

## PRAYER FOCUS FOR MONTH OF AUGUST 2015

### *The “Lost Generations” of Youth*

This month you are invited to reflect and pray for the “lost generations” of youth and the implications of that for the next generation. This affects most countries around the world including our own.



### REFLECTION ONE

The causes and intensity of violence inflicted on young people differ but some outcomes are similar. The conflict zones in the Middle East stand out as an extreme example made worse with the devastation caused by ISIS. “In camps throughout the Middle East children constitute approximately half of the refugee population and they are the most vulnerable demographic.

*“Thousands of children scattered in these camps have not been registered as refugees. They are ‘phantom kids’ whose parents have escaped abandoning their children and their names and date of birth were never registered. Others are separated from their families and live in poverty without basic services. In this defenceless state some are used as suicide bombers, or sold as slaves in markets, abused, forced into execution or executed.”*

*“There are millions of stateless children worldwide, who ‘according to the law, were never born.’ “According to U.N there are about 30,000 stateless children living in Lebanon.”* (Catholic News Service, Vatican City, 17 March, 2015)

Undoubtedly, it is children that suffer most the brutal consequences of war in these zones, and those named are just some of the atrocities inflicted upon them.

In an address to Catholic young people preparing for the World Youth Day to be held in Poland in 2016, Pope Francis asked them, “Do you realise how much you are worth in the eyes of God? Do you know that you are loved and welcomed by him unconditionally?”

(Catholic News Service, Feb.17, 2015 The Francis Chronicles, Vatican City)

And in one of his weekly audiences in Rome he said, “Children are the greatest blessing God has bestowed upon women and men. Yet many children are rejected, abandoned, robbed of their childhood and of their future.” He described this as a “Passion experience.”

(Catholic News Service, 8 April, 2015 The Francis Chronicles)

Let us hold these children and others like them throughout the world in fervent prayer.

### **GOD OF JUSTICE AND INTEGRITY**

*Teach us to appreciate the precious lives of the young people in our societies,  
To those who are in abusive situations, and those who live in fear for their lives.*

*Restore the hope to those young people  
who are ‘lost’ in a system that offers them no future.*

*Inspire us to find ways to influence those with the power to change this outlook.*

*Encourage us to be Christ for one another.*

*Amen*

### **REFLECTION TWO**

As we continue to pray for the ‘lost generations’ of our youth we need also to consider the wider consequences this has for entire countries including Australia and Papua New Guinea. We have only to look at Australia to find many of these issues being played out in Indigenous communities.



In Australia the incarceration rate of young people in prisons is substantially higher than in the non-Indigenous population. Incarceration becomes a model for children and they are getting younger in our prisons. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology data they are more than twice as likely to have had one parent or both imprisoned. The

consequences have been woven into the community. Poverty, homelessness, violence in the home often fuelled by alcohol and substance abuse, are common. With no education, and no role model from parents there is little hope for a better future for these young people.

In July last year we focussed our prayer on the rise in youth suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Self-harm and suicides continue to rise at an alarming rate. In some remote communities there are reports of suicides among children as young as 11. These communities struggle with the sense of hopelessness that mass incarceration and youth suicide inflicts on these communities. *“They become a much poorer community, economically and emotionally. There’s also the shame. The stigma comes back to the whole community.”* Until different measures taken within the criminal justice system to that of mass imprisonment, like ‘circle sentencing’ and ‘justice reinvestment’ where elders are involved, nothing will change. Disconnection with culture is also compounding intergenerational trauma. Elders and grassroots organisations are calling for prevention strategies to include Indigenous people and groups to focus on reconnecting young people with their country and culture. This could go some way towards prevention of Indigenous youth suicide. (The Guardian, 17 November, 2014)

Another vital issue confronting youth in Australia and Papua New Guinea is that of unemployment. Very soon after his election, Pope Francis was asked what he saw as the most urgent needs to be addressed. Without hesitation he replied: *“Difficulties confronting the youth of this generation, especially lack of employment opportunities. Without meaningful work many young people cannot find their place in the world and turn to crime, ending up in prisons, or worse, resort to suicide.”*

The scourge of youth unemployment is a serious problem within Aboriginal communities and a major reason for the escalation of the issues named above. Policies need to be implemented to address this. To our shame, it barely raises a flicker of protest around the nation. The Aboriginal people say, *“it has been that way since colonisation.”*(The Saturday Paper, 23-29, May 2015)

***Pope Francis continually calls us to mindfulness of the poor in our midst. In fervent prayer and with steadfast faith, let us hold up the first peoples of every nation to our compassionate God, who never fails to listen to our pleas on behalf of the disadvantaged in our society.***

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

*These Prayer reflections have previously been prepared by Sisters Maree Haggerty rsm, Patricia McDermott rsm and Celestine Pooley rsm.*

*As Maree died after a long illness on 14 July, 2015, Patricia and Celestine both especially wish to acknowledge their gratitude and respect for the times they have prepared these Prayer Focus reflections with Maree over the past year and a half. May she now rest in the Lord’s peace.*