

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

The focus of the Peace and Justice Prayer today will be on children.

At this time of the year all across South Africa, applications for Grade 1 and Grade 8 and all the grades in between are being typed into documents to be submitted and sent to provincial government departments. There is enormous anxiety about this whole process including waiting to be accepted into schools and just this week the Western Cape Education department notified parents that the online system had crashed. As a manual system for school applications is no longer being used, this further disadvantages communities who do not easily have access to technology, computers and data or printers which are required.

Once children are placed in schools it is still problematic and complex. In South Africa our legacies of colonialism, apartheid spatial geography, corruption, financial mismanagement in government departments and unequal access to resources means our South African education system is in crisis.

Our education system is underfunded, lacks a focus on child and adult wellbeing, allows exclusion of every kind including excluding neurodivergent children who could be attending mainstream schools. There is much to be deeply concerned about and for many children they have very little choice about the kind of schooling they will receive, where they will go to school and even what they will learn about.

We as adults often want what is best for our own child or children but this inevitably means this is not best for all children. We acknowledge with gratitude that there are very good schools and very good teachers and principals with support staff in schools changing children's families and communities' lives but this is not everywhere and it is not for the benefit of everyone.

Let us pray.

Dear God move us to speak up about harmful practices that affect children negatively and cause them pain.

There are many words we use to describe children and their behaviour which are harmful and cruel, yet we remain unchanged in our vocabulary even though we have been able to learn new words for different things like WhatsApp or cryptocurrency.

Help us to be more creative in the way we recognize the unique contribution children make to all our lives.

Challenge us to love children fully so that they can experience joy in abundance while they are very young and then continue to experience this throughout their lives.

Help us to be more humble so that we use the power we have simply because we are adults, to transform all spaces and places so that they will be life giving for all children.

God forgive us for not caring enough or at all about all the children in the world not just the ones in our lives.

Children continue to suffer because of our inaction and inattention as adults. Mary Oliver powerfully reminds us that "attention is the beginning of devotion", Lord help us move from inattention, to attention to devotion. A devotion that puts in place transformative practices which reject our centuries old ways of disregarding children and their needs.

We need to recognize that children matter.

Let us pray for the wisdom required
to speak kinder and gentler words to and with children
and then to act with justice and reverence in our interactions with all children
and then live with a radical devotion to changing ourselves so that we can see that children matter
for they do,
children matter...

Now let us pray the prayer for Africa

God bless Africa and all the world
Guard our children
Guide our leaders
And give us peace