



BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES IN THE WAY OF CHRIST



Bishop Kantipudi Reuben Mark and Bishopamma Revd Priscilla Reuben with the children they nurture. See page 2.

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EDITORIAL

There is something deeply human about wanting to be strong. Perhaps it is because we feel that if we are strong then we will be safe, in control, successful and achieve our ambitions. Yet for Christians, the idea of 'being strong' should be a complicated ambition, simply because we follow a Christ who was crucified. On the cross we see the strength of God revealed in what the world sees as weakness and failure. The strength of love is lifted high as Jesus' physical strength is drained by wounds and the torture of crucifixion.

So why, as we follow in the way of Christ, do we still aspire to be strong in worldly terms – a strong church with strong leaders, a strong faith with strong marriages and strong families? Especially when so called 'strength' can mask all sorts of abuse which comes when there is an imbalance of power.

In the gospel stories we read of people being drawn to Jesus because of what he was saying and doing. It was the spirit of God, and all that flowed from his relationship with the Father, which characterised his strength – for apart from that he had no money, no status and no worldly power. Jesus did not control or force people, but instead invited others to share in his vision and in his experience of being intimately caught up with God. It was this vision and experience which strengthened Jesus in his ministry in the face of so much opposition, ridicule and violence. It gave Jesus what we call 'resilience' – which is the ability to cope with things going wrong and not letting our character and love be changed by the way other people treat us.

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The 'resilience' of Jesus meant that even on the cross, with all its pain and anguish, we can see the quality of God's love shining through as he speaks to the repentant thief on the cross next to him.

If we aspire to having strong families as a mark of being in the way of Christ, then that strength will be in our ability to live out the love of God in the face of so much that can undermine our family life. This means strength to forgive; to 'go the extra mile'; to keep seeing the image of God in those we love even when their behaviour masks that image; the strength not to give up on those who share our lives. In the same way, the resilience of Jesus means that, as disciples, we never tolerate the manipulation, violence and abuse which can be hidden within the privacy of family life. To do so, would be to condone behaviours that do not reflect the image of God in each of us. It is because of the resilience of Jesus that we are determined to transform all that disfigures humanity – not least within families.

So strong families in the way of Christ will discover the strength to live out the same 'resilience' that was in Christ Jesus. Such resilience cannot be learnt, for it develops out of our being intentional disciples of Jesus. In the end, it is in discovering the resilience of Jesus that we are strong. With the armour of God we are not changed in our Christian character by the trials and tribulations of life, but we continue to love and be loved.

Bishop David Rosedale, Chair International Anglican Family Network.

BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Faith formation and spiritual nurture of children.

How can churches help parents to build a strong family in the way of Christ? In the UK, as in so many places, churches are seeking to answer this question. One person who is working on it is Yvonne Morris, a diocesan children's adviser and author of 'Side by Side with God in Everyday Life' a book of bible stories illustrating important life themes. Here are some of her reflections.

Many Christian parents feel anxious and under-equipped when it comes to the faith formation and spiritual nurture of their children. Yet, they are the primary spiritual carers in their home and family. There are some key things that churches can do to bless and assist parents in raising children of faith.

- **Work together.**

Churches can make worship, buildings and events as welcoming and hospitable for families as possible. Ensuring that children are - everyone is - welcomed and enabled to participate in and contribute to the worshipping life of the community is key. Encouraging cross-generation relationships is beneficial to the spiritual growth of every member. Older folks have experience and wisdom to share. So do young people, even toddlers!

- **Model discipleship and language** that recognise and promotes spiritual growth. If you ask an adult Christian "Where have you seen God at work today/ this week/ sometime?" or a Christian parent "How do you know your child is growing spiritually?" you might well see a look of sheer panic on their face. Churches could help by asking the first question each time a group gathers for worship or fellowship or over coffee. Helping all disciples learn a spiritual language is important. Recognising, encouraging and celebrating biblical markers I believe is key to the faith formation and spiritual nurture of children. Noticing when they are being patient, kind, self-controlled, pursuing peace and justice is vital. We must be intentional so that our children know they are living by grace, and don't just hear about faith when they get things wrong (which let's be honest, we all do).

It might sound strange or over the top, but faith grows when we see it in action. Sometimes we all need help to recognise it.

- **Actively encourage.**

When we forget to dwell in the peace that Jesus gives, it is easy to become anxious about the wrong things. So actively encourage the children (and other adults) when you see it. "You've waited so patiently thank you", "Well done you for not shouting back when Johnny was getting cross in the game", "Your teacher told me you've been brilliant at welcoming and helping the new boy in your class to settle in. I love hearing that you've been kind and generous in that way and it encourages me that I see you doing the stuff that Jesus did". It might sound strange or over the top, but faith grows when we see it in action. Sometimes we all need help to recognise it.

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Bishop Reuben Mark praying for mothers and their children.

Family Care for Street Children

For many years, Priscilla and her husband Bishop Reuben Mark in the Diocese of Karimnagar, Church of South India, have opened up their home to children who would otherwise be on the streets. Priscilla describes how she and Bishop Reuben have extended family care to the children and their mothers whose lives are broken and difficult.

I praise God for giving us the opportunity of taking care of 49 children for about 19 years. These children come to our home after school and study. We have helpers who teach the children and help them to do their homework. We have a time of singing, prayer and Bible study and then they eat dinner and go home. For most of them, this is the only meal they get to eat during the day.

We take time as a family to counsel the children in times of need and distress to instil in them a sense of hope for brighter days with the help of God.

Their mothers work as maid servants and toil the whole day for little pay. They just want to have a bright future for the children and they want the children to study hard and get a respectable job. As mothers, they struggle very hard and do not take care of their health. So we conduct medical camps with the help of friends and Christian organisations. With the help of the YWCA, we have conducted a workshop on HIV AIDS to bring about awareness and help the young girls to be cautious.

We take time as a family to counsel the children in times of need and distress to instil in them a sense of hope for brighter days with the help of God. We invite the children's mothers, whose lives are very broken, into our home where they might be able to speak with a woman counsellor and where Bishop Reuben and I serve them with food. In this way they are treated with respect and human dignity.

Often our friends visit us and help the mothers and the children to develop a positive attitude in life. We believe, pray and claim God's blessing on each one of them.

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BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS



A procession supporting the Girl Child campaign.

Girl Child Campaign

Rev. Asir Ebenezer, one of the organisers of the Focus 9/99 campaign, writes of how the Church in Kallimandayam of the Church of South India (CSI), Madurai-Ramnad Diocese, with over 50 girls from their parish and some street theatre artists, drew the attention of local people in the busy bus station to the plight of children, particularly girl children.

It was Sunday the 24th of January 2016, the National Girl Child Day when the Church, responding to the call of Focus 9/99 – a project supported by the Mission Agency Us, came onto the street. Through the street theatre artists in the community, the Church brought home the different rights of children under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The performance also brought out instances of physical, emotional, sexual abuses prevalent in the community, showing child neglect as an abuse: all this from the perspective of discrimination against girl children in Indian societies. The viewers were able to connect with the performance and went home with the message that children have rights, and girls cannot be discriminated against.

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The CSI Kallimandayam Church is one of 99 churches which have been chosen by their respective dioceses, one per revenue district, to serve as key congregations with regard to promotion of the rights of the Girl Child. These 99 local congregations have learnt about child rights and child abuse including abuse of girl children, and the legal framework within the Indian constitution that 'assures the future of the Girl Child'. Each of these 99 local churches has worked out intensive campaign activities in different parts of South India over the period between the National Girl Child Day (January 24) and International Girl Child Day (October 11).

The child sex ratio in India has been showing a declining trend among the 0-5 age children, signifying the prevalence of female feticide and infanticide despite strict monitoring to prevent it. This speaks of a mindset that the male is superior to the female of the species. Several attempts have been made in the past by faith communities, civil society and organisations to address the issue and turn it around. The CSI through its decade-long commitment to the girl child (2000-2010) has contributed to these efforts.

It is hoped that this further initiative, to 'assure the future of the girl child' in collaboration with the community, will create a lasting impact on the community and in the Church.

Alongside Focus 9/99, the CSI is also working on a Child Protection Policy, conducting trainings on self-protection skills for adolescent girls in its schools and hostels, and working alongside the World Council of Churches and UNICEF in developing 'principles for child-friendly churches'.

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A Family and a School keep the Faith

The vision of Mowbray College in Kandy, Sri Lanka, is to endow girls with life-oriented and value-based education in a Christian environment, focusing on academic excellence and personality development, so that its students can effectively face the challenges of a highly competitive world. College Principal Dilanthi Manuel describes how a girl, expelled from another school, gained the education she needed thanks to the support of her family and the open-hearted welcome and care of her new college.

The world of competition and commercialisation is fast creeping into schools. Hence priority is shifting from the child to the image of the school, though schools and governments say they are child-centred.

A girl was expelled from a leading girls' school at the age of 15. Her school had a disciplinary concern relating to the girl's alleged involvement with a boy. This is not a reason to expel a child, but this is what the school did. The parents denied the allegation and said that their daughter was falsely accused. However, the voices of the child and her parents were not heard due to the popular status of the school. After listening to the parents' plight, Mowbray College welcomed the child and took her in. She joined school in September 2010 in the third term of an academic year in grade 10, a year before she sat her General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level public examination.

In our communities, if she had not come to Mowbray – a church school - this child would have been labelled and set aside as a shame to society.

At the time of her admission, the girl's expected results were one B, one C, three ordinary passes and four failures. The community's reaction was that this academic status was not up to the expectation of some of the teachers as they needed results. Many parents too were critical of this child's admission, stating that she would be a bad influence on their children.

But the girl's family and Mowbray College remained strong in their support. Neither gave up on her! She sat her examination in 2011 and obtained good results. She then sat her Advanced Level examinations in 2014 and obtained three Bs and two Credits, making her eligible to enter university. Today, this same community – the girl's parents and teachers – are proud of her.

In our communities, if she had not come to Mowbray – a church school – this child would have been labelled and set aside as a shame to society. No other school would have taken her in. Mowbray welcomed her and stood by her, remaining true to its Christian vision, because the girl needed an education just like any other child. One girl child matters! Her education matters!

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BUILDING STRONG MARRIAGES

Early Marriages and Pregnancies

Early marriages, early pregnancies and gender-based violence are a challenge in the village of Mzenje, Zambia and the surrounding villages. The Church has been conducting a focus group, based at St John's Anglican church, to get a deeper understanding about the root causes of this. The discussions have brought some awareness to the women and the community and a few are empowered to testify about their experiences.

A number of contributory factors were identified by the women: lack of social activities, peer pressure, family pressure, physical, emotional and financial abuse.

- **Peer pressure.** When a girl reached puberty, women would take her aside and teach her about sex-related issues. After graduation, the initiated girl may take it upon herself to teach her friends with an air of superiority, putting pressure on them. The women thought that the initiation ceremony should have limitations, with topics being selective and taught to adolescents when they are matured.
- **Family Pressure.** The villagers' research showed that early pregnancies and early marriages are also influenced by family pressure from the girls' home and conflicts can result from misunderstandings. An innocent interaction between a girl and a boy can sometimes bring about unnecessary accusations. For instance a parent might say, 'I saw you with a man, why can't you just get married, all of your friends are either married or are pregnant!'
- **Physical abuse.** One of the women did not know that beating, threatening and using weapons on her child was an abuse. She thought it was a way of life until that Sunday when the Bishop talked about it. She used to hide whenever she faced such vices; but now she is able to tell the husband that if anything happens she will report to police.

One woman did not know that beating, threatening and using weapons on her child was an abuse. She thought it was a way of life until that Sunday when the Bishop talked about it.

- **Emotional Abuse.** Another woman testified that the greater appreciation of sons was an emotional abuse for a girl child, making her feel she is not worthy and so likely to misbehave. Women needed to have discussions with their spouses to appreciate the worthiness of girls.
- **Economic Abuse.** A young woman testified that she didn't know that a man not handing over adequate finances for the family or school support for the children is an economic abuse. She also came to learn about this the time the Bishop mentioned it when he visited Mzenje.
- Another young girl, who testified how she was sexually abused by a man when she was doing grade 5 and only 12 years old, opened up after discussing the importance of education and confessed, 'I wasted my time, I would have been somebody in society today.' Another, married aged 13 and now with four children, regrets having been married off at a tender age. She wants to go back to school and start grade 6. She is a Sunday school teacher at St John's.

Effects of Early Marriages

Early marriage is one of the most harmful practices as it usually denies girls' education, leads to poverty and economic insecurity and has a serious negative impact on their health and decision-making capacities. It also reinforces other forms of gender-based violence and problems, For example:



An older girl returns to school to catch up on missed opportunities.

Photo: J Hymphreys.

- Inability to read or write makes child wives entirely dependent on their husbands in practical aspects of everyday life.
- Having many children early exposes the mother and her children to psychological and health problems, as the immature girls exercise less control and have less ability to manage.
- The over-riding desire to be a good wife in the eyes of family and husband prevents the child wife from negotiating for safer sex practices; thus exposing her to risk acquiring HIV/AIDS and other STDs.
- Children whose mothers were married early tend to marry early; thus creating generations of child wives.
- Because of the age differences and the attendant poor communication, many early marriages end in early divorce or separation.
- Out of fear of her parents and the social stigma, as well as the poverty associated with being single, many child wives are compelled to remain in a loveless and violent marriage.

So far, a number of girls have decided to go back to school and there is an awakening among many women that marriage is a partnership.

Conclusion

The Church is part of the community and it feels the pain that early marriages cause. It is for this reason that Mzenje Parish and other parishes in the Diocese of Eastern Zambia, are fully committed in the programme to intervene with a holistic interpretation of Ephesians 5.21-6.4. The main approach is awareness and sensitisation through weekly meetings. So far, a number of girls have since decided to go back to school and there is an awakening by many women that marriage is a partnership. Single mothers in the villages may fail to meet their daughters' needs and some young girls may then go out to look for men, not caring about the consequences. It is against this background that intervention by the Church will increase awareness and contribute to the reduction of unwanted pregnancies and early marriage in Mzenje village and local communities.

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CHALLENGING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Classes on biblical responses to domestic violence held in the Church.

Photo:D. Misolo.

Biblical responses to Domestic Violence

Revd Dominic Misolo, a priest in the Bondo Diocese, Anglican Church of Kenya, writes of his innovative work piloting classes on the causes and effects of domestic violence. He is the founder of Ekklesia Foundation for Gender Education (EFOGE), a registered faith-based and ecumenical organization working within East Africa on Gender Justice and Equality from a Biblical perspective.

In the book of Isaiah 1:18, the Holy Bible invites all of us as Christians to come and reason together. "...Come now, let us reason together... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool..." The prevailing statistics on the increasing trends of sexual and gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and around the world are a serious issue that demands our collective dialogue and wisdom as a people of God. I am convinced that the World Health Organisation's claim that 35% of women worldwide have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence includes all of us Christians.

So where is our place as Christians, and what is our responsibility to help stop sexual and gender-based violence in the Church, home and society? I believe God is calling us at a time like this as 'His chosen people' to generate responsive dialogue, come Side by Side as males and females and reason together for reconciliation, peace, love and justice in order to stop the escalating trends of gender-based violence in our churches and communities.

By God's grace, this year we are piloting two discipleship classes on domestic violence in Bondo diocese, to train local congregations on the causes and effects of domestic violence and equip the church with Biblical principles of mutual love and respect to nurture peaceful and happy families free from violence and oppression.

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violence and oppression. The two classes, with four weeks' lessons, are being piloted at St. Peter's Church, Nyamira and St. Andrews Church, Nyawita. These classes – taught from a Christian perspective – give men and women, rare opportunities to talk and discuss issues surrounding sexual and domestic violence in a safe place, as participants learn how to build bridges for love, peace and reconciliation among their families. Training in Nairobi as a lead facilitator on the Christian approach to domestic violence, equipped me with knowledge and skills to engage Christians in discussing and resolving issues around such violence and the idea to pilot two classes in Anglican Churches.

These classes – taught from a Christian perspective – give men and women rare opportunities to talk and discuss issues surrounding sexual and domestic violence in a safe place (a church).

When these classes were starting, I was surprised that many participants believed that the church is a holy place and issues touching on sex and sexual violence should not be discussed there but in secular places. But this sentiment is strongly backed by our old traditional cultural belief and practices. Among the Luos of Kenya and many communities in East Africa, it has been a strong culture that issues of sex and sexual violence are unclean and should not be taken to the holy shrines for this will scare away gods and makes them angry and unhappy. Because of this, it was not easy for communities to talk and discuss issues surrounding sex and sexual violence except in conflict-resolution where elders ordered ritual cleansing or some payment to the girl's family to accomplish justice. This gives a true picture why churches in Sub-Saharan Africa may have been reluctant to be involved on issues of sexual and domestic violence in the church, a holy place.

These two classes are quiet, open, interactive and educative, as we give space for dialogue and gain valuable experiences from participants on the root causes of sexual and domestic violence. The content of the curriculum touches on:

- Basic/Biblical human rights – male and female identity in God, value, respect and dignity.
- Love – self, Christ and faith.
- Mind, body, soul and our uniqueness.
- Our relationships, testimonies and stories.

In this pilot project, there are critical issues emerging including theology and Biblical interpretations on women's leadership and equality; cultural practices and worldviews on women. There are plans to revise and contextualize the current training curriculum to include these emerging issues. Plans are also underway to scale up these classes in East Africa including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan.

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CHALLENGING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



Kiran Bala, director, and Asha Kasgar, worker, take notes about a woman's case at the community court at the Mahila Panchayat Women's Empowerment Centre, Seemapuri, Delhi, North India.

Photo: Us/Leah Gordon.

Anglican Brotherhood helps to Reconcile Families in Delhi

The Delhi Brotherhood Society is reaching out to marginalised communities, helping people to realise their potential and dignity by becoming self reliant and independent. One of their initiatives is the establishment of Women's Councils

There is a sense of expectation in the room. In a community centre in New Seemapuri, Delhi, four couples have gathered for a hearing before the Mahila Panchayat (women's council). The council is managed by the Delhi Brotherhood Society (DBS), with support from the Anglican mission agency Us (formerly USPG).

Hearings run by the council provide an opportunity for prominent members of the community to resolve local disputes – in this instance, domestic violence and marital conflict – without the need for fines, court fees or imprisonment: all penalties that further impoverish families.

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The room is not large. There is no furniture – people sit cross-legged on mats. The walls are a plain fading-yellow, but the room is an explosion of colourful saris and hopeful expressions. Justice is not hurried. Time is taken to hear and discuss cases. And trained counsellors can help couples find a way forward.

One couple has been married six years. They have no children, but the wife is pregnant. The woman wears a remote expression and sounds sad and distracted as she tells the room how her husband hits her and gives her very little money to buy food and medicine. Her mother, who is also in the room, starts to weep quietly. After she has spoken, her husband has a chance to respond. He tries to talk his way out of the accusations, but the

women in the room interject – they know this man from their community and know his wife is telling the truth. The facilitators ask further questions and help the couple reach a resolution: the man will stop his violence immediately and start giving his wife sufficient money for food and medicine.

Furthermore – as is customary – the couple must return in 14 days so the council can confirm that the agreement has been fulfilled.

Another couple has brought their two children, aged about four and seven. They are returning to the council having first appeared 14 days earlier when – like the first couple – the husband was told to stop beating his wife. The wife is smiling and says there is now peace in the family home. The husband is sent out of the room and the wife is questioned further. She affirms that the violence has stopped.

The children are also questioned and confirm that family life is much happier.

When the day's proceedings are over – and the couples have gone home – there is a joyful atmosphere in the room. These council hearings are bringing peace to their communities.

This work ensures that more vulnerable women receive the protection and support to achieve peace in their lives, their home and communities. Dr Monodeep Daniel of DBS has reported that one encouraging sign in 2015 was increasing support from men in the community.

DBS is currently operating two councils in Delhi. With legal accreditation, they have the power to summons people to attend a hearing. One of the reasons for their success is that women in the community are both witnesses to proceedings and able to monitor and verify whether rulings are being upheld. The people are accountable to each other. The councils are also an example of inter-faith co-operation. While DBS is a Christian organisation, the councils are in the hands of the people – whether Hindu, Muslim or Christian. There is no discrimination according to faith.

This work ensures that more vulnerable women receive the protection and support to ensure that they achieve peace in their lives, their home and their communities. Dr Monodeep Daniel of DBS has reported that one encouraging sign in 2015 was the increasing support from men in the community.

DBS Council facilitator, Asha Kasgar, said 'Our main work is to help women find justice. There is a mentality towards women in India which is the cause of a great deal of violence and abuse. The women are often afraid to speak out, so they suffer in silence.'

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BUILDING STRONG PARENTING

The Mothers' Union Parenting Programme

Hannah Taylor, Regional Development Manager Mothers' Union Parenting Programme, writes of challenges and successes.

Being a parent can be the most rewarding – and at the same time the most challenging – experience of our lives. All over the world, parents look to each other and their communities for support. Mothers' Union (MU) volunteer facilitators run parenting groups all across the Communion, currently in 23 different countries, from Argentina and USA to Kenya, Nigeria and the Solomon Islands. Each year, over 1,000 parenting facilitators work with their communities through parenting groups. These focus on bringing families together for fellowship to share experiences and together resolve their challenges. Many participants decide to continue meeting after the group has finished the course, for continued mutual support (for the challenges don't just go away!) and/or to set up an income-generating activity.

Ruth's Story (name changed).

Gloria Deuart, who facilitates groups in one of the Hinterland communities of Guyana, told this story of change and hope:

I had a parent Ruth in my group who was illiterate but wanted help because her husband spent weeks away from home working in the farm. Whenever he returned home, he abused her in many ways, and she, in turn, because of frustration, was abusing her children. She beat them and often left them alone. Tired of being beaten and cursed by her husband, she wanted to run away and even had suicidal thoughts. But, remembering the vows they made to each other when they got married, she decided to stay. Because of my paralegal training, I was called in to help the family. I introduced them to the Mothers' Union Parenting Programme but only Ruth attended. Although she was illiterate, Ruth learned about how to have a good relationship with her husband; how to parent her children by showing them more love and attention; and also how to take care of herself. I used lots of visual aids and role play so Ruth could understand and participate fully in the sessions. Ruth said the Parenting Programme has changed her life and that of her family. Her husband has made a commitment to join the next Parenting Group. The children are also much happier. When Ruth's husband is not away in the farm they attend Church as a family.

The parenting programme is open to people of all faiths (and none) and Mothers' Union is able to support and build up many different families.

The parenting programme is open to people of all faiths (and none) and Mothers' Union is able to support and build up many different families. In Guyana, one of the MU facilitators is a mother working with Muslim families, giving them the support network they need to build a strong and loving family unit. Supporting the expansion of the programme to new areas, in 2016, MU will train new group facilitators in Myanmar and Papua New Guinea.

We hope and pray that, through the parenting groups run around the Communion, we are able to support families to thrive and build secure, loving relationships.

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Family Support for Grieving Parents

"As we came into the hospice it felt as though our whole family was wrapped around by care and understanding. We all felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from our shoulders". (Carine, grandmother to baby John)



Loving support for baby John.

A new family arrives at Rachel House, having been referred by their hospital because their baby or child has a life-shortening illness – perhaps not expected to live to their next birthday. Imagine their apprehension and anxiety. They often feel that their life is out of control and they are alone. However they find they are welcomed with a smile into an atmosphere of calm encouragement. They are introduced to a team of carers and soon realise that not only their physical and medical needs are met, but that they will also be supported emotionally and spiritually.

The chaplain has a recognised role within the Family Support Team, and has been given dedicated time and space to simply be present with the families, giving them the opportunity to share their deepest hopes and fears. Each family is assessed to identify how we can best support them to find their own inner strengths and build up their spiritual resilience. We try to foster hope as they search for the meaning and purpose in their new life circumstances – 'Why my child? Why our family?' Perhaps it is above all our presence and compassionate listening that helps them to understand that they are deeply valued and that each child is precious.

We believe that all people are spiritual beings at core but some also have a religious dimension to their spiritual life. We reassure them that their religious needs will be met and respected (perhaps supplying a prayer mat, enabling them to observe religious festivals and liaising with other faith leaders. As an Anglican priest, I have the privilege of helping families to grow in their faith when we conduct funeral and memorial services, or are asked to pray with them, give blessings, baptise and even conduct the occasional wedding. One I remember well was a young couple whose baby had died here. I had conducted the funeral service and been part of their bereavement support. About a year later, they approached me at our Remembering Day Service asking if I could marry them. A date was fixed and the church was booked, but shortly before they cancelled because, to their surprise – and against all medical expectations – they were expecting another baby. To everyone's delight, the baby was well and healthy, and I had the joy of conducting the Marriage Service a few months later.

Rachel house is a "home from home" for all our families, and every member of staff works to help each child to live their lives fully and with hope. I believe that what John's grandmother was sensing when she first came here, was God's Spirit – the "Everlasting Arms".

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PARENTING IN A CHANGING WORLD



Church support: Elder and lay reader, Mountain Province, the Philippines.

Photo:Us/Leah Gordon.

Caring for elderly parents in a changing world

The latest Age International report says that people across the globe are living longer. People are also on the move, leaving the countryside for life in the cities or going overseas. This means that traditional family patterns of extended family members living in the same home or close by, ready to take care of each other, are more disrupted than ever. More and more older people are living alone, or are taking care of young grandchildren because their own children have died or have moved away. None of this is new, but it is becoming more common, and as individuals, as churches and communities, we have to find ways to deal with it.

More and more older people are living alone, or are taking care of young grandchildren because their own children have died or have moved away.

I work with Us (formerly USPG), an Anglican mission agency and talked with other workers who, like me, faced the issue of caring for ageing parents at long distance. We all live in England, but my 93 year old mother is in Jamaica; Davidson misses his parents and parents-in-law in India; Eunice helps look after both her parents in Uganda and Jeanette used to live in New York, but came home to the UK largely because her mother was getting older and more frail. Our situations varied, but we had many things in common.

We want to be there.

We all deeply regretted that we could not be with our parents to look after them in the way we would have liked. Our work gave us satisfaction, and allowed us to contribute to our parents' well-being, but we deeply wanted to be physically with them. Our cultures and our natures dictated that we should be there with our mothers and fathers who had taken care of us, and we endured the pangs of self criticism, and sometimes, the criticism of others in our home communities for being far away.

One real challenge was the distance of our parents from their grandchildren. We tried to get them to know each other, but even Skype is no substitute for grandma's hug, and travel is expensive. Getting home to see our parents was not easy, and getting them over to visit us was even more challenging. The cost of plane tickets was one barrier, but the prospect of getting visas for elderly people from the two thirds world to enter the UK is becoming increasingly difficult.

We were all very aware that we might not be there with our parents through their prolonged illness or death.

Providing financial support

One good part of working away from home is that we are able to contribute financially towards our parents' care. This helps to bridge some of the gaps in social support

available in our home countries. Some of our parents were doing fairly well with pensions and adequate health care, while others were completely dependent on their children.

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When you are not there, the really big challenge is how to provide for the daily necessities of our parents' lives. Who will take them to the doctor, or buy their groceries? Increasingly we have come to depend on those who were 'like family', not blood relatives, but whom we can trust and depend on to care for our family members. Some are old friends, some are church members, while others used to work with the family, but have become so much more than employees.

How can the Church Family Respond?

The world is facing a growing challenge to find new ways of taking care of older people. We are, perhaps, the lucky ones. We are able to be in touch with our parents, we can send them money, and we have people we trust to look in on them. Many people are desperately yearning for ways to do all of this.

Churches are already involved in helping with separated families, but they, like world governments, need to take more seriously the growing crisis of the elderly. What a joy it is to be in one part of the world and to be able to hear from a member of the church family far away in another country, 'I took your mother to the doctor yesterday, and I am making sure that she takes her medication properly'. What can we do to make this the pattern of care especially for those who have no-one else?

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BUILDING STRENGTH BY COMBATING STIGMA



Waverley Care raise awareness about HIV in schools through the www.HIVAlwaysHear.org campaign. They support children and young people who are part of a family where someone is living with HIV, or children who are themselves HIV positive. The aim of the work with children directly affected by HIV is to build the skills and emotional strength they need to be successful in school, relationships and life

Challenging HIV Stigma

Sadly, people living with HIV have been stigmatised and discriminated against since the virus was first discovered in the 1980s. This is often due to lack of knowledge about the facts – people can now live long healthy lives and can be un-infectious on medication – about how it is transmitted and about the true impact of stigma on those affected.

I am part of a charity, Waverley Care, which works with communities and individuals to challenge HIV stigma and has incorporated faith and spiritual care as a clear part of its work. At the forefront of HIV support in Scotland, it aims to offer fully holistic care. This support includes valuing the contribution of spiritual care and the charity demonstrates this commitment by directly employing me as a chaplain.

I have been in post for 16 years and am passionate about the issues faced by the people I work with who are living with HIV. Today, stigma may not be as obvious as it was when newspapers ran with 'plague' headlines and people were having graffiti painted across their front doors. But people living with HIV still regularly face discrimination – being gossiped about or treated differently at work or in healthcare settings – and the effects of this on an individual can be devastating.

But people living with HIV still regularly face discrimination – being gossiped about or treated differently at work or in healthcare settings - and the effect of this on an individual can be devastating.

The psychological impact of stigma is often shown in hugely damaged self-esteem or depression. Studies suggest that up to 60% of people living with HIV have experienced clinical depression. People may also struggle physically with side effects from treatments or with taking their medications because they hate the constant reminder of an illness they associate with a feeling of shame. Stigma means people living with HIV are less able to achieve their full potential.

Family support is one tool that can help challenge stigma. For some people, this is support from their birth family, and I and my colleagues at Waverley Care work with parents, children, siblings and other family members to help them understand that

HIV is no longer a death sentence but a long-term medical condition like diabetes or asthma. People can live well with it. We are also there to listen to families' other concerns or worries.

Sometimes, because of HIV stigma or for other reasons, people do not have their biological family for support and so look for another safe place to create 'family'. Waverley Care is often the family they turn to.

Sometimes, because of HIV stigma or for other reasons, people don't have their biological family for support and so look for another safe place to create 'family'. Waverley Care is often the family they turn to. The pastoral support people get from being part of a faith community is experienced in the settings that we've created: places such as our residential and outreach support centre, Milestone. I recently heard one service-user say 'Milestone is my church.' I think she was saying

that Milestone offers her all that we would hope church offers – unconditional care, friendship, a safe place and reassurance that she is loved by God.

Through a combination of one-to-one work and therapeutic group activities, I've seen people's lives made significantly better. We've a long way to go to ending HIV stigma, but we're getting there and family – no matter what form that takes – is an important tool in the fight.

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Stigma of Ebola

Speaking at a conference organised by Us, the Bishops of Sierra Leone and Guinea spoke of the stigma and fear affecting whole communities with the outbreak of ebola in 2014. Some 11,300 people died and 15,000 children were orphaned. The church and faith leaders showed great courage in taking the message of how to prevent infection to far-flung communities, often by boat, and the churches' intervention played a major part in reducing the spread of the virus. The leaders worked to combat the stigma. One Bishop, in spite of opposition, granted land in his compound for a holding centre – where people with signs of illness were held to ensure they were not infected. To show publicly the drastic action needed to stop the spread of the virus, the Dean of Monrovia voluntarily went into the 21 day quarantine lockdown with his household after his wife had visited a friend who later died of the virus.

With so many dying or fleeing in fear, tributes were paid to the importance of the partnership between church leaders, chiefs, and traditional healers in the efforts to change the traditional practices which were contributing to the spread of infection. As one Church leader replied to the question of where God was in this terrible situation of the Ebola epidemic "God is in you – what you are and what you do."

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BUILDING STRENGTH BY COMBATING EXCLUSION

Defending the rights of Filipino migrant children.

Japan has been one of the major destinations of Filipino migrant workers. There are 224, 048 registered Filipinos in Japan and nearly 29,000 are aged 0-18. Thousands of Filipino migrants are undocumented.

Many Filipino children were born from intimate relations between Filipinos, or between a Filipina and a Japanese partner, without their having married. Undocumented foreign migrants' children and those who were not recognized by their biological father, are not covered by any social security and could not go to school. Speaking inadequate Japanese, many of them acquired information and knowledge only through television, staying at home or in nearby parks. Others, brought up in the Philippines, struggled when brought back to Japan and not understanding language or culture, often dropped out of school.

Ecumenical Learning Centre for Children.

The Nagoya Youth Centre (NYC) of Anglican Church in Japan following the Diocese of Chubu's vision of a society where all people are equal and live together with mutual understanding and respect, established The Ecumenical Learning Centre for Children (ELCC) in 1998. This aims to provide basic knowledge and develop skills and values – including the moral and spiritual dimensions essential to a child's personal development and necessary for living in a changing society. The Centre also works to promote the children's knowledge and love for the people to whom they belong.

In 2002, following a campaign, Nagoya city government allowed undocumented children to enter regular school. With the subsequent revision of 'special permission to stay' – a visa which could be obtained by individuals who were not related to a Japanese national – eight students of ELCC, and their 18 family members, had the chance to stay legally.

The Centre played a key role in their quest to stay legally in Japan, providing lawyers and financial support for them and other families while they applied for visas. Every case won guarantees a good future for these kids, and, aside from the education we provide, this is one of our biggest



ELCC children participating in a charity concert for the flood victims in the Philippines.

achievements. Parents and children are very thankful to all who supported them. Now, they do not have to live like criminals; they can live a normal life: the children can study and the parents can work.

ELCC continues to serve not only the children but also their families, providing information on health and welfare benefits delivered by local government. Although parents have the option to send their children to regular school, many choose to stay at the Centre due to concerns of potential bullying from other children and lack of knowledge of the Japanese school system.

In the past years, an increasing number of small children of Filipino parents and of other nationals from Brazil and Peru with a Filipino mother (some of them single parents) are entering ELCC. The influx of migrating children in Japan is a phenomenon we could not ignore.

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WELCOMING THE STRANGER



Night time rescue of refugees on the Greek island of Lesbos.

Photo: Us/Max McClellan,

Light in the Darkness

From the air it looks like someone has run an orange highlighter pen around the Lesbos coastline, such is the density of life jackets that litter the coast from refugees who have landed in Greece from Turkey. Since the beginning of 2015, more than half a million refugees have arrived on Lesbos in small boats. January this year saw 36,175 refugees arrive,

compared with 742 in January last year.

The Anglican Chaplaincy in Greece, supported by the Anglican Mission Agency Us, is funding Lighthouse Refugee Relief (LRR), an NGO set up last year by volunteers from Sweden, Norway and the UK and one of over 80 NGO and volunteer groups helping on the island. It is an inhospitable part of the coast near the Korakas Lighthouse, where the light beam – in a cruel twist to its intended purpose to warn of rocks – instead attracts the refugees to the dangerous shore. But Lighthouse Refugee Relief has set up a reception and welcome centre and runs operations at Korakas in the evening and through the night. There are search lights, tents, sleeping bags and tools. A dangerous horror location on Lesbos is now transformed into a 24 hour reception centre with volunteer groups meeting vulnerable refugees on the shore and offering shelter, food and medical care. The Church of England's Diocese in Europe is working ecumenically to reach out to refugees in crisis. Suffragan Bishop in Europe. David Hamid said: 'There are huge needs, particularly concerning unaccompanied minors, pregnant women and the most vulnerable among the refugees.'

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WELCOMING THE STRANGER



Sergio and his family find peace and security in the U.S.

Photo: Episcopal Migration Ministries.

The Importance of Belonging – Sergio's story.

What does it feel like when you don't belong in your own country?

Living in Yugoslavia, Sergio found himself in 1991 in the middle of a war that was certain to claim his life, as well as the life of his mother. They fled, leaving everything behind, receiving refugee status from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and moving from refugee camp to refugee camp searching for safety.

"I felt that I didn't belong anywhere, but I also literally didn't belong... anywhere"

Reflecting on this time of his life, Sergio says, "I felt that I didn't belong anywhere, but I also literally didn't belong... anywhere."

After four years and countless background screenings, interviews and health checks Sergio and his mother were notified that they were bound for the United States through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Programme.

Landing in Chattanooga, Tennessee, they were greeted by staff and volunteers of Bridge Refugee Services, an Episcopal Migration Ministries local resettlement partner, who not only welcomed them to the city but helped Sergio restart his career as a videographer.

It turned out the local broadcaster needed a videographer. Fast forward to a few years later and Sergio is on the stage accepting an Emmy award for his work on a documentary.

Exactly five years after coming to US, Sergio and his mom became U.S. citizens. With his career well underway, Sergio got married and had a son.

Exactly five years after coming to US, Sergio and his mom became US citizens. With his career well underway, Sergio got married and had a son. Receiving his son's birth certificate in the mail was the moment when Sergio realised that through his journey, he found a place where he belongs and where his son will never be forced to wonder about home.

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"It kinda makes me at ease, I know he belongs from the start."

It's this kind of resilience and hope that inspires everyone involved in refugee resettlement ministry. However, stories like Sergio's are all too uncommon. Consider that there are currently more than 60 million displaced people worldwide. Of these, 20 million are refugees, and half are children. The vast majority of displaced people, asylum seekers and refugees either remain in their home country or in the country of asylum. In fact, only 1/2 of 1 percent of displaced people are resettled to a third country like the United States.

Refugees bring enormous gifts to our communities through their resilience, culture, and ambition.

In 2016, 85,000 refugees will be admitted through the U.S. refugee resettlement programme. Through Episcopal Migration Ministries, The Episcopal Church will provide welcome, support and 'belonging' for more than 5,000 of these new American families.

Working through a network of local partner agencies and volunteers, Episcopal Migration Ministries accompanies every refugee from their first moments in the U.S., starting with a welcoming greeting at the airport and following up with immediate, intensive assistance with translation, food, clothing, housing, education, mental health support, medical services, job training and community orientation.

Refugees bring enormous gifts to our communities through their resilience, culture, and ambition. Episcopal Migration Ministries invites you to learn more about this life-saving, life-giving work. Visit episcopalchurch.org/emm for more information.

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WELCOMING THE STRANGER

'No longer strangers'

Alison Clark, a member of the congregation of St Paul's Scottish Episcopal Church Rothesay, is working as one of the volunteers welcoming Syrian refugees to the Isle of Bute. She writes of her experience:

Children are often the best icebreakers. When our new Syrian residents arrived at our drop-in centre in Rothesay, they were welcomed by a team of volunteers including some young mums with their children. The fact that the little ones were playing around helped the Syrian children to relax. We were excited to meet the families for whom we had been preparing.

Our new residents, all families with children, are here under the Home Office *Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme*. It gives financial support and requires that English language teaching is provided. Most of the group have no English at all and so attend classes run by a trained teacher and supported by some of us who help with the 'homework'.

The centre, the local Roman Catholic Church hall, has provided a point where the various statutory services can meet the new residents and provide information. It has also allowed the Syrian families to begin to get to know each other. A range of organisations – religious and secular – have responded, including the island's food bank which has collected and distributed food and clothes. There are good ecumenical links among the island churches, all of which have been involved. Working together, they placed a welcome advert in the local paper in Arabic and English, with space for prayers to be added..

There are challenges and occasional misunderstandings but there is a great urge... to help. My guess is that in the face of the horrors we witness so regularly, we grasp at the chance to do something, however small.

There has been generous support from the Scottish Communities Initiative, a Muslim organisation. They gathered donations of halal meat for the families and organised a reception at the Glasgow Central Mosque for Syrian arrivals and volunteers, attended by Humza Yousaf, the Scottish Government Minister for Europe and International Relations, who has been directly involved in the planning for the refugee arrivals. Aware of cultural sensitivities, we played down Christmas at first but the families enthusiastically accepted invitations to the local pantomime and school carol concert, delighted to have photos taken beside the Christmas tree.

The school in Rothesay has nursery, primary and secondary stages. Students and staff were well prepared with some of the children making a welcome video and learning a few words of

Arabic. The parents' association donated a starter set of school uniforms. According to the head teacher, the children are settling in well.

There has been some negative comment both locally on social media and nationally in the press. But this has not resulted in hostile community action – quite the reverse. Neighbours have opened their doors; local folk nod and smile in the shops or the street.

It is unusual for me to be face-to-face with people whose plight I have seen on the news, but they are individuals and it is important not to treat them as news stories. Even if communication was easy, we do not ask about their stories. It is up to our new residents whether and when to share them.

There are challenges and occasional misunderstandings but there is a great urge, I would almost say 'need' to help, not just here in Bute. My guess is that in the face of the horrors we witness so regularly, we grasp at the chance to do something, however small.

It has been an enriching experience for us to meet our Syrian friends. They have been hugely appreciative of the way they have been received and expressed this just recently by cooking a fabulous Syrian meal for the volunteers and the representatives of the services involved. A further group is expected to arrive soon and we hope for them all that Scotland will begin to feel like home.

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Lord Jesus,

you call the heavy laden to you
you see the burdens people carry: the bowed backs
and the crushed spirits;
the burdens that are visible
as well as the sorrows, stresses and sores
that are carried in the lonely hidden places.

Lord Jesus, you came to bind the broken hearted and
to set the captive free,
to proclaim Jubilee,
to give life in all its fullness to every child of creation;
In you we can find rest, and restoration.

Walk alongside the suffering, the abused, and the outcast,
reveal your love and compassion.
Renew and restore the broken, envision the defeated,
plant seeds of hope with strong roots,
build resilience and a new capacity for hope.
Set hearts aflame with the desire for justice and change.

Inspire your church to reach out and build up families and
communities
where all are welcome, loved and treasured, as
children of the God who delights in them.

S. Burrell

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