

F A M I L Y B R E A K D O W N

EDITORIAL

Statistics on family breakdown are not hard to come by. The articles in this newsletter tell of increased marriage and relationship breakdown, more children on the streets, more despair fuelling alcohol and drug abuse. Many refer to the root causes of poverty, the AIDS pandemic, and, of course, war – as illustrated in the Family Network's last newsletter. But the picture is not all bleak. An article from Canada points out that a marriage breakdown may, in some cases, represent a new start, free from hidden violence and abuse. Many of the articles tell of vigorous efforts being made by churches and projects from all over the Anglican Communion to help the casualties of family breakdown: the street children, the children traumatised by the splitting up of their parents, the parents who need help not to inflict more pain on themselves and their

families in the struggle of their divorce. The Gospel of hope, redemption and reconciliation is behind the work of individual churches, organisations such as The Mothers' Union, some professional lawyers and probation officers and many individual Christians. The Church can and must do much more to help prevent the terrible casualties of family breakdown. 'Family' has meant different things to different people and cultures. The Western nuclear family could well be regarded as narrow by some cultures for whom the family unit includes other relations – grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts. As this newsletter shows, both nuclear and extended families are suffering under a variety of pressures. In a recent pastoral letter, the Bishop of The Highveld, South Africa, stresses that our attitudes must change and we must adopt a wider vision. He argues that "In these days 'family' must embrace far more than our immediate circle of

blood relatives." And he points out the potential of the church community to be inclusive and a source of strength to those affected by family breakdown. "How far," he asks, "are parishes a true family – do they welcome and embrace lone parents (through divorce or widowhood), single parents (fathers or mothers) and single people without children? ... Families are meant to protect one another, to share one another's joys and sorrows, fears and failures, to help and support one another in times of crises, to relax and enjoy one another, celebrate with one another."* Such a vision of parishes throughout the Anglican Communion providing community support to those affected by family breakdown presents an important challenge.

**Extracts from Pastoral letter to the Parishes sent by Rt Rev David Beetge, Bishop of The Highveld, South Africa*

I will start off by saying how families were made in our context. I am sure that for me this was the best way of life. Everybody in the family lived together, not necessarily in the same house but in the same yard. Every time a son got married, they were built a home in the same yard, so that every member of the family took care of the other. Grandparents were everybody's concern. There were no old-age homes, because they were not necessary.

There were no orphanages, because the orphans were the responsibility of the whole family. There was actually no divorce, because once married you stayed married. If there was any abuse, the family intervened to reprimand the abuser. If the wife felt she needed to run away to her home because of abuse, the husband was fined by the in-laws to say he is sorry. The old people worked on that.

Then came colonisation and urbanisation, which dismantled family life. Young people went to cities to work. Their families went with them; the older people remained at home, with nobody to care for them. Some children took their parents with them, but most old people do not like to move away from their familiar environment.

The family was on its own; they did not know or care what was happening next door. Everybody was busy working to cater for their family needs. Couples were unfaithful. There is no communication because in the morning there is a rush; in the evening it is still a rush to get home, cook dinner, attend to

children, then jump into bed as tired as ever and sleep like a log. Men, because they can avoid all that, just go to work, come home, read the paper, eat dinner, watch T.V. and go to bed. Then he starts cheating because he assumes he is not cared for, when he does not help with the chores at home.

There is very little time that the parents have with their children. Most parents just give what the children ask for to try and make up for the little time they get, and then they get out of control. Children need discipline, but we find it very difficult to be very hard on them because we don't stay with them. Nobody is home when they come home from school, they only have their peers to listen to. In fact, the more sophisticated we are getting, and travel more on business, the more our children feel left out and lonely. Most of them turn to substance and alcohol abuse at this stage. By the time the parents notice, it is generally too late. The teachers in school need parents to work with them, they cannot do it alone.

One time I asked somebody "Where do you stay?" She answered, "I sleep at Amanzimtoti; I say that because I only go there to sleep." I thought, "How true, and how crucial."

Budgets are another problem in our marriages. Families do not budget together, so each person in the family spends his/her money alone.

The Mothers' Union, which is concerned with all aspects of family life, tries very hard to help with families. We have some members who have done marriage

counselling. We also do marriage preparation, where we talk to couples preparing for marriage on what marriage is all about. Most M.U. branches have a Young Wives organisation. We teach young mothers how to cope with a lot that they will be confronted with.

Another problem is the boy/girl child. Most mothers treat boy children differently from girl children. Boys are favoured. There are things they may or may not do because they are boys e.g wash dishes, cook, change nappies, clean, wash; and this makes them irresponsible husbands and parents. So we teach young mothers to treat their children the same.

We also have a problem of husbands not attending the workshops, thinking it is a woman's affair.

The HIV/AIDS is another cause of very serious family breakdown. The unfaithful husband comes and forces himself on the poor wife, who cannot say "Let us use a condom." If she says that, she is beaten-up or kicked out. If she gets infected, she again is kicked out because the man is not diagnosed yet.

The biggest problem is that women are always victims whatever the case. The world needs to change its attitude towards women; then there will be improvement.

The other problem is that people don't speak about their problems until it is too late for any counselling or reconciliation.

The Zambian situation, in as far as family breakdown is concerned, is worsening every day. This breakdown is attributed to many factors – poverty, privatisation of companies, HIV/AIDS and illiteracy.

Poverty

The privatisation of companies in the country has affected so many families. A lot of companies have been closed down, leaving many people out of employment. Most of the breadwinners in homes have been affected, as a result bringing untold misery and family tension. Families which already are burdened find themselves with nowhere to go. Children cannot be supported in schools, making some find ways in which to feed themselves. Mostly they go on the streets to beg and do some casual work to get small money. Records show that some children on the streets have actually been forced there by parents, to go and earn a living on the streets. Some, because of the pressure and the sudden change in lifestyles, run away from home and go on the streets. More and more children are now being found victims of child labour and other types of abuses on the street in order for them to bring a few monies in the homes.

Children between 5 and 18 years are a common sight on the streets. In a big way, poverty has contributed to the family breakdown in Zambia.

HIV/AIDS

The deadly HIV/AIDS has claimed many lives in Zambia. Almost every household has had a relation or friend die because of AIDS. AIDS is most common among the educated, the elite, professional of the society. It is also common among the rural set-up in which – because of tradition – women don't have much say on a husband's sexual behaviour. Children are affected because mostly they see their parents' health deteriorating, and eventually dying. After a year or two, the other parent dies. This makes the whole family set-up break down. Mostly the breadwinners die, and though in our society it is an extended type of family structure, there is so much pressure on other family members because of poverty. You will find these children sometimes sent to the village or they run on the streets for refuge. So many have become child-headed homes. Due to poverty in homes, young children are forced into early marriages which affect their normal growth and end up also contracting this deadly disease, then

leaving behind a number of children after their deaths, who sometimes are also HIV positive. For those who become child labourers, some find themselves victims of child prostitution. No matter how dangerous it is, they have to do it for their survival, be it girl or boy.

Way forward and conclusion

It is these factors, and for sure many others, that have brought about this problem of family breakdown. The Government is now working with non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations and churches in trying to correct the situation.

The Anglican Children's Project, under the Anglican Diocese of Lusaka, was formed in September 1996 to look into the plight of these children who are victims. The project is working with orphaned and other vulnerable children and their family/guardians, building their capacities in order for them to continue providing necessary requirements for their families. The project has its residential facilities in Chelstone, Lusaka, where these children who run away from homes onto the streets are brought for rehabilitation in preparation for re-integration into their communities. However, re-integration can only take place after the family, from which the child comes, has its capacity built in order to continue providing for the child's needs.

The project also looks at the importance of counselling the families where such children come from, for their need to have a best way forward and not send children away. HIV/AIDS counselling is also an important aspect for our children as we believe that they are tomorrow's future and if they take care of themselves now, deaths due to this pandemic will be reduced.

This is only one such project, and with the needs in our society, it is like a drop in the ocean, but it does go a long way in these trying moments in our society. If only we had more financial support we would go such a long way.

As a result of the problems of poverty and AIDS outlined above, more children than ever before in the history of Zambia were orphaned at a very tender age. Extended families were left powerless to be able to cope with the increased number of orphans, resulting in family breakdown as more children end up on the street.

Challenged by this new phenomenon, Christian Alliance for Children in Zambia (CACZ) through the church responded by facilitating projects such as these:

● **Kanyama Crisis Nursery**

A community-based project that cares for orphans under five years and other children in a crisis for a period of up to 160 days. Our objective is to re-integrate children into their natural families or extended family to provide them with a suitable home, or in co-operation with the Department of Social Welfare, find them suitable foster or adoptive homes. CACZ continues to support the family until the child is stable.

● **House of Moses Infant Home**

A unique programme providing 24-hour nursing care for premature and high-risk infants. We work in partnership with the University Teaching Hospital, the Department of Social Welfare, and the Zambia Police Department.

● **"Faith Works" Free Primary Education Programme**

The Faith Works model divides a community school into grade levels, where each participating local congregation assumes responsibility for one or more primary grades. Over 2500 orphans and vulnerable children are receiving a primary education in this unique partnership of churches. Faith Works classes are operating in Mtendere, Garden and Kanyama Compounds of Lusaka and Mongu/Limulunga, Western Province.

● **Feeding Hungry Children**

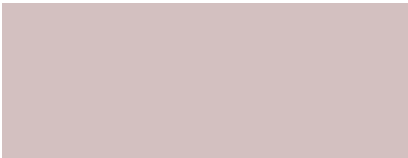
A supplementary feeding programme for families at high risk, especially in homes where the elderly or young girls are caring for orphans: administered through local congregations.

● **Empowerment of Families**

Assists families of orphans with livelihood ventures through grants or interest-free loans to ensure continuity of care of children after discharge from the House of Moses and/or the Crisis Nursery Centre.

● **Saturday Community Bible Clubs**

A weekly programme where children play games, listen to music, sing songs, learn Bible stories, have a snack, receive clothing, medical assistance and HIV/AIDS education. Children have fun. Five clubs cater for over 2000 children each week in and around Lusaka.



Kabale Women's Project

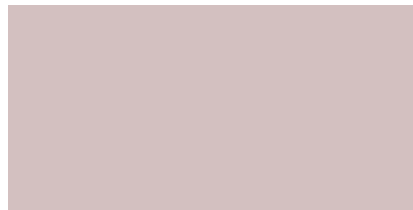
In Uganda, like most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, women are under-valued and overworked. The low status of women results in the neglect of daughters and a cycle of women, wives and mothers who are mistreated and uneducated. The primary role of women is seen as childbearing, and a woman's status is reflected by the number of children she has. As we read in an earlier IAFN newsletter, female education is often disregarded, and girls often marry young, uneducated and unhappy.

Despite the strong Christian influence in Uganda, there are a large number of polygamous marriages, especially in the more rural areas. Women will agree to become a man's second, or even third wife for fear of being left unmarried and socially excluded. It is impossible to ignore the vast range of spiritual and practical problems caused by polygamy. These problems include rivalry and competition between co-wives, and large families with the subsequent poverty, sickness and neglect of children. Polygamy can result in huge marital strain, with the effects being felt by the whole extended family.

Ugandan women rise at sunrise and work until night time. They are responsible for farming, cooking, childcare and most other household-related activities. Their husbands, on the other hand, have few responsibilities, and many spend their days drinking in local bars. It is not surprising that the women feel overworked and frustrated, with subsequent marital discord and disharmony.

Kabale Women's Project is based in the South West of Uganda. The Director and Founder of the project is a Ugandan School Teacher. The project offers women guidance and counselling, as well as equipping and empowering them through education and training programmes. Kabale Women's Project offers women the skills they need to run better homes and to look after their families. For example, the project runs cooking courses, agricultural demonstrations, promotes health care and organises income-generating projects. The Project also counsels women who are experiencing spiritual, financial, practical, emotional or marital problems. Ugandan women have practically no rights within marriage and, unlike in the West, divorce is not a culturally or financially viable option. Kabale Women's Project aims to support and encourage women who are trapped in difficult marital and family situations. The hope is that by offering women practical skills and emotional support, they will be better equipped to hold their families together.

The work of the Project is still in its early stages; the vision of the Project is that the love and forgiveness of Jesus will be brought to women, restoring their sense of self-worth and value.



Where does it start, those cracks that split families apart? Poverty, the scourge of society, produces so many ills it is hard for fragile Honduran families to overcome them.

The prevalent macho attitude towards women and abject poverty shape the bondage that affects women and children the most. Prejudice against women and the girl child demeans society and squanders the most vulnerable members of society, yet it is the tenacity of women doing the hard work that keeps the thread of hope alive for the family.

The complexity of situations that cause family disintegration is aggravated by forces of nature and the structures of society in this poorest Spanish-speaking country in the Western Hemisphere. The largely agrarian country is still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Mitch that in 1998 left more than 5,000 dead and destroyed 700,000 houses.

Impoverished families begin to fall apart when first the men, the fathers, leave to find work, or discouraged, just leave, often to find solace in alcohol, drugs, another woman and crime – sometimes in another country. Generally, the poor can't afford a civil ceremony, necessary to legitimise a church wedding, so divorce is not an issue.

Seeking opportunity, rural families stream into cities but do not have skills needed to get jobs. They build makeshift shelters, squat along roadsides, ravines or any unclaimed land. Their children rarely go to school or learn a trade.

Instead, they are sent out to beg. Girls as young as ten offer themselves as prostitutes to survive.

A serious factor is AIDS, the highest rate in Central America, which creates countless orphans. Recent statistics report that 30% of the entire population suffers from depression, impacted by significant alcohol and drug abuse. These factors lead to physical abuse and the abandonment of children. Permanent brain damage and internalised trauma impact on children abandoned to street begging and glue sniffing.

Strengthening the family has been a focus of the Episcopal Diocese of Honduras for many years. With outside aid, the diocese has built churches and community centres, provided health and agricultural services and overseen the construction of new housing developments. The two homes for abused and abandoned children, the Home of Love and Hope and farm school for boys, and Our Little Roses home for girls, are safe havens where they are loved, nurtured, educated and equipped for their adult lives. Where possible, they are reconnected with their families for opportunities of reconciliation.

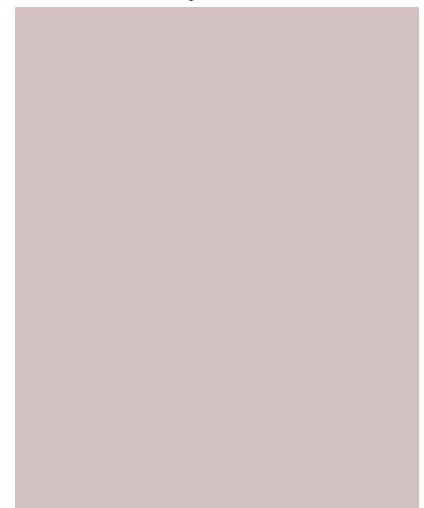
Diana Frade, founder of Our Little Roses, says "Every girl has come to us through the juvenile court judge because there was criminal violence and/or no one to care for her." Before Our Little Roses was established in 1988, girls were sent to the women's prison, because there was no other place for them. "One of our first girls was taken to the

men's prison where her father was incarcerated," Mrs Frade said. She lived there for a week until someone discovered the newly-opened Our Little Rose girls' home where the nine-year-old was taken.

Concerned about justice issues for women, Mrs Frade set about creating a home that provided the best possible education and nurturing opportunities in a Christ-centred environment, as the means of breaking the cycle of poverty from which these girls came, thus preparing them for productive lives. Many have graduated from high school and are attending university. Some are married and building families and involved in community life while also employed as accountants, administrators and teachers.

Prevalent alcohol and other drug addictions in Central America hinder long-term family stability. The Rt. Rev Leo Frade, former Bishop of Honduras, invited Dr Mary Theresa Webb, director of Global Outreach for Addiction Leadership (G.O.A.L.) to help Honduran counsellors understand root causes of alcohol and drug addictions. Her team made two trips, in 2000 and 2001, to train clergy and laity to recognise the biological, psychological and spiritual aspects of addiction. Teaching included how to establish and maintain support groups, stressing that recovery is linked to long-term rehabilitation.

During the course on family issues, the class acted out mealtime using the model of a family sharing a meal together versus a dysfunctional family style of eating without interacting with one another. A simple class activity of eating a meal together stymied class members. "But we never eat together as a family," protested most of the class. As they role-played mealtime, both clergy and laity gained a better sense of how a family meal is symbolised in the sacrament of Holy Communion.



Collaborative Divorce: A New Method

Sherri Goren Slovin, a Cincinnati divorce lawyer, will never forget the day she appeared in court to represent the devastated mother of a 14-year-old girl who had committed suicide with her father's gun. The father had filed a motion for reimbursement of funeral expenses.

Slovin used to litigate many of her cases. But often she found that when she thought she had "won", the bitterness of the trial endured and post-divorce issues continued to traumatise families. She grew tired of seeing children as victims in these battles. All of the anger and hatred that is intrinsic to family law litigation made her feel that her legal abilities were being abused. Rather than helping people, she felt that she was adding to their problems. There must be a better way.

Today, a significant portion of Slovin's practice is collaborative divorce. Unlike other divorce cases, in a collaborative divorce, the parties and their attorneys work together to solve problems. There is a commitment at the beginning of the case to work towards settlement: the lawyers and the parties sign a stipulation, which is submitted to the court for entry as an order, where the lawyers contractually agree to withdraw from representation if the case goes to trial.

In a collaborative divorce, there is no formal discovery. Both sides must agree to make full and voluntary disclosure. All appraisals are joint. Both attorneys refrain from attack letters and confrontational behaviour. Collaborative divorce is not for every case or every attorney. It cannot work where there are allegations of hidden assets. It may not work if there is substance or alcohol abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness.

However, many divorce cases involve none of the above issues. Many involve two reasonably good people who just cannot live together anymore. While anger may temporarily blind them, their long-term best interests, when there are children involved, require a decent, if not amicable, relationship.

The legal process can do harm to this relationship, which may fester for years to come. As a result, many people are reluctant to use lawyers for their divorce, preferring mediation or even proceeding without lawyers. In many cases, this may be perfectly fine. In other cases, having a trained, experienced professional involved may be essential for agreements that are tax-friendly, address all relevant issues, and afford parties the security of approval by a lawyer focused

The young social worker came up to me after our workshop day had ended, her blue eyes brimmed with tears. She took my hands in hers and said in poignant English, "Thank you for coming to Russia... it means so much to us." Dr Andy Spickard, Jr. from Nashville, Tennessee and I were in Tosno, Russia, outside of St Petersburg, to observe and speak during an **Opora** five-day training event on the family disease of alcohol and other drug addiction that threatens to destroy Russian families, especially its teenagers and young adults.

63% percent of Russian children live with an alcoholic parent and 76.2% of boys and 87.2% of high school students use alcohol on a regular basis. Suicides among young boys, as well as death from heroin-induced HIV/AIDS, are higher than in any other country in Europe. Between 1991 and 1995 the number of teenage Russian drug addicts rose by 617%. Six out of ten crimes are committed by drug addicts under 30. In a 1998 poll, Russian high school seniors ranked "prostitution" and "hired assassin" attractive career choices – above scientist, engineer and researcher.

Opora (a Russian word meaning support) began in 1997 as an ecumenical outreach to church lay leaders and pastors to train them how to help alcoholics, drug addicts, and their family members in Christ-centred 12-step recovery. In just four years, **Opora** teams of all-Russian trainers have trained over 1,000 Russians in 38 towns and villages, planting over 77 support groups. In several cities, treatment centres have been started as a result of these initial efforts. Local Anglican churches may support one of these trainings, called adopt-an-Opora-centre.

My church, All Saints Episcopal Church, Princeton, adopted one of these **Opora-centre** trainings in Tosno, Russia. Father Nicholas Aksyonov, rector of St Nicholas Orthodox Church in Sablino, Russia, a

partner church supported by the Miami Valley Episcopal Russian Network (**MVERN**) from the Episcopal Diocese of Southern Ohio, organised the training along with a Narcological Centre in St Petersburg. Among the 67 persons in attendance were medical doctors, psychologists, priests, teachers, and social workers, including the young woman who thanked me for coming.

MVERN not only financially supports the St Nicholas Church but also many of the struggling church's social projects such as a nearby women's prison, the Nikolskoe Orphanage, and a series of Russian youth exchanges. Sometimes the youth come to live with teenagers in Southern Ohio, sometimes teenagers from the Diocese visit with Russian teenagers in Father Nicholas's parish. This past summer, 11 teenagers from Ohio joined 25 Russian teenagers in Sablino to work on service projects for the church. Together they laid new pathways, rolled down weeds, took down an old shack, and burned trash. They sorted, piled and stacked lumber. Curious youth from the local school showed up to help, most for the first time in a "religious" environment.

"Who is this Jesus Christ?" the youth asked. "Why do these Americans come all this way to work in His name?" We Anglicans were living out our faith so that they may know Him by our witness and turn away from a drug-infected lifestyle.



on their best interests.

Collaborative divorce requires lawyers who believe in the process and commit to work to resolve problems. It is not an answer to every case, nor is it for every lawyer. However, for those people who care more about their children than they do about inflicting pain on their ex-spouse, it offers a viable alternative to traditional methods of ending marriages.

For more information, visit the CFLC Web site at www.collabdivorce.com.

CANADA

My father used to say that it should be much more difficult to get married, and easier to get divorced. Since he died in 1972, it has certainly become easier to get divorced, but if anything we spend even less time in preparation for marriage, not more.

What a wise man he was. Marriage breakdowns are now on the increase, and that shouldn't be. But my misconceptions about this had a jolt recently. Whatever the circumstances, what we must learn to do, as Christians in our communities, is to be less judgmental of the parties involved, and accept that first, no-one undertakes a marriage break-up lightly, and secondly, you can never, ever know

what really goes on in someone else's marriage.

We had a one-day Diocesan rally in the spring. Our speaker and workshop leader was a woman who had left a marriage with her only child, who was ten years old at the time. She told us how she had married a loving man whom she had known for some time. He was charming and witty and everyone liked him because he was the soul of the party. The problem was, he drank a lot. The drinking grew worse, and he descended into serious alcoholism and began to beat her – never around the face or where it would show – but very seriously. Finally she had to leave, out of fear for her life and the safety of their son, and she went into hiding. It was a good thing, as it turned out; she heard later that for two weeks her husband had driven around looking for her with a loaded gun in the glove compartment.

She was surprised to find that the most difficult thing to bear was the non-acceptance and suspicion of her church community. She knew she had done nothing wrong – alcoholism is a terrible illness. But people said it must have been partly her fault -- somehow she must have driven him to it. She should have stuck by her husband until death parted them – actually it nearly did. She hadn't felt guilty when it happened, but she almost came to feel guilty because of the way she was treated.

She discovered true loneliness. If she didn't want to share what had happened to her, she was criticised. If she did tell

them, people often didn't believe her, because people who also knew her husband liked him. She couldn't go out alone, because that was seen as looking for a pick-up. She found women were reticent about going out with her, because people might suspect they were lesbians. She couldn't go out with a male friend, because people thought she was either living in sin with him or she was after someone else's husband.

We asked her what she would have had people do. As a community, she said, accept the person unconditionally. She (or he) may not want to talk, but just listen if they do. Don't pre-judge, and don't give advice. Remember one thing above all. You cannot EVER really know what goes on in someone else's relationship.

For centuries, wives in cruel marriages had to suffer in silence, in a way we would not tolerate today. Nowadays we recognise that if the shattering of the sacrament of marriage is total, it is okay to declare it dead, so that the healing can begin. So, when we are concerned about the rising rate of family breakdown and divorce, perhaps we should consider another interpretation of the statistics. More families may be safer, and better able to grow into the people God designed them to be.

ENGLAND

In the 1980s, it was recognised that the work done by the Probation Service in the civil courts needed different skills and experience to protect and represent the children who were affected by divorce. You see, at that time, we were still using an "adversarial" approach. If a marriage broke up and Dad went to live far away and Mum stayed living where she was, then I, as a Probation Officer, would have to travel miles to see both Dad and Mum. I would then have to make a decision as to where Freddy and Johnny, aged six and seven, should go and live. Clearly, seeing two parents separately I got two different stories and it was difficult to make a reasoned report for the Judge as to where might be the most suitable and happy place for the children to reside. I went all over the country at that time, seeing first one parent and then another, each time a Judge ordered a report on the future of the children of the broken marriage. I had to make a proposal and the Court could then make decisions. Parents did not take responsibility; the system encouraged them to make accusations about each other as they vied with each other to

keep the children. Often accusations that one parent made against the other were very serious, even to the point of accusing each other of sexually abusing the children. The "adversarial" approach reinforced the antagonism between the two parents who were already in conflict.

As a result, in the 1980s, the Probation Service set up separate Family Court Welfare Teams to undertake this specialist work. No longer was the adversarial approach used in preparing reports though there were, of course, cases where it still had to be applied. Instead, both parents were encouraged to come and see the Family Court Welfare Officer, often with the children, and discuss in the presence of a third party the possibilities that could be realistically set up for future arrangements. No longer did the Family Court Welfare Officer provide a report giving two parents' views but suggested a solution which both parents had discussed and for which both took responsibility.

At the same time, there were two further emerging issues. The first was that children themselves were given the right of consultation. So often in the past we only consulted children when it was felt they were old enough and they had no automatic right to give their opinions. Secondly, grandparents were beginning to want a voice in the arrangements for the children. On many occasions I have interviewed angry and depressed grandparents who have not seen their grandchildren for many months.

All these changes were taken into consideration when the Children and Family Courts Advice and Support Service (CAFCASS) was set up in April 2001. The Government's aim is to establish a new system which allows the children to be consulted and encourages parents to work together for the best interests of the children. While it would be a false claim to say that the setting up of CAFCASS is in any way based on Christian principles, we cannot avoid the Gospel imperative of working for a better, more inclusive community for which we all take individual responsibility.



CHILD CONTACT CENTRES – ENGLAND AND WALES

100,000 children a year in the UK lose all contact with a parent and their extended family due to family breakdown. This can lead to the children involved developing a range of emotional problems such as guilt and low self-esteem.

Whilst the law acknowledges that it is usually in the best interests of children to maintain contact with both parents, the family courts cannot make a parent take an interest in their children and have limited power to force resident parents to arrange that their children see the "other parent". There are many emotional and

practical problems which Court Orders alone cannot overcome.

"I loved him, even though I didn't know him. I just loved him for having the courage to come back and being there for me now... sometimes I do feel angry with him for not coming back before... as I know more about him, I grow to like him more and it makes my anger go away which makes me get a bigger hole for him in my heart."

Leah aged 8

In order to "bridge the break-up", in the last 15 years hundreds of churches in England and Wales of all denominations have committed themselves, their premises and their finances to running and supporting Child Contact Centres. 19,000 children a year now use these neutral meeting-places in order to enjoy contact with one (or both) parents, and sometimes other family members, in a comfortable and safe environment when there is no viable alternative.

Most Child Contact Centres, whether church-run or not, are under the umbrella of The National Association of Child Contact Centres (NACCC). NACCC helps centres to develop, provides training, a comprehensive manual of guidance, has a help-line for parents and grandparents, liaises with Government, the judiciary, and other charities to ensure that children's needs are given priority. We have contact with similar organisations across the world, but volunteers and faith groups are not usually the key providers in other places.

A quote from a parent using a centre in an Anglican Church in the West Midlands:

"The Centre was absolutely brilliant for me and Susan to start building our relationship after a long and hurtful gap. I have never met a kinder and more concerned group of people in my life. I am now seeing Susan every Saturday 9am – 6pm. We go anywhere and everywhere and now she even telephones me in the week. Our bond and love for each other

is beautiful. All this was made possible by all of you at the Centre."



Family Groups on The Wirral

The Wirral is a peninsula in North West England where there is a great deal of wealth but also a lot of families living in poverty with poor housing and stresses on their family. Family Groups are a simple way of helping families support one another through these times of stress.

The Family Group Development Project is a partnership between Anglican Churches and the Catholic Children's Society and they have set up 20 family groups across the Wirral, most of which meet in church premises. Each family group finds a church hall or a similar building for its meeting where they can have a room for children to play, a room for parents to meet and access to refreshments and toilets. The project provides training for the group leaders and up to ten parents can come to each of the groups.

The aim is simply to provide somewhere for parents to meet and talk together about what it means to be a parent and the pressures and problems they face. The leaders help the discussion along but don't tell people what to do or how they should behave. It is deceptively simple and it works. At a recent conference a young mother movingly described how a family group had helped her and how she wanted to go on to help others through leading a group.

The official Social Services appreciate the service greatly. They recognise that they cannot help all of the families under stress because they have to concentrate on the most needy. They also recognise that this low-key support at an early stage can avoid the need for more expensive intervention when problems have become more serious.

The project team also see the Project as a way of showing Christianity in action through loving care and support.

SCOTLAND

HAMILTON FAMILY CONTACT CENTRE

The last two years has seen the Scottish Episcopal Church of St Mary the Virgin in Hamilton committing itself to a partnership project with the Women's Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS). The initial concern for the church was a suitable community use for a former caretaker's flat, whilst the WRVS were keen to find premises more suited to helping close family contact and develop their UK programme of Family Contact Centres in Scotland.

Aware of increasing pressures on family life in Scotland, and especially in Hamilton, where a local curfew had been imposed by the police authority restricting children to the home after dark, the Rector, together with the Church's Social Action Group and the local WRVS Community Services'

manager, were keen to develop some support for families in the area. £12,000 was raised from several sources to refurbish the flat.

Many parents are struggling to work and care for their children, particularly if the conventional family unit is under strain or broken. Issues of violence, poverty, poor housing and crime are also closely related to how a child might survive in an increasingly fragmented community structure. For the non-resident parent seeking access to their child, the practice, for many, is to find a refuge. Yet space at the local play area, cinema, pizza house or other local fast food outlet, will not provide the close contact for one parent or the essential supervision required by the other parent. Also, to prevent further conflict damaging the parent-child-parent relationships after separation, there are often legal restrictions put in place that have to be worked out, enabling children to meet their non-resident parent.

St. Mary's and the WRVS were keen to develop a "neutral space" for children to meet non-resident parents. They had observed that families suffering from the difficulties of separation were hesitant to find support within their local close-knit neighbourhood, even from churches or schools, for the fear of stigmatisation, local gossip and folk all too ready to

interfere in often complex personal issues. The Flat-space within St Mary's premises, in a mainly non-residential area in the town centre, creates an environment similar to any home for the child but offers privacy and anonymity for the parent, which is more appropriate than an impersonal agency office. It has the comfort essential for a parent to meet, play, communicate and build relationships with their child. Volunteers from the Hamilton churches and the local community, trained by the WRVS, provide the Flat-space with the necessary provisions for good family contact.

St Mary's is now looking to provide other family support resources and is working closely with another family support charity seeking to extend its services to West Central Scotland. It is the intention of St Mary's, in partnership with the other churches and volunteer services in Hamilton, to extend their current premises to provide further meeting/activity areas for a range of family support. A local community audit has just been completed; so we hope and pray for the future direction of this work.

HONG KONG

In recent years, Hong Kong has faced rapid economic and social changes which bring significant impact on families. The Population By-Census and other recent studies reveal that from 1986 to 1998 divorce cases increased two and a half times. With the upward trend in marriage breakdown, the number of single parent families rose sharply in the five years up to 1996 with 72% of these being single mothers. There were about 55,000 new arrivals per year from Mainland China and these families frequently encounter problems with housing, schooling, employment and other adjustment problems. Following the economic downturn and restructuring of the labour market, the unemployment rate in Hong Kong soared up to 4.9% recently.

Services Provided by the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (H.K.S.K.H.) Welfare Council

The H.K.S.K.H. Welfare Council, as a welfare arm of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui (Anglican Church in Hong Kong), provides a wide range of services to enhance family functioning, to promote family well-being and to resolve family problems.

The H.K.S.K.H. Counselling Centre is a self-financed centre offering counselling and family mediation services to families having relationship and marital problems. Through the network of two community centres, one integrated service, six children and youth service units and school social work units under Sheng Kung Hui, a large number of family life education programmes

have been organised to promote harmonious family relationship and equip family members with the knowledge and skills for performing their roles. Trained social workers in these service units also provided counselling service to families in need. In response to the overwhelming service needs of the new arrivals from Mainland China, the H.K.S.K.H. New Immigrant Integrated Service Centre, which was the first project in Hong Kong funded by the Council, was established in 1996. The service outcome of the Centre was successful and fully recognised by the user, the community and the government. The H.K.S.K.H. Kowloon City Post-migration Centre was a pilot project supported by the Government in February 2001 to outreach the new arrival families and provide them with necessary assistance. In case of sudden family hardship, a Director's discretionary fund is available to tide over the emergent financial need.

In addition to the strong network of the social service units of the Council, the Church and school network of the Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui have provided a strong support to the Council in terms of volunteers and resources. The joint forces of the Church, school and social service will work together to combat family breakdown and assist the families in trouble.

BRAZIL

"The Brazilian family has a new look" states a survey of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics at the end of the 20th century. This is true. It is smaller, there are more single parent families; there is more drug abuse, more children meet in the streets, more adolescents idle in the streets, squares and beaches; more families are affected by urban violence.

We are also affected by environmental problems. Of the 169,590,693 inhabitants, 73% live in urban centres. The infrastructure of the cities was not prepared for such an invasion, or for the consequence of this rural exodus.

Faced with all these problems, the Brazilian population is presently going through a great social transformation, which cries out for urgent measures. The violence has reached an unbearable point.

My city of Recife is considered by UNESCO to be proportionately the most violent city in the world. The Brazilian population is crying for hope, dignity, opportunities, love, and faith.

The Anglican Mission of Living Water serves directly a section of the 30% of the Brazilian population that live in absolute poverty. Our activities involve over 100 families. We have only two cases of traditional marriage (civil) and over 80% have had more than three relationships. Of all the confirmed members only one couple has children from just one relationship. Within this context we understand our mission to be:

- Do not judge
- Create a welcoming spirit in the community of love of Jesus Christ

- In the light of the Bible present the values of the Kingdom
- Strengthen the present family unit and try to understand and restructure the previous ones (especially the children)
- Talk with them about the question of guilt (abortion, abandonment)*

**Extracts from paper delivered at the West Malaysia Consultation of the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion held in July 2001*

BOLIVIA

Marital breakdowns in Bolivia have reached crisis proportions. It has been stated that a stunning 75% of marriages in Bolivia end in divorce, with 73% of these ending in the first two years of marriage. Apparently, a sizeable number of these individuals enter a cycle of divorce, remarriage and divorce once again. The profile of the Anglican congregation in Santa Cruz, Bolivia corroborates such claims. Divorcees, persons in a second or third marriage, single mothers and couples struggling

with breakdowns in marital relationships, far outnumber healthy first marriages. Some members were non-Christians when their first marriages fell apart. But Christian marriages have not been spared the devastating effects of marital breakdown.

Some of the contributing reasons for such breakdown are:

- **Absence of social restraint**
Social taboos surrounding divorce and separation have lost their

restraining influence. Divorce is now an option to be considered and even a normal outcome when a couple persistently encounter difficult problems in their marriage. This is a paradox, considering the strong Roman Catholic influence in Bolivian society. In poll after poll, the Roman Church scores highly as a trusted institution in Bolivian society. This influence however stops at the door of marital relationships, if the divorce statistics are anything to go by.

turn to us for help. Here are some examples of this work:

Premarital counselling and therapy.

- It is not easy to reconcile a couple who see no future in their marriage. Preventative therapy is easier but not less challenging than finding a cure for a terminally sick marriage. Couples require a premarital course where they are taught the biblical basis of marriage and exposed to the issues which await them in married life. Much mentoring, discipling and therapy takes place in the sessions because virtually all the couples that we work with come from broken and dysfunctional homes. The most important work in premarital counselling and therapy is introducing and highlighting the central place of Jesus Christ in marriages. He truly mends broken relationships.

Support groups.

- Couples meet once a month. They listen to a marriage-building message. They separate into groups, discuss the issues raised by the speakers and close the session with corporate prayer. As most of our couples come from broken marriages and very difficult domestic backgrounds, a communal environment where marriage-enhancing values are upheld and encouraged is vital for the growth of a Christian marriage.

Counselling.

- As well as professional help, use is made of lay counsellors. Many have gone through a basic course in counselling and from this group we hope to choose some and further equip them as lay counsellors. Helping troubled marriages will certainly occupy an important role in any training syllabus.

Conclusion: stories of hope and redemption

The story of creation and redemption is mirrored in stories of transformed lives and marriages. Marital breakdowns and problems leave a trail of personal destruction in Santa Cruz. This is, however, not the end. Christ, like the good Samaritan, picks up the wounded and redeems them. The congregation are his hands and feet.*



*Extracts from paper delivered at the West Malaysia Consultation of the Evangelical Fellowship of the Anglican Communion held in July 2001

- **Separation for reasons of employment**

The lack of jobs forces men to leave their households and look for jobs in other parts of the country. They leave Santa Cruz and work in outlying provincial areas where oil and gas exploration projects abound. The physical absence of the husband strains the intimacy between husband and wife and can dispose them to various temptations.

- **Lack of mutual understanding**

Marital breakdowns befall couples who have stopped trying to understand each other. Heart-to-heart communication comes to a standstill. Resentments fester and eventually break out into full-fledged conflicts. Bolivian culture promotes warm greetings, hospitality, and physical expressions of welcome: however these cannot guarantee gut-level communication and sometimes mask destructive problems within the marriage.

- **Dominant wife – passive husband**

In almost all cases of marital breakdowns in the congregation, the man feels intimidated by the wife, and feels uncomfortable with his inability to control the circumstances surrounding the marriage. The 'machismo' element in Bolivian culture apparently honours the virile and strong man who puts everyone in their place, including his wife:

however, on closer inspection the culture regards the woman as the 'life-giver' who by her strength and virtue holds the family together.

- **Extra-marital affairs**

The culture in Santa Cruz highlights physical sensuality in feminine beauty. Sex shops, legalised pornography and nudity in some of the daily newspapers, coupled with social permissiveness, provide an atmosphere which does not promote sexual abstinence. On Friday nights (*Viernes de Soltero*) some married men go out with their friends and carouse as if they were single again. Some lose self-control and succumb to temptation.

The Church's redemptive strategy and tactics

It is tempting to think that marital breakdowns are *out there* in society and that the church is somehow free of these rather unpleasant developments. The opposite is true. Marital problems and breakdowns are a reality *within* the church in Santa Cruz. Many persons who have decided to identify themselves fully with the life of the congregation belong to one-parent families and wrestle with the trauma of divorce/custodial issues.

The redemptive nature of the congregation is also reflected through its lifestyle, activities and programmes. The Lord provides and guides as we try to minister to couples and marriages who

USA

Mothers' Union USA begins a program of uniting all individual members, the few existing branches and hopefully many new soon-to-be-installed branches in Episcopal Parishes throughout the United States. The purpose is Christian concern for families worldwide.

We have the blessing and the prayers of our Presiding Bishop, Frank T. Griswold for our endeavours. The President of the United States, George W. Bush has just recently (actually since the tragedy) issued the statement, "strong families make a strong America" with defining statistics quoted to substantiate this fact.

So we join now to do our part with over a million members worldwide who have already offered over 125 years of prayer and service for the family. May all we do be to the Glory of God and to the strengthening of the family in our nation and in the world. May this Scottish blessing become true.

If there is righteousness in the heart,
there will be beauty in the character.

If there is beauty in the character,
there will be harmony in the home.

If there is harmony in the home,
there will be order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation,
there will be peace in the world.

IAFN Office Move

The Family Network is moving office in the New Year. After 14 years of much-valued support from The Children's Society, it will be moving to the Anglican Communion Office as the "host organisation". The Network office will continue to be located in the home of the Co-ordinator, at a new address in England. Details of the new postal and e-mail address for IAFN, to be in operation after April 1st, will be given in the Easter Anglican World. Meanwhile, continue to contact IAFN at the current address. All letters will be forwarded to the Co-ordinator.

In light of the recent terrorism attacks on our country and the ensuing tragedy, horror, death, fear, pain, sadness, anger, and economic demise experienced by so many, there is good news for the family and thereby for the nation. Divorce lawyers are reporting more people are putting divorce on hold, deciding to work through the difficulties in the marriage. People who were co-habiting are choosing marriage. The dark horizon shown in the disturbing statistics in the United States has these and other points of light shining forth.

United we stand as a nation. May that fact and, more importantly, the fact that more people are now praying and calling on Almighty God to rescue us and to have mercy, help to change the downward spiral of the family in our land and truly help to strengthen our families.

Here in the United States "we have been humbled, we are praying, we are seeking His face, and hopefully we are turning from our wicked ways" (each of us) – so in God's infinite wisdom, mercy and grace, "He will hear from heaven, forgive our sins, and heal our land." (Based on 2 Chron. 7:14)

The prayers and support and love shown to us by and through the international community have been so thankfully received and accepted and so powerfully helpful. May we all together be "filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding, be walking worthy of God, fully pleasing Him and being fruitful in all good works and ever increasing in the knowledge of Him."

United we stand – yes. In God we trust – more again each day – for peace in the family, for peace in our nation, for peace in the world.

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