



## International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

*Shalom*

The reality of children

November 2018

### **Introduction**

“The experience of loving and being loved is one of the essential conditions for the healthy development of the human being” (Jersild, 1971, p.319 as quoted in Pereira, p.4).

Being protected, cared for, loved are essential to the life of the human being. We need to welcome our children, with all love in our hearts, and to take good care of them, because they are for us signs of joy, blessing, grace and the presence of God in our midst. Every child born is a sign that God still continues to love us unconditionally and believes that we are able to make love flourish in our fallen world. It is necessary to welcome with great love our children, so that they do not become targets of violence, running the risk of being abandoned in the streets, or even inside their own homes, because “a loving childhood generates a more secure society” (*Material of the Claves Brazil, Rede de Mãos Dadas*). This is why we are committed to the welfare of children; they need us, they are our hope for a better world. It depends on us; we must save our children while there is still time.

### **Invitation to prayer**

Just as the disciples did, we often prevent children from approaching Jesus, of having life in abundance, of being happy, living their child’s life, approaching good. They stay lost on the streets or in their own homes. We ask for forgiveness for our lack of sensitivity to the suffering of so many children.

### **Experience**

A teacher known to us who lived close to the family witnessed the horrors that five children, ages 3 to 12, experienced each day. The children lived in the Esperança neighborhood of the city of Cajazeiras - Paraiba, a Brazilian northeastern backwoods area.

The parents were drug users. They beat the children with excessive spanking, verbally abused them using expressions such as “you are not worthy”, “you were born just to make us angry”. The children were forced to be alone in the house where they lived. The parents often went out to use drugs; the mother went out most frequently. If she was gone when the father arrived home, he beat the children because the mother was not at home doing the housework. However, it was worse when they were both home and began discussing financial matters. The father forced the mother to bring money home. When this did not happen, he beat her in front of the children. In addition, the mother also brought drug users into the house and they would use drugs in front of the children.

This often happened late at night. The defenseless children would leave their home and wander the streets because they did not have a safe place to rest, free from this horrific situation. They had no support from their parents who irresponsibly treated their children with ignorance and contempt.

Cajazeiras, August 18, 2018.

## Reflection

With this example, we have an idea of how many Brazilian children suffer and struggle to survive the terrible evil of family dysfunction, social and economic inequality, nonexistent or weak public policies, the lack of commitment of authorities to social needs, and so on.

“So, this is the question, how to reduce the vulnerability of children and adolescents, since those who should protect them are the ones who threaten them the most? ... Children are less protected where they are less visible, yet making them visible is not the same as leaving them on their own.” (Sierra, 2006)

“These situations ... are related to the weakening of social networks. Children and young people who are in situations of social vulnerability are those that suffer the negative consequences of social inequalities; poverty and social exclusion; the lack of affective bonds in the family and in other spaces of socialization...” (Pereira, 2009)

When we love our children, look after them and care for them, we learn that each one hides the secret of the Kingdom of Heaven within. This is so necessary for creating a just and egalitarian world where there is well-being and enough for all.

May we continue to ask God for the wisdom and courage to face this situation that cries out to heaven. With boldness and hope let us fight for a world where love takes precedence because love cannot wait and love gives everything to save and to redeem. We cannot be discouraged by such grave affronts to the dignity of our children.

## Action

- Take time to study, think and ponder the consequences of the vulnerability and marginality experienced by many children.
- Assist refugee children by partnering with other groups and organizing actions such as educational workshops and solidarity campaigns to help them in their development.
- Support and clarify the role of the family in the development and well-being of children.

## Closing Prayer

Dear God, full of grace and truth! Protect the innocent children, who do not hate, do not destroy, do not carry the weight of evil in their hearts. May they experience peace and security, the love of their parents, and the protection of their families and all of us. Protect children, especially those who are victims of violence, beaten by family members, forced to beg for food and money, and to steal so that their parents may continue to use drugs. Look out for those children who are the most vulnerable, who wander the streets with no one to care for them and help them in times of danger. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

God bless you. God bless the children who are close to you! God bless all the children of our diverse cultures.

## References

Pereira, S. E. F. N., 2009. Crianças e adolescentes em contexto de vulnerabilidade social: Articulação de redes em situação de abandono ou afastamento do convívio familiar. ([pdf online](#))

Sierra, V. M., Mesquita, W.A., 2006. Vulnerabilidades e fatores de risco na vida de crianças e adolescentes. São Paulo em Perspectiva, v. 20, n. 1, p. 148-155, jan./mar. 2006. ([pdf online](#))

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