

Millennium Development Goal 4

Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five

Scripture Reflection:

'I have come that they may have life, and may have it in all its fullness.' (Jn 10:10)

Food for thought

What does it take for a human to achieve their full potential; to become all that God wills them to be? In our western industrial society, we might answer: financial security, prestige, a well-paid job, a university education, a peaceful nation. Sometimes it's difficult for us to remember that even in our prosperous country infant and child mortality among Aboriginal people is unacceptably high and many of our indigenous Australians live in Third World conditions.

Globally, a child dies every three seconds from hunger, poverty and preventable disease. Eighteen thousand children are denied the opportunity to achieve 'fullness of life' each year because they simply don't live beyond their fifth birthday. Jesus came to bring life to the full for all people – not just the lucky few.

The preventable and premature death of so many

of our little brothers and sisters is an injustice we must no longer tolerate.

A story from the field

"Why did your child die?"... I asked the family as yet another pitiful procession had made its way down the mountain carrying the small pink coffin containing the body of their one-year-old child. Mindanao, Philippines, was the parish where I worked as a Columban missionary for many years.

"The will of God, Father" was the reply with a sad shrug of the shoulders. This is the standard response to another avoidable death among small children. But the sad truth is that they die as a result of ignorance, poverty, disease, malnutrition, lack of education and oppression in a situation where 3% of population controls over 90% of the land and its wealth.

My response was to initiate a health programme in the parish which aimed to raise the consciousness of the people for better hygiene and nutrition in their community. It also sought to ask the question, 'Why are the children dying?' What are the social, religious, economic, cultural and political factors



REDUCE CHILD MORTALITY

which impact on their lives and which prevent them from living life to the full?

It's only when people become aware of the reasons for their poverty (beyond "The will of God") and can begin to use their own resources as a community to tackle their various ills that the root causes of poverty can be faced and real development can be achieved.

The sad shrug of the shoulders at the death of their child is less noticeable these days. This has been replaced by an anger and frustration that maybe their child should not have died if there was less poverty and more justice. That really is something worth struggling for.

- Fr Bernie McDermott

How should we respond?

* Consider volunteering at a children's hospital or an organisation which assists children in need.

* Monitor media stories which highlight the plight of children in our world. Initiate discussions with others about these stories.

* Financially support the work of Columbans which provide fullness of life for children.

Under-five mortality rate per 1,000 live births, 1990 and 2004 (%)

	1990	2004
Sub-Saharan Africa	185	168
Southern Asia	126	90
Oceania	87	80
CIS, Asia	83	78
Western Asia	69	58
South-Eastern Asia	78	43
Northern Africa	88	37
Latin America & the Caribbean	54	31
Eastern Asia	48	31
CIS, Europe	28	20

More children are surviving their first years of life, though Sub-Saharan Africa trails far behind

Percentage of children (12-23 months) immunized against measles, 1990 and 2004 (%)

	1990	2004
Oceania	70	48
Southern Asia	58	62
Sub-Saharan Africa	56	65
South-Eastern Asia	71	81
Eastern Asia	98	85
Western Asia	80	88
Latin America & the Caribbean	76	92
Northern Africa	85	94
CIS	85	98

Three out of four children are protected against measles, which still kill close to half a million children each year



To make poverty history