

# PASTORAL APPROACHES FOR WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN IN THE POST-WAR CONTEXT OF SRI LANKA

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*Children have the fundamental right to live in a healthy and safe environment. However, many of them have faced extremely difficult situations and enormous challenges in life. This article primarily focuses on the war-affected children of Sri Lanka that went through an ethnic war for nearly three decades. The study will examine the post-war realities of these children, many of whom have lost their parents, siblings, relatives and friends. It will look into how these orphaned and vulnerable children are taken care of by government agencies and non-government organizations. Pointing out the inadequacy of the interventions given to these children who have to deal with deep traumatic experiences in the past, the author proposes a more holistic approach that adopts a community-based model as a therapeutic way of bringing about healing in their lives. Literature on pastoral care, which seldom touches on war-affected psyches, especially of children, will be appropriated in developing an effective and contextual pastoral care approach based on the interventions of Church-based communities to war-affected children. The ultimate goal is to improve the lives of these vulnerable children.*

## INTRODUCTION

Children are vulnerable, due to their dependency on parents and adults, but that does not mean that they can be put aside and disregarded in their dignity as human persons. We can appreciate them as active subjects and happy members in society. However, children encounter a lot of challenges in daily life situations such as family problems, poverty, abuses, natural disasters, and war. In their vulnerabilities, children could be traumatized by certain horrors and tragedies in life. This article mainly concentrates on the situation of war-affected children in the post-war context of Sri Lanka. It will first describe the pastoral

context of the study which is the conflict in the country and its aftermath, highlighting the realities of the children. Secondly, it will expound on a community-based model that finds expression in some pastoral approaches which could be applied in the pastoral care of the war-affected children. The third part will propose concrete pastoral care programs for the Church that will enable her to be at the genuine service of such kinds of children in their pursuit of a much better life in the future.

## THE PASTORAL CONTEXT

Theological reflections and pastoral interventions become more meaningful and appropriate when done within the particular context. This first part will first give a short historical background of the situation of Sri Lanka, recounting the circumstances that led to the bloody civil war. It will be followed by a description of the post-war condition of the life of the people, especially of the children who have been traumatically affected by the conflict.

## SHORT HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka, popularly known as Ceylon, is one of the South Asian nations and an island which shines as the pearl of the Indian Ocean.<sup>1</sup> According to the 2011 census, there are 20.3 million habitants in Sri Lanka.<sup>2</sup> The population consists of majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils. Sri Lanka is a land of many religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. The country went through a civil war which was mainly motivated

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<sup>1</sup> See J.M. Joseph Jeyaseelan, *Reconciliation and Peace Building in Post-War Sri Lanka* (Sri Lanka: Claretian Publication, 2018), 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2011, accessed February 25, 2019, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/Pages/Activities/Reports/FinalReport/Population/Table%20A9.pdf>.

by political reasons.<sup>3</sup> The thirty years of political and ethnic war started in 1983.<sup>4</sup>

The 2011 report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability about Sri Lanka highlights that the reason for ethno-nationalism is that after the independence from British colonizers, the majority wanted to be a strong community in the country. Especially, they wanted to make the country a Sinhala-Buddhist nation and a dwelling place of Buddhism as well. The Buddhist Sinhalese wanted to be considered as the real citizens of the country. This led to the rise of ethnic conflicts.<sup>5</sup> The intention of changing Sri Lanka to a Sinhala-Buddhist country is one of the essential reasons for the conflict and divisions among the people.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the Tamils wanted to claim their fundamental rights through a political solution. However, failing to receive a satisfactory answer to the injustice, some of the Tamil ethnic groups

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<sup>3</sup> See Jeyaseelan, *Reconciliation and Peace Building...*, 1.

<sup>4</sup> "The Sri Lankan Civil War was an armed conflict fought on the island of Sri Lanka. Beginning on 23 July 1983, there was an intermittent insurgency against the government by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (the LTTE, also known as the Tamil Tigers), which fought to create an independent Tamil state called Tamil Eelam in the north and the east of the island. After a 26-year military campaign, the Sri Lankan military defeated the Tamil Tigers in May 2009, bringing the civil war to an end." See Sri Lankan civil war. Accessed February 25, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri-Lankan-Civil-War>.

<sup>5</sup> "After independence, political elites tended to prioritize short-term political gains, appealing to communal and ethnic sentiments, over long-term policies, which could have built an inclusive state that adequately represented the multicultural nature of the citizenry. Because of these dynamics and divisions, the formation of a unifying national identity has been greatly hampered. Meanwhile, Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism gained traction, asserting a privileged place for the Sinhalese as the protectors of Sri Lanka, as the sacred home of Buddhism. These factors resulted in devastating and enduring consequences for the nature of the state, governance and inter-ethnic relations in Sri Lanka." See Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka, Accessed, March 30, 2019, <https://www.britishtamilforum.org>.

<sup>6</sup> See Laksiri Fernando, "Ethnic Conflict and State in Sri Lanka: A Possible Solution," in *South Asia: Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, eds., Siri Gamage and I. B. Watson (New Delhi: South Asian Association, 1998), 87-89.

engaged in a fight for their fundamental rights. Eventually, the fight for rights turned into an ethnic and military war between the militants of the Tamil minority group and the militants of the civil authority. Some of the political parties and a group of Tamil minorities wanted to establish a free Tamil separatist nation among the Tamil community in the north and east of Sri Lanka. The aforementioned worsened the ethnic problem.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, this ethnic problem turned into a civil war. The Tamil militant group started in the 1970s and continued to fight for the rights of Tamil minorities.<sup>8</sup> Even though there were many Tamil militant groups, it was the LTTE, (the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) which was the strongest group to fight for a free Tamil state. Fighting for the rights of Tamil minorities turned into civil war in 1983.<sup>9</sup>

This war lasted for more than twenty-five years, causing unimaginable consequences in the lives of many Sri Lankans, until it came to an end on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2009.<sup>10</sup> During the war, thousands of people were affected, and many were inhumanly massacred by the military forces. In the final face of war “[...] tens of thousands lost their lives from January to May 2009, many of whom died anonymously in the carnage of the final few days.”<sup>11</sup> Along with the loss of many lives, nearly 400,000 people were also displaced and became refugees.<sup>12</sup> Although the war was over in 2009, there is still tension between ethnic communities,

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<sup>7</sup> See Purnaka L. De Silva, “The Growth of Tamil Paramilitary Nationalism: Sinhala Chauvinism and Tamil Response,” in *South Asia: Conflict and Contemporary Sri Lanka*, eds., Siri Gamage and I. B. Watson (New Delhi: South Asian Association, 1998), 97-110.

<sup>8</sup> See Jeyaseelan, *Reconciliation and Peace Building...*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> See Sri Lankan civil war, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri-Lankan-Civil-War>.

<sup>10</sup> See Sri Lanka declares end to war with Tamil Tigers, accessed February 25, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/18/tamil-tigers-killed-sri-lanka>.

<sup>11</sup> Report of the Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka, 2011, ii, accessed March 21, 2019, <http://www.britishtamilforum.org/resources/un-reports/>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

discrimination among different religious groups, the situation of insecurity, corruption, unequal distribution of the resources, religio-politics, and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism which paved the way for the ethnic conflict.<sup>13</sup> During the Sri Lankan ethnic war, people went through a terrible time. The war did not only take away the lives of many military forces; rather, it also affected all the innocent people. Particularly the people who were in the war zones lost their livelihoods and even their lives.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, innocent civilians became victims as a result of the war, especially the Tamil people of the North and East of Sri Lanka.

Many Sri Lankans are in a situation of despair in all spheres of life, due to the civil war and its violence, which prevailed for three decades. In the last phase of the war, a substantial number of people lost their lives, and many were displaced and forced to become refugees, of whom children were the most affected ones.

### **THE POST-WAR CONDITION OF WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN**

Even though the inhuman tragedy of war has ended, the ravages of war are still present among the peoples of the country. Among those, children are the most affected and vulnerable in many spheres. Many children have lost their parents, siblings, education and a healthy and peaceful environment. Today children long for love, good education, a healthy and conducive environment, and so that with moral values they can try to be good citizens of the country.<sup>15</sup> These children are constantly confronted with their past traumatic experiences.

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<sup>13</sup> See Laksiri Fernando, "Ethnic Conflict and State in Sri Lanka: A Possible Solution," in *South Asia: Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka*, eds., Siri Gamage and I. B. Watson (New Delhi: South Asian Association, 1998), 87-89.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See Catani Claudia, Schauer Elisabeth & Neuner Frank, "Beyond Individual War Trauma: Domestic Violence Against Children in Afghanistan And Sri Lanka," *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* 34 no. 2 (2008): 165-176.

According to the Save the Children's 2016 report, the war-affected children face various kinds of problems. One such challenge is poverty, which hinders their education, health, protection and growth.<sup>16</sup> Another challenge is the family stress<sup>17</sup> which weighs too heavy on the war-ravaged children. Many of their parents, especially the mothers, have gone to foreign countries in search of jobs, making the children more vulnerable. Due to the war, many children have not been able to pursue their education.<sup>18</sup>

These vulnerable children are taken cared of by non-government organizations such as the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Save the Children, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and some others. These organizations provide for the material needs of children, like food, clothing, shelter and education. Yet, according to some observers, the psychological, mental, spiritual and inner healings are overlooked.

I recently did a qualitative empirical study. I did this research by using the online skype interviews with Salvatorian Sisters who are giving pastoral care to the war-affected children. These Sisters shared that even though those children receive a lot of care and support, they still face many challenges, especially past traumatic experiences that hinder their growth.<sup>19</sup> According to the Sisters' observations, children find it hard to concentrate on studies, and they are afraid to relate to other ethnic communities (Sinhalese). Children also long for parental love and care. The Sisters emphasized that there is a lot to do with war-traumatized children, and therefore, the Sri Lankan Church has to collaborate with other religious leaders, governmental, and non-governmental organizations. The Sisters highlighted that through efficient pastoral care, through counseling and therapy, children are offered

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<sup>16</sup> See Save the Children, *Investing in Children in Sri Lanka-Child centric resource analysis Summary Report* (Sri Lanka: Colombo, 2016), 55.

<sup>17</sup> See Save the Children, *Sri Lanka Supplementary Report on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (Sri Lanka: Colombo, 2017), 41.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>19</sup> See Anne A. Lambert, *Pastoral and Diaconal Care with Children in The Post War Context of Sri Lanka* (Master Thesis, chapter 3, not published).

inner healing, restoration of life, wholeness, and transformation. Such a transformation is possible only if they are cared for, nurtured, mentored, and looked after.<sup>20</sup> They believe that it is obligatory to propose an effective pastoral care for children who faced the unforgettable violence.

The Sisters also expressed that a great responsibility to bring healing and reconciliation among the war-afflicted children falls on religious congregations, on the church, and on the local government. Initially responding to that obligations, the Salvatorian Sisters organize rebuilding and reconciliation programs to heal the inner wounds of these children. The Sisters also give spiritual exercises through yoga meditation. They also plan to find the close relatives of the children so that they could experience reunification with their own parents or relatives. The Sisters also believe that long years of wounds and trauma cannot be healed in a few days or few years. According to the experiences of the Sisters, the pastoral care that they give to these children in the best way that they could, introducing different approaches that is most fitting to their needs, is what could enhance rapid reinsertion into society.

### COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL OF PASTORAL CARE

Human persons are essentially relational beings. The recognition of the relational or communitarian nature of human person is very important in pastoral counseling. Community precedes the individual; therefore, the presence of a community is very important in our lives. In this regard, Ryan LaMothe<sup>21</sup> states, “[...] the notion of ecclesia or faith community is a central, existential anthropological premise that can shape an understanding of facets of pastoral counseling such as diagnosis, process, and aims.”<sup>22</sup> The pastoral caregiver cannot bring healing to

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> “Ryan LaMothe is professor of pastoral care and counselling at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology,” Accessed March 4, 2019, <https://www.saintmeinrad.edu/faculty/?profile=2712>.

<sup>22</sup> Ryan LaMothe, “Pastoral Counselling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: The Centrality of Community,” in *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counselling*, 68 no. 2 (2014): 2.

the client in isolation. He/she needs the support of the client as well as others in the community. According to LaMothe, the pastoral counselor presents an improved understanding of community to a person in crisis, which enhances healing of psychosocial alienations and depressions. For him, pastoral counseling goes beyond the therapeutic model. It should try to place the community at the center in the experience of healing.<sup>23</sup>

### FROM INDIVIDUAL TO COMMUNITARIAN APPROACH

LaMothe observes that the important communitarian aspects are missing in pastoral counseling and therefore it should be re-implemented.<sup>24</sup> The pastoral counselor is supposed to help the care seeker to recover lost hope and make meaning of life after being frustrated by the difficulty he or she has undergone. I do agree with LaMothe because I observed in Sri Lanka that most of the pastoral counselors are solely concerned about how to bring the client out of the struggle but forget about how to (re)connect them with the community. Most of the time, those who experienced the war believe that they are isolated from other communities. The pastoral counselors on behalf of the Church could present to the people in crisis the ecclesial understanding of suffering or being in crisis. They can try their best to make people understand that the ecclesial understanding of crisis provides hope drawn from the perception of life and theological tradition. By the support of pastoral counseling, care seekers meet at the parish to share their stories and experiences. Ecclesial communities could come at the forefront to help people to have or recover hope. In the Sri Lankan communities, it is good to implement such practices. However, some may question, how do the Hindu and Muslim understand this? Or even the caregivers who are non-Christians? This is where I would bring Mercer's community-based model, which gathers the care-seekers outside the church premises, so that those who belong to another religion may not feel excluded. The Church has a

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 8.

responsibility to associate with other religious leaders to bring the community together to help the vulnerable clients.

### WITHIN THE LIVING HUMAN WEB OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL REALITIES

In regard to community aspects, Bonnie Miller-McLemore emphasizes that “pastoral theologians should claim and retain an essential focus on the individual and on psychology but situate this focus differently, embedding it more explicitly within culture and context.”<sup>25</sup> This explains her challenge to focus on the development of broader theories of pastoral theology and ministry. She believes that there is a need to change the focus from individual psychotherapy to communitarian care. She tries to make it clear that practical theology should not focus on the individual alone but should be focused on the web perspective. She emphasizes that the individual care of a person could also include the socio-prophetic aspect as well. Thus, she challenges that “ministers will now have to know how to analyze communal resources, enter and organize communities for action, and balance ministry to individuals in crisis with social advocacy.”<sup>26</sup> Both pastoral care and diaconal ministry mainly focus on personal care while there is an overlooking of the social perspectives of care. She also states that “besides ministering to individuals in need, we may have to confront unjust social situations and preach on delicate but important social and political issues.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the pastoral care and diaconal ministry does not stop with individual care alone but goes beyond its boundary, just like a web, and connects all the other aspects including the community and society. Miller-McLemore highlights that “pastoral theology must give public voice to those least heard and must challenge beliefs and practices (religious and otherwise) that perpetuate silence and suppression, such as racism, sexism, colonialism, and economic exploitation.”<sup>28</sup> This point of

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<sup>25</sup> Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore “The Living Human Web: A Twenty-five Year Retrospective,” *Pastoral Psychol*, 67 (2018):315.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

view is definitely important for the Sri Lankan Church to go beyond its scope to stand on behalf of the rights of war-affected people. The past war memories and wounds are still fresh in the minds of people; therefore, a careful pastoral care is of utmost importance. Pastoral care and diaconal ministry could speak out for the social, economic and political rights of people as well. Miller-McLemore emphasizes on the living human web that links all aspects of the human being, including communitarian anthropology in today's context.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the centrality of community is very important in pastoral counseling. The communitarian anthropology in pastoral counseling will surely be an eye opener and a ground-breaking project for all who are involved in the pastoral care of the war-troubled children in the post-war context, both of Sri Lanka and also of the other countries where it is really needed. This communitarian anthropology will also go hand in hand with the community-oriented model, which mainly concentrates on the community that would provide pastoral care for the war-troubled children.

### **PASTORAL CARE FOR WAR-AFFECTED CHILDREN**

War-traumatized children are wounded psychologically as well as physically. Even though their physical wounds are healed; their psychological wounds have not yet been healed. They need sufficient care for rehabilitation. These children often use violence to protect or to revenge because of their past violent experiences during the war. In this situation, the Sri Lankan community could provide the necessary care to heal these wounds, to help them grow as healthy children. Therefore, there is an urgent need to stimulate the children's physical and psychological recovery for their total rehabilitation. The traumatized children need special attention, to heal their memories from their past traumatic experiences. Salvatorian Sisters emphasized that the war-troubled children find it difficult to heal their past traumatic experiences, and it affects their lives, especially in their behaviors, relationships with others, and in their education.

We may question whether their traumatic memories can be healed. Some of the researchers who speak about trauma, say that it is possible. For instance, Susan D. Solomon states that “even after fairly severe traumatic events, a majority will cope effectively if provided with the opportunities and resources to rebuild their lives.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, children who have had traumatic experiences can be given opportunities to heal their wounds. They cannot do it all by themselves, and they cannot live with these experiences forever, thus the responsibility falls on to parents, elders, and caregivers of the community.

### **HEALING OF WOUNDED MEMORIES: LA-KRI-VI PASTORAL CARE APPROACH**

Joseph Jeyaseelan expressed his experiences with regards to healing the wounded memories of Sri Lankan war-afflicted people.<sup>30</sup> Through his interviews with Sri Lankans, he came to know that healing is a process that will slowly take place in the post-war context of Sri Lanka.<sup>31</sup> He added that during the interviews, many interviewees stated that it is not an easy task to heal their memories, thus there is a great need for healing the past memories and wounds. Therefore, it is necessary to discuss how to heal the past war memories that hinder the growth of children. Jeyaseelan emphasized that there is a limited contribution of the Catholic Church in healing the memories and bringing reconciliation among people.<sup>32</sup> However, he emphasized that some of the Religious Congregations take the initiative in healing the painful memories of war-ravaged people, especially with the students and

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<sup>29</sup> Susan D. Solomon, “Introduction,” in *Trauma Interventions in War and Peace: Prevention, Practice, and Policy*, ed. Bonnie L. Green et al. (New York: Kluwer Academic: Plenum Publishers, 2003), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Jayaseelan has done several interviews with Sri Lankans from the North and the South as part of his doctoral research in Reconciliation and Peacebuilding. His book was officially published in 2018.

<sup>31</sup> See Jeyaseelan, *Reconciliation and Peace Building...*, 53.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

youth.<sup>33</sup> For instance, he says, “LA-KRI-VI is another project of the Oblates of Colombo. It is basically a children’s project which has as one of its aims building bridges between the children of north and south.”<sup>34</sup> This program helps a lot to bring the children and youth as one family. Children are gathered at the national or district level where they share their stories and joy with each other. This project is not only for the Catholic children but also for children belonging to other dominant religions who are invited to participate in it.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, introducing the LA-KRI-VI project in various places in Sri Lanka will enhance the healing of the traumatized children and their memories, and help them to accept everyone as brothers and sisters. This project is organized by one particular Religious congregation, therefore if the Sri Lankan Catholic Church can encourage its priests and religious to begin this kind of project in their parishes and mission zones, then the children in the entire country may benefit from it. The Church also can inform other religious leaders about this project, so that there won’t be any misunderstanding about this mission. Assuredly, in a multi-religious country like Sri Lanka, it would become one of the integral pastoral ministries of the Church.

### **EMPHATIC LISTENING TO NARRATIVES IN PASTORAL CARE**

Due to the war, many children in Sri Lanka have lost their parents and dear ones; this has become one of their unforgettable memories in their lives. Doehring underlines ‘the losses’<sup>36</sup> as an important effect of war. She proposes that in such a situation the pastoral caregivers must listen to the story of the affected ones. Expressing the traumatic experiences in a safe environment as well as with the help of professionals, one can get healing. It allows them to overcome their negative feelings that are suppressed in their

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 62

<sup>35</sup> These statements are also based on my experience of being the coordinator of LA-KRI-VI, at Namunukula Parish, Badulla, Sri Lanka.

<sup>36</sup> See Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach*, 67.

hearts and minds. In such a situation “Caregivers can learn much about the care seeker’s psychological well-being by simply listening.”<sup>37</sup> Listening would enable trained caregivers in trauma counseling to respond positively to each situation with care. Children with psychological disorders require the utmost care. Doehring points out the steps which a caregiver can take towards a client seeking healing in the face of loss. In other words, the loss could be raging thoughts that might in the future overwhelm the client. Doehring places special attention on listening because through it the caregiver expresses empathy and relational boundaries. Simply listening does not help, rather additionally is an empathetic listening to lead these wounded children through the past traumatic experiences so that they can redeem themselves by accepting their past with a hope for a better future. One can observe her interest in the tension within the caregiver on not over-identifying with the care-seeker, and the caregiver distancing of his/her emotion from the care-seeker.<sup>38</sup>

### **PASTORAL COMPANIONSHIP WITHIN A COMMUNITY-ORIENTED APPROACH**

According to Joyce Mercer, healing wounded memories of post-traumatic experiences is one of the main tasks of the community-based model, which calls for a united community living.<sup>39</sup> Mercer has empirically developed this community-focused model in dialogue with the situation of the children affected by the war in Indonesia. This model tried to bring harmony between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia. After many years of war, this is how the Church tries its best to heal the wounds of war-affected people through a community approach. Mercer argues that the pastoral caregivers have extensive responsibility to cooperate in the process of healing past memories.<sup>40</sup> Discussing further from what

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> See Joyce Ann Mercer, “Pastoral Care with Children of War: A Community-Based Model of Trauma Healing in the Aftermath of Indonesia’s Religious Conflicts,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 64 (2015):858.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid 859.

Mercer presents, we can infer and reflect on the ideal of the pastoral companionship to the war-affected children. The community-oriented model will not only empathize, analyze, and listen reflectively to the war-afflicted, but it will also understand the vulnerabilities and what triggers the experience, to avoid re-traumatization. A caregiver's approach as a mother, father, sister, and brother to these children will help them heal their past wounds. These vulnerable children can grow in confidence in such an environment. An empathic attitude towards war-troubled children experiencing grief due to past wounded memories does not by itself mean that the client will receive appropriate services, but it does provide a platform on which more proactive and continuous services of companionship can be built, and loss of hope thinking can be prevented.

### PASTORAL COUNSELING AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING

According to Jane Sutton and William Stewart "Counseling is a 'talking therapy,' a process aimed at providing care seekers with time and space to explore their problems, understand their problems, and resolve or come to terms with their problems, in a confidential setting."<sup>41</sup> This definition provides a clear understanding of what counseling actually means. As it is explained in this definition, first of all, children should be given more time to express their problems. Secondly, pastoral caregivers must understand the problems of war-affected children. Jane Sutton and William Stewart also indicated that counseling supports the care seeker, to explore more about themselves. At the same time, it allows the caregiver to understand the care seeker in a better way.<sup>42</sup> During the interviews, Salvatorian Sisters highlighted that they provide pastoral counseling to the war-traumatized children. Salvatorian Sisters suggested a continuous pastoral counseling that would help children to come out of their past painful experiences. Pastoral counseling plays a vital role in pastoral care for war-affected

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<sup>41</sup> Jane Sutton and William Stewart, *Learning to Counsel: Develop skills, insight and knowledge to counsel others* (Glasgow: Bell & Bain, 2008), 13.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

children. Caregivers are expected to understand and accept the persons as they are and support them to accept what they have gone through in their lives. It is not sufficient to stop with understanding the problems of war-traumatized children but also can proceed ahead to solve their problems with confidentiality. Confidentiality is one of the essential elements in pastoral care as it provides assurance and certainty for the clients. Most of the time, these counselors have their supervisors to monitor them; therefore, in that case, strict confidentiality cannot be observed. However, it is not necessary to share the information about the clients to the other professional except when it is required. Counselors cannot harm clients by breaking confidentiality yet can help the clients to overcome the difficulties. Confidentiality enhances the clients' ability to be more open to counselors.

### **PASTORAL COUNSELING AND RELIGIOUS VALUES**

In Christian perspective, Richard Vaughan meaningfully describes: “counselors in pastoral ministry are called to be counselors because of their faith and commitment to Christian values, and this faith and commitment, therefore, should play a major role in their counseling. In this case, the task of a pastoral counselor is to link the topic under discussion to the faith and to the values of the counselee.”<sup>43</sup> While listening to children’s traumatic experiences, the counselors are called to make the children aware that God is there for them. However, since there are multi-religious beliefs in Sri Lanka, the counselors must know all four religious beliefs and practices to guide the war-affected children. For example, a Hindu child will not understand how the Lord Jesus loves children, but the child will understand how the Hindu Supreme God, Lord Shiva cares for children. There are other methods used in trauma counseling, such as expression of anger, fear, and disappointment. Pastoral counselors can introduce these methods to war-troubled children, so that children may be able to be open to the pastoral counselors and share their past

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<sup>43</sup> Richard P. Vaughan, *Basic Skills for Christian Counselors: An introduction for pastoral Ministers* (New Jersey, NJ: Paulist, 1987), 31.

experiences. When children begin to express their anger and fear in counseling, it will allow them to express constructively.

Regarding the pastoral counseling for children, Pamela Couture points out what a pastoral counselor has to do during counseling. She emphasized that “pastoral counseling teaches that a counselor can only go as deeply into human experiences with a counselee. Yet in pastoral counseling training it is often the counselee’s experience that nudges the counselor to enter more deeply into his or her counselee’s own experience.”<sup>44</sup> In this regard, the Sri Lankan Church should train more pastoral counselors especially those who work with children, so that they may able to do counseling for these innocent children. Through pastoral counseling, children may able to share their painful experiences which are buried in their heart and mind.

### PASTORAL COUNSELING AND COMMUNITARIAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND APPROACH

In the post-war context of Sri Lanka, many Sri Lankans need pastoral care and counseling due to post-war trauma. The war-torn people are the most vulnerable, who require the Church’s motherly care. The use of communitarian anthropology in the post-war context of Sri Lanka will be beneficial for healing and total integration into society. The Sri Lankan Church can also introduce some new ministries for the refugees, victims of war, youth and pastoral care of children, not as a separate apostolate but as an integral part of its pastoral ministry. I emphasize that communitarian anthropology will not only analyze, empathize and listen to the client, but also understand their vulnerabilities and provide effective pastoral care for the needy. In a communitarian approach, the perspective of the care-seeker is understood as a discovery of openness for the future. It gives an empowering and accompanying presence by which the pastoral caregiver creatively journeys with the client towards healing and growth. In this way, the care-seeker can experience the sense of ‘reconciliation’ so as to

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<sup>44</sup> Pamela D. Couture, *Seeing Children is Seeing God: A Practical Theological of Children and Poverty*, (Abingdon: Nashville, 2000), 61.

grow in the path to healing. The communitarian approach will enable the client to overcome the struggle between wanting to despair and wanting to live by reinforcing realistic hope through relational experience in a community environment.

### **PASTORAL CARE AND THE CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO HOLISTIC EDUCATION**

The right to education is another essential aspect of war-troubled children in Sri Lanka. Due to war, many children were forced to abandon their education, therefore, the pastoral care could also include a safe environment for their intellectual growth. Michael Marland argues that “pastoral care is not merely a way of supporting the academic work but having a central educative purpose in it.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the war-afflicted children too, are allowed to grow intellectually to build their future. The academic learning, instead of being a mere transfer of knowledge, can become a process of creative and active participatory learning whereby their past is taken seriously. Pastoral care should also help the children develop skills such as music, art, dance, drama, sports, poetry etc. The children who are in the Salvatorian children's home in Sri Lanka are given the opportunities to discover their talents and develop them creatively for a better future. Through these activities, those children can express themselves and slowly come to terms with their past and grow holistically towards maturity. However, academic learning alone will not help the child to become a fully mature person.

In Sri Lanka children receive formal education in schools; however, the schools don't provide all that is essential for life. Children could receive moral life experiences, especially on how to behave in society in Sri Lanka. Education that is given in school is not enough to have a holistic life. Therefore, essential learning more than merely academic, and intellectual knowledge is very significant. Some of the spiritual exercises would help them to become more mature in life. As Doehring expressed:

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<sup>45</sup> Michael Marland, *Pastoral Care: Organizing the Care and Guidance of the Individual Pupil in a Comprehensive School* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 8-15.

“For care-seekers to regain calm, religious and spiritual practices like prayer, worship, Christian sacraments may help the care seekers to regain moments of peace to engage in the daily routines necessary to life. When care-seekers can effectively use spiritual and religious practices to cope up with stress during the acute stage of crises, such coping will become an ongoing resource in maintaining and deepening the connection with God and a sense of life as sacred.”<sup>46</sup>

The spiritual exercises will help children to experience the presence of God in their lives. In the Christian perspective, participating in the Holy Eucharist, doing recollection and prayer would help them to be connected with the Divine. They may come to the realization that even though they have gone through a terrible war, God still cares for them. Even though the above paragraph articulates about Christian spiritual practices, all the war-affected children are not Christians. Therefore, religious practices according to other religious beliefs and practices also will help them to overcome their bitter experiences. For instance, the Hindu children in the Salvatorian children’s home begin their day with reverencing the sun, which helps them to experience the presence of God in nature. Those children say that starting the day in prayer and meditation gives them positive energy to face reality with courage. Collectively with physical, psychological, social support, and spiritual support also enriches the lives of children.

Regarding holistic education for children’s growth and transformation, pastoral caregivers may look for many alternative and creative ways to bring holistic healing to war-afflicted children. They can also learn about other religious practices and cultures to guide the non-Christian children.

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<sup>46</sup> Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 134.

## PASTORAL CARE AND THE WAY OF NON-VIOLENCE

The war allows the people to experience violence in their surroundings, between two groups or between nations. Sometimes the effects of war make the people more violent against the opposite party. In Sri Lanka, many Tamilians look at Sinhalese as their enemies and Sinhalese look at the Tamilians as terrorists. This idea is very much seen even among many war-affected children. I myself have personally heard from many Tamilians, that it is not easy for them to forget and forgive Sinhalese who have done vast damage to their lives. Eventually, this leads to violence once again. Therefore, it is necessary to create a non-violent approach or communication between Tamils and Sinhalese. Such an approach would help the war-afflicted children to adopt a peaceful living, rather than revenge and violence.

According to Marshall B. Rosenberg<sup>47</sup> non-violent communication (NVC) leads us to have a peaceful mind and body. Rosenberg highlighted that, if we have negative feelings and thoughts, it would be difficult to form a healthy atmosphere in our livelihood.<sup>48</sup> These characteristics are in most of the people who faced the terrifying war, especially in children. Rosenberg stated that NVC supports us to create a peaceful mind as it emphasizes what we really want, rather than focusing on what others have done to us.<sup>49</sup> The minds of those traumatized children are very much disturbed. During the interviews, some of the Sisters expressed that these children have revengeful attitudes towards Sinhalese. Knowingly or unknowingly this attitude is there in many Tamil children, who have faced the terrible war. As proposed by Rosenberg, a solution against a violent attitude is by introducing the non-violent communication. NVC helps the persons to accept,

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<sup>47</sup> “Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg (1934-2015) was the founder and director of educational services for The Center for Nonviolent Communication.” Nonviolent Communication, Marshall Rosenberg, founder of NVC, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.cnvc.org/about/marshall-rosenberg.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, (Encinitas: Puddle Dancer Press, 2015), 197.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

understand and face reality in a positive way rather than being negative and revengeful. Rosenberg stressed that “worldwide, NVC now serves as a valuable resource for communities facing violent conflicts and severe ethnic, religious, or political tensions.”<sup>50</sup> Children need to come out of their bitter experiences and revengeful emotions. Therefore, NVC is one of the prominent means that could be used by war-troubled children. Rosenberg stated that NVC leads to a good relationship with each other and with oneself. Furthermore, it also demands of us careful listening.<sup>51</sup>

Rosenberg especially pointed out that NVC focuses on four main areas such as “[...] what we are observing, feeling and needing, and what are we requesting to enrich our lives.”<sup>52</sup> It is the duty of the pastoral caretakers to let the children observe what is happening at present. They can make the children aware that the war has ended. In the next step, caretakers would know what the children are feeling. They will realize whether the children still feel frustrated or angry towards the other community. In the third stage, caregivers may find out the needs of children. In this case, children may reconcile with each other and create a peaceful environment to live in peace and harmony. In the end, caregivers can help war-affected children to communicate with non-war-affected children by using non-violent communication.

As for Rosenberg, NVC adapts careful listening, respect, and empathy while it produces a willingness to give it wholeheartedly.<sup>53</sup> Rosenberg explains that NVC not only leads us towards peaceful living with one another but also would provide us inner healing and changes.<sup>54</sup> NVC changes our negative thinking<sup>55</sup> into positive energy that would free us from depression and hurt feelings. This also leads to mutual understanding and creates a good relationship with each other. NVC leads people to feel, understand, and accept each other in an appropriate way. Rosenberg

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

emphasized that NVC can be used at any level of communication as it involves oneself and others.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the war-traumatized children can be given enough knowledge about NVC and be initiated in the process of transformation. Especially the pastoral caregivers can arrange seminars on NVC which could create positive thinking of oneself and one's neighbor. Through awareness-raising programs, war-affected children may be able to absorb the meaning of peaceful living.

In line with Rosenberg, Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger takes self-empathy as an essential element in NVC.<sup>57</sup> According to her, empathy with oneself helps the person to be empathetic towards others. Then a person understands his/her physical and spiritual needs and is able to apply it in his or her life.<sup>58</sup> She states that empathy is a very essential element in pastoral care; therefore, it should begin from the person him/herself. In another book, Hunsinger notes that one of the essential characteristics of NVC is an association between individuals. According to her, it is "honesty and empathy"<sup>59</sup> that connects the persons.

Violence is still a dominant factor in many parts of Sri Lanka. There is a tension always among the two ethnic groups which could escalate into another war. The recent Easter Bomb blast (21<sup>st</sup> April 2019) as well took many lives in Sri Lanka including many children. The children who were born during the war have been hearing shelling from heavy weapons. Due to this, their behavior has become very rude. It is not their fault, but it is the consequence of war. In this situation, it is necessary to introduce the notion of non-violent communication, which is exceptionally necessary. Non-violence is one of the essential characteristics of our lives because it restrains our violent nature. It is the responsibility of all the adults to create in children a positive way of thinking and a non-violence approach.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>57</sup> Deborah Van Deusen Hunsinger, *Bearing the unbearable: Trauma, Gospel and Pastoral care* (Cambridge: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2015), 73.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

## PASTORAL CARE TREATING CHILDREN AS ACTIVE SUBJECTS WITH RIGHTS

Children need to be treated not as mere objects but as active subjects who play an important role in the society. Many authors such as Miller-McLemore, Annemie Dillen, John Wall, and Kristin Herzog plead for the cause of children emphasizing the freedom and respect given to active subjects as adults in society. John Wall highlighted that the rights of children have become a global challenge.<sup>60</sup> He pointed out that children are exposed to many challenges such as abuses, war, slavery, domestic work, etc. Due to this, they have become more vulnerable. Therefore, Wall challenges us to have renewed human rights for children.<sup>61</sup> According to him, the rights of children need to become active to offer help to the needy. Wall emphasized that children are to be given a good education and a peaceful environment. He especially stated that the children who went through war and conflicts must be given the above needs.<sup>62</sup> He argued that “simply providing children a childhood is not enough. Children also need their childhood protected against adult harm and societal injustice.”<sup>63</sup> It is clear that the rights of children to be in the world always demands their active participation and not mere passive observation.

Children who underwent war experiences can be given freedom and opportunities to participate in social activities such as; sports, days out and, cultural tours to the areas where they have not been, especially to the places where they could meet the Sinhala or Tamil community. They also can be given responsibility to be a leader where they could feel equal to other members of the same community. All the religious leaders, government leaders, and parents could help the children to be engaged in productive participation through social activities for the transformation of society.

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<sup>60</sup> See John Wall, *Children's Rights: Today's Global Challenge* (Lanham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield Publication, (2016), 15.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 53.

Many children who went through this war have lost their confidence. Most of the time they are anxious about what to say and do, due to fear. So, it is another important facet to create confidence in them that the community is there for them, to love them and care for them. The Sri Lankan community also can create an atmosphere that will encourage the children to have trust in themselves and in their community. This atmosphere will make them aware that they are also an active subject in the community. Looking at those war-traumatized children just as vulnerable will not help them; rather, the caregivers are also encouraged to engage with those children as valuable members of society. They are called to respect the child's dignity and rights. It is the responsibility of the community to see that the children get their dignity and are respected by the other members of the community. Making us aware that war-affected children are also full members of the Sri Lankan community, and accepting them as active subjects are important steps in the process of pastoral care. By accepting these children as constitutive members of the Sri Lankan society and allowing them to be active subjects in the development and growth of the society will surely contribute to the empowerment of every child who experienced terrible war.

### **RECONCILIATION BASED ON TRUTH AND JUSTICE AS A WAY TO PEACE**

Everyone wishes to live in a peaceful environment. Countries that have gone through a rigorous war are especially in need of peace and reconciliation. Reconciliation is important in identity conflicts, where the different sides need to reconcile with each other, heal and stop seeing the other as an enemy.

There is still tension for the fear of another war in Sri Lanka. Most of the time there are many religious disharmonies. There is also lack of interest on the side of government leaders in building peace and reconciliation. Those war-affected children are now growing into early adulthood, yet, there is less opportunity to involve them in the process of reconciliation. If the people in Sri Lanka are not going to face the above-mentioned problems, there will be no opportunity for peace and reconciliation. Therefore, the

current situations of war-affected children require the government to pay more attention to bringing reconciliation between the ethnic communities. Robert Schreiter states that “Reconciliation so understood holds within itself themes of truth telling, justice, memory, healing, and forgiveness.”<sup>64</sup> There would not be reconciliation, without truth, justice, and forgiveness. When applying the community-based pastoral care to the war-traumatized children, pastoral caregivers could explain about these themes, and make them aware of the importance of these elements in the process of reconciliation. One of the main objectives of this community-focused care is bringing reconciliation among the war-affected children and non-war-affected children; therefore, it requires the recognition of reconciliation among children.

Joseph Jayaseelan points out that peace and reconciliation are very much applicable in the post-war context of Sri Lanka. He highlighted that every Sri Lankan has to contribute toward the goal of peace.<sup>65</sup> Furthermore he says that “[...] we may not forget that we are ministers of reconciliation, commissioned by God to be partakers in God’s mission of reconciliation.”<sup>66</sup> All Sri Lankans need peace and reconciliation in order to live a happy and peaceful life. To achieve this, the community-based model calls us to a new way of pastoral approach that can help the children to hope for a better future. This also calls for an encounter, dialogue, and solidarity among the affected and non-affected children. In this task, the Church in Sri Lanka has lots of responsibilities towards the war-affected children. The Church has a great task to network with the wider community in the struggle for justice, unity, and peace. The Church is called to indiscriminately associate and work with both Sinhalese and Tamils, as it is an added advantage for them to bring the two together in faith and practice. In order to bring truth, peace and reconciliation, leaders of every religion can

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<sup>64</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, “A Practical Theology of Healing, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation,” in *Peacebuilding: Catholic Theology, Ethics, and Praxis*, ed. Robert J Schreiter, R. Scott Appleby, and Gerard F. Powers (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2010), 367.

<sup>65</sup> See Jeyaseelan, *Reconciliation and Peace Building...*, 41.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

call for inter-religious dialogue. The Secretary-General of Sri Lanka's Bishops Conference, Rt. Rev. Dr. Valence Mendis states that "There is a strong need for interreligious effort in promoting this process of peace. There have been some initiatives toward this and even at present, there are some inter-religious groups who have realized this importance."<sup>67</sup> The Catholic Church of Sri Lanka realizes the importance of inter-religious dialogue in the post-war context of this country. Therefore, the Church has the responsibility to call for the inter-religious dialogue with other religious leaders, and to bring Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu children to have communication with Christian children. This very activity will help the children to come out of their negative ideas about each religion and language. It also will create in them a peaceful environment which would heal their bitter past experiences.

Truth is a very important aspect of our life. If there is no truth, there will be no opportunity for peace and reconciliation. Children who experienced war are obliged to know what caused the ethnic war. Tamil children think that because of the entire Sinhala community, they had to go through the severe war and its consequences, whereas this is not true. This thinking will continue to create violence in them. Elders have the duty to explain to children that the war is over now, and not every Sinhalese is responsible for the war. Displaying short video clips on peace-building and reconciliation would help them to turn their thinking pattern. Children also can be given other activities such as dance, drama, drawings, storytelling, sharing of experiences, expressing and healing their past through re-telling their stories, etc. Through these simple methods, children are led to truth, peace, and reconciliation, which are essential for peaceful living. It could be arranged in small groups. For instance, places like schools, churches, temples, and mosques would fit for children to come together. After this has been explained to them in the small groups, children can be brought to a common place where they meet with the other children. Furthermore, the war-troubled children must

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<sup>67</sup> Valence Mendis, *Trends and Pathways: An Ensemble of Articles on Some of the Contemporary Ecclesial Trends* (Colombo: Sarasevi Publishers, 2015), 72.

be given better knowledge about peacemaking. Organizing peace and reconciliation seminars for those children will be a new step in bringing peace and reconciliation among children and thereafter to all the citizens of Sri Lanka. When their mind is at peace, it will help them to heal their inner wounds. At the same time, the pastoral caregivers can arrange sports that can bring children together and mix them up in the same team.

The biblical understanding of peacemaking always takes us to Jesus teaching on the mountain. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9). This call is for all Christian to experience peace in themselves and spread it to everyone with whom they live. The same idea of peace can also be seen in the writings of St. Paul. He always greeted the communities with peace of Christ. Especially in his letter to Romans 12:18 he writes, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” This call is for a peaceful living. All the Christians in Sri Lanka have the greater responsibility to bring in peace in their homes, villages, cities, and the country. This call is not only for Christians but also for all human beings.

Reconciliation is not an easy task to achieve. As Villa-Vicencio highlights, “Reconciliation is often as painful as it is costly, and it often requires moral compromise. It involves negotiating with one’s memory and deciding which of those memories is to have the last word.”<sup>68</sup> Therefore, helping children to deal with their past memories and helping them overcome their painful experiences is itself a first step in promoting reconciliation. The everyday lives of war-affected children in Sri Lanka can be transformed by common attitude, common unity, common goal, and common understanding. Consequently, a positive approach of non-violence atmosphere within the community-based care will motivate children from intolerance to tolerance and from violence to peace.

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio, and Erick Doxtader, eds, *Pieces of the Puzzle: Keywords on Reconciliation and Transitional Justice* (Cape Town: Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2004), 6.

## HOW CAN THE SRI LANKAN CHURCH IMPLEMENT THESE PASTORAL APPROACHES IN ITS MISSION?

In the post-war context of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan Church plays a big role in taking care of war-affected children. We have already discussed above how the Church is involving in activities for children. Looking at the current situation of the war-traumatized children, we could propose the following responsibilities to the Church that can be provided through community-based pastoral care.

1. Become more responsible in providing a caring, protective and healthy environment.
2. Fulfill the emotional needs for parental love, care and affection, as well as the physical needs
3. Be in solidarity with all the children, whatever religion they may belong to
4. Respect the child's rights and dignity and become a voice for the voiceless
5. Provide them with trauma healing
6. Create confidence in the children
7. Stimulate the child's physical and psychological recovery and rehabilitation
8. Help the children to have productive participation in social activities
9. Provide opportunities for holistic education
10. Create in them a positive way of thinking and the non-violence approach
11. Organize peace and reconciliation seminars
12. Organize inter-religious dialogue
13. Become a bridge between two ethnic groups
14. The Sri Lankan Church also can introduce some new ministries for the refugees, victims of war, youth and pastoral care of children, not as a separate apostolate but as an integral part of its pastoral ministry

The Sri Lankan Catholic Church includes many religious congregations, who passionately serve people through their charism

and mission. Especially during and after the war, many religious communities were involved tirelessly in caring for the war-affected people. There are many homes for children in Sri Lanka administered by religious communities. Many religious congregations play an important role in providing pastoral care for vulnerable children in Sri Lanka. Through the interviews with Salvatorian Sisters who are engaged in caring for the war-afflicted children, we came to an understanding that there is an urgent need for renewal in pastoral care. This renewal is not only needed for Salvatorian Sisters but also for those other Religious Congregations and the Church as a whole who are engaged in this particular mission.

### PROCESS

First of all, religious congregations that have children's homes for war-affected children can come together regularly to discuss the strategies of pastoral care. Especially the major Superiors of these congregations can come together and come to a common understanding, to have the same kind of pastoral care for all the war-affected children. They can introduce a community-based model for pastoral care in their children's homes. The superiors also can arrange various seminars regarding this model for the religious pastoral caregivers and the laity, who are working in their homes, so that caregivers may first of all understand what the community-based model stands for. When they adopt this model, they can, first of all, gather the war-affected children in children's homes and the other war-affected children who are not in the children's homes but living with their parents or relatives. After gathering those children, they can be given the opportunity to share the children's own stories with each other. So that these suffering children may come to know that they are not the only ones who are affected by the war, but there are others as well. That will encourage children to accept their vulnerability as well to be in solidarity with others.

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## FOLLOW-UP AND PROJECTED OUTCOME

Once the religious congregations have made the children aware of the community-centered model and instructed them about it, they can arrange with other Religious Congregations that are in the Sinhala areas, and bring both Tamil and Sinhala children together in common places. For example, they can organize it in schools, playgrounds, or in any place where children can come without any hesitation. Because if it is in a Church, children belonging to another religion may find it uneasy to enter. It is not an easy task; however, taking into consideration the needs of war-affected children, it is mandatory to inform the government authority regarding these activities so that they are informed of the updated method of pastoral care in bringing peace and healing to the war-affected children. Religious Congregations also can have inter-religious dialogue with other religious leaders and bring Buddhist, Muslims and Hindu children to have encounter with Christian children. Bringing children together is the first step for peace-building and reconciliation. It also will create in them a peaceful environment which could heal their bitter experiences. When religious priests or nuns work in the schools or other organizations, they get a lot of opportunities to work with people who belong to other religions, and it is an added advantage to get the support of those people.

Due to the lack of trained pastoral counselors in trauma counseling, it is mandatory to introduce some kind of training which will help the war-affected children to follow the regular trauma counseling therapy to heal their past wounded memories. Therefore, Religious Congregations can educate some of their members as pastoral counselors. A caregiver who has not learned about child psychology and therapy will not understand the psychology of war-affected children. Therefore, it is necessary to train the caregivers in psycho-counseling.<sup>69</sup> A continuous updating seminar on pastoral counseling for the caregivers will add more

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<sup>69</sup> The Aquinas University College, Colombo, Sri Lanka offers Psycho-Counselling courses (one year & three years). If pastoral caregivers can follow that course, it will be more useful.

advantages to pastoral care. Religious and laity who receive the pastoral training may in turn assume the responsibilities of accompanying children in their children's homes, schools, and parishes. By being professional in their duty they ensure that pastoral care is taken seriously for the war-affected children. These trained pastoral counselors can visit the war-affected areas at least once in a month and give pastoral counseling for the war-affected children. Parents and relatives of those children are responsible for bringing their children for pastoral counseling. A new start to establish a new approach to pastoral care is very much applicable in the post-war context of Sri Lanka.

There are many pastoral caregivers who care for the elderly and sick, but very few are available to care for the war-traumatized children in Sri Lanka. The Church together with priests, brothers, and nuns can arrange one-year training courses or in three series in a year. These trainees can be awarded the certificates of merit to license them to be suitable to give pastoral care to the children. This course can be arranged at the diocesan level or the national level. Young men and women who are studying to become Religious priests, brothers, nuns and other lay brethren who are interested in pastoral care can also follow up with these courses.

In each diocese of Sri Lanka, there are many schools run by both men and women Religious Congregations, especially in places where the war took place. These religious can ask the government through the ministry of education, requesting them to grant the proper education with new technology. They can also receive the support of teachers and professionals to give particular attention to these vulnerable children who are very weak in their studies and in extra academic skills. Arranging continuous seminars on how to deal with children would help teachers efficiently support the war-affected children. Priests, brothers, or nuns who are responsible for these schools can supervise the teachers and support them to care for those children. These teachers can also be given the above-mentioned pastoral care training so that they too may become experts in caring for traumatized children in addition to their knowledge of academics.

At this juncture, my concern is whether all the war-affected children in Sri Lanka receive care. People who were displaced due

to war are still not settled down in their places. The children in those areas need pastoral care as well. Therefore, the pastoral caregivers can visit these areas and find out the details about the war-troubled families, especially about the children. However, some of the parents of children may like to keep their children with them but may ask for the support of pastoral caregivers. In that situation, pastoral caregivers can arrange to provide them with pastoral support. If the parents of children like to send their children to a children's home, pastoral caregivers can accompany those children to the children's homes. In that way, war-tormented children in different areas of Sri Lanka can get pastoral care, which is an essential need for them.

During their interviews, the Salvatorian Sisters stressed that they need support from others to proceed with their mission. They especially claim the help of the government authorities to ask for the children's rights in which children can be independent. At the same time, they need professional teachers to support children who are weak in education. They also need financial support from benefactors to help cover the expenses of the children. Apart from this support, Sisters also need the moral support of parents to help bring up their children as good citizens. They also need the help of various private organizations, especially from the NGOs that work for the rights of children. In order to achieve all this support, it is necessary to implement the community-based model among all who are living with the war-affected children. Through this model, the Church together with these religious communities can be responsible for the care of the children. The community involvement will assure the continuity of the care, and a close follow up of the children towards growth and maturity. The religious communities can also take the role of parents in caring for the orphans and enable them to integrate fully into the family and society. Religious communities in Sri Lanka can support the Church by giving more of their members for the pastoral care for war-affected children. A renewed pastoral care for those children in the religious communities will indeed bring an enormous change in their mission and the lives of children.

## CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that healing wounded memories in post-traumatic pastoral care is very essential for war-affected children. Furthermore, it links pastoral counseling to the community-based model and shows its value as an essential aspect of the proper development of children. Moreover, the paper highlights the need for holistic education for children's growth and transformation, which would sustain the life of the children. The study also underlines the need to educate children with a non-violent approach for healing and integration, which would create a peaceful environment for the war-traumatized children in the post-war context of Sri Lanka. This article acknowledges that war-troubled children are active citizens, and they can become more active by doing various social activities. In addition, it suggests that by enabling the children to live and practice truth, peace, and reconciliation, they become a channel for peaceful living in Sri Lanka. It concludes with an invitation to pastoral caregivers, especially to the religious congregations who are already offering pastoral care for traumatized children, to update their knowledge and implement a community-based pastoral care in their communities. In summary, all the findings in this research on war-ravaged children become the guide for this project to be more sustainable in the future. Pastoral caregivers are confronted with the challenge of providing quality care, through hope and trust. Healing the past memories of war gives an empowering and accompanying presence by which the caregiver creatively journeys with children towards self-discovery. A healthy relationship with the pastoral caregiver will enable those war-wounded children to overcome the struggle between wanting to despair and wanting to live, by reinforcing realistic hope through relational experience.

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