Why Children are Important to the Kingdom of God

Implications for Leadership

Eastern Europe Leadership Forum – March 17-18, 2003

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A Personal Pilgrimage

- Early experience - Methodist orphanage
- Counter Culture and the 70's (the "me" decade)
- 1982 – Darkness and Light – Missions India, etc
- 1987 – Southeast Asia - AGWM A discovery of Children at Risk and church lack of concern
- 1995 – Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge – what impact did Communism have in your context?
- 1998 – Mission of Mercy – a chance to reflect and research issues on a larger scale
- 2003 – Why Eastern Europe?

Children at Risk

- Today, 1.3 billion children live in inhumane situations.
- In the next 25 years, 5 billion children will be born, 95% in the less developed world.

Children in Asia

- 40% of Cambodia's prostitutes are children.
- There are 800,000 child prostitutes in Thailand; 200,000 below age 12.

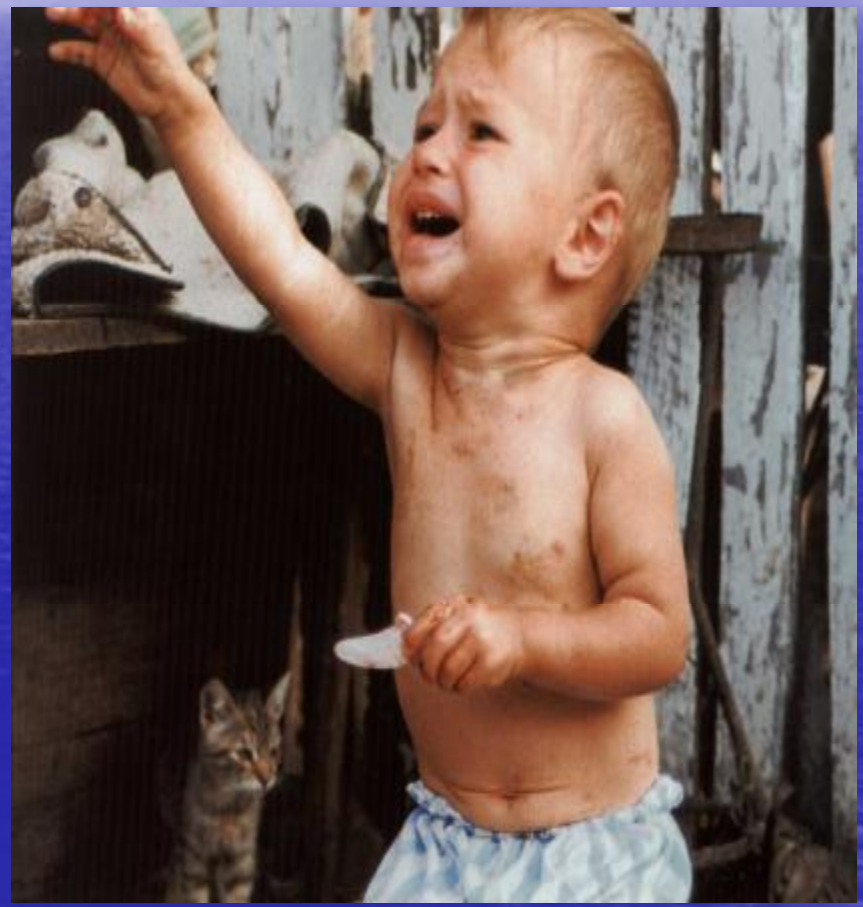
Children in Eastern Europe

- Romania – street children, orphanages and family breakdown
- 200,000 women in the Balkans are victims of human trafficking each year
- Sexual attitudes towards women and girls – violence estimated in 1/3 of homes
- War in Balkans has affected many children and families
- What about your ministry context?

The State of Our World

The Needs of Children

- 1/2 of the world's population is children
- Today there are 100 million street children; 800 million are predicted by 2020.
- 1 million children enter child prostitution each year.
- 200 million children under 5 suffer from chronic hunger.



Children at Risk…

What Categories?

- Every year 12 million children under 5 die of hunger/disease related causes
- 360 million children have no schooling
- 300 million are homeless or orphaned
- 100 million children live on the streets of the world's mega-cities.
- 80% of the world's children grow up in non-Christian environments
- Implications for the church in 20 years?

The State of Our World
Global Impact of AIDS

- 6 people are infected with AIDS every minute.
- 600,000 children under 15 infected with HIV last year.
- 8,500 children infected with AIDS daily in 1998.
- 8 million African children orphaned due to AIDS.
- There are 1,000 AIDS orphans in Nairobi.
- 10 million children will become orphans as a result of AIDS in the next 5 years.

The State of Our World

Asset Management and the Poor

- Half of the world's population lives on $3 per day or less.
- Over 1.5 billion people live on under $1 per day.
- The world's three richest people have fortunes greater than the world's poorest countries and their 600 million inhabitants.
- The assets of the world's 200 richest people exceed the combined income of 41% of the world's population.

Children Are Important to God

- Psalm 139:13
  - For it was you who formed my inward parts . . .
- Matthew 10:42
  - Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones . . .
- Mark 10:14
  - Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me . . .
- Luke 9:46-48
  - Let the little children come to me
- Matthew 18:10
  - Do not despise one of these little ones

What about developing a THEOLOGY for Children?

•Talking and thinking = logos
About = from – towards – with for
GOD = theos

•We Trust God because He is……

•God wants this…… and not that

•Because the Earth is the Lord's we may expect that…

- We cannot help being "theologians" so 2 questions arise:

1. Are we speaking worthily of God or not?
2. Are we speaking intelligibly, so that people can understand and be built up?

GOD speaks the word made flesh in Jesus and Jesus speaks CHILD – one of God's languages

In CHILD, there is no information which is not also an invitation

CHILD – *pointer and point of entry* to the Kingdom of God

How have we

- ***individually***
- ***organisationally***
- ***in church practice***
- ***in cultural tradition***

responded to the invitation given us in CHILD?

What is your view of Children – Theologically?

OLD PURITAN	ROMANTIC
Children seen as sinful	child seen as important now
be suspicious, careful	to be happy now
control through discipline	with godlike qualities able to redeem the adult world
correct through education	

Question: Jesus sees what in Children?

For further reading: A Child in Christian Thought - Bunge

Working towards Child Theology

Old Testament

- Cast of Children – Ishmael, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Obed, Samuel, David, Josiah, Esther, Jeremiah
- Worship accessible to children
- Children were seen as a sign of blessing, yet the first to suffer from sin, war and deceit
- Community and adults were held accountable for the well-being of Children

Children in the New Testament

- Incidents with Jesus – daughter of Canaanite woman, official's son, Jairus' daughter, the boy with the 5 loaves
- The birth of Jesus – significance of Incarnation – worship a baby?
- Matt. 17 – Matt. 21 A thread from Transfiguration to the Temple – why place a child in the midst? Kingdom of Heaven is like….
- What about the upside down nature of the Kingdom – it has nothing to do with status, wealth, power or influence.

Child as Sign of God's Kingdom

- God's way of doing things
- Matt 18:1-5= Mark 9:33-37=Luke 9:46-48
- The disciples are arguing over rank and status – this Kingdom is after all a very important thing
- There is a competitive quest for greatness – everyone can be a threat

But the child is not a threat – why place a child in the midst? The thrust is the character of the Kingdom – not rank in it but to aim to be IN it – do we understand the character of the Kingdom?

Child Development Principles
1. *Children are Holistic Beings*

- Socio-emotional
- Cognitive
- Physical
- Spiritual
- Time
- The importance of "synergy"
  - or 1 + 1 = 3

2. Children are unique

- Children are not miniature adults
- Childhood is a special time of life
  - The importance of "sensitive periods"
- Children have unique needs

3. Children need developmentally appropriate interventions

- What is Developmentally Appropriate Practice or DAP?
  - **Age appropriate**
  - **Individually appropriate**
  - **Culturally appropriate**
- The importance of indigenous perspective
- The benefit of working with local entities

4. At what level can we have the most impact?

- The importance of individual child impact
  - Or “child” versus “children”
- Which role in the relief and development world?
  - The many definitions of “development”
- It’s not about “stuff”
- Increasing children’s resilience

“North American Pentecostals…have been reluctant to emphasize social concerns too strongly… “

Dr. Gary McGee

The Church needs to repent for…

1. Dichotomizing between word and deed.
2. Truncated vision.
3. Middle-class “captivity.”
4. Attitudinal evils.
5. Treating people and children as “clients.”

The Kingdom of the Church must minister to *all people* because *all* have been created
in the image of God.

The Work of the Kingdom

- Proclamation
- Community
- Compassion
- Stewardship
- Spiritual warfare
- Transformation

The Church should represent *today* what the *future* Kingdom will be like.

When the gospel comes in fullness,
it not only transforms the *individual*,
it also transforms *communities* and *societies*.

The Kingdom of God is any place where God rules

Matthew 25:35-40

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Then the righteous will answer Him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"

Who are the Least of These?

The King will reply,

"I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."

What should Christians do
in a world that seems to be
moving toward chaos?

We should do what Jesus did.

Jesus ministered to whole persons.

The Church must be a...

- *proclamation* community
- *reconciling* community
- *unifying* community
- *proactive* community
- transformative community

- So what is the place of the child in the Church?

The Strategic Role of the Church for Children

- The “4-19” Window – 85% of all decisions for Christ
- Children provide a gateway for families, communities, peoples
- The “4/19” Window – most affected by sin, most vulnerable
- Consider Sin – disease, sickness, exploitation, war, etc.
- Often overlooked strategically – what priority?

Implications for Church and Missiology

- UNICEF – most significant interventions for national development are child health and education
- How can the church be more engaged in community and the lives of at risk children
- Do you see children as effective community and health resources? - Child Participation models
- Leadership development – how early do you start –

  - ask the Communists, UN, what about the Church
- Research on children and the unreached peoples what opens doors? Are you looking for opportunities?

Areas for Further Research and Reflections

- How do we define “Church” – what is the role of church “local”, church “organizational”, or NGO

- How do we build greater CAPACITY in local churches
- Have we missed something in our adult focus?

Areas for Further Research and Reflections

- Enlarging our Theological understanding of what God intends for your community – think of children
- Enlarging our understanding of the nature and impact of poverty and sin – especially as it concerns children
- Enlarging Christian culture – Western theology and missiology will change – look where the young are