



## Making God's Wish Come True

The Pope's concern this month is for children who are suffering, especially those who are homeless, orphans and victims of war. **Peter McVerry SJ**, well known for his concern for the homeless, addresses this intention.



**Every parent's dearest wish is that their child will grow up to lead a happy and fulfilling life.**

**Pope's Intention:** We pray for children who are suffering, especially those who are homeless, orphans and victims of war; may they be guaranteed access to education and the opportunity to experience family affection.

Jesus had a special concern for children. When people brought children to him for a blessing, the disciples scolded them, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children alone, and do not stop them coming to me, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of Heaven belongs' (Mt 19:13–14). Perhaps Jesus was thinking of the unconditional trust

that most children have in their parents or guardians, an image of our relationship to God. Jesus also had special criticism for those who led children astray (Mt 18:6). We might think of drug gangs who lure or coerce children into drug use and drug dealing with the promise of money or the threat of violence. There are millions of children in our world who are suffering and dying unnecessarily. There are children who



are malnourished, who are dying from preventable diseases due to lack of money and who are traumatised by war or human trafficking.

In Ireland thousands of children have experienced homelessness, resulting in the loss of security and routine, which are essential to children's well-being. The effects of homelessness on children have been well documented: they are damaged emotionally and psychologically and their education is affected. Some will bear the scars for the rest of their lives. Some children in Ireland wait years for vital therapies such as occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech and language therapy, or for vital orthopaedic surgery, often waiting in great pain. An assessment for autism, without which children cannot access the services they need, can take years. Children with mental health problems often find access to suitable services difficult or even impossible, and some are still being placed in adult psychiatric wards, which are totally inappropriate for children. One in ten children in Ireland live in poverty, struggling to access basic essentials such as adequate food, heating or housing. This imposes a strain on family life, can increase existing vulnerabilities such as parental mental health issues or parental substance use, and exacerbate tensions within the family. It can also make confronting those issues all the more difficult. This negatively impacts on children's well-being and leads to poorer health, education and employment opportunities in adult life.

Education today is a primary determinant of a person's future employment options and hence their place in society. Two-hundred-and-fifty-million children worldwide are not engaged in any form of education. It is well documented that children living in poverty or in deprived neighbourhoods are greatly disadvantaged in their progress through the educational system and cannot compete with those whose families have greater resources to invest in their children's education.

Every parent's dearest wish is that their child will grow up to lead a happy and fulfilling life. So, too, God's dearest wish is that every human being, God's children, will also grow up to lead a happy and fulfilling life. We all have a responsibility to make God's wish come true, by reaching out to those who are in need or vulnerable. As the well-known African proverb says, 'It takes a village to raise a child'. Our care for children should include demanding that the government provide the resources and services that all children require to eventually become happy and fulfilled adults. That includes ensuring that no child grows up in poverty.

My heroes are parents who have fostered or adopted children, many from dysfunctional families, who otherwise may have faced a dismal future. By giving a child a new life, new hope and new opportunities, often at great financial and emotional cost to themselves, they imitate Jesus who said, 'I have come that they may have life and have it to the full' (John 10:10). 