



DIVIDED FAMILIES



Palestinian farmer and his family isolated from their village by the nine-metre Israeli separation barrier.

Photo: Dieter Telemans/Panos Pictures.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

In this Easter season, it seems right to start this newsletter with an article from Jerusalem where families are divided by multiple barriers and restrictions. Throughout the Communion, divisions are caused by many different factors: conflict, addiction, work, and relationship breakdown. Yet, as in Jerusalem with the risen Christ, the Church has a message of hope and healing and many articles in this edition tell of practical help and compassion for broken and divided families.

STORIES FROM JERUSALEM

Perhaps the Holy Land is the only place in the world where restrictions of all kinds are the norm and "normalcy" is the exception!

For Palestinians, restrictions take many shapes and forms – restrictions on movement within the West Bank, from the West Bank to Gaza and from there to Jerusalem. Barriers, trenches, checkpoints and barbed wires turn life into a big prison and within it many smaller prisons exist. But life is further complicated by the presence of emotional and mental restrictions that add to the challenges of physical barriers. People of faith are told to respect and co-exist with each other, but real co-existence and tolerance do not exist here. It is hoped that real and imagined barriers can be removed and a new normalcy in the Holy Land can become a reality.

To offer one story, a Jerusalem man got married to a woman from the West Bank. Since he holds an Israeli identity card, she is not allowed to

get one unless she has a Military entry permit to be with her husband. This entry permit must be renewed regularly. This makes a big problem for the family and divides them from each other. The wife's family cannot visit her in Jerusalem because it is virtually impossible for them to get a permit. Even if they get one, the permit is only for a few hours and excludes staying overnight. This keeps the family divided and living in fear, resulting in many ongoing problems. They do not see each other; they do not socialise and this is the result of just one marriage.

Another story begins with a woman from Gaza strip who got married to a man from the West Bank. She lived with him in Ramallah, West Bank, for two years after which she was stopped by Israeli police and asked for her Identity card. When the police found out that she was from Gaza, they took her back to Gaza leaving the man and her kids in Ramallah. She is trying to get a permit from the Authorities to re-enter Ramallah, but has yet to succeed. She has not seen her family for more than a year.

Such restrictions do so much to divide families.

We have just entered the Easter season. There have been families who needed special entry permits to allow them to enter Jerusalem. Their entry is not guaranteed. But even in the event that permission is given, it is only for a short duration, creating great stress among families who wish simply to celebrate a major holiday together.

The Peace of Jerusalem is not yet. Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem.

SRI LANKA

Families divided by civil conflict

We as a nation underwent nearly three decades of civil conflict. Although numerous attempts and initiatives were taken both nationally and internationally to avoid a full-scale war, none of them could have produced a workable solution; the war did take place with a military victory and drastic consequences. Three years after the conclusion of hostilities, it is still a debatable matter whether all communities in this nation enjoy the privilege of experiencing real peace based on justice, as we find people with wounded psyche in all ethnic communities. This situation demands of us to take the direction of healing and reconciliation as it is the priority of the hour.

The Reconciliation and Peace Desk of The Church of Ceylon, Diocese of Colombo, has been engaging in peace and reconciliation activities for over 20 years. Recently, this work

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has enabled us to reach out to a most vulnerable group of women who have been directly or indirectly affected by the consequences of war and have become single mothers. In the Eastern and Northern Provinces of the country, they have lost their husbands, and in some cases their sons, through forcible disappearance, abduction, illegal and arbitrary arrest and detention and assassination – either during the civil conflict or in the immediate aftermath. To date, their men's whereabouts are not known and remain as unrevealed truth. The women are in deep pain and sorrow. These mothers have now become the breadwinners and are shouldering the responsibilities of their husbands by themselves. In order to meet the demands of children's education, rising cost of living and other basic needs in the families, they are forced to find employment as domestic helpers, seamstresses, labourers, retail food sellers. Some are compelled to do multiple odd jobs to keep the home fires burning.

We told them that we had come to listen to their stories, to empathise with them in their bitter experiences and stand in solidarity with them in their suffering and their struggle to regain normality.

When we first met these single mothers in 2010, we had to make it clear to them that we are not a NGO or welfare organisation with ability to meet their material needs, set up livelihood schemes or provide funds, as these needs were immediate and urgent. We told them that we had come to listen to their stories, to empathise with them in their bitter experiences and stand in solidarity with them in their suffering and their struggle to regain normality. They were given an opportunity to introduce themselves and space was created to enable them to share their bitter stories. They shared their painful experiences that had left deep wounds, in tears. No questions were asked to interrupt; they were simply allowed to speak and it paved the way for the facilitating team to get to know their feelings, pain and suffering. Being single mothers ranging from 18 years of age was an uncommon phenomenon in their culture prior to the war. It was also counter-cultural for such young mothers to be earning a living.

The objective of this interaction was gradually to open the way for these women, most of them very young, to come to the path of healing and to equip them to move forward in the face of the hard reality that governed their lives. We imparted our understanding of self-confidence to them and encouraged them to do some practical exercises to come through their pain and bitterness and be able to support their families. When we met them after about four months for a follow-up session, they said that they had tried to put into practice some of the skills they had acquired on the previous occasion on self-confidence and they themselves had come to realise the gradual changes in their lives. We too noticed that they had lost their feelings of hostility and had a new sense of confidence in providing for and sustaining their families economically, socially and spiritually. Further follow-up sessions are planned to help them cope with their new situation and the bitterness of their loss.

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IAFN BIRTH REGISTRATION BLOG

www.registerbirths.blogspot.com

This is your chance to blog on what is happening around birth registration in your part of the world.

Our November 2011 IAFN newsletter highlighted wide-scale under-registration of children – according to UNICEF, 51 million babies miss out every year, which means their prospects of gaining access to healthcare, education and full participation in society are bleak. And no birth certificate means that children are more vulnerable to abduction, trafficking and abuse.

Churches serving their communities are ideally placed to promote birth registration and to work with State agencies and NGOs in overcoming obstacles to registration.

What are the obstacles in your parish or diocese?

Are organisations concerned with birth registration in your area taking seriously the potential to collaborate with local churches? Why not read through IAFN's newsletter on birth registration at

<http://iafn.anglicancommunion.org/newsletters/2011/november/index.cfm> and blog your own comments and ideas.

IAFN is taking the issue of birth registration to the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) when it meets in October this year because we care deeply that millions of children are missing out on formal documentation that could increase their prospects of participation, well-being, and even of survival.

Go to www.registerbirths.blogspot.com, read what we have to say, and add your own comments or tell us about your experience in your parish, region or country. This will help us to plan our message and materials for the ACC meeting and encourage Anglican communities in all places to get involved.

KENYA



The destruction of demolition.

Photo: Barrack Oluoch.

Divided by demolition: families facing eviction in Nairobi

Any developing country cherishes improved housing for its citizens and that is certainly true for Kenya and its capital city, Nairobi. However, sometimes what is called upgrading and improvement also involves the demolition of homes and the destruction of communities. In the past month alone, thousands of Nairobi residents have lost homes and possessions as bulldozers, under heavy police protection, have ripped through

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communities taking all in their wake. In Kibera slum, this was to make way for a government project to provide low-cost housing for the community; in Mukuru slum, a week later, it was to satisfy the interests of a private developer. In Kibera alone, hundreds of households were displaced by the demolitions. One of our concerns is the impact these forced evictions and demolitions have on some of the most vulnerable families in the city.

For the next three nights, the family slept together out in the open by the roadside.

One of those affected by the evictions was David, a labourer, who heard about the demolition of his neighborhood while he was at work. He quickly returned to Kibera only to find his wife rapidly taking their few possessions out of their 10 foot by 10 foot one-room house. For the next three nights, the family slept together out in the open by the roadside. Unable to stay another night exposed to the elements, David's wife and children moved to a nearby estate to stay with his wife's sister. Meanwhile, David sought refuge in a local Anglican church which had managed to accommodate eight families. For cultural reasons he could not stay under his "in-laws" roof.

For several days, he lived in the church away from his family and remained apart from them until he found another room to rent. Evictions affect the whole family, but for many, like David, it also divides families. In some cases wives and children will migrate back to a rural area while the husband continues to look for a place for them to stay in the city. To the pain of loss is added the pain of separation.

In the midst of situations like this, it is difficult for the Church to know how to respond. Emmanuel Anglican parish in Kibera opened its arms wide to accommodate some of the families that were displaced by the evictions and offered them food and assistance in finding another room to rent. In a community that was marked by the pain and the wounds of demolitions, the

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Church became a sign of healing and a beacon of hope to many displaced families, fulfilling Jesus' words in St Matthew 25:35. However, housing the homeless is not enough. There are too many Davids and their families sitting by roadsides with their possessions or escaping one demolition only to be caught in another. Development is good, upgrading is good. But we need to press for ways of improving our city that do not leave families separated from one another and separated from the communities they once called home.

But we need to press for ways of improving our city that doesn't leave families separated from one another and separated from the communities they once called home.

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STORIES OF HOPE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



House of Hope.

Photo: Hope Africa.

Introduction

Family takes many different forms in our global society, and our understanding of healthy families cannot easily be defined. In the past, it was often our extended families with whom we lived that provided support and a sense of well-being. The movement towards nuclear families has impacted this scenario in both positive and negative ways.

Other influences have been the high incidence of alcohol and drug abuse across income levels within our communities, the impact of HIV/AIDS on parents and youth and the movement towards urban areas to overcome the impact of poverty. This has resulted in family units being disbanded and strained-to-broken relationships. These problems are being addressed by many communities in the Church of Southern Africa. Here are three examples:

- a Halfway house for recovering drug addicts
- building homes for Granny-headed households
- a hospice which allows children of patients 24-hour access to one another.

Halfway House – a project of HEAL ministries, Diocese of Pretoria.

At the end of 2007 we realised that God was asking us to open a Halfway House. We knew that if he wanted this he would find us a house and we heard of one that had been left to our parish.

The aim of the Halfway House was to help addicts leaving rehab to adapt to life in the city, to find jobs and to reunite them with their families.

After consultation with the parish council and diocese, it was agreed that we could use this and so the next stage began. Renovations were needed and we set about fund-raising.

In June 2008, our first resident moved in. She had been a resident at a Recovery Centre and they asked if we could sponsor her. She had had many years of taking heroin, living with

dealers, helping to highjack cars, being arrested and her parents were tired of picking up the tabs and being hurt. In 2009, she wrote the meditation for Good Friday in the St Francis parish Lenten Booklet, all about how she had searched for independence and freedom in drugs and yet her real freedom had come through knowing and serving God. She also set herself to studying and become a Pilates instructor and despite the damage to her short-term memory from the drug use, she managed to pass all her exams. She is now back home with her parents and is getting married in April.

The aim of the Halfway House was to help addicts leaving rehab to adapt to life in the city, to find jobs and to reunite them with their families. Residents have found articles with accounting firms, some have studied, qualified and subsequently been employed, one as a paramedic. One of the members in our parish offers the girls temporary positions in her office to enable them to gain experience and get back into a working environment. Sadly, we are now having problems finding a manager for the house, and have to use other accommodation, but the work of HEAL still continues and our phones ring constantly with people seeking help and support.

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Building of homes – Diocese of Natal

A ten-member crew of retired parishioners has chosen to assist guardians of orphans and vulnerable children in their surrounds by building them houses. So far, they have managed to build two homes for Granny-headed households catering for nine and eleven children and are in the process of securing funding for their next project, a hut for a crèche that caters exclusively for vulnerable children.



Jungle gym - help for children.

Photo: Hope Africa.

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STORIES OF HOPE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA



Building in Progress.

Photo: Hope Africa.



Opening ceremony.

Photo: Hope Africa.

Hawston Hospice – Diocese of False Bay

The parish identified HIV/AIDS as an area of need and responded by building a clinic, which was later registered as a Hospice which serves this community. The hospice services patients who are mainly on Anti-Retro Viral drugs and who are unable to care for themselves. The hospice recently built a second home which is able to accommodate children of patients in their care, and allows for 24-hour access to one another. This has allowed family bonding to continue despite the frail care period. This arrangement has increased recovery of patients and ensures that they are able to sustain strong parent-child relationships when they return home.

Conclusion

The efforts of individuals who take the initiative to respond to their community needs are admirable and bring about positive change, even to the most difficult situations. Each of these stories of hope has shown that individuals following the vision or call that God has laid upon their hearts have brought about significant change despite the unbearable challenges faced in doing so. As a relational God, restoring family relationships is a key aspect of restoring a community. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." *Romans 8:28*.

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HONG KONG

Migrant workers

Painful separation from loved ones is one of the highest social costs of labour migration and often has far-reaching consequences. Most migrant workers do not leave their families by choice. They come from poor Asian countries like the Philippines and Indonesia where there are no opportunities for them to earn a decent living to support their families, send their children to school or just to put food on the table. Ironically, many children, whose parents toil in foreign countries in order to be able to provide a good education for them, drop out from school, turn to drugs or get pregnant at a young age due to lack of parental guidance. There are also some cases where young children of migrant workers have been abused by relatives who have been entrusted to look after them in the absence of their parents.

For a large number of migrant domestic workers themselves, the dream of providing a better future for their families may turn to nightmares of abuse and exploitation at the hands of their employers and employment agencies. But many of these oppressed workers are often less concerned about obtaining justice for the abuses they suffered than being able to continue to provide financial support for their families at home.

It takes a strong spirit and stoicism to endure a long separation from husband and children and at the same time put up with dehumanising treatment.

The pain of being away from loved ones is not confined to married migrant workers with children. Many young migrants carry the burden of being the sole family breadwinner, sacrificing their own future to support their parents and siblings and even extended families. Sally (not her real name) is one of those young women.

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A meek young girl from the Philippines, Sally never thought of coming to Hong Kong to work. She had already been working as a domestic helper for a couple in the Philippines when her female employer, a Filipina married to a Hong Kong citizen, brought her to Hong Kong on a tourist visa to look after a senile elderly lady, a relative of the male Chinese employer. Sally was promised that she could return home to the Philippines whenever she wanted, but if the Hong Kong couple liked her, they would take care of the papers



Help and advice for domestic workers.

Photo: HDH project.

needed to formalise her employment in Hong Kong. As she had never been abroad either as a worker or a tourist, she was not aware of immigration requirements.

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As soon as she arrived in Hong Kong, her passport was taken away by the employers. And there began her nightmare. She was made to work 18 hours a day, seven days a week without pay. Her Filipino employer paid a token to her family in the Philippines for her work only for the first few months and she herself was never given any money. She had no opportunity to spend money anyway as she was never allowed to leave the house except on one occasion in the company of the employers and had only very limited communication with her parents.

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This oppressive working condition and isolation took a toll on Sally's health. She began to feel unwell, constantly suffered from headaches and her hair started falling out. She pleaded with the employers to let her return to the Philippines but was told that she would go to jail if she left as she was only on a 14-day visitor visa and has overstayed. Only when her father died, did her employers allow her to leave with them warning her not to tell anyone what she had been doing for the last two and a half years.

The courts refused to recognise her as a victim of human trafficking and she was sentenced to four and half months' imprisonment.

Confused and grieving her father's passing, Sally suffered further blows when she was arrested by the Hong Kong Immigration Department for overstaying her visa. Months of ensuing litigation prevented her from returning to the Philippines and the full force

of Hong Kong's harsh immigration laws came down on her. The courts refused to recognise her as a victim of human trafficking and she was sentenced to four and half months' imprisonment. Her lawyers have advised her to appeal, but the idea of further court battles which may take longer than her sentence and keep her away from her family is not an attractive option. Faced with the choice of either fighting for justice or returning to her family, Sally has a difficult decision to make

It is to help migrant workers like Sally – and the many like her – that the project *Helpers for Domestic Helpers (HDH)* was set up. HDH is a St John's Cathedral pastoral outreach venture, set up by a group of lawyers in the congregation to cater for the special needs of Hong Kong's foreign domestic helpers. These, predominantly women, now number well over 100,000. They come

As low earners they are seldom in a position to pay for the services of a lawyer and yet are frequently in need of legal advice and assistance. This is the need the Cathedral project HDH works to meet.

from a variety of South East Asian countries including Thailand, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh, but the vast majority are Filipinos and they form a very substantial part of the Cathedral's own congregation. HDH offers advice and assistance to the women regardless of their nationality or religious affiliations and its services are free. The work is conducted by a small full-time staff assisted by voluntary helpers, some of whom are practising lawyers.

Exploitation of these women is widespread. They may find themselves the victims both of the rapacity of the employment agencies which recruit them, and of unscrupulous employers who force them to undertake non-domestic work in offices, restaurants and factories. Contracts are frequently terminated for the flimsiest reasons, often late at night and the helper simply put out on the street.

Others, like Sally, are vulnerable to finding themselves before the criminal courts on charges of overstaying their visas or working in unapproved employments. Sentences can be severe. As a result, a substantial proportion of the female population of Hong Kong's prisons consists of foreign domestic helpers.

It will be apparent from this brief account that foreign domestic helpers encounter serious problems as a result of the very stringent immigration regime affecting them and because of the employment disputes which frequently arise. However, as low earners they are seldom in a position to pay for the services of a lawyer and yet are frequently in need of legal advice and assistance. This is the need the Cathedral project HDH works to meet.

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INTERNATIONAL MISSION TO SEAFARERS



Communicating with families through the internet.

Photo: MtS.

Founded in 1856, as a Mission Society of the Anglican Communion, today's Mission offers emergency assistance, practical support, and a friendly welcome to crews visiting ports around the world. Whether caring for victims of piracy or providing a lifeline to those stranded in foreign ports, we are there for the globe's 1.2 million merchant seafarers of all ranks, nationalities and beliefs.

Absence may make the heart grow fonder, but that is of little comfort to seafarers and their families, divided by thousands of miles of ocean. Instead of the togetherness which should lie at the heart of family, there is distance, absence, and isolation. Worlds apart, seafarers are commonly away from home for up to a year.

Instead of the togetherness which should lie at the heart of family, there is distance, absence, and isolation. Worlds apart, seafarers are commonly away from home for up to a year.

That's where *The Mission to Seafarers* (MtS) comes in. Loneliness seriously undermines seafarer wellbeing, so 2012 sees the Mission redoubling efforts to help reduce the pain it causes. With chaplains, staff and volunteers on-call in 250 ports, the MtS offers a Christian welcome and practical and spiritual support to the world's merchant mariners. In the Mission's *Flying Angel*

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clubs, visiting crews can re-connect with their loved ones through the magic of the internet.

It has meant many seafarers have seen their newborn babies for the first time, comforted parents who are ill, and shared in news of birthdays, weddings, and exam successes. While they can't be there in person, they stay in touch, their feelings of isolation and exclusion replaced with involvement and belonging.

"The sea is his parish" – in the *Flying Angel* Club chapel, the MtS chaplain joins seafarers in praying for the safety of their vessels and the wellbeing of their families. At Christmas, when seafarers feel desperately cut off, MtS volunteers and chaplains ensure that they are cared for, taking Christmas gifts on board ships and holding festive lunches and Christmas services.

Ship turn-round times can be just a few hours, so MtS ship visitors, with internet-linked laptops and phone cards, go on board to meet seafarers who cannot come ashore – just as the Mission's founder did when he first began the work which continues today.

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Funded entirely by voluntary donations, Sea-Sunday collections, and legacies, the Mission exists to promote the physical and spiritual wellbeing of seafarers and their families. This can mean giving fresh warm clothes to a sailor rescued from an Atlantic shipwreck; providing post-trauma counselling to young ratings tortured by Somali pirates; undertaking family liaison for a hostage's wife; visiting a cadet left behind in hospital or prison; or helping seafarers abandoned by their employer to survive and get home.

This can mean giving fresh warm clothes to a sailor rescued from an Atlantic shipwreck; providing post-trauma counselling to young ratings tortured by Somali pirates; undertaking family liaison for a hostage's wife.

Take George: he was owed four months' wages when he was abandoned in Falmouth, living in freezing conditions on the laid-up ship. "We didn't have electricity. We had to catch rainwater for washing," says George. "It was so cold at night we couldn't sleep. We had no fridge so our food didn't stay fresh. The chandler stopped delivering food as the bill hadn't been paid. Back home, my wife's gas, electricity and phone were cut off, and the family was living off neighbour's leftovers."

The Mission intervened to help, providing an emergency grant for the family, and helping George to get home the day before his son's seventh birthday.

"When you're alone, all you see is winter but when you're with family, every day is Christmas! I want to thank the Mission to Seafarers from the bottom of my heart – the *Flying Angel* has truly been the herald of joy for us", he said.

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CANADA



Happy mother and child.

Parenting programme

I am a Mothers' Union Worldwide Parenting Programme facilitator in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), and two of my courses were held with residents of a women's refuge and a lodge for Aboriginal women recovering from alcoholism. The women in the refuge had their children with them but were

Trish described how she could never do anything right for her parents and never received any encouragement, praise or appreciation and consequently her self-esteem was very low.

separated from their spouses, while the Aboriginal women's children were in foster care and for the most part they were single mothers.

In the refuge, started some 50 years ago by the Church and now run by an Independent Community Service Society, there are two stages of housing. The first stage, houses families for four months to give the mothers time to find housing and a job. While there, they receive support, counselling, child care, free room and board and fellowship. If there is a vacancy, some families can move to the second stage housing where they live independently for up to two years until they get on their feet. Most of the participants were from second stage, the majority having suffered physical abuse from their partners or had come from very dysfunctional families. Trish described how she could never do anything right for her parents and never received any encouragement, praise or appreciation and consequently her self-esteem was very low. She cried frequently. They all found that sharing their experiences was very beneficial, comforting

and uplifting, as they realised they were not alone and that their parenting skills were better than they thought.

The *Coming Home Society*, which runs *Young Wolves Lodge*, was the brainchild of the clergy and one or two members of St James' Church with a Mothers Union Member as President, and is now run through donations from the Diocese of Westminster. The Lodge offers each woman tools for a healthy life, a healthy pregnancy, and the best possible chance to parent her children. Culturally-based, it heals by giving Aboriginal women back their pride and connection to their families and communities. Following the four-month residential programme they receive one year of mentoring from the transition worker.

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Carla and Jenny each had three children by the age of 21. Because of the legacy of Canada's Residential school system, these women had never received adequate parenting and had little knowledge how to live safe and healthy lives. Jenny had alcohol problems and got into a relationship with an abusive partner, who threatened both Jenny and her mother. When her mother threw her out, she ended up using and selling drugs on the Downtown Eastside – the poorest and most problematic area in Vancouver and where St James' Church is situated.

Carla's mother left the family with no explanation when she was five years old. She watched at the window for months waiting for her to come back. From the age of eight she was abused by her brother and others. She lived in multiple foster homes, finally ending up on the Downtown Eastside. Both entered *Young Wolves Lodge* when they were pregnant with their fourth child. There, they had the experience of feeling parented themselves by a loving staff, living in a healthy family environment and gaining a sense of their own self-worth.

The goal of the Lodge is that they can be reunited with their extended families on the reserve and eventually with their children.

Giving a young girl loving and skilled parenting makes all the difference in her own life and in the lives of her future children. They are less likely to have early babies to fill the void in their lives – to have one person in the world who will love them unconditionally. The goal of the Lodge is that they can be reunited with their extended families on the reserve and eventually with their children. Both Carla and Jenny returned for an additional four-month stay when life once more became overwhelming. Jenny has now returned to school and has been sober for a few years. Thanks to a donation from our Mothers' Union branch, Carla, along with others, opened her first Christmas present in 10 years. She has also completed a work internship programme and has connected with her extended family.

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Conflicts within Families

As we face the challenges of the 21st century, we need to remember that God calls us to be peacemakers. In many parts of the world, there is war and economic conflicts, and shortages of food and water as a result of the devastating effects of climate change. All these pressures can divide and separate families. But in Canada, although we also see families who are cruelly divided by international politics, unjust refugee laws and prolonged bureaucratic processes, many families are divided not so much by external conflicts, but internally, by relationships breaking down.

Much of my work is in the area of family breakdown. We don't have to be professionals to help others resolve



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conflicts and build bridges towards peace. Helping others resolve conflicts with themselves, with their partners, with children, with parents, with colleagues, with neighbours, requires patience, compassion, faith, and often "tough love".

But for many people, profound reconciliation becomes impossible. In Canada, separation and divorce statistics are high. Families are divided by marriage-breakdown, and children become divided from one parent or even from siblings. In the face of such breakdown, especially when children are concerned, a mediated resolution provides a kind of truce.

We don't have to be professionals to help others resolve conflicts and build bridges towards peace.

The day-to-day ways in which we help children be friends, reduce sibling rivalry, work cooperatively in our workplaces, and seek deeper understanding with partners and friends who have wounded us, stretch us all to grow in our understanding of the psalmist's vision of a time in which "justice and peace shall embrace" (Psalm 85:10). Although we cannot realise this vision completely (that is ultimately God's work), we can achieve substantial healing in ways that are compatible with it.

Why do conflicts occur within families?

In any relationship, community, or workplace, conflicts are an inevitable outcome of personal interaction. The family is a complex community consisting of people living together and relating over time, so it's hardly surprising that a variety of conflicts will arise. The following are examples:

- **Misunderstandings.** These occur when one person doesn't say explicitly what she/he thinks or feels, and the other draws conclusions or makes assumptions. Sometimes, with the stresses of life, it is easy to become so rushed that we fail to check out what someone meant.

- **Hurt feelings.** It is natural to be hurt by comments that convey insult, blame, or faultfinding. Being ignored can be very hurtful. How to give honest feedback that does not destroy another person is a skill we can all learn. It is part of the biblical injunction to "speak the truth in love" so that we can grow as individuals and in our relationships.

The family is a complex community consisting of people living together and relating over time, so it's hardly surprising that a variety of conflicts will arise.

- **Defending ourselves.** We naturally become defensive as a result of feeling "invaded," violated, betrayed, or when another's communication seems to be hostile. Sometimes, it is possible to learn together how to build a bridge, moving toward a place of resolution. We need to remember that the Christian life is not a game, in which one person's gains are another person's losses, but a life in which we all called to grow, individually and as families and communities.

- **Escalations.** These occur in families when there are insufficient or unclear rules, or no way of resolving issues. It is helpful to develop "fair fighting rules," which clarify and enable a creative process which is not coercive, and which seeks solutions in order to resolve conflicts. Violence is never acceptable, and in domestic violence situations often the only road towards peace is that of separation or divorce.

Hopefully by understanding some of the roots of division within families, our churches can act as resources and can help in finding ways to resolve tensions and disputes and thereby rebuild families.

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St Mary's Church, home for a contact centre as well as worship.

Child Contact Centre

On two Saturday afternoons every month, St. Mary's Church in Slough town centre hosts a Child Contact Centre. We offer a safe, neutral environment where children from separated families can meet with their non-resident parent and we work to a policy of strict confidentiality and impartiality. We are accredited members of the National Association of Child Contact Centres but operate under our own management committee. Our volunteers (all checked for their suitability to work with children) are recruited from among friends, relatives, Mothers' Union members and our church congregation.

Slough has a large diverse population and our families come from all parts of the community. They are referred to us from local solicitors, courts, social workers, and in some cases are self-referrals. We are given the basic minimum information on the circumstances why a family needs our space, and that way both parties can be treated equally – obviously bearing in mind the safety of the children is of paramount importance.

The volunteers are on hand to encourage the non-resident parent to communicate with their child because often they have no idea of how to play or even talk to them

Our volunteers do a fantastic job, because quite often the child might not have seen their estranged parent for many months or even years, and they are torn between joy at the proposed meeting and divided loyalty to their resident parent, who often cannot hide her/his resentment at having to come to us especially where there is a history of abuse or domestic violence. It sometimes takes a lot of persuasion to get the child into the main room. Our role is also to offer support to the resident parent, without taking sides or being judgemental. The volunteers are on hand to encourage the non-resident parent to

communicate with their child because often they have no idea of how to play or even talk to them (that is if we can get them to turn off their mobile phone). The parents often have never played the familiar board games, dominoes, or Lego. We have invested in computer games but our most successful purchases have been a pair of indoor football posts and craft items. It does not take long for a Dad and his son to start kicking a ball about and then having heated discussions about who supports the best team, or for a Mum to sit and glue and stick while they catch up on school news.

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The church is a large Victorian building with half the pews removed so the space is ideal for the Contact Centre. Most important are the two separate entrances so that parents do not have to meet or even see each other. Storage is limited, but with a bit of imagination all the toys and equipment are well hidden by 9.30am on Sunday morning. I often reflect in the Sunday church service about what has gone on the previous afternoon. It is often very emotional for us to see a child shriek

It is often very emotional for us to see a child shriek with joy when they see their estranged parent for the first time in many months, and then that awful goodbye when they leave, not knowing if Mum or Dad will be there the next time.

with joy when they see their estranged parent for the first time in many months, and then that awful goodbye when they leave not knowing if Mum or Dad will be there the next time. We can only hope that the laughter and screams of delight during the afternoon will leave them with happy memories and that the first steps can be taken towards mutually-agreed access.

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ENGLAND



The separation of prison.

Mothers' Union work with prisoners' families.

"It was beautiful." This isn't the sort of thing you would expect a great big muscular prisoner to say, but it was something that Darren said describing some of the work Mothers' Union do in prisons in our diocese. He had, for the first time, taken his little girl of three by the hand and walked up to the tea-bar in the

He had, for the first time, taken his little girl of three by the hand and walked up to the tea-bar in the visits room during a family visit.

visits room during a family visit. He realised that he had never done that before, he had a life-changing moment; an event that marked a cross-road for him, with the realisation that he had missed out on his little girl's progress.

For over 20 years, Mothers' Union in Worcester Diocese has been supporting children and families of prisoners. One of our projects, *Family Time*, is an initiative set up to enable families to just be that, a family, divided due to imprisonment. It takes place within the prison and gave Darren the first appreciation of his family once he was separated from them. He – and they – really

enjoyed getting together to make things, read, play and eat together.

Often, when we think of prisoners, we hear or

One of our projects, Family Time, is an initiative set up to enable families to just be that, a family, divided due to imprisonment.

think: 'lock 'em up and throw away the key'. Our prison work has been ground-breaking in many senses, enabling us to move away from negativity towards compassion for families who have not done anything wrong. Do we not find in Matthew's gospel handy hints from Jesus about prisoners, and each time we say the Lord's Prayer are we not really able to forgive others? To challenge negative views is essential to lessen the detrimental impact of separation within society.

Darren's little girl Ellie just beamed at her Dad whenever they shared some time. The beam of a father's love for his child was even bigger.

With the development of technology, we can communicate with each other in an instant and yet one of the most common problems is loneliness. We yearn for a sense of belonging, a community.

A recent government study estimates that 45% of prisoners lose contact with their family, and 22% of those who are married later divorce or separate as a consequence of receiving a custodial sentence.

People's schedules are full. There are not enough hours in the day. Did God intend His family to live in busy isolation?

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As a Mothers' Union development worker in the UK, I work with prisoners and their families to ensure that relationships are sustained, not wrecked, during sentences. This not only benefits the children, many of whom are otherwise penalised for their parent's misdeeds, but will also reduce the chance of re-offending on release. We all need a place to belong.

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PAKISTAN

Prison Ministry

In Pakistan, every individual is identified with a family, and a family is the unit of society. so in all spheres of life, such as culture and religion, one's family identity matters. Even in the general election people would vote for the candidates who have a kinship with them. In this situation it is near impossible for single mums to survive.

Normally the men look after financial and social aspects so their imprisonment sometimes brings irreparable damage to family life. When both parents are behind the bars, children suffer even more.

In this article, I shall be sharing our experience of work among prisoners and their families. Prison ministry in Pakistan requires legal assistance, financial help, care for the prisoners' families, reconciliation between accused and victims, social and spiritual growth and restoration. Prisoners mostly face financial difficulties in terms of children's education, healthcare and living expenses.

Pakistan is a male-dominated society. Normally the men look after financial and social aspects so their imprisonment sometimes brings irreparable damage to family life. When both parents are behind the bars, children suffer even more.

Another dimension of family life is the intimacy, confidence and attachment between members. When the head of the family is

During our ministry in Pakistan, I often observed divisions in family life being initiated and exacerbated when a wife or husband, or both, were sent to jail.

in prison it sometime becomes difficult for the family to maintain its unity. In Pakistan, as in most parts of the world, 'prisoner' is considered as synonymous with 'sinner'. It has a very negative impact on the prisoner's spouse and their

children. During our ministry in Pakistan, I often observed divisions in family life being initiated and exacerbated when a wife or husband, or both, were sent to jail.

In 2007, I and my husband, who was a priest and the prison chaplain in the Diocese of Lahore, visited the Sialkot Central Jail and met Ashraf and Iram, a Christian couple in the prison. They lived in a small town near Sialkot where they worked in a factory as labourers. They had three beautiful daughters. But Ashraf and Iram were involved in a murder and as a result both received life imprisonment. Their family life was badly affected. Their daughters were being looked after by their maternal grandparents. A local priest recommended that the girls go to a church boarding school for poor and needy people.

During their imprisonment, the diocesan prison ministry provided them with legal assistance and after a year the wife was released on bail. It was good for her and the children as they could live together, but because of financial and social pressure

It's a divided family waiting for the time when they all will be able to live together. Hopefully, the help given by the Church will make this possible.

this was not possible. She had lost her job, and so needed money and she had also lost confidence. Their foes were from the same city and were so powerful she had a fear they might attack her, so she decided to move from Sialkot. She contacted us to see if she could come to Lahore to find a safe place. Though it was not an easy decision, we invited her to live in the vicarage as she needed social restoration as well. Very quickly, she recovered from the trauma. Now she works as a maid to earn some money but still is not able to support her children, who are in the same boarding school. Her husband is still in prison but was later transferred from Sialkot Jail to Lahore. She visits him once a month in the prison, and twice a month goes to see her daughters. It's a divided family waiting for the time when they all will be able to live together. Hopefully, the help given by the Church will make this possible.

A PRAYER FOR DIVIDED FAMILIES

Help us, O God,
to work with you in bringing healing
to divisions in family life;
grant those who suffer
distance, absence or isolation
patience in their pain,
wisdom in bridge-building,
and the preservation of an inner love
towards those for whom they care,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen

Revd John Bradford

Contact Person: Moseena Rana, C/o Network Office

IAFN is an Anglican forum for the exchange of information about challenges facing families in different countries and contexts, and the practical work being undertaken by churches and individual Christians. See website www.iafn.net for further information and how to receive the newsletters electronically or in the printed version.

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IAFN BLOG

www.registerbirths.blogspot.com

Read about the importance of birth registration for children; and tell us about your experience in your country (see p2).