



16 days of Activism: ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Extract from World Week of Prayer 2016



INTO YOUR HANDS – ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE

Luke 11 33-36: The Lamp of the Body

“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.”

Let us be the ones who bring light into the body of the community, and name what is dark, and care for the body.

Reflection: Let's open the gates and let our lights shine

While most young girls were busy playing, five-year old Maria, from Trinidad & Tobago, was meeting her future husband. At age nine, she was married, and by age 11 she was pregnant—the first of 25 pregnancies.

In Trinidad and Tobago, although the legal age for civil marriage is 18, girls as young as 12 are still getting married based on religious exceptions. In fact, it's a tradition some faith leaders vigorously defend, with one cleric claiming he himself married a child bride years ago.

The YWCA of Trinidad and Tobago is a strong advocate for zero tolerance for violence against women and girls in all its forms, including child marriage. The organisation states:

“Child marriage is an unacceptable violation of the rights of girls and young women, with long-term negative consequences on their health and well-being. It is a form of sexual violence perpetrated on young girls who have not yet achieved sexual maturity.”

In creation, in Jesus, and in all the ways God encounters us during our lives, God brings light to us. We know the Gospels and all the biblical texts telling of encounters with God. We know how far God goes, to give land to the dispossessed, to raise the poor, to lift up the oppressed. We know the worth given to children – daughters and sons are so cherished, that divine rewards are measured by them. And only to the worst of enemies goes punishment that destroys future generations.

Yet why do people, families, and even communities give away their children to experience such misery?

Brothers and sisters, may all of our hearts bleed, call and cry out at the injustice of a fate like

Maria's from Trinidad. Her light was never given a stand to shine. This is a stain of darkness that we need to name and fight against - not only in Trinidad - for child marriage is a tradition that we can find in every single country in our world.

Poverty leaves little room for dignity. Even worse – it leaves a lot of space in each stomach to try to fill. It is hard for families to care for many children, and the easy way is to have one of those cherished children taken in by another family.

But the price we pay for that kind of relief is too high, and it is the young daughter, the child we should be protecting, who is paying it. We must not let that kind of darkness seep into our lives and our daughter's lives!

Instead, God calls on us to stand up for one another. Let us build traditions that are life-giving, as God has sent Jesus to us to give us a way that protects life. Let us build communities in which we care for each other's children as well as for our own. Let us build relationships in which there is space to name wrongdoing, and space to learn from it and grow into better people. Let us look upon one another with kind eyes and hands ready to help.

Do not lose hope, for "hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (Rom 5:5)."

Let us be the ones who bring light into the body of families and into the community. Let us find a strong voice to name what is dark, so that it may be changed. Let us take each other by the hand and care for the bodies we live in. Let us be gentle to each other and protect our children together. For our hands were created by God, for the world. Our hearts are surrounded by God's presence. Let us open all gates, so we may be flooded by God's love.

And may our actions each day show tenderness and grace so that our light may shine brilliantly.



Questions for discussion



Let's ask ourselves:

1. Hearing today's reflections, what comes to mind?
2. This week, what can I do to name what is dark and help someone else's light shine?
3. As a community, how can we protect our children and better care for each other?

Prayer



Loving God, remove from our lives false religion and false confidence

and dependence on things

that do not reach out to the others.

And teach us to abide in your love.

Amen



Blessing

*Look at your hands.
See and touch the tenderness,
They are God's own for the world.*

*Look at your feet.
See the path and the direction.
They are God's own for the world.*

*Listen to your heart.
See the fire and the love.
They are God's own for the world.*

*Look at the cross.
See Jesus our saviour.
God's own for the world.*

*This is God's world.
We will serve God in it.*



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following team of writers, theologians and contributors for their work in developing the content for this year's World Week of Prayer booklet:

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Design by the World YWCA and Bertha Clark Design.