

“Let the little children come to me”



SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND EXPANDED

Biblical-theological framework for
ministering to children and young people



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This document was prepared by the Children and Youth Movement (CYM) to provide churches, theological institutions, Christian organizations and church leaders in general with an educational resource for Biblical, theological, and pastoral reflection about ministering to children, adolescents and youth. This document does not attempt to be conclusive. Rather, it is a starting point for later reflection and especially to take on greater and better commitments in this priority ministry.

The writing process¹ was participatory: for one year, the Bible and Theology Desk for JCYM worked on different documents that were later placed into the hands of more than 120 church leaders for them to be discussed, corrected, and improved. This text is the result of a long process with the participation of male and female pastors, theologians, educators and other leaders of different churches in the Americas among adolescents, young people and adults.²

For its part, this second edition is being published one year after the first with some grammatical changes, expansion of certain subjects and greater development coherence and order.

The document will now be the property of the people who would like to join this participatory process: reading it, discussing it, and meditating on it. The text is divided into paragraphs. Each paragraph has a number so they may be referenced (citing specific parts) with more ease in the study and reflection process. Our prayer is that what started as written text will become, because of the grace of God and the commitment of his People, a movement that, along with children and young people, will make an inclusive Church possible where people who have always been considered to be small today take on the starring role in the Mission and the ministry's core focus.

Let us recall what the Master taught us: “Let the little children come to me. Do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I assure you that those who do not trust in God the way a child does may not enter the kingdom of Heaven.” (Luke 18:16-17).³

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² Input that arose in a work group was also taken into account. That group had more than 100 participants in the Mesoamerican Children, the Heart of the Mission Conference held in San Salvador, El Salvador in October 2014. It was announced by the Joint Children and Youth Movement, along with a meeting by theologians, Bible scholars and pastors at the Latin American Conference on Childhood Theology hosted by the Child Theology Movement in Quito, Ecuador from August 17 to 21, 2015.

³ All the Biblical texts have been taken from the Bible Translation into Current Language, TLA, Sociedades Bíblica Unidas, 2003.

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INTRODUCTION

0. Children and adolescents represent the most numerous sectors in our Latin American societies and they are also the most vulnerable within the context of poverty, injustice and lack of protection.⁴ They are part of the groups that are most affected by diverse problems such as violence, migration, HIV/Aids, etc. This outlook is part of the daily reality in our communities and churches. Consequently, to face this problem, we must research the statistics and other quantitative information, especially when it comes to the causes. Based on that, it is our responsibility to reflect on how we are able to act from our perspectives of faith. As God's people, we must ask ourselves what the Scriptures teach us, rethink our Christian ethics, and evaluate our mission and the specific possibilities that we have to act as agents of transformation.

4 See the 2014 UNICEF report <http://www.unicef.org/spanish/sowc2014/numbers/>



Our children today

Children in a socially risky situation. Vulnerable and violated children

1. The statistics and studies about the situation of children and adolescents in Latin America show us an image that should seriously concern us: the “infantization of poverty.” The most numerous subgroup within the impoverished indigent population in our region consists of boys and girls. Poverty is understood to not just be financial scarcity, but also a lack of access to basic services related to health and formal education and to spaces for participation and protection. Violence, neglect, discrimination, exclusion, lack of protection and propagation of disease, etc., occur with a greater magnitude within the context of poverty.
2. In Latin America, six million children suffer physical abuse, including neglect. More than 80,000 boys and girls under 18 years of age die each year due to abuse by their parents. The five countries with the highest percentages of violence are Nicaragua, the

Dominican Republic, Peru, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. The situation is also reflected in the churches, especially based on an erroneous interpretation of the Scriptures related to physical punishment. In many cases, they are used to motivate and legitimize situations of abuse and violence in the heart of Christian families.

3. In research carried out in Peru and Bolivia about evangelical churches and domestic violence, in the section on beliefs and punishment and disciplinary practices toward children, the records show that more than half the evangelical families agree with or partially agree with physical punishment (more than one-third claim that they use instruments such as belts, rods, or other objects). It also corroborated that, in Peru, physical punishment in evangelical homes is used more frequently than in other families in Peruvian society. In Bolivia, despite the drop in the use of physical punishment in the family setting, psychological punishment climbed. In both countries, girls suffer the most physical punishment.⁵
4. That same research demonstrated that the incidence of sexual abuse of children is high: 90% of the cases involved girls, with relatives and acquaintances known by the victim being the most common perpetrators. In that regard, the sexual abuse percentages for adolescents between 15 and 19 years of age is 20% in various countries in the Americas. In addition, the problem with child trafficking⁶ is growing in the region: In Latin America, two million children and adolescents are victim of labor exploitation and sex-trade exploitation.
5. The impact that the HIV and Aids epidemic is having on children is devastating. More than two million children live with HIV and Aids in the world, and 47,000 are calculated to be in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although advances have been made in the region in the care and treatment of adults, this does not occur with children. Without the protective

setting of their families, vulnerable children and boys and girls who are orphaned due to HIV and Aids face a greater risk of lack of nutrition, violence, exploitation, and abuse.

6. Children involved in crime is a group that is seldom seen in the circle of victims and risky situations. Oftentimes there are organized bands or “urban tribes” that recruit minors, some at a very early age. They are influenced to sustain life styles impregnated with violence. The factors that contribute to involvement in these criminal gangs are diverse: cases where children are running away from intra-family violence, racial discrimination, extreme poverty, being social outcasts due to migration, political corruption, the ambition to obtain certain possessions influenced by the consumer society, etc. These groups are not only characterized by crime, but also by a strong sense of belonging, a community of respect and autonomy that oftentimes they do not feel in their families or from the rest of society.
7. The other side of this reality is that there are more and more social policies and initiatives from diverse stakeholders for children. During the last decade, various Latin American governments have delved into establishing public policies that are committed to this sector, running from more egalitarian opportunities related to education, health, gender, and justice in the case of domestic violence to generating equal opportunity contexts for those who live in poverty. Nevertheless, these problems persist and children, adolescents, and young people represent the most vulnerable sector related to social problems in our societies.

A problem for “adults.”

8. The figures cited in the preceding paragraph show a reality that we see around us day by day. Now, the question is: Why are children in the Americas the

5 Report Inside Four Walls. Evangelicals and Domestic Violence in Peru and Bolivia:

<http://institutopaz.net/recursos/resumen-ejecutivo-dentro-de-las-cuatro-paredes> <http://institutopaz.net/recursos/resumen-ejecutivo-dentro-de-las-cuatro-paredes-bolivia>

6 Trafficking represents illegal commerce in people for sexual exploitation, forced labor and other types of slavery.

most vulnerable group? What is so special about the circumstances in this sector for them to be the victims of such a predicament? The answers to these questions are closely related to the ways we understand and define who our children are. In turn, they are related to the place they hold in Latin American societies. The way we answer the basic question of what it means to be a boy and girl will result in diverse ways to act, to understand the reality, and to recognize the children in our communities. Faced with different ways of thinking about children will correspond to certain ways to act toward them.

9. The exclusionary practices and circumstances are frequently produced by viewing the situation of children as being natural within certain rigid, mistaken frameworks and structures. That gives rise to many questions whose answers will need to be addressed contextually and as a dialog between different areas of study (social, medical, psychological, theological, etc.) where the definition of a boy or girl is not reduced to biological categories and that, on the other hand, is believed based on our broad array of Latin American realities. That is why we will ask ourselves these questions throughout this document: What place do children have in our communities and churches? What contexts are used to define what a boy or girl is? What situations cause the ways we understand them? Is it possible for them to legitimize their vulnerability or even more so, place children into a risky situation?
10. The risky situation that children are in are mostly due to the adultcentric cosmovision that is part of our societies. What do we mean by that?

- a. Children have an inferior place in relation to adults, which is reflected in the lack of rights, spaces where they are included, etc.
- b. A division exists between adults and children that is presented as being “naturalized.” In other words, the division is based on means of comprehension and definitions that are accepted because -- supposedly -- they are inscribed in our human condition (biological and physical) instead of being due to social, cultural, and temporary

cosmovisions related to transitory, questionable age-related determinations. This division is based on characterizations of both groups.

- c. A very market distinction is in place between “things for children” and “things for adults.” This produces distinctions in their own power, legal, and value relationships between both groups where adults are considered to be superior to children.
 - d. There is an “adult logic” and a “child’s logic” in relation to how to view life. The way they are compared is detrimental and no way is found to value them equally. The former is viewed as what needs to be aspired to and the latter is viewed as an initial stage that must be overcome.
11. In summary, committed work with children and adolescents will imply not just dealing with the consequences of certain practices and contexts, but also the vision, thinking, and discourses that allow these circumstances. In other words, we need to question adultcentrism present in our societies. This phenomenon gives rise to children being victims of mistreatment, violence, and exclusion based on an unconscionable power for adults that is legitimized based on their supposed position of superiority.

Adultcentrism in our churches

12. Does adultcentrism affect our churches? Sadly, the answer is yes. We can find diverse cosmovisions that consider children’s places to be inferior that are now founded on Biblical readings and doctrinal principles. This is reflected in the ministerial organization modes, social practices, and leadership structures where it is evident that children are excluded.
13. In particular, we can view this adultcentrism present in the secondary place that children and adolescents hold in the church organization, and the fact that they do not play the leading role very often in activities that are considered to be exclusively for adults. From an even broader perspective, we view these dynamics in the way the doctrines and images of God are understood. They are based on an adult, masculine vision that represents Biblical revelation only partially. We could also mention some practices,

such as baptism, the Lord’s Supper, liturgy, etc., where children and adolescents are often times completely excluded.

14. But, as we said, adultcentrism is also presented as a way of understanding life and the world. Categories such as strength, domination, control, success, suspicion, rivalry, etc., are tied to an adult outlook. They are compared to the detriment of the categories about childhood that are linked to ideas such as dedication, trust, play, fellowship, and opening to other people. Opposition to these cosmovisions involves diverse definitions of the place inside the church, ways of forming ties in the community, spirituality practices, ways of exercising power, places within the hierarchy of the ecclesiastic structure, positioning within the heart of the family, etc., that each group determines in particular and faces irreconcilably.

Where are our children?

15. Faced with this outlook, a proposed change necessarily implies getting to the bottom of these problems: the cosmovisions (social, cultural, and religious) that sustain and underpin children’s position of vulnerability. In other terms, children need a new place in our families, our communities, our schools, our churches, and our countries. Therefore, today much is said about children as subjects of law where their capacity to choose, create, grow, participate, believe, and have a voice is recognized.

Children in the kingdom of God

“And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them: If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them; and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them: Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.” (Mark 9:35-37)

What it is and what it could be

16. Jesus taught us that the kingdom of God does not coincide with the outlooks of other kingdoms. He demonstrates it by placing the girl or boy of a peasant in the middle of the disciples and showing them that the Messiah identified with him or with her;⁷ vulnerable and violated, full of hopes and upheld by the love of God.
17. The image of a kingdom of God is inspired by the hopes of old Israel, especially in those times when people would be directly guided by Him. For this to happen, God would raise up a person who obeyed Him in everything and who would be a faithful witness for the others: the Messiah. Thus, in circumstances involving a moral crisis, in situations with huge social conflicts and, even more so, when they suffered the oppression of foreign governments that abused the faithful people of Israel, their hopes increased for the intervention of God through his chosen one and for the establishment of a time of justice, repentance, reconciliation, and abundance; especially for those who trusted in God and those who practiced his teachings.
18. The kingdom practiced and proclaimed by Jesus is inspired by hope, especially about the reality of God's action in relation to the people and their circumstances. In fact, it had to do with opting for

the most unfortunate of the society in those times: caring for the poor and prisoners and fighting against injustice in the social, political, economic and religious setting (Mathew 5:3, Luke 4:16-20). For Jesus, life in the kingdom implied acts of love and justice where ideologies were broken that legitimized the exclusion of women, marginalization of the infirm, scorn for foreigners, abuse of the weak, and disregard for children. In relation to the latter, the approach that Jesus took with children is striking, as shown in the Gospel of Mark: the young cripple in 2:1-12; and the daughter of Jairus in 5:22-24; 35-43; the daughter of the Syrophenecian woman in Mark 7:25-30; and the young epileptic in Marc 9:17-29, among so many other indirect allusions. When incorporating these stories into the Gospel of Mark and in the stories themselves, the hopes and experiences of the kingdom of God are obviously closely related to the life of children.

Little boys and girls in the kingdom

19. Throughout the Bible, a group of persons exists who are ordered to take care of: widows, orphans, and foreigners (Exodus 22:22; Deuteronomy 14:29; 24:17, 19-20, 21; 26:13; 27:19; Psalm 68:5; Jeremiah 49:11; James 1:18, cf. John 14:18). These represented sectors that had many denied rights, such as inheritance, fair work, voting on social decisions, social dignity, etc. In the particular case of orphans, reference is made to not just a situation of simple "children without parents," but to abandoned children. It has to do with those children whose close relatives did not want to take care of them after their parents died. In addition, it may indicate children whose parents and relatives have been killed in war and who wander looking for sustenance, as well as small children excluded from the family group due to reasons of "impurity." In other words, because they have contagious diseases, some physical deformity or some mental problem.
20. They may also be little children in whom Jesus takes a special interest and it may also be a metaphor for life in the kingdom. In particular, in Matthew 18, Jesus talks about the little children as an allusion to those

who follow Jesus as children (18:3). The metaphor of little children alludes to renouncing contemporary categories of power and domination and is a call for assuming a life of service option based on vulnerability as a condition of trust in God and dedication to your fellow man. "Like this girl" set in front of the disciples is not just a minor, she is also a peasant, a girl exposed to many difficult situations just because she is a girl and a minor. Her fragility would be even greater if she were a foreigner or orphan. That is how the little children in the kingdom come to be a metaphor for a life condition where Jesus serves and calls on his followers to serve others.

The kingdom and family

21. The subject of the family in the Bible enters, of course, into this proposed kingdom of God as a central depositary of education, social harmony, relationships, and growth through faith. First of all, the Bible should be recognized as not presenting any unique model or paradigm of what could be called the ideal or Christian family, as many people tend to believe. Instead, diverse concepts and organizations are described for the family tied to their contexts. Family relations and families were not equal in contexts involving war and peace and there were huge differences between rural and small town settings. On the other hand, the family was not equal for anyone who was a slave or for the poor masses in comparison to the few people who were wealthy in the time of Jesus. Thinking about one model and one model alone is an affront to the Bible in relation to the testimony it provides.
22. Nevertheless, we can find, both in the Old and New Testaments, some characteristic elements of what a family led by God is understood to be. It consisted of a place of belonging and identity (for example, the "faith of Israel," "the son of the Carpenter," etc.). In many cases, the family included the whole clan (as in the families of Abraham and Lot). It included the children who were raised not just by the parents but also by the aunts and uncles, older cousins, and grandparents,

⁷ Historically, people thought that Jesus chose a "boy." Possibly this belief in most people is due to the fact that translations chose "boy" over "girl" despite the fact that the Greek text is neutral when referring to a boy or a girl. In that regard, it is equally legitimate to imagine that it had to do with a girl or a boy.

even without knowing how they belonged to the same lineage. Relatives that did not know each other felt committed to helping each other due to the fact that they had a history in common and, in certain cases, they shared a family blessing or promise.

23. Another core issue is education about faith. Families were a fundamental space where faith in Israel and, afterward, Christian faith, was cultivated. It was not the only place though. Common spaces also existed for dialog and reflection that afterward came to be what we know now as a synagogue or the ekklesia (church) itself. The wise and teachers served to educate the people. Nevertheless, children were expected to be instructed in faith by the elders and wise in their own family group, or more individually, by the parents.
24. Added to this, the family was understood as a construct for mutual care relationships. In that construct of relationships and agreements called "family," the strongest members with the best possibilities should care for the more vulnerable and weak members. Thus, care for the elderly, infirm, servants and children are particularly important and are prescribed in the Law of God.
25. Despite the commandments, there were also those who were guided by other viewpoints or whose who applied them differently. For example, there is no denying that the way women were treated was very different than for young men, since in many cases they were treated as a possession and a servant (cf. Exodus 20:17). The same may be said of the relationship with children where the adults were considered to be more important. Added to that are the cases of people who belonged to a family with no blood ties or who were foreigners. In these cases, servants and slaves received different treatment despite being considered to be a part of the family. Generally, they were abused and when boys or girls were involved, the conditions could be worse.
26. In the eyes of Jesus and the New Testament, the family will occupy an important place but it will be deeply revised. That place is not made up of people with

blood ties; instead, it is due to the personal decision to become siblings under the guidance of the Holy Father. Although certainly Jesus is not going to break up a blood family per se, he does call for joining with people and building family ties with others in the life in the kingdom. In that regard, he calls for taking the most vulnerable among us into consideration and for building a solidary, united life. The vocation is to love one another (John 13:34-35) and allow yourself to be loved by the more vulnerable as a way of growing with them.

Children: the kingdom's theological subjects

"At that same time, Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit and said: I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Yes, Father, for this was well-pleasing in your sight."

27. Mark 9:35-37 reflects how Jesus uplifts children as a metaphor in the kingdom and the active place that they have. Everything that the followers of Jesus had lived through, everything that made them happy and filled them with glory, had been hidden from the wise and the understanding of the law and the religious leaders of the time, yet it was revealed to children. Therefore, within this context, it should be understood that children were conceived of as a "voice of divinity," both in the Jewish tradition and in the religiousness of Greco-Roman antiquity. In this tale, Jesus offsets two types of logic: that of the wise and understanding -- adults who supposedly knew all the authorized details and interpretations in the religious documents -- and that of the little children. The former represent reason, intelligence, calculation, control, all those adjectives that define the cusp of supposed maturity that makes it possible to speak with objectiveness, determination, wholeness, and right, in other words, God Himself. But in the end, the ones who were chosen to receive the divine mysteries are the children. Jesus uses them as a symbol, as theological subjects as a key to revelation.
28. Jesus uses the image of children as a metaphor on several occasions (Matthew 18:1-2, 19:13-14,

Mark 10:15-16, Luke 18:14-17). This claim has been interpreted different ways: as a personal aptitude, a social place, an attitudinal characteristic, etc.) But it is precisely the contrast that is explicit in the passage that shows us a better comprehension of its meaning. Using the image of little children is to make an ironic investment in the rigidity of the Law, which, as was stipulated in those times, does not require any follow-up or compliance on the part of children. From this perspective, Jesus may be said to have defined the kingdom as a reality that goes beyond compliance with a religious standard and a particular way of viewing God himself, revolving around an interpretation by adult men who knew the law.

29. As we know, Biblical texts are not just stories that describe events in a linear fashion. On the contrary, they are events that possess a very deep symbolic meaning. What does it mean, then, to see God from the viewpoint of children and not from the viewpoint of people who possess authority (moral, spiritual, institutional, and academic) to do so? A claim may be made that these two types of logic present in the passage represent different ways of viewing God. And we are not just referring to specific images or discourses. Instead, we are referring to different ways to approach what is divine.
30. In Mark 9:35-37, the child placed in the center as a metaphor for the kingdom has several meanings: it represents Jesus' claims that the kingdom implies a special commitment to those people who were excluded from society, which is a situation of vulnerability and injustice. While there are some who maintain those unjust borders, God acts to include and create justice. But Jesus' action is also an affirmation of empowerment, where little children symbolize a metaphor for the revelation of God, in juxtaposition to what is believed to be correct and true. These types of searches are characteristic of adulthood.

From a Patriarchal God to the Family God



Images of God

31. Different images of God exist. Where do they come from? God decides to reveal himself through stories. That is where we name him by calling him Father, Friend, Savior, or we assign him traits such as Loving, Merciful, Compassionate, Gentle, and many more. Comprehension of God and the way we describe and know him is directly related to the way we live our faith on a daily basis and how we follow the Word. Even more so, the images of God that we use are tied to the practices and cosmovisions that we promote.
32. The images of God are just partial expressions of what he is and how the divine acts; since God is always more than we can put into words: no speech can describe him finally and fully. Therefore, nobody can say that they have a full knowledge of God. Religious discourse becomes dangerous when it does not recognize those dynamics. We tend to believe that our particular ways of understanding and defining God are absolute. We forget that we are always interpreting his Actions, from when we read the Bible to the diverse experiences that we have. It is even more dangerous when, in practice, a discourse, an action or cosmovisions in particular attempt to represent themselves as being absolute in the name of God and they view themselves as being exempt from questioning. Therefore, we should ask ourselves: What conception of God does adultcentrism in our churches uphold? To which image of God are we referring when we speak about the kingdom?
33. One of the images used the most in the Christian world to speak about God is that of the Father. This designation is described in his tie to his faithful followers, who are called sons and daughters. This image is not based on the imposition of an honorific title nor on the authoritarian prerogative in his

capacity as the progenitor. Without overlooking his virtues and place for exaltation, it is important to observe that God is Father since he is related as such with his sons and daughters. God's parental practices also represent a demand for reciprocity for his followers who want to be called son or daughter. This expression is striking: "that you may be children of your Father" (Matthew 5:45; cf. 1 John 3:1.10; 4:15), where their ethics and life are made manifest by resembling the Father so they are called his son or daughter.

34. The image of God as Father is contextually influenced, although not subordinated, by the tie that the father and son/daughter established in those times. Preserving the honor of being the head of the family or paterfamilias through the obedience and good testimony of the children was, doubtlessly, one of the most important ways of honoring the father. Honor as a social construct led fathers to fulfill their task of caring for their sons and daughters in terms of love, justice, and dedication.

With the divergences that we may have today about the meaning and performance of what is fatherhood, Biblical teachings and witnesses about a God who is the Father that closely and freely guides, teaches, takes care of, holds a dialog with, and assists his children is not just current, but it is very necessary. In the testimony of Jesus, the Son, we are able to see a Father who breaks with some of the violent historic authoritarian models and a relationship burdened by the difference between sons and daughters. The testimony of the New Testament continues in the path open by the Son to overcome chauvinistic and paternalistic practices that disqualify and disparage boys and girls.

35. All images are a construct of feeling based on a situation that has been experienced, of an encounter with a person with whom a relationship was had or that you may want to understand. In that direction, the conception held of paternity in each culture and person will influence how this God is tied to and understood to be the Father. Unfortunately, there are people who conceive of God as a Father and

they view him as punishing, castrating, unmoving, authoritarian, or insensitive. But, is this the way that the Scriptures predominantly present God as the Father? Is it possible that the divine metaphor for Father that we are projecting or in which we are including characteristics, roles, and feelings that pertain to other experiences are not that of the image expressed in the Scriptures and based on the testimony of Jesus Christ (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2)? A fundamental key for discerning what Jesus meant by Father lies in getting to know his ties, his reciprocal actions, and his teachings about God.

36. The construct of the image of God should not be based exclusively on the names that are assigned to him in Scriptures. They are a product of the revelation of God in the story of his people, i.e., they are assignments that his people have made based on how he interacts with them. Thus, doing justice to the Biblical revelation, it is also fitting to think about God through his actions that are culturally assigned as being maternal. This God raises his children; he feeds them; he is sweet, understanding, and close emotionally to them; he loves them enormously. By God's actions toward his creation, we are forced to designate names and roles for him that possibly are not explicitly mentioned in Scriptures but are inspired by his testimonies.
37. What we understand to be the "image of God" is not a neutral exercise. Instead, it has to do with the interpretation that we have of the divine revelation as well as our options in life. When we think about God in relation to children, we should mention hundreds of Biblical details and testimonies that we may have possibly set aside due to ideological reasons. We should perceive the actions of God through his multiple historic gestures revealed in Jesus of Nazareth and through thinking about his way of approaching us as a child, poor child. As someone who is persecuted, an immigrant, a worker, big brother, friend, savior, crucified, and resuscitated. Because God has revealed himself to us, mostly through his Son, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2).

About the Trinitarian God community and the family

38. Related to what was said in the preceding point, another basic subject arises that is essential to Christian theology that has been set aside many times: when we speak of God, we are speaking of a Trinitarian God. The images from the New Testament express the relationship among the three people in the Trinity as a community. Communion is oftentimes expressed in terms of family ties: lifelong community, deep love, mutual care, a common vision and mission, incorporation of others to be joined by family ties, and other traits. In the ministry of Jesus, the role of Father is dominant and is assigned to the first person in the Trinity. He defines himself and is defined as the Son. The Holy Spirit is the other paraclete, i.e., the Holy Spirit continues in the ministry and ties to Jesus in perfect harmony with the Father. The importance of this tie between Jesus and the first person in the Trinity may be noted, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew where the first person in the Trinity is called Father 45 times.


39. Thinking about the Trinity as a family leads us to opening other images and family roles. We can find God in both the Old and New Testaments where he is tied to his people and follows roles that were stipulated in that era as feminine or maternal. This latter observation will depend to a great degree on the conception of masculinity that is held, even today, as a construct for the idea of paternity of maternity. Actually, they are not exempt from divine nature, their affectionate love and sacrifice, their dedication to the children, and not just to the creation of a people as though they were little boys and girls.

Their delicacy and tenderness may be perceived in the teachings and in their merciful treatment of the people when Jesus himself speaks in the first person and says, in the name of the Father: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." (Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34). This same vulnerability, theologically speaking, is expressed in the second person in the

Trinity incarnate. In Jesus we can know the "God with us" in a swaddling child. The story that was related in Mark 9:35-37 (and in parallel) takes that same direction where he upheld the daughter of his followers and encourages them to look at her as a metaphor for God incarnate. This theological detail is no less when we want to understand what Jesus tells us as Son of the Father, and as the older brother.

40. The Trinity is linked to family ties and especially to children when Jesus is introduced as the older brother. The Gospel of John and the Johannine letters use the term only son to speak about the exclusive nature and of the particular relationship between Jesus and the Father (John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18; 1 John 4:9). Jesus is also called the only son (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 1:6.) This term is associated with siblings and children of God. In that sense, Jesus is the oldest brother from among many brothers and sisters. In Hebrews 2:11-18, Jesus is spoken about under the figure of the priesthood as the leader from among brothers and sisters. In this sibling relationship, and unlike communities of priests, women, foreigners, and children are not excluded; rather they are a fundamental part of the ministry of the family of God.

41. God's closeness to Jesus transmits the message of a God that is very close to us; he is a nearby God who is closely tied to his creation and especially to "little boys and girls." Jesus being the oldest brother implies his ties as such to the younger brothers and sisters where once again we are in the presence of the metaphor of a child. The Trinity as a family is a family that is open to adding new members to the family's relationships of love and commitment. The mission of God the Father that entrusts him with his Son is continued by the Holy Spirit, which trains the sons and daughters of God to advance the objective of reconciling the world with itself. It is valuable for the mission of the sons and daughters of God to not be understood as a task taken in parallel to the fact they are God's family. They are a family where boys and girls are the main members and, beyond that, a metaphor for life.



Ecclesiology from a Child's Stance

Churches for children

42. Children as a metaphor for the kingdom did not just reformulate the life of the first of Jesus' followers; they also guided the imagination about what was conceived of as the church. The term itself (church) was one just one of others (body, house, family, temple) used to describe and understand the relationships and agreements that the group of Jesus' followers sustained. Nevertheless, the use of that term was re-signified in light of Jesus' teachings, e.g., about the involvement of slaves, women, children, and foreigners. These groups of people did not participate in the Greek *ekklesia*, while the Christian church in the beginning was made up of a large percentage of them.
43. If Jesus' followers should have been like little children to be part of the kingdom of God, what should the churches be like that were part of it? The church thought of itself using the metaphor of little boy and also, although not exclusively, based on children's reality. If, as was said previously, Mark 9:35-37 teaches about simplicity and vulnerability as core qualities in the followers of Jesus, the church that wants to be witness to life in the kingdom should create its relationship based on those life conditions. It should be a community of children, of simple people who trust in their Lord and dedicate themselves to the others in love that creates ties where the power relationships circle in search of a blessing for fellow man and to bear witness to the presence of God. On the contrary, when a church builds its ties based on the power of some over others, children are unavoidably disparaged or even oppressed. But also with this disparagement, the possibility of the church being a true sign of God on the earth is excluded. Therefore, there should be no confusion between a

church where there are "little boys" with a church whose DNA is made up of being like little children as was taught by Jesus.

44. A church that takes the words of Jesus seriously needs to clear away its adultcentrism. No attempt should be made to ignore the fact that the metaphor of a boy or girl has its limitations, as does any metaphor. Thinking about a church of children is not the same as talking about an "infantized" church. It is, however, talking about a church that questions adultcentric viewpoints that are governed, e.g., by relationships of domination, by ethics based on suspicion, by exaltation of force and of contempt for weakness, by a competitive sense of life, and, literally by disparaging children as "immature" or "incomplete" subjects. Clearly, there is no desire to ignore the "growth" process that children are in. What is being questioned, instead, is what growth is understood to be. In other words, we should question the idea of "maturation" that we inculcate in children who trust us. From what place do we feel able and prepared to "train them" and how is it that the mutuality relationship between adults and children is broken by adultcentrism to the point of communicating a twisted look at the kingdom of God.
45. While in some sectors there is a positive awakening related to the relationship of children with the rest of the church, unfortunately, most churches and the people who create an opinion about churches continue to display an anti-kingdom vision. Such a categorical affirmation is directly related to the words of Jesus that told us that if we are not like these children, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3). Adultcentrism is part of this anti-kingdom vision. In certain areas, even "evangelization" and "discipleship" imply losing faith in our fellow man, protecting ourselves against the risk of loving, blind obedience, forbidding ourselves to play and enjoy using our senses, structuring life and following the sequence of ecclesiastic commands, etc., which are issues where the mission is confused with religiosity. The church should question its adultcentrism but also its conception of being an adult in light of the teachings of the kingdom and under the guidance of children who re-evangelize it.

Churches that learn to play

46. One of the characteristics of childhood is play (although unfortunately oftentimes they do not play because they have even had the right to play taken away). This is not just a recreational activity; it is one way that they learn to socialize and understand the world around them. Playing is differentiated considerably from the way that being adult-centric attempts to comprehend reality: enjoyment is positioned above compliance, spontaneity about rules, the body and emotions above reason; esthetics above writing.
47. In that sense, do churches need to be based also on the logic of play? What do we mean by that? That the church's being should more openly reflect the characteristics of play in the liturgy, in the institutional organization, in the leadership, preaching, and teaching schema, etc. This means that affection, the place for spontaneity, bodily movements, flexibility, questioning the establishment, the use of imagination, and the plurality of ways of doing things -- the way that most children live day to day -- take a core position in our ecclesiastical communities. We should be original and use our creativity in our services, the liturgies should be more inclusive, there should be more participation by the voice of children in making decisions and in the ecclesiastical projects, including other elements that we could mention.

Children at the core

48. From everything that has been developed so far, we might say that a church that walks on the paths of the kingdom of God makes its children one of its main agents. What we do not want to insinuate with this is that children should be a unique subject to take into account from the kingdom's perspective. Boys and girls need a place with greater centrality. Even more, understanding the kingdom in this key area shows us the importance of making a commitment to any person and any circumstance that reflects the presence of injustice and exclusion.

49. As we said, speaking about children at the core is to give a more leading role to a sector whose vulnerability comes from making them invisible and excluded. This implies empowering them, recognizing their creative capacity, the right to speak, etc. Therefore, we should re-imagine our ecclesiastical structures, both the theology and pastoral that sustain them, such as the participation of its members. How can we allow them to really be “in the center” for that expression to stop being just a cliché? How can we learn to listen to their voices better, learn from their capacity, deeply consider their viewpoints? The church should be re-evangelized in terms of returning to understanding the saving message of Jesus that is before us as people. We have to learn to “read human lives,” which brings us to the Biblical texts where Jesus first of all “looked at the person” and saw God’s will.

50. Children being in the center, then, calls us to:

- a. Do away with the adultcentrism that conditions our way of viewing and disparaging them;
- b. Review our conception of childhood and adulthood, especially based on their ties, without viewing adulthood as something that is positioned above childhood;
- c. Observe that vulnerability and vulnerabilization are different conditions and practices. Vulnerability is a condition that is not negative in and of itself. This requires great care but it also makes it possible to create relationships of mutual dedication and care, which are difficult to create when you take the defensive. Vulnerabilization is a practice that makes a person lacking in defense and leads him or her to suffer the havoc of personal and social conditions that are hostile toward people. Thus, adultcentrism, for example, makes children vulnerable because it disqualifies them, does not see their intrinsic qualities and may make legitimizing their mistreatment more real. In that sense, for children to be “in the center” implies seeing their vulnerability as a richness, but also, seeing that we can cause them grave damage.

Theology and playing

51. Every way of understanding faith, spirituality and the church are closely tied to a vision of God, to a theology. In other words, the ways in which we understand and define God will give rise to, will allow, will make possible (or not!) certain practices and cosmovisions. By making this claim, we are basing ourselves on the fact that theology is a practice that every believer and every church develops in their daily life when they view their circumstances in the light of faith. We have already seen that a preponderant adultcentric image of God exists, which also legitimizes and promotes certain images, practices, cosmovisions, and dynamics. That is why we wonder: How can we create a theology that is more sensitive to our children? How can we develop a theology where children are also craftsmen and not just mere vessels?

52. The path we need to take consists of facilitating a theology based on children. This means building spaces where children are listened to about matters of faith, the Bible, and the Church. Of course, adults have a great deal to teach. But we can also create spaces where children’s insights and images teach us more about God. When theology is linked to childhood, play arises as the place and the logic that may be needed to find God in our fellow man. When people think about a place, we are talking about the world of which we are a part, and we assume our positioning and capacity faced with it. Thinking about the world as a game leads us to rethink the world that we are unfamiliar with and of which, even so, we are a part: the world of feelings, of re-creation, of no order, of freedom of imagination and freedom from the rigid constrictive structure. The world of which we are a part is organized by control, competitiveness, efficiency, superiority, etc., where everything needs to be organized (number 1, number 2... cf. “a God of order”), organized by category (leaders, converts, people of the world, social classes, ethnicities) or by success levels (excellence, work goals, achievements), etc.

In a theology right from childhood, play helps us to experience the reality based on other parameters, such as, for example, based on relationships (friendship, fellowship), based on constructive creativity (play as a construct for agreements and imaginary types of logic), based on the randomness of life (not subject to rigid rules), and it also allows us to understand the central position occupied by human life in enjoyment.

53. We use logic to describe the living process we use to organize our knowledge and the reality of which we are a part. Logic is not the same as rationalism. In theological logic, play is involved in all of human life, obviously, its corporeality and sensoriality. The logic of play is different from the controlling rationalist logic. During play, there is no need to know everything or to do everything. What it seeks is to associate one with the other as a purpose in and of itself, not as a means. Utilitarian relationships are overcome by a notion of “we.” This is the sister of mutually supplying ourselves with the needs of the soul such as: having fun, imagining new realities, reaching mutual agreements, being able to spend time, empowering motor skills that are usually put off, etc.

In the logic of play, God becomes known to us in our whole being. The theological knowledge process that is exercised involves all of human life and not just rationality. God becomes known based on the body, emotions, senses, community, randomness, and imagination.

54. This means huge changes in how the church recognizes itself as a community of learning. That is why we wonder: How do you build educational offices in churches? Are children able to create theology -- to make manifest their vision of who God is and how to act?

Mission for children: conversion, evangelization, discipleship and pastoral

55. To consider the mission from the boys' and girls' point of view is to change our Churches' traditional types of logic. In church practices, it tends to be the adults who evangelize children and try to steer them to Jesus, turning them into vessels for evangelization and not into subjects of mission. A review of Jesus' message starting from the theology of (or from) childhood should lead to a review of our Biblical conception and the evangelization practices.

56. Generally, conversion occurs within the framework of an adultcentric, pragmatic experience where the boy or girl follows a predetermined formula (raise your hand, say the prayer, and go to the altar) to be "saved" as a purpose. But the Scriptures teach us that evangelization is a process where the metaphor of "following" (Jesus) is one of the most important inasmuch as full life is appropriated in the kingdom of God as a lifestyle. In that sense, evangelization is not just a product of a personal faith decision in a given moment, it is also the result of a context that allows the good news to become real in history. With that having been said, evangelization is not just spreading the "good news," but also assisting with appropriating them. Seen from that stance, it will be understood to involve a lifelong process.

Therefore, we are able to see that evangelization is not an action based on a personal decision. It is also related to the social decisions that allow it to be a reality in the believer's integral life. In other words, evangelization is a process to assist people in living life in fullness and, in many cases, to bring down the barriers that keep them from completely enjoying that life.

57. Conversion first seen in childhood invites us to consider it as a faith experience that transforms us and changes constantly on the pathway of life. From the few references we have of Jesus' childhood, Luke makes particular mention when he tells us that "The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him" (Luke 2.40). A similar description is given in relation to John the Baptist (Luke 1.80).

58. Children grow integrally: physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually, and intellectually. Based on this experience, the church could carry out its evangelization work and beg forgiveness based on each one of these processes. That is why they should be considered to be agents of change in society (Isaiah 11:6). In that sense, what is forgiven becomes an adventure of assistance and caring for faith; the pastoral work would dare to change the control programs to "entertain" and "calm," which are typical aspects of traditional liturgies. It would incorporate the inclusion of community life and its share in leadership and ministry and make them visible in the ministry of the Church. Likewise, we can think about the liturgy and services as spaces for boys and girls to participate in, as well as for including them in practices that are so central such as administration and participation in the Lord's Supper.

59. Aware of how vulnerable boys and girls are in a world awash in sin, we should choose a type of evangelization that cares for their lives versus structures and people who are hostile to children. The Church's pastoral work should opt for taking care of children's wellbeing. This implies a radical resistance and claim against any practice that threatens a full life: violence, malnutrition, trafficking, mistreatment, exploitation, etc. A pastoral that stifles these realities becomes an accomplice of those examples of injustice since it does not follow its role of pointing out the sin and calling for repentance.

60. Evangelization based on children offers broader horizons than evangelization for children. It suggests new guidelines for the church for missionary actions with children. It not only safeguards their "souls" -- it follows Jesus' call to be like them by sharing a restorative message for human relationships based on simplicity and vulnerability that requires a mature love and a huge spiritual strength. Because you can only receive by giving, because by dedicating your life, your life will be found.

Churches that make themselves heard

61. Churches should be a prophetic voice for situations that involve children's risk and vulnerability, but not as an external element. Instead, it should start with the context of boys and girls in the same community of faith and its context. From there, we believe that some pledges that the ecclesiastical communities are able to take on are the following:

- a. Children situations should have a more important place in the times related to the community's preaching, teaching and liturgy.
- b. Based on what was learned from boys and girls, the church should dare to review its structures and internal power relationships. In other words, it should dare to be more flexible, relationship-based, transparent, and trustworthy as an action with the "girl or boy in the center," the same way that Jesus did.
- c. Children should play a more leading role in diverse areas of the church, such as in teaching, in the ministries, and in the liturgical moments.
- d. We should incorporate practices and dynamics that are generally applied to childhood in the interactions with the whole church and its membership to review those boundaries that so sharply divide the groups in different age ranges. The core matter here is the inclusion of an esthetic dimension (the use of images, the theater), of a participatory dialog within the community (the use of narrative, preaching and teaching that are built together and not transmitted in a single direction), and the inclusion of activities related to ludic actions (games, dance, painting, sculpture, etc.).
- e. Work spaces should be opened up with other social organizations (religious or not) that are committed to the vulnerable position of children in the neighborhoods and the church's communities.

**Challenges:
transform
and be
transformed**



Brave, valuable actions

62. The situation of children, adolescents and youth in the Americas requires brave (prophetic) actions that are coordinated by the Christian churches, institutions, and organizations. Jesus' message calls us to act in two directions: to become involved with children in the processes that promote integral wellbeing, plus to allow children to confront our models of an adultcentric life and to lead us on the paths to human transformation. This is a two-way transformation process: do more of what we have so far been doing for children, and allow children to do the great deal that they can do for our adult world. In other words, transform and be transformed.
63. The challenges for our churches, for Christians in particular, are many. Some of them have been enunciated with pastoral urgency in this document. The following is a brief overview of these challenges:

A service-oriented, prophetic church

64. The Lord wants a Church that gives testimony to His love among the neediest people. As was stated in the first part of this document, children are not one of, they are the first of, these populations. But, in addition to poverty, the statistics on violence are well known (including gender violence against girls) and they should include neglect, commercial sexual exploitation, limited access to education, health problems and HIV/Aids.

65. The role of the churches in civil society -- especially in political spaces, organizations and institutions that work with children -- is becoming increasingly well known. We see NGOs, municipalities, schools (private and public), civil organizations, etc., that seek ecclesiastical communities or faith-based organizations to develop projects, put together consulting groups, help in emergencies, prepare legislative proposals to the benefit of children, etc.
66. Therefore, a challenge does not consist of beginning something that we have not done up to this point. Instead, it consists of delving deeper into what we are doing, of learning from the best experiences and of checking how effective what we have done has been. It also consists of, in addition to its social sense, imbuing those actions with a political character and of taking on the role that our churches may fulfill in the field of having a public effect on children's rights. A ministry revolving around promoting and defending children's rights is still an unexplored field for many churches.
67. The challenges that occur when trying to perform the helpful prophetic role (Proverbs 31:8-9) more faithfully and pertinently have to do with raising your voice along with the different social stakeholders who are committed to the situation of children and adolescents related to awareness raising about this social sector's situation. It also includes the need to create more public policies, report situations, discourses and abusive, violent practices. It especially has to do with being an agent for change through pastoral assistance and coping with specific sets of problems in our communities.

Sensitive and learning church

68. We need to recognize that our churches have mistaken conceptions about children and the world around them. This lack of knowledge is something we share with society in general. We talk about it and we think we have the last word, but, actually we have explored very little and have a great deal to learn. Sometimes we think that they are inferior beings, that some are people on the way to "becoming people"

or that they are small adults who still have not gained the knowledge or reached the conditions that they need to be real adults. In this perception of children, adults are better than the children are.

69. It bears mentioning here that there are negative effects that these perceptions have for our ministry to benefit children and also for the ministry that children should develop to benefit adults. Therefore, as this document points out, we need to transform how we have understood children's world up to this point. The ways in which we act toward this understanding and the place that we grant it in our social context depend on this understanding.
70. Inter-disciplinary dialog with the sciences related to education, psychology, anthropology, politics, theology, etc., is becoming urgent on this path to learning. We need to review, among other matters, our traditional ways of understanding children and our visions of infancy, the theological discourses that we have employed and the way we have related with children.
71. Jesus, for example, had an understanding of children that helps us understand how he respected and valued children and gave them a place in society and in the kingdom (Luke 10.21). He placed children before the adult disciples, for example (Matthew 18.1-2; 19.13-14). He followed them the same way as people followed Him. He used that as an example to show that they were also disciples, with no distinction from the rest (Mark 10.15-16). But the arm gesture with the girl or boy placed in the center showed the tie and identification with them that he had with few people. This makes us think about a church that identifies with their structures and actions.

Inter-generational, inclusive church

72. Churches in general are made up of young people and adults. In addition to that make-up, we also know that the mentality that governs our ecclesiastical culture and the culture in general is adultcentric. In other words, we relate to each other, we see the society, and we experience spirituality "the way adults do."

73. This adultcentrism is translated into ecclesiastic practices that present adults as the model of what is finished up and completed and children as people who are waiting to “grow up.” Thus, the adult world is understood to be superior to a child’s world so asymmetric power relationships are developed between adults, who are considered to be superior, and children, who are considered to be inferior. This adultcentrism characterizes our culture and delimits many of our models for family life, for social organization, and for Christian spirituality.

74. Perhaps the above can help us understand the reasons why the voice of children is not listened to the same way as the authority of adults is perceived. In many cases, it is not even heard. How different we behave in comparison to God! Jesus unveiled even the face of God through children, validated their presence, listened to their words and designated them, as was said previously, as signposts of his kingdom (Mt. 19.14).

75. The challenge is no less: churches need to listen to the voice of children and they need to be allowed to play a leading role, subject to actions and the law, as an ecclesiastical and social practice that empowers them, includes them, and seeks fullness in life. The churches’ challenge is even to take into account the value of children and to validate their place in the church and in society in general.

Tender, just church

76. The figures for violence against children are alarming. Faced with this punishing reality, churches must play the role of defenders of children that not just fight for their rights to protection, they live in such a way that they give testimony to protection, safety, and justice.

We are making the protection that we are looking for out there (outside the churches) patent here (inside the churches; we can say the same thing about safety, tenderness, justice and full wellbeing). Churches can be safe places, places of loving protection and tender care for children, like the model bequeathed to us by our friend Jesus.

77. In that regard, the church should reflect on the relationship between diverse practices involving physical punishment for children -- which are legitimized by reductionist readings of the Bible text -- and the promotion of contexts involving abuse and violence. The faith-based communities are responsible for assuming the positive discipline and urging that punishment in any of its forms be left behind. It is important to emphasize here that having limits is necessary and is a right of children. This implies that parents need to be trained and guided to develop their own judgment, self-control capacity, self-esteem and autonomy so the way they behave in society is appropriate in the culture in which they live. Thus, positive discipline, based on respect for children, makes it possible to develop their potential.

78. Proper treatment should be the distinctive trait of the churches’ ministry toward children: safe spaces where they participate freely, where they learn about God and experience his love in an environment of respect and value, where their rights are recognized, where their value is considered and where their contributions are taken into account as a God-given gift to transform everyone.

A church that trains and protects

79. Part of the church’s mission is to train in faith. But this training is not limited to transmitting the doctrinal teachings that are commonly summarized in the confessional credos or in the declarations of faith. Instead, training encompasses education for daily life, for citizen responsibility, and for practicing the values of the kingdom of God. This is an education that is oriented toward training citizens in the kingdom of God that live their faith in solidarity and claim their rights with dignity.

80. An upbringing is a life-long task that begins in the closest circle, i.e., in most cases, in the family. And the church plays, along with families -- and with other people who care for children, a primordial educational role so they are healthy, healing, formative and just spaces for care and learning.⁸

8 Faith-based communities and organizations that develop programs and services and that have direct contact with people under 18 years of age, would do well to adopt a written policy to keep them protected. This is generally known as a policy to protect children and adolescents. This policy should help create a safe, positive environment and demonstrate that the church or organization seriously assumes its responsibility to take care of them. Unfortunately, surrounded by so many people who are genuinely interested in children, it should not be ignored that unscrupulous people with bad intentions (sexual abusers, or traffickers in children and adolescents) are also known to join in. Therefore, resounding measures should be taken to increase the possibility of keeping these people out. WorldVision has published an informational notebook about this subject called: *Churches and organizations that are safe for children and adolescents that may be seen here: <http://www.wvi.org/es/IglesiasSeguras>*

Proposal for Educational Mediation



The team made up of the Bible and Theology Panel for the 'Juntos con la Niñez y Juventud Movement' (Joint Children and Youth Movement) has prepared valuable materials to promote Biblical, theological, and pastoral reflection for the ministry with children, adolescents and youth. This is the second edition of these Biblical-theological framework for the ministry with children and youth. The same as with the first edition, four workshops are offered below. The purpose is to encourage people and introduce them to the leading Christian churches, institutions, theologies and organizations in general whose work is related to studying the subject.



1. Each workshop's structure is illuminated by the Biblical text of Luke 10:30-37. An approach is being proposed by taking a look at the reality of children, adolescents, and youth.
2. The illustrations are meant to graphically describe what is stated in the document. The images are meant to work inclusively with people who have a problem reading. In addition, they are meant to explore and integrate other paths to knowledge, such as the visual and emotional memory paths and to cause a conversation that is even richer in possibilities for sharing experiences and for creating significant knowledge. The fact that proposed graphics are not meant to replace the written material should be taken into account. Therefore, shared reading and comments throughout the document are very relevant. The workshops are oriented toward reading sections of the document.
3. The first workshop is based on two illustrations. The second, third, and fourth workshops begin with viewing one illustration. The fifth workshop does not use an illustration as a start-up point for reflection. All the illustrations refer to the contents developed in the documents prepared by the team made up of the Bible and Theology Panel for the 'Juntos con la Niñez y Juventud Movement'

Each illustration is accompanied by stirring questions. The idea behind the questions is to encourage dialog about the contents of the illustration pertaining to the workshop that is being held. We suggest that an accumulative reflection process be moved along so each workshop will be adding the most outstanding issues from the preceding workshop. This task must be taken on by the workshop coordinator or facilitator. Notes should be kept in a notebook to gather the contributions by the participants to provide feedback to the reflection process with the contributions that the participants make. These notes are very important and it would be a good idea to send them to the team made up of the Bible and Theology Panel of the 'Juntos con la Niñez y a Juventud Movement to be used as input for their work in the future.

4. At the end of each workshop, the section of text is indicated where more detailed information about the conversations may be found and people are invited to read the section related to the illustration and the pertinent workshop.



FIRST

WORKSHOP:

Children, adolescents and youth are on the road to our communities “stripped, beaten, half dead” Luke 10:30

Introduction: In the first workshop we are going to affirm our stance as people who believe in the God of Jesus Christ who invites us to share his love, mercy, and justice. We are also going to acknowledge the situations that children, adolescents, and youth go through currently that contradict the concept of “having an abundant life.” The reflection should be oriented toward connecting the “hard” data in the surveys with local stories that come from nearby and are well known with faces and names.

1. We will gather into small groups to look at illustration 1 and share what catches our attention. We are going to rejoice in the community love, solidarity, and justice project to which we are invited. Then we are going to stop at the second illustration and look at all the situations shown in illustration 2. A flipchart may be used to take notes so they are visible and may be revisited afterward.
2. Then we are going to talk about our own experiences in relation to the situations expressed in the illustration. We can ask ourselves about the following issues:
 - Have we experienced cases similar to what illustration 2 depicts?
 - Are there any other situations in our reality that are connected to violence, social risk for children, adolescents and youth that are not expressed in illustration 2?
 - What are those other situations?
 - How do we feel when we face these situations that children, adolescents, and youth go through?
 - How do we question that reality based on our Christian identity?
 - A devotional moment should be taken. It may consist of the following steps: write the names of children, adolescents, and youth down on slips of paper that are in situations involving risks, violence, and distress. The slips are placed on the floor around illustration 1. Candles will be lit as a sign of commitment to transform the conditions in which these children, adolescents, and youth live and they will be invited to live in the Project of Jesus that is represented in the illustration.
3. The first part of the document should be read, starting with numeral 1 up to numeral 7.



SECOND

WORKSHOP:

2

Recognizing aggressors Luke 31-32

Introduction: this second workshop refers to adults who are responsible for the wellbeing of children, adolescents and youth but who do not fulfill that task. We are going to talk about who the “assailants” are and who acts indifferently and with a lack of commitment.

1. We will gather into small groups to look at the illustration and share what catches our attention. The attitudes that adults have that appear in the illustration should be pointed out. We can brainstorm about them and jot them down on the flipchart.
2. Then we are going to talk about our own experiences in relation to the situations expressed in illustration 3. We can ask ourselves:
 - Do we know about similar cases?
 - Are there other situations in our reality where adults act similarly to what appears in the illustration?
 - What role does the church community play in this set of problems?
 - What is being done currently at the ecclesiastical and civil level to transform these situations?
 - How can we improve what is being done?
 - A devotional moment should be taken. It may consist of the following steps: placing items on the floor that represent attitudes of selfishness, violence, disinterest, abandonment, lack of love, etc., that adults express toward the lives of children, adolescents, and youth (they may be some thorns, rocks, dry dirt, etc.). Then some flowers are placed on the rocks and the dry dirt is sprinkled with water, seeds, and fruit (representing the capacity to change that we have as Christians who are always invited to change by following Jesus Christ).
3. The first part of the document should be read, starting with numeral 8 up to numeral 15.



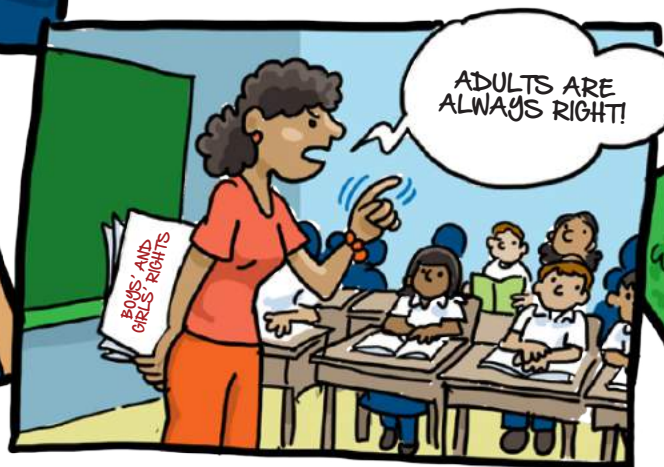
THIRD WORKSHOP:

Our commitment to transformation of the different forms of violence directed against children, adolescents and youth, Luke 10:33-37

Introduction: this third workshop references the initiatives that are promoted to achieve the wellbeing of children, adolescents and youth.

The proposal consists of talking and evaluating the stance we take to perform interventions and to reflect on some of the underlying motivations.

1. We will gather into small groups to look at the illustration and share what catches our attention.
2. Then we are going to talk about our own experiences in relation to the situations expressed in the illustration. We can ask ourselves:
 - Do we know about similar experiences?
 - Are there any ecclesiastical or civil initiatives in our reality that are similar that support children, adolescents and youth? The comments should be jotted down to have a map of the stakeholders involved in transforming reality.
 - As believers in the God of Life and followers of Jesus and his liberation, what motivates us to work for the wellbeing of children, adolescents and youth?
- How much do we know about and bring every day into the legislation where the rights of children and adolescents are brought to life?
- A devotional moment should be taken. It may consist of the following steps: Place illustration 2 (used in the first workshop) on the floor. It shows situations that children, adolescents, and youth go through. Copies of some documents with the current legislation that benefits minor children will be placed round the illustration or, in the absence of that document, their names will be written on pieces of paper. We may also write down the name of some institutions and projects that work for the wellbeing of children, adolescents, and youth. A prayer of thanksgiving will be said for those initiatives and the people will join hands as a sign of support for and commitment to these organizations and projects.
3. The second section of the document should be read, which includes from numeral 16 to numeral 30.



FOURTH WORKSHOP:

Children, adolescents, and youth are active, pro-positive people.

Introduction: this fourth workshop refers to the skills belonging to children, adolescents, and youth as people and the need to acknowledge them, value them, legitimize them, and integrate them into our pastoral, ecclesiastical, family, and social tasks.

1. We will gather into small groups to look at the illustration and share what catches our attention and why.
2. Then we are going to talk about our own experiences in relation to the situations expressed in the illustration. We can ask ourselves:
 - What is the prevalent value associated with children, adolescents and youth?
 - During their childhood, adolescence and youth, they hear phrases like these: “children, as well as adolescents and young people do not know anything, they cannot have an opinion, their contributions are not valuable, they do not have any experience, they do not know what is good for them, they are always needy and are always guided by the adults’ good judgment.”
 - Are these phrases true?
 - In our ecclesiastical and civil reality, are there any experiences where value is placed on children, the adolescent population, and young people and where they are respectfully brought into the fold?
 - What can we do to acknowledge, value, encourage, and integrate the contributions by children, adolescents and youth?
 - A devotional moment should be taken. It may consist of the following steps: placing the illustration used while this workshop was held on the floor. Placing a large lit candle, a growing plant, a piece of bread, a glass of milk, and some toys around the illustration as a sign of children’s joy and creativity. We are invited to think about children, adolescents, and youth who display energy, vitality, intelligence, and love and who nourish our families and communities with their gifts.
3. The third, fourth, and fifth parts of the document should be read, which includes from numeral 31 up to 61.



FIFTH WORKSHOP:

Minor children are agents of the kingdom of God.

Introduction: this fifth workshop refers to the skills belonging to children, adolescents, and youth as people and the need to acknowledge them, value them, legitimize them, and integrate them into our pastoral, ecclesiastical, family, and social tasks.

1. Organized into groups of three people, we will read and comment on the fifth part of the document. It includes from number 62 to the end of the document.
2. One person is appointed in the group to comment in the full session about what the sub-group was talking about.
3. What calls our attention the most is emphasized and some ideas are chosen to share in the full session.
4. The challenges that we are discovering in the framework are jotted down on the flipchart.
5. We comment in the full session about what the groups were talking about.
6. A devotional moment should be taken. It may consist of the following steps: the facilitator will give each participant

a silhouette of a girl, boy, adolescent, or young person drawn on paper, hopefully in different colors, to express how diverse we are. Each person will write down or draw on the silhouette and verbally express a wish they have for the life of minor children. The facilitator will hold illustration I used in the first workshop in his or her hands. Prior to that, the facilitator will have made small holes and placed threads with different colors in them that are used to tie the silhouettes that each person received. This way the longing may be expressed about being part of the project of love that Jesus invites us to join regardless of age, social position, ethnic origin, or any other part of our identity.



Materials needed to move forward with each meeting:

Workshop No. 1.

- Illustrations No. 1 and No. 2. There should be at least one copy of the illustrations for every two people. This will give the participants a chance to observe each detail up close and will encourage them to participate. If there is the proper equipment and the necessary conditions exist, the illustration may be projected and only the printed illustration for the devotional activity will be needed.
- Flipchart
- Colored markers
- Adhesive tape or tacks to hold up the paper sheets on the flipchart
- Strips of paper, markers, and pens
- Candles and matches
- What is necessary for refreshments

Workshop No. 2.

- Illustration No. 3 There should be at least one copy of the illustrations for every two people. This will give the participants a chance to observe each detail up close and will encourage them to participate. If there is the proper equipment and the necessary conditions exist, the illustration may be projected and only the printed illustration for the devotional activity will be needed that is suggested afterward.
- Flipchart
- Colored markers
- Adhesive tape or tacks to hold up the paper sheets on the flipchart.
- Items for the devotional moment (thorns, rocks, and dry dirt will be used to express the adults' hostile attitudes against children, adolescents, and youth). Flowers and green twigs, containers with water, some fruit or seeds will also be needed.
- What is necessary for refreshments

Workshop No. 3.

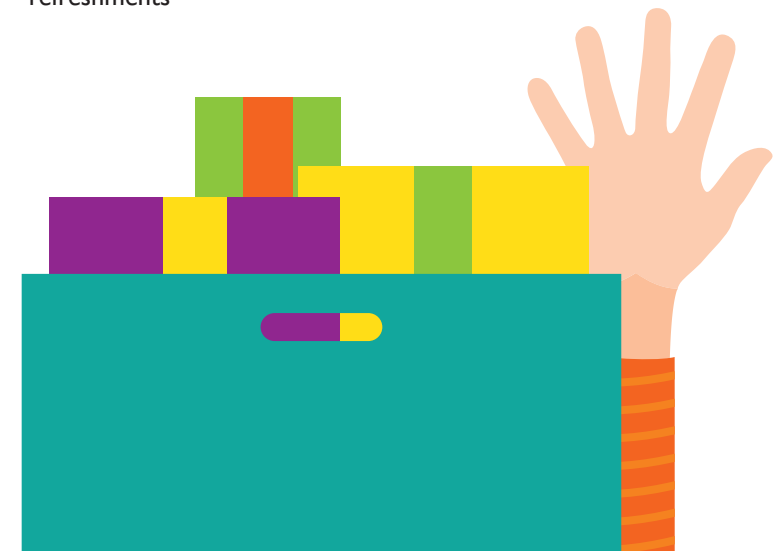
- Illustration No. 4 There should be at least one copy of the illustrations for every two people. This will give the participants a chance to observe each detail up close and will encourage them to participate. If there is the proper equipment and the necessary conditions exist, the illustration may be projected and only the printed illustration for the devotional activity will be needed that is suggested afterward.
- Flipchart
- Colored markers
- Adhesive tape or tacks to hold up the paper sheets on the flipchart.
- Illustration no. 2 photocopied for the devotional moment
- Copies of the current legislation favoring the rights of minor children or, in the absence of the copies, strips of paper with the names of those laws (may be the Convention on the Rights of the Child)
- What is necessary for refreshments

Workshop No. 4.

- Illustration No. 5 to start up the reflection. There should be at least one copy of the illustrations for every two people. This will give the participants a chance to observe each detail up close and will encourage them to participate. If there is the proper equipment and the necessary conditions exist, the illustration may be projected and only the printed illustration for the devotional activity will be needed that is suggested afterward.
- Flipchart
- Colored markers
- Adhesive tape or tacks to hold up the paper sheets on the flipchart.
- What is necessary for refreshments

Workshop No. 5.

- Flipchart
- Colored markers
- Adhesive tape or tacks to hold up the paper sheets on the flipchart.
- Illustration No. 1 photocopies with small perforated holes to hold threads of different colors
- Silhouettes of girls, boys, adolescents, and youth drawn on sheets of different colors and sizes
- What is necessary for refreshments





Our current graphic identity represents the dynamic, creative, contextual essence of the Children and Youth Movement. It is a sign of the transformation, pertinence and influence that characterize our efforts and initiatives with churches and, particularly, with children, adolescents, and youth in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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