World Weekend of Prayer for Children at Risk
7th - 8th June 2008
“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

(Matthew 25:35-40)
Thank you for being part of the World Weekend of Prayer for Children at Risk. As we pray on 7th and 8th June 2008, we join millions of Christians worldwide in responding to Jesus’ call to care for the “least of these”.

The problems facing children can change over time, with HIV/AIDS and natural disasters in the news one year, and trafficking and exploitation the next. The need can seem overwhelming. But God’s call to make a difference has remained the same for the last 2000 years:

“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” (Matthew 25:35-36)

Jesus asks us to do simple things in response to basic needs, reminding us that our small efforts have eternal significance. When we reach out to children in need – through our prayers or practical help – we are doing it for him.

Pray with us believing that God can transform children’s lives, bringing his light and life into the darkest situations. Together we will see amazing change.
Today the Christian community is a significant provider of care for the estimated 1.2 billion children at risk worldwide. Tens of thousands of individuals and projects are reaching out to them and speaking up for them. Yet, due to the sheer scale of the situation, these workers often find themselves isolated and under-trained, with some projects existing on the brink of closure.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Even though more children are at risk than ever before, we believe that by working efficiently together, the church has the potential to make a profound difference.

Working together, we can revolutionise the quality and quantity of care available to the world’s most vulnerable children. Together, we can influence governments and change policies that work against children. Together, our solutions are better and our responses faster. Simply put, when we work together, more children receive better help.

Today, Viva is a global community of childcare practitioners and supporters totally committed to working together to give children all they need to thrive. Established in 1996, Viva has pioneered effective collaborative work amongst Christian projects and organisations serving children at risk.

Today, Viva’s local networks are helping 1.2 million children. At a local and national level, there are 38 network initiatives representing over 7000 childcare projects. At the international level, 85 Christian NGOs and mission agencies are associate members.
Viva’s annual prayer initiative is now in its 13th year. The World Weekend of Prayer for Children at Risk has grown to involve 4 million people around the world, and each year we hear how God responds to our prayers.

Last year in Kano, Nigeria, a local children’s ministry prayed for abandoned babies. God answered almost immediately when police arrived at their door with a baby who had been found in a drainage ditch. Despite torrential rain and flooding, he was unharmed. The ministry was able to care for the baby while they located his mother and grandparents, and they referred the case to an agency set up by the government and UNICEF.

In Chillán, Chile, Christians from many different churches came together to pray for the first time. More than 2000 people interceded at their prayer event, with children taking the lead in praying for other children. Their compassion for children at risk brought them together, paving the way for more unity and real change in the city as Christians combine forces.

In Tanzania, a group of girls who attended a prayer time became Christians soon after the World Weekend of Prayer. Shortly after that, they were able to leave the sexual exploitation they were exposed to, finding freedom from the trauma of life in a brothel.

As you pray, be encouraged that God is listening, and that he will respond. He is able to bring change to children’s lives, no matter how serious their needs. Your prayer time will make a difference.
Help in organising your prayer time

Planning a prayer event

- Get together with a few other people to plan the event
- Decide where you will pray and how long your event will last
- Think about the programme for the event. It often works well to include a variety of ways to pray and a range of different prayer topics. See “How to use this booklet” on page 7 for ideas
- Decide who will organise each section of the prayer event. Don’t try to do it all yourself!
- Buy or borrow any necessary materials. Paper and pens are needed for some of the activities, and you might like to provide drinks or snacks for longer events
- Remember to pray for the event, for the people who will come and for children at risk

Telling people

- Ask your church leader to help you publicise the prayer event in notices during services and in church news sheets
- Get in touch with local churches, inviting other Christians to join you

- Put up posters and give out flyers in your area using the template available on www.viva.org/pray
- Advertise the event in a local newspaper and/or on local radio. You can download a sample press release from the Viva website http://www.viva.org/?page_id=327

Feedback

Remember to fill in pages 36 - 38, and send them back to Viva after your prayer time. Your feedback will help us to improve our prayer resources in future years and encourage others with stories of prayer events all around the world. You can also fill in the form online at www.viva.org/pray.

On the day, keep a count of the numbers of people (adults and children) who take part so you can remember when you come to fill in the sheet.

Keep praying

See “What can we do next?” on page 15 for ways to stay involved and keep supporting children at risk throughout the year. Viva’s range of prayer resources can help you pray in your own daily devotions or keep your church up to date with children’s prayer needs.
This booklet includes information on a wide range of issues and regions. Each section is based on part of Jesus’ call to reach out to “the least of these”, from Matthew 25. The verses remind us that God cares about all of the situations that put children at risk in our world and encourages us to pray and act. Each section includes a story about a particular child or ministry, along with information on specific issues, prayer points and an activity to use with children.

How you use the booklet will depend on the kind of prayer time you are planning:

**Church services:** see our service ideas over the page.

**Getting children involved:** bring the issues to life using the stories in each section of the booklet and help the children to imagine what it’s like to be a child living in each situation. Involve them through the prayer activities in each section and make the time active, varied and fun! Why not ask a group of children to help plan the prayer time with you?

**Meeting in a small group to pray:** choose a couple of the sections in this booklet and talk through the issues together. Maybe share any personal experiences you have of work with children at risk or talk about charities you know that are helping them. Break into smaller groups and pray using the prayer points to start you off.

**Holding a larger prayer event:** use the prayer information and stories to tell the group about a wide range of issues. The PowerPoint resource on www.viva.org/pray could also be a good introduction.

You might like to ask a few people to read out some of the stories or present a section using role-play. Try displaying information and images on each theme in different corners of the room, so that people can read and respond to it in their own time. Be creative!

Choose prayer activities suitable for your group and intersperse them with quiet prayer times and worship.

You might like to sing worship songs that remind you of God’s love for the vulnerable and his power to change lives.

**At the end of your prayer time,** come together and pray the 2008 Prayer for Children at Risk (see back cover). You’ll be joining with millions of others around the world, as together we call on God to transform children’s lives.
Praying for children at risk in your church service

Praying during a church service is a great way to involve the whole church and to raise awareness of the issues facing children around the world. Try making it a family service, with children playing an active part.

Make sure you tell people in advance that the services on Sunday 8th June will focus on children at risk. You could include the following text in your notice sheet:

“Did you know that half of all children are at risk in some way? Join us on 8th June as we focus on children around the world who suffer from poverty, abuse and exploitation… and help make a difference!”

Prayer time

Encourage children and adults in your church to lead a prayer time, choosing the themes that catch their attention. You might like to focus on a certain issue or region in particular.

- Read out a story from the booklet along with some background information on that theme, or maybe act out the story if there are any budding dramatists among your group!
- Pray through the prayer points from the sections you have chosen, either from the front or in small groups
- All pray the 2008 Prayer for Children at Risk together (see back cover). You can print this on service sheets or use an overhead projector so everyone can see it

Sermon

You may want to include a talk on Matthew 25:35-40 (or the whole passage, v31-46) to introduce the theme of the service and encourage people to reflect on Jesus’ call to make a difference to others? Here are some areas you might like to talk about:

- **Integrity** – matching our actions with our words
- **Jesus’ simple call** – he asks us to do small and achievable things, which count for a lot
- **Serving others means serving Jesus** – whatever we do for the “least of these”, we do for him

You could also give examples of children’s needs and how we can pray and act in response to these. Use the rest of this booklet for information on different issues affecting children.

Make the talk child-friendly by using some of the prayer activities suggested in this booklet, and involving children through role-play or visual demonstrations.

Communion

If you are sharing Communion in your service, you could begin this time with the verse, “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink” (Matthew 25:35a). Remind everyone that Jesus has made the ultimate sacrifice in dying for us, meeting our spiritual hunger and thirst and bringing eternal life – he sets an example for us in reaching out to others.
“I was hungry and you gave me something to eat”  
Matthew 25 v 35

Children are hungry for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes no food is available and sometimes there just isn’t the right kind of food. Levels of malnutrition are gradually falling but with 10% of under-5s in developing countries severely underweight,\(^1\) there is still a great need for us to feed the hungry – just as there was 2000 years ago when Jesus taught his followers how to reach out to the poor.

Food for thought...

In 2005 a group of churches in San José, Costa Rica, discovered that they had something in common. They were all providing food for children from marginalised communities, whose families were living in extreme poverty. The majority of these children had no contact with their fathers and their mothers were struggling to provide for them.

Eleven churches decided to work together, forming a network to coordinate their work with the children and reach out to more of them. Together, they managed to increase awareness of the children’s needs in the city and they now receive regular donations of meat and vegetables. Now they can afford to provide meals for 800 children, helping their families to cope with the challenges of poverty and family breakdown.\(^2\)

\(^1\) UNICEF, State of the World’s Children 2007  
\(^2\) Costa Rica feeding network
The facts

Malnutrition
Not getting enough of the right foods can cause big problems for children. They need protein, vitamins and enough energy from what they eat, or their bodies and minds can’t grow and develop properly. Malnourished children are more vulnerable to diseases than those who are able to eat well. They are also less able to concentrate and learn at school when they are hungry and poorly nourished, so their future hopes and well-being are threatened too.

When things go wrong
Natural disasters and war can prevent children getting the food that they need.

In Autumn 2007, serious flooding hit several regions around the world. West Africa was badly affected and many families saw their food stocks washed away and their crops submerged. In poor communities there is often no alternative to farming as a source of income and food, so this kind of damage hits families hard. Many have no choice but to eat less while food is scarce, putting their children’s health and development at risk, as well as their own. Climate change means that extreme weather conditions are getting more common and this has the biggest impact on the poorest regions.

In Iraq, the years of conflict, poverty and insecurity have caused nearly 3 million people to flee their homes. Living as refugees, parents have problems finding regular work, which makes it hard for them to provide the food that their children need. About 9% of Iraqi children now suffer from acute malnutrition.

3 UNICEF
I was hungry and you gave me something to eat

Prayer points

- Thank God for the way that Costa Rican churches have been able to help provide food for children in need by working together
- Pray for protection for children who have been malnourished early on in life. Pray for their physical and mental development to catch up, and for access to the healthy food they need
- Pray that God will help governments and international groups to seek peace and care for the environment, so that families are protected from circumstances which make it hard to access the right food

Activity

Divide children into groups of three. In each group give one child a treat (maybe some chocolate or a sweet), one child some rice or a piece of bread and one child nothing. Invite the children to say how they felt about what they were each given. Expect responses like “It’s not fair!”

As a group, thank God for all we have to eat. Pray for those who don’t have enough to eat and ask God to bring justice so that food and wealth are shared more fairly around the world.
“I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink”

Matthew 25 v 35

Water is vital for life. Our bodies are made up of around 60% water\(^4\) and we need a constant supply to survive, however 1 in 6 people in the world have no access to clean water\(^5\) and nearly half of them are children. Wherever we are in the world, even more people are thirsty for God and don’t know him – Jesus asks us to share his living water with those around us.

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**Water brings life**

One small primary school and its village in Wakiso District, Uganda, has been revolutionised by the arrival of clean water. Over the past 5 years, hundreds of children have passed through the school run by Child Concern Ministries\(^6\), and most of them have struggled daily with waterborne diseases. Their village’s only source of water was the local stream, and boiling the water was not enough to kill all the harmful bacteria in it.

In June 2007, the gift of a water purifier transformed life in the village. The school can now filter rain and stream water, making it 99% pure – and the whole village has access to it. Pastor Davis Habassa, the project director, has seen an amazing change in the children he works with. They are concentrating much better in class, and in the months since the purifier arrived, there has not been a single case of waterborne illness amongst them!

The miracle of clean water is also being seen in the spiritual life of the children and adults. As a result of the care received at the school and the access to clean water they are starting to come to Jesus, the source of living water.
Clean water needed

Many communities face the same challenges as they did in Wakiso District. Children often have to walk miles to get to a safe water source, fetching daily supplies for their families. Others have no way of reaching clean water, and are in danger of serious diseases as they drink from contaminated rivers, ponds and wells. One of the United Nations’ “Millennium Development Goals” aims to halve the number without clean water by 2015, but there is a great deal of work to do if this is going to happen.

Climate change is causing some water sources to dry up and the arid desert to encroach into areas that used to be fertile and well-watered. In Central Asia so much water is used in farming dry land that the vast Aral Sea has shrunk by three-quarters in the last 40 years. Drinking water is now scarce in many areas, and polluted by salt and pesticides. Children in these areas suffer from problems with their lungs, as well as serious diarrhoea and damage to their growth and development.

When children have enough clean water to drink, they are much more likely to grow up healthily – something that many of us take for granted in places where water is always available.

Quenching thirst forever

Jesus said, “Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst” (John 4:14). Passing on God’s promise of eternal life and hope needs to be an even bigger priority than meeting children’s physical need for water. The National Association of Evangelical Christian Educators of Venezuela reaches 90,000 children each week through their schools’ programme. Educators go into schools across the country, teaching Christian truths and values to children and young people. Their input has already helped many to come to know Jesus as their saviour. These initiatives and thousands more around the world give children the opportunity to respond to Jesus - Sunday schools, Christian clubs, drop-in centres, schools and residential programmes all share his good news with the children they serve.
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink

Prayer points

• Pray for God to help the United Nations, governments and other organisations as they work to provide clean water for millions of families. Pray that they would meet and even surpass the aims of the Millennium Development Goals

• Pray for Christians working to show children who Jesus is and how he can turn their lives around. Pray that God would bless all of their outreach and bring many to know him

• Pray for children to be protected from diseases when they have to drink water from unsafe sources, so that they can grow and develop in good health

Activity

Pour out a glass of water, and add some sand or earth. Pray for the millions of children who only have dirty water to drink, asking God to provide clean water that keeps them healthy.

After you have prayed, tip away the dirty water and fill the glass with fresh clean water.
“I was a stranger and you invited me in”  
Matthew 25 v 35

Too many children know what it feels like to be a stranger, alone in a place where no-one knows them or cares about them. Trafficked children have been taken away from their families, and unregistered children can feel like strangers in their own countries. They need people to support them and help them find their homes, families and identity.

A name for David

Until last year, a 13 year-old boy living in the Dominican Republic didn’t know his name. Orphaned and alone, he scavenges at the rubbish dump for food and things to sell. When Christians started working with displaced children and families in his community, he simply couldn’t introduce himself to them.

Over the next few weeks project workers spent time with him; playing, chatting and meeting his physical needs. Then one worker said she had a very special gift for him. Bending down, she whispered something in his ear. A huge grin spread across his face as he nodded enthusiastically, “David. Yes, David!” Now, he not only has a name, but he knows that it means ‘beloved’.

Even with a name, life for David and the other 36 orphans in his village is far from easy. Many of them don’t know where they come from and have no birth certificate, so they can’t access even the most basic of services. But through the local church, children like David are being linked to projects that can help them with their education, provide basic healthcare and ensure that they are being well cared for.

A few months after David was given his name, a new team member was being shown around the village. A figure came racing towards him, and with a beaming smile said excitedly, “Hello! I’m David!”
The facts

Birth registration
When a baby is born, most families will excitedly register the birth and receive a birth certificate. The child’s existence will be recognised by the state, giving them an official identity and access to the services that they need. But 50 million children each year\(^7\) miss out on registration and the protection it brings. Attending a registration office is hard for families in remote rural areas, for refugees and many other groups. Orphaned children like David have even more problems, as they have no support from parents who could make sure they were looked after and recognised as citizens.

Migration
In many regions, children are left at risk when their parents leave to find work elsewhere. This is an issue for Latin America and the Caribbean - in Ecuador alone, 150,000 children were left without one or both parents in the year 2000 as a result of economic migration\(^8\).

Trafficking
The International Labour Organisation estimates that 1.2 million children are trafficked every year. These children are moved from one place to another, often into another country, in order to be exploited. In East Asia, most of this trafficking results in children being sexually exploited in brothels and bars. In India, trafficked children often end up in the slavery of bonded labour, trying to pay off relatives’ debts through years of work.

While some children are abducted by traffickers, many more are sent away by their families. The poverty they live in forces them to make choices which put their children at risk – it is hard to refuse the offer of money when you are struggling to feed your family, especially when you are told that your child will be looked after and well-paid for their work.

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\(^7\) UNICEF
\(^8\) Situational analysis of children at risk in Latin America and the Caribbean: redefining social action in the church (Viva, 2004)
I was a stranger and you invited me in

Prayer points

• Pray for families worldwide to have access to birth registration facilities, wherever they live and whether they are rich or poor.

• Pray for more Christians to respond to the needs of trafficked children, looking out for those who are “strangers” and helping them to escape from exploitation.

• Pray that trafficking would come to an end, with families recognising its dangers and governments making it a priority to clamp down on traffickers.

Activity

Read out David’s story, then act it out, giving as many children as possible a role (David, project workers, other children, etc). Talk about how it would feel if you didn’t have a family or a name, then pray together for children like David.
“I needed clothes and you clothed me”

Matthew 25 v 36

Clothing is just one of the practical needs that every child has, wherever they live in the world. Children also need the shelter and safety of a home to live in, the support of a family and the opportunity to learn at school, but many of them go without these basic necessities. Jesus asks us to respond in a practical way, whether we can do a lot or a little – Christians in cities and villages worldwide are reaching out and making a difference.

Project Jireh shows that God provides

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, Project Jireh helps 45 working children. Daniel, 12, is one of them. Each day, he leaves the house at 7am to go and work on the streets as a shoe cleaner. His father left when he was very young, so he works to help make ends meet. He often cleans 30 pairs of shoes in a day, and has to pay for his food and travel into the city out of the little he earns. He says, “The streets are a dangerous place - sometimes I get robbed. I was robbed once in the car park and they took my polish and brushes.” Project Jireh helps him by providing a meal each day, and giving him the opportunity to study as well as work. Their ongoing support means that his dream of becoming a teacher could one day be within reach. 9

Project Jireh is a member of the Cochabamba network
Street children

Street children exist with the bare minimum, surviving in cast-off clothes, scraping together enough to eat by begging or scavenging, and often sleeping wherever they can.

In Nepal, the ministry of Karuna\(^{10}\) helps to meet the greatest needs of local street children. Around 40 attend their drop-in centre, where they are given food, learn about personal hygiene and can get first aid when they need it; they also learn to read and write through informal schooling. Staff provide counselling, helping children to recover from the difficult experiences that many of them have gone through. Sharing God’s love on a daily basis has an amazing impact on the children and a number have started coming to church regularly. In the last year, six children have been reunited with their families through the work of Karuna and many have been able to give their up addiction to glue-sniffing, drugs and alcohol.

Children need families

Without the support of a family children are vulnerable to poverty and have no-one to care for them. Among the 15 million children orphaned by HIV/AIDS\(^{11}\) is a 17 year-old girl in Nakulabye, Uganda. Since her parents died, she has had to look after her three younger siblings, carrying adult responsibilities at an age where she needs parental support herself. Her contact with a ministry called Mission for All\(^{12}\) has made a big difference, as the family now has the support of adults who care, as well as access to medical care and school. Now she is learning to make candles, which will help her provide for her younger brothers and sisters.

Often, even younger children find themselves alone when parents die or cannot support them. But there is hope for many to find a family when Christians step in to help. The Romania International Children’s Foundation (RICF)\(^{13}\) cares for some of the orphaned and abandoned boys who find themselves in the capital, Bucharest. As soon as each child arrives at their centre, they start work to reunite them with their parents or extended families, visiting their home town to trace them. When problems in the family make this impossible, they organise a long-term foster placement within Romania through RICF’s “A Family for Me” programme. Social workers help to prepare the child and foster parents for their new life together, and keep supporting them as they get used to living with each other and become a family.

\(^{10}\) Karuna Nepal is a member of the Carnet Nepal network
\(^{11}\) UNICEF
\(^{12}\) Mission for All is a member of the CRANE network, Kampala
\(^{13}\) See www.ricf.net
I needed clothes and you clothed me

Prayer points

- Thank God that he is our provider, and that he uses his people to help meet the needs of vulnerable children
- Pray for children who spend their days, or even their nights, on the streets. Pray for safety and for opportunities to receive clothes, shelter and education
- Pray for children who are trying to care for themselves – and often for their brothers and sisters - without the help of parents. Pray that adults would come alongside them to bring the security and support they need

Activity

There are around 150 million children living or working on the streets around the world – if you said one name per second, it would take you three years to name them all!

Take turns to say all your names and remember that God loves you all. Now think about all the street children whose names you don’t know. Thank God that he knows and loves each one of them, and pray for them to find care and support from local churches, night shelters and drop-in centres.
“I was sick and you looked after me”

Matthew 25 v 36

 Millions of children are at risk because of disease and injury. Most of us are aware that HIV/AIDS is seriously affecting children, but it is easy to forget the many whose lives are threatened by preventable and “minor” diseases like measles and diarrhoea. Still others are in danger due to war and violence. All of these children need people to look after them, giving love and attention as well as medical care.

Luís’ story

Luís is a child from an indigenous community who lives in a remote part of Costa Rica. When he became seriously ill, the only way to get medical help was to travel on foot to the capital city, a journey which took several days. Luís and his father crossed mountains and rivers on their way to hospital, and during the trip, the boy’s father broke his leg.

Luís had to stay in the capital for a number of weeks for treatment, and with his leg in plaster, his father wasn’t able to return home either. They didn’t know anyone in the city. But through Casa Viva\(^\text{14}\), a residential care programme, they were put in touch with a local church. A family from the church offered to look after both of them until they had recovered. Their practical care and support was a demonstration of God’s love in action.

\(^{14}\) Casa Viva is a Viva initiative in Costa Rica, providing church-based foster care
HIV/AIDS

Every minute of every day, a child under the age of 15 dies of an AIDS-related illness. Most of these children are infected through their mothers at birth or through breastmilk. If they and their mothers received the care they needed, many would be protected from the virus and would grow up free from HIV/AIDS. But medicines and healthcare cost money, and HIV/AIDS is most common in the poorest parts of the world – only 10% of vulnerable pregnant women are offered services to prevent their babies becoming infected.

In India, increasing numbers are affected by HIV/AIDS, but people are often rejected by their families and communities once they find out that they are HIV-positive. One Kolkata-based Christian organisation reports that an 11 year-old boy was excluded from school when he tested HIV-positive. Even when he was allowed to come back, he was made to sit away from the other children, and shunned by his class. Children in this situation need medical care, but they also need their communities to understand the real issues around the disease, and to accept them and support them, rather than stigmatising them.

Preventable diseases

One of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals is to combat diseases that affect many poor and vulnerable families. With simple measures like vaccination, children can be protected from many common illnesses. Using insecticide-treated mosquito nets lowers the chances of catching malaria, which causes 10% of all children’s deaths in the developing world.

In Iraq, around a million children under 5 missed out on their routine immunisations because of the conflict in their country in the past few years. During 2007, a team of 8000 people spent two weeks visiting families in their homes to give vaccinations for measles, mumps and rubella to the children who needed them. These diseases can cause serious problems and even death for some children, so the catch-up programme will have a big impact in the long term.

Violence

Conflict causes injury for children, who can end up caught in the crossfire and unable to defend themselves. Afghanistan’s ongoing violence includes suicide bombings targeted at civilians, and even deliberate bombings of schools. When landmines and cluster bombs are used, they endanger generations of children who unwittingly play in mined areas. As the international community, all our nations need to recognise the impact of conflict on children, seeking peace and protecting the weakest in society.

15, 16, 17 UNICEF
Prayer points

- Praise God that he cares for the sick, and can bring healing and protection. Pray for any children you know who are affected by illness
- Pray for a reduction in the spread of HIV/AIDS and for the right medical care and nutrition for children who are HIV-positive
- Pray for children in war zones to stay safe from physical injury and emotional harm. Pray for peace in areas where there is long-standing conflict

Activity

Draw pictures of things which can help keep children safe from illness – a syringe for vaccinations, a bottle of medicine, a doctor, a nurse, a mosquito net, etc.

Put all the pictures in the middle of your circle and take turns to pick one up and pray for children who need these things to protect their health.
“I was in prison and you came to visit me”

Matthew 25 v 36

What would it feel like to be a child in prison? Around the world over a million children are held in prisons and detention centres18, with many being mistreated or denied justice. Many more live in circumstances that “imprison” them – when children are sexually exploited, they can’t choose to leave the brothel they are living in. Drugs and alcohol can make young people captive to the need to feed their addiction.

Leah’s story

At 16, Leah was out of work and out of school in Western Samar, one of the poorest regions of the Philippines. Leah was approached by a woman who offered her a job in the capital, Manila, as a “masseuse” - the euphemism for a commercial sex worker. She was frightened and went to her church pastor for advice.

Fortunately, Leah’s pastor had recently been on a training course organised by the Philippines Children’s Ministry Network (PCMN), which taught him about child trafficking and the danger of exploitation. He informed the police, who were able to arrest the woman. But Leah’s ordeal wasn’t over – she was threatened by other traffickers, who tried to force her not to testify in court. The local PCMN network found her somewhere safe to live outside the area, protecting her and helping her through the court case. In the end, the woman was convicted.

Leah has now started back at college, where she is studying to become a secretary. Because of the support of the local church and PCMN, she is living in freedom.
The facts

Child sexual exploitation

Many young people are not as lucky as Leah, and end up in situations of sexual exploitation. The International Labour Organisation estimates that up to 700,000 children are victims of forced commercial sexual exploitation, coerced into work in brothels and similar places against their will.

This kind of exploitation degrades and damages children emotionally and often leads to serious physical illness, too. They are at a high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases and girls often become pregnant at a very early age. Children can even be treated as criminals when they seek help – governments across the world need to recognise that they are the victims of abuse and give them the support they need to find freedom and restoration.

Children in prison

Children who are in prison have not necessarily committed a crime. Young children in many countries can go to prison when their mothers are convicted, if there is no one else to take care of them at home. Life in a prison is often a damaging experience, even for older children who have broken the law in some way. They are taken away from positive role models and from services like education. In the worst cases, some are abused by other prisoners, or their health and well-being are neglected by prison services.

Organisations like Prison Fellowship International work to provide alternatives to prison, such as community-based programmes and restorative justice. These can reduce re-offending rates, helping young offenders to understand what they have done wrong, and to resolve problems that have led them into crime.

Addictions

Often, young people begin to use drugs or alcohol to make themselves feel better when life is hard. The substances may help them forget their problems for a while, but soon cause more issues – finding the money to feed their addiction can lead them into crime, and alcohol and drugs can seriously damage their health.

In the UK, drug use amongst children is a real problem, and in 2006, 17% of 11-15 year olds used drugs19. Drinking alcohol is also more damaging for children than it is for adults, and they can more quickly become addicted to it.

19 NHS Information Centre report, 2007
I was in prison and you came to visit me

Prayer points

- Pray for God to bring freedom to children who are imprisoned by sexual exploitation
- Thank God for the education programmes which raise awareness of the warning signs of trafficking and exploitation, and pray for more vulnerable people to benefit from them
- Pray for God to heal children from addictions, and from the pain and trauma which can cause them to turn to drugs or alcohol

Activity

Draw keys on paper, thinking about the situations which keep children trapped. Write prayers on the keys for children who are in prison, or addicted to drugs or alcohol. Ask God to “unlock” these situations for children, bringing them freedom.
More information

If you would like some more resources to use during or after your prayer time, have a look at the following websites:

www.viva.org/pray:
- Versions of this booklet in a wide range of languages and formats
- PowerPoint presentation on children at risk
- Templates for posters, press releases and so on
- Further information on the needs of children around the world

www.redviva.org:
- Resources in Spanish
- Information focused on the needs of children in Latin America

www.globaldayofprayer.com:
Viva is partnering with the Global Day of Prayer to raise awareness and mobilise prayer for children at risk in our nations.

Resources are available online to help you pray for transformation in your nation, including prayer for children at risk. There is information on prayer events taking place on Pentecost Sunday, 11th May 2008, and details of how to get involved.

www.unicef.org:
Up-to-date news on children at risk in countries around the world.

www.windowkids.com:
Information and activities to help children pray for the “10/40 window” region and children at risk there.
What can we do next?

The World Weekend of Prayer for Children at Risk doesn’t need to be the end of your time of prayer for children – why not make it the beginning?

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

Prayer by post: Viva Prayer Diary
If you’d like to pray each day for children, individually or with your family, you can subscribe to the Viva Prayer Diary. Prayer requests for individual children, projects and networks are provided for each day, alongside relevant Bible verses. The Prayer Diary is sent out every quarter.

Get children involved
Why not get together children from your area or church to pray for other young people on a regular basis? It is never too early to help children understand God’s compassion and the need to pray. You could include a “children around the world” time in your Sunday school sessions, or hold an interactive children’s prayer afternoon every few months, with prayer activities and a focus on a particular country.

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

Fill in the form on pages 36 - 38 to let us know how you would like to stay involved.
How was your prayer time?

Please complete in BLOCK CAPITALS

Contact details

☑ Mr ☐ Mrs ☐ Miss ☐ Other

Name: ____________________________________________________________

Surname: __________________________________________________________

Address: __________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Postcode: _________________________________________________________

Tel: ______________________________________________________________

Fax: ______________________________________________________________

Email: ____________________________________________________________

Ministry/Organisation/Church: ______________________________________

How did you hear about the World Weekend of Prayer for Children at Risk? (please tick the box)

☐ Viva publication

☐ Another publication/ website (please specify)

_______________________________________________________________

☐ Other (please tell us how)

_______________________________________________________________

How many people participated in your time of prayer?

Adults (18 and over) _____

Children (under 18) _____

How long did the prayer last?

_____ hours _____ minutes
Help us make next year’s Weekend of Prayer even better!
Did the information in the prayer booklet help you pray?

☐ ☺ ☀ ☐ ☺ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Tell us more…

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Did you use the prayer activities?
☐ Yes ☐ No

If “Yes”, did you find them useful?

☐ ☺ ☀ ☐ ☺ ☐ ☐ ☐

Tell us more…

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Did the prayer booklet help you organise your prayer event?

☐ ☺ ☀ ☐ ☺ ☐ ☐ ☐

Tell us more…

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
We’d like to help you keep praying and supporting children at risk – how would you like to stay involved?

**Pray:**
- Please send me a fortnightly email of prayer news
- I would like to receive the quarterly Prayer Diary by post (I enclose £10.00/ $20.00)

**Give:**
- I enclose my donation to the work of Viva for children at risk
- Please send me more information on giving

**Help us encourage others!**
What was the best part of your prayer time?

How did God answer your prayers? What encouraged you?

☐ Please tick the box if you do **not** wish Viva to share these stories with others
Remember to register your prayer event on www.viva.org / pray, where prayer resources in other languages and formats are also available to download.

The photographs used in this booklet do not depict the actual children referred to in the text and all names of children have been changed to protect their identity.

Viva is very grateful to Stephanie Hunter for many of the photos used in this booklet.

Designed & produced by Clear & Creative Communications. www.clearandcreative.co.uk
2008 Prayer for Children at Risk

Lord Jesus,

Thank you that you love every child in the world, and that you died on the cross to give them the hope of eternal life.

Help us to follow your example, seeing the needs of the vulnerable and making a difference to their lives.

Please hear our prayers, bringing food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless and care for the sick. Provide families for the lonely and support for the prisoners.

Thank you that when we turn our hearts to the poor, we turn our hearts to you. Help us serve you today in our prayers.

In your name,

Amen