## We Hold These Children

#### A Service for Children’s Sunday

*By Rev. Richard Bott, St. Andrew’s Haney United Church, Maple Ridge, BC*

##### Preparation for Worship

On the Sunday(s) before Children’s Sunday, invite everyone in the congregation to bring photos of children to the service. Ask them to bring a photo of a child with whom they are connected and a photo of a child from somewhere else in the world from a magazine or newspaper or online. You may wish to have images available for guests and others who need them.

You will also need a photo of a child’s *silhouette* to give to everyone. As an example, see www.flickr.com/photos/vox\_efx/2159537751. You may be able to find a silhouette in a magazine, or you could take a picture of a child against the sun or other bright light. It’s important that the child’s features not be visible or recognizable in the photo.

### Order of Worship

#### Call to Gather

(*Taken from the words of the Under-18 Delegates to the United Nations Special Session on Children, May 2002. This should be read by children or teens:*)

**One:** We are the world’s children.

We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.

We are the street children.

We are the children of war.

We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.

We are denied good-quality education and health care.

We are victims of political, economic, cultural,

religious, and environmental discrimination.

We are children whose voices are not being heard:

it is time we are taken into account.

**Two:** We want a world fit for children,

because a world fit for children is a world fit for everyone.

**Three:** In this world, we see respect for the rights of the child.

In this world, we see an end to exploitation, abuse, and violence.

In this world, we see an end to war.

In this world, we see the provision of health care.

In this world, we see the eradication of HIV/AIDS.

**Two:** In this world, we see the protection of the environment.

In this world, we see an end to the vicious cycle of poverty.

In this world, we see the provision of education.

In this world, we see the active participation of children.

**One:** We are the children of the world,

and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality.

We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all.

You call us the future, but we are also the present.

**Two:** The Future…

**Three:** *and* the Present.

**One:** So come, sisters and brothers of every age!

Come, cousins from every land and place!

As children in *this* place—disciples of Christ and children of God—

we’re here with the belief that the world can be different.

We’re here with the belief that God’s love,

living in us and through us,

changes the world!

**Two:** Alleluia.

**Three:** ALLELUIA!

**All: ALLELUIA!**

#### Prayer of Approach

(*The prayer leader invites the group to repeat words and actions:*)

(*arms open wide*) Holy God,

(*arms move in, pretending to rock a baby*) you were with us when we were born,

(*squatting down, slowly rising with arms overhead*) you are with us as we grow,

(*covering heart with hands and crumpling a bit*) you are with us when we hurt,

(*standing tall, arms to side*) you are with us when we are whole.

(*cupping hands at belly*) Thank you.

(*raising cupped hands to chest level*) Thank you!

(*raising hands above head*) THANK YOU!

(*making “binoculars”*) Would you help us to see?

(*cupping ears*) Would you help us to hear?

(*stretching arms out*) Would you help us to love?

(*making* *360-degree turn*) So we might change ourselves.

(*making* *360-degree turn*) So we might change the world!

(*arms open wide*) Amen.

#### Opening Hymn

“I Am a Child of God” (*More Voices* 157)

(*This hymn is by Cheryl and Bruce Harding. If you have LicenSing, this piece is covered.*)

#### Sharing Scripture

(*This is set up as a series of vignettes. Each takes a look at a biblical child who offered significant ministry to the community. One of our congregation’s favourite ways to share scripture is to have it read by someone, while actions that support the story are mimed by actors from the congregation. While some congregations have people who can do this impromptu, it often works better if people have had a chance to practise their actions and to bring props that help to set the scene.*)

##### 1 Samuel 3:1–18 God calls Samuel

(*Needs one child, one elder, and a reader.*)

(*After the story has been acted out, break into groups of three or so. Invite people to take a minute to think about three questions and then chat about them:)*

* How do you think Samuel felt during the story?
* What messages of God do the children in our congregation have to share?
* What could we do to do a better job of hearing God’s message through the children in this congregation and in the world?)

*Music to bring people back:* “Cradle Me in Your Arms” (*More Voices* 91) (*This hymn is by Bruce Harding. If you have LicenSing, this piece is covered.*)

##### Mark 6:17–26 Herodias’ and Herod’s daughter asks for John the Baptizer’s head

(*Needs two adults, a child, the congregation to be the crowd, and a reader.*)

(*After the story has been acted out, break into groups of three or so. Invite people to take a minute to think about three questions and then chat about them:*)

* How do you think the girl in this story felt about what was happening?
* Do children of our time get dragged into adults’ battles? How do we see this happening? (E.g., child soldiers, children as go-betweens in separation/divorce)
* What could we do to help adults deal with their stuff without involving children?)

*Music to bring people back:* “Cradle Me in Your Arms” (MV 91)

##### Luke 2:41–52 Jesus in the Temple

(*Needs two adults, a child, the congregation to be the elders, and a reader.*)

(*After the story has been acted out, break into groups of three or so. Invite people to take a minute to think about three questions and then chat about them:*)

* When you think about all the things you’ve learned from the stories of Jesus’ life, which teachings are most important to you?
* What does that teaching (or those teachings) mean for how you relate to other children in the world?

*Music to bring people back:* “Cradle Me in Your Arms” (MV 91)

Invite people to share with the congregation something they learned in the listening and speaking in the scripture sharing time.

#### Hymn

“Draw the Circle Wide” (MV 145)

(*This hymn is by Gordon Light © Common Cup Company. If you have LicenSing, this piece is covered.*)

#### Prayers of Thanksgiving, Confession, and Intercession

(*Invite everyone to take out their three pictures and set them in their lap or on the pew beside them—somewhere they can see them. Ask them to focus on the picture of the child they know.*)

**One:** As I look at this picture, I say, “Thank you, God!”

For the gift of this person in my life.

Thank you for who they are.

Thank you for how they change who I am.

Thank you for all that is good in them,

and for all that is good in the world.

Thank you for making them my teacher,

and thank you for helping them learn from me.

Hold this child in your love!

**All: Hold all children in your love!**

(*Ask everyone to focus on the silhouette given to them when they came in.*)

**One:** As I look at this picture, I realize I can’t really see the face.

So, today, God, this picture represents someone I’ve hurt—

maybe because of something I did,

maybe because of something I didn’t do.

God, could you help me to realize what I’ve done?

Would you forgive me for what I’ve done?

Could you help me, tomorrow and every day afterward,

to make wiser choices—

ones that bring healing, rather than hurting,

to your world?

(*A moment of silence.*)

Hold these children in your love.

**All: Hold these children in your love.**

(*Ask everyone to focus on the image they brought of the child they don’t know.*)

**One:** God, this child is your child.

I’m not sure where they come from.

I don’t know what is happening in their life.

But I do know that, just like me, they need your love.

If there is some way that *I* can make a difference in their life,

guide me to that action—

so I can help to be your hands, your heart, and your love in the world.

Hold these children in your love.

**All: Hold these children in your love.**

#### Offering

**One:** In celebration and in hope, let us continue our prayer. Let’s each of us bring forward an offering today—an offering of the faces in our prayer. We’re going to place the photos on the communion table so we might see the faces of God’s children. As we do so, let’s bring our financial gifts in the offering plates as well.

*Music while people are bringing forward their offerings:* “Rise Up, Rise Up” (MV 130) (*This hymn is by Linnea Good © Borealis Music. If you have LicenSing, this piece is covered.*)

(*When everyone has brought their offerings forward and the ushers have brought forward offerings from those who can’t easily get to the table:*)

**One:** All of these people, all of these things, all that we have, and all that we are are gifts of God. So we say, “Alleluia!”

**All: Alleluia!**

**One:** So we say, “Amen!”

**All: Amen!**

#### Closing Words

(*Taken from the words of the Under-18 Delegates to the United Nations Special Session on Children, May 2002. This should be read by children or teens:*)

**One:** We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children’s rights.

And, while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking—because the children of the world are misunderstood.

**Two:** Today, we hope you have seen that

we are not the sources of problems;

we are the resources that are needed to solve them.

We are not expenses; we are investments.

We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world.

**Three:** We are the children of the world,

and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality.

We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all.

You call us the future, but we are also the present.

**All: Future and present,**

**we promise to work with you,**

**to build a world in which all children**

**can live their birthright**

**as beloved children of God.**

**For this task,**

**may God bless all of us**

**with wisdom, with hope, and with love.**

**In Jesus’ name, with the breath of the Spirit,**

**we pray. Amen!**

#### Closing Hymn

“Go, Make a Diff’rence” (MV209) (*This hymn is by Steve Angrisano and Tom Tomaszek. If you have LicenSing, this piece is covered.*)

**One:** And the people said—

**All: Amen!**