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The Children's Home and local churches have shared a vision of improving the quality of life for children and families for 100 since 1912. We know that children do best when raised in homes where they are surrounded by the love of family, the love of God, and the love of God's people. In a perfect world, every child would be born into a family where they are loved, wanted and cared for. But, this is not a perfect world, and not every child is fortunate enough to be in a safe, nurturing place.

At the Children's Home, we continue to believe that every child deserves a safe place where they are loved unconditionally and where they grow with the hope of a bright future. We offer a number of programs specifically designed to address the needs of children and families with the goal of keeping children in their homes. And, when the child must be removed from the home, we strive to provide an alternative family-like setting for the child, sometimes leading to adoption and permanence.

We invite you to help us tell the story of the Children's Home and to advocate for all children and families by designating a "Children's Home Sunday" in your church. This year's theme is "Someone to Call Me Home." We can supply you with a sermon, a liturgy, a children's message, and a short PowerPoint presentation. If interested, we also offer our 'traveling artwork' for display in various religious, business or community settings. Also, in some areas, we can arrange to have someone come to make a presentation. Call, write or e-mail us for any of these resources.

We invite you to consider making a financial gift by taking an offering on Children's Home Sunday, or by including us in your mission budget. We continue to be faithful stewards of your gifts and your trust. Visit our website to view a copy of our Annual Report. Additionally, we ask you to keep the Children's Home in your thoughts and prayers as we look toward the day when every child will be in a loving, caring, nurturing home. From taking in one child in 1912 to caring for almost 10,000 children over 100 years, we celebrate our work together!

Thank you.

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P.S. We invite you to be a part of the Children's Home 100th Anniversary Celebration Luncheon on Wednesday, May 23, 2012.

LITURGY

SOMEONE TO CALL ME HOME

Thought for the Day

All God's children deserve a safe, permanent home where they are loved, wanted and cared for.

Call to Worship:

Like a loving parent who guides a child's first steps,

God Guides Us Along.

Like a gentle hug from an adoring grandparent,

God Holds Us In Times Of Need.

Like a true friend who seems to know our every need,

God Is Always Working For Good In All Our Days.

In many ways and with many faces,

God Loves Us Without Condition And Without End.

Opening Prayer

Awesome and amazing God, You go to the depths of love and the heights of caring for us. You call us with your gentle voice, and mold us with Your tender hands. You walk with us each day. You hide us under the shadow of Your wings each evening and stay with us through each night. You alone are the giver of peace, the source of joy and the whisperer of love. Lay Your hands upon us and strengthen us to do Your will and to sing Your praises.
Amen.

Scriptures

Psalm 1:3

¹ Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked

or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers,

² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night.

³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

⁷ “But blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him.

⁸ They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.

It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Matthew 13:3-8

³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed.

⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up.

⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow.

⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root.

⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants.

⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Suggested Hymns (hymn numbers are from the United Methodist Hymnal)

#408 The Gift of Love

#191 Jesus Loves Me

#445 Happy the Home When God Is There

#560 Help Us Accept Each Other

#348 Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling

Benediction

Go forth in the name of the risen Christ and may God’s Spirit strengthen you to be scatterers of seeds, sharers of joy, shapers of peace and trumpets of hope. Let your voice be heard in the wilderness calling the lost, the weary and the lonely to “come home.”

SERMON

SOMEONE TO CALL ME HOME

“Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in.” Robert Frost
“Home is the place where you know you will be loved, wanted and cared for.” Bill Townsend

INTRODUCTION

The following story is from a book entitled “No One to Call Me Home,” by Rev. James Close. Rev. Close was the Superintendent of Mercy Home for Boys and Girls in Chicago.

Nineteen-year-old Johnny read about my work at Mercy Boy’s Home in a newspaper article. He called and asked if I would visit him. His place of residence was the Cook County Jail where he was awaiting trial for armed robbery. Johnny was the kind of kid I expected to see – thin and worn looking, with sad, dark eyes that had seen too much of the seamy side of life for too long.

He told me about when he was a little kid, maybe six or seven. His dad was mean and hit him around a lot. There was always fighting and yelling. His mom didn’t pay much attention to anything. She was the only one working. And she was tired most of the time.

He liked it a lot when the weather got warm and he could play outside in the street with the rest of the kids in the neighborhood. “Our street was as big as the universe to me then,” he said with a smile. “When it started getting dark, the other kids’ moms would lean out the window and start calling to their kids, ‘Billy, Joey, it’s time to come home.’”

“I’d stay out there and keep playing until I was alone. I was always the last one to go home. I always had to decide when to go in. There was never anyone to call me in – to call me home.”

What do you say to someone like Johnny – now thirteen or fourteen years too late? I didn’t know anything to say to him, so I just sat there.

“I think sometimes that maybe if there were somebody, just sometime, I wouldn’t be here,” he added. “I just wanted to tell you that.”

We finished our visit and went on with our lives. I never heard from Johnny again. But his words haunt me to this day.

That story drives home the simple fact that every child needs and deserves a safe, permanent place and someone who loves them enough to call them home. In a perfect world, every child would be born into a family where they are loved, wanted and cared for. And, if that family were not able to offer the necessary love and support, there would be other caring adults who would step up, so that every child could be raised in an environment that exudes safety, acceptance and hope. Unfortunately, that's not the reality in our country. Sometimes, despite all the efforts to strengthen family systems and keep children with their biological families, it becomes necessary to find an alternative placement for a child in need. Each year more children enter the foster care system than are adopted. A child can expect to wait up to five years for an adoptive family. It is estimated that 23% of children in the system will turn 18 and leave the system without a family to call their own.

The chapel services at the Children's Home usually conclude with the sharing of prayer requests. The requests include everything from praying for a sick pet to praying that grandma's surgery goes well. Each request is genuine and touching. But it's difficult to hold back the tears when a little ten-year-old boy prays, "I just hope they find a family that wants me," or when a sixteen year old girl cries out, "I just want someone to love me." Every day in every town and every city there are prodigal sons and daughters wandering the streets looking for someone who wants them – someone who loves them enough to call them home. But all too often, there is no one there.

A HISTORICAL CONNECTION

The importance of raising children in a family setting cannot be overstated. The White House Conference on the Care of Dependent Children offers the following conclusions:

1. Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. It is the great molding force of mind and character. Children should, as a rule, be kept with their parent, such aid being given as may be necessary to maintain a suitable home for the rearing of children.
2. As to the children who for sufficient reasons must be removed from their own homes, or who have no home, it is desirable that if normal in mind and body and not requiring special training, they should be cared for in families whenever practicable.

This Conference clearly understood the importance of raising children in a permanent, predictable, healthy setting. You might be interested to know that this Conference was held in **1909** and reported its findings to then President Theodore Roosevelt. What was true in 1909 is still true today. The family is the best place for children.

A SCRIPTURAL CONNECTION

The passage from Psalm 1 suggests that the person who is rooted in faith and is striving to walk the right path in life is like a tree, planted by the water. Note that the tree is one that was *planted* – not one growing wild, but one that has been carefully cultivated and nurtured. The tree puts out roots, anchoring itself in a good place where it will continue to receive the nurture it needs to grow strong and tall. But what would happen if that tree were not allowed to stay in the same place for an extended period of time? The ending might be very different.

Imagine that you plant a tree in your yard, anxiously anticipating the day when it will provide an abundance of beauty and shade to you and your family. After a few months, you decide the tree might grow better in a different location. So, you dig it up and move it to its new home. Just about the time the tree begins to put down roots, your neighbor calls and informs you that you have planted the tree too close to the boundary line. So once again you dig up the tree and move it to a new location. How likely is it that the tree will grow and prosper if you keep moving it? Even if proper care and nurturing is provided, the lack of roots will be a problem. The tree needs permanence – to be left in one place long enough to put down the roots that will sustain its life and provide stability. Moving the tree from place to place to place doesn't make sense.

What is true for a tree is true for a child as well. A child needs permanence. If a child is “planted” in a loving caring family where he or she is nurtured both physically and spiritually, we have good reason to expect a godly and useful life. If, however, a child is raised in a setting void of proper care and permanence, or if the child is moved from place to place throughout their life, it is less likely that child will grow to be a happy, healthy, functioning adult. Every child needs and deserves a permanent place and someone who loves them enough to call them home. Unnecessarily moving a child from place to place to place doesn't make sense, and often fails to produce the desired result.

APPLICATION

And yet, all too often, that is what happens in the lives of the young people in the foster care system. A child may move three or more time in search of a permanent placement. Even when the moves are necessary and are in the best interest of the child, the moves prevent the child from putting down roots and growing to their full potential.

There is good news! In recent years there has been a strong movement in the child care system toward permanence. A larger number of young people are being placed in foster care and adoptive homes rather than in residential facilities. The belief is that, just as affirmed in 1909, a home setting offers the best hope to children in need. The Children's Home is proud to be on the leading edge of this movement. The Children's Home endorses the core beliefs that:

1. Every child deserves to live in a safe, loving, permanent family.
2. No child should linger in foster care or leave the system at age 18 without a permanent home.
3. Every child is adoptable.

When people think about the Children's Home, many think about the residential program that operates out of the main campus on Chenango Street in Binghamton, New York. Beginning as an orphanage and now operating as a Residential Treatment Center, the campus has been a temporary home to young people in need for nearly 100 years. What many people may not know is that the Children's Home also offers a number of programs specifically designed to prevent removal from the family or, when placement outside the family is necessary, to place the child in a family environment instead of a residential setting.

The Children's Home has programs that serve children who live at home and come to the Hillcrest Campus for school as well as after school for therapeutic and family oriented programming. Services are provided to some families in the home, teaching them to strengthen their families and to live independently. A program called Supervised Independent Living provides older youth with a subsidized community-based apartment while teaching life skills necessary to achieve independence through a "skills-based" approach.

We have expanded our foster care program to recruit, train and supervise many families in the community who wish to care for children in their homes. Some go the extra mile by receiving more training to care for youth who have significant social, emotional, behavioral and/or physical problems. For those youth who are released for adoption, two programs, Adoption/Homefinding and Wendy's Wonderful Kids an Adoption Program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, work hard to make a match between a child and a home. We believe that kids are never too old to want to be loved and to have a home.

The Children's Home, in the business of taking care of kids for 100 years, is proud to continue to be a leading force in the effort to keep young people with their families and, when removal from the family is required, to place children in a family-like setting.

CONCLUSION

In the parable of the sower, Jesus uses an illustration that would have easily been understood by the people of his day. Planting seeds and waiting for the harvest was an important part of their economy. Let's leave probing for the deep theological meaning of this passage for another time and simply look at what this passage has to say about the literal planting of seeds.

The success of our sowing depends on the quality of the soil on which it lands. The seeds have little choice as to where they are planted and thus, little choice in whether they flourish or not. It's all in the quality of the environment in which they land. If a bird eats you, you're done for. If the ground you're on is rocky, you wither. If the ground you're on is thorny, you're choked. If conditions are not ideal, it is unlikely you will yield a good harvest. Matthew focuses on the fact that the seeds that fell on good soil brought forth a harvest of grain. This is reinforced by the passage from Jeremiah: good soil, good crop; bad soil, bad crop.

Like the seeds in the parable, young people have little choice where they are planted. Not everyone is blessed to land in fertile soil. But more and more, the child care system is working to improve the poor soil – to facilitate changes in the family and the community so that children can thrive where they are planted. When it is necessary to move the child to a new setting that is more conducive to life and growth, priority is given to placing the child with a loving, caring, nurturing family.

A lot of good work is being done. But our work will not be complete until every child has someone to call them home – home to a place where they are loved unconditionally, forgiven completely, and equipped and encouraged to strive for something better.



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CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

SOMEONE TO CALL ME HOME

Object: Show the children a small potted plant or flower.

Talk about how there is an important part of the flower that we can't see. The root of the plant is hidden down in the soil. The soil wraps itself around the root and helps the plant to stand firm. The soil also holds the water and provides the food that the plant needs if it is to grow strong and tall.

What do you think would happen if we pulled the flower out of the soil? Right, it would stop growing and would eventually die. The plant needs to stay planted in the dirt.

People need to put down roots also. Each one of us needs someone to support us and to feed us and to help us grow strong and tall. We need our family and friends, we need other caring adult like teachers and coaches, and we need God and our church family. All those people are like the soil. They support us in good time and in bad times. They give us what we need to help us to grow. Without them, life would be very difficult.

So today we thank God for the plants and the flowers. We also thank God for the soil that makes it possible for the plants and flowers to grow. We are thankful that God loves each one of us and puts people in our lives that help us so that each one of us can grow to be as unique and beautiful as this flower.

Children's Home Sunday
October 2011

Every Child Deserves A Safe Place

E-mail: info@chowc.org
Web Site: www.chowc.org



CREDIBILITY • INTEGRITY • ACHIEVEMENT