



THE FAMILY— A RECONCILING COMMUNITY



Happy family: sharing childcare and chores.

Photo: SEND.

EDITORIAL

by **Bishop James Tengatenga, Chair of the Anglican Consultative Council and President of IAFN**

In these hedonistic, individualistic and narcissistic times, family has a tendency to be seen as a kill-joy and an encumbrance. Strangely, at the same time there is a yearning for something like it – hence gangs and such associations. As the psychiatrist Maslow observed in his study of human needs and motivation, we have a deep need for belonging. Given the many forms and values of this fundamental (if not primal) human institution, we more often than not end up with a mixed bag of appreciation. Family is what you are born into and have no choice in the matter. Is it ever a given? Can one opt out? My African sensibilities makes it a given. There is no solitary person: one who does not belong somewhere. The proverb says, 'I am

Family in Christ is knowing that you have a community of people there to love, encourage and support you. It is knowing that no matter what is happening in your life, you are not alone because God is in everyone and everything around you.

because we are and we are because I am'. One belongs! Of course it begs the question 'To what do I belong?' – or, more correctly, 'To whom?' One belongs to a people, to a clan and a family and ultimately to the Supreme Being (God). This is why in African relationships, kith and kin are referred to in relational terms. One is a son, a daughter, sister or brother, cousin,

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nephew, a mother or father, an aunt or uncle, grandfather or grandmother. These titles know no boundaries. (The only exception is when one talks about enemies; but they too use family descriptions.) It is a basic understanding of relationships that is based on family as the basic unit from which all relationships are based. Family is thus from God, from whom all things come and have their origin. In this understanding, all of Maslow's needs come together and are met in family. A sermon preached at my daughter's local parish church put things into perspective:

Family in Christ is knowing that you have a community of people there to love, encourage and support you. It is knowing that no matter what is happening in your life, you are not alone because God is in everyone and everything around you. The comfort that provides is unmatched. This doesn't mean that happiness and comfort are always guaranteed. There will be uncertainty, doubt, sadness, angst, anger and anxiety. But the family that God provides allows you to face those difficulties with a community of people committed to loving and supporting you. They will be with you throughout to offer support, advice and critique when you need it.

So what makes the family such a place? Beginning with Genesis through the Old Testament genealogies (all the 'begats' and the prophets), the Bible talks about the relationship between God and God's people in family terms. The Gospel of Matthew, in its introduction of Jesus, follows the same pattern. The incarnation sanctifies family even further as God chooses to *tabernacle* with his people through this institution, as Luke highlights in his Gospel. Mark and John further show us Jesus in and alongside

families and working miracles and teaching in family settings. The Pauline Corpus has the so-called 'family tables': eg. Ephesians 5-6. One of the Pauline prayers that emphasises the place of God in family is the one that begins: 'For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name' (Eph. 3:14-15). We know that in the Bible, a name and naming have strong theological connotations. Naming confers character, blessing, grounding and source and power relations. It follows, then, that family is named after God and is thus the centre of being in relationship with God in all its forms. God is Being in relationship. As such, there are strong

Trinitarian overtones and undertones in this understanding of family. Another New Testament word for family is 'household'. Words like *oikonomos* and *oikodomeo* which come from the root of the word for house -*oikos*- add to the point. The household is the site of nurture, conversions, healing, listening to the apostles' teaching and also the sacraments, and godly living. As such the divine 'economy' finds the focus of its locus. In other words, family is the place where grace is experienced as the Spirit of God works among God's people. Practical outcomes of this theology from all over the Anglican Communion are told in the following articles.

Husbands and Wives



Pastor and his wife explain the benefits of the Gender Model Family to church members.

Photo:SEND.

The Gender Model Family in West Africa

Pastors and their families in West Africa are among those who have been enrolling in an innovative Gender Model Family scheme because they want to be an example for change and transformation by challenging traditional notions of gender roles and responsibilities within the family. Nancy and Siapha Kamara describe the scheme.

'Living as a Gender Model Family has shown to my congregation that it is not only husbands who can bring income to the family.'

The *Gender Model Family* scheme has its earliest roots in a *Livelihood Security Promotion Programme* in Northern Ghana. In 2003, the West African non-governmental organisation *Social Enterprise Development Foundation* (SEND) established a revolving loan scheme to support women involved in small-scale trading activities. Even though all the women agreed to repay the loan, the default rate was more than 80%. The reasons they gave for this were: taking care of family needs such as paying school fees or hospital bills and husbands borrowing from them and refusing to repay. When husbands were interviewed, the majority said that they were poor and did not understand why SEND gave loans only to women.

That response inspired SEND to develop the *Gender Model Family* as a training programme in Ghana and Sierra Leone to enable husbands and wives to live in an equitable and just manner. This challenges some of the traditional ways husbands and wives live together. When there is equity between men and women, society can see the social and economic benefits.

Husbands and wives make a decision to become a *Gender Model Family* because they want positive changes in their lives. Men and women expect that adopting this model will bring 'unity' and 'harmony' to their family and community.

Couples commit to an action plan which they develop themselves. This first involves a simple re-distribution of tasks. For example, Bendu and Foday agreed that the last person up had to make the bed; they would split the

job of sweeping inside and outside the compound; they would share the job of caring for the children. In Kadiatu and Suleman's action plan, Suleman would help pound cassava leaf and rice; fetch water, and bathe the baby every night.

Revd Abu Lavallie of the *New Life Church* in Sierra Leone describes his experience:

'Living as a Gender Model Family has shown to my congregation that it is not only husbands who can bring income to the family. My wife's business has grown since we became a Gender Model Family because I am sharing the domestic chores with her. This has allowed her to travel up and down to do her marketing. The family income has increased. This improvement in my family situation was noticed by the church leaders. They asked me to plant the church in a new community. I have preached about the

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virtues of the *Gender Model Family* in the church. I have invited members of the congregation to my house. Whenever they come, I allow them to sit, relax and chat with my wife while I do work around the house. Sometimes I even prepare food when members are visiting. Some of my church members have accepted to become *Gender Model Families* and it is helping them.'

After a family adopts this model, household tasks are not done according to whether you are a woman or girl. Everyone helps out with all tasks. Progressively, as with the work, decisions start to be shared. As women have more say in decision-making, they begin to have more opportunities to become involved in community-management and leadership. As a result of new openness and communication, husbands and wives experience a renewed commitment and love for each other. According to participants, the concept of the *Gender Model Family* is 'motivating' because it means that 'life has to change completely.'

Many benefits result. The burden of work for women and girls is reduced because men and boys are sharing tasks. Mothers and fathers are better parents; both girls and boys are sent to school. Men and women experience a greater capacity to be productive and prosperous because they have pooled their resources and are sharing the work. Women's self-esteem has

increased because women and their roles are valued in the family and community. Family tensions are reduced because of a new and positive start. *Gender Model Families* are admired and respected by community members because they have proven that families can experience peace and unity. When couples were asked about what it means to be a 'model', they said that they are a 'light' for the community and need to 'keep shining'.

Copies of the *Gender Model Family* manual can be downloaded from SEND's website: www.sendwestafrica.org/sl/index.php/publications/category/38-gender-model-family

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Parents and Children



Revd Rogers and Mrs Esther Banda: reaching out to children and families.

Good News for Children in Zambia

Esther Yawawa Banda writes of how she and her husband, Revd Rogers Banda, set up a 'Good News' club for children and of the help given to one young boy in trouble with his parents.

My husband and I saw a need to open our home to a children's Good News club. Our children and neighbourhood children aged one to twelve gathered on Saturday afternoon for a minimum of one hour. Our purpose was to reach out to the local children with the Good News of our Lord Jesus.

Most of the urban families are facing a lot of challenges due to high cost of living, lack of employment and poverty. These pressures force husband and wife to spend more time out working or doing business to make ends meet, than time with their children. Some children are growing with little or no parental guidance. Some have not been in a church – there is no one to take them.

About fifteen children attended, bringing friends to the club. We shared the Gospel through Bible stories, sang songs, did memory verses, prayed and played. In short, it was 'Sunday School' in the neighbourhood. We held our meetings outside the house under a tree; if it rained we used the garage with the door left open. This we did as a safeguard and assurance to the parents about the security of the children.

One night we heard a frantic knock on our door. When we opened it, there was Bupe, aged 10, and one of our Good News

club members. He was crying and bleeding from the mouth and nose. We said a short prayer and quickly attended to the wounds. The bleeding stopped and he was able to talk. He told us he had been beaten by his mother and father. Both had been away from home from morning till evening; the children had been by themselves, with Bupe being the eldest. He had slipped up in carrying out one of the chores – hence the beating. Bupe is one of the children who had responded to the Gospel to receive Christ in his life during one of our club sessions. We briefly ministered to him. He admitted his wrong, said 'sorry' to Jesus and wanted to go home and apologise to his parents.

We walked home with Bupe and greeted his parents and the boy apologised to them. We counselled that it was good to instil discipline in their children but parents should be careful not to cause harm. When they saw the blood-stained T-shirt of their

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son, they realised the seriousness of the matter. They admitted they were very scared and thought they would be reported to the police. They appreciated our counsel and the family was reconciled.

Bupe later completed his secondary school and trained as an electrician. He is working and lives with his parents - a blessing to his family and the community. Last Easter, he also assisted us. It was a joy to see a fine young man in his early twenties. I was reminded of that night and chose to write his story.

We thank God that Bupe had somewhere to run to that night, coming to the church because of the Good News club. He could have easily taken to the street in rebellion. The fruit of the presence of Jesus Christ in his life was his willingness to admit his wrong and seek forgiveness from God and his parents. He was a witness for Jesus to his family.

Reaching out to children is reaching out to families.

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Positive parenting – Melanesia.

Photo: The Melanesian Mission UK.

Mothers' Union Programme to help and empower parents in Melanesia

Mrs Mary Vunaagi, Provincial Mothers' Union President, writes of the achievements of the Mothers' Union Parenting Programme.

The ministry of the Mothers' Union is one of the lay ministries playing an important role in the mission of the Anglican Church in Melanesia to families. And this ministry has become more important today than ever before.

The Mothers' Union believes that the Positive Parenting Programme is the prevention mechanism for gender issues such as family and domestic violence.

The challenges that many families in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu now face continue to be on the rise, especially that of social issues affecting marriages and family life. These challenges cut across urban and rural areas. The Mothers' Union believes that the *Positive Parenting Programme* is the prevention mechanism for gender issues such as family and domestic violence. There has been a lot of awareness and rallies against violence in all forms, but it continues to increase.

Despite the many challenges during the initial stages of this programme's implementation, the Parenting Trainers have been

able to train five sets of Positive Parenting Group Facilitators who have the most important task in working with parents.

The Diocese of Central Melanesia, where Honiara, the capital town of the Solomon Islands is situated, is now into their third group of parents. It has been very encouraging to have some Church leaders, policemen, nurses and people with high status – with their wives – enrolling in the programme. Three Dioceses are scheduled for facilitators' training, one in the Solomon Islands and two in Vanuatu.

Many tears have been shed during the parenting sessions. Some parents felt that this programme should have been implemented long ago when their children were still young.

The Programme is starting to obtain the respect of the public, not only within the Anglican Church but with others as well. This programme is not to convert people to Anglicanism, but rather to:

- establish community support network of teams to encourage parents in their role
- empower parents to respond to the process of growth and development of their children
- support families and communities to respond positively to the social changes of parenting.

With the passion and commitment of facilitators, we are starting to see positive impacts on families of parents and carers who have gone through the Parenting Programme. Many tears have been shed during the parenting sessions. Some parents felt that this programme should have been implemented long ago when their children were still young.

In Honiara, the programme is starting to attract the interest of a lot of parents and carers in all levels and from different backgrounds. Some facilitators have been able to link fathers to their children – overcoming cultural barriers.

It is our prayer that in five years' time the Parenting Programme will make a difference in the life of many families. The saying we have shared with all parents who have gone through this Parenting Programme is that 'the job now is to support this programme so that each child that passes our way has a map or compass and food for the journey, and then leave everything to God to bring them to the eternal port.'

We continue to seek God's guidance and direction in our journey in this very important programme in order to achieve positive impacts, if not for this generation but for the future.

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Family Divisions: Help for Young People



Coordinator of Mugumu Safe House: Rhobi Samwelly and her daughter. Photo: Mugumu Project.

Escaping Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) – Tanzania

Rhobi Samwelly writes of her own experience in overcoming the trauma of FGM; reconciliation with her parents; and her work in helping young girls in the Mara region of Tanzania to escape the cutting, and – where possible – go back to their families.

I was born at Kinyariri village, Mara region, which borders Kenya. My mother was a Maasai and my father is Kurya. I am the oldest of 12 children. In 1987, I completed primary school

After completing my primary school, my parents asked me to undergo FGM. I remembered a number of girls from the village going to have FGM and one of them died.

and passed to Maswa girls' secondary school. I then joined a Teachers' training college for two years and in 2009 I joined the Open University of Tanzania studying Business Administration with Education, graduating in 2012.

After completing my primary school, my parents asked me to undergo FGM. I remembered a number of girls from the village going to have FGM and one of them died. Traditions dictate that if a girl dies during the procedures she cannot be buried, but instead her body is thrown in the bushes to be eaten by wild animals. I was very upset by this.

Seriously, I considered running away but had nowhere to go because all my relatives supported my parents and I had no option but to go ahead. My grandfather paid for a special circumciser for me from the next village, but she worked slowly and badly and I lost so much blood that I lost consciousness. My family and neighbours were all crying and thought I had died. They were too scared of being arrested to take me to a hospital. Miraculously, I pulled through. Although I was angry with my family, I agreed to forgive them if they promised not to cut my six young sisters. This my parents promised.

Despite this trauma, I did very well at school and was awarded a place at a prestigious secondary school. But this didn't stop my grandfather saying, "Why do you insist on going to school; you should marry and get your father cows." Ironically, this pressure ceased the following year, when, returning from market, he was gored to death by cows.

My husband and I have a daughter whom we promise will not have to undergo FGM.

The Anglican Church of Tanzania, Diocese of Mara, is working to educate communities about the effects of FGM and gender-based violence through involving church leaders, community leaders and the community at large. As a result of this community education, we have received some girls who run to escape FGM and go to our pastors asking for protection. This situation led to the establishment of the safe house at Mugumu, Serengeti District. In 2014, 143 girls fled from FGM and were protected in the safe house. thirty-four girls remained there learning tailoring skills, handmade crafts, cooking and computer skills. Also, young women who experienced violence from their families received a short-time place to stay while demanding their rights.

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A hundred girls were taken back home after negotiations and relationship-building with the girls and their parents. Then they signed the memorandum of understanding with the police gender desk, village chairman, parents, and the safe house staff, for the safety of the girl back home. Safe house staff – in collaboration with the police gender-desk staff – make follow-up visits every month to see their progress.

This work of development and discipleship is challenging most Christians who are still practising the tradition and customs of FGM and violence to women and girls. This situation provides opportunities for church leaders and Christians to challenge this bad tradition and to fight against such violence. A further challenge is to promote girl children going to school and to stop early marriages which can contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS and cause delivery difficulties and complications when they give birth to their children.

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Photograph modelled for The Children's Society.

Photo: The Children's Society.

Help for teenagers who go missing – The Children's Society, England

Nicola from Greater Manchester tells how her teenage daughter kept running away from home. Desperate, Nicola eventually obtained support from the Missing From Home (MFH) service, run by The Children's Society, a national charity with links to the Church of England which helps children and teenagers at risk, and tackles child neglect and poverty. The MFH service offers return interviews when children return home, to find out why they have gone missing and offers support to help prevent this from happening again. Nicola is now training to help other young runaways as a mentor for MFH.

Nicola's story

When describing their child, most people talk about their character, and what they are like. When I am describing my child I say "She is 15 years old, 5ft 4, medium build with long brown hair and brown eyes. She has no distinguishing marks or features and she is at risk of child sexual exploitation" I am describing her to the police when reporting her missing.

I vividly remember the first time she ran away. We had a trivial disagreement; she went out and just didn't come home. At first I felt angry, then the feelings turned to anxiety and the fear that every parent's nightmare was coming true. As the hours passed, I grew more convinced that something must have happened to her, that she needed me and I wasn't there. I reported her missing to the police. Hospitals were checked and her description circulated. I spent the days in a trance, feeling sick, not sleeping and full of fear. Eventually she was found through friends messaging on Facebook and we brought her home. But this was just the beginning.

Over the next year, she continued to go missing, and was excluded from various schools. She was violent, aggressive and disruptive at home, and social services became involved. We all

suffered. My ten year relationship with my partner broke down and I found myself on my own, looking after my daughter and a six year old. We moved to a busy area with bars and clubs close by. Frequently going out late at night – sometimes climbing out of windows – she put herself at risk of harm and exploitation. Angry and sad, she started self-harming. I didn't know how to cope anymore and started drinking quite heavily. I was ashamed that I couldn't control her behaviour and felt constantly judged. I couldn't stop my world falling apart. Family and friends trying to help sometimes made me feel worse. How could they understand this nightmare? I was isolated, insecure and lonely, trying so hard to keep it all together – job, kids, my sanity.

I knew I wasn't doing my best for my fragile family so I decided to stop drinking and engage more with the support services. Some seemed pointless; sometimes I knew better than them,

'She is 15 years old, 5ft 4, medium build with long brown hair and brown eyes. She has no distinguishing marks or features and she is at risk of child sexual exploitation' I am describing her to the police when reporting her missing.

but sometimes they helped and when they did it was fantastic. The Missing from Home worker from The Children's Society really changed things for me. She was there whenever I needed her and she gave me back my confidence to be a parent. I must admit when I first heard she was going to be helping with 'parenting advice', I went on the defensive. Although I questioned my ability as a parent, I didn't want anyone else to. But I was in a situation so extreme that most people would struggle.

I think realising that I was not in control of my daughter anymore, helped me to get to where I now am. I could try to guide and help her, give her the best home life possible, but ultimately they were her decisions and I could not change this. I also tried to 'pick my battles' and not focus on little things that were going wrong but appreciate the positives. I started to be kind to myself and tried not to feel guilty.

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With the help of the MFH worker, we wrote up some house rules with rewards and punishments. This helped my daughter understand what was expected of her, creating some boundaries, and she responded quite well. I stopped locking doors and windows, and hiding keys. I just let her know what the right choice would be and hoped that she would make it.

As the parent, I was the key. To help my daughter, I had to be the best I could be, learn to try and understand, not judge, live day by day and, most importantly, hold my head up high. The MFH service has helped me to do this and I recognise how far we have come. There is light at the end of the tunnel now and I am a happy mum with two lovely children who are challenging, gorgeous and a bit mad! But that's ok!

Contact: To find out more about this project write to The Children's Society, Edward Rudolf House, Margery St, London, WC1X 0JL, UK, website www.childrensociety.org.uk

Help for Families Suffering from Stress and Addiction



Counsellor helping couple with marriage problems.

Photo: HKSKH Welfare Council.

Family Support for Young People affected by Substance Abuse – Hong Kong.

Established in 1966, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (HKSKH) Welfare Council is the social welfare arm of the Anglican Church in Hong Kong. The Council is dedicated to offering a wide range of services with person-centred approaches for users of various age groups and strata in society. As one of the largest social service organizations of the Anglican Communion in Hong Kong, the Council follows the footsteps of Christ, with the vision to develop a society of love and care. Rebecca Wong writes of the Council's work in combating drug abuse and tells the story of how a young man was helped to recover his health, his girlfriend and his family.

Hidden drug abuse problem in Hong Kong

According to the latest statistics about substance abusers in Hong Kong, 40.8% were ketamine (a mind-altering drug) abusers, many aged between 21 and 30. The number of hidden drug abusers has been increasing; over half of the abusers took such substances at home. An increase in the average duration of drug abuse amongst abusers was also noted, rising to over five years in 2014. The prolonged duration not only brings hardship on the abuser but also considerable costs to the family.

The Neo-Horizon counselling centre for substance abusers was established by the HKSKH Welfare Council in 2008. It aims to provide counselling and medical support services to help them abstain from taking drugs. The service believes that early identification and support from family members are crucial factors in the intervention process.

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Lost in the Dark: Story of Ming

Ming (name changed) had been a ketamine abuser for eight years since he was 16. He said when he felt lonely and unhappy he took ketamine to boost his mood. He was in a daze. With prolonged ketamine abuse, his health deteriorated and problems such as kidney damage became obvious. His mother

and his girlfriend, June (name changed), noticed the symptoms, but Ming tried to cover them up with lies. His mother felt very disappointed and finally called the police to arrest him.

June also felt helpless and upset with Ming's lies and behaviour and they broke up several times. However, they reconciled time and again because they loved each other deeply. June said "Every time when I found ketamine in his belongings, I felt frustrated and hopeless as he cheated me again. I always questioned and puzzled if he loved ketamine more than me. And I doubted whether he was the 'Mr Right' for me to share the rest of my life."

The project also fosters family members' understanding of the difficulties that drug abusers encounter when they quit drugs, and enlists their support to help the abuser resist the temptation of taking them.

'Love can Change Everything' Family support project

With the encouragement of a social worker, June and Ming's mother were able to support him to fight the temptation of ketamine. Ming and June joined Neo Horizon's 'Love can Change Everything' – an intensive project especially for couples. It provided a pre-marital physical check-up, marital counselling and medical support services. After the check-up and counselling, Ming clearly realized how ketamine had become the barrier and even the intruder ruining his relationship with June. The project also fosters family members' understanding of the difficulties that drug abusers encounter when they quit drugs, and enlists their support to help the abuser resist the temptation of taking them.

With the patience and love of his mother and June, Ming finally quit his drug-taking habit. After 12 months' treatment, he managed to develop a healthy lifestyle, refused the temptation of ketamine and rebuilt close relationships with his loved ones. Now he is planning to get married to June, get ready for a new chapter in life, and say 'Good Bye' to substance abuse.



Love can change everything poster

Photo: HKSKH Welfare Council.

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Children enjoying a craft session with the chaplain.

Photo: MU AFIA.

The Mothers' Union Away From It All Holidays – England

Away From It All (AFIA) is a Mothers' Union holiday scheme, run by members across the UK to help people who are experiencing stress in their family life. In 2012, the project helped 2,721 people to get Away From It All by providing holidays and away days. This article tells of the aims of the project, and how it benefits families.

We spent a wonderful week as a family; not just as a holiday but it was a time with my daughters to talk and understand how they were feeling.

AFIA breaks give people an opportunity to step away from their stressful lives and reconnect as a family. The families who go on the holidays can be referred from many different sources – social services, doctors, the clergy, Mothers' Union members or anyone who knows a family who would benefit from such a break. Some Dioceses, such as Winchester, take some 12 families away for a week, paying full board, with a team of 12 there all the time to provide care and support. Another Diocese has a caravan on a site which is well equipped with everything a family needs for entertainment during their stay including a play park for the children. The beach is a few minutes' walk away and – if needed – the family is provided with everything they need from buckets and spades to new clothes and spending money.

People suffering from many different forms of stress write of the healing provided by the holiday:

'I had fled from my husband with two of my daughters because of domestic violence and mental abuse. We had nothing. However, we spent a wonderful week as a family; not just as a holiday but it was a time with my daughters to talk and understand how they were feeling.'

'On our holiday it was the first time I've seen my Mum smile for a long time'.

The change in my life has been incredible. Let's look at what I was: a murdering, lying, cheating, thieving scumbag who liked to drink and was virtually alcohol dependent, on the brink of suicide. Always putting work in front of family – thinking I was doing it for them and at the same time not realising what I was doing to them or to me...

Neil, a sniper in the British Army who had seen many horrendous things, suffered from post traumatic stress and his family suffered with him. He describes how the time away and hearing the Good News of the gospel at an evening reflection enabled him to take stock of his life:

'The change in my life has been incredible. Let's look at what I was: a murdering, lying, cheating, thieving scumbag who liked to drink and was virtually alcohol dependent, on the brink of suicide. Always putting work in front of family – thinking I was doing it for them and at the same time not realising what I was doing to them or to me... Now I am a Licensed Lay Reader, I help out on the AFIA holiday and I preach the gospel.'

Neil goes on to tell how, having been through it himself, he was able to help another soldier on an AFIA holiday. The man had many anger issues and problems with alcohol, putting great strain on his family who were only just coping. After talking with Neil, this soldier got further help through his local church and the charity *Combat Stress*. He is a very different man, with marriage on the horizon, and admits that now he is a much better partner and father.

Neil is clear that on *Away From It All* Holidays many miracles happen, and the break for a family to be together makes a difference not only to the holidaying family. It is a generational change that will live on through the children who have been helped by the break and the wider community.

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Removing Stigma



Villagers listening to the gospel and learning about epilepsy.

Photo: Bethesda Project.

The Effects of Epilepsy – Burundi

Bridget Hathaway, Crosslinks Disability Consultant, writes of the effects of epilepsy on the sufferer and tells the story of how one father and his family in Burundi learnt about the illness and was given back his life.

‘You have given me back my Life!’

Have you ever been unwell but wanted to keep it secret? Epilepsy is something that cannot be hidden easily. This is especially so if you are not taking any medication to control the fits. This is a story about Dismas (name changed), a young man living in a village near the town of Muyinga, Burundi.

He felt disregarded by his friends and upset that he could not provide for his wife and children. The stigma of epilepsy brings marginalisation not only to the person who is affected, but to the whole family.

Dismas grew up in a small village. He had no particular health problems and enjoyed all the usual activities of any young lad. He had work to do by helping with digging the garden but that was no problem. When he was old enough he married and started a family. Then one day, when he was 30 years old, he had an epileptic fit at night. No one was quite sure what happened but it kept happening. Oh the shame of it! Dismas was involved

in community life; he played a part in community-leadership, but all that changed. The leaders said he could not continue in his roles so he had to give it all up. His wife and children were shocked. As his strength diminished so did the food store, as he was the main breadwinner. He felt disregarded by his friends and upset that he could not provide for his wife and children. The stigma of epilepsy brings marginalisation not only to the person who is affected, but to the whole family. Is the person bewitched? Has it infected the family? Will friends who meet him catch epilepsy? People say that if he falls in the fire or in water he will never get better. These are just a few of the beliefs that surround epilepsy.

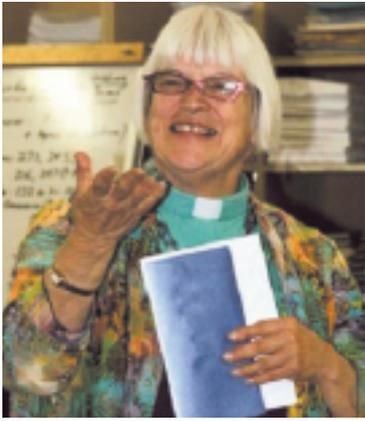
The Bethesda Project, under the Anglican Diocese of Muyinga, has been holding epilepsy clinics in three villages, helped by Mothers’ Union members and the church evangelist. Initially, only a few people would come – perhaps ashamed of being seen as having epilepsy. Slowly, the word spread that medication was available and the example of the first few people helped others to come.

Since then he has had no more fits. His family are thrilled and they thank God for the huge change in their lives.

Dismas came and shared how he had been having fits for nine years and how hard it is to be a father and husband who is respected when you have epilepsy. The specialist nurse listened to him, counselled him and six months ago he began medication. Since then he has had no more fits. His family are thrilled and they thank God for the huge change in their lives. They always attend church now without fear of a fit. At the last clinic he was jubilant! “You have given me back my life”, he said, “If you were a party standing in the presidential elections I would vote for you!” We all laughed. And why did we have so many new clients last time? It was because Dismas had been our ambassador in the village. He is no longer ashamed. Instead he has regained confidence and knows he has a role in his family again. Praise God!

When asked what he says to people with epilepsy who come to him for advice, Dismas told us “When I get someone come, I tell them to come here because if they go elsewhere they won’t get proper treatment. I tell them you will get true treatment at the clinic.”

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Revd Dr Lesley McLean.

Women in Prison

Revd Dr Lesley McLean, Chaplain to Mothers' Union, Diocese of Adelaide, South Australia, writes of her concern for women in prison. She is hoping to set up a programme to help them and their families, including personal involvement with prisoners as well as providing gifts, but progress is slow.

In the suburbs of South Australia's capital city, Adelaide, there have been two high profile cases of child abuse and neglect in the last two years which have led to the imprisonment of the mothers. The cases stirred my attention. It was almost as if latent thoughts came to the surface – thoughts about how women of all ages can become trapped in a cycle of abuse and neglect and develop little or no sense of mothering. These mothers are now prisoners, not because they are addicts or cheats or thieves, but because they could not or would not care for their children.

I know what it is like to be a mother with no idea what to do – and with an undeveloped sense of my own self, purpose or role, dutifully putting my husband's needs above any nascent mothering instinct. I know how close any of us are to falling into condemnation.

Since then I have researched what life is like for those under sentence of the law, whether loving mothers or those where neglect – or worse – has led to the death of a child. I went on to make contact with a local women's prison. After an interview with the supervising chaplain there, I have offered to write to a prisoner who is a mother. But setting this up with the prison authorities is proving to be a slow process and six months later it has yet to be finalised. The chaplain of the women's prison suggested particular points for prayer and these revealed that pregnant mothers having babies while they are in prison have

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the babies taken from them at birth, and that the women worry about the welfare of their children outside the prison. But it is now decided by the prison authorities that these prayer points are no longer to be issued.

In 2014, I was commissioned as chaplain for the Mothers' Union in the Diocese of Adelaide. I brought the matter of mothers in prison to the attention of branches and the executive and wrote a prayer for mothers in prison, which I circulated to all members. The task of praying for discernment is a difficult one and not always satisfactory for those keen to act. Nevertheless

my path has led to links with a group gathered by a state senator to an organisation for women released from prison, to lectures and seminars by the legal profession and to private individuals concerned for mothers.

So now I am more informed (and as a consequence more disturbed) by the treatment of mothers and their children in my state of Australia, which in the 19th century led the world in women's suffrage, and which today incarcerates women in a Dickensian world, surrounded by stigma and hardship.

Prayer for Mothers in Prison

Most loving God, whose tender mercy knows no bounds, Hear our prayers for mothers in prison.

Be with them in sorrow and remorse, in anger and despair. Ease the pain of broken relationships and guide those who counsel them.

Hear our prayers for children suffering the effects of their mothers' imprisonment.

They are all in our mind's eye and heart's care; Gather them under your wing where they may be brought to wholeness.

We pray, dear God, for guidance in discerning our ministry to mothers in prison.

May your Spirit's healing power be upon all our members as we put our trust in you.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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Family Strength



Margaret Sentamu and family.

Photo: M. Sentamu.

African understanding of 'family'

Margaret Sentamu, born and educated in Uganda, and now a Diversity and Leadership Development consultant (and wife of the Archbishop of York, England), writes of the practical consequences of the African concept of 'family'.

The wider understanding of family membership in Africa provides physical, emotional, spiritual, social and practical support as well as ensuring security in the home or family compound. If you have no job, not enough food to feed the family, hardly any clothing or bed to sleep on, no school fees for your children, no money for medical fees when you or the children are ill, and no pension or social benefit to rely on, how do you cope? You cope by relying on members of your immediate and extended family for help and support.

But the concept of family is being affected by the changes taking place in modern society, both positively and negatively.

But the concept of family is being affected by the changes taking place in modern society, both positively and negatively. With the influence of Christianity and basic economic considerations, some families limit the number of children due to the high cost of education. Nuclear families have become increasingly the norm in urban areas but less so in rural districts. Christianity also challenges traditional African practices such as polygamy, and the promotion of monogamy has had a direct impact on the concept of family. The stress on individual success, competitiveness and financial gain, modern education that promotes personal values at the expense of the communal, the emphasis on paid employment, the gap between the rich and

poor and the process of urbanisation that encourages many young men and women to move to cities in search of work have not only contributed to the phenomenon of slums but to the fragmentation of the family.

My husband and I had the good fortune of going to school and into higher education and as a result have a decent income. We are, therefore, expected to support the other members of the family who are economically less fortunate than ourselves. The requests we get include school and university fees, medical bills, food and clothing, business enterprises, not to mention contributions to weddings and funerals and church buildings. The list is endless. I sometimes suffer from 'survivor's guilt' of being the 'fortunate one' or the 'blessed one'. Where do you draw the line? The

temptation to overstretch oneself through borrowing is great, and the temptation on some people in the developing world to 'borrow' or misappropriate funds is also great.

Wider family members also rally round during times of sorrow, loss and bereavement so when you lose a loved one you are never alone.

There remains a positive side which is revealed during good and bad times. People help each other out at harvesting and weddings because they too will, in due course, receive support from others. Wider family members also rally round during times of sorrow, loss and bereavement so when you lose a loved one you are never alone. You have family to 'sit' with you at the wake and throughout the period of mourning.

The spirit of 'Harambee' (togetherness) is deeply rooted in the concept of wider family. There may be significant changes in the

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concept of family today and the burden on those who are relatively well off might continue to be great but my sense is that the 'harambee' spirit will continue to remain. This means that you will never die alone because you belong. The concept of wider family is the safety net on which everybody can rely, especially in times of need.

We serve a God who blesses us and desires us to bless others with the gifts he has given us. But God also wants us to be good and responsible stewards of what has been given to us in trust.

Margaret Sentamu, Bishopthorpe, York.



Family strength: Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Photo: Awareness Foundation.

Huda Nassar, Director for the Middle East Awareness Foundation, writes of the strength of Syrian families – even in war.

Family Strength in War

The life of the family, and its effects on society, is a very important factor in our communities, both in the East and the West. If we want to build our communities, we must also build our families; when the families are healthy, then our community will be healthy too. The understanding of 'family' for many people is not one of blood. Firstly, when the family members are biologically related to each other, they share a great number of similarities which can be the basis of deeper love and understanding. Secondly, if the family does not share the same blood biologically, they can share the same stream of love which can be also a strong bond between its members.

The understanding of 'family' for many people is not one of blood.

Many things negatively affect the life of the family. Economic pressure on the family, emigration and financial hardship can be found everywhere. In some parts of the world, there is an even greater threat to the family: war. Warfare in all its forms, many of which today are sectarian and insurrectionist, can affect children most of all, and therefore the family's life undergoes changes which may appear to be beyond their control. In this situation, the families have to find a way to cope, and to contribute to the healing and restoration of their community.

When I visited a Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon, I met a family who had adopted an abandoned child who was previously unknown to them. In Lattakia, my home town, some families have taken in displaced families, making them part of their own and sharing everything they have with them. Here we see families healing and restoring a genuine sense of belonging, taking in the forgotten and the despairing. In many cases, they are saving and restoring lives: true acts of charity. Even in the darkness of war and hatred, we can see the light of hope and love, the act of God in people.

The views of individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the International Anglican Family Network.

The concept of grace will always be much more effective in the life of the family than the concept of law could be. Family remains the building block of each community and there can be no rest while those whom God has called His children remain divided and at enmity. God, through the death of Jesus Christ, has accomplished the salvation and liberation of the world. Yet we are agents of that action. It is not magic. For we who would be Christ-like, there can be no limits to our sharing of the love that has been given.

In Lattakia, my home town, some families have taken in displaced families, making them part of their own and sharing everything they have with them.

When so many families are being destroyed or torn apart through violence and hatred, the unity of the family should be in and through love, making a common proclamation that Christ lives in us and we in Him. We are His hands, feet, ears and mouth. The integrity of the family remains intact by keeping the image of God alive in us, living like Christ and acting with an unconditional love that transforms, heals and saves. In this way, we can heal our own families and, through reflecting the light and love of Christ, we can help our neighbours and our communities. Love is stronger than hatred, and the family can be a perfect beacon of this love – healing, reconciling and forgiving.

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PRAYER

Beloved God,
who cares for us as a mother
who protects us as a father
who is closer to us than a brother or a sister
Bless our families, whatever their shape or form.
We ask you to care for our families in time of need;
to protect them in times of danger
and to tie them ever closer to each other and to you
with bonds of love.

Loving God,
We ask you to give strength and wisdom to all those who
work with families throughout the world.
And we ask you to give to each of us the compassion to
reach out to all our sisters and brothers
In recognition that we are all precious members of your
family.
Rev'd Dr Evie Vernon