

Suggestions,
Background
Materials, and
Templates for
Consultations

Collaboration with Children and Adolescents in the Implementation of “CHURCHES’ COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN”



World Council
of Churches



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in the Implementation of
“Churches’ Commitments to Children”**

**Suggestions, Background Materials
and Templates for Consultations**

July 2017

For any questions or feedback/photos from your consultations to be shared with other churches please write to churchesforchildren@wcc-coe.org

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Introduction

The views and ideas of children and adolescents are of utmost importance for the success of the “Churches’ Commitments to Children” currently being implemented. The World Council of Churches (WCC), UNICEF, and World Vision have therefore jointly worked on this guide to support church members and partners interested in conducting consultations with children and adolescents on “Churches’ Commitments to Children.”

Your consultations with children and adolescents may take very different shapes depending on the opportunities you have for such exchanges in your church community. You may choose to focus on just one Commitment for your exchanges with children and adolescents or ask for their views and ideas on the entire initiative.

Within this guide you will find:

- Information about how to prepare for the consultation;
- Important details/suggestions for ensuring we accurately document the young people’s recommendations;
- Various group activities to support discussion, learning, and team building;
- Ideas relating to next steps and follow-up;
- A template to share the results from the consultation with children with the WCC and UNICEF.

STEP 1 – PREPARATION AND PLANNING

If possible, we encourage you to involve children and adolescents as early as possible in the planning process. For example, if appropriate in your context, you can work with some young people to prepare the meeting, develop the agenda, and even help facilitate the meeting.

Minimum Standards in Children’s Participation

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard describes the basic requirements for implementing the right of the child to be heard. Minimum standards include: transparency, voluntary participation, creating a child-friendly environment, equality, protection, safety, qualified staff, and follow-up. (See Annex 2 – Minimum Standards in Children’s Participation.). Because we speak about the rights of the child, it is important to mention that the Convention also covers the category of adolescents, as declared in article 1 (below the age of 18, or depending on the majority stipulated by national legislation).

Safety and Protection

One of the standards in children’s and adolescents’ participation is to ensure the safety and protection of all children and adolescents. In particular, these are some important considerations that should be taken into account during the planning phase of any consultation with children and adolescents:

- **Prevention of Harm in Child and Adolescence Participation:** This consultation aims to empower children and adolescents as citizens and should minimize any risk of harm or negative consequence resulting from their participation in this process.
- **Ethics:** Child and adolescent participation activities are to be designed and implemented to adhere to principles and ethics that keep the best interests of children as the top priority.
- **Informed Consent in Child Participation:** Child participation activities are to be voluntary and inclusive (especially of the most vulnerable children), and both children and

parents/caregivers are to make informed decisions regarding participation, including due consideration of risks that could be associated with the activity.

- **Child and Adolescent Travel:** If children have to travel in order to participate in this consultation, the parents or caregivers, or other legally required entity or individual, will give informed consent prior to the travel. The child's health, safety, and well-being are the most important priorities during travel.
- **Safety:** It is important to identify places where children and adolescents feel safe to participate and be part of the consultation, taking into consideration children's and adolescents' opinions and inputs.

Rapporteur

Ensuring that you accurately record and capture the recommendations and perspectives of the children and adolescents is a top priority. Please consider, ahead of time, who will be responsible for taking notes during the consultation(s). (See Annex 5 – Rapporteur checklist.)

Photos

Photos may include pictures of the participating children and adolescents, or they can include images chosen by the children, including artwork or other forms of expression. Please adhere to relevant protection policies and obtain proper consent. Children and adolescents should be informed that this is voluntary. Children and adolescents (and parents/guardians) should be informed that their images may appear online, in national and international publications, and/or in any resources relating this initiative. (See Annex 4 – Sample consent form for parents/guardians.)

Supplies and Resources

Each consultation will be different, and you should take into account your resources and capacity when planning. Please allow some time to think about and plan for all the material you might be needing (e.g., flipchart paper/board, papers, markers/pens, printed materials - see attached documents). Please also try to identify an appropriate venue for the consultation (a location that is welcoming, accessible, and child friendly).

Energizers and Icebreakers

As the facilitator, it is important that you pay attention to the participants and take breaks when needed. It is a good idea to have a list of “energizers” ready for when your group needs a bit of a boost. (See Annex 4 – Energizers and icebreakers.)

Time

We estimate that you will need a total of about 8 hours to complete the full consultation with children and adolescents; times will vary according to the activities you choose and the size of your group. Depending on your team / resource people, you can break it up over a number of days. We recommend that you consider doing it over the course of two days, but the consultation process is flexible to accommodate your needs/preferences.

Participants

All participants should be under 18 years of age. We suggest having no more than 12 to 15 children/adolescents in a consultation. It is recommended to consult separately pre-school children; children aged 6 to 12; and adolescents. As you invite children and adolescents to

participate, please consider the group's gender balance and diversity (try to include as much as possible young people from urban and rural settings; different economic backgrounds; with disabilities; belonging to indigenous and minority groups, etc.).

Facilitators

Facilitators should consider devoting some time to be trained for this consultation. Some of the attachments to this guide might be useful for facilitators to build or refresh their knowledge on the CRC, including by exploring the issue of children's and adolescents' rights within a biblical perspective.

STEP 2 – INVITATION

Once you have decided when, where, how, and who will be invited to participate in the consultation, it is time to send out the invitation and other related materials. (See Annex 3 – Sample of invitation.) Along with the invitation, please include a copy of Annex 1 (Questions & answers on the consultations with children around the “Churches’ Commitments to Children”). Ideally, children and adolescents will receive these details at least one week in advance of the consultation.

Note: Before the meeting, please circulate a consent form for children, adolescents and parents/guardians regarding their participation in the meeting and any photos that will be taken during the consultation. (See Annex 4 – Sample consent form for parents/guardians.)

STEP 3 – WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION (estimated time: 30 minutes)

Introductions (5 minutes)

Start off by introducing the team that will be supporting the meeting: for example, the facilitator(s); translator(s), rapporteur(s), photographer, etc. Ask the young people to briefly introduce themselves and why they are attending this meeting.

Important information to be shared

Before you begin, share the following details and information with the participants:

- Child Protection
 - Please remind participants that their participation is voluntary.
 - This may also be a good time to share with them the Minimum Standards in Children's Participation in an interactive way
 - Please share with the group the details of all child protection policies and procedures. These include:
 - Issues relating to disclosure of information/privacy if sensitive issues arise (the facilitators should maintain appropriate confidentiality for individuals and sensitive issues raised during the consultation. They may disclose general information about the issue in order to support learning and accountability, and prevent future incidents, and as required by law).
 - Where they can access support if needed.
- Rapporteur
 - Please explain the role of the rapporteur, in simple words through a game and include him or her in the process

- The rapporteur may want to talk about their role and remind participants that their ideas and recommendations will be shared/documented, but that their names and personal details will not be shared (only ages, gender, and country).
- Photos
 - If you have chosen to take photos or to film the consultation, talk to the participants about their rights before any pictures are taken. Explain how the photos will be used.
 - As much as possible, the participants should feel ownership and control of the photos or films (for example, ask if there are any participants who would like to volunteer to work with the photographer after the consultation to select images).
- Logistics
 - Make any relevant or needed announcements, for example:
 - location of the washrooms;
 - details about snacks or lunch;
 - details about transportation after the meeting;
 - how to make a call if they need to.

STEP 4 – EXPECTATIONS AND AGENDA (estimated time: 30 minutes)

Introducing the Churches’ Commitments to Children and this Consultation’s Objectives

Now it is time to share with all participants the goals and objectives of the meeting, and to introduce the idea of the “Churches’ Commitments to Children” (see Annex 1 – Questions & answers on the consultations around the “Churches’ Commitments to Children”). Groups of children and adolescents in many different countries are talking about them. Ask the group if they have any additional questions before you move on.

Suggested Activity: Defining Expectations

1. Provide each participant with three pieces of paper and a marker (if your group is larger, you may want to adapt this for small group discussion). Each paper should identify the user’s age and sex.
 - On one piece of paper ask them to write an answer to the question, “What would you like to learn from this meeting?”
 - On the second piece of paper: “What is something you hope to see happen during this meeting?”
 - On the third piece of paper: “What do you want to see happen after this meeting?”
2. Ask participants to tape their “expectations” on the wall in columns.
3. Read each expectation out loud to the entire group. Look for similar groupings: for example, expectations about learning new things. Move the cards into their grouping as they are read out loud. It is important to read each expectation without telling the names of the children and adolescents in order to not feel them embarrassed for any reason.

You should refer to these expectations throughout the discussion and afterwards to ensure you are meeting expectations and understanding individual and group goals/priorities.

Agenda

It is a good idea to have the agenda clearly displayed in the room, so that everyone can see it. (See Annex 6 –Sample of agenda.)

STEP 5 – CHILDREN’S RIGHTS REFRESHER (estimated time: 60 minutes)

These activities are intended as an introduction to Children’s Rights, or as a refresher in case your group already has a good understanding of it. (See Annex 8 – Child-friendly version of the CRC.)

Suggested Activity: Rights versus Wants

1. Write the following words or “headings” on three pieces of paper and tape each piece of paper on the wall so that they are a few feet apart from each other.
Rights
Needs
Desires
2. Write the following words and “concepts” on separate pieces of smaller paper
Clean water Family reunification Medicine
A tattoo Designer clothes Books
Fresh air Education Food
Shelter Sports Equipment Television
Join a cult Family Eyeglasses
Music CDs Love Library card
3. Divide the group into three groups and then provide each group with an equal number of words/concepts. Ask each group to work together and place their word/concept under the heading (right, need, desire) they feel is the most appropriate. Explain to the group that, at this point, there may not be a right or wrong answer and that there may be more than one correct answer.
4. Provide the participants an opportunity to explain why they have made some of the choices they have and ask participants from other groups if they agree or disagree.
5. Inform participants that the exercise will be revisited a little later on. Leave the information on the wall for the next activity and ask the rapporteur to record the information.

Suggested Activity: Group Discussion

Talk to the participants about their rights and their understanding of the CRC (note: the discussion will vary according to your group’s current understanding of the Convention). Please choose the questions that are appropriate to your group. Possible questions could include:

- Was anyone surprised by what they found in the CRC?
- Have they learned anything new about the CRC and their rights?
- Which rights do they think are the least understood and supported?
- Which rights are the most understood and supported?
- Which rights does the current initiative address?

Suggested Activity: Rights versus Desires Revisited

This activity is a continuation of the first suggested activity, “rights versus needs.”

1. Ask each group to revisit the activity and their original placements of the words/concepts.
2. Do they want to make any changes? (please record their discussion)
3. What new information have they gained that makes them want to reconsider?
4. Ask groups to explain their new perspective.
5. To conclude the exercise, follow these recommendations:
 - Ask participants to review the text of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
 - What words/concepts are clearly defined as rights in the CRC?

If there is a high level of debate within your group, you may want to explore the following ideas:

- In cases where the exact language (e.g., books) is not found in the CRC, it is still possible to advocate for children's rights by asking that governments provide children with books to ensure their right to an education is fully realized.
- Different "needs" will be emphasized depending on the cultural context or country specific situations.

STEP 6 – DEFINING THE CHURCH: WHAT IT IS, DOES, AND CAN DO (estimated time: 90 minutes)

Suggested Activity: What the Church Is

1. Write in big letters the word "church" on a flipchart and post it to be visible to all.
2. Ask the children/youth: "What comes into your mind when you hear the word 'church'?"
3. Distribute crayons and paper to each participant and ask them to draw their thoughts.
4. Give them seven minutes to draw and then ask them to share their drawing and explain it. (After each finishes sharing, put them on the wall.)
5. Write the key words they use to describe church on the flipchart.
6. The facilitator can then summarize what the children shared.

Suggested Activity: What the Church Does

1. Make five columns on the flipchart and name each of them as, respectively "personal life," "family life," "community life," "country/region" and "world."
2. Ask participants "In what ways does the church affect you at the personal level?" and write the outcome of the discussion in that column. Do the same for the other categories.
3. Now try to assign a "right" to the replies. In this way you will have identified what "rights" churches have to do with.
4. Explore some of the following questions with the group:
 - From our discussion, does it appear that churches have more to do with some rights than others?
 - If yes, which ones?
 - Are there any other rights that churches deal with that didn't appear on the list?

Suggested Activity: What the Church Can Do

With the previous activity, we saw the different ways churches deal with children's rights. Now we need to ask ourselves, "How can churches better support and respect children's rights? What do they need to be doing and where do the opportunities exist?"

1. Write and post the following themes in a place all participants can see:
 - The church should make it possible for girls and boys to participate in church activities and decisions and activities affecting their lives.
 - The church should do everything possible to protect children.
 - The church should help to make sure that everyone knows about the rights of children and adolescents.
 - The church should organize projects with boys and girls in the church to help protect our planet and your future.
2. Provide the explanation above and ask participants:
 - Do you feel that these points are a good summary of the different things the churches can do to support and respect your rights?

- Are there things you think churches should do for children that aren't covered by these themes?
3. Once you have a final list of "opportunities/themes," it is time for the group to decide which ones they would like to discuss. The group may decide that they want to look at all the themes, or they may choose 2 or 3 that they would prefer to focus on. The following questions are suggested in exploring each theme:
- What are the current problems related to this theme?
 - What should churches be doing to fix these problems and to better support and respect children's rights?
 - What other things could churches do, in general, to support and respect children's rights? (Note: Don't focus only on "fixing" existing problems, but also ask what churches can be doing to prevent problems and how they can advance and support good work/efforts that support children's rights.)

Please be sure to record the group discussion, and if you were working in small groups, provide each group the opportunity to report back and hear feedback from the other participants.

STEP 7 – INTRODUCING THE COMMITMENTS (estimated time: 15 minutes)

Recap

Prior to saying goodbye to the group, please briefly recap the day's discussion and accomplishments.

Please review the agenda for the next day with them and provide an overview of the preparation they need to do ahead of time (see below).

Ask the group if they are satisfied with the consultation so far and if there are any changes/adjustments that need to be made for the upcoming discussions.

Ask if anyone would like to volunteer to provide the group with a recap to start off the next day's agenda.

Homework

To support their discussions and planning, we have developed a child-friendly version of the Commitments. (See Annex 9 – Child-friendly version of the Commitments). Share the child-friendly version of the Commitments with all participants and explain to them that for homework they should review the Commitments and, using the discussions they have had today, reply to the following questions:

- Which of the Commitments are most urgent in your community?
- How could children/adolescents be involved in implementing one or several of the Commitments? Remind participants that while their comments will all be taken seriously and considered by the church.

Please consider a closing activity to conclude the day and thank everyone for their time and great insight. Remind participants about the day, time, and location for the next meeting.

STEP 8 – DISCUSSING THE COMMITMENTS (estimated time: 90 minutes)

Welcome participants back to the consultation, and do a group energizer before you get started. Review the agenda with everyone.

If a group of volunteers agreed to do a recap of day 1 (see Step 8), please invite them to do their presentation; otherwise, please provide the participants with a summary.

If possible, please display key materials/charts/information discussed previously.

Remind participants of their homework and the questions they were asked to consider.

Note: You may want to have extra copies of the Commitments on hand in case someone forgot theirs.

Ask if there were any terms, concepts, or sections that were unclear?

It will be helpful to keep in mind that after discussing what they think about the Commitments you will explore how to ensure that churches are following them and what role should children have in promoting them.

Group Discussion

The Commitments have the following main sections:

1. The church can make it possible for girls and boys to participate in church activities and decisions and activities affecting their lives.
 - a) In church activities and planning for services and praying.
 - b) In society (society means a large group of people including you, your family, your school, your community, and your leaders, politicians and decision-makers): Churches should ask society to listen to and act on children's and adolescents' ideas.
2. The church can do everything possible to protect children.
 - a) Make sure children and adolescents are safe within the church community. Also make sure children and adolescents know whom to ask for help if they have a problem.
 - b) Help to stop violence against girls and boys throughout the village/city/country and even throughout the world.
 - c) Help protect children and adolescents if a big unexpected problem happens near the church (for example, in countries where there can be big storms, earthquakes, or wars).
 - d) Help all children get a document called a "birth certificate," because this paper is needed for a person to get support if they are ill, or to go to school, or to access many other rights.
3. The church can help to make sure that everyone knows about the rights of children and adolescents; and tell the people in charge of their village/city/country to act when the rights of children and adolescents are not properly respected.
4. The church can organize projects with boys and girls to help protect our planet and your future.

Session 1

1. Ask Participants to sign up for one "small group session." Post the headings for each Commitment on the board and ask each participant to choose the one they are most interested in by writing their name next to that Commitment.

If there is little interest in one section, please explain that everyone will have the opportunity to comment on every section (during large group sharing), but that the small groups will get the conversation started and the initial ideas on paper.
2. Ask if anyone will volunteer to move their names and join the smaller group. Ideally, there will be a minimum of two to three people in each group.

If there is absolutely no interest in a section and no one wants to volunteer, this is okay; the participants are here to share their expertise and explore areas of interest to them.
If appropriate, please explore with the group why there is little interest in a particular section. (This may be a helpful insight for the "writers")
If, on the other hand, there is a great deal of interest in one section (e.g., ensuring a child-safe church environment), consider having one session with multiple small groups all discussing the same topic. The remaining sections can be explored in session 2. Be flexible and adapt to your group's interests.

3. Once the groups are established, instruct each group to do the following:
 - Review the Commitments.
 - Consider the discussions the group has already had (for example: during Step 8) and their personal experiences, and discuss:
 - Are there things missing in this section?
 - Are there things included that the group did not consider? (In other words, did they find some strong points in the existing draft?)
 - What do they feel are the most important points that need to be included?
 - Do they have any other comments or recommendations about this section?

Provide each group with approximately 20 minutes for the small group discussion. Once finished, ask them to share their discussion with the full group and invite all participants to give feedback.

Sessions 2 and 3 (if time is available)

Ask Participants to sign up for their second small group session and proceed with the same questions as above. Please be sure to carefully record all of their comments and recommendations.

STEP 9 – MAKING IT HAPPEN (estimated time: 60 minutes)

In discussion, as a large group or in smaller groups, please explore the following sections and questions:

Benefits

- How can churches benefit if they decide to adopt the Children Churches Commitments? (The answer to this question may help us find ways to convince other churches to “sign on.”)
- How can children benefit?
- How can families and communities benefit?

Joint Efforts and Monitoring

- How can we know if churches decided to work on one, several or even all three Commitments?
- What role can children and young people play in helping to implement the Commitments?
- What role can the parents and caretakers play?

STEP 10 – NEXT STEPS (estimated time: 30 minutes)

All the different recommendations and ideas will be sent to the church’s leadership, who will have the challenging task of trying to take into account the many different ideas.

First Steps

1. Recommendations
 - Ask whether a few of the young people would like to volunteer to work with the rapporteur to finalize the report.
 - It may be a good idea to develop two reports: the first being detailed minutes and a second one the summary of recommendations (for inclusion in the “rapporteur checklist”).
2. Pictures
 - You may want to ask participants if they would like to help you selecting photos from the consultation.
3. Communication
 - Make the necessary plans, as a group, about how you will stay in touch with each other, distribute updates, plan for follow-up meetings, etc.

Short and long term planning

Consider the following questions when making your recommendations:

- Does the Commitments initiative offer your group any new opportunities they would like to take advantage of? Please explain.
- How might children and adolescents use the Commitments?
- Are there any planned opportunities/events that your group would like to take advantage of? Please provide details.
- Does your group need to or want to create an event or project to advance their goals?
- Other than funding, are there any immediate resources that would be helpful for your future work/goals? For example: advocacy materials; resources; guides; reports; child friendly resources, etc. Please be as specific as possible.

STEP 11 – EVALUATION AND TEAM WRAP UP (estimated time: 30 minutes)

1. Please ask the group if they have any final questions or comments.
2. Explain that every event, consultation, and get together are opportunities for us to learn. We get to gather new information and we get to learn more about our process, about what works, and about what can be improved next time.
3. We would like to hear from you and get your feedback about this consultation. Please write the following statements in a place where all participants can see them:
 - The best thing about this consultation was ...
 - A new idea for me was ...
 - I am leaving with the hope that ...
4. Please go around in a circle and ask participants to finish the statements.
5. Do an icebreaker as wrap up.

STEP 12 – SHARING THE RESULTS

The outcomes of your consultation will be of great importance to further strengthen the engagement of your church for children. Please remember to share the following documents with your church leadership: Details about the consultation (Step 3 – Information Collection).

- Rapporteur checklist (Annex 5).
- Any other notes of the meeting you may want to share.
- Photos of the consultation if participants and legal guardians agreed that photos could be shared.
- It will be highly appreciated if you also share some information and photos with other churches through the WCC by sending information/photos to: churchesforchildren@wcc-coe.org (we will post articles about the consultations on www.oikoumene.org/children).

ANNEX 1 – QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON THE CONSULTATIONS WITH CHILDREN AROUND THE “CHURCHES’ COMMITMENTS TO CHILDREN”

Introduction

This document has been prepared to support you, children and adolescents, to better understand how churches affect your lives, families, communities and also your rights. Through this document you will also learn about the “Churches’ Commitments to Children.” The purpose of this document is to provide a practical resource to respond to frequently asked questions regarding “Churches’ Commitments to Children.”

What are children’s rights?

Every child has the same human rights. Some of your human rights have to do with the basic physical needs to stay alive. For example, you have the right to food, water, shelter and basic health care. Some of your human rights have to do with how other people treat you. You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. Some of your rights have to do with your need to be cared for, to develop and to grow and be part of your communities. You have the right to an education, to express your own ideas and opinions, to information, protection and to participate in making decisions about issues that affect you. You also have the right to not be discriminated against because of who you are or where you come from.

All of these rights can be found in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On 20 November, 1989 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child – also known as the CRC. The CRC sets out the human rights that all children, every boy and girl, everywhere in the world have.

What is children’s participation?

Participation is:

- Having the opportunity to be involved in making decisions that affect you;
- Being involved in something or playing a part in something;
- Having information about things that are important to you and other children;
- Being able to have your voice heard;
- Having your ideas respected and taken seriously.

All girls and boys have the right to participate. All girls and boys have the right to have their voices heard and taken seriously.

What is a church?

A church is both a place and a community. Church is people gathered together with the shared purpose of praying together. Church is a special place where good things should happen, where prayers and blessings are offered in a safe, peaceful setting. Church can be a building, very fancy or very simple. Church can be a special room, set apart for the community/for people to talk with God. Church can be indoors (with walls, ceiling, floor) or outdoors without walls and maybe only a thin roof/cover overhead.

There are many types of church community, but they all aim to live their lives in accordance with the Bible, building friendships and helping each other.

What do churches have to do with my rights?

Governments/states have the main responsibility for respecting, protecting and fulfilling your rights. However, there are many other groups and parts of our community that also have a role to

play, including churches. Churches have an active role to play in the promotion of children's rights as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including but not limited to: the right to non-discrimination; the best interests of the child as a primary consideration in all actions concerning children; the right to life, survival and development; and the child's right to express his or her views freely in "all matters affecting the child," those views being given due weight.

There is an ongoing discussion that churches have a wider responsibility to respect children's rights. This means they must make sure that they take steps to ensure that the child rights are respected. Through upholding and promoting the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Churches are responding to their call to serve the needy and vulnerable people, including children.

What are the "Churches' Commitments to Children"?

The idea started in 2013, when the World Council of Churches (WCC), an organization that rallies 348 churches in the world behind joint goals, held a big meeting in Busan, a city in South Korea. In this meeting, the 10th Assembly of the WCC, over 5,000 people, including leaders of churches and many young people, discussed how to improve the world. A group there discussed that churches should do more to support children throughout the world. At the end they signed a Declaration, called "Putting children and adolescents at the centre" - a text in which they agree that churches can do a lot to improve children's lives. They said that the WCC should help them do this.

In 2015 the WCC signed a partnership with UNICEF - the United Nations Children's Fund. As part of this partnership it was agreed to work with many experts on "Churches' Commitments to Children." This document should explain what churches can do for you and should ask all WCC member churches to turn these Principles into action. Some of the most knowledgeable on these questions are, of course, you, the children and adolescents themselves.

What do the Commitments hope to achieve?

Through the Commitments it is expected to achieve the following:

1. The church can make it possible for girls and boys to participate in church activities and decisions and activities affecting their lives.
 - a) In church activities and planning for services and praying.
 - b) In society (society means a large group of people including you, your family, your school, your community, and your leaders, politicians and decision-makers): Churches should ask society to listen to and act on children's and adolescents' ideas.
2. The church can do everything possible to protect children.
 - a) Make sure children and adolescents are safe within the church community. Also make sure children and adolescents know whom to ask for help if they have a problem.
 - b) Help to stop violence against girls and boys throughout the village/city/country and even throughout the world.
 - c) Help protect children and adolescents if a big unexpected problem happens near the church (for example, in countries where there can be big storms, earthquakes, or wars).
 - d) Help all children get a document called a "birth certificate," because this paper is needed to prove a person's identity. This is needed to get support if they are ill, or to go to school, or to access many other rights.
3. The church can help to make sure that everyone knows about the rights of children and adolescents; and tell the people in charge of their village/city/country to act when the rights of children and adolescents are not properly respected.
4. The church can organize projects with boys and girls to help protect our planet and your future.

Why are the Commitments Needed?

The objective of these Commitments is to promote and support efforts by churches to apply a child rights approach within their communities, but also to fully develop their potential as child rights advocates, contributing to the improvement of children's and adolescents' lives in society at large.

The "Churches' Commitments to Children" will help to make churches welcoming and safe places for children all over the world. The Commitments will also explain what churches could do to encourage all churches worldwide to put these suggestions into practice.

How were the Commitments developed?

The Commitments were developed using different ways of collecting information and opinions, for example:

- Drafting the commitments: a working group with representation from many organizations (churches, non-governmental organizations and UNICEF) was formed. This working group drafted the "Churches' Commitments to Children," which aim to ensure that churches act responsibly and protect children and their rights;
- Consultations: meetings and consultations with many different groups were organized to talk about the Commitments and how to improve them. These meetings took place in different regions and countries and the participants included: church representatives, children, adolescents, child rights experts.

Why are children and adolescents involved in the "Churches' Commitments to Children"?

We want to consult with children and adolescents on the "Churches' Commitments to Children" because we:

- Recognize the value of children's knowledge and contributions to these Commitments;
- Are committed to share experiences, expertise and accurate information with children;
- Want to learn from children and seek out their input and feedback on these Commitments;
- Ensure the best interest of the child by including their inputs in these Commitments.
- Work towards respect for the rights of children in communities at the national and international level;
- Help children and adults to understand their rights and responsibilities;
- Intentionally provide opportunities for children to make decisions and implement them;
- Want to share decision-making between adults and children;

If you are reading this, you likely have already been asked to participate in a meeting, consultation or other event. Here are some other ways we hope to support the participation of other children and adolescents:

- Reach out: we will identify children, adolescents, churches and invite them to support the initiative;
- Hold consultations and do research: we will ask children and adolescents in each region to explore church roles and responsibilities to support and respect children's and adolescents' rights. We will map and collect information of known initiatives and case studies;
- Create and provide resources: various resources (for example: facilitator guides, questions, background information) will be made available to support all consultations, including groups in remote areas and the most vulnerable children;
- Documents: through films and publications (reports and resources targeting both children and adults) we will document your recommendations and the consultation process;
- Discuss implementation, follow up and monitoring: we want to hear from you, what needs to happen to ensure the Commitments are actually used. What long term role should children and adolescents have? How do we make sure churches are doing what they promised to do?

Do you need more information?

If you have any questions please contact the person who gave you this resource or write to churchesforchildren@wcc-coe.org.

Key-words:

The World Council of Churches: is a group of 345 churches that are all working together to try to make a difference to situations in our world. It is also called the WCC.

UNICEF: is an organization that helps all children in the world to have food to eat, medicines to treat their illnesses, a good school to learn in, and a family that cares for them.

Child Friendly: programs, policies, initiatives etc. designed for children, with their rights in mind.

Community: a group of people that know each other or live near each other (local community), or have other things in common such as interests or beliefs.

Consultations: asking people what they think; often in the form of a meeting or gathering of people.

Convention: Conventions are legal agreements made by governments to protect girls, boys, women, men and also our planet. They highlight the promises that governments have made on an issue (for example: to protect children and women's rights) and they are part of the international law.

Monitoring: checking to make sure something has been done.

Ratify: when a government "ratifies" a Convention, it is saying that it agrees with it, and it becomes a legal duty for that country. In other words, by ratifying a Convention, a government is saying that it promises to do the things outlined in the Convention.

Research: careful study and investigation for the purpose of discovering and explaining new knowledge.

ANNEX 2 – MINIMUM STANDARDS IN CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

Basic requirements for the implementation of the rights of the child to be heard

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urges States parties to avoid tokenistic approaches, which limit children's expression of views, or which allow children to be heard, but fail to give their views due weight. It emphasizes that adult manipulation of children, placing children in situations where they are told what they can say, or exposing children to risk of harm through participation are not ethical practices and cannot be understood as implementing article 12.

If participation is to be effective and meaningful, it needs to be understood as a process, not as an individual one-off event. Experience since the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989 has led to a broad consensus on the basic requirements which have to be reached for effective, ethical and meaningful implementation of article 12. The Committee recommends that States parties integrate these requirements into all legislative and other measures for the implementation of article 12.

All processes, in which a child or children are heard and participate, must be:

- a) **Transparent and informative** - children must be provided with full, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information about their rights to express their views freely and their views to be given due weight, and how this participation will take place, its scope, purpose and potential impact;
- b) **Voluntary** - children should never be coerced into expressing views against their wishes and they should be informed that they can cease involvement at any stage;

- c) **Respectful** - children's views have to be treated with respect and they should be provided with opportunities to initiate ideas and activities. Adults working with children should acknowledge, respect and build on good examples of children's participation, for instance, in their contributions to the family, school, culture and the work environment. They also need an understanding of the socio-economic, environmental and cultural context of children's lives. Persons and organizations working for and with children should also respect children's views with regard to participation in public events;
- d) **Relevant** - the issues on which children have the right to express their views must be of real relevance to their lives and enable them to draw on their knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, space needs to be created to enable children to highlight and address the issues they themselves identify as relevant and important;
- e) **Inclusive** - participation must be inclusive, avoid existing patterns of discrimination, and encourage opportunities for marginalized children, including both girls and boys, to be involved (see also para. 88 above). Children are not a homogenous group and participation needs to provide for equality of opportunity for all, without discrimination on any grounds. Programs also need to ensure that they are culturally sensitive to children from all communities;
- f) **Supported by training** - adults need preparation, skills and support to facilitate children's participation effectively, to provide them, for example, with skills in listening, working jointly with children and engaging children effectively in accordance with their evolving capacities. Children themselves can be involved as trainers and facilitators on how to promote effective participation; they require capacity-building to strengthen their skills in, for example, effective participation awareness of their rights, and training in organizing meetings, raising funds, dealing with the medias, public speaking and advocacy;
- g) **Safe and sensitive to risk** - in certain situations, expression of views may involve risks. Adults have a responsibility towards the children with whom they work and must take every precaution to minimize the risks to children of violence, exploitation or any other negative consequence of their participation. Actions necessary to provide appropriate protection will include the development of a clear child-protection strategy which recognizes the particular risks faced by some groups of children, and the extra barriers they face in obtaining help. Children must be aware of their rights to be protected from harm and know where to go for help if needed. Investment in working with families and communities is important in order to build understanding of the value and implications of participation, and to minimize the risks to which children may otherwise be exposed;
- h) **Accountable** - a commitment to follow-up and evaluation is essential. For example, in any research or consultative process, children must be informed as to how their views have been interpreted and used and, where necessary, provided with the opportunity to challenge and influence the analysis of the findings. Children are also entitled to be provided with clear feedback on how their participation has influenced any outcomes. Wherever appropriate, children should be given the opportunity to participate in follow-up processes or activities. Monitoring and evaluation of children's participation needs to be undertaken, where possible, with children themselves.

ANNEX 3 – SAMPLE OF INVITATION

Dear _____ (children and adolescents),

Ever think about your rights?

Ever wonder how churches can make sure that you are safe from harm and can actively participate in your church, family, and community life? Ever wonder how churches can help make sure children’s rights are protected and promoted?

Right now, a lot of different churches, organizations (like the World Council of Churches and UNICEF), and people are asking these same questions. We would like to invite you to participate in a meeting to think and talk about these issues.

This meeting is being hosted by:

Participants will include:

Please attend and share your ideas and recommendations with us.

Meeting details

Location:

Date:

Time:

Other details:

Your recommendations will be shared with the church leadership and with other churches participating in this initiative through the World Council of Churches.

We look forward to seeing you soon.

For more information, please contact:

ANNEX 4 - SAMPLE CONSENT FORM FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS

PARENT / LEGAL GUARDIAN'S CHILD CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent / Guardian,

Thank you for your interest in allowing your child or your adolescent to participate in the consultation about the "Churches' Commitments to Children."

When your child or adolescent participates in this consultation, the church and facilitators of this process collect some basic information about your child and your family for administrative purposes. Because your privacy and your child's privacy are important, we want to ask your permission to collect, keep, and use this information.

Why church and facilitators collect information?

The church has been invited by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and UNICEF to ask young people about their views in an overall effort to strengthen churches' engagement for and with children. Your privacy is important to us.

How will we use the information we collect?

The church leadership will use the information provided by your child to consider implementing actions related to "Churches' Commitments to Children," taking children's opinions into account and better respond to their needs.

How will we make sure the information is used properly?

Church and facilitators value your privacy, and we want you to be assured that the information we collect from you and your children will be kept secure and will only be used for the purposes of this initiative. Church and facilitators will make sure that only authorized people can access to the information. They will maintain reasonable safeguards to keep all the information secure and protected from loss or misuse. When information is transferred, it will be sent using generally accepted data security policies and practices.

Consent Authorization

I have read this document or the document was explained to me. I confirm that

1. I fully understand and give permission for my child or my adolescent listed below to participate in the consultation on the Churches' Commitments to Children through the _____ Church. The process of the consultation on the Churches' Commitments to Children has been explained to me, and I understand the potential benefits from and our responsibilities for his/her participation.
2. I give my consent to the church and facilitators of the consultation on Churches' Commitments to Children to collect and use my child's or adolescent's information (including photographs and video documentation), as church and facilitators deem appropriate and necessary.
3. I further understand that as the parent or guardian I have the right to access, rectify, and erase the information collected on and from my child or adolescent, or to object to its processing. I can exercise these rights by contacting my local church at the address _____.

4. I understand that if at any time I am not satisfied with the consultation process of Churches' Commitments to Children through church I may withdraw my child or adolescent from participation.

Name of child or adolescent

Signature of parent or guardian

Relation to child or adolescent

Name of parent or guardian

Church staff member

Date

ANNEX 5 - RAPPORTEUR CHECKLIST

Information collection

We will appreciate if you can share the following information regarding your consultation with children/adolescents both with the leadership of your church and with the WCC.

For feedback to the WCC please send this completed form to: churchesforchildren@wcc-coe.org

1. *Where and when did the discussion take place?*
Country:
City:
Location:
Date:
2. *Who is the facilitator?*
Name:
Position:
Age:
Organization:
Contact details (e-mail and phone):
3. *Who is participating?*
Number of children/youth participating:
Number of boys:
Number of girls:
Ages of the participants:
4. Is there anything else you would like to share about the group?
5. Describe how the facilitator was selected? Did he/she receive a copy of the “Minimum Standards in Children’s Participation” (Annex 2)?

Checklist

The following checklist can help convey key points and recommendations that have been recorded. You may copy it into a word document to use as much space as needed for your feedback:

Feedback collected during preparatory activities

1. Participants’ observations during activities about the CRC.
2. Feedback received during activities on “What the church is/does/can do.”

Recommendations for the implementation of the Commitments

1. Which Commitments are the most important one(s) for your community?
2. How could children/adolescents contribute to the making these Commitments a reality?

Ideas for monitoring and follow-up

1. How can we know if our church is implementing the Commitments?
2. What role can children and young people play in monitoring the implementation?

Any other recommendations which were made

1. Do you have suggestions how to further improve the Commitments in the coming years?
2. Did your group have any other ideas on how churches can help to improve children's lives?
3. Possible follow-up actions suggested by children and young people.
4. Are there resources that would be helpful for your future work/goals (e.g. advocacy materials; guides; reports)

ANNEX 6 - SAMPLE OF AGENDA

Day 1 (total estimated time: 4 hours, 15 minutes)

Step 4 (Welcome and Introduction) and Step 5 (Expectations and Agenda) → 1 hour

Break → 10 minutes

Step 6 – Children's Rights Refresher → 1 hour

Break → 30 minutes

Step 7 – Defining the Church: What It Is, Does, and Can Do → 1 hour, 30 minutes

Step 8 – Introducing the Commitments → 15 minutes

Day 2 (total estimated time: 4 hours)

Step 9 – Discussing the Commitments → 1 hour, 30 minutes

Break → 30 minutes

Step 10 – Making It Happen → 1 hour

Step 11 – Next Steps → 30 minutes

Step 12 – Evaluation and Team Wrap Up → 30 minutes

ANNEX 7 – ENERGIZERS AND ICEBREAKERS

String Conversation

- * Cut string or yarn into pieces of different lengths.
- * Each piece should have a matching piece of the same length.
- * Make sure there are enough pieces for each participant to have one.
- * Give each participant one piece of string, and ask them to find the person who has a string of the same length.
- * After they find their matches, they should ask each other a few questions about themselves.
- * After a few minutes, ask each participant to introduce their partner to the entire group

Food for Thought

- * Ask each participant to state his or her name and a favorite food that begins with the same first letter as the name. For example: "Hi, my name is Amira and I like Apples"
- * As each participant introduces himself or herself, he or she must repeat the names and favorite foods of the person(s) who came before.
- * It can be a challenge for the participants toward the end to remember everyone's names/foods. Encourage teamwork and remind participants it is all in good fun.

Appreciations

- *Ask participants to form a circle.
- *Ask each person to say something they appreciate about the person standing to their right hand side.
- *Continue until everyone has spoken and everyone has received an "appreciation."

Human Knot

- *Form groups of approximately 10 people each.
- *Ask participants to form a circle, shoulder-to-shoulder.
- *Ask participants to each place their right hand in the middle of the circle and to grasp another hand.
- *Then ask participants to put their left hand in the middle and grasp a different person's hand.
- *Check to make sure that everyone is holding the hands of two different people and that they are not holding hands with someone directly next to them.
- *Explain to participants that what you'd like them to do is untangle themselves, without letting go of hands, into a circle.
- *Participants may change their grip, but they are not allowed to unclasp and re-clasp their hands.
- *Stand back and see what happens. It can take some time before you see progress, but encourage participants to not give up and to keep looking for solutions.
- *Provide support and encourage participants to talk to each other and try different things.
- *When the group accomplishes their tasks, have everyone clap and celebrate. As a team you have overcome a "tangled" and confusing problem: by working together, you have found solutions!

More ideas for energizers and icebreakers can be found at:

<http://wilderdom.com/games/Icebreakers.html>

<http://www.mwls.co.uk/icebreakers/>

<http://www.excellerate.co.nz/freeicebreakers.html>

ANNEX 8 - CHILD-FRIENDLY VERSION OF THE CRC

Article 1

Everyone under 18 has all these rights.

Article 2

You have the right to protection against discrimination. This means that nobody can treat you badly because of your color, sex or religion, if you speak another language, have a disability, or are rich or poor.

Article 3

All adults should always do what is best for you.

Article 4

You have the right to have your rights made a reality by the government.

Article 5

You have the right to be given guidance by your parents and family.

Article 6

You have the right to life.

Article 7

You have the right to have a name and a nationality.

Article 8

You have the right to an identity.

Article 9

You have the right to live with your parents, unless it is bad for you.

Article 10

If you and your parents are living in separate countries, you have the right to get back together and live in the same place.

Article 11

You should not be kidnapped.

Article 12

You have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.

Article 13

You have the right to find out things and say what you think through making art, speaking and writing, unless it breaks the rights of others.

Article 14

You have the right to think what you like and be whatever religion you want to be, with your parents' guidance.

Article 15

You have the right to be with friends and join or set up clubs, unless this breaks the rights of others.

Article 16

You have the right to a private life. For instance, you can keep a diary that other people are not allowed to see.

Article 17

You have the right to collect information from the media – radios, newspapers, television, etc. – from all around the world. You should also be protected from information that could harm you.

Article 18

You have the right to be brought up by your parents, if possible.

Article 19

You have the right to be protected from being hurt or badly treated.

Article 20

You have the right to special protection and help if you can't live with your parents.

Article 21

You have the right to have the best care for you if you are adopted or fostered or living in care.

Article 22

You have the right to special protection and help if you are a refugee. A refugee is someone who has had to leave their country because it is not safe for them to live there.

Article 23

If you have a disability, either mental or physical, you have the right to special care and education to help you develop and lead a full life.

Article 24

You have a right to the best health possible and to medical care and to information that will help you to stay well.

Article 25

You have the right to have your living arrangements checked regularly if you have to be looked after away from home.

Article 26

You have the right to help from the government if you are poor or in need.

Article 27

You have the right to a good enough standard of living. This means you should have food, clothes, and a place to live.

Article 28

You have the right to education.

Article 29

You have the right to education which tries to develop your personality and abilities as much as possible and encourages you to respect other people's rights and values and to respect the environment.

Article 30

If you come from a minority group because of your race, religion or language, you have the right to enjoy your own culture, practice your own religion, and use your own language.

Article 31

You have the right to play and relax by doing things like sports, music, and drama.

Article 32

You have the right to protection from work that is bad for your health or education.

Article 33

You have the right to be protected from dangerous drugs.

Article 34

You have the right to be protected from sexual abuse.

Article 35

No-one is allowed to kidnap you or sell you.

Article 36

You have the right to protection from of any other kind of exploitation.

Article 37

You have the right not to be punished in a cruel or hurtful way.

Article 38

You have a right to protection in times of war. If you are under 15, you should never have to be in an army or take part in a battle.

Article 39

You have the right to receive help if you have been hurt, neglected, or badly treated.

Article 40

You have the right to receive help in defending yourself if you are accused of breaking the law.

Article 41

You have the right to any rights in laws in your country or internationally that give you better rights than these.

Article 42

All adults and children should know about this convention. You have a right to learn about your rights and adults should learn about them too.

This is a simplified version of the CRC. It has been signed by 191 countries. The convention has 54 articles in total. Articles 43 – 54 are about how governments and international organizations will work to give children their rights. The full text can be found here:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf>

ANNEX 9 – CHILD-FRIENDLY VERSION OF THE COMMITMENTS

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is a group of 345 churches that are all working together to try to make our world a better place. In 2013 a meeting of over 5000 people took place in Busan, a city in Korea. Some were leaders of churches, some were children like you, and all of them talked about how to make our world a better place.

One way to do this is for churches to do more to take care of children, so at the end of the meeting everyone signed a paper called “Putting Children at the Centre.” This meant that they all agreed that children and young people are very important. The churches committed to help improving children’s lives, and the WCC decided to help them do this.

UNICEF is an organization that helps all children in the world to have food to eat, medicines to treat their illnesses, good schools to go to, and families that care for them.

The WCC and UNICEF got together and agreed to work very hard to help make churches welcoming, safe, and happy places for children all over the world.

The “Churches’ Commitments to Children” explain what churches can do to make them better places. All the churches around the world are encouraged to put the Commitments into practice.

Churches that make these Commitments their own will try to make sure that all people understand the rights of children (“rights” mean what all children need to be safe and happy). For example, they can put a list of children’s rights on a message board. They can encourage people in charge of a village/city/country to put things right when children are not being taken seriously. They give children like you the opportunity to say what they think and how they feel. They can tell journalists to talk about children’s rights and children’s views on TV and radio and the internet.

Here are the three Commitments for you:

1 - The church will do everything possible to keep children safe

The Bible makes it clear that this is what God has always wanted, and what Jesus taught. People brought children to Jesus because they knew that children would be safe in his arms [Mark 10: 13-16]. And he was very angry at anyone who looked down on children or who harmed them in any way [Matthew 18: 6]. Jesus taught his followers to welcome a little child in his name [Matthew 18: 5].

This is how we can go about it:

a) Make sure that children feel safe in their churches, homes and communities and that children know who to go to for help if they have a problem.

Sometimes adults treat children badly. One way they do this is to touch them in ways that make them feel uncomfortable, or force them to do things they don’t want to do.

The church does its very best to work with you to:

- set up safe rules and instructions for activities with children, for the selection of staff

and volunteers, and for how they care for children, to make sure that these are people you can trust;

- pay special attention to the protection of children with disabilities;
- create ways to help children tell a person they can trust when someone makes them feel uncomfortable or if they experience violence or something bad;
- stop straight away whoever is making children feel uncomfortable or being violent with them.

b) Help stop children from being hurt by other people in villages/cities/countries and throughout the world

However many are hurt God cares about every one [Matthew 18: 10-14]. Sometimes children get hurt by other people. This happens to children everywhere, in all countries and in both rich and poor families.

Churches should be safe places that offer help and support to children. To do this they commit to:

- support parents and caregivers and offer teaching on how to keep children safe;
- help people understand that it is always wrong to hurt children just to make them do what they want.

c) To find ways in which churches can protect children in dangerous situations (for example: refugee children, children affected by storms, earthquakes, wars)

The world has always been a dangerous place for many people, but some problems are caused by human beings. The Gospel offers hope and inspires followers of Jesus to help in practical ways ([Romans 8: 18-39; Luke 10: 30-37]. And when humans fail, God is always there [Matthew 18: 10]). When dangerous situations happen, children need to be protected.

Churches can help and support children in danger, by:

- being close to and helping children who are scared;
- trying to convince governments and all kinds of groups (like schools, associations, youth clubs) that they must pay special attention to the needs of children during emergencies.

d) Help all children to have something called a “birth certificate”

A “birth certificate” should be given when a baby is born. This important document helps children to get medicine if they are sick and to be able to go to school. All children are important and they should all have a birth certificate. (Our names are known by God and He never forgets them, and they are part of who we are [John 10: 3].) Churches can:

- help all governments and all people to understand how important this is to a child;
- keep records of children who are baptized.

2 - The church will try very hard to make all decisions together with children when such decisions have something to do with children's lives. They also have to plan activities for children together with children

Children have always been part of God's people from the beginning [Exodus 12: 1-28], and in there are messages especially for them in the New Testament [Ephesians 6: 3] and for their well-being [Ephesians 6: 4; I Timothy 4: 12].)

Sometimes adults don't pay attention to what children think and don't listen to their ideas. So here are the ways we commit to putting things right.

a) In church activities and planning for services and praying

Churches that make these commitments want to include all children, their families, and caregivers when making decisions about church life.

Churches can:

- think carefully about the needs of any children with special gifts or needs in the church, including when planning what goes on;
- try to get all church leaders and church councils trained in the rights of a child, and in how to listen to children and respect them;
- run services and Sunday Schools in ways that help children, their families, or caregivers to feel welcome and take a full part in what happens;
- focus on the needs of children in their day-today lives;
- find ways of discovering children's views, ideas, and worries;
- ask all children, families, and caregivers what they need and would like before planning their activities;
- include children who speak a language different from most others.

b) In society (society means a large group of people including you, your family, your school, your community, your leaders, politicians, and decision makers)

Children who feel safe, valued, and included in their churches want to share their ideas and suggestions and involve others. Churches should ask society to listen to children's ideas.

In particular, churches can:

- make people understand how much children can contribute to decisions affecting their lives and how important it is to give them a chance to do so;
- create spaces for children and adolescents to tell politicians and decision-makers what they think about decisions that affect their lives;
- help children develop their own ideas by informing them of what is going on and teaching them how to express their views to adults;

- support children sharing their views and ideas with society so that their views and ideas are listened to and taken into account.

<p>3 - The church will organize activities with children to protect our planet and to deal with problems caused by climate change</p>
--

We believe that the world was created by God, that it was good [Genesis 1: 1-31], that human beings are to care for it [Genesis 2: 15-24], and that God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus [John 3: 16/17]. At the end of the Bible there is a promise of how God intends the world to be [Revelation 22:1/2]. The church needs your help in making this come true.

The lives of children will be affected by future climate change. Also, children get hurt more easily than adults when there are big problems caused by climate change – like storms or lack of water.

Churches can:

a) Inside the church

- explain to children what climate change is and how it is a problem for them and for the world;
- offer children the chance to help shape the future by being involved in activities and training and included in making decisions on any issues about protecting the earth;
- explore how eco-friendly they are (maybe give awards to those churches who are very good at this) and then include children in deciding on any changes that need to be made;
- help people deal with problems caused by climate change.

b) In society

- tell those who are in charge to respect the promises they made on climate change;
- help people deal with problems caused by climate change, like storms or lack of water. The WCC is working very hard to help all churches in turning these Commitments into reality and make the world a better place for all children and young people. You can help the church to do this. Together we can achieve so much more and all be encouraged by the words in Jeremiah 29: 11:

“For surely I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD, “plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Do you find these commitments important? Do you have ideas for your own church?

If yes, then it will be interesting to talk with your parents, caregivers and the leaders of your church about them.

ANNEX 10 - BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON CHILD RIGHTS (by Tiffany Tao and Ruthi Hoffman Hanchett)¹

This biblical reflection examines child rights from a Christian perspective, using the Exodus story of God's people in Egypt. In the following passages, many years had passed since the prosperous time of Joseph, and God's people were now being severely oppressed by the Egyptians. As you read, consider how God responds to the suffering of God's people and what implications it may have on our view of child rights.

Part I Scripture and Discussion

Exodus 1:8-14, 3:7-9

8 Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. 9 He said to his people, 'Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. 10 Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.' 11 Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. 12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. 13 The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, 14 and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them...

7 Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8 and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...

Discussion questions:

1. What human abuses or injustices do you observe in this passage?
2. What kind of abuses or injustices do you observe in your own context or countries that specifically affect children?
3. What is the Lord's response to the suffering of his people? Why do you think He responds this way?

Part II Scripture and Discussion

Now, read these next few passages on how the Lord ensures the protection of the most vulnerable after the Israelites were delivered from the hands of the Egyptians.

Exodus 22:21-23

21 You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. 23 If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry;

Leviticus 19:9-10

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.

¹ This resource has been developed by World Vision International.

Deuteronomy 10: 17-19

17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, 18 who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them with food and clothing. 19 You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Discussion questions:

1. What relationship is there between God's nature and the responsibility of God's people in favour of the most vulnerable?
2. What policies does God prescribe to guarantee that the rights of the most vulnerable are upheld among His people the Israelites?
4. What implications do these passages have for children today—especially for the most vulnerable children?
5. How do you think God is responding to the suffering of the most vulnerable today?

Reflection

Although humanity has only progressively grown into an awareness of the rights of children, God has always bestowed an inherent dignity upon children throughout history. This is evident in creation (Gen. 1:27) in which humans are the only beings who are created in God's image. The value of humankind is affirmed by Jesus' birth as a child and His death and resurrection on the cross for the salvation of all people. From this perspective, the rights and dignity of children are not only human, but also divine. These rights are not something that are to be demanded, but are graciously given, enacted and protected by God. Therefore, upholding child rights is deeply spiritual. Violating them is not only a legal but also a divine offense.

In the Old Testament, the Lord upheld the dignity and rights of the most vulnerable in ancient Israelite society by setting forth guidelines for the treatment of orphans, widows, aliens and the poor. Today, we have similar guidelines and tools to protect the dignity of vulnerable children, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC encompasses what the Bible already states about God's special concern for children and sets standards for child protection. As Christians, we have a fuller sense of the value that God lavishes on children, but we can use the CRC as a tool to reflect and enact our Biblical understanding of God's love to a secular world.

The passages above not only tell us how God responded when the rights and dignity of the people were exploited back in the Old Testament, but are an example of how God continues to work for the full realization of child rights even today. The Lord still has great compassion on vulnerable children, continues to use his people today to rescue those under oppression, and provides us with tools (like the CRC) to ensure that the most vulnerable are not forgotten. As followers of Christ, we are invited and allowed to participate in God's action in the world concerning the rights of all children. We serve a God who is actively engaged in child rights and uses us as His instruments to intervene on behalf of the oppressed and destitute children around the world. As we strive to lose the bonds of injustice, to set the oppressed free, and to share our food and homes with the poor and hungry (Isaiah 58), we should consider child rights advocacy and programming as an expression of our partnership with a compassionate and gracious God.

Prayer for children

Let us remember the children in the world whose rights to dignity, justice, peace, and fullness of life are not yet a reality – and pray for them.

Ever compassionate Lord, be gracious to us and hear our prayer:

We pray today for the suffering children in our midst and those we do not see.

*We know that your eyes see their tears,
that your heart knows their sorrow,*

*that your hands can reach them now.
We remember that Jesus was once a child,
that poverty stole his bread,
that tyrants sought his life,
that his mother tasted tears.
We ask you to send friends for the lonely,
food for the hungry,
medicine for the sick,
saviours for the enslaved,
rescue for the perishing.
Give us the wisdom to do our part,
share our possessions,
leave our comforts,
lend them our voice,
send them our food,
love them with more than prayers.
We call on you in the name of your child Jesus.
Amen.*

(Adapted from a prayer by Tony Kummer, www.ministry-to-children.com)