

MINUTE FOR MISSION

STRIVING TO BRING AN END TO THE PLIGHT OF CHILD SOLDIERS

I want to tell you a story ... I wish it was just a story, but what I am about to share with you is sadly true. It is about a boy named Princeton—a happy, carefree, 13-year-old boy. Happy, that is, until the day he was snatched by soldiers and taken to a military training camp. Two weeks later, he was carrying a gun as a soldier in Nigeria’s civil war. Can you even picture such a thing happening to a child that you know?

“I was going to fetch water for my mom when they grabbed me, and I didn’t see my family again for two and a half years,” he says. I wish this was only Princeton’s story, but the reality is that children are forced to become soldiers every day in war-torn places around the world.

One hot, sunny afternoon, Princeton’s unit came under heavy fire, and an unexploded rocket landed nearby. While he was attempting to defuse it, the rocket detonated. Princeton endured six surgeries without anesthesia over the next year and a half. Finally, at age 17—several long and terrible years later—he came home to his mother’s arms.

His wartime experience wounded more than his body; it left him angry and rebellious. However, the peace of Christ worked in his life as he confessed his Christian faith for the first time. “My mom said God changed a heart of stone to a heart of flesh,” Princeton says. Eventually, Princeton came to the U.S., and today he is pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Midlothian, Texas. He serves the whole church through national initiatives of Intercultural Ministries.

Princeton speaks from the heart when he says using child soldiers is “an evil that we need to exterminate, and we need to call attention to any system that supports this evil.” Thanks to your gifts to the Peace & Global Witness Offering, we are doing just that.

Our participation in the Offering supports the Red Hand Campaign. Presbyterians across the country send prints or paper cutouts of red hands, along with an accompanying note to the Presbyterian Ministry at the UN. The hands and a cover letter are then sent to countries that have yet to sign a UN protocol that forbids the use of child soldiers. Using a human-rights-based approach, we engage in anti-trafficking work related to forced labor and sex trafficking, in addition to our work to end the forced conscription of child soldiers.

Peace is active, not passive; peace is doing, not waiting. As we work to share Christ's peace with one another, let's share that peace with those beyond our doors. Twenty-five percent of the Peace & Global Witness Offering stays with our congregation to support peacemaking and reconciliation in our own community ("And this is what we do" ... pastor may personalize). Another 25 percent will support these ministries at the mid council level, and the remaining 50 percent supports peacemaking and reconciliation ministries of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) such as the Red Hand Campaign. Your gifts will help more people experience the freedom and dignity that Christ wants for everyone. Please think about Princeton, and so many others like him, and give generously. Let us offer the peace of Christ at all times and in all ways.

Let Us Pray ~

*Liberating God, we pray today for people
around the world who yearn for freedom.
Help us to be instruments of your deliverance
in the struggle against human trafficking.
May we bear witness to the full and free life
that you want for all people.*

Amen.