

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

The South African Department of Basic Education has estimated that 46 000 children did not return to school in 2021, but The National Income Dynamics Study - Coronavirus Rapid Mobile Survey (NIDS-CRAM) has shown, under conservative assumptions that approximately 650 000-700 000 children aged 7-17 have not been attending school since May 2021.

Let us pray.

Dear God, these statistics have the possibility of numbing us into continued inaction as we ponder the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet, many of the reasons for non-return to school have been exacerbated by the pandemic, not only created by it. We pray for the children who have not been able to return to school because of food insecurity, poverty, inequality, parents losing jobs because of the pandemic, parents dying because of Covid-19 and the subsequent increase in child-headed households. Drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and loss of identity documents and complex paperwork all contribute to why it becomes impossible for a child to remain at school.

Dear God, let us be moved by the words of Rahiema Essop of the zero drop out campaign who reminds us that children don't just wake up one morning and decide not to go to school, rather this decision comes after years and years of struggling and enduring desperate circumstances which means that these children are forced to leave school.

I pray that we will be confronted by the role we play in 700 000 children being called drop outs. Let us pray for a change to this benign terminology which lays the blame on those who have 'dropped out', instead of being more honest that they have been excluded and forced out. Our South African education system works like a sieve with child-sized holes (which we have a role in creating as inequality is perpetuated, corruption and mismanagement of funds meant for food security programmes and various other factors). This sieve with the child size holes means children drop right through. Dear God in our despair you provide guidance when we choose to acknowledge that you knitted each and every one of us in our mother's wombs – dear God you know the hairs on each of the heads of the 700 000 children and teenagers who no longer have a safe school to attend daily. We weep with you, for your children. I pray that your example will light a fire in each one of us to help make that sieve into a carefully and tightly knitted web, where each child can be held and included into the education system, protected and cared for through the actions of all of us who yearn to 'do justice' – and that when we call children 'drop outs' we are reminded they have been forced out and that should change the way we pray, the way we speak, the way we love...all your children, especially those who are enduring tremendous pain and suffering.

Let us pray: God bless Africa and all the world
Guard our children
Guide our leaders and give us peace. Amen.

