IAFN International Anglican Family Network

ABANDONED CHILDREN

EDITORIAL

Almost every edition of the International Anglican Family Network Newsletter provides a moving tribute to the courage, tenacity and resilience of children all around the world. But the stories told in this edition present us with a picture of some the most extreme circumstances imaginable. We learn of children fending for themselves in the face of disease and danger, not only without adequate material necessities, but also without the love and emotional support that all human beings need to thrive.

It is important to know that, instead of being overwhelmed by the numbers of children involved, there are people who move from anger to action. Often with desperately limited resources, and at great personal cost, they are reaching out to children whose previous experience of adults has been painful and terrifying.

The provision of refuges for children who have been living on the streets, including health care and education, demonstrate the practical power of Christian love. Some of the articles, like the one from Estonia, tell of how work with abandoned children in one part of the world is supported by churches in wealthier countries. But it is important to remember that children are abandoned in significant numbers in countries that have not been affected by war, poverty and political upheaval in recent times, as the articles from Scotland and England illustrate.

In addition to the care shown by the committed Christians who help children in great need, it is also very moving to learn of the care that children show to each other. Older children try to care for younger brothers and sisters, and street-gang members look out for each other if they can. The runaways from Cidade de Meninos in Brazil returned with another child from the streets. "They had felt sorry for him." Compassion is not the prerogative of Christian adults alone.

It worth noting how many of the projects written about are collaborating with the civil authorities where this is possible, so that experiences can be shared and resources pooled. There is another theme running through this edition: the growing awareness of the possibility of fostering and adoption for many children. Particularly in Eastern Europe, changing political culture has helped to encourage changes in patterns of caring for abandoned children. Perhaps this is a further reminder of why Christians are called to engage with the wider societies in which they live.

It is hard to read the articles in this Newsletter without thinking of those parents who have been compelled to abandon their children. Many of the children described have not been orphaned, but are alone because their parents are unable to care for them. As Dr Irena Genyte, the Director of Kudishkiai Namai in Lithuania says, "many of the mothers grew up in Children's homes themselves and so find it normal to leave a child in one". In Papua New Guinea, as elsewhere, the social stigma of having a baby out of wedlock or as a result of rape can be too much for a mother to cope with. Jeanette Kasai Oala writes, "In the case of babies abandoned because they were conceived as a result of rape, most women even after counselling may still reject the baby because seeing the baby will remind them of the trauma they have experienced." Elsewhere, the ravages of war have split families up forever. There are hundreds of thousands of abandoned children around the world. There must also be hundreds of thousands of parents who lost their children. Let us remember them too.

Children are gifts from God, they deserve the right to be loved and nurtured by parents or guardians. However, circumstances such as death, separation, and divorce sometimes mean that one parent, foster parents or relatives have to bring up children.

The question is what happens if a child is born as a result of rape, out of wedlock, or to single teenage girls. In cases like this, children are sometimes abandoned in the hospitals, left with relatives, given away to other people to adopt or worse still thrown away in the nearby bushes or garbage bins.

The National (PNG) Newspaper of Thursday, 21 August 2003 reported that a body of a baby girl wrapped in a laplap (piece of material) and put in a plastic bag was found in a dormitory at a technical college in Lae. Metropolitan Superintendent Simon Kauba said the mother delivered the baby on her own in the early hours of Saturday morning without the knowledge of anyone in the dormitory. "After delivering the baby the mother wrapped the infant in a laplap and placed her in a plastic bag and placed the bag under her bed," Mr Kauba said. He said after placing the plastic bag away under the bed, the mother complained of stomach pains and was taken to the Angau hospital where she was admitted to the emergency ward. When she was at the hospital, one of her girlfriends cleaned the room and found the dead infant among the clothes. The baby's body is now at the morgue.

I asked people working in the children's ward of city hospitals if it is true that some mothers deliver and abandon their children. They told me that it was true that some women do that. The main reasons for doing this are rape, birth out of wedlock (while husband was away for work/studies), teenage girls who do not want to bring shame to the family or cannot afford to bring the child up, husbands not paying bride price, broken marriages, polygamy and HIV/AIDs. Some babies are given away for adoption by other people who are not relatives.

In the case of those babies that are abandoned in the hospital, the health department has ways and means of identifying the relatives. If they are willing to adopt the babies, this is arranged. There is also a foster parents program that helps some children with their basic needs.

In the case of babies abandoned because they were conceived as a result of rape, most women even after counselling may still reject the baby because seeing the baby will remind them of the trauma they experienced. It is best given away for adoption by parents who do not have children of their own.

Much effort is needed to bring up these abandoned children because there is an increased number of children walking the streets and begging for a living mainly in urban centres. They are deprived of the basic necessities of life, often become involved in drugs and are used by adults to steal and rob.

Such children can be regarded as "abandoned children" because the parents don't seem to care about them walking the streets and living on what they can lay their hands on.

Of course those women who are found guilty of abandoning and killing babies are brought to justice. But what of the men? Nothing much seems to be done about them. But organisations such as the Social Welfare department, the Churches, Non-Governmental Organisations and individuals have their own programs to address this situation.

Generally, in the Melanesian culture, the extended family unit enables children to be brought up even if they are born in one of these ways shared. In most cases children in rural areas are not abandoned, it is in the urban centres that such circumstances occur.

"Cidade de Meninos" or Boys' Town is some distance from the city of Rio de Janeiro in the mountainous interior of the state. I served as chaplain there at one time and was glad to revisit recently to speak to the psychologist, Dr. Angela Maria Rocha, who works there one day a week. It was good to be reminded of the pleasant surroundings, caring atmosphere and wholesome food, and to be with the youngsters and staff again.

Angela was not slow to bring me up to date. Despite the reputation of being the best institution of its kind, Boys' Town continues to face problems around acceptable behaviour and acceptable levels of discipline. A "game" which, according to her, had much to do with power (and the temporary absence of the administrator through ill-health), had recently developed of climbing on the roof and taunting staff. This may be fun for the boys but it is very wearing for the residential care team. Questions of not valuing the secure environment and physical care sprang to mind. But my need was to think a little more about abandoned children.

Without hesitation Angela spoke of certain individuals, for example, Roberto. In the absence of documentation he was thought to be about 16. After medical bone-formation tests it seems he is 18 or 19, and therefore beyond the age he can stay in the home. What to do? At around five he had been taken into care. Badly abused and subsequently rejected by his very poor family, he suffered a further unfortunate experience in the "godparents scheme" that the home set up as a (usually successful) link with the wider community. The care team, which includes social workers and educators, is aware that his time at Boys' Town has done little for his low self-esteem; he doesn't relate well with the others particularly those who are younger. One small sign of hope is that he aspires to friendship with his peers at school. There is an imaginative suggestion that he live in a community in a poor but non-threatening neighbourhood where there is a church that consists exclusively of young people. It is one of the communities for which I have pastoral care. There is much careful planning to be done. When I mentioned this to him he had little to say. However, the mixture of youthful excitement and anxiety was only too obvious in his face.

Those who arrive at Boys' Town have usually lost one parent, the second being absent or incapable. It is relatively easy to arrange adoptions for babies but things become increasingly complicated as children get older. Ivandro, whose mother is a drugs trafficker now in prison, was taken off the streets where he had been hiding from violent "uncles". According to Angela he has long given up expecting affection and the best he hopes for is protection from violence, a protection that he had experienced away from his home as one of the many children on the streets.

The home has its success stories. One youngster, an orphan of both parents, Eduardo, is now studying law at University and living with the family who had been his "godparents". And there is Frederico, aged 14, whose mother has recently died after a long illness. He arrived long before her death and has responded well both at the college and with relationships and responsibilities in the home. Angela says that despite the sad incapacity of the mother to care for her son in the latter years and the cruel poverty of the home, his well-being and sense of belonging in the early years has given him strength to live creatively within his circumstances.

But what about the threatening behaviour on the roof? It is difficult for any institution to compensate for the absence of family and patterns of abandonment. It is extremely rare to meet a child who would not choose to be with a family, whatever its circumstances, rather than in the home even with all its order, cleanliness, food, college and even little swimming pool. Even if some rebellion and naughtiness are normal they become more complicated with this volume of damage from home and street. The roof is a sign of things ticking away below the surface: a gesture of power hiding the frustrations, the loss, the elusive desires. Angela is clear: "There are limits to what we can achieve and many unhealed wounds, but if violence and abuse leave their scars there is always the hope that patient and long-term understanding and disciplined care might leave their traces. Who knows when they might flourish?"

BOLIVIA

Bolivia is the second poorest country in Latin America after Haiti and probably also the second country in levels of corruption. In the last fifty years the population of the country has doubled from four million to eight million people. Unemployment is dramatically increasing day by day and as a result of this poverty is also increasing.

For the last seven years our Anglican Church "Cristo Redentor" (Christ the Redeemer) in the city of La Paz has been making an effort to help up to 150 children in need every week. We have a special programme which runs every Saturday morning called "Children's Ministry" where children are offered Bible teachings with prayer and praises, along with free breakfast and showers. Many of these children live in the areas surrounding the church where there is no water, electricity or sewer system. Most of their parents migrated from rural areas to the city. We have a small clinic with a doctor's office and a dental office which is open on Saturday morning providing free treatment. Every Wednesday evening we have a Bible Study for adolescents and at the end of class we give them hot chocolate with bread.

At the beginning of the school year we provide the children with free school supplies and we give them toys at Christmas Seasons, when attendance can rise to 300. We thank God for these gifts, most of which are sent by friendly churches in the United States. Without this support it would be impossible to help our children.

Our hope is that these children will grow in Christ and become a witness to their parents and not follow their example, because many parents have a tendency to alcoholism. One of the worst influences among our people is that Bolivia is a country with many traditions and costumes and as a result of it the paganism and idolatry among the people is very strong. We trust in God that one day the people of Bolivia will bend their knees to accept our Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

ARGENTINA

Almost two years after Argentina's economic collapse, the effects on the family of the misery into which the country has been plunged continue to be felt. The worst is not over yet. Increasing numbers of children are becoming victims of physical and emotional abuse or abandonment as parents find themselves unable to cope. More children are ending up on the streets. Countless others have a home, but are left largely to fend for themselves.

Sometimes parents give their children food or money, but more often they must try to scrape a few coins together themselves by begging, stealing or doing odd jobs. They receive few expressions of love, there is inadequate nutrition, clothing and health care, and little support to get them through school. Such children become vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Aware of the dangers of the streets, some parents resort to locking their children inside their precarious dwellings, or even tie small ones up whilst they are away at work. Accidents, sometimes fatal, occur frequently. In the sweltering summer months, such houses resemble ovens.

One response of the Anglican Church in Northern Argentina to the needs of such children is a day-care centre in a marginalised neighbourhood in Salta. Due to open its doors soon, staff will care for 30 children between the ages of two and five whose parents have no-one to leave them with whilst at work. One such child will be two-year-old Camila. Her parents go out to work all afternoon and her eight siblings are at school. Sometimes, the older ones take turns missing school to look after her, at other times she is left in the care of one of two neighbouring families – often she is simply to be found wandering around on her own.

Over the last year, ten new soup kitchens have been opened throughout the Diocese in an attempt to fight the crippling effects of child malnutrition. Children not only receive a hot meal, but are also shown how they can know and serve God through Bible teaching. Parents are also taught how to grow vegetables and conserve food.

Six out of the 11 soup kitchens offer help with homework, giving children the opportunity to continue their schooling and so break out of the cycle of deprivation. It is hoped that eventually all soup kitchens will be able to offer this support as more funding becomes available.

Since March this year, the Church has employed a doctor and offers medical assistance together with prayer ministry to reach out to whole communities. Parents, who themselves feel abandoned by society, are experiencing a God who cares and are finding fresh hope for the future. It is our prayer that in all these projects, parents and children who have been suffering various forms of abandonment will experience the life-changing love of God and the warm embrace of His family.

BURUNDI

Street Children: a big challenge to the Church

Street children are seen almost everywhere in countries at war or that have undergone civil strife. Burundi is one of those countries whose youth are unfortunately wasting their tender age in streets – lacking education and good morals.

Even before the civil war came to world-wide public attention in 1993, there were some street children in the capital city, Bujumbura. But now they are counted in thousands and unfortunately the number goes on increasing. So, what to do? This is a big question asked by and of the Church. The following case may help you understand the phenomenon and act where you are.

In Bujumbura, the capital city of Burundi, the Anglican Church has launched a programme called "Children and families in hardship". The programme started with giving breakfast to children who were wandering and begging around Sainte Trinite Cathedral. After the meal, the Word of God was taught to the children. Little by little, the numbers increased and became too big to manage. Also, the children's interest in the Bible teaching session decreased.

After a deep analysis, it was discovered that not only were many of the children already under the charge of other children's associations, but also a few of them came from their own home for the "free breakfast". The children knew that at a certain day and hour, they could go to the cathedral for a breakfast.

What to do to help those who are really in need? Now, Esperance, a lady in charge of the programme in the Diocese of Bujumbura, together with the parish priest and faithful men and women, has identified a manageable group of 30 street children from 19 families. From the contact with children in the street, the Church reached their parents/relatives with whom they are living. Some of the parents used to be street children themselves and are sending their children on to the streets as a source of income. Other children are sent out when they don't have classes, either in the mornings or in the afternoon, so that their families can make ends meet. For all these children, urgent action is really needed so that they don't leave school and become street children.

A programme has now been arranged so that, in September 2003, the identified parents and relatives will work together on income-generating projects. This will help them pay for food and school fees for their children. It is also a way of reaching parents and relatives for counselling by the Diocesan programme and to encourage them to work together and support one another.

There is still room for improvement. We praise God for the programme and request prayers for those children to grow up and become good Christian parents.

RWANDA

Rwanda is a country in central Africa and has 7.2 million inhabitants. It is a landlocked country of 26,338 square kilometres and its economy is predominantly dependant on agriculture.

Abandoned Children has been a critical issue in Rwanda for a long time. It is calculated that about 400,000 children have been abandoned who now face the challenge of impaired development. Rwandan culture used to encourage people to care for the children in their neighbourhood and regard them as their own children. As the years went by, the number of abandoned children increased, outstripping the capacity of society to absorb the numbers of children who needed care.

Who are these abandoned children? They are those who have lost their parents because of war or genocide and who are without support from a responsible parent, guardian or other fit adult person. Some abandoned children are street children and orphans due to illnesses (mostly HIV/AIDS) or poverty. Most of these abandoned children end up on the streets. They may be sexually abused, used as cheap labour and become involved in sniffing glue, drugs and the like.

The Church in Rwanda has been trying to raise awareness about the plight of these children and also giving some material support. The Church has been helping to put some abandoned children in schools, providing uniforms, fees, and some food parcels. Because the Rwandan Government doesn't want to institutionalise children, the Church encourages fostering homes. Fostering helps children to grow up with dignity,and self-esteem. It removes stigma, and brings a sense of identity. It maintains family unity where it is applicable. All these benefits reduce trauma and stress to children. As well as this, some dioceses have started or are planning to start a comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention programme for youth.

Skills are needed in many areas of the Church on how to address the issue of abandoned children. Children who head families and the widows of war and genocide need skills that can help them to earn a living for their livelihoods. The Church's ministry to abandoned children should aim at creating a generation that fears God and is HIV/AIDS free. This would address the spiritual, social, physical, and cognitive development of a person.

The future of Rwanda lies in the way children are cared for, especially abandoned children. The Anglican Church of Rwanda has joined other churches and other organisations in healing and reconstruction, though there is still a long way to go.

SUDAN

Abandoned children in Southern Sudan are children who have been left by their mothers or fathers after losing one partner in the 20-year civil war which has claimed the lives of many innocent people. In western countries and some countries in Africa such children are known as "homeless or street children" because they run away from home or are thrown out by their parents to beg on the streets. In Southern Sudan it's different because these children are victims of the war and struggling with the trauma of living without parents from their early years. They live under trees and in destroyed buildings such as churches or school compounds where they are exposed to all sorts of abuse. Most of these children joined the army as child soldiers. They had no option but to be in the armed forces and carry guns which they used to terrorise people for food and money.

On a short visit to Southern Sudan in July 2003, I saw these youngsters who are the future leaders of our nation wasting time in shopping centres. Some former child soldiers have been saved from combatant life and re-united with their families by humanitarian organisations like UNICEF but they are finding it difficult to live with their families where their movements are monitored. I was told they can be aggressive and arrogant towards their families. If centres were there to rehabilitate these children, they might have a bright future and be useful people to their country instead of roaming around in gangs.

SOUTH AFRICA

In keeping with the Constitution of South Africa, the Vision of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund states that we "strive to change the way society treats children and youth" embracing all children who, through no fault of their own, are disadvantaged and do not have the means to reach the heights of maturity and success to which every child has a right.

South Africa is a developing country where poverty and unemployment are major contributors to the lifestyle and plight of large communities both urban and rural. The HIV/AIDS pandemic precipitates the problem. HIV positive parents have increased the vulnerability of children and levels of abandonment in hospitals, care centres and even in dustbins and along railway lines. It has been established that mothers who are informed they are HIV positive are increasingly abandoning their children, as they believe they will die imminently. It is also believed that many HIV positive mothers abandon their children, not because of their own HIV status, but as they fear that they will not be able to care for their HIV positive child who will become ill and die.

On 21 February this year, the Founder and Chairperson of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Mr Nelson Mandela, himself paid a special visit to the people and projects who help make the vision and practice of the Fund a reality.

Mr Mandela was shown around and introduced to staff members and was especially touched when taken through the injustices and horrors that children have to endure. After sharing stories, Mandela reflected on why he formed the Children's Fund in the first place:

> *"We were driving back to the Presidency in Cape Town one cold winter's evening, when I saw a group of street children and stopped to talk to them. The children asked me why I love them. This astounded me and I asked them why they ask this and they said that because every time I get money from overseas, I share it with them."*

It was after this interaction with abandoned children that our former president took it upon himself to do something about the development and nurturing of our children and his subsequent vision gave birth to the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund recognises that it is in the best interest of the child to ensure that family support and parental care is maintained as far as is humanly possible. Our focus is on supporting and strengthening models of care that communities have in place, thereby preventing abandonment and providing a support system whereby the child remains in the care of its family and community.

When this primary aim of the Fund is not achievable and cannot be realised, the Fund looks to supporting communities who provide foster homes and extended families for abandoned babies and children.

Ideally the Fund's involvement with families and communities should eliminate the need for placing children into institutions. Although seen as a last resort, the reality of the situation is that this is not an ideal world and therefore the Fund extends its support to various institutions who take over the role of the family and community – one such institution is the Carl Sithole Centre in Soweto, Johannesburg. Soweto is made up of 37 suburbs and the population is estimated at approximately 5 million people of African origin where there is general poverty in the community exacerbated by limited access to social grants.

Working with the Carl Sithole Centre, the following has been achieved:

- Reunion of young mothers with their families who were rejected because of their HIV status.
- 70% of the abandoned, HIV infected children are being hosted within families.
- Integration of abandoned toddlers into the day care centre.
- Abandoned babies whose life expectancy was limited due to their HIV status and who have been cared for by the Carl Sithole Centre have outlived this expectancy and are now about to embark on their schooling career.

The involvement of the community remains important to this project, in that members of the community assist by relieving care-givers at the centre on a regular basis by taking care of the children and providing moral support to the staff. Members of the community contribute to the nurturing of the abandoned children by taking them into their homes and exposing them to normal family life with its problems, sibling rivalry and interaction.

Other projects – the Karos and Kambro projects – encourage children living in the streets to rise above their plight. In association with the National and Gauteng Alliance of Street Children, the project's primary focus is on theatre, art and development programmes, aimed to stimulate hidden talent in over 1000 children living in the street from Benoni to Pretoria. The project's objective is to use theatre as a therapeutic intervention to enable children to speak out, be confident and continue to dream.

Mr Mandela, at his birthday celebrations in September this year, stated:

> *"My joy and what I firmly believe in is to let children be, and support the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in its business, working with children and not just for children. We understand and promote the notion that while children need to be guided, they also have a birthright and entrenched human rights to be whatever they want to be and they can achieve if they are given a space to dream and live out their dreams."*

The task is a mammoth one. The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund recognises the need for increased partnerships with organs of civil society – especially faith-based organisations – in ensuring that, through moral regeneration, a value system is put into place whereby children's rights within the family and community are nurtured and protected.

More details at:
www.mandela-children.com

LITHUANIA

Close to the Baltic Sea, seven kilometres out of the port city of Klaipeda, stands the "Kudishkiai Namai" – a home for young children. It began after the Second World War as an orphanage for babies, with numbers increasing during the Soviet period. A new building was constructed in 1972. During those times many children went on to live in institutions and so never experienced life in a family.

At present there are some 80 children, from new-born to ages five and six. Most of these have been left in hospital by their mothers from birth, and this for a wide variety of reasons – poverty, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, prostitution.

The Director of the home, Dr Irena Genyte, says that many of the mothers grew up in children's homes themselves and so find it normal to leave a child in one. She herself tries very hard to place children in families in order to break this "cycle" of abandonment. Nowadays a good number of children are adopted, by couples abroad as well as Lithuanian. This may be with the mother's permission, but if mothers never visit their children they officially lose their right to keep them.

As far as maintenance goes, the government supplies only the most essential needs. Over recent years the home has received much help from outside, particularly from volunteer Christian organisations including members of the Klaipeda Anglican church. Such helpers assist by playing with the children, taking them for walks and other activities, by showing them love as well as financial support. The staff work hard to provide a good environment, but of course two staff members on duty cannot provide the level of care and attention desirable for a group of 12 or 13 toddlers, especially when 10 - 15% of children have psychological problems. The home also provides all possible medical care.

Joke Ball, wife of the Anglican chaplain, says: "I have been helping in the children's home for two years now. It was hard-going at first, with the language difficulty and the need to earn acceptance. I generally play with two or three children outside, pushing swings and so on. It is my joy to make a birthday cake on their birthdays, which otherwise are not normally celebrated. And sometimes I am asked to speak English to children who will be adopted and live in an English-speaking country."

ROMANIA

Maternity hospital. *Photo: Jeremy Hartley/Panos Pictures.*

"With abandon" suggests a certain exciting wildness. Something in us that defies domestication. Abandonment is a complex issue.

Radu, 22, has one tooth in the front of his mouth. He ran away from State care in the Ceausescu era. He knows the current air fares to Germany and the UK, and does a hilarious take-off of respectable churchgoers begging from God. Last February he found an 11-year-old suffocated in the city drains.

Romania's fostering programme is progressing well, with the target of closing State care institutions by 2004. However, the scars of dictatorship, an emergent market economy, and minimal free health care and welfare create massive problems. Reportedly in one county alone 173 babies were abandoned between January and June this year.

Children in "orphanages" are often not orphans, but were abandoned due to desperate poverty. Fostering, adoption and reintegration are the acknowledged way forward. Yet money received for a foster-child may go to augment family income, foster-parents are not always well prepared, and up to six children may be placed in a family rather than one or two. This can create greater scope for getting into trouble.

At the age of 18 children must leave care, but rarely have they been adequately prepared for independence. Orphanage staff are themselves largely untrained in such areas as family life and parenting. There is no system of supervised housing.

Care leavers often lack basic information and work experience and so are ill-equipped for normal social interaction. Exceptional courage and highly-developed survival skills from orphanage life give them inappropriate boundaries. Although educated, they may be unable to use their knowledge constructively.

Many children in care or on the street originally left home due to abuse. Meanwhile institutions (most State-owned) provide stability, food, clothes, and schooling but remain "institutional" – and so some children prefer the abandon of the street.

Marketing and entertainment present the nuclear family idyll, and a counter-idyll of money, sex, and sexualised violence. Deceived by such idylls, unsupported youngsters are trapped into prostitution, addiction and into becoming a source of body organs. Romania's geo-political position makes it a nodal point for illegal traffic in people and drugs, vulnerable to repercussions of conflict elsewhere. HIV is set to escalate throughout south-east Europe.

The problems of abandoned children are those of a global society that compulsively glamourises and institutionalises. Struggling, often heroically, against cyclical abuse and lack of opportunity, these children can recall us to values we have abandoned. "Who are my mother and my brothers?" asks Jesus. "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." *(Mark 3.33-35)*

ESTONIA

The history of the congregation of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church Peeteli started back in 1927. The congregation worked 12 years without its own church until 1936 when the corner stone for Peeteli Church was laid. In World War 2 only the stained glass windows behind the altar were broken. Otherwise the church stayed intact and was actively used by the congregation until 1962. Then the local soviet government closed the church and gave the building to Estonian Telefilm.

From 1962 until 1993, when the church building was given back to the congregation, it was used as a movie studio. A film equipment repair shop and small sewing factory operated in the building. From 1993 to 1997 services were held in a dark and cold church with the windows blocked up. In 1996 Avo Üprus came to be our minister. Up until that time he had started programs for victims of crime, chaplaincy in prisons, and the resocialisation of prisoners. His vision of church is the Social Gospel: one that is socially active and open to all community members. A church that is not serving its fellow human beings is a dead one. The most active members of the congregation decided to answer the most painful challenge in society: the street youth without home and care.

In one spring night in March 1997 the members of our congregation met with a gang of seven or eight children in a Tallinn seaside district, Kopli. Kopli is famous for its high rates of criminality, drug addicts and violence. Many illegal and unhappy people are gathering there. The children were unwashed, in dirty clothes and shy. We tried to start a conversation but they ran away from us. We told them that we were Christians and wanted to offer them what little we had. Then we asked whether they were hungry, after a short discussion they said yes.

Luckily that night, there was a 24-hour food store in the city where we had to go twice since the food we had was eaten up fast. When leaving we had a haunting awareness of their hungry stomachs tomorrow and the days to follow. So we went back again and again, and slowly trust and friendship appeared. The children were aged 5-15. They didn't go to school and lived in derelict houses without electricity, water and bathrooms. Some of their parents had come from the countryside. Some lived nearby but separately from the children.

Soon children asked us: 'You are Christians, Why aren't you taking us to your church?" Take them to the cold and dark Peeteli where water was dripping from the only tap, and where water from the sewers was running into the cellar? We needed to accept that our home church was not able to offer these children a safe and nurturing environment. Instead we had to give them trips to the countryside and make regular visits to Kopli with food and clothes.

In September 1997, our minister, Revd. Üprus, made the suggestion that we repair some rooms on the second floor of the church where the minister's flat had been and use these for the children.

We had five or six unemployed men, two of whom had just been released from prison. With their help, a kitchen and three rooms were repaired and the new rooms were blessed on December the 23rd, 1997 as a Day Centre for the street children. The children now got proper meals four or five times a week and were in a warm room for the day and evening but then at night we went back to our own homes, and the children went back onto the street. The beginning wasn't an easy time since we lacked food, showers and a washing machine. The Peeteli congregation is one of the smallest in Tallinn with only 50-60 active members. But good angels sent us friends who came to the door and asked if we needed help. The first Christian friends were Norwegians and after them came others from Sweden and Finland.

In July 1998 we organised a month-long camp in Saaremaa for the children. Coming back from the camp, many children said that they didn't want to return to the streets, and asked us if they could sleep in the church cellar. We thought: In the cellar without windows and heating, with burned electrical wires and water on the floor! We tried to agree some rules and gave them the church key. The food and a modest living came from us, and the children promised to clean and help in church restoration. Throughout 1998-2001, five to six boys were living full time in the church cellar. With their friends, they broke open the sealed church windows (5 metres high and 1 metre thick), cleaned the Soviet-era oil paint from the corridors and hall (using small spatulas and removing half a metre a day) and removed over 230 metres of building rubbish. As Avo Üprus said, these boys are building the church as a house and also building the church within themselves. Actually they were building a home for themselves, but they didn't know that and we didn't know that either.

In the end of 1998, the congregation board and the child care workers decided that the Day Centre was not enough (since the children went back onto the street and we went to our own homes every evening). So we offered the children who wanted to go to school the opportunity to live in the church. In January 1999, two of the girls who had been in our group since March 1997 came to us, and said "Yes". This was the beginning of the Children's Home. The numbers of those who wanted to live in the church grew more and more in the autumn, but the rooms were too small and the only place to build new sleeping places was in the space for the church choir. So in October 1999, two more bedrooms and showers were built there. By the end of 1999 there were 12 children living in Peeteli Church.

The work of the Day Centre was expanding to the church hall, corridors and cellar. We had 20-25 children who came regularly plus the same number of casual drop-ins. All wanted food. We prepared the food upstairs in the Children's Home and then shared it in the church hall, corridors and cellar. Because we couldn't have the older street kids in the Children's Home, we built a new shower for them in the corridor near the front door of the church. Our dream was to build an entirely new church cellar (400 sq. metres) so we could establish a Day Centre and Shelter for the children without parental care. In the end of 1999 the bigger boys who were living in the cellar started to demolish the storage rooms left over from Soviet times and to deepen the floor. In the end of June the last of the rubbish was carried out and in July we signed the building contract for the sum of 1.8 million EEK. But we only had a congregation bank account with slightly over 250,000 EEK. At first, the Congregation Board didn't agree to sign, but Revd. Avo Üprus told us "Don't be afraid, have Faith". After signing we quickly informed all our friends who had supported us in the past, and the money started coming in from Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, England, Canada, New Zealand, US and even a little from Estonia. The Blessing of the new Day Centre and Shelter took place on April the 1st 2001, and on that day the Bible was read in eight languages at Peeteli Church.

Today there are 28 children who are living in Peeteli Church building and going to school or kindergarten from there. 18 of them are living on the second floor and ten in the cellar. Another 15-20 children are coming regularly to the Day Centre. Today we have 12 showers, washing machines, dryers and a proper kitchen in Peeteli Church. We have just written down many numbers. It would be better if we could write about our feelings such as one evening, when an 11-year-old girl came to the Children Home's door and told us: "I agree to go to school if you will take me in". And that she had thought about this for four months, and then she had to start from the first class.

What else? Of an 11-years-old girl who we found living in an underground heating tunnel with a wooden block for a bed and metal lid for a roof. She thought for many months before she decided that she wanted to live in a church.

What about our friends who made it all possible? These were Baptists, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Adventists, Anglicans, Lutherans, Methodists and many good people and organisations without any church connections.

I thank God for all his love and mercy, for our friends and the children who have now found a home in Peeteli Church.

INDONESIA

Most people in my country believe that "a child is a gift from God", while the old Chinese tradition (at least as my parents and relatives believe) is that "more children means more blessings". With this belief, the population of the country is increasing very much although in the past three decades central government has been trying to reduce the number of births through the Family Planning Programme. In many cities the programme is successful, but in the villages it is not so. People in the villages do not realise that having many children is a burden. Villagers in less populated communities would not think about the need to control the number of births. Take the example of my family. My parents had eleven children, whereas I am the eldest and now have two boys (surely that is enough) and the youngest is still in high school. Fortunately, my parents had the opportunity to send us all to school. What if they were less fortunate? Surely all of us, or at least nine of us would become abandoned physically. For sure, spiritually and mentally, my younger brothers and sisters might have experienced abandonment.

In the urban context, the number of births is less in each family, but the number of children is extremely high. Accordingly, the number of less fortunate parents is high and this means many children are not cared for appropriately. The number of abandoned children in the city is very high. Take the example of Bandung City, where the Salvation Army serves hundreds of street children and homeless children in our two homes. More than 60% of these children were born in poor families, around 15% are from broken homes, while the rest are thrown-out children. Looking at the faces of these children, my heart is broken. How can they reach their future if no one cares?

Take another example of Surabaya City – East Java, where the Salvation Army has a similar programme with the addition of a Mothers' and Babies' Home. This home serves over 60 babies every month. All of these babies are abandoned children. Over half of them were born in the home, while others were born in hospitals and left by their parents. The majority of the mothers giving birth in the home come from poor or broken families. Fortunately, they still had the conscience to come to this home to give birth and then left the baby under the care of the Salvation Army. How much more abandoned, the babies who were found on the doorsteps or rubbish bins? "Oh Lord, have mercy on us!" Currently this Mothers' and Babies' Home is under reconstruction to build a two-storey building to accommodate and care for more abandoned children. If there were more financial resources, this home would be completed by the middle of 2004.

With "heart to God and hand to man" the Salvation Army Indonesia has been using its limited resources to care for these abandoned children and open the "windows of hope" for their future. With the support of many helping hands who adopt these children through sponsorship for their education and health, the Salvation Army has been able to transform thousands of children from abandoned to accepted children. Currently there are still thousands of children abandoned, and with the economic and moral crisis, there will be still more to come – as they beg for the right to live and have a better future.

We might not be able to eliminate the numbers of abandoned children, but as we make a caring response to this social issue and with God's help, we can help these children to find the river of hope that leads them to prosperity.

SCOTLAND

Aberlour Child Care Trust commissioned some research which showed that 11% of children under the age of 16 run away and stay away from home overnight. This includes many who are forced to leave by their parents. In Scotland alone, 6-7,000 children under 16 run away every year for the first time. Whilst most will run away once or twice and return home, 20% of young runaways leave home three or more times and 28% sleep rough. Perhaps more shocking is the finding that 20% of children who run away are under 11 years of age. Whilst they are away there are obvious risks particularly of physical or sexual assault.

The research also looked into the reasons young people run away. Usually this is to do with problems in the family home. This includes arguments and persistent conflict with parents or step-parents, abuse and neglect, and the need to escape the effects of parental problems with drugs, alcohol or poor mental health. Some of these young people will need long-term intensive support to deal with the effects of trauma whilst others will be able to build on their own resilience with some timely help.

Many of the young people we work with talk about the need for adults who will listen to them and take them seriously. Often they feel there are barriers to them getting the support they need and the services do not offer a sufficient degree of confidentiality or the choice and space to work out problems.

In the following poem one of the young people we have worked with describes some of the feelings that she faced.

Nothing to do, nothing to say
I'll never know anyway

Across the road, across the sea
To try and get away from my family
I went through murder, I went through hell
Eventually I had to tell
I blocked away emotions
I blocked away my fears
I blocked away my sadness
But always end up in tears

Nothing to do, nothing to say
I'll never know anyway

I feel ashamed
I feel alone
When I am sitting on my own
Nowhere to go, nowhere to stay
Sometimes that's why I run away
Nobody to talk to
Nowhere to turn
It feels inside like fire ready to burn

Nothing to do, nothing to say
I'll never know anyway

In order to offer a more comprehensive service, particularly to those children and young people who are most at risk, Abelour is about to open the first Scottish Refuge for young runaways. We will be able to provide short-term accommodation, and care and support for up to three young people at any one time if they have run away and are at risk of harm. We will then help them address the causes of their running away.

The Scottish Executive are funding this development as a national demonstration project and we hope that the learning gained from this will mean that many of the other thousands of young people can be prevented from running and given the help and protection they need.

ENGLAND

Until recently young people in public care in England could almost be described as a "lost tribe": not only were they seriously neglected but they were also lost to public view. Despite a series of scandals connected with incidents in residential homes, these children and young people remained a low priority for many of the local authorities with responsibility for their care.

The Buttle Trust, which has been making grants to individual children in need throughout the UK for more than 50 years, has been particularly concerned about two aspects of children in public care: their education and their move to independent living.

The level of educational attainment of children in public care has been very low with few children succeeding in public exams; and this is all the more shocking as research has shown that the group of children in public care are no more or less capable than any other children. For the few children in care who achieve worthwhile results and manage to enter higher education – a heroic achievement – the Trust has always provided grants to help with their living expenses at university and during the university vacations when they often have problems finding somewhere to live.

Most recently the Trust has commissioned a major piece of research – "By Degrees" – to establish what types and levels of support are necessary if care leavers are to be encouraged to enter higher education and supported throughout their time at university. An interim report was published in May this year and the final results are expected early in 2005.

As to the move into independent living, many local authorities appeared only too anxious to wash their hands of young people in their care and children as young as 16 were not infrequently placed in flats without even the minimum of furniture and equipment. Local authority practice varied from the exemplary to the indescribably mean and the Trust found itself compelled to give grants to children who had the misfortune to have been looked after by neglectful authorities. Fortunately the attention of government has been focused on this area since the end of the 1990s and, following recent legislation, the performance of local authorities has begun to improve.

Some further reflections from the Pacific

As we turn towards Christmas, children, family, friends and reunions, celebration and toys take central place in our preparation. What kind of toys do people give as Christmas gifts to their children? In the context of the Pacific, military toys and all the associated items that go with them have become prevalent. Many people in different parts of the world associate the Pacific with peace, serenity, coconut palms, grass skirts and friendly people, and the list goes on. Military toys are symbols of violence. Most of the people in the Pacific are Christians. Christmas is associated with peace and good-will. To what extent are people aware of the impact of military toys in relation to the message of Christmas? The exploitation of the poor by the commercial sector is also an issue. In a militarised context as I identify below, the availability of military toys on a big scale, and affordability, are interconnected. Military toys symbolise violence and these toys which are given by parents and friends to children for Christmas perpetuate a violent culture. When children who are already in a war-torn tribal context are given gifts symbolising violence, their early formation and development are deeply affected. The silence of the Church concerning this new culture does not help to address the morality of this issue.

Guns are a new phenomenon in the Pacific. As an integral part of globalisation, this new culture has manifested itself in different forms. Let me illustrate this point by providing three brief examples.

In the second part of the 1980s, Fiji became the first nation in the Pacific to be torn apart by coups, the first coup taking place in 1987. This was followed soon by a second coup. Like any war-torn nation, shops, schools and transport closed, and families were disrupted. The rate of migration continued to impoverish the nation; poverty increased, crime rocketed, corruption thrived. Electricity and water supply, as well as people's movements, were restricted. From that time onward, Fiji was no longer the same. In 1990 another coup was staged and there was bloodshed and murders.

Around the same time, the Bougainville conflict in Papua New Guinea erupted. There was no political solution, the crisis crippled and paralysed Bougainville and activities of the country came to a stop. Schools closed down, and health care disappeared. Children became the most affected victims.

In the mid-1990s, French colonial imperialism imposed nuclear tests in Moruroa, French Polynesia despite fierce opposition from the Maohi people and the surrounding Island States. During the testing period, military uniforms, transport, and nuclear tests paved and established a new culture of militarism. A part of the world which was renowned for its friendship and welcome was transformed into a militaristic culture. Children who were born from that time onwards live in the uncertainty of the environment.

In the mid-1990s, militarism paralysed the Solomon Islands. The tribal war lords closed down the major activities of the nation. Corruption was rife. As major investors moved out, the Solomon Islands were increasingly isolated. Tribal wars between the major rivalries dominated the affairs of the nation. The Parliament was still in place but dysfunctional in reality. Some of the major work places were closed down. Unemployment increased. Crime festered. Lawlessness became uncontrollable. Murders included the killing of seven Anglican Melanesian Brothers.

The costs of living rose and continues to rise. Children were sent home from school because of the inability of the parents to meet the fees and other costs, although schools continue to persevere in an unstable situation. Recently, Australia and New Zealand, with the assistance of some neighbouring Island states, have moved in to stand alongside the Government of the Solomon Islands.

The world of the children who were born in the Solomon Islands since the 1990s has been dominated by tribal wars, guns, crime, poverty and unrest.

The situation in the Pacific challenges the Church for a new approach to mission to transform the unjust structure which victimises innocent children.

IAFN International Anglican Family Network

NEW ADDRESS FOR IAFN OFFICE

The Family Network office has moved. The address is:
IAFN Office, PO Box 54,
Minehead, Somerset TA24 7WD
ENGLAND
Tel/Fax: (+44) (0) 1643 841 500
E-mail: mail@iafn.net

THE NEXT FAMILY NETWORK NEWSLETTER

The next Newsletter will be "The International Year of the Family – 10 years on: progress and problems". Please send contributions to the IAFN office by mid-February.