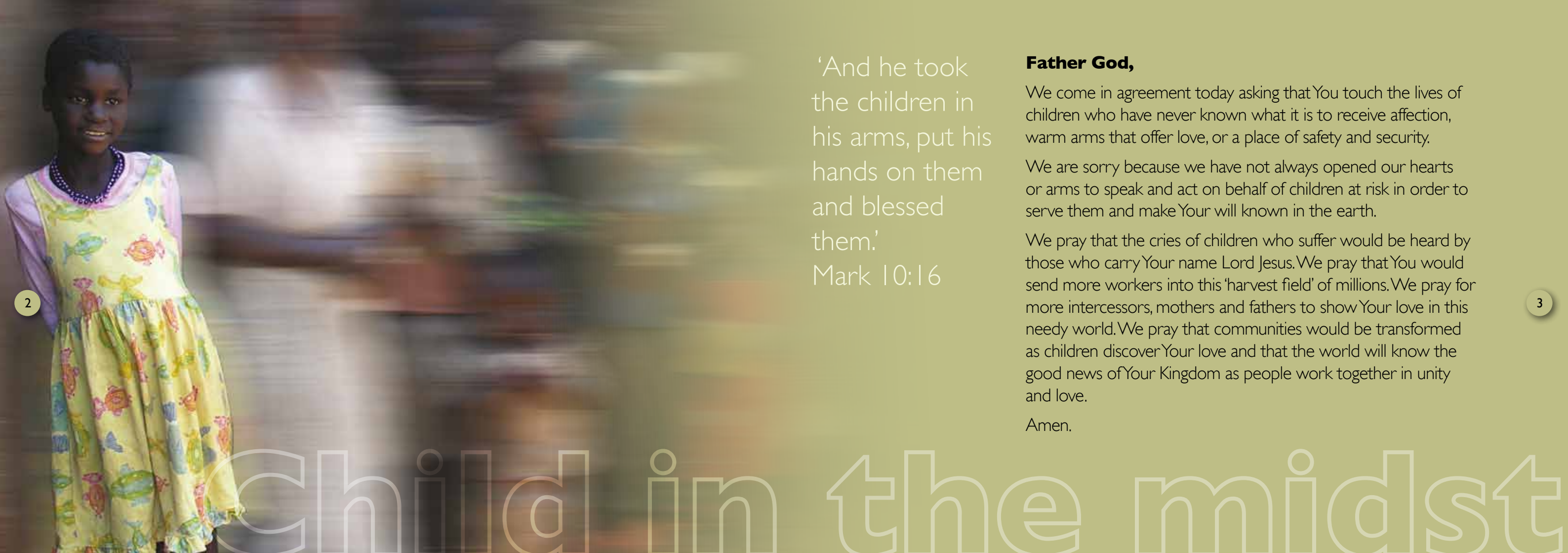




Child in the midst

viva
together for children

Prayer for children at risk



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‘And he took
the children in
his arms, put his
hands on them
and blessed
them.’

Mark 10:16

Father God,

We come in agreement today asking that You touch the lives of children who have never known what it is to receive affection, warm arms that offer love, or a place of safety and security.

We are sorry because we have not always opened our hearts or arms to speak and act on behalf of children at risk in order to serve them and make Your will known in the earth.

We pray that the cries of children who suffer would be heard by those who carry Your name Lord Jesus. We pray that You would send more workers into this ‘harvest field’ of millions. We pray for more intercessors, mothers and fathers to show Your love in this needy world. We pray that communities would be transformed as children discover Your love and that the world will know the good news of Your Kingdom as people work together in unity and love.

Amen.

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Child in the midst

This prayer guide for children at risk focuses on issues we believe burn in the heart of God. Every page reminds us of children and why they should be at the centre of our actions and prayers. As we put the child in the midst we give space to include the child's voice and perspective.

We continue to refer to and profile issues around the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and highlight the role we can have in working towards their fulfilment. These goals aim to build fair and just societies and many of their aims reflect principles of the Kingdom of God.

This material promotes prayer around the following MDG's:

- 1 Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
- 3 Universal primary education
- 4 Reduction of child mortality
- 6 Combating HIV/AIDS

Although this material can be used throughout the year in a variety of different contexts, it has been developed specifically for the annual World Weekend of Prayer for children at risk, which since 1995 has been held on the first weekend of June. We hope that your prayers will be enriched by the ideas and information given here.

For many children our world may appear desolate and hopeless - but we believe there is hope. For this reason we want to help increase the number of people praying and participating in this global movement of prayer on behalf of children at risk.

“Let the children come to me”

People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” *Mark 10: 13-15*

At the time Jesus lived on earth people didn't fully understand the 'good news' message He preached. The disciples tried to stop the children coming to Jesus, yet Jesus did something that must have shocked the local people. He took a child and placed the child in the middle promising them that if they truly wanted to be part of the Kingdom the only way to follow Him would be to become like that child.

Jesus modelled important principles; in this same story we are told that 'He took them in His arms and blessed them.' We are called to continue Jesus' mission on earth. We need to pray that we would take to heart in our prayers and actions the millions of children at risk living in our world today.

Let's pray together and see transformation!

The Viva prayer team.

** Some of the suggestions for group activity require sensitive facilitation. We have marked these with an asterisk. You may consider adapting them appropriately.*

UNICEF estimates that the total number of children in institutional care globally is 2.2 million, but they point out that due to under-reporting and lack of regulation this is an underestimate. Studies show that even good quality institutional care can unhelpfully effect a child's ability to form relationships throughout life. Nothing can replace a real family.

The child in the midst **who needs a family**

Imagine – The child in front of us is two years old, she has thinning hair and scratches all over her body. She already knows that by scratching herself and pulling out her hair she gets the attention she wants from the staff member who happens to be on duty looking after the other seven babies alongside her.

What should our response be?

- A child's first emotional attachment to their main care giver (mother figure) is considered to be the blue print for all later emotional attachments as the young child learns how to love and be loved.

Where specific children are mentioned, their names have been changed to protect their identity.



Costa Rica

Thank God for the Viva team in Costa Rica. Eight year-old Nina had spent most of her life in an orphanage. She worried because she knew she could only stay there until she was 12, as teenage girls were considered too difficult to look after.

8 Casa Viva placed Nina in a foster family at her local church, giving her a home and a family who would care for her for the rest of her life. Nina was so happy under the care of her new parents that she wanted to make sure other children had the chance to experience this love and security too. When Casa Viva were searching for new foster families Nina told her parents that she wanted them, as a family, to take in another child!

She told them *"I know what it is like to live in a children's home, and I do not want other children to have to go to one."* As a result, Nina and her foster parents took in a little three year old boy who is now thriving in their family.

Russia

Thank God for the Russian Risk Network of Christian ministries who believe that orphans can be sons and daughters and have families that they can belong to.

Many children live in orphanages, in families that do not work well or on the street. They do not feel parental love or know what it is like to be in a family.

Hunger, neglect and abuse often lead to future generations becoming orphans too. This network has a goal to equip and encourage more Christians to work with orphans, adopt or become foster families.

Psalm 68: 5-6

'A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads forth the prisoners with singing'.

Pray for -

- Children who live in institutions in the country where you live
- The many people responding with compassion to the needs of children within Christian orphanages and ministries around the world. When no families are available this is often the only alternative
- Ministries, organisations and churches who are working to help children find families
- Society to respond to the needs of children who need parenting, to prioritise helping children in their communities to find homes and families
- Children to overcome difficulties or challenges that prevent them taking hold of a better future, no matter what they might have been through

Prayerful activity

Think about welcoming someone else into your family who has never lived in a loving family. In a small group discuss the following - What would make them feel welcome? How might you feel? What difficulties might there be? What would you enjoy showing them? Write a letter to a child who might come and join your family, welcoming them and telling them about your family.

Not all of us are able to adopt or foster a child who needs a family, but this exercise can help us to pray for children who need to be cared for and to think how our family can be an example to children who do not have a secure or loving home.

The child in the midst who suffers violence

According to UNICEF, millions of children run away from home because of violence and abuse. 185 million children under 18 years of age live in Latin America and every year six million suffer extreme violence and some 80,000 die in their own homes.

Imagine – The child in front of us has been badly beaten by his drunken father. His hardened face makes him look much older than his 12 years. He glares at you through swollen eyes.

What should our response be?

"It's not fair that due to the carelessness on the part of the parents children suffer. They should give more attention to their children, God never deserts us and never neglects us."

Wendy, 10 years old, El Salvador

- Four out of five children in Latin America suffer physical punishment in their homes, a third of these would be considered cases of serious bodily harm
- The World Health Organization estimates that nearly 150 million girls and 73 million boys have suffered some form of sexual harm

- A report from the United Nations (2006) indicates that in 100 countries children are punished with sticks or other objects in school
- According to UNICEF data, in Kazakhstan 80% of children living in residential schools are treated with cruelty

Pakistan

Many young girls are sent to work as housemaids for richer families and become vulnerable to violence and abuse at the hands of the homeowners.

It is a tragedy that poor people, knowing their children might be at risk, have to send their daughters to work in unknown households.

14 Due to poverty this is often many families only form of income.

Thank God for our PCMA network as they work hard to offer alternate employment, to help keep those children safe.

Bolivia

Daniel is 17 and lives on the streets of Bolivia. As a consequence of his mother's death, his father started to drink and began beating him and his brothers. Daniel ran away trying to find better living conditions. He was struggling to make a living cleaning shoes on the streets, until he met someone from one of Viva's Early Encounter street teams who invited him to be part of their ministry. Daniel said that was the experience that changed his life.

"They give me breakfast and lunch and I also have support where I am happy and can play and learn with my friends. Now I work as a shoe cleaner in the morning and in the afternoons I can take care of my little brothers and then I go to school."

Today Daniel is a happy, gentle, responsible young man. He studies, works and dreams of having a good career to help his family.

Thank God

Jeremiah 29: 11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Pray for -

- Children who suffer physical or verbal abuse from parents or other adults; that these adults would change their ways
- Good teaching and training of parents to discipline children without resorting to bodily harm
- Children like Daniel who have not been looked after well, that they would have a chance to experience something different so that behaviour is not repeated with their own children
- The adults who do not treat children well. That they would be changed and become aware of children's needs
- Families to give more time to teaching, praying, playing and blessing children both within and outside their own families
- Governments to acknowledge the significance of the family unit, to honour marriage and legislate to protect and help keep families together

Prayerful activity

Think about all the ways our hands can bless others. In a group draw a very large hand and write or draw pictures using one colour which show what our hands can do to bless others. Choose another colour and write or draw the sorts of things which our hands can do that can make people sad. Spend some time in prayer that God will give us opportunities to bless someone with our hands this week. Pray especially that children will know loving, caring, protective hands that bless and do not harm them. *

How often do we bless people outside our own family relationships?





It is estimated that there are 700 million children of primary school age and more than 121 million do not attend school, mostly in South Asia and sub Saharan Africa where poverty prevents them.

Imagine – The child in front of us is a small girl, not much older than 9 or 10. She is unable to read the torn piece of paper in her hands. If she were able to read it she would not be surprised to know that her parents had sent her to the city in the hope of a better future. She has found work of sorts enabling her to earn her keep.

What should our response be?

The child in the midst with no educational opportunitites

- 50 million babies have started life without a legal identity. With no documentation to prove how old they are or even if they exist, they are likely to be faced with discrimination and lack of basic access to services such as education or health care
- Churches of the Nazarene in the Dominican Republic have formed a network where 25 church-based ministries are being qualified to help more than 63,000 children who do not have legal registration

Slovakia

A family in eastern Slovakia decided to welcome into their home four children with varying degrees of disability. The family had the support of other local families who prayed and helped them financially. **As a result nine year-old Michal, who has severe mental disabilities, was able to attend a special school that met his needs.** He has had the opportunity to learn wood carving and has since won several international awards. Michal also learned cooking, and shows many other abilities, thanks to the support of a family who decided to welcome him into their home and show him the love of Jesus.

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Uganda

María, a teenager, was expelled from school because she became pregnant. Dove Light church committed to support her so that she could complete her education. The pastor who is also helping others in a similar situation said: *"Despite being mothers, these girls are still children and need schooling. ...it was the church's duty to help."* This year, 17 children will complete the primary school level and have plans to go on to secondary education thanks to the support of Dove Light church.

Cambodia

"I live in northwest Cambodia near the Cambodian-Thai border. As with many poor families in Cambodia, my parents went to Thailand to find work. They left me behind in the village to care for my younger siblings, so I had to stop school. A few years ago, one of the leaders at church started a project. I was able to participate in the catch-up education programme where I learned to read and write Khmer, studied maths and learned many other things. I also learned about God and His love for me. In February 2009, I gave my heart to Jesus."

Khamera, aged 15, Poipet

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Thank God

Isaiah 54: 13

'All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace.'

Pray for -

- Children who do not have an opportunity to go to school because of physical or mental disability
- Children who live in very poor families who cannot afford school uniforms, shoes or books, which means they are excluded
- Children who work during the day and cannot attend school because they must earn money to feed themselves and their families
- The many ministries which are seeking to develop and educate children – particularly those doing so in line with Godly values and wisdom
- The daily provision of resources both financial and human to give children the opportunity to learn
- That governments would keep their MDG commitments to provide universal education for all primary age children

Prayerful activity

Ideally in a mixed generation group, talk about the different things that people learned when they were at school.


What if you had been unable to go to school?

What might have stopped you?

Talk about children today who do not have the opportunity to go to school. It might be useful to include other statistics, videos or images you can find. Spend some time praying about the situations of children who do not go to school.

The next time you notice children walking to school why not take that opportunity to pray for someone of the same age who does not have an education.





27,000 children die every day because of hunger or preventable illnesses and 100 million children live or work on the streets (UNICEF).

The child in the midst who suffers through hunger or poverty

Imagine – The child in front of us looks like a heap of ragged clothes, barely able to lift her head. She appears to be around four years of age so we are surprised to learn that she is seven. Her skin is dry and a dull yellow colour. She has never had a full meal and does not know what it's like not to feel hungry.

What should our response be?

- More than 140 million children are malnourished and 5.6 million die every year through starvation
- The International Labour Organisation (ILO), estimate that 12 million children are victims of trafficking each year; being moved from one country to another to fulfil selfish sexual needs. In India, children are exploited and end up working as slaves to pay off debts incurred by their families

Uganda

Child Concern, a project in Kampala, Uganda, were looking after 200 children and really struggling for money. One of the biggest difficulties was that their children needed more milk for better nourishment. The project could not afford milk and did not see a way of getting enough money to ever improve the children's health.

After receiving some training from Viva they were inspired to think creatively about the issue, and decided to buy two cows, one of them pregnant.

They now have 15 litres of milk every day, which they can add to their children's porridge. The children are now receiving well-balanced and healthier meals.

Bulgaria

For 10 years now, every winter, Mission Possible in Bulgaria has been supporting the soup kitchen at the church and feeding more than 60 children.

Volunteers cook and take care of the hungry and ragged traveller children, showing God's love in action. God has started changing the children's destinies. As their parents are drawn to Jesus they now take better care of the children - dress them better; keep them cleaner and most important of all send them to school, not to the streets to beg for money.

Uganda

Jesus Outreach Church is in the middle of a very needy area with very poor families who hardly eat. They are now providing meals for some of the children. The congregation has further responded to protecting and caring for children, by being active in the community collecting rubbish, releasing drains and cleaning up the area. This congregation has been a great example to the children, showing them how they can live in a healthy environment.

Matthew 25: 44-45

They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

Pray for -


- A greater kindness and love to be shown to those who live in poverty
- Governmental practice to improve for better distribution of relief, food and resources so that real needs are met
- Fewer deaths and less suffering through untreated diseases because people commit to giving proper attention to the needs of the poor and hungry
- New and creative ways to be found to help poor communities
- Governments to create laws in favour of children, so that better choices to break away from poverty and lack of opportunity are available
- An increase of faith in Christian communities to experience God's supernatural intervention where necessary

Prayerful activity

Place a small packet of crackers on a table that seats a group of about eight. Share the crackers unequally around the group. Consider if there was sufficient for all. How did it make you feel to see someone get less/more? Who is hungry? Comment that many children in the world eat very small portions of food daily and become very hungry while others eat more than they really need. What do we think about people in our communities who live in poverty and need?

Next time you look at a picture of yourself as a baby think about how much food and how much money it cost to help you grow into who you are today. Thank God for His love and care.





Approximately 33 million people were living with HIV in 2008; 2.1 million of them were estimated to be children under 15 years of age.

The child in the midst affected by loss and death

Imagine – The child in front of us sits shyly with a few of his younger brothers and sisters trying to climb up on his knee. At his feet is a crawling baby who he lifts up by the arm and helps stand to his feet. The demands on this 13 year old boy can be seen in the tiredness of his gaze. In the last year he has lost all other older living relatives to HIV/AIDS.

What should our response be?

- Around 17.5 million children under the age of 18 have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Millions more have been affected, with a vastly increased risk of poverty, homelessness, school dropout, discrimination and loss of life opportunities. These hardships include illness and death
- Of the estimated 2 million people who died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2008, 280,000 of them were children under 15 years old



Rwanda

James, who is HIV positive, lived with his grandma, then his uncle, after his parents died from AIDS related infections. His loss affected his behaviour making him difficult to live with. APRECOM project found him a temporary foster home.

Please pray for them as they work towards reconciling James with his uncle.

South Africa

Thandi and her sister Nombeka had grown up in South Africa with parents who cared for them. Everything changed however when their father died. Their mother's reaction to the loss was to find a boyfriend and abandon her daughters. Their grandmother was able to take them into her home, but they were severely traumatised. It was only when the girls had the opportunity to attend a grief workshop run by a local project that Thandi shared her feelings. She had learned as a child not to question adults but had found it hard not to talk about her father's death. The project social worker talked to Thandi's grandmother and explained how Thandi felt and the questions that she was struggling with. The grandmother began to understand, stating, *"I never thought that children could think so deeply"*. Tears started rolling down her cheeks as she shared how she avoided talking about her son's death because she always ended up crying herself, and that she didn't want to cry in front of the children. Yet now they can talk and grieve together, slowly but surely working through the issues.

Thank God

Ecclesiastes 3

'There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to ...'

(Read and pray as led by the rest of this passage.)

Pray for -

- More local church families to be open to welcoming HIV/AIDS orphans into their homes or supporting them
- The children who end up being the head of a family, that they would have support, training and encouragement
- The ministries and initiatives who are working to educate people about issues relating to HIV/AIDS
- More governments to follow Uganda's example by supporting services to give all pregnant women very effective antiretroviral therapy in a bid to stop children becoming infected
- The strengthening of marriages and family relationships, which encourages commitment to one sexual partner for life thus preventing the spread of HIV.
- Children in other situations where they suffer loss. (War, disease, natural disaster...)

Prayerful activity

In small groups supply each person with a small stone and a piece of cloth. Encourage them to share about a time when they lost something. How did this make them feel? As people share their experiences, wrap up a stone in cloth to symbolise the memory. When everyone has shared, place the wrapped up stones at the foot of a simple cross to welcome Jesus into the memories and use those feelings of loss to help you pray with compassion for the many children in our world today who have lost parents or relatives who they loved.*

Life and death issues are something we all face. Our faith in Jesus helps to prepare us for this and gives us a hope and a future. When we next hear of loss, take time to worship our Saviour Jesus.

Your feedback is important to us. We would love to know how you use this prayer guide.

You can help us by doing two simple things:

1. Let us know about any prayer events you plan to hold by joining the Viva Community. Register online at **www.viva.org/CommunityRegistration.aspx**
2. Send us feedback by filling in the online questionnaire at **www.viva.org** or by emailing **pray@viva.org** letting us know the following details:
 - Where did the event happen?
 - How many adults and children participated? (18 and over and under 18's.)
 - How long did the event last?
 - Was the booklet useful and how did you use it?
 - What were some of the highlights of your prayer event?

Letting us know in advance about your planned prayer events means that we can advertise on our community pages so that others in your area can be invited to join in.

Feedback

We would like to thank Sterling Greenaways for kindly printing this document with no charge to Viva



Further information

www.viva.org/pray.aspx

Please use this website to access:

- Downloadable versions of this prayer guide
- Translations of this booklet
- A PowerPoint presentation to complement the theme
- Further information about the needs of children around the world

What can we do next?

Email resource: Children at risk Prayer News

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If you would like to pray regularly with your church or small group, why not sign up for our email update on children at risk? Every fortnight we will send you news on issues affecting children, and prayer requests from ministries and networks helping children at risk. You could set aside time in a service to pray for children, or bring together like-minded Christians from one or more churches for a monthly prayer time.

Please contact **pray@viva.org** to sign-up.

Viva Prayer Diary

If you would like to pray each day for children, individually or with your family, you can download the Viva Prayer Diary **www.viva.org/PrayerDiary.aspx** or email us to receive a quarterly email attachment. Prayer requests for individual children, projects and networks are provided for each day, alongside relevant Bible verses. The Prayer Diary is a quarterly publication.

Children in Prayer

There are many growing networks of children's prayer groups committed to praying for issues facing children in the world today. Why not get together children from your area or church to pray for other young people on a regular basis? Children are never too young to begin to understand God's compassion for children and the need to pray for those who suffer.

To connect with others and for ideas on involving children in praying for children at risk join the online community group 'The Roar' at **www.viva.org/CommunityRegistration.aspx**

Give

If you or your church would like to help children at risk financially, one way to do this is through Viva. Your contributions will help Christians around the world to work together to transform the lives of the most vulnerable children. Please visit the web site or post your gift to

Viva, Unit 8, The Gallery, 54 Marston St, Oxford, OX4 1LF, UK

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What can we do next

**Children are suffering. We all know that.
Thousands of people are trying hard to help them. We all know that too.**

Yet the problems persist. Children are still suffering.
In cities all over the world there are projects doing great work, but a lack of
money, people, and time means there is a limit to what they can achieve alone.

We need to work together.

Imagine what would happen if the people caring for children joined up.
If child care workers, local churches, governments, and international charities
came together to tackle the issues faced by children.

Whole cities would be transformed.

Together we would have the power to bring about real change for children,
not just chipping away at the surface of the problems but fighting them right at the root

At Viva we are doing just that.

Through our 43 city-wide networks we are increasing the unity, quality, and impact of work for
children at risk, our joint action changing the lives of over 1 million children around the world.

**Together we can give more children
a safer, happier, and brighter future.**

Will you join us?

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