

Remembering Our Children

Theme Taking time to reflect and share on the gifts God brings us through the children in our lives and to listen to our call to lessen the suffering of children in our world today.

Environment Prepare a setting that is expressive of the gifts that children bring into our lives. *Suggestions:*

- ◆ Posters of children's faces and children involved in a variety of activities; or slides or a video depicting children.
- ◆ A display of children's games, balloons, children's books.
- ◆ A single budding flower or new plant symbolizing newness of life.

Opening Song

"God of the Gathering"

(From *Faces of the Children* by Kathy Sherman, CSJ.

Used with permission.)

Refrain

*God of the gathering be with us now,
God of the gathering make us all one.
Join us together to love and to sing,
We are your family and we all belong.*

The children, the mighty, the weak and the strong,
The beggars, the wealthy, come all let us sing. *Refrain*

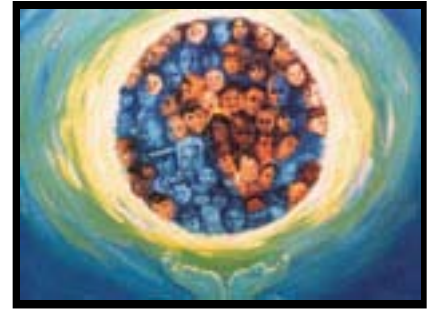
The mountains, the meadows, the flowers and trees,
The rivers, the oceans, come all let us sing. *Refrain*

The frightened, the brave ones,
the right and the wrong,
The lovers, the dreamers, come all let us sing. *Refrain*

The rocks and the fields, the planets and stars,
All creatures forever, come let us sing. *Refrain*

The wounded, the healers, the hurt and the glad,
The dancers and poets, come all let us sing. *Refrain*

As the song is played and sung, have children or dancers enter with symbols of each of the groups named as a verse is sung forming a circle of belonging as the song ends.



Artist: Fran Gregory, CSJ Associate

Opening Prayer

O God of all new life and infinite possibilities, you gift us with the wonder, openness, spontaneity, and creativity of our children. We pray this day that we may listen and learn from the wisdom you share with us through their joy of life, their trust in your goodness, their acceptance of all people and all creatures as beings loved and cherished by you.

May our hearts be moved to a new freedom and to a renewed commitment to build a world of peace and love where our children can grow in their primal gifts, nourished by your call to oneness in you. Touch the child within each of us that we may be filled with trust and hope that new ways are possible through your loving care and assistance. We pray in our oneness as people called to fullness in you. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Mark 10: 13 - 16

People were bringing their little children to him to have him touch them, but the disciples were scolding them for this. Jesus became indignant when he noticed it and said to them: "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them. It is just such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I assure you that whoever does not accept the reign of God like a little child shall not take part in it." Then he embraced them and blessed them, placing his hands on them.

Leader Through this picture of Jesus with the children, we are given a glimpse into God's great joy in our children and God's call to us to learn from their presence with us. Let us pause to listen to that message in this time and place.

Reflection and Sharing

Take a few minutes of silence to reflect on the following questions. Then allow for sharing in the group.

- ◆ How have you been brought to know God's love through a child?
- ◆ What personal message does God bring to you through this picture of Jesus with the children?

Prayer of Praise *Praise God for Our Children*

Praise God joyfully at the wonder of birthing a child.

Praise God for nurturing love
in the growth of this child.

Praise God for laughter and delight
in the play of a child.

Praise God for the tender beauty of a sleeping child.

Praise God as we listen to the awed wonder
in the questions of a child.

Praise God as we touch and caress
the suffering in a child.

Praise God as we give love and
know trust from a child.

Praise God and give thanks
as we embrace our own inner child.

Leader may invite additional praises from those present.

Leader As we rejoice and give thanks for the beauty, joys and gifts of our children, we also remember our children who live in suffering and want. Let us open our hearts as we listen to the situation of many chil-

dren in our country and throughout the world, remembering God's tender love for these children at risk.

Remembering and Praying with and for Our Children at Risk

Reader One Children constitute almost one-half of the six billion people on the planet. Tremendous numbers of them are suffering and dying. Millions of children lack basic education, health care, and housing. Approximately 20 percent of all the world's children of school age have no school to attend.

(Response) Move our hearts to find ways to relieve this suffering of your children, O God.

Reader Two Even in the United States, known as the richest country in the world, 100 children die each day before their first birthday. In the year 2000, poverty in the United States was four times greater than that for children in Western Europe. Lacking the basics, children suffer and die from malnutrition, diarrhea, diphtheria, malaria, respiratory illnesses, and other diseases.

(Response) Move our hearts to find ways to relieve this suffering of your children, O God.

Reader Three An estimated 45 percent of 12 million refugees uprooted from their homes are children, with 14 percent under five years of age. Increasingly, children are not only victims of war, but also are combatants. In thirty countries worldwide, an estimated 300,000 children under the age of 18 are fighting in armed conflicts. Some are forcibly recruited, trained, and forced to kill.

(Response) Move our hearts to find ways to relieve this suffering of your children, O God.



Children of Iraq (Picture by Brad van Guilder)

Reader Four In agriculture, juvenile farm workers are routinely exposed to dangerous pesticides. In low income areas especially, lead is a dangerous pollutant. Children, whose bodies are more vulnerable, suffer the worst consequences. One of the worst global crimes against children is sexual use and abuse. Most feel trapped by poverty, violence,

and threats of retribution. Sex tourism and slavery occur in countries from Thailand to the United States.

(Response) Move our hearts to find ways to relieve this suffering of your children, O God.

(Exerpts from "Children at Risk")

Prayer *All together*

Compassionate One, we are surrounded by the needs of your children and are overwhelmed by their suffering. We confess that so often the harm that comes to them could be alleviated by our willingness to share in their hardship, by our efforts to end the injustice our systems and lifestyles help to support. We are in need of your mercy.

We ask your blessing on your children everywhere who are in danger today. Bless all who suffer from injustice. Shelter them in the warmth of your love and safeguard them from the evil that rages around them. Turn our eyes and hearts to their needs and give us courage to act for their good. We ask this, relying on your compassion and confident of your love. Amen.

Adapted from "Mother of Exiles" in More Than Words, Prayer and Ritual for Inclusive Communities

by Janet Schaffran, CDP, and Pat Kosak, CSJ.

Leader

Distribute a small piece of paper with some symbol of children on it to each person present.

Our time of reflection here today challenges us to go forth with a new direction of awareness and action as we strive to move toward a more peaceful and just world for the sake of our children. You are invited at this time to write out and to share with the group any action or change that you hope to bring into your life in the days ahead.

Pause for time to share for those who wish to do so.

Closing Prayer

O God of All Children

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Reader One

O God of the children of Somalia, Sarajevo, South Africa, South Carolina

Of Albania, Alabama, Bosnia, and Boston, Of Cracow and Cairo, Chicago, and Croatia,

(All) Help us to love and respect and protect them



Graphic from "Woman Song II"

Reader Two

O God of Black and Brown and White and Albino children and those all mixed together, Of children who are rich and poor and in between, Of children who speak English and Spanish and Russian and Hmong and languages our ears cannot discern,

(All) Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

Reader Three

O God of the child prodigy and the child prostitute, Of the child of rapture and the child of rape, Of runaway or thrown-away children who struggle every day without parent or place or friend or future,

(All) Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

Reader Four

O God of children who can walk and talk and hear and see and sing and dance and jump and play and of children who wish they could but can't,

Of children who are loved and unloved,
wanted and unwanted,

(All) Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

Reader Five

O God of beggar, beaten, abused, neglected, homeless, AIDS, drug and hunger-ravaged children,
Of children who are emotionally and physically and mentally fragile,
And of children who rebel and ridicule,
torment and taunt,

(All) Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

Reader Six

O God of children of destiny and of despair,
of war and of peace,
Of disfigured, diseased, and dying children,
Of children without hope and of children
with hope to spare and to share.

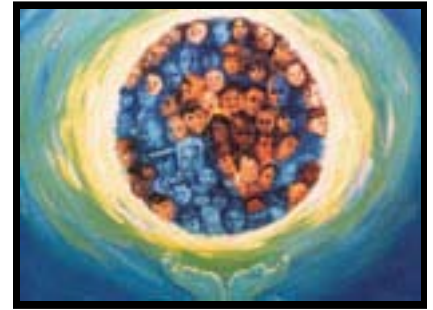
(All) Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

Closing Song

“Send Us Forth”

(From *Faces of the Children* by [Kathy Sherman, CSJ](#).)

Used with permission.)



Artist: [Fran Gregory](#), CSJ Associate

Send us forth
with your blessing,
O God

(all echo the leader)

To be Your **1.** Love as we work and play

(all echo the leader)

2. Truth

3. Joy

This gift of your love will bless all the earth

(all echo the leader)

And with all the Earth we will bless you.

(all echo the leader)

Acknowledgments

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