

Today is Children's Sunday with the theme of *It's not fair*. It's not fair the way some children are treated in Canada and the world, specifically in relation to children seeking refuge who are locked up, and held in detention.

Jesus tells us to love our neighbour and said we sin if we fail to love and care for our neighbour. A lawyer once tried to define the limits to who was his neighbour. Surely, we aren't responsible for the children on the other side of the earth. When Jesus heard this, he told the lawyer the story of the Good Samaritan.

Over the centuries, Christians have puzzled over the motives that drove the priest and Levites to abandon the dying man on the roadside. Perhaps they were running late, scared that it was a trap, too tired from helping so many that day, or too ritually pure to touch blood. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. put it, in each of these instances the men were asking, "What will happen to me if I help this man?"<sup>1</sup>

The Samaritan doesn't ask this. Instead he asks, "What will happen to him if I do not help him?"

Israel has the dubious distinction of being the only country in the world that continually puts on trial around 700 children each year in military courts lacking fundamental fair trial rights. The United Church of Canada through its [No Way to Treat a Child](#) campaign asks us to call on the federal government to take steps to hold Israeli authorities accountable to their obligations under international law. From the moment of arrest, Palestinian children encounter ill treatment and torture at the hands of Israeli forces. Three out of four experience physical violence during arrest or interrogation.

"Jesus himself was born in Palestine under Roman Occupation and, according to Matthew's Gospel, escaped the slaughter of innocents by becoming a refugee in Egypt before returning to the land of his birth where he came of age," reads a [motion](#) to United Church of Christ Synod, June 2017. "To read the Gospels is to become aware of both the blessing and the vulnerability of children. It is to know that God's love was revealed in a child and, in particular, a child vulnerable to injustice and violence."

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The United Church of Canada believes the Canadian government must use all available means to pressure the Israeli government to end the detention and abuse of Palestinian children. By demanding Israeli authorities comply with international law, we are seeking to stop the abuse of Palestinian children and demanding justice for them.

In Canada, the data for 2018-19 so far shows that 113 minors have been held in detention in Canada — a 51 per cent drop in less than five years.

For Rachel Kronick, a professor of psychiatry at McGill University who has researched children held in immigration detention in Canada, the detention of children for any period of time can have negative impacts on them and on the community on a broader level. Her work helped inform the Canadian response to addressing minors held in immigration detention, and she is alarmed by the ongoing situation in the U.S.

What will happen to the children if we do not speak up? If we give a modern-day Levite or priestly answer to the plight of our siblings? The situation is complicated, some will say. The children are not in our path but far away. These are semantics that Jesus would have no time for. The children are before us, every night on our television screens, screaming for our love. What will happen to the children if we do not help them?

The non-profit [Immigration Counseling Service \(ICS\)](#) has used court transcripts to re-create hearings where children as young as three years old have had to represent themselves after crossing into the United States. Watch their four-minute video, [\*Unaccompanied: Alone in America\*](#).

You will find some scripture quotes on your table. Have someone at your table read it to the rest at the table and take some time to reflect on your own for a few minutes before discussing for 5–10 minutes what the Spirit might be saying to the church through the scriptures, videos, and any other information you have experienced today. What might you, what might we do? You may draw and write on the table as you reflect and discuss.