regarding the children's needs and their vision of what the priorities should be:

- *To be accepted as we are, and to respect those who do not think as we do (290,498 votes).*
- *Teachers are not to use their authority in an abusive way; their words should be in accord with their actions (275,687 votes).*

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- O My God, you love me. I come before you today to pray for those who are alone, those who have not encountered you, for the children who have lost faith, for those who are ill. *(Katia, 12 years old)*
- Lord, I desire to pray today for the children of Asia and Africa: may they be granted a smile which they can share with the world. *(Irvin, 12 years old)*
- I come before you today, Lord, to pray for the young women of the world; please grant us the chance to think openly. We are capable of doing so; we have faith and love. *(Lizbeth, 12 years old)*
- O holy Virgin, my Mother, I desire that you come to the help of all boys and girls who have been victims of abuse. Since they do not know how to either read or write, they have been prevented from becoming aware of their rights and from being able to defend themselves. *(Karen 12, years old)*
- I beg you, O God, that in the world there no longer be found any discrimination because of the color of one's skin, because of religion, of economic situation and of the way children think. We wish to express our ideas, and if others listen to us, we can help the process by which peace will come to the world. *(Andrea, 12 years old)*

CLOSING PRAYER

God our Father, your Son will soon come to birth. May he be the light of that hope which the world's children need so that they may come to know you.

Among the world's children, may we be able to find examples of life, of love, of simplicity, of innocence, of joy, of fraternity and of humility.

Following the example of the Holy Family, may adults be careful in guiding young people, while respecting their way of thinking, of believing, of perceiving the world with loving vision.

Amen

16

DECEMBER

Introducing:
World Organization Against
Torture

TUESDAY - THIRD WEEK

Sof 3,1-2.9-13 *Promise of salvation for all*
Ps 32(33) *The Lord listen to those who fear him*
Mt 21, 28-32 *The sinners have believed*

ARTICLE 40: CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

We all bear the responsibility for making possible the full enjoyment of their rights by all children whatever their country, their origin or their social and legal situations. This is even truer in situations where children face higher risks of becoming victims, which is often the case of children accused of or convicted for having infringed the penal law.

International texts such as article 40 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provide for the special protection of children in conflict with the law. However, beyond a protection limited to the sole rights and safeguards within the administration of the juvenile justice, the best interest of the child urges that young offenders are considered not only mere perpetrators of criminal offences, but also victims. Indeed, the roots of juvenile delinquency generally come from desperate need for social protection and care of children.

During this period of Advent, it is important to consider those children not with fear but with understanding and tolerance. Punishing the young perpetrators for their crime should not override the high necessity to respond to juvenile delinquency with other means rather than strict repression. Particularly, prevention should be considered first and effective rehabilitation and reintegration into society should be the pillar of all juvenile justice systems.

The sufferings of children in conflict with the law may stop fair social environment, investment in education and fight against poverty. Children's hope starts when everybody realises the need to hear those who claim (Psalm 32).

ABOUT...OMCT

Created in 1986, the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) is today the main coalition of international non-governmental organizations (NGO) fighting against torture, summary executions, enforced disappearances and all other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. With 282 affiliated organizations in its SOS-Torture Network and many tens of thousands correspondents in every country, OMCT is the most important network of non-governmental organizations working for the protection and the promotion of human rights in the world.

Based in Geneva, OMCT's International Secretariat provides personalized medical, legal and/or social assistance to hundreds of torture victims and ensures the daily dissemination of urgent appeals across the world, in order to protect individuals and to fight against impunity. Specific programs allow it to provide support to specific categories of vulnerable people, such as women, children and human rights defenders. In the framework of its activities, OMCT also submits individual communications and alternative reports to the special mechanisms of the United Nations, and actively collaborates in the development of international norms for the protection of human rights.

Website: www.omct.org

TEXT

Social perception that minors are responsible for a large proportion of offences remains widespread, notably due to the fear-mongering context in many countries. In this regard, the UNICEF report on The State of the World's Children 2006 acknowledges that "often children in conflict with the law effectively cease to be regarded as children. Instead, their perceived transgression is considered to remove them from childhood protection".

UNICEF, The State of the World's Children 2006, Excluded and Invisible, p.41

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Let's implore the Christ who loved us unconditionally:

R / Saves us by your love

- Jesus, you were scorned without reason
have mercy of those whose love is betrayed.
- Jesus, you lost your life on behalf the Kingdom of Heaven
have mercy of those who are in jail.
- Jesus, you didn't find someone to comfort you
have mercy of those who are afflicted.
- Jesus, you received vinegar to calm your thirsty
have mercy of those who suffer for their work for justice.
- Jesus, humiliated by the men, saved by God,
be the joy and the feast of the poor.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, we expect your coming that will bring definitive freedom for the whole world.

Help us to feel near to those children and young people that for different reasons are in conflict with the law. May we open our hearts to their reality with an attitude of mercy and to contribute in their reintegration to their families and society.

We pray to you, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

Amen.

17

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Good Shepherd Sisters

WEDNESDAY - THIRD WEEK

Sof 3,1-2.9-13 *Promise of salvation for all*
Ps 32 *The Lord listen to those who fear him*
Mt 21, 28-32 *The sinners have believed*

ARTICLE 35: TRAFFICKING OF CHILDREN

"Two centuries after the end of the transatlantic trade, we need to fight against a crime which the 21st century has no room for" said Antonio Maria Costa, the Executive Director at the Forum of Vienna against human trafficking on 13th February 2008.

Human trafficking is a criminal activity that generates an estimated profit of 12 to 32 billion US dollars per year. Human trafficking includes women and minors, proxenetism as well as illegal labour trafficking.

More often associated to prostitution, sex and exoticism, trafficking is rarely perceived in its

global dimension: it includes forced labour, slavery, sexual exploitation of adults and children and organ trafficking. Even more rarely mediated are the struggles, the difficulties and the initiatives of associations and public authorities against this globally escalating phenomenon.

The UN believes that trafficking includes all actions entailed in recruiting or transporting people within or beyond frontiers... Two million people are the object of trafficking including one million children who are often sexually abused.

ABOUT...GOOD SHEPHERD SISTERS

The Congregation of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd became affiliated with the United Nations as a Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) in consultative status with ECOSOC in November 1996.

The purpose of this affiliation is to further our mission of reconciliation, particularly in its orientation toward girls and women. Through this means of collaboration we work to bring about change in whatever conditions condemn others to a marginalized life.

Through our affiliation with the goals of the UN, we seek to extend mercy to the poor and to the oppressed, awakening our world to the dignity and value of each person.

"Our commitment to reconciliation demands that we promote justice and peace."

Website: www.goodshepherdsisters.org/un.htm

TEXT

The phenomenon has the proportions of an epidemic. 12.3 million people and children are involved in forced labour, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 4 million women and girls are sold every year, plus 500 thousand identified cases of sexual abuses on children, according to Interpol.

In 2006 alone, 500 thousand women from eastern and central Europe, vulnerable due to their poverty, came to western Europe through the trafficking networks. The figures reveal that in 30 years human trafficking has evolved considerably. The most disquieting mutation concerns its industrialisation, its globalisation, its spreading far and wide due to armed conflicts and the adaptability of the traffickers.

What the figures do not describe is the trivialisation of the phenomenon, to the point that in France and abroad one can see the same language of human trafficking used for advertisements. This trivialisation does have an impact on the life of the victims.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

In you, o Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame! Jesus, you respect every woman, never forget prostitute women.

Jesus, we thank you for your mercy.

Rescue me and deliver me in your righteousness; turn your ear to me and save me. Jesus you want every man and every woman to be free, you want human beings to be set free, you want children to grow in freedom.

Jesus, we thank you for your mercy.

Be my rock of refuge, to which I can always go. Jesus you wait with outstretched hands for all those who are subject to trafficking and exploitation; listen to them when they call upon you.

Jesus, we thank you for your mercy.

O God, you have done great things. Who, o God, is like you? Jesus, many women want to praise God with Mary, your mother, who protect them in the darkness of their lives.

Jesus, we thank you for your mercy.

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, full of mercy, you were not ashamed to talk to the Samaritan woman, nor to be touched by Thomas. You sat at the same table with people rejected by the society. Help us to follow you in our daily lives, help us to truly love our brothers and sisters.

Amen.

18

THURSDAY - THIRD WEEK

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Marist District of Amazonia

Jeremiah 23, 5-8: *He will reign as true king practising honesty and integrity in the land.*

Psalm 71(72) *Justice will flourish and there will be an abundance of peace.*

Mt 1, 18-24: *The Virgin will conceive and she will call his name Emmanuel.*

ARTICLE 29(1.e): CHILDREN AND ENVIRONMENT

We hear today, from all parts of the world, the most varied catastrophic forecasts concerning the environment. Diverse political measures for protection are being taken. In this context, Amazonia represents a space that must be preserved for the survival of the planet.

In 2007 the Church launched as a motto for the campaign of fraternity the slogan "Fraternity and Amazonia", directed to looking after that region, through the premises of understanding, education and spirituality, as an announcement of an Advent of preservation and control of the natural resources for the children of today who will be the men of tomorrow.

In these days of hope and Advent, we must continue strengthening our faith with the announcement of the Good News that brings us the coming of the liberating Messiah. We have to give the following generations reasons for hope in the planet they will inherit.

May the God of life fill us with spirit so that we are messengers of conscience and education which prioritize the care of others and of the environment. We must guard nature with respect and care, so that "we all have life in abundance" (Jn 10, 10)

ABOUT...MARIST DISTRICT OF AMAZONIA

The Marist District of Amazonia was established in July 2002. It unites the present communities in the States of Acre, Amazonas, Rondônia and Roraima, to the north of Brazil. A mission is also planned in the State of Mato Grosso, constituting a total area of 3.101.405'9 square kilometers. Of the nine communities there, the pioneer is Lábrea, which was founded in 1967. Therefore, the creation of the District is recent, but little by little we have already achieved four decades of history.

The Marist mission in Amazonia is diverse. The Brothers do not own schools. They work as teachers, educational coordinators or advisors in public centers or universities, or diocesan schools in conjunction with the government. They are also involved in different types of pastoral work: youth, catechesis, communication and vocational animation. The social pastoral is present in several communities where they help children, adolescents and young people who are socially vulnerable. They advise basic ecclesiastical communities and they collaborate in the formation and animation of religious life. They produce resources for environmental education. A distinctive element of the mission in the untutored region is the attention to the coastal and indigenous communities. That work is carried out in cooperation with the inter-congregational and inter-institutional indigenous Pastoral and itinerant Community established in the frontier bordering Brazil, Peru and Colombia. The Brothers work with the priests, religious and lay people from different organizations, living poorly with the isolated people on the banks of the rivers, the interior of the forests and the outlying barrios of the cities. At this time, the intention is to form a community dedicated specifically to the education of the children and indigenous young people of that region.

TEXT

Humanity is part of a vast evolving universe. Earth, our home, is alive with a unique community of life. The forces of nature make existence a demanding and uncertain adventure, but Earth has provided the conditions essential to life's evolution. The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust.

Source: www.earthcharter.org

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

1. God of life, who always fills us with paternal and maternal care, help us to be carriers of the messianic hope and messengers of your good news.
We ask you to hear us
2. God of life, many times we have been more announcers of catastrophes than messengers of hope. Transform our heart saddened by discouragement and despair.
We ask you to hear us
3. God of life, make us sensitive to the silent screams of so many children who lack attention and the most basic of rights. May our forgetfulness turn into attentive listening to their clamouring whispers.
We ask you to hear us
4. God of life, help us to be, like Mary, generous in our readiness for the announcement of your Kingdom.
We ask you to hear us

CLOSING PRAYER

God of life, of caring and hope, grant that in this time of Advent we may know how to distinguish your voice in the silent screams of the excluded children, excluded from all rights.

May our efforts be directed to the announcement and sharing of your Kingdom. May Mary, our Good Mother, the model of attentive and profound listening to the Word, be the light that illuminates our steps in the building of a new world. A world in which the children are not treated as useless beings that do not produce anything for the market, but valued as your daughters and sons.

Amen.

19

DECEMBER

*Introducing:
Marists in Africa
Reflection from Nigeria*

FRIDAY - THIRD WEEK

Judges 13, 2-7.24-25a: *The boy will be set apart to God from birth*
Psalm 69 *I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving*
Luke 1, 5-25 *Many will rejoice because of his birth, he will be great in the sight of the Lord.*

ARTICLE 6: RIGHT TO LIFE

When ever a child is shown love, there is trust and he or she feels better prepared to rule the world.

Jane was only fourteen years old when her parents died, leaving her and her four sisters at the mercy of her step-mother who had already a big responsibility of taking care of many children in the family. Like any other child of her age, Jane has dreams. Her dreams are to remain a virgin until she gets married and to study very hard so that she can be a pilot. In spite of high level of poverty that surrounds Jane, she keeps her dream alive. As a bright student, she often times combines her studies and hawking of biscuits and breads on the street after school, in order to alleviate the untold hardship they are encountering in the family.

Her faithfulness, honesty, beauty, humility, God fearing and cheerfulness makes her the most likeable person in the village that everybody tries to mingle with her. It is not a surprise that Madam Kate whom many people respect in the village opted to help Jane realize her

dreams by taking her to Italy. Jane did everything humanly possible to refuse the offer of going to Europe but later she was force to give up after Madam Kate convinced the step-mother that she will take proper care of her.

Arriving in Italy, she expected Madam Kate to enroll her into the school, she was surprise that instead, Madam Kate introduced her to prostitution. Jane vehemently refused to bow down to the offer of Madam Kate, which resulted her gang-raped by two men and sudden deportation as facilitated by Madam Kate. Being two-month pregnant, Jane lost her virginity, her dream of becoming a pilot, accused of being immoral and arrogant.

Children, like Jane, deserve a good life: in Africa, in Europe... in any place. Like her, many children have abilities that need adequate opportunities to be developed. There are no excuses to not make this happen. Our commitment, our love and our proximity to their realities in the different places we work with them is a real chance for them to make their dreams come true.

ABOUT...MARIST SOLIDARITY

Mwangaza primary School (Kisangani – Democratic Republic of Congo)

The aim of the project is to equip the school with new desks and refurbish the multi-purpose hall of the Mwangaza Primary School, run by the Marist Brothers in Kisangani (population 500,000), the provincial capital of Orientale in the north-east of the country.

The area has been hit by war and now, as a result of it, Kisangani is characterized by parentless children, unemployment and poverty.

In such a difficult context, a good school structure and sound education represent an important resource for the development of the local community, and offer to the children (currently 1,200) the possibility of improving their skills in a safe and comfortable environment.

TEXT

"...I learned about respecting others, with the help and encouragement of my mum and dad, and learned what love and friendship are. I now know that all experiences are worthwhile, and that sometimes success can only be achieved after difficulty and failures. My self-esteem became stronger and I learned to love others. I also learned that a humble person is someone not someone who is weak, but someone who is strong, because he understands that humility is a virtue, which can improve one's life.

"I am very grateful to the host parents for their selfless love towards us, and for teaching us how to give love to others. I am glad that in this world there are people who are encouraging others, caring for them and giving them strength."

Du Linda, a young girl from China (from the book "18 Candles: The Convention on the Rights of the Child Reaches Majority", IDE: Sion, 2007, p. 47)

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

We pray that our good Lord may visit all the people suffering especially, in Africa, for the offences they do not commit and give them the grace to find joy, fulfillment and hope in their agony.

R/ Lord Hear us

For all people who doubt the existence of God, that Christ may strengthen their believe in God.

R/ Lord Hear us

For all married couples that they may remain faithful to their marriage and always take the family of Mary and Joseph as their model.

R/ Lord Hear us

We pray for our leaders especially, in Africa, to have the fear of God and see their leadership role as a call to service.

R/ Lord Hear us

For the orphans, children and the most marginalized, that God may hear their cry and visit them in this Advent/Christmas.

R/ Lord Hear us

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father,

look with pity on your people in this season of Advent, as we strive to do your will.

Give us the grace to discover your presence in our life and in our neighbor. May we be patient in waiting for your appointed time so as to inherit the everlasting kingdom you promise us.

We ask this through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

20

DECEMBER

Introducing:
International Catholic Child
Bureau

SATURDAY - THIRD WEEK

Isaiah: 7:10-14 *The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son
That the King of glory may come in!*
Psalm 23
Lk 1:26-38 *You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him
the name Jesus.*

ARTICLE 7: RIGHT TO A NAME

From Article 7 of the Convention: Children have the right to a name at birth. They also have the right to acquire a nationality and, if possible, to know their parents and be raised by them. Let us reflect on these first two rights.

The name given at birth represents the identity of a child. By registering the child with the authorities, parents ensure that a bond is created, uniting the child to the mother and the father. This marks the child's belonging to a family. By recognising a child's existence, the State expresses the child's importance for the Country. By means of its nationality, it grants the child a series of rights and duties and access to a number services of-

ferred to the population. Identity and nationality make the child a citizen, a veritable subject of law.

In the world today there are still many children who are not registered at birth and who therefore have neither an identity, nor a nationality. Deprived of their lawful existence, these children, often girls, become easily exploitable due to their young age, for labour or prostitution. Often they do not benefit from vaccination campaigns and it is harder to enrol them in school, and this causes their right to health and education not to be respected.

ABOUT...INTERNATIONAL CATHOLIC CHILD BUREAU

Since its foundation 60 years ago, the International Catholic Child Bureau (ICCB) strives for the defence and promotion of the dignity and rights of children, which are still ignored too often today. The ICCB is present in 60 countries and its members and partners accompany and protect children, especially the most vulnerable. The ICCB also upholds their cause in contexts involving International Institutions (UN, Council of Europe, UNICEF, European institutions).

The ICCB aims at carrying out a durable action. Together with those who accompany the children, it strives to identify the new risks that threaten them and also those new opportunities they are offered. By defending their dignity and rights, it contributes to building a world of justice and peace that offers a future to every child.

Website: www.bice.org

TEXT

Did you know that...?

- In 2003, about 48 million births were left unregistered – which is 36% of the total estimated number of births in the world that year.
- In southern Asia there is the greatest number of unregistered births: 23 million, representing 63% of the births in that area of the world and 47% of the total unregistered births in the world.
- In sub-Saharan Africa 55% of children under five years of age are not registered.
- In the Middle East and Northern Africa, 16% of children are unregistered at birth, and in Eastern Asia and the Pacific the percentage is 19%.

Source: www.unicef.org/protection

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- The annunciation of the Angel Gabriel who visits Mary ends with the words: “Nothing is impossible with God”. Often it is the poorest of children who bring to us this message of hope by their extraordinary way of facing the most difficult situations. O Lord, make us attentive to the messages of hope the children give us!
- To have a name, a nationality, to have the chance to be written inside the history of a family, of a country. Let us pray for all those children who were separated from their parents by misery and war, for the growing numbers of lonely minors, for them all to find, on the path of life, an adult, an organisation that helps them recover their citizenship and build their future.
- Name and nationality make a child a citizen. Let us pray for our organisations, our Churches, in their work for the children, to do so always with the greatest respect for their identity, their faith and nationality, and consider them always as the subject of law.
- Many children in the world have no identity, no nationality, though practically all the States in the World have ratified the Convention. Let us pray for leaders to act responsibly, and effectively honour the commitments they made.

CLOSING PRAYER

The name Emmanuel that will be given to the child according to the prophecy of Isaiah means “God with us”, a God that accompanies us and loves us. By developing in the course of our lives our bond with a God who accompanies us, we discover who we truly are, what we are called to, and ultimately our profound identity.

O Lord, grant us to protect the spirit of childhood that allows us to answer the personal call you address to us like Mary, by saying: “May it be to me as you have said!”.

Amen.

21

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Child Rights Information
Network (CRIN)

SUNDAY - FOURTH WEEK

2 Samuel 7, 1-5.8b-12.14a.16. *Your house and your kingdom will last forever.*

Psalm 88(89) *I will sing of the Lord's great love forever.*

Romans 16, 25-27 *The mystery hidden for years, has been revealed and made known*

Luke 1, 26-38. *Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God*

ARTICLE 17: CHILDREN AND MEDIA

Children are often excluded from adult's conversations. "It is not a matter for children" is the frequently expression that is used to justify this behaviour. But, sometimes we forget that times have changed, and children have access to a lot of information through different ways: books, computers, mobile phones, newspapers, magazines, TV... there are many communication instruments at reach of them. What kind of information should children have access to? Although parents and educators have establish some kind of control over such information that children receive, there is more information out of our control than we think.

Art. 17 of the CRC recalls the "important function" that mass media has in providing material that could help to the promotion of their "social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health". We could ask how many TV shows and films that have children as target public are produced following that criteria. It is worthy to say that those programs are not produced by children, but by adults. Are we thinking about their well-being? What can we do to have more "child-friendly" material in radio, TV, cinema, the web...? How to incorporate children's perspective and opinions in

such material? How to involve them in production of it?

The reaction of Mary before the announcement she received from God was not exempted from concerns. She felt confusion. She did not understand what the angel was speaking about. But she trusted the "source" of that announcement, accepting it with courage and determination. God does not "hide" information to His children, but we need clarity of spirit to understand what He wants to tell to us.

In an era of communications, of digital information, we should think seriously about positive ways to introduce children to the use of information, to appreciate its benefits and to be aware of possible risks that can be found in mass media. It is impossible to blind fold their eyes. On the contrary, it is necessary to accompany them in getting critical thinking skills and to react with firm values before the information that they have access to. Adults also have a role to play in the promotion of adequate material for children that promote social, cultural and spiritual values, as well as the dialogue and pacific relationship between nations.

ABOUT...CRIN

The Child Rights Information Network (CRIN) is a global network that disseminates information about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and child rights amongst non-governmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, inter-governmental organisation (IGOs), educational institutions, and other child rights experts. The Coordinating Unit is based in London, UK.

The network is supported, and receives funding from Save the children Sweden, Save the Children UK, UNICEF, Plan International, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and World Vision International. Project funding is also received from the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

CRIN has a membership of more than 1,800 organizations in over 140 countries. About 85 percent of our members are NGOs; and 65 percent are in the Africa, Asia and Latin America. In addition to working with member organizations, CRIN services the information needs of 2500 organizations and individuals who have joined our mailing lists.

Website: www.crin.org

TEXT

“The role of media and its power to influence attitudes and behaviors of adults and young people is ever expanding.

Young people use media - TV, radio, internet, newspapers or other outlets - because it's fun, exciting and imaginative, and because using the media is a great way to learn about the world.

Young people's participation in the media creates a platform for them to 'speak out' and have their voices heard. Increased participation in the media by children and young people brings about increased media literacy. It also encourages the media to provide better representation of children - that includes encouraging positive messages about children and young people and issues that concern them.

In recent years young people have been participating at all levels of the media production process, including in TV programs, radio shows and newspapers, with interesting and often unexpected results.”

Source: http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/media/explore_3024.html

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- May all the pastoral agents in the Church, use the media of social communication to spread the good news of salvation for all, let us pray to the Lord. *Jesus, hear our prayer.*
- For all children have the possibility of access the communications media and to use it in the interest of their social and spiritual development and for peace among people, let us pray to the Lord. *Jesus, hear our prayer.*
- For all those who own and are responsible of the modern means of communication to have the courage to prefer the service of truth to which all have a right, rather than their own personal views or interests, let us pray to the Lord. *Jesus, hear our prayer.*
- For all the professionals in the communications media --journalists, producers, technicians--aware of their social responsibility, to work promoting the wellbeing of children, let us pray to the Lord. *Jesus, hear our prayer.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus,

The Father has sent You to reveal the mystery of salvation to all humankind. Let the Holy Spirit that came over the Holy Virgin Mary, to come over us, to proclaim the good news of your love and freedom to all people on earth and to communicate to the others what you have done for us.

Amen

22

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Marists in North America
Reflection from Canada

MONDAY - FOURTH WEEK

1 Samuel 1,24-28

Anne thanks the Lord for Samuel's birth.

Psalm: 1 Samuel 2,1-7

My heart rejoices in the Lord.

Luke 1,46-56

My spirit rejoices in God my Saviour

ARTICLE 33: PROTECTION AGAINST ILLICIT DRUGS

In order to comfort our feelings of unease, our consumerist society provides simple and ephemeral solutions: lawful and illegal drugs. They cut individuals off from their inner world and keep them at a distance from it, just like all the other articles of consumerism. This solution, quite profitable from an economic point of view, is embedded in the paradigm of consumerism, but it leaves individuals with a thirst to find something else to make them more satisfied and fill their constant yearning. Consumerism creates the illusion of happy people, preventing them from getting in touch and solving the problems they encounter in their lives.

The majority of people seek things that are at odds with each other. They wish for different objects in different moments and they do not know what they want, except that they do not want what they have now, they reject the present. Unease and annoyance, boredom, anxiety and dissatisfaction are the product of an unquenched thirst.

It should be known that as signatories of the "International Convention on Children's Rights" we acknowledge our folly and therefore further the creation of novel solutions.

It should be said that we commit ourselves to work for the coming of a new heaven. There is a prophecy in the Old as well as in the New Testament. It speaks of the fall of the existing world order and the coming of new heavens and a new Earth. It explains that this new heaven is not a location, but an inner kingdom, within one's conscience. And the Earth is the outer manifestation of this inner heaven. We wish to contribute to the construction of this new Heaven.

We act so as to further the rise of spirituality in people, so that they may free themselves from their inner sufferance and become the masters of their lives.

ABOUT...MARIST SOLIDARITY

The School of Peace of the Community of Sant'Egidio in Lima (Peru)

A few years ago, BIS provided a micro-project grant to support the solidarity activities of the Community of Sant'Egidio in the world.

With this project BIS is engaged in providing some basic furniture to the School of Peace of the Community of Sant'Egidio, a social centre where poor and marginalised children are accompanied in their personal and intellectual growth.

The capital of the country has more than 7 million inhabitants and the school is on the left side of the river Rimac, a place where poverty, illiteracy and crime prevail. The centre welcomes 90 children from 11 to 20 years old, the majority with family problems or financial difficulties.

This micro-project grant given of BIS allows the Community of Sant'Egidio to respond to the needs of these children.

TEXT

Young people in their 8th, 10th and 12th year of school of all countries continue to contribute to the fall of the line on the diagram depicting the use of illegal drugs, according to the 33rd national survey of the Monitoring the Future programme, successfully conducted by scientists of the Institute of Social Research of the University of Michigan.

The rate of young people in their 8th year who used illegal substances at least once in the 12 months before the survey (what we call annual frequency) was 24% in 1996; which fell to 13% in 2007, about half the rate. The fall was less remarkable among young people in their 10th year, who went down from 39% to 28% in the same period, and even less among young people in their 12th class, who went from 42% to 36%.

The three age-groups continued in the same trend, even though the diagram concerning young people in the 8th degree is relevant from a statistical point of view.

Currently the rate of drug use is at 13%, 28% and 36%, respectively, for each of the three different groups. In short, our interventions are leading to a great deal of hope.

Study Web site: www.monitoringthefuture.org

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- When I recognise my folly, I allow my mind to surface and my healing to take place. Lord, help me to recognise myself for who I am.
- The Scriptures, the Old and the New Testament, teach us the meaning of the word Sin. It is like missing the mark, like an archer misses his target. To sin is to live awkwardly and blindly, and therefore to suffer and make others suffer. O Lord, be my aim.
- When I recognise what is irresponsible in me, I wake up to life, to love. Lord, be with me.
- I look with hope at the signs of the times and I become aware of a profound change that is slowly surfacing in the conscience of the world. Lord, thank you for letting me live this spiritual awakening at its beginning.

CLOSING PRAYER

O Lord, I behold the greatest success of humankind, which is not the glory of its accomplishments, its works of art, its science and technology, but the confession of its weakness and folly.

I believe, O Lord, that in spite of all the foolish actions done in the name of religion, the Truth which such actions are directed to shines ever more.

Make me one of your tools.

Amen.

23

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Scalabrinni International
Migration Network

TUESDAY - FOURTH WEEK

Mt 3,1-4.23.24 *The prophet Elijah will be sent before the coming of the day of the Lord.*
Ps 24 *Rise, lift up your head, your liberation is at hand.*
Lk. 1,57-66 *Birth of John the Baptist*

ARTICLE 10: MIGRANT CHILDREN

Of all the people who are immigrating in the contemporary world, women and children are the most vulnerable. They are the ones in greatest need of special protection. Not only the United Nations and international bodies, but governments and civil organizations as well: all, in fact, have judged the theme, "Immigrant Women and Children," as the number one item on their agenda.

All authorities concerned with immigration continually raise questions like the following. How many children have been left back in their homelands by parents who immigrate? The children are left without any guaranteed means of protection. The parents cannot be certain that the money they remit will secure a proper upbringing for their children, since as the most concerned parties, they, the parents, will be absent. How many children are forced to leave their homelands in company with their parents, to look for a better life, having to face legal issues, culture shock and great differences in religious expression? What about children who are immigrating solo, without an adult guardian? Or children who are kidnapped or caught up in trafficking or in sexual exploitation, or caught in abusive working conditions?

What about children who are refugees...?

Despite the "discretion" and silence in which these problems have until recently been surrounded, some are gradually being resolved. The reason is that specific norms for children have become integrated into international organizations which have as their aim the protection of personal rights, e.g.; the Convention on Stateless Persons (1954) and the Convention on Reducing the Number of Stateless Persons (1961).

Another body which has taken measures to protect immigrant children is the Convention for the Protection of the Migrant Workers and their Families. The Convention promotes legislation which supports family unity. Unfortunately, this Convention, which has been in force since 1990, has not been ratified by the countries which have the greatest number of migrant workers. Also, within the Millennium Development Goals, a priority must be: policies and practices for protecting those who are the most vulnerable in society, especially children who are affected by immigration. The goals are to be in force by the year 2015.

ABOUT...SCALABRINI INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION NETWORK

Since its founding in 1887, the Missionary Congregation of Saint Charles Borromeo, better known as the Scalabrinians, has been committed to the area of child immigration protection, demonstrating the commitment by building orphanages, schools and hostels for immigrants and their children.

In order to coordinate these programs and activities, the Scalabrinian Missionaries have set up the *Scalabrini International Migration Network* (SIMN). SIMN gets involved with the protection of young people, the advancement of their dignity and the rights of immigrants, refugees, nomadic peoples, and displaced populations. This international network is composed of more than 270 organizations working in various activities and services to assist displaced persons in all parts of the world. The SIMN carries out its mission through study/documentation centers, immigrant assistance centers, houses of welcome, senior citizen homes, orphanages, clinics, kindergartens, schools, vocation centers, missions, the mission to seamen, and parishes.

Striving to advance the rights of displaced persons, SIMN is also involved with political organs, at the national and international levels, especially the United Nations and international bodies. One of the specific areas of SIMN action is the protection of the rights of immigrant children, mainly those who are victims of international trafficking and juvenile-immigrant slave trade.
website: www.simn-cs.net

TEXT

«In regard to economic and social rights, the Assembly is of the opinion that the following minimal rights, among others, must be enforced:

. . . societal protection which is offered by forms of social security necessary for combating poverty and preserving human dignity, must not be refused to immigrants who are undocumented. Children are in an especially vulnerable position. They ought to have the right to societal protection on an equal footing with children who are citizens....”

“Fundamental Rights of Undocumented Immigrants,” a report of the Commission on Immigration, Refugees and Population. Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe. Document 10924, May 4, 2006.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

1. For the Church, the People of God, people on pilgrimage in this world: that their life witness may demonstrate that building a society based on universal brotherhood is possible. Let us pray to the Lord.
2. For political leaders and those in charge of international bodies: that they may promote policies and actions which foster the protection of human rights and the dignity of all people, especially those individuals and families who are far from their native lands. Let us pray to the Lord.
3. That all countries which receive immigrants may accept the new arrivals as their « neighbors » and « discover in them the face of the crucified and risen Christ.” Let us pray to the Lord.
4. For those who are victims of violence and exploitation in various stages of the immigration process, especially women and children who may be prey to trafficking and slave trade: that the plight of such persons may awaken, in us and in public and private institutions, the strength to be committed to the rebuilding of their lives. Let us pray to the Lord.
5. For immigrants and their families, particularly women who are victims of family breakdown: that national and international laws clearly establish the right to family unity so that children may be protected and be assured the conditions needed for a dignified life. Let us pray to the Lord.

CLOSING PRAYER

Life is a journey to you, O Lord.
To depart is to die a little.
To arrive is a never-completed event until we dwell with you, O Lord.

Lord, you yourself knew the experience of immigration.
You have placed the experience in the heart of every person
who understands what life is all about,
who desires to reach safely the true destination of human life.

You directed Abraham to leave his homeland,
he who is the father of all believers.
Through the prophets and apostles,
You remind us of the pathways which lead to You.

You made yourself an immigrant,
journeying from heaven to earth
arriving within the womb of your mother
fleeing hurriedly into Egypt
walking the pathways on which you preached
the Gospel,
multiplying the loaves,
healing the sick, and, in the Ascension,
journeying once again to the Father's side.

Grant us an unshakable faith,
a confident and joyous hope,
ardent and generous charity.
Thus may we journey with a peaceful spirit,
so as to arrive in your presence each day,
and so too on our final day. Amen.

(The Immigrant's prayer—Bishop Francisco Valdés S.)

24

WEDNESDAY - FOURTH WEEK

DECEMBER

Introducing:
Marists in North America
Reflection from USA

2Samuel 7, 1-5.8b-12.14a. 16. *Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me.*

Psalm 87(88). *I will sing of the Lord's great love forever*

Luke 1, 67-79. *The rising sun will come to us from heaven.*

ARTICLE 5: APPROPRIATE DIRECTION AND GUIDANCE

Among the many articles of the Convention, one that has a "Marist" tone to it states:

"State parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development." (Article 27)

Article 65 of *In the Footsteps of Marcellin Champagnat* says that, "In opening our eyes and hearts to the depths of suffering of young people, we begin to share God's compassion for the world."

Today's responsorial psalm sounds like a prayer from the lips of the world's suffering children calling for our Marist compassion:

"Yahweh, my God, I call for help all day; I weep to you at night.

May my prayer reach you; hear my cry for help."

(Psalm 88: 1-2)

In what practical ways does my Marist spirituality challenge me to respond to the plight of the world's children?

ABOUT...MARIST SOLIDARITY

Drinking water system for the rural communities (Wewak—Papua New Guinea)

The objective of the project is to favour the access to drinking water for the poor rural communities located in Wewak area, on the highlands of Papua New Guinea, through the installation of hydraulic pumps.

The high plateaux of Papua New Guinea form one of the most difficult places to access in the world, with their high mountains (Mount Wilhelm is 4,509 m high) and deep valleys. To go from one summit to another can require a week of walking.

Rural villages are located on the highlands and lack of water and other basic facilities. In spite of the abundance of natural resources, the majority of the population depends on subsistence economy. Especially the lack of a proper water system along with the long distances to be run across to access water, cause great difficulties and disease to the rural population. Women and children are those traditionally committed to water collection in the valley streams, but this hard work takes a long time also preventing children from attending school on regular basis.

In order to answer these needs, the Marist Brothers from Australia decided to launch a project for the installation of drinking water systems in several villages. Each system is composed by a hydraulic ram pump, poly pipe and fittings and a 9000-liters polyurethane water tank. The hydraulic ram pump collects water from the streams and forces it through pipes, in order to reach the villages on the highlands

TEXT

“The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights that must be realized for children to develop their full potential, free from hunger and want, neglect and abuse. The Convention offers a vision of the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights and responsibilities appropriate to his or her age and stage of development.

Protecting and Realizing Children’s Rights: UNICEF Website)

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

Lord, children are the world’s future. How we respond to them now will determine how they will respond to future generations of children. Lord, I pray: *move me to action.*

Lord, children need to be children, not little adults scarred by the world before they are fully grown. Help me to look beyond myself and my needs. Lord, I pray: *move me to action.*

Lord, may my concern for the world’s children be rooted in the witness of your love and care for them. Lord, I pray: *move me to action.*

Lord, move me beyond an intellectual awareness and concern for the world’s children to a practical involvement in causes benefiting them. Lord, I pray: *move me to action.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord God, it is almost Christmas and I am bombarded by images of happy, healthy, children waiting to receive an abundance of gifts. That image is in sharp contrast to the reality of most of the world’s children on this Christmas Eve. As I reflect on the starkness of your humble birth, may I be motivated to live out my Marist spirituality with Marcellin’s spirit of “practical compassion.”

Amen.

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DECEMBER

Introducing:
Brazil's National Forum for
The Rights of Children

THURSDAY - CHRISTMAS

Isaiah 52,7-10 *All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.*
Psalm 97(98) *All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.*
Hebrews 1,1-6 *God has spoken to us by his Son.*
John 1,1-18 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

ARTICLE 27: ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child was established about twenty years ago, in a context lacking an international treaty expressing and embodying the protection of the rights of children, which entails the recognition of their condition as subjects of rights.

The treaty was ratified by 193 countries, which makes it the most endorsed agreement in history. It was truly a great step toward the acknowledgement and guarantee of the specific rights of children. Its 54 articles focus on four principles that are the framework for the implementation of the rights, namely: the principle of non-discrimination, the principle of the best interests of the child, the principle of survival and development, and the principle of participation, that states the child's right to express his or her point of view, which suggests that said points of view should be taken into account.

Pablo, Ian, and Cristian Nunes, who received their education at the CESOMAR Mont Serrat of Santa Catarina in Brazil, bear witness to their hope: *our community must improve, re-*

placing gunfire and death with respect and friendship, peace and love, passion and education. Less weapons and less drugs. Water and leisure for those who wish to live. Lets work at Morro da Caixa, lets work! To improve our lives. We are the future of our city, we are fully human beings, who believe in the strength of the community. Come with us to spend a real day in our community.

The situation of children and teenagers in Brazil still needs to attain the standards of dignity that we see as a crucial element for their rights. Children are constantly the victims of poverty, discrimination, violence of all kinds and neglect.

This quest for an attainable utopia drove Champagnat and many other inspiring leaders. We need in our turn to struggle for human dignity to be upheld through the exercise of freedom, democracy, justice and solidarity.

ABOUT...NATIONAL FORUM FOR THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The National Forum in Brazil is a democratic space of the civil society, devoted to fostering awareness and commitment in favour of an effective implementation of the protection and defence of the rights of children and adolescents. It includes 53 affiliated organisms and 27 forums. The Marist Institute works in coordination with this political reality.

The groups connected to the Forum have been working together since the end of the eighties; their participation was crucial in attaining the approval of the chapter devoted to children and adolescents in the Constitution of 1988, which included the vision of children as subjects of rights, and the protection of children as an absolute priority.

Currently, we collaborate in sectors such as social control, support of policies and actions concerning the rights of children and adolescents; we work side by side with official organisms like the Councils for Rights and the Parliamentary Front, in implementing public policies and their budgets, joining campaigns, cooperating with national and international networks, including the drafting of the alternative report for the UN which will be presented in 2009.

TEXT

“Currently the whole world agrees in saying that children are the subject of rights. Unfortunately, many among them see their rights jeered at when they live in miserable conditions, when they are the victims of discrimination and abuse, or when they are denied participation in the decision-making processes. In the coming years, we need to strive to stop all forms of violence against children in any ambit, trying to improve their living conditions and committing ourselves to eliminate the risks they run; in short we must eradicate all kinds of discrimination and guarantee their participation in decision making processes”.

Yanghee Lee, President of the Committee for Children’s Rights (from: 18 Candles: The Convention on the Rights of the Child Reaches Majority, IDE: Sion, 2007, p. 13)

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL

- The time of Advent is the proclamation of a new time, let us think now of all that has still not come and let us ardently wish that respect for children and their human dignity may grow in depth and scope in the time to come.
- Let us think of all forms, more or less veiled, of injustice and violation of rights, and let us envision how we can bring the hope of the Good News contained in the words of the prophet Isaiah.
- Let us think of what we can do to proclaim hope to those children whose rights are jeered at, in a world where war, hunger, sorrow and lack of love rule.
- The earth is summoned to take part in the praise of the people who sing to God. His Royalty is established in history such that justice triumphs over injustice. In every action in favour of justice we see the coming of the Kingdom of God.

CLOSING PRAYER

God, our Father,

your Word of wisdom is the light that illuminates the consciences of humankind; justice and righteousness are the base of your throne. Illuminate us with your Light so that we may bear your path into the world. In the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen



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