



# Values for Christian Reflection

Through a process of listening to children as well as adults – and particularly to children living with poverty – The Children's Society has discerned four key values:

**Brave:** We are brave, fighting injustice at every level, fearless in our determination to be listened to. We expose and directly address 'hard truths' and are determined to turn words swiftly into actions.

**Supportive:** We support children in their personal development and to build positive relationships. Together we enable children to reach their full potential and realise their ambitions.

**Trusted:** We have been trusted for over a century to deliver care where it is most needed. We maintain that trust by being dependable and consistent in our approach and by fighting for change based on hard evidence.

**Ambitious:** We are ambitious for the lives of the children we work with. The pioneering work we do helps them and children across the country aspire to better lives.

This booklet provides some materials for study and reflection – on how we might listen more intentionally to children, and on these four core values which have emerged. On each theme, we have provided some short reflections from the Bible, and from other Christian writings, some questions for reflection, and some suggestions for prayer. These can be used in individual devotion, group discussion, or as a basis for preaching and worship.

# Listening to children

## i) A crucial window onto the Kingdom

At that time Jesus said, 'I thank[a] you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants';

*Matthew 11.25*

Children are not simply to be understood and valued as adults-to-be. Their childhood is of value in its own right, and it offers us a unique and crucial window onto the Kingdom of God.

*'The Heart of the Kingdom', The Children's Society, 2013*

### For discussion

Why do you think Jesus says that God has 'revealed things to infants' that are hidden from the 'wise and the intelligent'?

In your experience, and in the life of your church, what are children revealing about the Kingdom of God that adults might otherwise miss?

## ii) Children need a 'good listening to'

Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.

*Matthew 19.14*

We can become abusers of our children by default when we ignore the choices we can make to secure their stability, their sense of being seen and being listened to.

Do you remember that wonderful Children's Society poster a few years ago showing the face of a child obviously in distress, with the slogan 'What I need is a good listening to? The result, when we ignore this, seems to be to produce people who themselves cannot properly look or listen...

*Archbishop Rowan Williams, Citizens UK Lecture, 2005*

## **For discussion**

How do children get 'a good listening to' in your church and community?

How does their perspective get heard, and how are their needs recognised, when decisions are made?

What might help your church to hear children more clearly?

What pressures stop parents and carers having enough time to spend with their children?

How might they be addressed?

## **iii) Taking on the task of forming other human lives**

And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

*Luke 2.52*

If we want to give children a chance of experiencing childhood as they should, experiencing as a time to learn, play, grow in an environment of stability and security, we have to face the demands of being adults ourselves. We have to accept that growing up is about taking on the task of forming other human lives.

*Archbishop Rowan Williams, Citizens UK Lecture, 2005*

## **For discussion**

As you look back over your life, what helped you to grow and understand the responsibility that goes with being independent?

How do you ensure there is a balance between freedom to choose and accepting responsibility? How does this play out when children or young people are involved?

What does Scripture teach us about the healthy formation of children? What examples can you draw on for guidance?

# Our core values

## Brave

***We are brave, fighting injustice at every level, fearless in our determination to be listened to. We expose and directly address 'hard truths' and are determined to turn words swiftly into actions.***

'Do not be afraid' is one of Jesus' most frequent commands to his disciples. This suggests that following him leads them to situations where they might be afraid! Likewise, his command to them to 'love your enemies' suggests that discipleship will involve tension and confrontation. How can we be **courageous** in our care for children – as individuals, as a church, and as a society?

[The false prophets] have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace; and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets[a] smear whitewash on it.  
11 Say to those who smear whitewash on it that it shall fall

*Ezekiel 13.10-11*

Challenging injustice leads to conflict and resistance. The love shown on the cross is courageous and provocative, but it embraces even those who perpetrate injustice. The purpose of provocation is always to lead to true reconciliation. Jesus does not 'preach peace where there is no peace' but peace remains the ultimate goal of all his action – the peace that flows from a restored relationship with God. Our practice needs to be both provocative and loving, which is yet another reason why it must have deep roots in our life of prayer.

*'Just Church,' Contextual Theology Centre, 2013*

Speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ

*Ephesians 4.15*

## For discussion

What would lead you to speak 'peace where there is no peace' when it comes to the welfare of children?

Where do we – and society – plaster over the cracks in our duty of care to children and young people?

What are the **hard truths** that influence children and young people in your area?

When have you had to be brave in our conversations and actions?

How might you avoid the temptation to demonise those you have to confront – so that you can 'speak the truth' and yet still 'love'?

## Supportive

***We support children in their personal development and to build positive relationships. Together we enable children to reach their full potential and realise their ambitions.***

As Christians, we make an individual commitment to Jesus Christ, but in doing so we become part of 'one Body' with every other believer. We are called to bear one another's burdens, and to help one another grow to fullness of life in Christ:

Therefore, encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

*1 Thessalonians 5.11*

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfil the law of Christ.

*Galatians 6.2*

Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves before you?

We are speaking in Christ before God. Everything we do, beloved, is for the sake of building you up.

*2 Corinthians 12.19*

At the heart of Christian social teaching is a vision of Christian *solidarity* – so that our mutual support in Christ is reflected in the way we help to build a wider society in which all are valued, and all grow to their full physical, social and spiritual potential.

Solidarity is an important concept for Christians. It is the idea that together we can make a difference. Solidarity is not just about unity of message or vision; it is about valuing our fellow human beings and respecting who they are as unique individuals. It is also about standing up for what is right.

Christians need to realise that their voice is important and relevant in society – when we have spoken out on issues such as Fairtrade or global poverty, we have delivered the change we seek because together we are much stronger than when we are apart.

Through Adam we inherited alienation and a lack of solidarity with God, with nature and with one another, but in Christ we discover a solidarity of reconciliation and new life.

*Archbishop John Sentamu*

### **For discussion**

Where did you experience support and solidarity in our development through childhood, youth and into adulthood?

What difference would it have made if that support had not been present?

How is our church a place of support and nurture for young people?

Do you know whether (and if so, how) young people feel supported by our common life?

What would enable us to show more such solidarity?

## Trusted

***We have been trusted for over a century to deliver care where it is most needed. We maintain that trust by being dependable and consistent in our approach and by fighting for change based on hard evidence.***

The Bible teaches that integrity of word and deed is absolutely vital in the Christian life.

For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves[a] in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing.

*James 1.23-25*

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.

*Matthew 23.1-3*

The late Kathryn Copsey, former director of CURBS, who spent many years supporting the ministry of inner-city churches to children, was fond of reminding adults that children remember *how churches treat them* even more than they remember *what churches try to teach them*.

Lives are changed, not simply when Christians say the right things, but when people *experience* something of the Kingdom of God through the church's common life:

...pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love ... It is the responsibility of the Church's charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.

*Pope Benedict XVI, 'Deus Caritas Est'*

## For discussion

How do you communicate your values in the way you treat children and young people? What values are the most important to present?

What practices of prayer and reflection might help you to be more open to the grace of God – so that you ‘may be credible witnesses to Christ’?

Who has been a good witness to the faithfulness of God in your life? What did they do the engender your trust?

What can we learn from them about how to be good witnesses?

## Ambitious

***We are ambitious for the lives of the children we work with. The pioneering work we do helps them and children across the country aspire to better lives.***

Like the word ‘power,’ the word ‘ambition’ is one which Christians often bristle at. Surely our faith calls us to renounce power and ambition? In fact, the Bible is more positive about power than we often realise:

Jesus said [to the disciples]: ‘I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’

*Luke 24.49*

The kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power.

*1 Corinthians 4.20*

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that ... you may know ... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

*Ephesians 1.17, 18, 19*

John Stott (one of the twentieth century's leading evangelical Christians) argued that ambition needed to be understood as a good thing, when it is placed at the service of the Kingdom of God:

There is something inherently inappropriate about cherishing small ambitions for God. How can we ever be content that he should acquire just a little more honour in the world? ... Christians should be eager to develop their gifts, widen their opportunities, extend their influence ... not to boost their own ego or build their own empire, but rather through everything they do to bring glory to God.

Reading the stories in *The Heart of the Kingdom* – of the way poverty diminishes children's life chances, and the way it affects their relationships with family and friends – should surely make us want to build the power to change the situation! Likewise, Christians should (as John Stott argues) be ambitious for the things of the Kingdom. If we leave ambition and power in the hands of those who have not placed it at the service of the Kingdom, we abdicate our responsibility to work for a more just society. The consequences of this mistake are most harsh for the most vulnerable.

### **For discussion**

When have you experienced *power* in a positive way – as something which has helped love and justice to flourish?

What do you think are some of the dangers of power and ambition? How might you guard against them?

How can you be more ambitious for the children in your community – and what power might you have to change their lives for the better?

How can you make sure that the young are listened to, so our ambitions for them reflect their perspectives