MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL #4
Reduce Child Mortality

Definition: Child Mortality is the death of infant under the age of 5 years.

UNICEF’S Targets: To reduce child mortality by two-thirds, from 93 children of every 1,000 dying before age five in 1990 to 31 of every 1,000 in 2015.

Child survival lies at the heart of everything that UNICEF does. About 29,000 children under the age of five approximately 21 each minute, die every day, mainly from preventable causes.

More than 70 percent of almost eleven million child deaths every year are attributable to six causes.
- Diarrhoea
- Malaria
- Neonatal Infection
- Pneumonia
- Preterm Delivery
- Lack of Oxygen (O₂) at birth.

These deaths occur mainly in the developing world. An Ethiopian child is 30 times more likely to die by his or her fifth birthday than a child in Western Europe. Among deaths in children, south – Central Asia has the highest number of neonatal deaths, while sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates. Two-thirds of deaths occur in just 10 countries. (UNICEF)

Some deaths occur from illnesses like measles, Malaria or Tetanus. Others result indirectly from marginalization, conflict and HIV/AIDS. Malnutrition and lack of safe water and sanitation contribute to half of all children’s deaths. Research and experience show that six million of the almost eleven million children who die each year could be saved by low-tech, evidence-based, cost-effective measures such as vaccines, antibiotics, micro nutrient supplementation, insecticide – treated bed nets and improved family care and breastfeeding practice. These measures are the basis for UNICEF’s action to help children survive, carried through with hundreds of allies and via offices in the field, and well travelled staff all over the world. UNICEF’s responds by:-Providing high – impact health and nutrition interventions.
In partnership with governments, WHO (World Health Organization) and others, UNICEF aims to scale up proven, high-impact, cost-effective health and nutrition interventions to reduce the number of neonatal and young child deaths from preventable and easily treatable causes. Targets are to increase Immunization coverage to at least 90 percent at the national level and 80% in all districts, with particular focus on reaching population groups with low coverage levels, and final eradication of Polio.

UNICEF also delivers micronutrient supplements to offset malnutrition another critical factor in child survival. Supplements of vitamin A taken every four to six months can reduce child mortality from all causes by as much as 23 percent, measles death by 50% and deaths from diarrhoea by 33%. Another target in this area is increasing the rate of children sleeping under mosquito nets to at least 60% in malaria endemic areas. Malaria is responsible for 10% of all under five deaths in developing countries.

According to WHO, poor neonatal conditions are the most prominent cause of young deaths. Four million babies per year die in the first week of life. In response, UNICEF advocates for and promotes programmes to increase rate of exclusive Breastfeeding. The strongest foundation of baby’s health is nutrition, and the best food for newborns is breast milk. Breast feeding protects babies from diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections; stimulates their immune systems and improves responses of vaccinations and contains many hundreds of health enhancing molecules, enzymes, proteins and hormones.

UNICEF advocates and lends technical and financial support to comprehensive community health programmes for expectant women.

Increasing access to improved water and sanitation UNICEF helps to develop systems to control water-borne diseases, like Guinea Worm and Cholera that undermine child survival and development, reduce productivity and raise health – care cost.

PROGRESS:
In its sixty years of existence, UNICEF has seen a fifty percent reduction in under-five mortality between 1960 and 2002.

In 2002, seven of every 1,000 children in industrialized countries died before they were five. In South Asia, 97 of 1,000 children died before they were five. In Sub-Saharan Africa, that number is 174 of every, 1,000 children.
Of Ninety countries, 53 of them from developing nations should be able to meet the 2015 Goal of reducing child mortality by two-thirds, if they maintain their current annual reduction rate, but 91 developing countries lag far behind.

The number of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS is projected to reach 25 million by the end of the decade; Eighteen million of them in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Bible Study - ‘Reduce Child Mortality?’

Introduction:

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate. (Psalm 127:3-5)

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; My soul knows it very well. (Psalm 139:13, 14)

Lamentations 2:11 – 12, 19-21; 4:1-5

Children, tragedy and Hope of the world...
The death of a child is human tragedy – witness the commotion at the house of the dead child when Jesus arrived and before he healed her in Mark 5:38. Such distress is being played out across the world all day, every day.

‘My eyes are spent with weeping...because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city’. (2:11)

Lamentations emerged from the misery endured by the people following the capture of Jerusalem and the destruction of the great temple. They are poems of grief and mourning for a nation reduced to lowliness first by the Babylonian and then the Persian Empire. Yet, when we explore these poems, we surprise ourselves with their tremendous actuality.
In the destruction of the Holy City (although holy are all cities, women and men, because we are all of the image and Temple of God) it was especially hard to observe the fate of children, as referred to in Lamentations.

It is not difficult to see these texts as a mirror of what is happening today. Children on so many of the world’s streets are homeless and without bread, many swooning in the laps of their mothers, although many of them don’t have even this maternal lap on which to die. The disintegration of families and the precarious conditions of life lead many children simply to survive on the streets of cities throughout the world; even worse, it is as if hunger devours them.

These children suffer in a world where there has been amazing 24 scientific and technological progresses; in a world where consumption without limits makes ‘Babylon’ drunk of power, almost divine (see Isaiah 47 and Revelation 17:2-7; 18). However, the sound of lament can again be heard (Isaiah 13:1-4 and Revelation 8: 9 -24), as death prowls around and even the very plant is under threat. The constant companions of this apparent progress are war, pollution, greed and famine. Many of the victims are, of course, children. Isaiah 1:6 ‘A child will guide them.’

Throughout the Bible we read of the hope of human coexistence, and children are found at the centre.

Isaiah wrote the Book of Immanuel (chapters 6 -12) to warn King Ahaz. If we read it carefully, we will find at every step a mention of the child, the ‘Holy seed.’ The sign is that ‘a young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel’ (7:14). The great hope was that ‘a child has been born to us, a son given us,’ and he can establish peace (9:1-7).

Children, the ones who are often least in the eyes of the world, were credited as being the very hope of the nations. The Apostle Paul described himself as ‘the least of the apostles’ (1 Corinthians 15:9) and spoke of those who were chosen by God and who would serve the kingdom as ‘what is low and despised in the world.’ Mark 10:15 ‘Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter into it.’

During the time of Jesus, children were considered to be of little value, but Jesus took a radical stance, saying that only those who become as a child will receive and enter the kingdom of God. Children occupy the centre of the kingdom. He moves the reference point; we adults must learn to become like children, to imitate them.
Furthermore, our attitude towards and treatment of children is the supreme criteria by which the authenticity of our faith in Christ is judged. So, to scandalise them, that is to place obstacles in their way, is to become worthy of the worst punishment (Mark 9:42 and Matthew 18:6), where as a gesture of relief and protection to children even a simple glass of water will not be without a response from God (Mark 9:41 and Matthew 10:42).

The way we treat the vulnerable, for example children and older people, the weakest links of the chain, speaks of our humanity and is a measure of our values. In our societies, all too often there is no place for children and older people; there seems no longer time to care for and serve them. This is so very different from the way of God, who says he cares for us with affection as is beautifully expressed in Hosea 11:1-4.

**Questions for discussion:**

1. Reflect on the treatment of children in our society.
   a) Do adults give enough time to children?
   b) Do we invest enough in education of children for life?
   c) Or are adults more inclined to impose their values and standards upon children?
   d) Do you think that a child should be given the same respect as an adult? Please explain your answer

2. Discuss your view of the place of children in our society today.
   Are they treated as the least in society, or are they in an elevated position?
   What are the implications of this for them and for society?

3. What do you think Jesus meant when he spoke of people receiving the kingdom of heaven like a child?

4. What are the qualities of children that adults may need to relearn in order to obey this demand?

**Reflection**

A child is born with no choice about her/his parents. The child has no choice over the home or into which religion the child is born. The child has no choice about the income of the family, nor about the race and colour. A child is born with no choice about their gender or genes.

The child Mary (mother of Jesus) was born and nurtured in a stable, positive and morally upright family.
The child Salome (daughter of Herodias, Mark 6:17–19) was born into an unstable destructive family setting.

Children are of equal value and potential. Children are to be loved.

**Prayer**

God of the kingdom, you call us to come to you like children. Thank you for the beauty and variety we discover in children; help us to discover that richness within. And in those places where children suffer, and are abused and neglected, use us and all of your Church to bring hope and peace and love, Amen.

**Action**

Consider the role and place of children in your church community. It is consistent with the scripture you read today?

**Conclusion**

**Matthew 18: 1-6, 10 -14**

...And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for such belongs to the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them. Amen.

Prayer

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