



Current Issues in Prayer

December 2016

Welcome! The Pope invites people of different faiths to come together and pray:

That the scandal of child-soldiers may be eliminated the world over.



Getting started:

I try to find a place from which I can watch children playing ... I watch the children running around, enjoying the sound of their voices and their carefree play. I put myself in the presence of the God who created them and me, and thank him for the joy children have and give to us adults. When I feel ready, I read the following story.



Short story:

Yusuf woke up screaming, bathed in sweat. He eased himself out of bed, and with the help of his crutch, hopped over to the sofa. He switched on his laptop and started playing a game as his mother, who had adopted him six months ago, made him a hot chocolate. It is 3.10 am but Yusuf is not going to go back to sleep. He is too afraid of getting another nightmare. This has been the pattern of his nights ever since he moved to Germany where he was eventually adopted by a loving and supportive family.



Yusuf is fifteen years old. His life changed completely the day his entire family was killed during the conflict in Aleppo in 2012 when the family home was destroyed by a direct hit during bombardment. Suddenly rendered all alone in the world, Yusuf experienced hunger for the first time in his life. He had nowhere to go and no-one to turn to. His old school friend Samir had joined the Free Syrian Army a few months before. Yusuf decided to do the same. At least there he would be given hot meals every day. That is what he had been told. Yusuf soon learned how to handle weapons and how to shoot to kill. His superiors tried to keep him away from combat and used him mainly as a messenger, but the day eventually came when he was forced to make his first kill, and then his second. Eventually he even got used to it. Until an explosive device shattered his right leg. The Free Syrian Army no longer needed him then and once more he was left to fend for himself.

He finally managed to make his way to Turkey, and eventually to the safety of Germany. But will his nightmares ever stop?



Time to reflect:

How do children become child soldiers? What effects does being a child soldier have on a child?



Let us pray:

Lord, I pray for all child soldiers that they may experience your love and hope even amidst the horrors they witness in war. I pause and then make my own prayer.



Inspiration:

When I was young, my father used to say, 'If you are alive, there is hope for a better day and something good to happen....'. I shmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*



Hands on:

Learn more about child soldiers. You can start by visiting these websites:

<http://www.child-soldiers.org/index.php> <https://www.warchild.org.uk/>
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/children-s-rights/child-soldiers>

I may watch the film, "Beasts of No Nation" (2015) directed by Cary Joji Fukunaga. (not suitable for children. Adults only)

If I am in a position to do so, I contribute to a charity which works to protect children in war zones. We have many asylum seekers and immigrants living amongst us. Some of them have fled war. I think about them this month and if I can, I find ways to make them welcome. I can make friends with an immigrant attending my school, befriend a family living in my neighbourhood or donate a blanket or warm winter clothes to an open centre.