

A Prayer for Children and Youth at the start of 2018

A number of things have been nudging me:

- o Singing at our Advent candle lighting each Sunday, "When God is a child, there is joy in our song, the last shall be first and the weak shall be strong. And none shall be afraid."
- o Last week, a UNICEF spokesperson said, "Children are being targeted and exposed to attacks and brutal violence in their homes, schools, and playgrounds.... Such brutality cannot be the new normal."
- o This past weekend, yet another Indigenous youth committed suicide in Winnipeg, this time a 13-year-old girl, Cornelius Wood.
- o In her address to the 2017 General Assembly, Dr. Cindy Blackstock articulated a fundamental human value, "It is the responsibility of adults to care for and protect children."

PRAYER

God of grace and love, Jesus Christ, took children on his knee and blessed them.

God who wept with Rachel at Herod's killing of the children that first Christmas, we confess our world is not a safe place for children. In Myanmar, Rohingya children and their families have been forced to flee from the attacking military. In Syria and Iraq, children have been used as human shields. Lord, have mercy.

God of the orphan, Jesus as a child, grew in wisdom and in stature, yet we confess our world often does not provide nutrition, health care and education to children. In Yemen, 385,000 children are severely malnourished. In the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, 400 schools have been attacked. Lord, have mercy.

God of justice, Jesus chastised adults for preventing him from connecting with children, we confess in Canada children are often not welcomed. In rural areas and the remote north, children, especially Indigenous children, do not receive equitable education, mental health care, and social work support. We acknowledge with broken hearts the epidemic of suicide among youth, especially Indigenous youth, in Canada. Lord, have mercy.

God of hope, the prophet in portraying your coming reign declared, "and a little child shall lead them." May we be led into the tomorrow you are bringing to our world, where children's laughter fills the land, and joyful play spills unafraid from homes on to the street and into the playgrounds. May we be led as adults to work for that day, taking up our responsibilities as citizens of your reign to care, protect, and advocate for children.

God of children, Jesus said unless we become like little children we cannot enter your reign. Come to us anew that we might become children in your coming reign.

These things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who makes us your children. Amen.

The Rev. Peter Bush,
Moderator, the 143rd General Assembly (2017)
Of the Presbyterian Church in Canada