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Missing Children

A lost coin, a lost sheep, a lost son....even Scripture tells of the distress experienced when someone searches for what is lost. The anguish is certainly intensified when it is a lost son or daughter. Yet the reality is that every day, all around the world, children go missing.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, provides a universal definition of “child” but there is no similar global consensus on how to define “missing child” or on how to investigate cases involving missing/abducted children. This, in turn, makes it difficult to know the full extent of the problem and to determine how best to protect children from going missing or being abducted.

The 2018 global statistics for missing children are staggering:

Eight (8) million children disappear every year; twenty two (22) thousand every day.

Brazil – 40,000 reports of missing children

Canada - 50,500 missing children

European union -250,000 missing children

Kenya – working to improve data collection*

United States – 800,000 missing children

** Kenya has the 17th highest kidnapping rate out of 19 African countries investigated.*

However, this is only the tip of the iceberg. In many countries, statistics on missing children are not even available. Unfortunately, even available statistics may be inaccurate due to under-reporting, incorrect database entry of information, and deletion of



*When a child is found and returns home,
it is truly an occasion for rejoicing
as we see in the Scripture stories.*

(Sr. Nancy Marie Jamroz)

records once a case is closed. This inconsistency is one of the reasons why national and international organizations have been established to address the global concern of missing children.

Children go missing in various ways: by running away or being told to leave home; by escaping domestic abuse; by being abducted by a parent; by being kidnapped by a criminal; by becoming lost during migration or during natural or human disasters.

Those searching for missing children hope to find them and return them safely home and over 90% of the time this is the outcome. However, those who do not return home often become victims of organized child trafficking for sexual exploitation, pornography, prostitution, solicitation via the internet, forced labor, domestic servitude, begging, criminal activities, drug smuggling, even forced

donation of organs. Tragically, some of them die or are killed.

Up to 20 years ago, this problem was being addressed only nationally by countries. Then, in 1998, the Belgian Prime Minister contacted the U.S. **National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)** for help in dealing with an outrageous case of serial kidnappings, killings, and rapes of a still-unknown number of teenage girls by one of their citizens. He requested that the U.S. establish their successful program in Brussels. The President and Board of NCMEC realized that they were not able to effectively respond to the many such requests they were receiving. Instead they decided to authorize the creation of a new organization that would devote itself to doing globally what NCMEC was committed to doing in the United States. Thus the **International Center for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC)** was launched in April 1999. Its



<https://www.icmec.org>

headquarters is in Alexandria, Virginia.

The Global Missing Children's Network (GMCN), is a collaborative venture of the ICMEC which aims to protect children around the world from going missing or being abducted by providing resources for governments, law enforcement, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and families on prevention as well as the appropriate actions to take in the event a child does go missing. GMCN members are law enforcement (police) and NGOs working on missing children issues, including prevention, investigation and recovery.

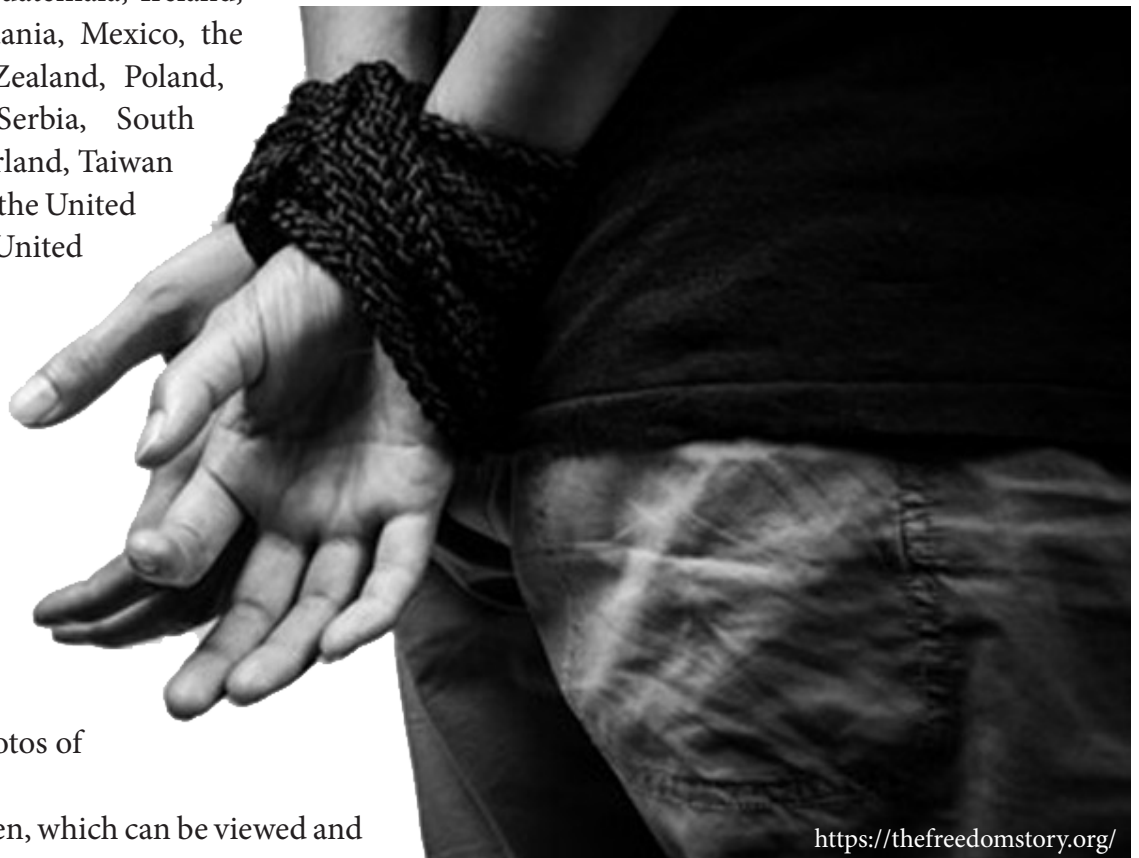
Thirty countries have joined the GMCN: Albania, Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Lithuania, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, South Korea, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan (Province of China), the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Each country can access a customizable website platform, and can enter missing children information into a centralized, multilingual database that has photos of and information about missing children, which can be viewed and

distributed to assist in location and recovery efforts. These national-level organizations are funded by the governments of the member nations and by donations from individuals, charitable organizations and foundations.

Professionals working in the field provide support, training and expertise to governments, law enforcement, policymakers, industry, civil society, educators, healthcare professionals, and others across the globe with one goal in mind: to make the world a safer place for all children. The public has access to information through the GMCN website.

GMCN members actively collaborate and share experiences, best practices, tools, research and



<https://thefreedomstory.org/>



<https://thefreedomstory.org>

trends related to missing children. They develop, improve, implement, and adapt best practices, such as Rapid Emergency Child Alert Systems. A child abduction alert system originated in the US in 1996. An acronym for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) alert was named after 9-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was abducted and murdered in Arlington, Texas. Several of the initiatives in developing the global response network have emerged after an individual or family has personally suffered the loss of a child.

In order to help in locating missing children all persons should be ready to report suspicious activity and can do so in two ways: 1) online by going to www.cybertipline.org or by phone via the 24 hour hotline: 1-800-843-5678. Reports may be made 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

When a child is found and returns home, it is truly an occasion for rejoicing as we see in the Scripture stories. It is also suggested that the returned child should be warmly welcomed and depending on the length of time gone and circumstances of the experience, the child should not be pressured to answer invasive questions but instead allowed to gradually disclose the experience. If there was trauma to the child, help from medical professionals or a counselor might be in order.

National and international organizations that assist in the prevention, searching and recovery of missing children can be a resource to answer questions about any part of the process of finding missing children. As has been said, "even one child missing is too many!"

Sources:

"A New Virtual Economy Poses New Challenges In Fighting Child Pornography And Child Exploitation". ICMEC. June 13, 2013.

"About the Global Missing Children's Network". National Criminal Justice Training Center.

"International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children Granted Special Status with United Nations". ICMEC. August 12, 2008.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, © 2018 Consortium for Street Children. All rights reserved.

- Sister Nancy Marie Jamroz, NA -



<https://fra.europa.eu>

Trafficking of Children in Kenya

Child exploitation takes place in different forms in Kisumu, Nairobi and Mombasa. These include domestic servitude; forced labour in supermarkets, hotels and restaurants; forced begging on the streets; sexual exploitation; and forced marriage. Common forms of deception used by traffickers are offers of well-paid jobs and free education. Online grooming and/or abduction are also common.

approached directly in the community or via social media with offers of work in exchange for payment of education. Traffickers deceive those from low income areas such as Mukuru, Mathare and Kibera slums in Nairobi and traffic children for the purpose of sexual exploitation to areas such as Westlands. In Kisumu sexual exploitation in brothels is common as truck drivers will pass through these rural areas at night.



Domestic servitude is the primary form in which child labour exploitation takes place. This is seen predominantly in private, middle-class houses or hotels. Boys and girls are forced to work as shamba boys (working in the garden), yayas (maids) and house help. They work from the early hours of the morning until late at night with no food, money or education. They are all vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse. It is difficult to recognize this type of exploitation as victims are hidden from the public.

Sex tourism fuels sexual exploitation of children in Kenya and is most prevalent in Mombasa and Nairobi. Children are groomed and targeted online and forced to work in brothels. Parents and children are also

Forced begging occurs where children and unaccompanied minors living and working on the streets are forced into criminal behavior. These children are extremely vulnerable to abuse. Some of these children are trafficked to Somalia for radicalization. Exploitation in the fishing industry is prevalent on the lakes in Kisumu. Traffickers recruit victims from other countries, refusing to let them off boats. Those who complain or try to escape are often physically abused.

- Sister Mary Millicent Njeru, KE -

Child Abuse in Poland

*The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)*¹, adopted on November 20, 1989 by the United Nations General Assembly, and ratified by 192 countries, provides care and protection for the youngest members of society. The authors of this convention were guided primarily by concern for the well-being of children and the principle of equality of the rights of all children regardless of their origin, skin color or religion. (It is worth noting that Poland was the initiator and originator of the creation of this document.) Although the protection of children has been evident in public discourse for over 20 years, the phenomenon of abusing them since the beginning of time, according to cultural and legal norms, has diminished in the present time but takes more sophisticated forms, which is also true in Polish society².

This phenomenon is defined by the Committee for the Protection of Children's Rights in the following way: "An abused child is one who suffers from inappropriate behavior of other people towards him/her - mainly parents and guardians - and at the same time s/he experiences a sense of injustice and powerlessness. The process of abuse is both an intended and unintended act of an adult, negatively affecting the child's health, physical or psychosocial development³." It is done in various ways:

- sexual abuse: forcing children into prostitution, exploiting children in the production of pornography often also distributed on the Internet;

- forcing children to work;
- forcing children to beg;
- selling children in illegal adoptions;
- hiring children to commit crimes;
- exploiting children to donate cells, tissues or organs;
- subjecting children to psychological (emotional) abuse;
- any other form of abuse that degrades a person's dignity;
- neglecting the child's needs necessary for his/her proper development (nutrition, shelter, clothing, education, medical care) as well as psychological needs (safety, love, belonging, etc.).

The sexual abuse of children was recognized as a social problem in the 1980s. It was then that more detailed studies of this outrageous crime were undertaken. Nevertheless, it is not easy to analyze this problem because of its delicate nature. Most cases are covered in silence because the victims prefer not to reveal painful experiences. The development of new technologies provides new opportunities to identify potential victims of abuse, and trafficking victims in pornographic films, photos, etc. Recent decades have vividly revealed the problem of child sexual abuse by clergy and celebrities, or staff from various educational or care centers. It seems, however, that the real magnitude of the problem is shrouded by silence and shame.



<https://polskiobserwator.de/>

A 16-year-old girl shares: *I don't want my mom to suffer but I can't take it anymore. He gropes me, talks dirty things. I tried to tell my mom that I didn't like her partner but I didn't dare tell her that he was molesting me.* (From phone calls and emails to Children and Youth Helpline, 116 111)⁴

Ewa has four siblings. Each of them had a different biological father. They were all adopted by their mother's husband and carried his name. Both parents were alcoholics. For as long as Ewa remembers, there was violence and alcohol at home. Her stepfather beat both Ewa's mother and the children. Her stepfather apparently was sterile and accepted her mother's sexual contact with other men also forcing his daughters to do so. Ewa was molested and sexually abused by her stepfather from the age of 6 to 15 years old, even nightly for some time. When her stepfather began to molest her, she did not call for help because she was very ashamed. When she resisted, he beat her. At that time, she also witnessed her older sister being abused. Ewa lived in fear of becoming pregnant. She often got sweets from the other men she was forced to have sex with. It was an opportunity to eat something because they were usually starving. Ewa's mother did not protect the children but neglected them to the point that they were cold and hungry and slept in soiled beds in the home. Ewa's family was under the supervision of social welfare all the while, but no essential action was ever taken to improve the children's lives. Ewa claims that her mother always said that she loved the children and promised improvement, and the social workers gave her another chance. However, the mother never changed anything⁵.

Another problem observed in Poland is forcing children to work. During the holiday season, children

are overworked cleaning the rooms in guesthouses, washing dishes in the kitchen, sweeping the yard, or carrying the luggage of guests. They collect waste paper and scrap, and sell vegetables and fruit. Sometimes,



<https://www.deon.pl>

children are sent out to the street by their parents and forced to beg. In Poland, they are essentially Polish and Roma children. However, the lack of public awareness of forcing children to beg as a form of violence means that security services do not react, although procedures in Poland require intervention in such cases.

An 11-year-old boy confesses: *Mr. Mariusz offered us a job. He arranged for us to clean car windshields. We told drivers that we collect money for our father's surgery or for vacation. People give more money then. The money was taken by Mr. Mariusz, and when we asked for our part, he said that we had not yet worked out what he had invested in cleaning supplies. But we collected a lot of money...* (From phone calls and emails to Children and Youth Helpline, 116 111)⁶

Physical, emotional or sexual abuse is a violation of the inalienable dignity and worth of each child and is not

I bring to you, Mother, the children, especially those who are alone, abandoned, and, because of this, are deceived and exploited...

Let us not yield to discouragement but, trusting in your constant help, we commit ourselves profoundly to renew ourselves, this city and the whole world. Pray for us, Holy Mother of God!

(Pope Francis)



<https://www.rm24.pl>

will learn to respect themselves and others. Thus, let us take care of the children who have been entrusted to us in our institutions and apostolates to help them grow in a developmentally favorable climate and lead them to positive participation in society in the future.

- Sister Mary Agnieszka Mruga, WA -

only a moral offense but a crime subject to prosecution.

The 14-year-old boy shares: *When I was little, I was beaten by my father and my stepmother. Then I lived with my grandmother and it was ok. Then dad found a new wife and promised grandma that everything would change. But the new wife began to rebel against my father. They yelled at me, ridiculed and criticized me. Now I'm with my grandma again and I think I'm lucky to have her*⁷. (From phone calls and emails to Children and Youth Helpline, 116 111)

Poland is obligated to prevent crime against children under many international laws. The Convention cited above requires us to protect children against all forms of physical or psychological violence, neglect, abuse, ill-treatment or exploitation. Polish legislation also ensures that this obligation is fulfilled by penalization of certain action towards minor victims. On March 27, 2017, members of the Parliament of the Republic of Poland adopted the final version of the Act amending the Penal Code, which aims to provide children with protection against violence in a more effective way than before⁸. This action on the part of the state raises the hope of dealing with this atrocity of exploiting the youngest and building a better society.

However, it is not the regulations that can protect children from violence, but responsible adults who respectfully accept the gift of every life. If children grow and develop in a climate of love, they will thrive in their environment. Children to whom parents devote time and interest will remain sensitive to the needs of others. Accepted children

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/legislation-and-case-law-international-legislation-united-nations/united-nations-convention-rights_en

² <https://www.niebieskalinia.pl/pismo/wydania/dostepne-artykuly/4409-pojecie-krzywdzenia-dzieci> [Blue Hotline; The Concept of Abusing Children]

³ <https://publicystyka.ngo.pl/konferencja-stop-krzywdzeniu-dzieci> [Talk on End Child Trafficking]

⁴ <https://studylibpl.com/doc/1363902/wykorzystywanie-seksualne-dzieci> [Sexual Abuse of Children]

⁵ <http://www.psychologia.edu.pl/czytelnia/59-niebieska-linia/971-historia-ewy-czyli-rozne-oblicza-wykorzystywania-seksualnego.html> [Ewa's Story i.e. Various Faces of Sexual Abuse]

⁶ <https://studylibpl.com/doc/1363902/wykorzystywanie-seksualne-dzieci> [Sexual Abuse of Children]

⁷ <https://studylibpl.com/doc/1363902/wykorzystywanie-seksualne-dzieci> [Study on Sexual Abuse of Children]

⁸ <https://brpd.gov.pl/aktualnosci/kodeks-karny-znowelizowany-przemoc-wobec-dzieci-bedzie-karana-surowiej> [Reviewed Penal Code; Child Trafficking will be punished severely]



<https://dziennikpolski24.pl>

Trafficking of Children: US

In the United States, most trafficking victims are runaway, thrown away, or homeless American children who use survival sex to acquire food, shelter, clothing, and other things needed to survive on America's streets. According to the National Runaway Switchboard 1.3 million runaway and homeless youth live on America's streets every day. It is estimated that the number of children trafficked each year in the United States is over 300,000 boys and girls. Many victims are first engaged by the trafficker by social media.

The average age a victim enters trafficking is 11 to 14 years old, with girls representing 80 percent of the victims. Pre-pubescent girls are reported to be injected with hormones to bring on puberty. Younger girls are expected to have a greater earning potential, and as such are in greater demand. The average life span of a victim is reported to be 7 years. Victims are found dead from attack, abuse, HIV and other STD's, malnutrition, overdose or suicide.

- Sister Maryann Agnes Mueller, NA -



Trafficking of Children: Canada

The majority of human trafficking victims in Canada are women and girls younger than 25, while most of the people charged with the crimes are men between 18 and 34. Children under the age of 18 accounted for more than a quarter of the victims, while one-third were trafficked over international borders.

Social media sites such as Facebook, Snapchat, and MeetMe are new recruiting grounds for traffickers. Fifty-one percent of trafficked girls have been involved in the child welfare system and traffickers hang

around homeless shelters and group homes knowing that these children are especially vulnerable. This is especially true for indigenous youth in Canada, where there exists a colonial legacy of separating First Nations children from their families and placing them in residential schools to forcibly assimilate them into a settler culture. Today there are more indigenous children in the child welfare system in Canada than there were in residential schools.

- Sister Maryann Agnes Mueller, NA -

SUSTAINABILITY is for the Children

Sustainable development is defined by the UN Commission on Environment and Development, or the Brundtland Commission, as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”¹ The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines sustainability to be: “of, relating to, or being a method of harvesting or using a resource so that the resource is not depleted or permanently damaged.”²

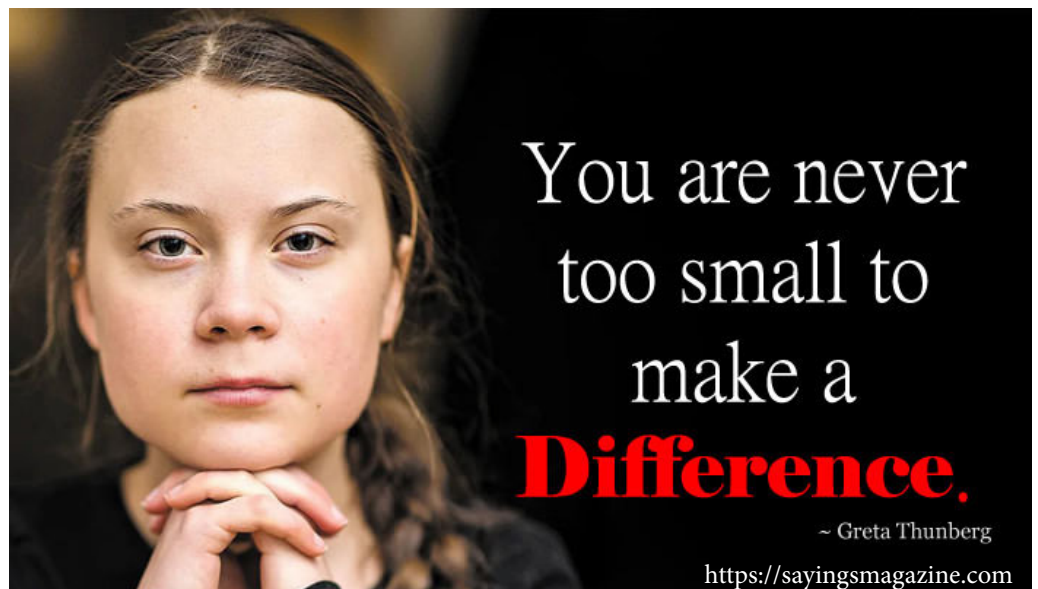
Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, states: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, children who are now growing up?”³ The Iroquois Confederacy held the Seventh Generation belief, specifically that, “In our every deliberation, we must consider the impact of our decisions on the next seven generations.”⁴

So, you see, sustainability and care for the earth is not all about us, it is about the future and the future that we leave to the children. Have you ever considered that we, in today’s world, are affected by the decisions made seven generations ago? Much development, new technologies, and new products were created during all that time. Surely, they were things that moved our society forward, but consequences were unforeseen and now we are dealing with the end

products of some of those decisions like excessive greenhouse gas emissions, electronic and plastic waste that we don’t know what to do with, acidification of our oceans, and soil degradation to name a few.

The question is what are we deciding for our own good and the good of future generations? Are we staying silent and allowing the consequences to be what they may or are we actively adding to the climate crisis debate, making personal behavior choices, and educating others for a better world and a healthier earth?

The 1989 UN Convention of the Rights of the Child tells us that “...every child has the right to health, education and protection, and every society has a stake in expanding children’s opportunities in life.”⁵ How are we living up to this challenge?



The children of today will make the choices in the future. It is our duty to help guide those choices by educating them about the sacred gift our earth is and by showing through our example how important our actions are to preserve and enhance life for all inhabitants on a global scale.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in their 2018 Special Report, sounded an alarm that if swift, concrete actions are not taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions there could be dire consequences noticeable in as soon as eleven years.⁶

Our generation is the first to see the effects of climate change and the last to have the ability to do something about it. Become a part of the solution: read *Laudato Si*; urge your legislators to enact laws that protect the environment; cut back on plastic use; recycle; reuse; compost; plant a pollinator garden; choose hybrid or electric vehicles; buy local; eliminate chemical cleaning products; get outside and enjoy nature.

May we not fail the world's children.



<http://eceresourcebank.org>

Footnotes:

1. Neumann, R. (2005). *Making Political Ecology*, London: Hachette UK Company, p. 84.
2. Miriam Webster Dictionary. Retrieved from: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sustainability>
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6. Leahy, S (2018, October 7). Climate change impacts worse than expected, global report warns. *National Geographic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2018/10/ipcc-report-climate-change-impacts-forests-emissions/>

- Sister Mary Jean Sliwinski, NA -



<https://will.illinois.edu>

Prayer Intention



*To pray for children who are abandoned, neglected,
and used for hard work and armed struggle*

Father, you have open arms
for every human being.

We entrust to you abandoned children,
neglected ones, and those who are used
for hard work and armed struggle.

Today we pray
for children abandoned emotionally
who are in day cares, for the sick,
the disabled and neglected children
that they be surrounded
by the love of good people and experience
the atmosphere of a loving family.
We also pray for parents who neglect
the education of their children,
who allow children to work too hard
or engage them in hostilities.
May they provide their children
with proper care and love.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.



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Abbreviations

Rome, Italy – RO

Kraków, Poland – KR

North America – NA

Przemyśl, Poland – PR

Warszawa, Poland – WA

Curitiba PR, Brazil – BR

Embu, Kenya – KE