

In the Old Testament, the Book of Isaiah says, "For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given." Isaiah's words foretold the birth of Christ, and they hold special meaning for all Christians during this blessed season.

But, taken more broadly, the same quote means that we on earth have a responsibility to one another – to be kind, to be charitable, to be patient and good. Every child, from its very first moments, is on its way to joining a community – whether it's a loving family, one of our Missouri cities, a nation of citizens, or simply taking a rightful place among all of God's children.

The striking statistics about childhood homelessness released this month, then, should give pause to each and every one of us. In America today, one in 45 children is homeless: 1.6 million of them, with more than half of that number under the age of seven. They sleep in cars at night, they wash up every morning in a gas station bathroom, and they eat what they can get when they can get it.

These homeless American children have no bed to call their own, they cannot gather around a kitchen table to eat or do homework, and they don't know the safety of a home. As a result, they encounter challenges to their health, hunger and education. Some of these kids overcome the odds. Others find a place at a shelter or a motel room provided by a charitable organization. Still others escape homelessness when the parent who has been looking for a job for months finally finds one.

But there are others who are not so fortunate over the long run. They may live in homes where drugs have taken over the household. They may suffer from untreated illnesses. They may be close to giving up hope as they struggle to keep their families together. It's a lot to ask from anyone, let alone a child.

When Missourians contribute to charity, when we donate to food banks, when we volunteer and when we make an offering through our places of worship – we are getting involved in the young lives at the heart of this problem.

Helping our homeless is not a religious calling, it is a national calling. Children, veterans,

families, the mentally ill – all make up startling proportions of the homeless population. We have a responsibility to care.

I realize it is easy to call our obligation to the homeless to mind at Christmas, but really this is a year-round issue for the nation. Children are living on the street not just in urban areas – it happens in rural America, too, in every state of the Union. Fortunately, in every community, there are organizations using public and private resources to help.

Wonderful counselors, advocates and caseworkers do a great service to the homeless family that needs a short-term stipend for a hotel room. Church volunteers open their doors to serve hot meals to the hungry or to send a bag of groceries home with a mother who needs to feed her kids some protein. And good nurses and medical professionals take it upon themselves to go looking for people who need help; they go into homes where a pregnant mother needs advice on nutrition as she takes care of her unborn baby.

When we all do a little extra to help those who truly need it the most, then soon enough that pregnant mother gives birth. Then, when a child is born, we can all hope for its great opportunity and great things to come.