

How are the children doing?

The week after I finish writing this column, my colleague, LeAnn Gardner, and I will be taking 10 social work students to work with local associations that serve vulnerable children in Rwanda. In a nation where 90% of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, where 1 million people were killed in a genocide 14 years ago, and where hundreds of thousands live with HIV, tuberculosis and malaria, we will be learning from organizations that have made caring for orphans a priority.

During the week prior to my writing this, our CFCM offered a Congregational Child Care Research Summit with Buckner Children and Family Services. We shared the research reports offered in this issue and provided a setting for invaluable conversations among researchers, pastors and child care coordinators.

In looking forward and looking back, a particular question keeps coming to mind. The question I hear is one I imagine God asking a gathering of leaders from around our country: "How are the children doing?"

In order for us to live out a real sense of compassion and justice, of mercy and faith, we must also ask ourselves this question.

The "So what?" questions of our faith, such as this one, seem to be the most important ones. This question about the health and welfare of our children is certainly one of these "so what" questions of theology that we, as professionals, service providers and church leaders, lay and clergy alike, cannot ignore.

Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman continually reminds us of the children left behind by the drastic revisions and funding cuts that have been made in recent years to Headstart, Medicaid, child care, after-school programming, and health care. We must find another way to live in order to assure a better future for all of our children.

"How are the children doing?" Well, for one thing, we are making it harder and harder for

their families to access child care in our state. More than \$5 million of child care assistance funds have been cut in Texas affecting tens of thousands of working poor families. There are too many other costs involved in raising our children, and child care assistance must be provided in this stage of life so that parents do not have to choose between being a responsible worker and a responsible parent.

The prophetic voices of people of faith are vital to strengthening civil society and promoting the welfare of our children. Each of us can do our part to assure our communities, our churches and our nation are doing more for our children in need. The costs are relatively low and the benefits will be an entire future of better opportunity and more life options for our children. Small steps toward real justice and real compassion require us to make real investments in our children. "How are the children doing?" A response that honors God demands nothing less than this level of care and concern.

In these pages, we hope you hear the stories of many individuals and communities of faith loving and nurturing children as they strengthen families and build communities.

Moreover, I hope you are inspired, as I have been, to take a next step in advocating on their behalf.



Jon Singletary

*Editor, Assistant Professor;
Director, Center for Family and
Community Ministries*