



Prayer and Action for Children

How Prayer Can Help Build a Better World for Children



On Sunday, November 13, 2016, Hartford Seminary and Arigatou International's Prayer and Action for Children initiative co-hosted a multi-faith panel discussion and prayer service entitled "How Prayer Can Help Build a Better World for Children." The event inspired further dialogue and consultation with diverse scholars and religious leaders and resulted in the development of this publication.

Hartford Seminary, which has a particular focus on inter-religious dialogue, is the first non-denominational seminary with an important emphasis on Christian-Muslim relations. It was also the first seminary in the United States to open its doors to women, in 1889.

Copyright 2018

Arigatou International — New York
Prayer and Action for Children



Table of Contents

Panel Members	2
Acknowledgments	2
Introduction	3
Message to the Panelists from Rev. Keishi Miyamoto, President, Arigatou International, and Spiritual Director, Myochikai	4
Question 1: (a) How is Prayer Conducted in Different Religions?	7
Buddhism	8
Christianity	9
Hinduism	10
Islam	11
Judaism	12
Sikhism	13
Question 1: (b) Does Action Always Follow Prayer?	17
Question 2: How Does Prayer Help to Encourage Action by Faith Communities?	20
Question 3: What is the Added Value and Importance of Emphasizing Both Prayer and Action in a Development Context?	22
Question 4: What Does Prayer and Meditation Add to Overcoming Violence Against Children?	29
Question 5: What is the Meaning and Value of Multi-faith Prayer for Children?	33
About Arigatou International	37
About Prayer and Action for Children	39
World Day of Prayer and Action for Children: Examples of Activities	41
Prayer and Action for Children Council Members	43

Panel Members

Dr. Mahmoud Ayoub, Faculty Associate in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, Hartford Seminary

Rabbi Herb Brockman, Lecturer in Supervised Ministries, Yale Divinity School

Ms. Malou Dusyn, Founder, Menla Holistic Health Center

Ms. Jennifer Hadad Mosher, ThM, Grants Officer, Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve

Professor Anantanand Rambachan, Hindu Scholar and Chair of Religion Department, St. Olaf's College, and Member, Prayer and Action for Children Council, Arigatou International

Rev. Bishop Victor Rush, Pastor at Ebenezer Temple United Holy Church of America

Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko, Co-Chair, Prayer and Action for Children Council, Arigatou International

Moderator

Dr. Heidi Hadsell, President, Hartford Seminary, and Member, Prayer and Action for Children Council, Arigatou International



Acknowledgments

Arigatou International wishes to thank Dr. Heidi Hadsell, President, Hartford Seminary, for offering Hartford Seminary as co-host of this discussion. We also thank Susan Schoenberger, Director of Communications, and the rest of the Hartford Seminary team. We also wish to thank Professor Anantanand Rambachan, Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko, Christopher Fici, PhD candidate, Dr. William Vendley, Ven. Galkande Dhammananda and Rabbi Diana S. Gerson, MAHL, for their valuable contributions and advice, which helped to strengthen this publication.

Introduction



“With the approach of the annual World Day of Prayer and Action for Children on November 20, it seemed to us like an opportune time to reflect on our mission. The need to articulate better the meaning of prayer, and how it contributes to action for children, became evident.”

—Rebeca Rios-Kohn, Director, Prayer and Action for Children, Arigatou International

Five key questions were posed to the panelists of the multi-faith discussion at Hartford Seminary on November 13, 2016. These eminent thinkers, representing different faiths, reflected on the questions together and contributed insights from their respective traditions. Following the discussion, a multi-faith prayer service was held. In the weeks after the event, further dialogue, consultation and research took place. This publication presents the results.

The Five Questions

1. How is prayer conducted in different religions, and does action always follow prayer?
2. How does prayer help to encourage action by faith communities?
3. What is the added value and importance of emphasizing both prayer and action in a development context?
4. What does prayer and meditation add to overcoming violence against children?
5. What is the meaning and value of multi-faith prayer for children?

How Prayer and Action, Together, Can Help Build a Better World for Children



Rev. Keishi Miyamoto

President, Arigatou International,
and Spiritual Director, Myochikai

Arigatou International is a global non-governmental organization with Buddhist roots. In everything we do, we aim to build a better world for children. We work together with people of every religion or no religion — people from all walks of life, including children and young people themselves. That's why we call our approach, "All for Children."

I know that the panelists will bring very rich and diverse wisdom to today's topic, so I thought I would simply share a few brief comments from the perspective of my own faith practice, which I have learned over a lifetime as a member of Myochikai, a Buddhist organization founded in Japan in 1950

by the late Rev. Mitsu Miyamoto. When founding the organization, she proclaimed: "The mission of Myochikai is to become a ray of light that permeates the world with unconditional love and mercy for every person. I am only a human being, a woman — but I resolve to become the base and backbone of the whole world. May the light that we shine make a contribution to world peace!"

Ever since, Myochikai members have been both praying and taking action to transform themselves, their families, their nation and the world with our founder's vision of peace. Both prayer and action are essential to our practice of spiritual transformation. The "ray of light" Rev. Mitsu Miyamoto referred to does not shine by either prayer or action alone. I believe some words from the late-Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, who faithfully led Myochikai for many years after Rev. Mitsu Miyamoto passed away, help to explain why: "Peace is built by human beings, and human beings are built from their hearts. That's why Myochikai strives to nurture the human heart."

The place where prayer and action meet is the heart. It is in the human heart that the inward, contemplative dimension of prayer and meditation, and the outward, volitional dimension of action meet and can become one inspired whole. One might say that the heart is the crossroads of prayer and action. Indeed, on the spiritual journey, we must constantly return to the crossroads of the heart. Is our action guided and shaped by our prayer and meditation? Is our prayer and meditation motivated by compassion for the suffering around us, or in other words, infused with a commitment to action?

When we are at our best, every action is a prayer, and every prayer is an action. I think this may be a good way to sum up what we mean when we say "faith-based" approaches to problem-solving, to living. When what we do is inspired by our faith, our action can be more than personal — it can literally be one more "act" in line with the will of the Divine Presence. Likewise, in our faith, we believe that our prayers and meditative practices are not simply interior disciplines; they have an active influence on the outer world. What we think of as the inner and outer worlds are not different, especially where they meet in the human heart.

These general principles come into even greater focus when we face up to the intolerable suffering of the most vulnerable among us, the children of the world. There are few things that so bring us to our knees — or so compel us to bold action — than witnessing a world where children are sick, malnourished, neglected, abused, sold, exploited, enslaved, and killed. The scale of the injustice that innocent children face, the magnitude of their totally unwarranted suffering, can seem overwhelming. So far, it certainly has not been amenable to instant, easy solutions. In our helplessness and inability to solve a problem that demands a solution, we are compelled to seek intervention from a power greater than ourselves. While turning to prayer and meditation, we are compelled to act, to do absolutely everything we can, everything in our power, to eliminate the violence against children in our world today. Perhaps if we all combine all the “unseen” power of the Divine Presence with all the visible power we have at our disposal, we can as a people, as a world, actually do right by our children one day.

In Myochikai, one of the most important daily practices we have is meditative chanting of the Lotus Sutra. I believe this is one method — at that crossroads of the heart — of bringing together these “seen” and “unseen” powers, so we can bring them to bear to reduce suffering for children and build a world of peace. The Lotus Sutra lists the merits of the sutra. One is that the sutra can give rise to a mind of wisdom and heart of compassion. By exposing ourselves to these truths in meditative chanting on a daily basis, we can gradually transform our hearts from self-concern to compassion. As this transformation progresses, what we do in the world — our “action” — becomes more and more focused on and effective in healing pain and honoring the dignity of all living creatures. We begin to develop the mind of wisdom that reveals that we are not only transforming ourselves, but transforming everything — or rather, perhaps I should say more accurately, that we are being transformed along with everything and everyone, in a great wave of universal compassion.

Another central practice we teach at Myochikai is to be thankful to and pray for our ancestors — all those who came before us. As we chant the sutra, we practice this gratitude for our parents, grandparents, and on and on to distant ancestors. Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto used to compare it to watering the roots of the tree. If our ancestors are the roots, and we are the trunk and branches, the children are the fruit. If we water the roots, the whole tree will be healthy and thrive, and the children will flower and ripen. We whose hearts are alive today play a vital role in connecting our ancestors with our children, the past with the future. This sense of our small but absolutely important place in the world teaches us the responsibility to relay the gift of a full and abundant life to the next generation, the children.

So, in this sense, our prayer and action for children is motivated by both the joy of gratitude, with its vision of all that life could be for children, and the heart-rending compassion we experience when we see children suffering.

Every year on October 12th we commemorate the anniversary of Myochikai’s establishment. This day is designated also as the Day of Prayer for Children, and Myochikai members offer their sincere prayers for all children around the world. The concrete actions we take for children in the form of Arigatou International started on that day in 1990, as well. This is the day when our prayer and action start, when we come back to the crossroads of our hearts.



Question 1: (a) How is Prayer Conducted in Different Religions?

Prayer, as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a “solemn request for help or expression of thanks addressed to God or another deity.” But this definition barely begins to scratch the surface. There are many definitions of prayer, and all the various forms of meditation practiced by religious traditions add many more facets to the whole.

Despite all these different outlooks, however, there are common threads throughout every religious experience. For people of faith, there is no question that prayer and meditation are powerful, both for the one who practices them and for the world in which he or she lives. Prayer, including meditation, transcends generations, cultures, and barriers. Across religious traditions, it is used in events that are considered holy. It is generally present at critical events in life, such as initiation rites around birth, coming-of-age ceremonies, marriage, and death.

Prayer, especially when considered in the light of our common human call and responsibility to care for our neighbor, as we would like him or her to care for us, is ultimately about cultivating our connection with the presence of the Divine. Prayer is one component of what the Hindu scriptures describe as the practice of *yoga*, or those practices, across all faiths, which “yoke,” or connect us fully, to Divine reality.

According to the writings of religious scholars consulted, prayer, in connecting us to the presence of the Divine which exists within and all around us, allows us to deepen and develop our natural and original faith.

“God cherishes all children, and reaches out with God’s hand.”

—Guru Granth Sahib

The Catholic monk and theologian Thomas Merton wrote:

Since faith is a gift, prayer is perhaps the most important of all ways of seeking it from God... Prayer is then the first and most important step. All through the life of faith one must resort constantly to prayer, because faith is not simply a gift which we receive once and for all in our first act of belief... Prayer is therefore the very heart of the life of faith.¹

It can be concluded therefore that prayer cultivates faith, which in turn cultivates our understanding of our common humanity and divinity, in a process that compels us always to act for and defend these common bonds.



It has also been pointed out that prayer must also always be an act of mindfulness, which deepens our natural mindfulness in our everyday lives. The consciousness of mindfulness is the energy of presence. We

become present to our own deepest needs and desires, and we understand how they are commonly shared with our fellow human beings.

The cultivation of faith and mindfulness is simple, necessary, and an act of joy. The Buddhist monk and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh taught:

When you walk at the airport, every step you make can be a prayer. You are truly alive; you don't waste your time, your life. When you sit in solidity and freedom, when you breathe in and out in mindfulness, when you touch the wonders of life — that is meditation; that is also a prayer. And in true prayer, there is no longer any separation between the one who prays and the one to whom we pray.²

As parents and guides, to encourage and teach our children to pray and be mindful, and to share with them our own prayer and mindfulness, is one of our most important and sacred responsibilities.

In many religious traditions and communities, the act of prayer follows prescribed procedures, which provide a foundation of language, ritual, and movement to guide the practitioner. Below, we consider a few examples from the six largest religious traditions. Of course, each of these traditions includes within it great diversity of practice and belief. The brief descriptions below do not attempt to summarize each tradition as a whole or to represent all the many prayer and meditation practices.

Buddhism

Many Buddhist practitioners speak of meditation, veneration, chanting, or spirituality, rather than of prayer addressed to a personal god. Others do address prayers to the Buddha, enlightened beings (bodhisattvas), ultimate reality, or ancestors.

A foundational vow for many Buddhists — sometimes repeated as a prayer — is the Three Refuges: “I take refuge in the Buddha; I take refuge in the Dharma; I take refuge in the Sangha.” In taking these refuges, Buddhists constantly seek inner awakening and enlightenment. Theravada Buddhism includes teachings about the stages of this process: *Sotapanna* (Stream-Enterer (Entrant)), the person who begins to question and detach from any surface attachments and doubts; *Sakadagami* (Once-Returner), the person who has begun to move on from unnecessary desires as well as hatred and ignorance; *Anagami* (Non-Returner), the person who is now free from any negative traits in character and consciousness; and finally *Arahant*, the person who, being free from these negative traits, approaches the full phase of enlightenment known as *Nirvana*, free from ego, fully awakened to the innate inner capacities of compassion and wisdom, and free from any obstacles to helping all living beings awaken their own innate compassion and wisdom.

Beads known as *malas* are a traditional tool used to count breaths during meditation, recitations of a mantra, *gatha* or a *sutra*, or repetitions of the Buddha's name. Other Buddhists use the Sutras to guide their meditation or chanting, and this is practiced together with other followers or in solitude.



Here is an example of a Buddhist prayer that all living beings would overcome suffering:

Prayer of Seven Limbs

*With strength of conviction in the
bodhisattva way
I offer and bow down to all Victorious Ones
Every harmful action I have done
With my body, speech, and mind
Overwhelmed by attachment, anger,
and confusion
All these I openly lay bare before you
I lift up my heart and rejoice in all
positive potential...*

*For the happiness and well-being of all
wanderers in samsara
Whatever slight positive potential I may
have created
By paying homage, offering, and
acknowledging my faults
Rejoicing and requesting that the Buddhas
stay and teach
I now dedicate this all for full awakening.
(Translation by Venerable Thubten Chodron)³*

Christianity

In Christianity, rituals and ceremonies, such as the Roman Catholic Mass, employ a carefully preserved liturgy which provides a foundation for the prayer of the faithful. From this foundation Christians can also find prayer in spontaneous moments of talking with God, in traditional prayers like the Sign of the Cross, the Hail Mary, or the Lord's Prayer, or in silent contemplative communion with the transcendent and immanent God. In the Gospels of the New Testament, Jesus Christ even encourages the faithful to pray and act with the innocence and humility of a child:

He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.' (Matthew 18:2-5 NRSV)



For many Christians across denominations, the Jesus Prayer is commonly shared and practiced. The simplicity of the Jesus Prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me (us), a sinner," also reveals a profound depth and relationship with God and with all of God's creatures. The Jesus Prayer is a type of *hesychastic* (contemplative) prayer which is meant and designed to open up the heart of the practitioner to intimate, loving, and compassionate relation with God and with all living beings. The Jesus Prayer is thus also known as the Prayer of the Heart.

The Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of the Eastern Orthodox Church said of the Jesus Prayer and of prayer in common:

Then, through silence and prayer, we no longer ignore what is going on around us; and we are no longer stuck in what merely concerns us. Then we can commit to a countercultural way.... This is because we recognize that we are all intimately interconnected and mutually interdependent. We come to know that nothing is self-contained, that there is no autonomy

*in our world.... Through the Jesus Prayer, one develops a greater sense of awareness and attentiveness to the world within and around.*⁴

Hinduism

In Hinduism, believers use a combination of individual prayer, often in the various forms of meditation or yoga practice, along with familial practice, often focused on a central shrine in the household, along with various forms of traditional worship, known as *arati*. The common items of *arati*, such as water, fruit, flowers, and incense, are offered with a sense of devotion, or *bhakti*, to a chosen deity such as Krishna, Ganesha, and Shiva, each of whom has descended into the form of the deity as an *avatara*.



Hindus also pray in community, in beautiful and intricately-constructed temples. Temple design in Hinduism is based on *sacred geometry*, or astrological and symbolic components, which encourage the prayer life of the congregation, or *sangha*. Different portions of the temple signify different divine elements — for example, the central shrine of the *avatara* also represents the heart of the worshiper, and the tower of the temple, or *shikhara*, represents the rising of the spirit to the heavenly realms described in the classical Hindu scriptures, the *Vedas*.

Indeed, the very idea and place of the temple extends in Hinduism to the natural elements

of Earth, such as the river Ganga, which are considered both places of pilgrimage and divine personalities where Hindus can offer their very bodies in prayer and devotion to the river goddess. The religious scholar and author Diana Eck notes in her book *India: A Sacred Geography*:

*In temples and homes throughout India, the Ganga is called to be present in the waters used in ritual, either by mixing those waters with a few drops of Ganga water or by uttering the name and mantras of the Ganga to invoke her presence. Thus, the Ganga is the quintessence and source of all sacred water, indeed of all waters, everywhere.... Bathing in this one river, they say, one truly bathes in all rivers.*⁵

Congregational prayer in Hinduism may be guided by the temple priest, who recites a variety of prayers in Sanskrit or vernacular languages from the *Vedas* or supplementary texts like the *Puranas*. They include the very popular narratives of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, which respectively tell the stories of Krishna, Rama, and their most cherished loved ones, family, and friends, as they engage in epic and dramatic battles for the forces of morality and duty, or *dharma*, against the forces of evil, or *adharma*.

In Hinduism, congregational prayer is known as *sankirtana*, or the chanting of the holy divine names of the Deity. Participation in *sankirtana* is said to cleanse the heart of all of the “dust” within, or all of the negative character traits, such as greed, envy, and ignorance, which prevent the practitioner from experiencing liberation and self-realization, or *jivanmukta*, even in this very life. Chanting of sacred mantras in the practice of *sankirtana*, such as the well-known *Om Shanti* (peace) mantra or the *Hare Krishna* mantra are kinds of vocative

prayers, invoking or calling out to the Deity, for deliverance from the unnecessary pains and evil of existence.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the Hindu *avatara* of *bhakti-yoga*, in his set of eight prayers on *sankirtana* entitled the *Siksastakam*, prays:

*Glory to the Sri Krishna Sankirtana, which cleanses the heart of all the dust accumulated for years and extinguishes the fire of conditional life, of repeated birth and death. This sankirtana movement is the prime benediction for humanity at large because it spreads the rays of the benediction moon. It is the life of all transcendental knowledge. It increases the ocean of transcendental bliss, and it enables us to fully taste the nectar for which we are always anxious.*⁶

Islam

Panelist Dr. Mohammed Ayoub explained:

*In Islam, prayer is the most important obligation. There are five obligatory prayers throughout the day, and extra devotional prayers as well. The day begins at sunrise with the call to prayer, or *adhan*. Before the prayer is uttered or articulated, a person must be in a state of ritual cleanliness or purity.*

These five obligatory prayers are known in Islam as the Contact Prayers, or *Salat* in Arabic, which the Islamic scholar Dr. Rashad Khalifa describes as the daily “main meals for the soul.”⁷ *Salat*, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is performed five times daily (dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, night), individually or communally, with the practitioners facing towards the *Kaaba*, the most sacred site in Islam, at Mecca. In the Quran, those who observe *Salat* are assured:

Surely, those who recite the book of God, observe the Contact Prayers and are charitable, both discreetly and openly, can hope for an

investment that never loses. He will recompense them generously and will multiply His blessings upon them. He is forgiving, appreciative.”

Two primary forms of prayer in Islam are *du’a* (prayers of supplication) and *dhikr* (remembrance of God). Prayer in the sense of *du’a* must be performed with firm faith in the response of Allah, with full sincerity, with patience for any response or result from the prayer, with pure and good intentions, and with an attentive heart. The Prophet Mohammed tells all practitioners to “make *du’a* to God in a state that you are certain that your *du’a* will be responded to, and know that God does not respond to a *du’a* that originates from a negligent, inattentive heart.”



Prayer in the sense of *dhikr* involves constant remembrance and chanting, on prayer beads, known in Islam as the *misbaha*, of the many names of God in Islam. Sufi Muslims echo the idea that the names of God are like a seed planted in the heart, and by constant performance of *dhikr* prayer, this seed is deeply watered and nourished. For example, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order teaches:

Dhikr is the means by which Stations yield their fruit, until the seeker reaches the Divine Presence. On the journey to the Divine Presence the seed of remembrance is planted in the heart and nourished with the water of praise and the food of glorification, until the tree of

*dhikr becomes deeply rooted and bears its fruit. It is the power of all journeying and the foundation of all success. It is the reviver from the sleep of heedlessness, the bridge to the One remembered.*⁸

Prayer can be offered privately, but communal, congregational prayer in Islam is crucial. Before one begins praying, one offers a declaration that "God is most great." Once those words are uttered, one must be detached from anything around him. The prayers said are understood to be the exact words of God: "We pray to God using God's own words," said Dr. Ayoub. God then returns an investment of faith and holiness to the practitioner, who is then called to act upon that investment and share it with the world.

Judaism

Across the different denominations of Judaism, prayers are offered morning, afternoon, and evening, by individuals or in community together. For weekday morning prayers, *tefillin* are worn. *Tefillin* are small black boxes containing Torah (Hebrew Bible) verses attached to leather straps that are wrapped around the head and the arms in prescribed ways. The Torah specifies that they should be worn as a remembrance that God brought the children of Israel out of Egypt.

The prayers from the Torah which are traditionally contained in the boxes of the *tefillin* include:

Shema (Devarim 6: 5, 8)

And you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means.

And you shall bind them for a sign upon your hand, and they shall be for ornaments between your eyes.

Vehayah (Devarim 11: 18-19)

And you shall set these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul, and bind them for a sign upon your hand and they shall be for ornaments between your eyes.

And you shall teach them to your children to speak with them, when you sit in your house and when you walk on the way and when you lie down and when you rise.

Kadesh (Shemot 13: 8-9)

And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, "Because of this, the Lord did [this] for me when I went out of Egypt."

And it shall be to you as a sign upon your hand and as a remembrance between your eyes, in order that the law of the Lord shall be in your mouth, for with a mighty hand the Lord took you out of Egypt.



Vehayah (Shemot 13: 14, 16)

And it will come to pass if your son asks you in the future, saying, "What is this?" you shall say to him, "With a mighty hand did the Lord take us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

And it shall be for a sign upon your hand and for ornaments between your eyes, for with a mighty hand did the Lord take us out of Egypt.

Jewish communal prayer prescribes that a minimum of a *minyan*, a group of ten adults, be present. For the Jewish community, the

act of communal prayer is simultaneously an act of reverence and celebration. The Jewish theologian and rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel remarked:

People of our time are losing the power of celebration. Instead of celebrating, we seek to be amused or entertained. Celebration is an active state, an act of expressing reverence or appreciation. Celebration is a confrontation, giving attention to the transcendent meaning of one's actions.⁹

During the morning and evening prayers, selections of Torah text that are contained inside the *tefillin* are recited aloud only when a *minyan* is present, across all the denominations in Jewish life. Specifically, the verses in *Devarim* (Deuteronomy) are part of the *Shema* and Her Blessings and they call all believers to action. Practitioners of Judaism are commanded to love God, to keep God's *mitzvot*, or commandments, in their minds, hearts and hands, and to teach those commandments to their children so they too, can actively fulfill them. In Judaism, prayer is not only about the prescribed prayer, for recitation of the prayers alone is not enough. Jewish prayer requires believers to be intentional about the words they say and to meet the obligations therein.

Sikhism

The Sikh community is monotheistic. The one God of the Sikhs includes all conceptions of gender, and every living being has direct, equal access through prayer. Sikhs participate individually or communally in *Ardas*, which are offered before or after significant tasks. *Ardas* prayers are rooted in the compositions of the Sikh Gurus found in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the central religious text of the tradition. The

Japji Sahib, compiled by Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh tradition, is considered the most riveting Sikh Prayer recited by the devout, early in the morning. This prayer focuses the Sikh practitioner on the absolute necessity of loving dependence on the Guru and on the Word and the Name of God.



Countless names, countless places - Hymn 19 of the *Japji Sahib*:

- *Inaccessible, unapproachable, countless celestial bodies.*
- *Even to call them countless is to carry weight on your head.*
- *The Word brings Naam; the Word brings Praise.*
- *The Word brings wisdom and the singing of songs of His Glory.*
- *The Word brings the written and spoken words and hymns.*
- *The Word brings destiny written on one's forehead.*
- *But Writer of the destiny – None are written on His Forehead.*
- *As He proclaims, so do we receive.*
- *Whatever You do, it's in Your Name.*
- *Without Your Name, there is no place at all.*
- *Think about the mighty Creative Potency?*
- *I cannot even begin to describe You.*
- *Whatever pleases You, All will be blessed.*

Sikhs believe in karma and reincarnation. The long journey of the soul, for Sikhs, ultimately ends in a recovery and realization of the soul's oneness in God. Prayers during Sikh funerals are sung and said together in a mood of joy and celebration. South Asian scholar and Harvard professor Harpreet Singh remarked:

Even though we grieve when loved ones depart, the tradition also teaches us that death is something worth celebrating, because the souls are going to be one with God. Almost like a drop of water going back into the ocean.¹⁰

Sikhism also falls under the umbrella of traditions of devotion, or *bhakti*. Guru Nanak is considered one of the classical poets of devotion in the *bhakti* tradition. This poetry is also prayer, an overflow of the heart which speaks to the practitioner on the deepest aesthetic and spiritual level. The poem-prayers of Guru Nanak draw the Sikh again towards Guru and the Name. Scholars of *bhakti* John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer remark that "the guru is described as the

singular bridge that makes salvation across the ocean of existence possible, but at the same time he is an ocean himself, containing nothing but the all-comprehending Word."¹¹ Guru Nanak prays in the *Japji Sahib* (excerpt):

*From listening,
truth, fulfillment, knowledge;*

*From listening,
the virtue of bathing
in all the holy places;*

*From listening,
effortlessly
one gains a sense of worth;*

*From listening,
spontaneously
meditation arises.*

*Nanak says,
those who hear
flower forever.*

*From listening,
sin and sorrow
disappear.*

Impact of Prayer and Meditation on the Human Brain

The emerging field of "neurotheology" sheds some light on the effects of prayer and meditation on the human brain. Neuroscientist, research physician and author Dr. Andrew Newberg has scanned the brains of nuns who pray, Sikhs who chant, and Buddhists who meditate, and found increased activity in their frontal lobes, which are responsible for focus and concentration. To test the efficacy of prayer and meditation, he studied people who were having age-related memory and cognitive problems, teaching them a mantra-based type of meditation, which they practiced for 12 minutes a day for eight weeks. At the end of that time, "We found some very significant and profound changes in their brain just at rest, particularly in the areas of the brain that help us to focus our mind and to focus our attention," he told a U.S. radio interviewer. "They had improvements of about 10 or 15 percent. This is only after eight weeks at 12 minutes a day, so you can imagine what happens in people who are deeply religious and spiritual and are doing these practices for hours a day," he said.

— Dr. Andrew Newberg, "Neurotheology: This Is Your Brain On Religion," *Talk of the Nation*, NPR Radio, December 15, 2010.

Pilgrimage Destinations Around the World

Millions of people travel long distances to visit holy sites to pray. The Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), a United Kingdom-based international organization founded in 1995 by His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, estimates a global total of 155 million pilgrimages per annum. The following are just a few of the sites listed by ARC:



- 30 million pilgrims – Ayyappan Saranam, India (Hindu)
- 20 million pilgrims – Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City, Mexico (Christian)
- 15 million pilgrims – Mecca, Saudi Arabia* (Islamic)
- 13 million pilgrims – Amritsar, Punjab, India (Sikh)
- 10 million pilgrims – Kumbh Mela, India (takes place every three years, at one of four places in India on rotating basis, with some festivals attracting 10 million and others 50, 60 or 70 million) (Hindu)
- 10 million pilgrims – Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India (Hindu)
- 10 million pilgrims – Arba'een, Karbala, Iraq (Islamic)
- 8 million pilgrims – Our Lady of Lourdes, France (Christian)
- 6.6 million visitors – Our Lady of Aparecida, Brazil (Christian)
- 8 million pilgrims – Western Wall, Jerusalem, Israel (Jewish)
- 5 million pilgrims – Dwarka, India (Hindu)
- 4-5 million pilgrims – Fátima, Portugal (Christian)
- 2.3 million pilgrims – Hajj, Mecca, Saudi Arabia* (Islamic) (including 1.8 million from overseas)
- 2.1 million pilgrims – Wutai Shan, Shanxi, China (Daoist)
- 1.5 million pilgrims – Santiago de Compostela, Spain (Christian)
- 1 million pilgrims – Varanasi, India (Hindu)
- 635,000 pilgrims – Amarnath Cave, Kashmir (Hindu)
- 43,000 pilgrims – Lumbhini, Nepal (Buddhist)

**More than 15 million Muslims visit the holy city of Mecca annually and over two million travel there during the Hajj, when pilgrims spend five days praying.*



Question 1: (b) Does Action Always Follow Prayer?

In the Dalai Lama's speech at the Parliament of the World's Religions in South Africa in 1999, he said that "change only takes place through action" and "frankly speaking, not through prayer or meditation, but through action." Here, we discover the tension, common to all religious traditions and communities, between prayer as an isolated, individual endeavor and prayer as a common, communal action. Must action for the common good, as framed by Pope Francis (see below), always follow upon and be fueled by our practice of prayer? If our prayer does not inspire us to act for the common good of all planetary beings, then is our prayer insincere, ineffective, or just plain selfish?

We can hardly find any person of faith who would not attach importance to the role of good works; action for the common good is part of the very being of religious communities. Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, teaches that participation in the care of the common good for religious communities requires an exquisite and intimate engagement with the fabric of human society and writes:

*The common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good.*¹²

For centuries, churches, synagogues, Buddhist temples, ashrams, mosques, and other religious institutions have been

involved in life-saving work for the common good of children. People representing these groups are often the first to respond and the last to leave when there is a humanitarian crisis. Religious communities have a very particular understanding that to work for the common good requires consciousness of care, compassion, and empowerment of all children in every nation and every community. Many people believe that without this, it is simply not possible to work effectively for the common good.

While some insist on a dichotomy between prayer and action, we can answer that action must always follow upon prayer and that prayer itself is a form of action for the common good. Sincere prayer itself affects the fabric of reality. For many people of faith, sincere prayer is the actual foundation of all effective action for the common good. It is argued that without sincere prayer, our actions for the common good may remain limited. The religious scholar A. Rashied Omar remarked:

*Prayer is the consciousness of spirit and it is a powerful tool that can be used to influence social change. In fact, I believe that our efforts as social justice activists become more meaningful if they emerge from a spiritually purified and a non-avaricious heart.*¹³

The panelists at Hartford Seminary next addressed how and why the practice of prayer can better actualize work on behalf of the most vulnerable children around the world. Some examples from that discussion can help to provide some answers.

Dr. Ayoub noted that alms-giving, or *zakat*, is mandatory in Islam. “Before people break the fast on Ramadan,” he explained, “the head of the family, be it father or mother, has to decide on what alms will be given to help the needy or orphans.” In the *Quran*, it is said that “those who believe and do deeds of righteousness and establish regular prayers and regular charity will have their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve.” (2:277) Muslims understand that no prayers can be accepted without offering *zakat*. The underlying principle and value of *zakat* is that everything on Earth belongs to God (Allah) and that we are entrusted with the wealth and well-being that God has given to us with the understanding that we will share this wealth and well-being freely and robustly with those most in need, who are all too often the children in our various communities.

Another example was given by Rev. Bishop Victor Rush, about his Christian Pentecostal congregation:

We sit in North Hartford, in the poorest neighborhood in the city of Hartford — poor financially and poor educationally — and so we pray often. We believe that faith without works is dead. It’s not enough to just pray. We do believe in the power of prayer, but we believe there needs to be action behind that prayer so that we can begin to do the work that needs to be done, particularly for our children. We believe that children are our most important asset, and what we invest in our children will determine what kind of world we have tomorrow.

The Rev. Dr. Hans Ucko sought to temper the tendency to dichotomize prayer and action. He was careful and considerate in emphasizing that there is strictly speaking no:

....binding obligation following from prayer to action; I am hesitant when you seem to instrumentalize one thing that has a value of its own to achieve something else. Prayer does not stop when action begins, and vice versa, to pray is not to be inactive. We do not pray with a kind of motivation to make our actions simply more materially effective. While our prayer is certainly important to help improve the material conditions of the most vulnerable children and people on the planet, prayer deepens the spiritual substance of our actions and turns our actions themselves into prayer.

Thus, the spiritual substance of our actions infuses our time of prayer with a deeper sense of integrity and devotion, as famously expressed by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel when he said, “In Selma, Alabama, I learned to pray with my feet.” Heschel had traveled to Selma to walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. at the full height and heat of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. When he returned to his home at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, his colleagues criticized him, saying, “What are you doing leaving the Seminary and going off to the South?” His answer was, “My feet were doing the praying.”

Rev. Dr. Ucko added:

Prayer is something that should make us better people, to live life in a better way. It is one way of saying to myself, ‘I am not alone, neither in relation to that which is beyond me, nor in relation to that which is next to me, or around me.’ Prayer is a tool for me to discover myself and the ‘other’ in a way that makes me realize my responsibility.



Question 2: How Does Prayer Help to Encourage Action by Faith Communities?

Rabbi Herb Brockman remarked that Rabbi Heschel's understanding of prayer-in-action echoes an African proverb which says, "When you pray, move your feet." Rabbi Brockman added:

My religion teaches: pray as if everything depended on God, act as if everything depended on you. There is not one thing without the other. We must pray and act to protect the most vulnerable among us.



"Prayer that doesn't lead to concrete action toward our brothers is a fruitless and incomplete prayer. But at the same time, when ecclesial service only attends to work, not reserving time for dialogue with God in prayer, it risks serving itself rather than God who is present in the brother in need. Prayer and action must always be profoundly united."

—Pope Francis, 2013

The fertile combination of prayer-in-action and action-in-prayer expands our hearts and consciousness. Returning to the Hindu idea that prayer, especially when in communion

and in combination with works of devotion, removes the dust of negativity and ignorance from our hearts, we come to understand that there is an accumulation and acceleration of spiritual energy and realization when we understand and practice our prayer and our action for the common good in concert. Panelist Malou Dusyn expressed the ideal path from prayer and meditation to action, from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective:

True peace begins with myself, with inner peace. It can be a skill that can be cultivated, an inner resource. Then kind mind leads to kind speech, and kind speech leads to kind action.

Our direct engagement to care for and love the most vulnerable members of humanity fuels our heart with the presence and reality of compassion, which sweeps away all within us that is an obstacle to compassionate engagement. This compassion helps us understand our inherent and original unity with all living beings beyond the obstacles of sectarianism and extremism.





Question 3: What is the Added Value and Importance of Emphasizing Both Prayer and Action in a Development Context?



The children of today and tomorrow are facing, and will face, profound challenges which will emerge from climate crisis, overpopulation, water shortages, energy transitions, and the ongoing realities of political and religious extremism. At the core of these challenges is redefining what we mean by *development* and *progress*. If by development and progress we mean creating unsustainable economic and ecologic conditions which threaten the very survival of countless children today and tomorrow, then we must leave these definitions and concepts behind to rediscover what is life-affirming. The communion and combination of prayer and action can help us to do this in many expected and unexpected ways.

When communities of faith pray and act in concert with secular groups in the developing world, the result can be a powerful synergy. Dr. William Vendley, Secretary General of

Addressing the Root Causes of Poverty in the Human Heart through Prayer and Action

Prayer, the study of religious texts, and other faith-inspired actions can effectively contribute to ending child poverty and fostering development by going beyond the conventional political and economic approaches, and delving into the root of the problem in the human heart, including attitudes such as greed, ignorance, hatred and fear. In addition, religion and spirituality are important in the lives of children, as they serve as a foundation for values. Such values include empathy, sharing, caring and service. By participating in acts of service, giving and charity, children contribute to mitigating the impact of poverty.

—Rev. Fred Nyabera, Director,
Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty,
Arigatou International

Religions for Peace, explains in his “Vision of Peace” Message for 2017, how this can work on the ground:

Today, religious narratives are being understood in terms of their profound potential to advance the common good. When the HIV & AIDS pandemic was roaring across Africa, there was a lot of money but there was an extraordinary bottleneck for that money — until we could figure out what you could do at a local mosque or church that was high impact, low-cost, and replicable. Then, suddenly you realized that you had millennia of building of social infrastructure, morally animated, that was already present to be a platform to help those suffering. They became public agents serving the common good. Often, one service was delivered by a mosque, so the whole village went there, and the next service was delivered by a church or another religious community, so that the community was actually being knitted together in their differences. This is happening in issue after issue today.¹⁴

Rabbi Brockman again quoted Rabbi Heschel:

Prayer cannot bring water to parched fields, or mend a broken bridge, or rebuild a ruined city, but prayer can water an arid soul, and rebuild a weakened will. We must pray and act to protect the most vulnerable among us.

Here it is noted that Heschel illumines the communion and combination of prayer and action exquisitely and accurately, especially in his acknowledgment that prayer-in-action is also the communion and combination of our body, mind, and spirit. When our faith practices, religious communities, and our theology become disembodied or overtly dualistic, we lose touch with the fabric of reality. We become unable to acknowledge the multi-layered reality of oppression and justice affecting our children, the most vulnerable members of our world.

Linking Religion and Prayer to Development

The International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) brings together governmental and intergovernmental entities with civil society organizations such as religious and value-driven organizations to harness the positive impact of religion and values in sustainable development and humanitarian assistance. PaRD’s Secretariat offices are in Berlin and Bonn, Germany.

Religion plays an integral part in all societies and is the most important source of values for many people. Any development policy that respects people as individuals must also respect their individual world views. For most people, this world view is fundamentally shaped by their religion.

For centuries, religious institutions have also been making a practical contribution to meeting people’s basic social needs. In many developing countries, the education and health care systems would be inconceivable without this contribution. Therefore, we can only truly breathe life into a new global partnership to implement the 2030 Agenda if religions are involved.

—Voices from Religions on Sustainable Development, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany

Prayer is the fuel of the spiritual substance of our being, and allows that substance, which can be considered to be one-and-the-same as the substance of God, to become *incarnational* in our works of action. We walk the talk, as it were. Our works of action

incarnate and embody the energy of our prayer and of our spirit. In this connectivity of our body, mind, and spirit we also return to a kind of innocence of being and spirit we see in our children. It is this innocence of being and spirit that we are most called to and which must be most cherished as we pray and as we act.



All religions speak of the preciousness of children, of the holiness that resides in them. For example, in the Christian Orthodox tradition, Jennifer Haddad Mosher explained at the panel at Hartford Seminary:

Because Jesus Christ came to us as an infant, we understand that divinity dwells in a child just as fully as in an adult. To be in the presence of a child is to be in the presence of Christ. And yet children across the world suffer at the hands of adults, at the mercy of politics, policies and cultural practices created by adults. And they suffer because we do not understand our relationship with them as being equally valued beings, both loved by God with the same love and light.

Dr. Rambachan explained:

In the Hindu tradition, we value children very deeply and we see the divine as present equally and identically as in the adult. There is no difference in terms of value; it is not dependent on physical maturity. We express our value for

them in the way we care for them, in our love and compassion for them.

The powerful prayers of devotion, or *bhakti*, in the Hindu tradition, especially to the deity of Krishna in his childlike expression and form, reveal how sacred childhood is to the practice and realization of devotion.

Yet devotion must not be an otherworldly enterprise, especially when we consider the development of our children, and the development of the kind of world we want them to live in. Dr. Rambachan added:

The profound value for the child in Hinduism matters very little unless it leads to practices that nurture and foster the flourishing of the child. It is important for religious value to become the basis of compassion for the child and the source from which we question injustice and oppression of children.... Our Hindu joy in Krishna's childhood and our celebration of his playfulness must awaken us to the suffering of millions of children who have no opportunity for the joys of childhood when they are thrown prematurely into the harsh world of work. It must find expression in the eradication of the sexual exploitation and physical abuse of children. These are gross violations of the cardinal Hindu ethical principle of non-injury, or ahimsa.



Communities, both religious and humanist, across Earth have clearly proclaimed the celebration of our children in the fullness of their being. The Day of the African Child is observed every June 16, commemorating the more than 100 children who died in the Soweto Uprising of 1976 and seeking ways to improve educational opportunity, nutrition, and freedom from violence for all of Africa's children. On that day, religious leaders all over Africa pray for the dignity and well-being of children, and the prayerful observance of the Day influences African governmental leaders.

*A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence Against Children*¹⁵ was adopted in Kyoto, Japan in 2006 and states:

Our faith traditions take a holistic view of a child's life, and thus seek to uphold all the rights of the child in the context of its family, community, and the broader social, economic and political environment. All children hold these rights equally and we must ensure that boys and girls have equal opportunities to enjoy these rights, particularly education, protection, health, social development and participation. Our religious communities are blessed to be multi-generational and we must use this to support the active participation of children in their own development and to address the issues of violence.

In the urgency of work to promote their most basic needs, the inherent, original spiritual dignity of children is often underplayed. Development must not be seen only in the social context, but in individual human terms as well, which include the needs of children to nourish their spirit in concert with their bodies and minds. Dignity is exactly as important to a child as it is to an adult, and is just as essential a right as freedom from hunger or violence. This is now enshrined in the UN Convention on the

Rights of the Child and other secular landmark documents, as it is in all faith traditions.

The poet and Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore once said: "Every child that is born comes into the world with the message that God has not yet despaired of mankind."¹⁶ The condition of the material and spiritual development of our children is the clearest mirror of how much we value our place in the human community. When our children develop fully in body, mind, and spirit then human society is assured to develop in the most healthy way. As Dr. Ayoub put it, simply, "Our children are the conscience of society."

In this same spirit, the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) held its 5th Forum in Panama City in May 2017, where more than 500 religious leaders and child-rights advocates, both adults and children, unanimously issued the Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children. In the declaration, participants affirmed that "transformed religious and spiritual communities can offer moral teachings and model practices to prevent, heal, reduce and ultimately end violence against children" and pledged "to do all that we can to end violence against children."¹⁷



Later in 2017, participants in the World Congress on Child Dignity in the Digital World issued the Declaration of Rome,¹⁸ which includes a call to action “To world leaders to.... educate and inform all the people of the world about the severity and extent of the abuse and exploitation of the world’s children, and to urge them to demand action from national leaders.” The Declaration calls on many groups to act, and specifically calls on the “leaders of the world’s great religions to inform and mobilize members of every faith to join in a global movement to protect the world’s children.”

At the conclusion of the Congress, Pope Francis thanked participants for sharing with him the results and the Declaration.¹⁹ He lamented “the grave and appalling crimes of online trafficking in persons, prostitution, and even the commissioning and live viewing of acts of rape and violence against minors in other parts of the world.” He further noted:

.... the progress of neurobiology, psychology and psychiatry have brought to light the profound impact of violent and sexual images on the impressionable minds of children, the psychological problems that emerge as they grow

older, the dependent behaviors and situations, and genuine enslavement that result from a steady diet of provocative or violent images. These problems will surely have a serious and life-long effect on today’s children.

Acknowledging the past failures of the Roman Catholic Church for failing to protect children, Pope Francis expressed the commitment of the Church to help and said:

For this very reason, as a result of these painful experiences and the skills gained in the process of conversion and purification, the Church today feels especially bound to work strenuously and with foresight for the protection of minors and their dignity, not only within her own ranks, but in society as a whole and throughout the world. She does not attempt to do this alone — for that is clearly not enough — but by offering her own effective and ready cooperation to all those individuals and groups in society that are committed to the same end. In this sense, the Church adheres to the goal of putting an end to “the abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children” set by the United Nations in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Target 16.2).²⁰



The 10 Commitments of the GNRC 5th Forum Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children²¹

1. Listen to children with empathy and respect, welcome their wisdom and gifts, and continue to work side-by-side to address violence against them;
2. Ensure that our religious places are safe for all children, and especially for the victims of violence and abuse, and vulnerable children such as those with disabilities;
3. Increase our personal and institutional commitments to take concrete actions to address the challenges voiced by children at this Forum;
4. Educate our leaders and communities about the different forms of violence against children and deploy resources to prevent and address it within and beyond our communities; educate children about human sexuality and what they can do to keep themselves safe; work to safeguard children from harmful media content and engage the media in preventing violence against children;
5. Partner with global programs such as End Violence and make the most of existing tools for addressing the root causes and drivers of the violence children face, with a special focus on countering violent extremism, gang violence, harm to children by organized crime, and sexual exploitation and abuse;
6. Strengthen local communities by offering education in positive parenting and ethical values to help families and children develop empathy, become more resilient, and grow spiritually;
7. Identify and challenge patriarchal structures and practices that perpetuate violence against and sexual exploitation especially of girls;
8. Embrace internationally agreed strategies and mechanisms to address violence against children, including the Sustainable Development Goals: 16.2 on ending abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children; 5.2 and 5.3 on ending violence against women and girls; and 8.7 on ending economic exploitation of children;²²
9. Strengthen cooperation and partnerships across Arigatou International initiatives, the wider religious and spiritual communities and strategic players at local, national, regional and global levels;
10. Work to generate greater social and political will for legislation, policies, and increased funding of programs to protect children from violence.



ARIGATOU | Prayer and
INTERNATIONAL | Action
All for Children



Question 4: What Does Prayer and Meditation Add to Overcoming Violence Against Children?

In 2011, after consultation with its Council members and partners, the prevention of violence against children became the thematic priority of the work of Arigatou International's Prayer and Action for Children initiative. Special emphasis was placed on supporting positive parenting, promoting universal birth registration and advocating for an end to child marriage. Religious leaders and faith communities are playing a crucial role in supporting these goals in many parts of the world and their involvement greatly helps to lessen violence against children. According to the Pew Research Center, more than eight in ten people worldwide identify with a religious group. This means that the moral influence of religious communities can have enormous impact on the behavior of their members.

This commitment to addressing the issue of violence continued as Prayer and Action for Children embraced the 2030 Agenda for the UN Sustainable Development Goals, a set of 17 development goals which include ending poverty, fighting inequalities, and tackling climate change, while ensuring that "no one is left behind."²³ As part of Agenda 2030, the world's governments have recognized the critical need to curb violence, setting ambitious targets to end violence by the year 2030. In Goal 16, target 16.2, UN Member States commit to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, torture and all forms of violence against children by 2030. This is the first time in history that the international community

has come together to include the issue of ending violence against children in worldwide development goals. Arigatou International fully shares the vision of a world where all children — girls and boys alike — grow up to achieve their full potential, free from violence, exploitation and abuse.

Franciscan Benediction

This traditional Franciscan benediction is based on the life and teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi.

May God bless you with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships, so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness to believe that you can make a difference in this world, so that you can do what others claim cannot be done to bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.

Amen!

Among those engaged in international human rights discourse, some are beginning to say that religion, human rights and development should not be seen in isolation from each other but as intersecting circles. There has been a growing understanding among secular organizations that the ambitious goals of Agenda 2030 cannot be reached without the participation of faith communities, which has increased the opportunity for collaboration between the UN and faith-based NGOs. As the UNICEF publication *Partnering with Religious Communities for Children* reflects:

There are compelling reasons for UNICEF and other child rights agencies to engage meaningfully with religious communities in promoting and protecting children's rights. These communities have the inherent advantages of legitimacy and moral influence as well as the reach of organic and extensive networks and structures. Many are already providing direct services and have the ability to identify and refer vulnerable children and families who need additional support. They thus play a myriad of roles for the care and protection of children.²⁴

In the concept note of the GNRC 5th Forum, Arigatou International drew attention to these statistics on violence against children:

.... (it) is one of the gravest challenges facing the world today, but it does not receive attention commensurate with its gravity. The evidence is overwhelming: violence is the leading cause of death and injury of children in the world. In 2014 alone, 95,000 children worldwide between the ages of 15-19 died as a result of violence. About 120 million girls around the world (just over one in 10) have been victims of forced sexual intercourse and other sexual assaults at some point in their lives. Three out of every four children

experience violent discipline at home; 85 million children (55 million boys and 30 million girls) are involved in hazardous work; and almost half of all forcibly displaced persons (24 million in total) globally, are children.²⁵

Why Focus on Violence?

- Every year, at least a billion children are exposed to violence. Every five minutes, a child dies a violent death somewhere in the world.
- Nearly 246 million — one in 10 — children live in countries and areas affected by armed conflict. Almost half the world's forcibly displaced people are children.
- Children who are refugees, internally displaced, asylum seekers or stateless are at greater risk of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation (including sexual exploitation), trafficking or forced military recruitment.
- Child survivors of violence are at risk of long-term physical and cognitive damage. Their brains may fail to grow normally and their immune systems can be affected. They are more likely to suffer poor health throughout their lives and to die early.
- Violence prevents children from receiving a quality education and reduces their capacity to learn.
- The impact on children's economic prospects and productivity is lifelong, with victims of violence twice as likely to be unemployed later in life and much more likely to be living in poverty.

—Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children

UNICEF's *State of the World's Children Report 2017: Children in a Digital World*²⁶ addresses online violence against children and provides data and analysis about children's online usage and the impact of digital technology on children's well-being.

In the foreword, Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director at the time the report was issued, says the report:

... also explores the undeniably dark side of the internet and digital technology, from cyberbullying to online child sexual abuse to dark web transactions and currencies that make it easier to conceal trafficking and other illegal activities that harm children. It reviews some of the debates about less obvious harms children may suffer from life in a digital age — from digital dependencies to the possible impact of digital technology on brain development and cognition. In addition, the report outlines practical recommendations that can help guide more effective policymaking and more responsible business practices to benefit children in a digital age.

The unprecedented scale of the violence children face demands an equally unprecedented response. All hands must be on deck, from every sector of society. A *Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence Against Children* that was adopted in Kyoto, Japan in 2006 states:²⁷

We find strong consensus across our religious traditions about the inherent dignity of every person, including children. This requires that we reject all forms of violence against children and protect and promote the sanctity of life in every stage of a child's development. Our religions share principles of compassion, justice, love and solidarity that provide great strength in dealing with violence in society.

Many people might ask, "How can my prayer, individually or in community, overcome the enormous problem of violence toward children?" Mahatma Gandhi had an answer to this question: "Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of action."²⁸

Dr. Rambachan explained:

Hindu prayer emphasizes ahimsa, or absolute non-violence. Non-violence and truth are two sides of the same coin. If meditation and prayer center us more profoundly in non-violence and compassion, that can have a profound influence on our work. As far as Hindu tradition is concerned, the cardinal virtue is non-violence, non-injury. It comes even before truth.





ARIGATOU | Prayer and
INTERNATIONAL | Action
All for Children



Question 5: What is the Meaning and Value of Multi-faith Prayer for Children?

Rev. Dr. Ucko reminded the group at Hartford Seminary of one of the first major global inter-religious gatherings for prayer, saying:

Pope John Paul II invited people of different religious traditions to Assisi for an inter-religious prayer for peace. He was anxious that his invitation was properly understood. He didn't say, 'Let's come to Assisi to pray together for peace,' he said, 'Let's come together to Assisi to pray for peace.' We are not mixing religions and prayers, we are witnessing to each other that we believe that prayer, in whatever tradition, and in whatever form, be it one prayer or another, all testifies to our concern that the plight of children matters to all of us. We will fill the heavens and the earth with our cry, our sigh, our hope, our trust that children matter.

Diversity is not a threat and the fact that we understand prayer in different ways can be a source of enrichment. "We should learn from each other's prayers," said Dr. Ayoub. "For me, there is nothing in the Lord's Prayer of Christians that I should not accept."

"We don't yet have a prayer that a Hindu and Jew can recite together," said Dr. Rambachan. He continued:

This doesn't mean that multi-faith prayer is not valuable. There is great value in it, because through it people of different traditions can find out how much they share. There is too much prayer and action in our world that assumes the identity of our own narrow interests with those of God and thinks of God as the cheerleader for our nation, our community, our religion. Religion continues to be a powerful determinant

Multi-faith Prayer at GNRC Meetings

The guiding principle for the interfaith prayer for peace that is held during each global forum of the Global Network for Religions for Children (GNRC) is that event organizers provide the space and time for each religious representative to offer a prayer according to his or her religious tradition.

Certain participants are selected by peers from their religion to offer these prayers for peace.

In this light, those offering prayers refrain from asking the other participants from different faith traditions to join in and say the actual words of the prayers of the other traditions. Instead, it is understood that all participants present are silently praying for peace and a peaceful world for children, each in his or her own chosen manner.

of identities, even in this era of globalization. While identities helpfully define and explain, there are lurking dangers in a world of diversity. The identities formed by religion have not always been good for those who did not share those identities. Religious identities are still, in many parts of our world, professed exclusively, divisively and aggressively, with violent consequences for children.... No religious tradition is innocent in this regard.

This makes the meaning and value of inter-religious prayer quite clear. The discussion at Hartford Seminary suggested that to be able to pray in each other's presence with

members of diverse religious communities requires a special sense of vulnerability and humility which is also a vehicle for the expansion of the heart and consciousness. In the open-hearted vulnerable experience of praying with people of different faiths, we often discover that we have much in common, and we also find that we can hold and celebrate our natural differences.

“The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children.”

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Theologian

We may also consider what Pope Francis describes as “the culture of encounter.” We can find some of the specific roots of this culture of encounter, which takes us across and beyond the boundaries and borderlines of our religious traditions and communities, in the document *Nostra Aetate* from Vatican II. In this historically important document, Pope Paul VI maintains:

Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing ‘ways,’ comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred

rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.²⁹

The Appalachian religious scholar Michael J. LaFrance wrote:

*A culture of encounter is rooted in Pope Francis’s commitment to the principle that ‘realities are more important than ideas,’ a code he describes in his previous work, the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, or *The Joy of the Gospel*. He sees this principle lived out in Jesus of Nazareth in the way he engaged the people he encountered: ‘Faith is an encounter with Jesus, and we must do what Jesus does: encounter others.’Francis insists that members of human communities encounter one another first as persons, before ideas, traditions, and ideologies, and that we strive to encounter the poor and excluded, primarily and most deeply: ‘We need to build up this culture of encounter. We do not love concepts or ideas; no one loves a concept or an idea. We love people.’³⁰*

Rev. Dr. Ucko said:

The thing that can be ‘inter,’ or between us, is the concern that each one of us has for children — their upbringing, their security, their dignity. And this we would like to express as much as we can through the use of our own religions. If I listen to a Hindu prayer, maybe I could feel as a Christian that this could corroborate something in my own understanding, or teach me that there is a dimension that I’m sure might be also in Christianity but I haven’t been able to grasp. Your prayer not only tells me about the need for us to share our most inner thoughts, hopes and wishes through prayer for children, but it



might also help me discover and long for such dimensions in the religious traditions that I have yet to discover.

Malou Dusyn expressed the power of multi-faith prayer simply and directly: "If we understand each other better, we will hurt each other less."

Rev. Dr. Ucko held that the reality of prayer is not limited only to people confessing a particular faith, and said:

People pray, whether religious or not. There are moments in life when you're afraid, worried, anxious, sad, crying, when you say aloud or within yourself: 'God, please....' There are moments in life, when you are so moved, so touched, so surprised, so stirred that you don't know how to be able to take another step, or breathe, or continue, and the only thing that gets out of yourself is a deep, deep breath, and a wow that releases you to maybe begin to fathom.... These are prayers; it comes with being human.

Emphasizing the meaning and value of prayer and action for children, Rebeca Rios-Kohn brought the discussion at Hartford Seminary to a close with these words:

Today, as we celebrate the annual World Day of Prayer and Action for Children by discussing this topic, we are reminded of the power of faith, and the power of prayer, and the power of people of faith all over the world, working together tirelessly to better the lives of all children. We look forward to a wide range of activities, celebrations, and prayer services each year on the World Day and on other suitable occasions, when countless volunteers and faith communities in different parts of the world carry out this important mission. May our commitment to prayer and action for children grow and deepen!

"Buddy Benches" on Playgrounds

On behalf of Arigatou International, and in keeping with the twinned mission of prayer and action, a symbolic gift of a "buddy bench" was presented to a local school in Hartford on the occasion of the panel discussion. Buddy benches are intended to reduce loneliness and foster friendship on the playground; a child sits on the "buddy bench" if he or she would like someone to talk to or play with, and that gives the other children a way to notice and respond.





About Arigatou International

Arigatou International is a non-profit organization that works to bring together members of diverse faith-based organizations, religious leaders and people from all walks of life to build a better world for children. Arigatou International is “All for Children,” and draws on universal principles of common good to offer compelling new ways for people of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to come together to address children’s issues.

Arigatou International develops and sustains unique multi-stakeholder initiatives designed to ensure that all children are treated with dignity, the rights of all children are respected, and all children have the opportunity to freely pursue their full human potential. Involving diverse partners, these initiatives emphasize both grassroots action and international advocacy.

Arigatou International has faith in children, whose opinions and perspectives help shape the work of the organization. Young people are respected and participate as partners in Arigatou International’s programs and activities.

In the year 2000, Arigatou International inaugurated the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC), which continues to grow today as a platform for interfaith cooperation on children’s issues. In 2002, it began promoting Ethics Education for Children, and later published, with UNICEF and UNESCO, *Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education*. In 2008, it launched a global movement of Prayer and Action for Children, proposing the

The Arigatou Family

Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) is the world’s most extensive interfaith network of organizations and individual volunteers working specifically for the rights and well-being of children around the world. Established in 2000; Secretariat in Nairobi.

Ethics Education for Children promotes values and ethics for children as envisioned by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In collaboration with UNICEF and UNESCO, the Ethics Education for Children program published *Learning to Live Together: An Intercultural and Interfaith Programme for Ethics Education*. Established in 2002; facilitated from Geneva.

Prayer and Action for Children is a global social movement that promotes prayer and action for the well-being of children, particularly on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, held every year on November 20, Universal Children’s Day. Established in 2008; facilitated from New York City.

End Child Poverty is a multi-faith, child-centered, global initiative that mobilizes faith-inspired resources to end child poverty. Established in 2012; facilitated from Nairobi.

World Day of Prayer and Action for Children; and in 2012, it introduced the Interfaith Initiative to End Child Poverty. From religious

leaders, to international organizations, to grassroots child rights workers, people on every continent have enthusiastically welcomed these initiatives, which continue to grow rapidly in reach, diversity, and impact.

Arigatou International partners and collaborates globally, nationally and locally with international organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children, ECPAT, the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, Plan International, child rights advocates, and other like-minded groups. Arigatou International is in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and in consultative status with UNICEF.

Arigatou International deeply values the partnerships it has enjoyed with faith-based organizations from the time that it was preparing to establish the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) in 2000. Through the four initiatives mentioned

above, Arigatou International collaborates with religious leaders and key faith-based organizations at international, national and local levels, including the Community of Sant'Egidio, the Focolare Movement, the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, the Holy See through the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, Maryknoll, Pastoral da Criança, Religions for Peace, the Sarvodaya Movement, Shanti Ashram, the World Council of Churches, World Vision and others.

Founded in 1990 by the Japanese Buddhist organization, Myochikai, Arigatou International is headquartered in Tokyo. The Japanese word "Arigatou" means "thank you" and expresses the gratitude of Myochikai members for the opportunity to help children worldwide.



About Prayer and Action for Children

Arigatou International's Prayer and Action for Children initiative was launched in 2008 to bring together religious and secular organizations with the goal of preventing violence against children. Together with its affiliates and partners, Prayer and Action for Children continues today to be very active in the growing global movement to end violence against children in its many forms. Areas of great concern include child marriage, harmful and violent discipline of children, child labor, the trafficking and abuse of children, children in armed conflict, online sexual abuse of children, online bullying of children, child poverty, and the lack of universal birth registration. Together with the other global initiatives of Arigatou International, Prayer and Action for Children strives to contribute to achievement of the 2030 Agenda for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

“When we say “Prayer and Action” out in the world, it signals that we’re not a secular NGO but one that is based on an interfaith thrust. It signals something important. It tells people who we are. And while we work with faith communities, we also work with others who are not faith communities. Prayer and Action, to the people on the receiving end, many of whom are religious, conveys an added basis of trust.”

—Dr. Heidi Hadsell, President, Hartford Seminary, and Member, Prayer and Action for Children Council, Arigatou International

While program and advocacy collaboration is carried out year-round, Arigatou International's Prayer and Action for Children initiative was born out of a vision that on a single day, people of the world's diverse



religions could — together — embrace a shared focus on prayer for children. Every year on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children, November 20, religious leaders and faith communities are invited to pause, take stock of, reflect, consider and act upon prayer and action for the good of children. In this context, the word “prayer” is used to mean all forms of prayer, meditation, petition and reflection, as well as other forms of worship. This date is significant because it is also Universal Children’s Day, and the anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly’s adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989.

The notion that religious leaders and faith communities can set aside time to focus exclusively on the plight of children has a precedent. In 1983, at a time when conflict was engulfing whole swathes of Central America, the Swedish Committee for UNICEF suggested that children be considered “zones of peace.” This unique concept was adopted by UNICEF as a way to express a commitment to keep children above and apart from conflict. This in turn led to UNICEF’s pioneering work to negotiate ceasefires and corridors of safety in war zones so that humanitarian and medical aid could reach children. In 1985, with the help of the Catholic Church in the country, UNICEF negotiated three “days of tranquility” in El Salvador, when fighting stopped to allow 250,000 children to be vaccinated. Since then, hundreds of thousands of children have received emergency aid in this way, in zones of peace, in different countries at war around the world. Faith communities have always been active partners in these efforts.

When Arigatou International was looking for ways to express its commitment to protecting the rights of children, these pioneering UNICEF efforts came to mind. Arigatou International believed it would be powerful to set aside one day for people of faith to pause and focus their prayers on the rights and well-being of children. From this idea, the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children was introduced in 2008 at the GNRC’s 3rd Forum, held in Hiroshima, a city that has become known as a symbol of peace around the world. Since that time, the practice of religious communities working together with secular communities for the rights and well-being of all children is at the heart of Prayer and Action for Children, throughout each year, not just on November 20, though many activities are planned on and around this date.

Holding ceremonies, celebrations, activities and prayerful gatherings each year on or around November 20 also provides an opportunity to build upon the momentum from previous program successes and helps provide support for continued and increased action. In coordination with the other Arigatou International initiatives, Prayer and Action for Children engages with a wide range of local communities and partners in order to bring together religious leaders and faith communities to address children’s issues. It also focuses on raising awareness among faith communities about children’s rights and serves as a catalyst and resource for volunteer groups worldwide who strive to prevent all forms of violence against children and to promote their overall well-being.

World Day of Prayer and Action for Children — Examples of Activities

Since the inception of the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children in 2008, over 600 activities — from workshops to teacher trainings to prayer breakfasts — in at least 90 countries, have been carried out, primarily through the work and dedication of volunteers who are members of the GNRC and other partners. These activities have a specific focus on interfaith understanding, dialogue, action for children and cooperation.

Here are a few examples of activities held on and around the World Day, November 20:

- Members from the three main religions of Cambodia (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) shared with children aspects of their daily religious life and culture to show the similarities and differences in their practices;
- In cooperation with the Inter-religious Council *Doboj* in Bosnia and Herzegovina, youth and adults from all religious groups visited the centers of diverse religious communities;
- In Moldova, booklets promoting non-violence were disseminated to about 5,000 teens within religious communities;
- Religious leaders in the Dominican Republic meet every year for a prayer breakfast, and pray for the well-being of children;
- In Panama, with the collaboration of the Ecumenical Committee for Children and UNICEF, messages of support for children's rights and an end to violence against children culminated in a solemn interfaith mass, celebrated in the Don Bosco Basilica. The Mass was attended by leaders of other religious communities and faiths and was broadcast on local television;
- UNICEF has promoted and participated in the World Day through many of its field offices around the world;
- World Vision adopted the concept of the World Day in 2017 and has supported activities in many countries in order to raise awareness about ending violence against children.

Prayer and Action for Children programs and activities sometimes continue for long periods of time, with a wide range of participants. For example:

- On November 20, 2013, Tanzania celebrated the culmination of a three-year campaign addressing the prevention of violence against children. Over 2,500 children and youth from primary and secondary schools took part in the activities, along with community peace clubs, religious leaders, community leaders, international organizations, government entities, partner organizations, the media, and other groups. Activities ranged from a parade with a brass band, a silent interfaith prayer, the launch of the *Learning to Live Together* manual in Swahili, children collecting donations for children in need, entertainment and much more. In addition, children presented a formal list of requests to the government and authority figures on issues of children's rights and well-being and freedom from violence. Religious leaders shared their commitment to address a number of pressing children's concerns as well.
- In Brazil, Pastoral da Criança annually promotes the "Prayer for Children" to

its thousands of members. The prayer (shown below) was developed in partnership with the Global Network of Religions for Children to be used on the World Day of Prayer and Action for Children. The prayer was endorsed by

the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), the Israeli Congregation of Sao Paulo, the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI), the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil, and the National Council of Christian Churches.

Prayer for Children (provided by Pastoral da Criança, Brazil)

Lord of Life, may our children be as You wish!

May our faith be of help in the quest for more dignity and quality of life for the children of our community and city, our country and the world.

Lord, the idolatry of wealth does not allow sharing it, and is a threat to peace in many places.

Our planet is exploited and polluted even more, and the children are the first to suffer when selfishness takes over people's hearts.

Give us courage to change this story!

Help us fight against the causes of poverty, injustice and oppression of children and their families.

Give us strength to prevent girls and boys today from being exploited and forced to work, getting involved with drugs, sleeping and awaking with hunger and thirst, not having a school in which to study and a safe space in which to play, and dying from preventable reasons.

We want the well-being of children and respect for their rights.

We will protect them during their entire life, which is sacred.

May Your spirit enlighten us to care for children, beginning in their mother's womb, and to guarantee their rights of citizenship. May they receive vaccines and breast milk, adequate nourishment, clean water, good education, housing, protection and love from those who should care for children, means and opportunities for a full development.

Lord of Life, together with our children, with a single voice, we are grateful for all the good that has come from so many people of goodwill.

Our strength is in You, who takes us to action to build a world in which children may have life, and have it abundantly!

Amen!

Prayer and Action for Children Council Members*



Mr. Kul Chandra Gautam, Convening Chair
Former Assistant Secretary-General of the
United Nations, Former Deputy Executive
Director of *UNICEF*

Reverend Dr. Hans Ucko, Co-Chair
Former Program Executive, Interreligious Relations
and Dialogue, *World Council of Churches*

Reverend Keiichi Akagawa
Deputy Director, External Affairs Department,
Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation Group,
Rissho Kosei-Kai

Swami Atmapriyananda
Vice Chancellor, *Ramakrishna Mission*
Vivekananda University

Dr. Susan Bissell
Director, *Global Partnership to End Violence*
Against Children

Mr. Ted Chaiban
Director of Programmes, *UNICEF*

Mr. Somboon Chungprampree
Executive Secretary, *International Network of*
Engaged Buddhists

Dr. Heidi Hadsell
President, *Hartford Seminary*

Dr. Nelson Arns Neumann
International Coordinator, *Pastoral da Criança*

Ms. Marta Santos Pais
Special Representative of the United Nations
Secretary-General on Violence Against Children

Professor Anantanand Rambachan
Professor and Chair, Religion Department,
Saint Olaf College

Dr. Mohammed Sammak
Secretary General, *Christian-Muslim*
Committee for Dialogue

Dr. William Vendley
Secretary General, *Religions for Peace*

*Council members, and their titles, at the time of the panel discussion at Hartford Seminary, November 13, 2016.



ARIGATOU | Prayer and
INTERNATIONAL | Action
All for Children



End Notes

1. Thomas Merton, *Life in Holiness* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 104.
2. Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Art of Prayer: Interview with Publishers Weekly Magazine*, Plum Village, April 28, 2006, accessed at <https://plumvillage.org/thich-nhat-hanh-interviews/thich-nhat-hanh-answers-weekly-magazine/>
3. *The King of Prayers: The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra*, accessed at <http://thubtenchodron.org/2011/06/extraordinary-aspiration/>
4. His Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering the Mystery: Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today* (New York: Random House, 2008)
5. Diana Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony, 2012)
6. Krishndasa Kaviraja Goswami, *Sri-Caitanya Caritamrta*, trans. A.C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), Antya-Lila 20.12
7. Rashad Khalifa, *Quran: The Final Testament* (Tucson: Universal Unity, 2001)
8. Antoon Geels, *A Note on the Psychology of Dhikr: The Halveti-Jerrahi Order of Dervishes in Istanbul*. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 6.4 (1996): 229-251
9. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Wisdom of Heschel*, trans. Ruth M. Goodhill (New York: Farrar, Strass, and Giroux, 1986)
10. Daniel Burke, *For Sikhs, The Soul Lives On Long After the Body Dies*, Huffington Post, August 10, 2012, accessed at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/10/sikhs-soul-lives-on-body-dies_n_1763220.html
11. John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
12. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, May 24, 2015, accessed at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf
13. A. Rashied Omar, *Prayer in Action: Supplication and Prayer in a Time of Crisis*, *Contending Modernities*, May 10, 2017, accessed at <http://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/global-currents/supplication-action/>
14. Accessed at <http://ecrl.eu/rfp-secretary-general-william-vendleys-vision-of-peace/>
15. *A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children* (Adopted at the Religions for Peace VIII World Assembly, Kyoto, Japan, 2006) accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/Final%20Declaration%20VAC-28%20Aug-Kyoto.pdf>
16. *The Present Condition of Child Rights and What Should Be Expected of Religious People*, Arigatou International, accessed at <https://gnrc.net/es/lo-que-hacemos/foros/first-forum/presentaciones/3307-the-present-condition-of-child-rights-what-should-be-expected-of-religious-people>

17. GNRC 5th Forum Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children, accessed at <https://gnrc.net/en/knowledge-center/documents/document/1173-gnrc-fifth-forum>
18. *The Declaration of Rome, World Congress: Child Dignity in the Digital World*, October 6, 2017, accessed at <http://www.osservatoreromano.va/en/news/declaration-rome>
19. Speech by Pope Francis at the World Congress, Child Dignity in the Digital World, October 6, 2017, accessed at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/october/documents/papa-francesco_20171006_congresso-childdignity-digitalworld.html
20. *2030 Agenda for the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals*, 25 September, 2015, accessed at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
21. GNRC 5th Forum Panama Declaration on Ending Violence Against Children, accessed at <https://gnrc.net/en/knowledge-center/documents/document/1173-gnrc-fifth-forum>
22. *2030 Agenda for the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals*, 25 September, 2015, accessed at <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
23. Ibid.
24. *Partnering with Religious Communities for Children*, UNICEF, January 2012, ISBN: 978-92-806-4618-4), accessed at https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Partnering_with_Religious_Communities_for_Children.pdf
25. Global Network of Religions for Children 5th Forum Concept Note, Arigatou International, citing statistics from UNICEF and others, accessed at http://bpw.md/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=150:global-network-of-religions-for-children-gnrc-5th-forum-concept-note&catid=2:child-right&Itemid=5
26. *The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World*, UNICEF, December 2017, accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/sowc2017/>
27. *A Multi-Religious Commitment to Confront Violence against Children* (Adopted at the Religions for Peace VIII World Assembly, Kyoto, Japan, 2006) accessed at <https://www.unicef.org/violencestudy/pdf/Final%20Declaration%20VAC-28%20Aug-Kyoto.pdf>
28. Mahatma Gandhi, "Prayer: The Food of my Soul," accessed at http://www.gandhi-manibhavan.org/gandhiphilosophy/philosophy_god_prayerfoodsoul.htm
29. Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate: The Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, October 28, 1965, accessed at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html
30. Michael J. Iafrate, *Intentional Communities In Our Common Home: Building Interfaith Cultures of Encounter in a New Appalachia*, *The Other Journal*, July 13, 2017, accessed at <https://the-otherjournal.com/2017/07/13/intentional-communities-common-home-building-interfaith-cultures-encounter-new-appalachia/>



Contact Us

Arigatou International — New York Prayer and Action for Children

250 Park Avenue 7th Floor
New York, NY 10171, U.S.A.
Tel: +1 212 739 0811

 arigatouinternational.org

 prayerandactionforchildren.org

 newyork@arigatouinternational.org

 /PrayerandAction

 @prayerandaction

 **ARIGATOU** | Prayer and
INTERNATIONAL | Action
All for Children





**“God cherishes all
children, and reaches out
with God’s hand.”**

—*Guru Granth Sahib*

**Arigatou International — New York
Prayer and Action for Children**

250 Park Avenue 7th Floor
New York, NY 10171, U.S.A.

prayerandactionforchildren.org