



1 March, 2010

Dear Friends of AFCECO orphanages,

March is a month of new beginnings, literally on the 20th, Vernal Equinox. On that day is Nourz, what Afghan people celebrate as New Year's. School begins after a long winter break, and the children who have been visiting their relatives have already begun to return. Those who travelled to Italy have also returned. They are all excited and full of stories to tell, so you sponsors who wish to write can ask them to share their experiences with you in writing. (It is good practice for them!)

Soon we will open four new orphanages, including our expansion into other provinces. Thanks to Terry Cardwell and her Platinum Founding Sponsorship, one orphanage will open in Herat. Another will open in Jalalabad, this one thanks to Doffie Rotter's Platinum donation. Special houses will open in Kabul for the older boys and girls, thanks to Rose Vines for her kind donation.

AFCECO's director leaves for the U.S. this coming week, where she is to receive one of five Vital Voices Global Leadership awards for 2010. The awards ceremony will be held in Washington's Kennedy Center on March 10th. You can review information about her and the co-honorees at the following web site: www.vitalvoices.org/awards2010. She will also visit New York City and Dallas on this trip, holding meetings with organizers, sponsors and otherwise promoting AFCECO's vision.

This month we address a question most any teacher or parent asks when they have learned about our program: Are there behavior problems in the orphanages, and if so how are they dealt with?

Children in the orphanages come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds. They have differing values, temperaments, and prejudices. Add to this the sorrowful fact many come to us with psychological scars from the effects of war, extreme poverty and abuse. All of them have been witness to things no child should ever witness. Some have been exploited, or have lived in fear for their own lives. Boys have been affected by a misogynistic society, and come to the orphanage feeling they are superior to girls, that they must be strong, aggressive and good fighters. They are less tolerant, and think they are above doing domestic work. Girls on the other hand feel they are inferior and must obey men. All of this means that fifty children in the orphanage results in 50 different behaviors, some of them in complete opposition to one another.

The orphanage is very much like a big family. We deal with our weaknesses by utilizing our strengths. Older children have learned our policy that all human beings are equal regardless of their ethnicity, language, religion and especially their gender. Bad behavior is the only thing that is not tolerated, and who better to enforce it than peers? When a new child arrives, very quickly she or he is mentored by the older children. The orphanage is a place full of activity and

responsibility. Nothing balm a wounded soul like comradeship, working together to solve problems, complete chores or do homework. There is also friendly competition, which motivates children to achieve what they otherwise thought they could never achieve.

Whenever we can we assign one job to be shared by two children of different backgrounds. A Hazara and a Pashtun will be in charge of the storeroom, for example. As they work together they become friends and learn tolerance. We reinforce a family-like atmosphere in which we care for one another, where if one child falls we all fall, where everyone gets to celebrate a birthday, but just as importantly individuals are rewarded for their own particular strengths.

In this way, miraculously or not, there is little need for punitive action. The orphanage is an oasis of peace in the midst of war. Holding it together is the ever-powerful alchemy of mutuality and love.

