

THE PRICE OF CHILDREN – Bob Rockford

The government recently calculated the cost of raising a child from birth to 18 and came up with \$160,140.00, not including college tuition. But \$160,140.00 isn't so bad if you break it down into **\$8,896.66** a year, **\$741.38** a month, or **\$171.08** a week. That's a mere **\$24.24** a day! Just over a dollar an hour. Still, you might think the best financial advice is don't have children. Actually, it is just the opposite. What do you get for your **\$160,140.00**?

- Naming rights. First, middle, and last!
- Glimpses of God every day.
- Giggles.... under the covers every night.
- More love than your heart can hold
- Butterfly kisses and Velcro hugs.
- Endless wonder over rocks, ants, clouds, and warm cookies.
- A hand to hold usually covered with jelly or chocolate.
- A partner for blowing bubbles, flying kites, building sandcastles, and skipping down the sidewalk in the rain.
- Someone to laugh yourself silly with, no matter what the boss said or how your stocks performed that day.

For **\$160,140.00** you never have to grow up. You get to finger-paint, carve pumpkins, play hide-and-seek, catch lightning bugs, and never stop believing in Santa Claus. You

have an excuse to keep reading the Adventures of Piglet and Pooh, watch Saturday morning cartoons, go to Disney movies, and wish on stars. You get to frame rainbows, hearts, and flowers under refrigerator magnets and collect spray painted noodle wreaths for Christmas, hand prints set in clay for Mother's Day, and cards with backward letters for Father's Day. For **\$160,140.00** there is no greater bang for your buck. You get to be a hero just for retrieving a Frisbee off the garage roof, taking the training wheels off a bike, removing a splinter, filling a wading pool and coaching a baseball team that never wins but always gets treated to ice cream regardless. You get a front row seat to history to witness the first step, first word, first date, and first time behind the wheel. You get to be immortal. You get another branch added to your family tree, and if you're lucky, a long list of limbs in your obituary called grandchildren and great grandchildren. In the eyes of a child, you rank right up there under God. You have all the power to heal a boo-boo, scare away the monsters under the bed, patch a broken heart, police a slumber party, ground them forever, and love them without limits, so . . . one day they will, like you, love without counting the cost.

The 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health states that:

- Among surveyed youths, ages 12 to 17, more than 1 in 9 (11.6 percent) reported current use of illegal drugs in the 30 before the study.
- Marijuana is the major illegal drug used by this group; 8.2 percent of youths were current users of marijuana in 2002.
- Among 12 and 13 year olds surveyed, 4.2 percent reported current illegal drug use. The primary drugs used by 12 and 13 year olds were marijuana, non-medical use of prescription pain relievers, and inhalants.

What are Inhalants? Volatile substances that produce chemical vapors that can be inhaled to induce a psychoactive, or mind-altering, effect.

What are hallucinogens? Drugs that cause hallucinations, profound distortions in a person's perceptions of reality.

What is heroin? An illegal, highly addictive drug.

What is cocaine? A powerful stimulant that directly affects the brain.

That gets to club drugs, so we ask the question:

What are club drugs?

GHB, liquid ecstacy: a central nervous system depressant that can relax or sedate the body, a **date rape drug**.

Methamphetamine, speed, crank: it increases heart rate and body temperature.

Ketamine, Special K: produces impaired motor function, high blood pressure and respiratory problems.

Rohypnol, roofies: causes sedation, decreases blood pressure and vision, confusion. It is a **date rape drug**.

MDMA, ecstasy: stimulant that causes dehydration, hypertension, and heart or kidney failure.

LSD, Acid: causes dilated pupils, increased body temperature, increased blood pressure and heart rate.

What is alcohol? A depressant that causes addiction, dizziness, vomiting and hangovers.

What is marijuana? Causes paranoia, panic attacks, and it's a gateway drug that could lead to other drugs.

You spend \$160,140.00 to get this kid from birth to high school graduation and all this other garbage comes into the picture. Some of us say that, "My kid won't get into those things." Maybe not, but how can we, as the body, help them.

What are the risk factors for these kids?

SAMHSA, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, publishes this list of environmental risk factors.

- ***Community environment:*** poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, high crime, racial discrimination low education levels, low expectations.
- ***Family environment:*** parental abuse, neglect and drug use, socially isolated parents, single female parent, lack of family rituals, frequent family moves.
- ***Constitutional vulnerability of child:*** child of drug user, physical or mental health problems, learning disability.
- ***Early behavior problems:*** aggressiveness, emotional problems, inability to cope with stress, low self-esteem.
- ***Adolescent problems:*** school failure and dropout, delinquency, violent acts, teen pregnancy, suicidal.
- ***Negative adolescent behavior and experiences:*** rebellion, resist authority, fragile ego, hopelessness, inability to form close relationships.

These risk factors are indicators for potential problems, but they don't necessarily mean that a child will definitely develop alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems.

Many youth, living in high-risk environments, seem to possess personal resilience that helps them avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drug problems. This is what they say the protective factors are under the family environment:

- ***Family environment:*** nurturing family, parents promote learning, *multi-generational kinship network*, *Non-kin support network* and clear behavior guidelines.

It also says that if the high-risk environment is the family itself, for instance if children are growing up in an alcoholic or drug abusing family, studies suggest that they have a better chance of growing into healthy adulthood if they:

- Are able to ask for help for themselves.
- Are able to elicit positive responses from others in their environment.
- Are able to bond with some socially valued, positive entity, such as the family, school, community groups, or church.

In a booklet put out by the Office of National Drug Control Policy called “Pathways” to Prevention it says:

- Faith reflects a hope in the future. It is a belief that there is a higher plan for one’s life, a plan worth waiting for, sacrificing for and standing up for. Faith

and religion can play an important role in the healthy development of youth.

Another Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration pamphlet, “Risk and Protective Factors for Adolescent Drug Use,” says this:

- Low religious commitment has been associated with higher levels of substance use in a number of studies.

In “Signs of Effectiveness II” again from SAMHSA it says:

- The involvement of the faith community links alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use prevention with the moral authority of the institution as well as with the principle of spiritual health. In addition, many programs for youth at high risk find that churches are willing to offer material support, particularly in supplying meeting space. Church members are often willing volunteers.

In a copy of a “RespecTeen newsletter entitled “What Teens Need from Adults,” it lists the following:

- Youths who have access to and conversation with caring adults are less likely to engage in at-risk behaviors.
- According to a 30-year study of children in Kauai, the people most likely to grow up successfully despite deprived, abusive, or chaotic homes lives were those

who had a multi-generational network of family and friends when they were teenagers.

- Adult relationships help kids feel like “I matter” and that they can make a difference.
- Young people who have challenging adults in their lives tend to perform better in school and have stronger reasoning abilities.

Now listen to what it says in another book:

- *Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs. Luke 18:15-16 (NRSV)*

Jesus upset a lot of people during his ministry. There were healings on the Sabbath, “that’s against the law; you can’t do anything on the Sabbath.” Jesus ate and drank with the tax collectors; “He’s eating with sinners.” He touched lepers, “unclean, unclean.” There were prostitutes hanging around him and getting blessed, “holy cow he’s hanging around with prostitutes.” And he touched and held kids, *Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.* In the first century

Roman world, children were on the lowest rung of the ladder of status in a world of the status-consciousness. They were subjected to all sorts of adverse conditions and they possessed little, if no value. Jesus, the rebel, broke all the rules, *Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.*

The church in Corinth was like Crossroads church, it was a cross section of the socio-economic and religious makeup of the city; they met in houses, and most of them were gentiles. Listen to what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own. [21] Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"? [22] As a matter of fact, in practice it works the other way—the "lower" the part, the more basic, and therefore necessary. You can live without an eye, for instance, but not without a stomach. [23] When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as it is, without comparisons. [24] If anything, you have more concern for the

lower parts than the higher. If you had to choose, wouldn't you prefer good digestion to full-bodied hair?

[25] The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. [26] If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

[27] You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. [28] You're familiar with some of the parts that God has formed in his church, which is his "body":

apostles

prophets

teachers

miracle workers

healers

helpers

organizers

those who pray in tongues.

[29] But it's obvious by now, isn't it, that Christ's church is a complete Body and not a gigantic, unidimensional Part? It's not all Apostle, not all Prophet, not all Miracle Worker, [30] not all Healer, not all Prayer in Tongues, not all Interpreter of Tongues. [31] And yet some of you keep competing for so-called "important" parts. 1 Corinthians 12:20-31 (Msg)

We are Christ's body, and we are the various parts of that body. One of those parts is not working, in fact it's hurting. Paul said that if one part of the body hurts, then all the other parts of the body hurt. The Children's Ministry is in need of some help. Lise Copeland and I are in the process of starting a new curriculum for the Children's Ministry. The curriculum is called "Jubilation Station." The cost of the curriculum is around \$20.00 per six-week module. Lise has bought one module with her own money, and I have bought two modules with my ministry money. We, and the children need help.

The minimum that we would ask of you is to take on what Paul Steinberg is doing. Paul know the names of the youth and makes contact with them when he sees them. He is part of the body of Christ telling these kids that they are important in his eyes. Paul, you are awesome, thanks.

The other easy thing you could do is to volunteer for a once in every six weeks to bring snacks for the kids to have after the class time on Sunday mornings. And if you are brave enough, go and enlist five other people to bring snacks one of the other five Sundays. You can talk to Lise or I about this. Now we are getting into some of the more dangerous job assignments. We need another five people to take on a mission to help heal part of the body. To make this curriculum work we need two teams that will work six Sundays on and six Sundays off. On these teams we need large group leaders.

Large group leaders are people who enjoy communicating a story through drama, skits, role-playing, mime, puppets, or other story telling forms. There is a high time commitment, high presence, and moderate to high preparation time during the week.

Project leaders are people who enjoy research and making things: cooking, working with fabric, and other types of hands-on tasks. Project leaders gather and set up the materials, help the kids understand the background and significance of the project, and then help with clean up. There is a moderate time commitment, a moderate presence, and preparation during the week.

Shepherds are small group leaders who love kids, and that is their main requirement. Their task is to build a relationship with the children in their groups and provide an atmosphere in which current problems can be shared and kids can learn to pray for each other. Shepherds also help make the connection between the Bible story and the kid's lives, right now. Ideally, a Shepherd should be involved with the same kids for at least a year. He or she might also get the group together for a social event once every couple of months. The commitment for time and presence is high, but the preparation time is low.

We need every Sunday two shepherds, two project leaders, and one large group leader. That is the minimum we would need for a six-week module to work. The bad news is that we almost have one team filled, and we only have 7 spaces that you can pick from.

We have kids here in this body; we even have new kids, Samuel Elias Hatem, and even kids on the way, Christian and Lindsey Barber's new brother. They need our love, help and support. We are Christ's body; the kids are part of that same body. *When it's a part of your own body you are concerned with, it makes no difference whether the part is visible or clothed, higher or lower. You give it dignity and honor just as*

it is, without comparisons. Did you notice when Paul listed the parts of body in the scripture the third part?

apostles

prophets

teachers

miracle workers

healers

helpers

organizers

those who pray in tongues.

All of these are parts of the body. The Children's Ministry is part of this body, and I want it healthy again. We need you to pray and listen to what God has in mind for your calling. I don't want to stand up in a community meeting and say, "we will be having Children's Sunday school on a six week on and six week off basis." I want these kids to have every opportunity to meet Jesus face to face, when they see your face.

Would the worship team please come forward? Now I would like to have a commissioning time for the people who have heard God's calling and said yes to being with our kids. I will introduce each of them and they will come forward and I would ask you all to come after the introductions and we will

have a prayer time, a blessing time, and commissioning time. And while you are up here blessing these people, I would also ask for you to listen for what God has in store for you. Brothers and sisters, we are Christ's Body, and part of the body is not doing well. But let me introduce those who have stepped forward and said, "Yes Lord, I will go."

Benediction:

***MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II
TO THE YOUTH OF THE WORLD ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 19th WORLD YOUTH DAY 2004***

This is the way to meet Christ. Go out to meet all of human suffering spurred on by your generosity and with the love that God instills in your hearts by means of the Holy Spirit: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). The world is in urgent need of a great prophetic sign of fraternal charity! It is not enough to "speak" of Jesus. We must also let him be "seen" somehow through the eloquent witness of our own life.