



National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round Child Advocacy

Create Change for Children Today:
Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Children's Defense Fund

About the Children's Defense Fund

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. We have never taken government funds.

National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Advisory Committee

Ms. Nancy A. Davis

National Bahá'í Education and Schools Coordinator
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in the United States

Most Reverend Joseph A. Fiorenza

Archbishop Emeritus
Catholic Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon

General Secretary
National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

Dr. Rajwant Singh

National Chair
Sikh Council on Religion and Education

Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed

National Director
Interfaith and Community Alliances
Islamic Society of North America

Rabbi Eric Yoffie

President
Union for Reform Judaism

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round
Child Advocacy

Volume 18

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Acknowledgments

This book was made possible in part by funds granted by the Freddie Mac Foundation. The statements made and views expressed, however, are the sole responsibility of the authors.

This manual was written and compiled by Shannon Daley-Harris.

My thanks to Matt Rosen, Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s Deputy Director for Religious Action.

Thanks also to the following CDF staff for their contributions to the publication: Lisa Clayton Robinson, Editor; Janice Mantell, Vice President of Field Operations; Pakou Hang, Deputy Vice President of Field Operations; Scott Jacobsen, Program Associate for Religious Action; Elizabeth Alesbury, Managing Editor; Anourack Chinyavong, Designer; Casey Aden-Wansbury, Senior Director of Communications; Rhoda Schulzinger, Deputy Vice President of Policy; MaryLee Allen, Director, Child Welfare and Mental Health; Dr. Alison Buist, Director, Child Health; Dr. Natacha Blain, Lead Strategic Advisor, Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign; Janet Simons, Principal Researcher; Maria Aguirre, Poverty Research Associate; Catherine Crato, Economist; Elizabeth Davis-Pratt, Senior Policy Associate, Child Welfare and Mental Health; McKenzi Felt, Policy Assistant, Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign; Ariel Hayes, Policy Assistant, Child Health; Kathleen King, Policy Assistant; Marti Teitelbaum, Senior Health Analyst; Barbara Best, Director, CDF-Texas; Olga Gabriel, Associate Director of CDF-Texas–Rio Grande Valley; and Norma Bourland, Regional Faith Community Organizer, CDF-Minnesota.

CDF thanks the following contributors who wrote portions of the Children's Sabbaths manual:

- Martha Bettis Gee, Associate for Child Advocacy, Presbyterian Church (USA), Louisville, Kentucky (Christian Lesson Plans)
- Vidya Bhushan Gupta, M.D., M.P.H., Board of Trustees, Arya Samaj of New Jersey; Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, New York Medical College, NYC (Hindu Resources)
- Marc Katz, Rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College and former legislative assistant at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (Jewish Sermon Notes)
- National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís of the United States, Evanston, Illinois (Bahá'í Resources)
- Shakeel Syed, Executive Director, Shura Council of Southern California location (Muslim Resources)

Our thanks as well to the following who reviewed portions of the Children's Sabbaths manual or provided other forms of assistance:

- Rabbi Marla J. Feldman, Director, Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, New York, N.Y.
- The Rev. Joyce MacKichan Walker, Minister of Education, Nassau Presbyterian Church, Princeton, N.J.
- The Revs. Patti and Eliot Daley, Princeton, N.J.
- Jill Zimmerman, Legislative Assistant, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, Washington, D.C.

All scriptural references unless otherwise noted are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Cover photo: © iStockphoto

Inside photos: © Dean Alexander Photography, T.C. Perkins, Alison Wright Photography, Cleo Freelance Photography, Getty Images, PhotoDisc, DigitalVision and iStockphoto

©2009 Children's Defense Fund

This manual contains easy-to-use materials for planning a Children's Sabbath. These materials may be photocopied and distributed for non-commercial use without further permission from or payment to CDF. However, if you wish to use materials derived from another identifiable source, please contact that source directly. In addition, CDF would appreciate receiving written notification of your use of its materials. Please send notification to the Religious Action Team, CDF, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001.

Table of Contents

Section 1: Welcome to the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Manual

- Letter from Marian Wright Edelman 1
- Welcome to the *National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths* Manual 4
- Frequently Asked Questions about the Children’s Sabbath 7
- How Places of Worship Celebrated the Children’s Sabbath Last Year 8

Section 2: Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow – A Children’s Concerns Primer

- Why a Children’s Concerns Primer? 13
- A Child Poverty Primer 14
 - A Snapshot of One Child Living in Poverty
 - The Big Picture: Children in Poverty Today
 - Create Change: What Can We Do to Alleviate Poverty and Stabilize Families?
 - A Better Tomorrow
- A Children’s Health Coverage Primer 20
 - A Snapshot of One Child Lacking Health Coverage
 - The Big Picture: Children Without Health Coverage Today
 - Create Change: What Can We Do to Ensure Health Coverage for All Children?
 - A Better Tomorrow
- A Pipeline to Prison Primer 23
 - A Snapshot of One Child Swept Along the Pipeline to Prison
 - The Big Picture: Children in the Pipeline to Prison Today
 - Create Change: What Can We Do to Dismantle the Pipeline to Prison?
 - A Better Tomorrow
- Adult Discussion Guides 27
 - Bahá’í
 - Christian
 - Hindu
 - Jewish
 - Muslim

Section 3: Planning Your Children’s Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths

- Steps for Planning a Children’s Sabbath Celebration in Your Place of Worship 40
- Steps for Planning a Multi-Faith Children’s Sabbath Celebration in Your Community 43

Section 4: Promoting Your Children’s Sabbath: Ideas for All Faiths

- Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship 48
- Reaching Out to the Community and Media 51
- Reproducible Resources 54

Section 5: Bahá’í Resources

- Suggestions for Observances and Related Activities 68
- Passages and Prayers from the Bahá’í Writings 69
- Feast of ‘Ilm (Knowledge) Children’s Sabbath Program 71

Section 6: Christian Resources

■ Worship Suggestions	76
■ Worship Resources	79
■ Music Suggestions	87
■ Sermon Resources	88
■ Sample Children’s Sermons	98

Section 7: Hindu Resources

■ Hindu Perspective on the 2009 Children’s Sabbath Theme	102
■ Reflections	103
■ Children’s Activities	105

Section 8: Jewish Resources

■ Suggestions for the Services	112
■ Passages from Traditional Jewish Sources	113
■ Readings, Reflections, and Prayers for the Services	115
■ Suggested Music for the Services	122
■ Sermon Notes	123

Section 9: Muslim Resources

■ Suggested Activities	130
■ Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Perspective	130
■ Materials for Sermons and Discussions	132
■ Two Duas	135

Section 10: Resources for a Multi-Faith Children’s Sabbath Celebration

■ Suggested Outline for a Multi-Faith Children’s Sabbath Service	140
■ Resources for Observances and Related Activities	142

Section 11: Action Ideas for the Children’s Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

■ Tips for Planning Children’s Sabbath Activities and Actions	152
■ Actions for Children	153
• Learn More and Raise Awareness	
• Reach Out and Serve	
• Speak Up for Justice	

Section 12: Resources for Faithful Child Advocates

■ Resources from the Children’s Defense Fund	172
■ Resources from Other Sources	174

Appendix

■ National Endorsers of the <i>National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths</i> Movement	182
■ Endorser Form	184
■ <i>National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths</i> Evaluation Form	185
■ Order Form for Children’s Sabbaths Manual	187

All pages are perforated for easy removal.

SECTION 1

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

Dear Faithful Friend of Children:

Thank you for your care and concern for children and your commitment to create change today so that every child in our nation has a better tomorrow. By participating in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement, now in its 18th year, you are bringing to life and putting into action a core conviction of each of our religious traditions: that children are sacred gifts from God and that we as adults bear responsibility for nurturing and protecting children—especially those who are poor, excluded, and most vulnerable.

Earlier this year a small group of women and I gathered for a spiritual retreat at CDF Haley Farm. Over the course of the three days, in addition to times of worship, discussion, prayer, and reflection, we watched two documentaries. The first, “Pray the Devil Back to Hell,” documents the extraordinary women’s peace movement in Liberia that led to the ouster of dictator Charles Taylor and to the democratic election of Africa’s first woman President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. This movement began when one woman—who could no longer tolerate the suffering of children and families from the violence, poverty, and chaos caused by Taylor’s regime—stood up in her church and announced a “crazy dream” she had: that the women of the church would boldly lead the way to peace. A Muslim woman who happened to be there that day stood and embraced Leymah Gwobee’s dream, pledging her commitment to involve her Muslim sisters and brothers. Together, the Christian and Muslim women were determined to bring an end to the violent war and the suffering the children endured. They strategized, organized, mobilized, and protested, determined to create change for children, using peaceful means, and bring a better tomorrow for the entire nation. And they succeeded!

The second documentary describes the moving Birmingham Children’s March, a key turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. On May 2, 1963, thousands of children—some as young as six—gathered at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and went out, in groups of 50, to face the notorious police chief Bull Connor and his men. After the adults had failed to respond, the children were answering Dr. King’s call upon his release from the Birmingham jail to fill the jail, from where he wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” criticizing the silence of White faith leaders to speak and act for racial justice. The police officers packed the paddy wagons full of children and, when they could fit no more, brought school buses to carry children off to the jail. When the school buses could hold no more children, Connor ordered the firefighters to turn their fire hoses and dogs on the children to extinguish their passion for freedom, but the children courageously marched forward, singing freedom songs despite fire hoses, police dogs, and beatings. In ensuing days, thousands of children stayed home from school and went to the 16th Street Baptist Church to prepare. They galvanized an entire nation—including President Kennedy and his administration—stunned by the brutality of segregation against our youngest citizens. Children brought Birmingham to a standstill and paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement.

Now it’s our turn. We don’t face cruel, heartless, lawless dictators like Charles Taylor and Bull Connor, but instead the domination of poverty that is crushing the lives of 13.3 million children in our nation and the lack of health coverage that means nine million children in our nation may not be able to see a doctor when they need to,

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

resulting in unnecessary illness and even death. We no longer face the systemic, codified evil of legal segregation, but we face the crisis of a pernicious pipeline to prison, with its confluence of poverty, racism, lack of health and mental health care, abuse and neglect, failing schools, and other disadvantages, that places an 8-year-old Black boy at a one in three risk of imprisonment and a Latino boy at a one in six chance of imprisonment in their lifetimes. As in 1963, our school buses are loaded with children being driven to jail—not now willingly for the pursuit of freedom and justice but because of the pipeline to prison's injustice and preventable poverty and racial disparities.

Adults! Will we stand up to break up the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and replace it with a pipeline to college, productive work and healthy family formation? Will we stand up in our places of worship and declare that now is the time for the next civil and human rights movement to rescue our children from poverty, illiteracy, sickness and denied

health coverage? Will we march out of our places of worship, determined to end the growing apartheid of incarceration that is undermining the past 50 years of social and economic progress as young people are put on the path to successful futures?

We can and must work together to bring hope and a safe future through persistent work to assure every child health coverage in 2009, to put into place a high quality, comprehensive early childhood development system, and to dismantle the pipeline to prison.

The 2009 multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, October 16–18, is our time to stand together as leaders and members of places of worship all across the nation to learn more about the needs of our children. And to pray, sing, and preach and participate in other forms of worship that remind us of our sacred responsibilities to protect all of our children. It is a time



Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

to be inspired and sustained by our religious faith to do whatever is necessary to protect our children and work for justice. The Children's Sabbaths weekend is also a time to study—through religious education classes, special forums, assemblies with a speaker, or discussion within or among places of worship—to increase our understanding of the challenges children face and what and how we can make a difference now. Since children only have one childhood, Children's Sabbath is a time for action, direct service, and acts of compassion—such as preparing and serving meals for families in homeless shelters—and through work for justice—visiting and writing letters to our elected officials demanding health coverage for all pregnant women and children now as a first step towards universal health coverage for all. Children cannot wait! Their blood and bones and minds and spirits are being formed right now. All children need a healthy start now!

We know our immediate action is crucial and that it will take more than a day or a weekend or month to provide all children the building blocks for a successful adulthood. Every place of worship that participates in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend must see it as a beginning and not an end in itself. It is a chance to deepen our understanding, to gain inspiration and insight and to renew our commitment to new, increased, effective action throughout the year to help children. Throughout

this manual you will find over 100 actions that individuals and places of worship can take to make a difference for children. From your first planning meeting for your Children's Sabbath celebration, discuss what actions and outcomes you will create. Please think about, pray about, discuss, and plan for them, and share the special response postcard in this manual with us. Together we can, must, and will build the long overdue new civil rights movement for our children that, like the Liberian women's peace movement and the first Civil Rights Movement in the '50s and '60s, brings hope and a positive future for all our children and everyone.

If ten percent of faith congregations did ten percent more to reach out to and stand up for children, we would have a powerful force for the just treatment of children. Please don't let our children down. As mothers and children, fathers and youths, grandparents and young adults, leaders and members of faith, we have the power to make a difference in millions of children's lives. Let's do it.

In faith and hope,



Marian Wright Edelman

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

Creating change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow is the theme of the 2009 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend. By picking up this resource manual, you have already begun to create change for children. Engaging your faith community in learning more about the urgent needs of children, helping them reflect on the teachings of their faith that lead us to respond to children's needs and work for justice, and equipping members with the information and action steps to make a difference for children—that's what the Children's Sabbath is all about!

You make a difference in the lives of children and in the life of your place of worship—by connecting the two, you can help make incredible, important things happen that will improve the lives of children in your place of worship, community, and across our nation and at the same time bring new inspiration, motivation, and excitement to your worshipping community.

By participating in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement, you are part of a powerful, diverse, multi-faith voice for children spanning our nation and crossing all lines of income, race, ethnicity, and political party. What unites us is the belief that God calls us to protect children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and the conviction that our faith calls us to live out God's justice and compassion.

This inspiring weekend focuses attention on the urgent plight of children in our nation and calls us to put our faith into action to meet children's needs through direct service and work for justice. Through the service of worship, educational programs, and congregational activities, you can affirm what your place of worship already does with and for children while challenging members to take new actions and commit to new efforts to meet the needs of children in your community, state, and our nation. When 13.3 million children in America live in poverty, nine million lack health coverage, and thousands of children, especially Black and Latino boys, are at risk of imprisonment in their lifetime as a result of the powerful forces of the pipeline to prison, your concern and action are needed now more than ever.

What is the Children's Sabbath?

The Children's Sabbath is a weekend that aims to unite religious congregations of all faiths across the nation in shared concern for children and common commitment to improving their lives and working for justice on their behalf. In that respect, it is bigger and more powerful and more inspiring than the efforts of any one congregation on its own. On the Children's Sabbath, congregations have a strong sense of participating in a larger movement for children. Some congregations plan services, educational sessions, and activities for their own place of worship. Others join with one or more places of worship in shared services bringing their congregations together. In some communities all of the congregations work together to sponsor an interfaith service to which the entire community is invited. Often, local organizations serving children or working on their behalf join in the planning of these community-wide multi-faith Children's Sabbaths.

A Children's Sabbaths weekend typically has four elements:

- 1) **The service of worship or prayers**, during which the divine mandate to nurture and protect children calls us to respond to the needs of children today;
- 2) **Educational programs**, during which all ages learn more about the needs of children today and the social-political structures that keep children in need; explore the sacred texts, teachings, and traditions that lead us to serve and seek justice for children; and develop specific, active responses to help children;
- 3) **Activities** that immediately engage participants in compassionate service to help children and in action to seek justice (such as writing letters to elected officials); and

4) **Follow-up actions** that use the inspiration, information, and motivation of the Children's Sabbaths weekend to lead individual members and the congregation as a whole into new, effective efforts to improve the lives of children in the congregation, community, and nation throughout the year.

The Children's Sabbath is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, guided by a multi-faith advisory committee, and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations. The Children's Defense Fund's (CDF)'s Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investment before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble, or suffer family breakdown. CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. We have never taken government funds.

From its inception 36 years ago, CDF has recognized the importance of the faith community's partnership in building a movement to Leave No Child Behind. A nation that lets its children be the poorest citizens has at its heart a spiritual and ethical crisis. Thus, the religious community must help to transform our nation's priorities so that we defend those who are youngest, weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable. For many years CDF has worked to support denominations and religious organizations as they develop and maintain child advocacy campaigns. The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration was launched in 1992 to coalesce these efforts into a united moral witness for children that crosses all lines of geography, faith tradition, race, and ethnicity.

The Children's Sabbaths observance is guided by a multi-faith advisory committee with Muslim, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Bahá'í, and Sikh members. It is endorsed by more than 200 denominations, faith groups, and religious organizations. If you are interested in having your organization become an official endorser of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement, please call CDF's Religious Action Team at (202) 662-3555.

The Children's Sabbath is a time to...

Celebrate and strengthen existing efforts for children!

The Children's Sabbath seeks to affirm and celebrate the important work that places of worship are already doing with and for children. Congregations' faithful, week-in and week-out efforts make an enormous difference in children's lives, and the Children's Sabbath seeks to highlight, applaud, and build even greater support for those important, ongoing efforts. Hopefully, by the end of the Children's Sabbaths weekend, existing congregational efforts to help children and families will have more visibility, new volunteers, increased resources, and fresh energy.

Discover new opportunities to help children!

The Children's Sabbath provides an opportunity for each place of worship to consider in what new ways it might work—as a body or as individuals—to help children not only in the congregation, but in the community and across the nation. Religious leaders, committees, and members may discover additional problems confronting children—like poverty, lack of health care, or violence—and come up with new ways to respond to them. This might include starting a new program sponsored by the congregation. Or it might mean exploring and promoting opportunities for individual members to commit their time, services, or resources. Or it might mean forging a new partnership with another congregation or community organization to help children. It could mean establishing a new child advocacy committee to guide the congregation's work for justice for children.

Pray, study, and reflect!

The Children's Sabbath is a time to look deeply at what one's faith tradition says about our responsibility to nurture and protect children. This is done through the worship service—in prayer, readings, songs, and sermon. It is also done in educational sessions, whether classes for children and youths or adult forums or inter-generational discussions.

Take action!

The Children's Sabbath is a time for action that springs from that faithful study and reflection. It is not only a time to pray, but also a time to put prayer into action. It is not only a time to study, but also a time to serve children directly. It is not only a time to sing, but also a time to speak out to elected leaders and others about the need for justice. So on the Children's Sabbaths weekend, after wor-

ship/prayers or at another time, members and leaders should join in hands-on activities to help children as well as engage in working for justice—perhaps writing letters or planning a visit to an elected official.

Commit to new, long-term efforts!

The Children's Sabbath is intended to inspire new long-term efforts to help children and families. However wonderful the weekend celebrations may be, what matters most is what individuals and congregations do in the following weeks and months and years to help children. Some congregations will start new service or advocacy efforts (on their own or in partnership with other congregations or community organizations), such as an after-school tutoring program or housing a Head Start program or an outreach and enrollment campaign to help uninsured children get health care. Other congregations will not start a new service program or advocacy effort, but will work to encourage individual members to find new ways to volunteer time or resources to help children and change the systems that keep children in need.

The Children's Sabbath is a mix of joy and sorrow, celebration and sober commitment. To be sure, a Children's Sabbath exudes the happiness of a wonderful celebration. Children delight in their roles of the day, parents hug children a little tighter, more conscious of the gift that they are, balloons may adorn buildings, children's artwork may brighten hallways, child-friendly snacks may replace the usual after-services fare. It is a day that children and families look forward to, and those without children at their side can also appreciate the extra energy and excitement of the event.

At the same time, the Children's Sabbath is sobering, as the service and activities deepen our understanding of the terrible plight facing millions of children in our country. It is painful to think about children who are hungry or homeless, without access to health care, abused or neglected, victims of gun violence, without good quality child care, or denied a place in Head Start. The Children's Sabbath can be an eye-opening experience. And done properly, the Children's Sabbath will do more than open eyes to the problems facing children—it also will lift up new ways to help children and families and inspire and motivate people to respond and get involved.

The Children's Sabbath is an annual event. The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is designated for the third weekend of October each year.

I am elated to write back to you and let you know how much we appreciate purchasing the manual for the first time. We have often times borrowed the manual from our sister church, and we promised that we would purchase our own this year, so that we could be ready to prepare our children/youth for Children's Sabbath Day.

*This is our third year doing Children's Sabbath and it has brought so much joy and information, not only to our children/youth, but to the volunteers who help to put our program together. We are a small Methodist church (**Samuel Chapel United Methodist Church**) in **Itta Bena, Mississippi**, with about 125 members on roll.... Again we are just elated to share this manual with those who are interested in sharing Children's Sabbath with their congregation. To us it is used in so many ways, yet the preparation for our worship service is done with our children/youth and it helps us prepare them in the right way. This year's theme is beautiful, with the fact that it is also Domestic Violence Awareness month and Cancer Prevention month, we are able to entangle the workshops that are open for public with our youth and the information is geared in such a way that they (children, youth, and adults) are able to relate.*

If I can ever be of any assistance in getting the word out throughout our community from your company, just let me know.

Please continue to be blessed.

*Respectfully yours in Christ,
Sister Mabel Robinson
Youth Coordinator*

Because it is an annual event, congregations participating for the first time can just “stick a toe in the water” and participate in small, simple ways...although some want to jump in completely right from the start. Others build their participation year by year, adding more elements to their observance. Because it occurs annually, congregations have the opportunity to evaluate what worked well and what didn't and improve their plans for the following year. Most importantly, because the Children's Sabbath takes place each fall, children look forward to it from year to year, having a consistent experience of their congregation as a place and community that cares about children and is committed to nurturing and protecting them.

The Children's Sabbath is flexible. While there is a suggested theme each year, congregations are encouraged to focus on the most urgent problems confronting children and families in their communities. This resource manual is chock-full of materials from which you can pick and choose those that are best suited to your congregation. Most can be used as is, or adapted, or simply serve as inspiration for you to create your own materials. Materials prepared for one faith tradition may be enriching for the congregation of another tradition. And while the suggested date is the third weekend of October, if that date does not work for your congregation's calendar, pick a different date that does. What is most important is finding a time to focus on the needs of children and our responsibility to nurture and protect them.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Children's Sabbath

Is the Children's Sabbath the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, or a children's service?

The Children's Sabbath shares some aspects of Children's Day, Youth Sunday, and children's services, but it is distinct and unique in some vital ways.

Some congregations celebrate June Children's Day, often to congratulate and celebrate youngsters who have completed Sunday school. Like a Children's Day, the Children's Sabbath celebrates the gift of children and has a sense of hopefulness and joy. But the Children's Sabbath also focuses attention on the urgent problems facing children across our nation and provides a call and support to respond to improve children's lives. And while Children's Day is more typically celebrated only in churches, from the start the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend has been a multi-faith movement.

Many congregations have Youth Days when they turn the service over to the young people to plan and lead. Like a Youth Day, on the Children's Sabbath children and youths often participate in the planning and leadership of the day. But on the Children's Sabbath, the adults aren't only the “audience,” because the Children's Sabbath is an intergenerational event drawing on the leadership and involvement of *all* ages to convey its message that each of us, no matter our age, has a role to play in nurturing and protecting children and working for justice.

Some places of worship have separate services designed just for children to attend. Like those “children's services,” worship on the Children's Sabbath is intended to be engaging and meaningful to the children who attend. But the Children's Sabbath is a service for everyone, and it aims to speak to all ages.

I want to get involved in the Children's Sabbath movement. Where do I start?

Getting this manual is the first important step in getting involved in the Children's Sabbath, so you are already on your way! The next planning steps are outlined later in this section. One of the first decisions you and those who join you in the planning will need to make is whether to plan a Children's Sabbath just for your congregation or to join with congregations of other faiths or denominations to plan an interfaith or ecumenical Children's Sabbath in your community. Either option is a valuable way to participate. You should determine what is right for your congregation this year.

This manual provides planning suggestions, promotion ideas, worship resources, educational resources, activity ideas, and suggestions for building on your Children's Sabbath to help children throughout the year.

What if my place of worship can't participate on the designated dates?

Choose an alternate date! While it's great to celebrate on the same weekend as thousands of other places of worship,

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

what's most important is to participate at a time that works for your place of worship.

Which is better to do, a Children's Sabbath in my own place of worship or a multi-faith, community-wide service?

Both are valuable. A service in your own place of worship communicates that this concern is an integral part of the life of your congregation and makes it easier to plan follow-up efforts. A community-wide service is an exciting experience and expression of the shared concerns and common commitment to children of many faith traditions. They can create new partnerships for effective community efforts to help children. But they can also take a lot more work to plan and generate turn-out!

We just heard about the Children's Sabbaths weekend and don't have much time left to plan. What can we do?

There are a couple of options. You could schedule your celebration for a later date to allow for more planning time. Or, you could still plan to participate on the third weekend of October but just start with what is quickest

and easiest to do, such as photocopying and distributing one of the bulletin inserts, or including one of the prayers or readings provided in this resource. (You might still have time to invite a guest speaker who is engaged in work to improve the lives of children.) Then, you could plan an educational program or activities to serve or seek justice for children to take place in the months and year that follow.

Should we bother participating in the Children's Sabbaths celebration if my congregation already cares about children?

The Children's Sabbath is an opportunity to affirm what we already do and at the same time deepen our understanding both of God's call and the current crises facing children so that we may more fully, persistently, effectively, and faithfully live out that calling not only on the Children's Sabbaths weekend but throughout the year.

There is an extraordinary power in participating in the Children's Sabbath, knowing that all across the country, in congregations of many different faiths, we are united in our concern for children and in our commitment to respond.

How Places of Worship Celebrated the Children's Sabbath Last Year

Like our children, Children's Sabbath celebrations are unique, and no two are alike. They can be big or small, young or more experienced. Children's Sabbath celebrations reflect the diversity and unique gifts, resources, and concerns of the congregations that plan them. Some are celebrating their first-ever Children's Sabbath, some are building on a tradition of many years, and some are reviving their congregation's Children's Sabbath participation after several missed years.

As you'll see in the examples below and those scattered throughout this book, the emphasis and the extent of the celebrations vary—some congregations plan a full weekend of events, while others focus on just one element, whether worship or education or service. Together, they comprise a marvelous witness and work that bring our nation closer to the justice and compassion God intends for our life together.

Just a few examples are provided below. Look for other inspiring examples of Children's Sabbath celebrations throughout this resource.

Fifteen years! That's how long **Cathedral of the Incarnation in Baltimore** has celebrated the Children's Sabbath. For their 2008 Children's Sabbath celebration, the Cathedral of the Incarnation hosted U.S. Representative John Sarbanes as a speaker. The sermon at the two services focused on advocacy for at-risk children in

Baltimore City, and they expect that the weekend will reinforce their ongoing advocacy for children.

Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Bellevue, Washington, used the prayers and worship resources from the Children's Sabbath manual during their Shabbat services to raise awareness of America's children living in poverty.

Good Shepherd and St. Mark's, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

Episcopal Church in Madras, Oregon, celebrated their second Children's Sabbath for this rural congregation that averages 35 at worship. They demonstrate that you don't have to be a large congregation to make a difference. Reports the organizer, "We collected toothbrushes, stuffed animals, and soft blankets for children in local foster care at our Children's Sabbath service, which was the main worship service on Sunday, Oct. 19. These items were brought forward during the offering and placed at the base of the altar as part of our worship." The pastor had purchased CDF's America's *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*SM report and was able to draw from that resource in her sermon to raise awareness. This year, they plan to join with another church to have a public prayer service for children.

St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Columbus, Ohio, began preparing the hearts and minds of their parishioners long before the Children's Sabbaths weekend. Four weeks before the designated weekend, they began inserting selected statistics of children in need and prayers into the weekly bulletin for reflection. On the Children's Sabbath they focused the liturgy, prayers, and music on children's needs, involved children and youths more fully in the service, and offered educational programs on children's concerns. They will build on their Children's Sabbath through the social concerns ministry, focusing on the ongoing problem of poverty.

The Bahá'í community of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, partnered with the **North Church of Portsmouth (Episcopal)** for an interfaith Children's Sabbaths celebration. The interfaith gathering was held at the North Church parish house. The program was guided by the prayers and readings from the Children's Sabbaths manual and facilitated by a core planning group comprised of six youths from both communities. The selected readings focused on children at risk and were complemented by a dance performance, presentation of art, and photographs of children. In lieu of an offering, those in attendance were asked to contribute canned goods to a local shelter serving children and families in need. Mr. Calvin Wells of the Portsmouth Bahá'í community considers the event a smashing success and is excited about building upon the momentum and enthusiasm of last year's event for next year's Children's Sabbath!

Church Women United distributed copies of the Children's Sabbaths manual to each of its state offices, and urged its members to organize a letter-writing campaign in their faith communities urging Congress to cover all children with health care.

St. Luke's United Methodist Church reports that the **Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania**, area saw a big Children's Festival co-hosted by several faith groups that raised several thousand dollars, which was distributed by the Children's Sabbath network of the Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia.

Otterbein Lebanon United Methodist Church in Lebanon, Ohio, celebrated its first ever Children's Sabbath through the Chapel of the Air with some 40 in attendance and others watching on closed circuit TV. A speaker from the local Head Start program addressed the group, and the weekly devotional booklet from the Children's Sabbaths manual was made available. To build on the Children's Sabbath, they will continue supporting a project for low-income children's after-school homework and enrichment, and donating needed items for another after-school program.

In **Tucson, Arizona**, **Capilla del Sol Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)** celebrated their first Children's Sabbath in 2008 as the culmination of the Light a Candle for Children 40 Days of Prayer sponsored by their denomination. In addition to the special worship service and speaker, they distributed handouts of volunteer opportunities and are supporting a "shoebox ministry" with children in Nogales, Mexico.

St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta has celebrated Children's Sabbath for five years. In 2008, they held three Children's Sabbath services on Sunday morning for between 600–700 people. The service included special prayers and a sermon focusing on the Children's Sabbath. They also had educational signs up around the church and offered a course on issues of poverty and children during their Adult Christian Education hour, as well as a special class for the fifth graders. As a result of the Children's Sabbath, organizers report that there is increased openness to bringing volunteer opportunities for child advocacy to the church.

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

Temple Israel in Greenville, South Carolina, celebrated with a Friday night Shabbat service for their third year participating in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, drawing on the Children's Sabbaths theme, prayers, and blessing.

First Presbyterian Church in McAllen, Texas, participated for the eighth year, with the youth and children of the church leading the service.

South Hills Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Forth Worth, Texas, collected signatures on a petition issuing a call to conscience and action to ensure comprehensive national health insurance coverage for all children now.

First Baptist Church of Springfield, Ohio, used the occasion of their 13th annual Children's Sabbath celebration to initiate a mentor program for youth in the congregation and community. Organizer Clara Copeland writes, "We had an adult sermon 'preached' by a freshman in high school, and the adult speaker was the head of the local food pantry," who also served as the speaker at the Adult Forum following worship.

Reports Rebecca Caswell-Speight from **Louisville, Kentucky**, "This was **Broadway Baptist's** first Children's Sabbath experience. We started the weekend with a family camp-out. The camp out focused on the Beatitudes and how our church and families follow the demand for action that we receive from Christ. We closed the weekend with a multi-generational worship. Children and families participated in all parts of the worship service. In this worship service, we flew a pastor in from one of our partner congregations in Argentina to share the pulpit and tell the story of his congregation's attempts to strengthen the children in his community."

First United Methodist Church in Ames, Iowa, created a bulletin board featuring ways to help children as part of their Children's Sabbath celebration, which also included distributing the devotional guide the week before and involving children in leading prayers and song, handing out pre-k Bibles, and a youth puppet show.

At **St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Santa Clara, California**, reports the organizer, "The kids started a shoe drive—because 'they won't let you go to school and you can't walk to your piano lessons if you don't have shoes' (the idea came from a 9-year-old)." The church presented Sunday School lessons for grades 2-6 focused on understanding poverty in their neighborhoods, what church- and community-based resources are available and how the church supports them. The children led the service, and the teens gave the sermon based on their experiences on a mission trip to an American Indian reservation during the summer.

St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia celebrated its first Children's Sabbath in 2008. The event included special prayers during both services with the rector preaching to the topic. Opportunities to take action were included in the service leaflet, and the rector drew attention to ways to act on behalf of children in the sermon. She reports, "I see this involvement as a beginning—a way of raising people's awareness. For next year I would like to start earlier and incorporate Children's Sabbath into our children's and adult education, and then in the future perhaps partner with another faith community to celebrate."

What will your place of worship plan? Read on, get inspired, bring your own imagination and passion and commitment to the planning process, and be sure to send us a description of your own unique and important participation in the 2009 National Observance of

Children's Sabbaths movement. We look forward to highlighting what you do! Send information about your Children's Sabbath to CDF, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001, or email a description to sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org.



SECTION 2

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

A Children's Concerns Primer

The theme of the 2009 Children's Sabbaths weekend is "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow."

We know that children in our nation desperately need change. The more than 13 million children living in poverty, without enough family income to provide the food, homes, and other basics necessary for them to survive and thrive, need

us to create change. The nine million children without health coverage who may not be able to see a doctor when they are sick or injured or to keep them healthy need us to create change. The children, mostly Black and Latino boys, who are being swept along in the pipeline to prison need us to create change.

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Children need change, and they need us to create change today. Every minute we wait, we lose another child. We must step forward now to create a level playing field for all children. In the words of Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, “Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are formed, his mind developed. To him we cannot say “Tomorrow,” his name is Today.” Our children only get one shot at childhood. If we leave them mired in poverty and robbed of the enrichment for which their minds, bodies, and spirits thirst; sick or dying for lack of care we could have ensured they had; or locked up and out of sight in prison, they will never get that lost childhood back. The effects of having their childhood robbed will remain with them—and us—for a lifetime. One pastor, on a video about the church and child advocacy, said with frustration, “People talk about children as the church of tomorrow. Children are the church of today”—just as they are the synagogue, temple, masjid, and other worshipping communities of *today*.

When we create change today, it will bring hope and a better tomorrow for the children themselves and for all of us. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., rightly observed “In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother’s keeper because we are our brother’s brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”¹ When we create change for children, we as a society will all be the better for it. When all our children live in families with enough income to meet their needs, when all of our children are healthy and thriving, when all of our children are set on paths of promise, we will be a stronger, more vibrant, and more tightly knit nation that is ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

At the same time, as people of faith we affirm that the driving force for creating change for children is not because of how we will be better off for it, but because it is the right thing to do, and God expects of us nothing less. Of the Hebrew prophet Amos, who proclaimed

“Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious [to you],” Dr. James M. Efird wrote, “How contemporary some of his sayings are! Are there instances of religious hypocrisy in our society? How many people believe that prosperity must be the end result of doing right in the religious sphere? Are there in our society examples of injustice in the courts, of extravagance in the face of hunger and want, of corrupt and deceitful business practices? A society with such elements cannot long survive because it will crumble from the weight of its own oppression and the decay of its moral foundation. Amos did not believe that changes should be made simply because society would be better because of them or because people owed such conduct to each other as people; this is a humanistic understanding. Rather, the changes which Amos proposed, even demanded, were changes rooted in his understanding of God.”²

In the Children’s Concerns primer that follows, you will find stories of children that we hope will touch your heart with the reality of their circumstances and lead you to take action that creates change. You will find data and other information about the scope of the problems facing children that we hope will expand your mind. You will find suggestions of what you can do that we hope will stir your hands and summon your voice. You will find a vision of a better tomorrow that we hope will capture your spirit. As you read all of it, we hope that you will read with the eyes of faith, remembering that of the many urgent and important reasons for acting now to create change and bring hope and a better tomorrow for all of our children, there is no more compelling reason than that it is what the Eternal expects of us and calls us to do—and will sustain us with courage and hope as we seek to do so.

¹ *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

² James A. Efird, *The Old Testament Prophets Then and Now* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1982), pp. 43-44.

Why a Children’s Concerns Primer?

In the Middle Ages, the word “primer” referred to a book of prayers. Later, it came to mean an instructional book that provided basic or elementary information. This new meaning may have come, in part, from the worship book having been the text from which children first learned to read. Both of those meanings, then, are apt for what follows. We hope that it will provide you with the most basic information that you need to know about child poverty, child health, and children at risk of incarceration. We also hope that you will read it with the eyes of a worshipper and with a prayerful heart—that is, these problems and calls for action are deeply linked to our faith life and the work that we are called to do as people of faith.

A third meaning of “primer” also applies to the material that follows. A primer can also mean an “igniter,” a small amount of igniting powder that, when set on fire, creates an even larger explosion. We hope that this material will set your heart on fire and that you, in turn, will be the force that creates an even greater explosion of faithful action to create positive change in the lives of children and families in our nation.

In this primer, we address three urgent areas where we must act together to improve children’s lives: ending child poverty; ensuring all children access to health coverage; and ending the pipeline to prison that captures far too many children, especially Black and Latino boys, rather than putting them on paths of promise.

In each area, you will find a story of one child that puts a face on the problem. Then, there is an overview of the dimensions of the crisis. Next, you’ll find specific information about what we can do as individuals, communities, and a nation to improve the lives of children and thus of us all. Finally, we’ll glimpse the difference it will make when we do.



Use what follows as the basis of an educational program, as a resource for a social action committee or other group in your place of worship to inform and guide their action, and as you prepare your sermon or other address to your faith community. At the end of this section you will find suggested outlines for discussions among adults drawing on the resources and perspectives of various faith traditions.

A Child Poverty Primer

A Snapshot of One Child: Living in Poverty

Five year-old Herardo peeks out from behind his mother's protective arm with a sweet and playful grin. His brothers, Alfonso, 10, and Eduardo, 9, stand beside them, looking down with more bashful gazes. Another brother, eight-year-old Antonio, stands off to the side, not wanting to be photographed. Behind them is their home, a cramped weather-beaten trailer, its rusting metal sides a patchwork of paint that reflect efforts at various times to fix it up. The "stairs" in front of the trailer door are an uneven stack of wooden beams, making it more difficult and unsteady to get out than through a traditional home's wide, smooth doorway. The battered, peeling tires of the trailer home have sunken into the dusty dirt—the trailer has been there for quite some time and will be challenging to move. The trailer's buckling sides are somewhat steadied by wood propped against one end while cinderblocks under the trailer help support the worn tires. The trailer is, in many ways, a metaphor for the circumstances of poverty that grip the Torres family.

The father works hard—toiling in the fields as a migrant worker as soon as the school year ends, and caring for people's yards whenever he can get the work. It is hot, sweaty, physical work that is unforgiving should ill health strike and that fluctuates with the season. When he can find yard work, he earns about \$90 a week. Each month, \$75 is spent renting their trailer space. The family does not own a car so the father must rely on co-workers to pick him up and get him to his job. The lack of transportation poses other daily challenges for the family, from accessing supermarkets with the best prices to taking the children to appointments. They live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, in Hidalgo County, one of the poorest counties in the nation. There is no public transportation where the family lives—the nearest public transportation is in the neighboring city of McAllen, which is approximately 12 miles away. They rely on neighbors or relatives to get around. Fortunately, the father's meager salary is augmented by the food stamps the family receives, so they are able to purchase more food than his salary alone would have provided. When the children were asked recently if they had enough food, they all replied yes, although it is not known

if their diet was bulked up with cheaper, less nutritious food. The boys, all born in the United States, previously received health care through Medicaid but were recently denied coverage. Their mother does not know why and has embarked on the difficult task of working through the system to re-establish that they are eligible and secure their coverage once again. She is trying to work through the school district social worker, but even the social worker has not returned her calls. She has asked the Children's Defense Fund's Rio Grande Valley office to assist. In the meantime, she has not taken the children for medical care. There are no books or a computer in their home. Still, so far the children are doing well in school. But one of their older male cousins who lives nearby was recently sent to a boot camp for continuously missing school. His grades are now improving, according to his mother, but it remains to be seen what influence his choices—bad and good—will have on the young cousins.

The Big Picture: Children in Poverty Today

More than 13 million children in America live in poverty. Poverty casts long shadows throughout their lives in many different areas, among them health, nutrition, early development, and education. Multiple barriers associated with poverty build upon one another and unjustly deprive children of the opportunity to reach their full potential. Poverty hurts children, and poverty hurts all of us. Poverty affects the entire nation through its drag on the economy, loss of productivity and earnings, and greater crime and public health demands. And it exacts a high moral cost when we, as a rich nation blessed with an abundance of resources, fail to do what we can to protect the youngest and most vulnerable among us.

However, there is hope; child poverty is not inevitable or an act of God. Rather, it is the result of the decisions and actions we take—or fail to take—as individuals and as a society. Many factors and programs can reduce a child's chances of growing up poor or reduce poverty's impact on them. We can make a difference—as individual people of faith, as houses of worship, as communities, states, and as a nation; each of us can take a step to help lift children out of poverty and improve their lives.

What Is Poverty?

Many would consider a family “poor” if that family cannot afford to meet its basic necessities such as housing, food, child care, health care, and education. Officially, a family is considered poor if it has an income below the official poverty threshold, which is established annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, and is based on the number of family members and children. In 2007, the most recent year for which poverty data are available, a four-person family including two children was classified as poor if their annual income was less than \$21,027 and as extremely poor if their income was less than half the poverty line, or \$10,514.³ These amounts are generally considered well below what is actually needed to cover a family’s basic expenses; consequently, the number of children whose families are unable to meet their basic needs is underestimated by the official poverty measure.

Who Is Poor? Basic Facts About Child Poverty⁴

Note: Facts in this section refer to 2007, the most recent year of available data, unless otherwise noted.

- **A total of 13.3 million children, or one in six of all children in America, live in poverty.** Of these children, almost half—5.8 million—live in extreme poverty. The number of poor children increased by 1.7 million between 2000 and 2007.
- **Most poor children have working parents.** Seven out of 10 poor children are in working families where someone works full- or part-time for at least part of the year.
- **Children of color suffer disproportionately from poverty.** Black and Latino children are more likely to be poor than White children. In fact, approximately 1 in 3 Black children and more than 1 in 4 Latino children are poor, compared to 1 in 10 White children.
- **Other factors also increase a child’s odds of poor:** being young; having parents who have not completed high school, living in a one-parent family, or living with a caregiver who is not a parent, such as a grandparent.

How Does Poverty Affect Children?

Poverty is not simply about lack of income security. It affects a family’s ability to provide for their children in many areas. Poor children lag behind their peers in ways beyond material well-being. The challenges they face accumulate and interact, giving poor children an unfair start in life.

- **Health:** Poor children are less likely to have access to health care or to be in good health.
- **Food Security:** In 2007, poor children were almost four times as likely to live in homes with low food security, where not everyone had enough food all of the time, as compared to higher income children.⁵
- **Early Childhood Development:** Much research has found income-related disparities in children’s learning and behavior, which start early in life and tend to last later in life.
- **Home and Family Environment:** Stress and conflict related to low income can undermine the strength of a family. Lower-income parents report feeling more economic pressure, argue more about money, and use more harsh and inconsistent discipline with their children.⁶ Low-income women are also twice as likely to report depression, which is linked to infants’ limited language ability and poor performance on cognitive and behavioral tasks.⁷

Home and family activities differ by income as well, with lower-income children having fewer books in the home, being read to less, watching more television, and being less likely to have a computer or visit a museum or library.

- **Education:** Poor children tend to do worse in school and are less likely to graduate from high school; low-income youths and young adults drop out of high school at more than four times the rate of high-income peers.⁸

³ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey, Poverty Thresholds 2007*, at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/threshld/thresh07.html>. Accessed August, 2008.

⁴ Estimates in this section (“Basic Facts About Child Poverty”) unless otherwise noted, are from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*. Calculations by the Children’s Defense Fund.

⁵ Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, United States Department of Agriculture, Household Food Security in the United States 2007, Table 3 “Prevalence of food security and food insecurity in households with children by selected household,” *Economic Research Report*, No. (ERR-66), November 2008.

⁶ Arloc Sherman, *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America* (Washington, DC: Children’s Defense Fund, 1997).

⁷ Jane Knitzer, Jane Suzanne Theberge, Kay Johnson, National Center for Children in Poverty, Project Thrive, Issue Brief No. 2, “Reducing Maternal Depression and Its Impact on Young Children, Toward a Responsive Early Childhood Policy Framework,” January 2008.

⁸ Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007* (March 2008), Table 106.

- **Crime:** Youths from low-income households have an increased likelihood of participating in serious crimes compared to those from higher-income households.⁹

What Are the Economic, Social, and Moral Costs of Child Poverty?

In addition to affecting children themselves and the adults they become, child poverty takes a heavy toll on the United States as a whole. The most recent estimates indicate that the social and economic cost of child poverty totals *half a trillion dollars each year*—or the equivalent of nearly 4 percent of GDP—in loss of productivity, higher crime, and poorer health.¹⁰

Taxpayers ultimately pay for higher expenditures on social services, medical care, and criminal justice or in the diversion of government attention and resources from other pressing needs. Taxpayers also pay when a poor child needs special education or must repeat a grade and when a poor child suffers mental and physical disabilities that require costly care. Businesses pay when poor children grow up with less education and become less productive workers—workers who require more training, cannot work as fast or learn new machinery and techniques, cannot understand an instruction manual, or make costly mistakes with customer orders or valuable equipment. Everyone pays when a child grows up in poverty.¹¹

As people of religious faith, is there a moral cost when we as individuals or members of a house of worship don't act to ease or end child poverty? Is there a moral cost to us, as a nation founded on the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, when we allow one in every six children to start life on such an uneven playing field?

What Works?

Selected Public Programs That Combat Child Poverty

Children can't move out of poverty on their own, but there are effective ways that we, as a nation, can help lift children and their families out of poverty or at least protect them from poverty's worst effects. Programs that reduce child poverty by providing cash or near-cash assistance include the Food Stamp Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF), and the

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). There also are other programs, such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Head Start, and Early Head Start that provide important support to low-income children such as health care and early childhood care and education. (See Glossary on page 18 for more information about these programs.)

Government benefits—both federal and state—have made great strides in easing child poverty, lifting almost one of every three otherwise-poor children above the poverty line in 2003. Furthermore, poverty was made less severe for millions of other poor children than it would have been otherwise.¹²

Yet more than 13 million children remain poor, and millions of children who are eligible for programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start, Medicaid, and CHIP are not enrolled. Much work remains to be done to ensure that all children have access to the health care, child care, early education, and income support they need.

Create Change: What Can We Do to Alleviate Poverty and Stabilize Families?

1. **Connect with your concern and commitment.** In whatever way is most appropriate and helpful for you—whether it is through prayer, meditation, conversation, journaling, or some other way—connect with your own deepest desire to do whatever you can to end child poverty and improve the lives of children, our sacred charge. Identify the role that your religious faith plays in calling you to act on behalf of children and sustaining you when it is challenging. Look honestly at what gets in the way of your making the difference you want to make, whether it's discouragement, feeling busy, not knowing where to start, or something else. Consider your gifts, talents, and resources that you can bring. Discern what kind of action will be most fulfilling, satisfying, sustainable, and effective. What are you called to do?
2. **Learn more about child poverty.** Visit the Children's Defense Fund's website, www.childrensdefense.org, for more online resources about child poverty. Check out the bibliography in the Religious Action section of the

⁹ David Bjerck, "Measuring the Relationship between Youth Criminal Participation and Household Economic Resources" (Springer, October 2006).

¹⁰ Harry Holzer, et al., "The Economic Costs of Poverty in the United States: Subsequent Effects of Children Growing up Poor" (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, January 2007).

¹¹ Arloc Sherman, *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1997).

¹² Arloc Sherman, *Public Benefits: Easing Poverty and Ensuring Medical Coverage* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

website for resources that you can use in your place of worship. Look for opportunities to learn from low-income families themselves and from the people who serve them most directly.

- 3. Inform others.** Start a small group or class in your place of worship to find out more and come up with ways to take action to ease and end child poverty.
- 4. Get involved in hands-on service.** Volunteer with a program, organization, or agency serving children and families who are poor.
- 5. Start a program in your house of worship to fill an unmet need of poor families in your community** or one near it. Organize trips using your house of worship's van to help poor families reach supermarkets where their money can go furthest. Tutor children to help combat educational disadvantage. Start a book club to foster a love of reading. Host a parents-night-out to ease the stress of low-income parents. Make sure your community has a site during the summer that offers the federally funded breakfast and lunch program. The CDF Freedom Schools® program is a summer and after-school enrichment program that provides meals through the federally funded breakfast and lunch program. See www.childrensdefense.org for more information about supporting or starting a *CDF Freedom Schools* site in your community.
- 6. Help connect poor families with the programs that work.** People just like you are trained to be volunteer income tax preparers to help low-income families claim the Earned Income Tax Credit they are due. Others are helping spread the word about the children's health coverage programs available to poor and lower-income families. Visit www.tax-coalition.org to find out how you can help.
- 7. Be a voice for change and for justice.** The change children need won't come until members of Congress hear a broad, relentless demand from their constituents. Children's needs are easy to ignore because children don't vote or make campaign contributions. Figure out how to get your Representative's and Senators' attention. Start a letter-writing group or have a letter-writing table after services or at another time once a month. Join an advocacy group. Sign up for emails from the Children's Defense Fund so you'll know when action is needed. Make an appointment to

visit your representatives when they are in their district offices. Write a letter to the editor and send a copy to your elected officials. Invite your elected officials to come speak to your house of worship (or a coalition of them) about children's needs. Be prepared with good questions. Even though our lives are busy, we must make time to work for justice. We don't have a moment or a child to waste.

A Better Tomorrow

Imagine our nation in five years. We have cut child poverty in half and are on our way to ending it. Hard-working families are earning a living wage and have the needed tax credits so that they are bringing in enough income to put nutritious food on the table and provide a safe home for their family. The children leave the table nourished and don't worry about whether there will be enough to eat at the next meal. The youngest children are engaged and stimulated from their earliest days on, exposed to the world of books through their parents or caregivers or Head Start teachers, readying their eager minds for a lifetime of learning. Every school-age child is expected and supported to achieve. Teachers, administrators, parents, and community members work together for the success of every child. Young people are hopeful and strong, equipped with academic skills to expect and achieve success. Opportunities in the future are real enough to young people that they call forth the self-discipline and effort to reach them. Crime rates have plummeted, and there's a greater sense of community as adults and young people are connecting with each other with mutual respect. Every place of worship has found its role in supporting the success of all children. Some are nurturing children's school success, others are supporting positive parenting, while others help with work readiness and connections. Some places of worship house child care programs while others send volunteers into Head Start programs and schools. Members of Congress know that vocal, visible people of faith will stand up and speak out for justice for children, and so the elected officials look for ways to be champions for children.

What's your vision? What is your role in making it real?

Glossary

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): This federal tax benefit for low- and modest-income workers has been particularly effective at combating poverty; in fact, the EITC lifts more children out of poverty than any other program.¹³ In 2003, the EITC lifted 2.4 million children out of poverty. Without it, the child poverty rate would have been almost one-fourth higher. In addition, there is agreement that expansion of the EITC was responsible for large increases in employment of single parents over the past two decades.¹⁴

Child Tax Credit: A tax credit designed to offset some of the costs of raising children, the Child Tax Credit benefits millions of families. However, the credit is only “partially refundable,” meaning that many low-income families have earnings too low to qualify for the full benefit of the credit, if they qualify at all. Even full-time minimum wage workers with children do not qualify for the full credit amount. As a result, its ability to reduce child poverty and supplement low-income families’ income is greatly reduced. In fact, the credit lifts 2.6 million fewer children and adults out of poverty than if it were fully refundable.¹⁵

Minimum Wage: The minimum wage plays an important role in strengthening a worker’s ability to protect his or her family from poverty. After not having been increased in ten years, it was raised in 2007 from \$5.15 to \$7.25 (to be fully implemented in July 2009). Combined with food stamps and the EITC, a family of four with at least one parent working full-time at the new minimum wage when in full effect will not have to raise its children in poverty.¹⁶ This was not the case in the years immediately preceding the raise.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): TANF is the program intended to provide direct cash assistance to poor families in their transition to work, based on eligibility criteria set by states with strict work requirements and time limits that also vary by state. It replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as part of the effort to “end welfare as we know it.” With the main goal of transitioning adult recipients to employment, TANF has strict work participation requirements and a five-year lifetime limit on the time families can receive cash assistance, with some states having even



shorter time limits. TANF restrictions have resulted in weaker protections for the poorest families. Only about half of families with children that are poor enough to qualify for TANF assistance now receive it due to various barriers to enrollment and assistance. Many poor families have also been left deeper in poverty due to the reduction in income assistance provided through TANF.¹⁷

Child Care Assistance: Child care assistance provides important support to low-income working families and an opportunity to enhance their children’s development. In 2007, an estimated 2.7 million children received child care assistance from the Child Care and Development Fund, TANF, and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG). However, with current funding, that number is expected to drop to 2.5 million in 2009 and later years.¹⁸ According to the most recently available data, only one in seven federally eligible children receives child care assistance, indicating that substantial increases in funding are necessary to meet the needs of low-income working families.¹⁹

Job Training and Employment Assistance: Programs funded by the Workforce Investment Act have, on average, shown significant success in increasing participants’ earnings. However, the federal government’s investments

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

in workforce development programs over the past two decades have not kept pace with the increasing demand for skilled workers. The range of workforce training programs—particularly those targeting low-income adults and youth—which have seen significant cuts in recent years, have resulted in substantial lost opportunities for both workers and the businesses that want to hire them.²⁰

Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program

(CHIP): More than 35 million low-income children currently receive health coverage through Medicaid or CHIP. These two programs have been critical in protecting children’s access to health care, especially as employers continue to reduce coverage to employees and their dependents. Medicaid is an entitlement program, which means that states are guaranteed federal matching funds for coverage of all Medicaid eligible individuals who apply.

CHIP, however, is a block grant program, under which states receive an annual allotment of federal funds regardless of demand or need. When states exhaust their allotted federal CHIP funds, they must increase state spending on the program or shrink the program, which they generally do by limiting eligibility, instituting waiting lists, or using other cost-saving mechanisms. Each state sets its own income eligibility level for Medicaid and CHIP within broad federal guidelines, often with additional variations by age of child. Benefits in the Medicaid and CHIP programs may also differ substantially from each other within a state, and certainly between states. As a result, children’s available treatment regimens for the same condition may depend not just on their family income, but also on their age and where they live.

¹³ Robert Greenstein, “The Earned Income Tax Credit: Boosting Employment, Aiding the Working Poor” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

¹⁴ Robert Greenstein, “The Earned Income Tax Credit: Boosting Employment, Aiding the Working Poor” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

¹⁵ Aviva Aron-Dine, “Improving the Refundable Child Tax Credit: An Important Step Toward Reducing Child Poverty” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 2008).

¹⁶ Jason Furman and Sharon Parrot, “A \$7.25 Minimum Wage Would Be a Useful Step in Helping Working Families Escape Poverty” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, January 2007).

¹⁷ Arloc Sherman, *Public Benefits: Easing Poverty and Ensuring Medical Coverage* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

¹⁸ FY 2009 Budget of the U.S. Government, “Analytical Perspectives,” Table 25-5, Beneficiary Projections for Major Benefit Programs.

¹⁹ Jennifer Mezey, Mark Greenberg, and Rachel Schumacher, “The Vast Majority of Federally Eligible Children Did Not Receive Child Care Assistance in FY 2000” (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2002).

²⁰ Robin Spence and Brendan Kiel, “Skilling the American Workforce ‘On the Cheap’: Ongoing Shortfalls in Federal Funding for Workforce Development” (Washington, DC: The Workforce Alliance Report, September 2003): 1.

A Children's Health Coverage Primer

A Snapshot of One Child: Lacking Health Coverage

When you look at 9-year-old Kyle, you would never know how hard it is for him to breathe sometimes. Kyle has chronic asthma, as well as migraines and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) that require ongoing medical attention. His mother, Lorna, is a small business owner in Missouri City, Texas, who cannot afford private health coverage. She found out about the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) during the free day at the Houston museums and credits the program with improving Kyle's health and helping him to perform well at school.

Before Kyle enrolled in CHIP three years ago, he had no pediatrician and often went to the emergency room when his asthma and migraines flared up. Without treatment for his ADHD, he also had difficulty at school. Lorna never would have been able to afford the \$770 in medications that Kyle needs each month to keep his ADHD and other health conditions under control. Now with CHIP coverage, Kyle has been earning A and B grades, making friends, and even attended summer camp for the first time.

The Big Picture: Children Without Health Coverage Today

Millions of Children Cannot Get Health Services They Need

Nine million children in America—one out of every nine—have no health coverage. A child is born uninsured every 39 seconds. Far too many infants in the United States are born at low birthweight and/or die in their first year of life. Lack of coverage to ensure access to even basic health screenings and services can have devastating effects. Uninsured children are almost five times as likely as a child with coverage to go more than two years without seeing a doctor, and are twice as likely to die in the hospital when admitted for general injuries.

Children Have Special Health Needs

Regular health screenings permit early identification and treatment of potential health conditions and are crucial to a child's healthy development. Children have distinct and immediate health needs because their brain development, physical growth and mental health in childhood lay the

foundation for their adult capabilities and our nation's future.

Need for Coverage Starts Well Before a Child Is Born

Health coverage for pregnant women encourages early and regular prenatal care, which in turn is essential to maximize the health of newborns and put them on a path to good health throughout infancy, childhood and adulthood. Yet about 800,000 pregnant women are uninsured each year. One state-based study found that infants born to uninsured mothers are more than three times as likely to die in the first year of life as those born to women who have private health coverage.

Lack of Coverage Adversely Affects More Than Just a Child's Health

Children in poor health do not do as well in school as their healthy peers and have lower average earnings as adults. Children born at low birthweight are more likely to be in poorer health throughout their lifetime, and at age 17, are twice as likely to have significant behavioral problems and 50 percent more likely to score below average in reading and math.

The Rising Costs of Health Care Affect Everyone—Including Families with Coverage

Since 2001, health costs have risen more than three times as fast as wages. Fewer businesses are able to afford health coverage for their employees, especially as they face the current economic crisis. The average annual premium for employer-sponsored family coverage in 2008 was more than \$12,500. That's about the same amount a full-time minimum wage worker makes in an entire year. On top of that, families and businesses across America are struggling under the burden of skyrocketing health care costs. Those who retained their private or employer-sponsored health coverage have seen increases in costs and reductions in benefits.

Ensuring Health Coverage for Children Benefits Communities

Children are by far the least expensive population to cover, between three and five times less than adults or the elderly. Every \$1 spent on vaccinations for children saves \$16 in health and social costs to the community. Communities incur increased costs when their children are not insured, often because of increased use of emergency rooms and



longer hospital stays. For example, in Arizona, an uninsured child costs the community \$2,100 more than a child with Medicaid or CHIP. The annual funding needed to expand health coverage to all children and pregnant women in America would be less than the cost of two months of the war in Iraq.

The Opportunity Is Now

The new Congress and President Obama can build strong families and strong communities by guaranteeing that every child and pregnant woman has access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage. Polls show that 90 percent of Americans believe every child in the U.S. has a right to health care. It is time our leaders listened to the American people and made children's health coverage accessible and affordable for families across America in 2009.

Create Change: What Can We Do to Ensure Health Coverage for All Children?

1. Connect with your concern and commitment. In whatever way is most appropriate and helpful for you—whether it is through prayer, meditation, conversation, journaling, or some other way—connect with your own deepest desire to do whatever you can to assure that every child has health coverage so that no child, our sacred responsibility, goes without the care

they need. Identify the role that your religious faith plays in calling you to act on behalf of children and sustaining you when it is challenging. Look honestly at what gets in the way of your making the difference you want to make, whether it's discouragement, feeling busy, not knowing where to start, or something else. Consider your gifts, talents, and resources that you can bring. Discern what kind of action will be most fulfilling, satisfying, sustainable, and effective. What are you called to do?

- 2. Learn more about children's health and health coverage.** Visit the Children's Defense Fund's website, www.childrensdefense.org, for more online resources about our Health Coverage for *All* Children campaign. Check out the bibliography in the Religious Action section of the website for resources that you can use in your place of worship. Look for opportunities to learn from families without health coverage and from health care professionals and others who serve them.
- 3. Inform others.** Start a children's health campaign task force or a small group or class in your place of worship to learn more and take action. Download CDF's Discussion Guide and other resources at www.childrensdefense.org.

4. **Get involved in hands-on service.** Volunteer with a health clinic, or another program, organization, or agency serving children and families without health coverage. What could you do to ease the stress of a long wait in an emergency room or health clinic? If you or someone you know is a health care provider, what about donating your services through the local school?
5. **Start a program in your house of worship to fill an unmet need of poor families in your community** or one near it. Organize trips using your house of worship's van to help pregnant women get to prenatal care appointments. Collect books and games to donate to waiting rooms.
6. **Help connect families with uninsured children to Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).** Places of worship and individual members can help publicize the availability of Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. Contact your state's Department of Health to find out how you can help.
7. **Be a voice for change and for justice.** The change children need won't come until members of Congress hear a broad, relentless demand from their constituents. Children's needs are easy to ignore because they don't vote or make campaign contributions. Figure out how to get the attention of your Representative and Senators. Start a letter-writing group or have a letter-writing table after services once a month. Join an advocacy group. Sign up for emails from the Children's Defense Fund so you'll know when action is needed. Make an appointment to visit your Representative in the district office. Write a letter to the editor and send a copy to your elected officials. Invite your elected officials to come speak to your house of worship (or a coalition of them) about children's needs. Be prepared with good questions. Even though our lives are busy, we must make time to work for justice. We don't have a moment or a child to waste.

A Better Tomorrow

Imagine our nation in five years with guaranteed access to comprehensive health coverage for every child and pregnant woman. Children all across the country are healthier because they are all able to see a doctor for preventive care to keep them well and for timely care when they are hurt or injured so they can heal quickly before their conditions worsen. On the rare occasion that a child goes to the emergency room for a sudden health crisis, they are seen more quickly now that the emergency rooms aren't crammed with those for whom it was the only and last-resort place to turn for care. Stop by the window of a newborn nursery in a hospital, and you'll see more babies born at a healthy weight thanks to the good prenatal care their mothers received. Sales on tiny coffins have dropped now that the lives of more babies in their first year of life are being saved. Academic achievement is rising in schools across the nation as children miss fewer days of school for illness and more children are entering school healthy and ready to learn. Children are receiving higher grades and exhibiting fewer behavioral problems. Their smiles are bright: their teeth are strong and well-cared for. The improvements in health care coverage are resulting in savings to our local communities and our nation's economy, as parents are missing fewer days to care for sick children, more illnesses are diagnosed and treated in earlier stages when it is more affordable, and fewer people are receiving expensive treatment for critical conditions in the emergency room. Sure, children still get hurt. A tumble from the monkey bars still breaks a second-grader's arm, pneumonia still finds its way into a fifth-grader's lungs, a high school student with asthma still needs his nebulizer in the middle of a school day...but no one is sick with worry about whether the children can get the care they need. Everyone breathes a little easier now.

What's your vision of a healthy future for our children?
What role do you see for yourself to help achieve it?

A Pipeline to Prison Primer

A Snapshot of One Child: Swept Along the Pipeline to Prison

Chief Judge Patricia Clark of the Juvenile Division of King County Superior Court in Seattle gives us this glimpse of Frankie. “Let me tell you about Frankie, who first came before me at the age of 10 (now presumed to have the capacity to commit a crime). He was charged with Assault 4 (a misdemeanor). Frankie was born into the child welfare system. Removed from his mother at birth, Frankie spent his first eight years moving from foster home to foster home, getting angrier and more depressed. His angry outbursts landed him in a ‘therapeutic foster home’ placement for kids with behavioral problems. Of course, once he was placed, he continued to demonstrate his behavioral issues. He hit staff. The police were called. He was arrested and charges were filed. It is clear that the therapeutic foster home is using the courts to ‘enforce the rules’ and provide much needed respite care. But this created a criminal record for Frankie. Over the next five years, this pattern repeated itself several times. I last saw Frankie six months ago. He presented on two counts of Robbery 2 (felony charges). His lengthy criminal history (created from his behavior in placement) counts to increase his score for the purpose of sentencing. Frankie was facing 206-208 weeks in juvenile state ‘prison.’ By the time he is released, Frankie will be almost 18. He has literally been moved through the pipeline from the cradle—next stop, the adult prison system.”

The Big Picture: Children in the Pipeline to Prison Today

The Chinese character, or word, for crisis is made up of two symbols which mean “danger” and “opportunity.” America’s pipeline to prison crisis indeed represents both danger and opportunity. The grave danger is that if the pipeline is left in place, we will lose the bright potential of tens of thousands of children of God. At the same time, this crisis presents an extraordinary opportunity for us as people of faith, as places of worship, and as a nation to start treating every child and young person as a sacred child of God and do all that we can to ensure that every one has the opportunity, resources, and support to thrive and flourish and live out the lives for which they were created.

The Children’s Defense Fund recently launched the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Campaign, a national call to action to stop the funneling of tens of thousands of youths, predominantly minorities, down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration and, in some cases, death. Race and poverty are the major factors underpinning the pipeline. We created the pipeline and we have the power, knowledge and will to dismantle it. The need is urgent.

Key National Facts

A Black boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Latino boy a one in six chance; and a White boy a one in 17 chance. A Black girl born in 2001 has a one in 17 chance of going to prison in her lifetime; a Latino girl a one in 45 chance; and a White girl a one in 111 chance.

With the statistics just mentioned in mind, think of entering a third grade classroom made up of 24 students born in 2001, just eight years old. Can you picture eight-year-olds? Bright eyes fixed on the teacher as she reads aloud from a chapter book. Still baby-soft cheeks resting on hands as they listen. That funny mix of baby teeth and permanent teeth revealed by flashing grins at a humorous part of the story. Picture that in this classroom, some of the children live in poverty, and their stomachs may be rumbling because they didn’t get enough to eat that morning—or the night before. Picture that in this classroom, some of the children are uninsured and may be suffering from an untreated cavity or undiagnosed vision problem, or other illness. Picture that this classroom has few resources and a teacher with low expectations. In America, about seven of every 10 fourth graders in our public schools cannot read at grade level. Now, keep picturing the tender faces and bright eyes of this classroom full of eight-year-olds and realize that unless we act now to dismantle the pipeline to prison, many of these children will feel desperation or frustration or hopelessness and fall further and further behind.

Pervasive Poverty – Poverty is the largest driving force behind the pipeline, exacerbated by race. Black children are more than three times as likely as White children to be born into poverty and to be poor, and are four times as likely to live in extreme poverty. One in three Latino babies and three in seven Black babies are born into

poverty. More than one in four Latino children and one in three Black children are poor. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of poor Latino children increased by 960,000 (to 4.5 million) and the number of poor Black children increased by 323,000 (to 3.9 million).

Inadequate Access to Health Coverage – Latino children are more than two and a half times as likely and Black children are 71 percent more likely to be uninsured as White children. The number of uninsured children has risen two years in a row. The majority of these uninsured children have a parent who works full-time.

Gaps in Early Childhood Development – Studies have shown that children who do not get the early intervention, permanence and stability they need are more likely to act out and fail in school because they lack the skills necessary to succeed. Researchers emphasize the importance of early childhood nurturing and stimulation to help the brain grow, especially between birth and age seven, and even beyond, and thus help children thrive and follow a path toward successful adulthood. The importance of stimulation in the first years of life is dramatically underlined in the U.S. Department of Education's study of 22,000 kindergartners in the kindergarten class of 1998-99, which found that Black and Hispanic children were substantially behind when they entered kindergarten.

Disparate Educational Opportunities – Eighty-six percent of Black, 83 percent of Latino and 58 percent of White fourth graders cannot read at grade level; and 89 percent of Black, 85 percent of Latino and 59 percent of White eighth graders cannot do math at grade level. Black students are more likely than any other students to be in special education programs for children with mental retardation or emotional disturbance. Black and American Indian children are almost twice as likely as White children to be retained in a grade. The public school suspension rate among Black and American Indian students is almost three times that of Whites. Black, Latino and American Indian children are more than twice as likely as White children to drop out of school. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 59 percent of Black, 61 percent of Latino and 62 percent of American Indian students graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma in 2006. When Black children do graduate from high school, they have a greater chance of being unemployed and a lower chance of going to college full-time than White high school graduates. Only 48,000 Black males

earn a bachelor's degree each year, but an estimated one in three Black men ages 20-29 is under correctional supervision or control. Approximately 815,000 Black males were incarcerated in state or federal prisons or local jails at mid-year 2007.

Intolerable Abuse and Neglect – A child is abused or neglected every 35 seconds. Four in ten of the children who are abused or neglected get no help at all after their initial investigation. More than 800,000 children are in foster care each year, about 513,000 on a single day. Black children represent 32 percent of children in foster care but only 15 percent of all children.

Unmet Mental and Emotional Problems – A Congressional study found 15,000 children in juvenile detention facilities, some as young as seven years old, solely because community mental health services were unavailable. Studies have reported that as many as three-fourths of incarcerated youths have mental health disorders and about one in five has a severe disorder. Youths who age out of foster care are less likely to graduate from high school or college and experience more serious mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, than youths generally. They are less likely to receive adequate health and mental health care, and are more likely to experience homelessness, and to be involved in the criminal justice system.

Rampant Substance Abuse – Drugs, tobacco and alcohol lead our children down the wrong path. Disconnected youths, lacking a decent education or high school degree, job training skills, and social support systems or mentors, often resort to self-destructive acts. Unfortunately, alcohol and other substance abuse treatment for youths and for parents and other adults is in too short supply. Only about 10 percent of youths with a substance use disorder receive treatment.

Overburdened, Ineffective Juvenile Justice System – One-size-fits-all zero tolerance school discipline policies are transforming schools into a major point of entry into the juvenile justice system as children are increasingly arrested on school grounds for subjectively and loosely defined behaviors. Black youths are about four times as likely as their White peers to be incarcerated. Black youths are almost five times as likely to be incarcerated as White youths for drug offenses. Of the 1.7 million children with an incarcerated parent in 2007, Black children were more than seven times as likely and Latino children were more

than twice as likely to have an incarcerated parent as White children. Most juvenile correctional facility programs focus on punishment rather than treatment and rehabilitation, often creating environments that further harden youths. This makes it more difficult for them to productively reintegrate into their families and communities.

We must speak out against policies that contribute to criminalizing children at younger and younger ages, and fight for policies that help children thrive and put them on track to a productive adulthood.

We need to:

- End poverty by creating jobs that offer livable wages, increasing the minimum wage, expanding job programs, making college affordable for every student, and expanding income supports such as the Child Tax Credit.
- Ensure all children and pregnant woman have access to affordable, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services.
- Make early childhood development programs accessible to every child by ensuring such programs are affordable, available and of high quality.
- Help each child reach his/her full potential and succeed in work and life, by ensuring our schools have adequate resources to provide high quality education to every child.
- Expand prevention and specialized treatment services for children and their parents, connect children to caring permanent families, improve the quality of the child welfare workforce, and increase accountability for results for children.
- Reduce detention and incarceration by increasing investment in prevention and early intervention strategies, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and to the health and mental health care children need for healthy development.
- For those children who do get caught in the deeper end of the pipeline, we must accelerate reforms of juvenile justice policy at the federal, state and local levels to ensure that troubled youths get the integrated services needed to put them on a sustained path to successful adulthood.

For more information on the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Campaign, please visit www.childrensdefense.org or contact Natacha Blain, lead strategic advisor, at (202) 662-3554.

Create Change: What Can We Do to Dismantle the Pipeline to Prison?

- Mentor a child through Big Brothers/Big Sisters or another organization.
- Volunteer at an after-school program for youths.
- Educate elected officials about the pipeline to prison.
- Host a house party to educate others about the pipeline to prison and what they can do to dismantle it.
- Volunteer with children who are homeless or in foster care. Explore becoming a foster parent yourself.
- Work through your place of worship, perhaps in cooperation with other houses of worship in the community, and organize a forum on incarcerated youths and the funding disparities between prisons and education in our nation.
- Volunteer your talents or professional services to help a single-parent, kinship care, or foster care family by babysitting, inviting them to events with their children, or providing transportation.
- Invite youths to events at the next educational level (i.e., taking a high school student to a college basketball game).

In your house of worship:

- Institute a “Cradle Roll” within your faith-based institution or community, linking every child to a permanent, caring family member or adult mentor who can keep them on track and get them back on track if and when they stray.
- Promote learning by starting an after-school program for children.
- Ensure that at least one caring community member attends every public school student suspension meeting or court hearing.
- Encourage families to spend quality time together by hosting a movie or game night at your place of worship.
- Start a support group for single-parent or kinship care families.
- Provide job opportunities and guidance for families and youths in need.
- Create college scholarships for children from disadvantaged, foster care, and kinship care families.
- Work with school officials to develop and adopt more child-appropriate discipline policies and procedures.
- Reach out to youths who are homeless or in foster care.
- Prepare care packages of new clothes, personal toiletries and/or a welcome gift for children placed into foster care homes.



- Hold events to celebrate the strengths of our children and provide college scholarships and leadership opportunities to youths.
- Start a halfway house and counseling program for youths who have run away.
- Create a summer job opportunity for a youth.
- Create and distribute a community resource manual so that parents know where to turn for help for their families.
- Start a parent education program to familiarize parents about conflict resolution in the home and how to advocate for their children.
- Work with the local schools to create and distribute a calendar of free family-friendly community events.
- Encourage alternatives to incarceration such as restitution, community service, electronic monitoring, drug rehabilitation treatment, or placement in a “staff secure” (but not locked) community corrections facility.
- Work to ensure that counseling, social services, education, and health and mental health services are provided to at-risk youths.
- Establish partnerships with local businesses, schools and/or places of worship to create quality exit programs for those leaving the juvenile justice system as a way to start them on the “Pipeline to Success.”

A Better Tomorrow

Imagine a classroom of eight-year-olds a few years from now. Now, none of them is living in poverty, so they arrive at school well-nourished and ready to learn. They are healthy, thanks to check-ups and other appointments with a doctor when needed. The teacher has the children take turns reading aloud to the class. When one struggles, she makes a note to follow up with the extra help he needs so he won't fall behind his classmates, who are now reading on grade level. It is career day at school, and when the class begins to discuss what they want to be when they grow up, the hands go flying up in the air: doctor, vet, teacher, author, pilot, president. The teacher smiles: chances are, now, that that is just what they will accomplish. Not a single child's bright promise will be squandered in the emptying prisons of this new day.

What's your vision of a future in which all children are on paths of promise and the pipeline is a thing of the past? What role do you see for yourself to help achieve it?

Adult Discussion Guides

The following Adult Discussion Guides suggest how you might engage the adults in your faith community in exploring the preceding material in the Children's Concerns Primer and considering the perspective and teachings of your particular faith tradition. Adapt them as appropriate to fit the unique circumstances of your own place of worship, the size of your group, and the timing and setting for the conversation.

If your faith tradition is not represented in one of the following discussion guides, review them for ideas of how you might engage your own place of worship in a discussion for your religious tradition. Draw from the resources provided elsewhere in the Children's Sabbaths manual to enrich your discussion. These guides also may serve as a resource for developing an interfaith discussion in your community bringing together adults of many different faith traditions.

Bahá'í Adult Discussion Guide

Notes for the facilitator: There are many ways to organize discussion groups depending on the size and interests of the group and the time available. Following is one possible model for your consideration.

Materials needed:

- Easel, chart paper and markers OR whiteboard and markers for each discussion group
 - Copies of *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One* for each participant (pages 28–29)
 - Copies of Discussion Questions for each participant with pens or pencils (page 30)
 - Copies of **each** section from the “Children's Concerns Primer” (pages 11–26) – enough of each for 1/3 of total participants:
 - A Child Poverty Primer
 - A Children's Health Coverage Primer
 - A Pipeline to Prison Primer
1. Welcome participants. Consider opening with devotional music and favorite prayers and passages (see Section 5, Bahá'í Resources).
 2. Introduce the theme of the discussion, “Creating Change for Children Today: Bringing Hope and a Better Tomorrow.” Give a brief introduction of the purpose and history of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration. Explain that participants will examine a perspective on the eradication of poverty from the Bahá'í Faith and learn more about one of three challenging issues affecting America's young people: poverty, lack of health coverage, and the pipeline to prison.
 3. Distribute copies of the Bahá'í International Community's Statement on Poverty – *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*. Read this statement aloud together, and summarize the main points if time allows.
 4. Divide into three (or multiples of three) small discussion groups to look at the issues of poverty, lack of health coverage, and incarceration. Provide each group copies of *one* of these sections from the primer, chart paper and markers, and copies of the Questions for Discussion and writing implements for each participant. Ask each group to read aloud together their section from the Children's Concerns Primer and summarize the main points on their chart paper. Have groups go through discussion questions together, recording answers to questions 1–4 on chart paper. Individuals can record responses on their personal copies as desired.
 5. **[Optional]** If time allows, ask each small group to identify a spokesperson to share with the larger group key points that they learned and key conclusions in response to the Discussion Questions. Call small groups back together to discuss what they have read in their small groups. Invite each group's spokesperson to summarize the issue they studied and the results of their consultation. Encourage questions and comments to help clarify and better understand the issues. Show appreciation for each group's contribution.
 6. Allow a quiet reflective opportunity for individuals to respond privately to discussion question #5, making a personal commitment to action. Consider playing quiet music in the background or preceding this reflection with brief devotions using one or two of the selections from the Sacred Writings.
 7. In the large group, review the process. What points really inspired or stood out for people? Has your perception of children's needs changed, and if so, how? What personal actions will come out of this discussion?

Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One

A statement from the Bahá'í International Community¹
February 14, 2008

Part I

1. The crisis of global poverty has, at long last, been accorded a high priority on the international agenda. This propitious development has sparked a flurry of discussion and research concerning the means for eradicating this debilitating condition from human life. Yet as renewed pledges for action pour in from governments, as long-held theories and conventional approaches fail to quell long-held prejudices, conflicts, and exploitation, a feeling of rudderlessness looms over the global enterprise of poverty eradication. At the same time, a palpable optimism emerges from the attention and momentum generated by the search for solutions to this worldwide challenge.
2. The mechanisms of poverty eradication have long been defined in primarily material terms. Indeed, the central pillar of the international community's poverty alleviation efforts has been the transfer of financial resources. Approximately \$2.3 trillion has been spent on foreign aid over the last five decades.² Tragically, the aid, far from ushering in greater self-sufficiency, has often had a detrimental effect on recipient communities: increased dependency on foreign assistance, subservience to externally dictated priorities, misappropriation of funds and decreased pressure for governance reform. In a resolute push for change, the United Nations has sought to expand the mechanisms for assistance and to galvanize support for poverty alleviation through its Millennium Development Goals.³
3. It is now increasingly acknowledged that such conditions as the marginalization of girls and women,⁴ poor governance,⁵ ethnic and religious antipathy,⁶ environmental degradation⁷ and unemployment⁸ constitute formidable obstacles to the progress and development of communities. These evidence a deeper crisis—one rooted in the values and attitudes that shape relationships at all levels of society. Viewed from this perspective, poverty can be described as the absence of those ethical, social and material resources needed to develop the moral, intellectual and social capacities of individuals, communities and institutions. Moral reasoning, group decision-making and freedom from racism, for example, are all essential tools for poverty alleviation. Such capacities must shape individual thinking as well as institutional arrangements and policy-making. To be clear, the goal at hand is not only to remove the ills of poverty but to engage the masses of humanity in the construction of a just global order.
4. Individuals and institutions must work in tandem to take up this task. One of the goals of poverty alleviation, then, centers on the individual: He must be helped to reclaim his dignity and sense of self-worth, must be encouraged to gain confidence to improve his condition and strive to realize his potential. Beyond the achievement of personal well-being, he must be nurtured to become a source of social good—of peace, happiness and advantage to those around him. It is at the level of service to others that our humanity achieves its highest expression. The second goal centers on institutions: At every level of society, they must serve as channels through which the talents and energies of individuals can be harnessed in service to humanity. Resources that help to develop this individual and institutional capacity represent a true source of wealth to the community.

¹ The Bahá'í International Community represents the worldwide Bahá'í community at the international and national levels. See www.bahai.org.

² William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2006).

³ The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, launched in 2000, represent the United Nations' strategy to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

⁴ Andrew D. Mason and Elizabeth M. King, *Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice. A World Bank Research Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001); *Towards Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. (Washington, DC: International Center on Research for Women, 2005); M. Chen, et al., *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work & Poverty* (New York, NY: United Nations Fund for Women, 2005).

⁵ Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Massimo Mastruzzi, "Governance Matters IV: Governance Indicators for 1996 – 2004" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005); "Arab Human Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World" (New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme, 2004) on September 17, 2007, the United Nations News Centre reported that one quarter of the gross domestic product of African States, or \$148 billion, is lost to corruption yearly.

⁶ "Human Development Report 2004, Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World" (New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme, 2004).

⁷ Nicholas Stern, "Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change" (London, England: HM Treasury, 2006).

⁸ "World Employment Report 2004-2005, Employment, Productivity and Poverty Reduction" (Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Organization, 2004).

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

5. Much like the physical principles that govern the material world, the social world, too, is governed by moral principles, which underlie the functioning of an ordered society. Principles such as gender equality,⁹ trustworthiness,¹⁰ access to education, human rights and freedom of religion,¹¹ for example, tend to correlate positively with measures of socioeconomic well-being and stability. The interrelatedness of challenges stemming from poverty calls for the articulation of principles capable of guiding analysis, decision-making and the development of indicators to measure progress. The essential merit of a principle-based process is that it guides individuals and institutions away from a focus on isolated, short-term concerns to consider problems from a systemic and long-term perspective. For any decision to garner support and deliver results, the decision-making process itself must have integrity; it must involve those directly affected by the decisions, and it must be governed by transparent, agreed-upon ethical standards.
6. It is in this context that the Bahá'í International Community would like to offer two principles as guides for efforts in the realm of poverty eradication: justice and unity. These principles underlie a vision of development in which material progress serves as a

vehicle for the moral and cultural advancement of humanity. Justice provides the means capable of harnessing human potential to eradicate poverty from our midst, through the implementation of laws, the adjustment of economic systems, the redistribution of wealth and opportunity, and unfailing adherence to the highest ethical standards in private and public life. Unity asserts that progress is systemic and relational, that a concern for the integrity of the family unit and the local, national, and global community must guide poverty alleviation efforts.

In our efforts to eradicate poverty, we are experiencing no less than the birth pangs of a truly global civilization: New modes of thought, new standards and new legal and institutional arrangements are struggling to take hold. As our understanding of the problems and their possible solutions expands, an unprecedented global consensus and accompanying capacity for international cooperation pave the way for an outcome far greater than any we have been able to achieve. Yet, to generate the knowledge and commitment needed to overcome poverty, the full spectrum of human spiritual and intellectual potential will need to be summoned for the task. And as the fullness of our humanity is engaged, it will regenerate the fabric of civilization.

⁹ See note 3.

¹⁰ See note 4.

¹¹ The Failed States Index," *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2007, pp. 55-63.

Questions for Discussion

1. What challenges from the Children's Concerns Primer do you see reflected in your own community – what examples of poverty, lack of health coverage, or the pipeline to prison do you see affecting the lives of children in your community?
2. Identify any lack of ethical, social and material resources that you think underlie these challenges in your community. [See paragraph #3 in *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*] Why is it important to apply a broad, community-development approach to finding solutions to these issues?
3. How can the principles of justice and unity be applied to resolving this problem in your community? Can you identify additional spiritual principles that would be vital to the process?
4. How can the activities of Bahá'í community life, including devotional gatherings, study of the Creative Word in small groups to build capacity for service, providing lessons for children that develop their spiritual faculties and lay the foundations of a noble character, and helping adolescents form a strong moral identity and empowering them to contribute to the well-being of their communities, directly impact these concerns facing your community's young people?
5. Use your responses to question #4, along with the suggested activities for creating change in the Children's Concerns Primer, to stimulate your thinking about how you will contribute to eradicating the challenges you identified in your community. Identify one or more action steps that you will carry out in the next three months to help alleviate problems of child poverty, lack of health coverage, or youths facing a future of incarceration in your community.

Christian Adult Discussion Guide

There are several ways to engage adults in your church in discussing and responding to the material in the primer, “Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow.” Options include:

- A one-hour discussion in which participants divide into three smaller groups (if you have six or more participants), with each small group assigned one of the three concerns: poverty, health care, and the pipeline to prison. Each group could read and discuss the material and then make a brief presentation back to the larger group.
- A four-week study devoting each week’s session to one of the three concerns in the materials and reserving the last, fourth session to discuss taking action and next steps. (If you pursue this option, you can use the following outline but instead of dividing into small groups, work through the same process each week, taking a different section each week.)
- A one-hour discussion in which you summarize and present the information provided and then invite responses to the suggested questions.

Suggested Outline for a One-Hour Session with Small Groups

Materials needed:

- Easel, flip chart paper, and markers (for three groups)
- Copies of Discussion Questions for each participant with pens or pencils
- Copies of **each** section from the “Children’s Concerns Primer” (pages 11–26) – enough of each for 1/3 of total participants:
 - A Child Poverty Primer
 - A Children’s Health Coverage Primer
 - A Primer on the Pipeline to Prison

Preparation: Ahead of time, invite several others to be small group facilitators so that each of the three small groups has a facilitator. Reassure them that they are not expected to be the “expert” for the group, but simply to be willing to keep the small group moving through the parts of the small group discussion. Ahead of time, give each of them a copy of the session outline as well as the primer material.

Session Outline

1. Welcome (10 minutes)

- Welcome participants.** If size permits, have each person briefly introduce themselves and name an area where they would like to create change to improve the lives of children. If the group is too large for everyone to introduce themselves, have people turn to their neighbor and introduce themselves answering the question, and then ask for several volunteers to share their responses with the whole group.
- Open with prayer.** (You may want to use one from this Children’s Sabbaths resource manual or offer your own.)
- Introduce the overall theme** of the 2009 Children’s Sabbaths: “Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow,” which is explained on pages 11–12 of this manual.

2. Small Group Exploration (35 minutes)

Divide the group into three small groups. Have the small group facilitators lead their small groups in the following:

- Our Inner Thoughts:** Begin by asking for a volunteer to read Mark 9:33–37 and for another to read Luke 9:46–49, printed on the handout. Note for the participants that Jesus was aware of the “inner thoughts” of his followers that might get in the way of their serving him and finding greatness through service. The disciples probably had not thought about their assumptions of greatness; they took them for granted. Sometimes that made it harder to hear or understand what Jesus had to say. Add that before we can take in new information, it is helpful to identify the assumptions, filters, and feelings that we already have that may influence what we hear and how we hear it. Invite participants to jot down words or phrases that come to mind when they hear “poor children,” “uninsured children,” or “children in the pipeline to prison” (according to which small group they are in) on the discussion handout they received. Remind participants that this isn’t about “right” or “wrong,” and the responses won’t have to be shared aloud; the purpose is for each person to become aware of his or her assumptions and “inner thoughts” so that we are open to learning something new. Next, ask participants to jot down

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

their “inner thoughts” about solving this problem and themselves—do they feel hopeful or hopeless? What else? Allow time for participants to reflect and write. Afterwards, you may ask if anyone wants to share an insight they had from responding to both questions. Don’t press any participant to share.

- b. Distribute copies of the section of the primer each group has been assigned.
- c. **One Such Child:** Ask for a volunteer to read the personal story of the child affected by the problem in the primer. Invite participants to share their responses to the story.
 - How did you feel hearing the story?
 - Did it bring to mind a story of a child you know who has experienced that problem?
 - When you think about the problem, do you typically think of individual children, or does it remain more of an abstract concept or statistic? How does that impact your actions?
 - Reflecting back on the passages from Mark and Luke: In what ways does allowing a child like the one we read about in the CDF materials to remain in poverty (or without health care, or in the pipeline to prison) mean that we are treating Jesus that way? Can we imagine welcoming one child such as the one described in these materials as a way of welcoming Jesus and God who sent him?
- d. **The Big Picture:** Have participants take turns reading paragraphs from “the big picture” part of your section. When you are done, ask for responses. What was surprising? What was new information? How do they feel hearing such information—discouraged, motivated, concerned, inspired? How do participants see this problem affecting your community?
- e. **From Weeping to Work:** Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 31:15–17, printed in the handout. Ask: Does this picture of child poverty (or uninsured children, or children in the pipeline to prison) make you want to grieve as Rachel does? After hearing responses, say, “Listen to the two parts of God’s promise: First, there is a reward for our work—that is, we need to do more than grieve but we need to actively work to bring our children home; and secondly, our children will come

home—the hope for our future is concrete and real—it is the return of our children to an experience of safety instead of danger, fear, and exile.” Note that the last part of the small group time is to discuss the work that we can do to help children and restore hope for our future.

- f. **Create Change:** Ask participants to reflect and then write on their sheets responses to two questions: 1) How can you as an individual create change to bring hope to children in poverty (or without health care, or in the pipeline to prison)? 2) What could we do as a congregation to create change and bring hope? After they’ve had time to reflect and write, ask for people to share aloud what they came up with, and record the ideas on a sheet of flip chart paper. Then turn to the action steps listed in the handout. Ask: What additional ideas inspire you? Which feel like a good fit for your interests, skills, and resources or the concerns, commitments, and resources of the congregation? What next steps might we take individually or together? Ask participants to prayerfully consider a step to create change for children that they are willing to take and to write it on their sheets.

3. Closing (15 minutes)

- a. Bring the small groups back together. Invite a member of each group to briefly summarize their small group’s discussion.
- b. Read aloud (or invite a volunteer to do so) the passage from Isaiah 65 printed on the handout.
- c. Invite a member of each small group to read aloud the vision of a better tomorrow printed in the primer for their section. Ask for participants to add their own visions to that picture.
- d. Close in prayer. (You may want to use one from the Children’s Sabbaths resource manual or one of your own.)

Discussion Questions

“An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me, for the least among all of you is the greatest.’” (Luke 9:46–48, New Revised Standard Version)

1. **Inner Thoughts:** What comes to mind when you hear the “poor children” or “children living in poverty”? What comes to mind when you hear “children lacking health coverage” or “uninsured children”? What comes to mind when you hear “children in the pipeline to prison”? Jot down the words, phrases, first impressions, and assumptions that arise for you.

A version of the story from Mark 9:33–37:

“Then they came to Capernaum; and when [Jesus] was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”

2. **One Such Child:** What did you think and feel when you heard the story of one child in the primer?
3. How do you see this problem affecting our community, state, or nation?

“Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country.” (Jeremiah 31:15–17)

4. **There Is a Reward for Your Work:** What is the “work” I could do? What work could our church do to help bring our children out of danger and back to safety? Brainstorm here:
5. One step I will take:

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating: for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime.... They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendents as well. (Isaiah 65:17–20a, 23)

Jewish Adult Discussion Guide

This discussion guide may be used or adapted to guide a one-hour discussion among adults on the Children's Shabbat weekend, during a sisterhood meeting or men's club, or with another gathering convened just for this purpose.

Suggested Format

Welcome

- Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and provide a brief overview of the purpose of the discussion and the context of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend.
- If this is not a group that regularly meets together, provide a time for participants to introduce themselves and say what about the topic interested them. If numbers don't permit time for each participant to introduce themselves, have participants introduce themselves to each other in pairs or groups of four.

Introduce focus: "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow" and connect it to Jewish teachings.

- Summarize the focus and briefly note the three issues of particular concern: 13.3 million children in poverty in the U.S.; nine million children lacking health coverage, and countless children—especially poor, Black, and Latino boys—in a pipeline to prison.
- Connect the theme of creating change for children today to Jewish teachings. Options for doing this include:
 - Make copies of the passages from traditional Jewish sources on poverty, health care, and youth development in Section 8. Invite participants to discuss how these readings inform their feelings about and actions to address children's needs.
 - Discuss the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*. How does it speak to the focus of this Children's Shabbat? Where do they see themselves or the congregation carrying out the work of repairing the world, especially for disadvantaged children? Where do they see new opportunities to repair the world for children in poverty, without health care, and in the pipeline to prison?
 - Link the Torah portion for October 17, 2009 (the Children's Sabbaths weekend), *B'reishit*, with the Children's Sabbath theme. Invite participants to

respond after you read the following: "When God created the world, God made everything a little bit incomplete. Instead of making bread grow out of the earth, God made wheat grow so that we might bake it into bread. Instead of making the earth of bricks, God made it of clay so that we might bake the clay into bricks. Why? So that we could become God's partner in the task of completing the work of creation." How do you connect the understanding of ourselves as partners with God in the task of completing the work of creation with the current situation in our nation of more than 13 million children in poverty, nearly nine million without health coverage, and a Black boy born in 2001 facing a one in three risk of incarceration in his lifetime?

Engage with the material in the Children's Concerns Primer

- If numbers permit, divide into three small groups with each assigned one of the sections—children in poverty, children lacking health coverage, and children in the pipeline to prison—to discuss. Give each participant a photocopy of their assigned section of the Children's Concerns Primer. (If your group has fewer than 12 people, you may want to stay in one large group. In that case, you may want to select just one of the three concerns to discuss this time, and save the other two issues for a subsequent gathering.) Ahead of time, have a facilitator prepared to lead each small group through the following steps:

- Introduce the story of one child affected by the problem (poverty, lack of health coverage, or the pipeline to prison crisis) by reading the following passage from *Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5*:

"Therefore, man was created singularly to teach you that a) whoever destroys a single soul of Israel, is considered as if he destroys an entire world, and one who saves one soul of Israel, it is considered as if he saves an entire world; b) no one could say to their fellow that my father is better than your father; c) none of the heretics could say, 'There are many powers in Heaven'; d) again, to declare the greatness of the Holy One of Blessing, for man stamps out many coins with one die, and they are all alike. But the Ruler of all Rulers, the Holy One of

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Blessing, stamped each person with the seal of Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow. Therefore, each and every one is obliged to say, 'For my sake the world was created.'

(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5)

Ask for a volunteer in each small group to read aloud the “snapshot” of one child for whom’s “sake the world was created” in their material, and offer their responses to what they heard.

- In each small group, take turns reading paragraphs about “The Big Picture.” (Alternatively, the facilitator of each small group may want to summarize the overview provided in this section.) If the discussion is being held at a time when participants may write, you may want to invite group members to mark their copies as the information is read, with a check mark by information they already knew, an exclamation mark by information that surprised them, and a question mark by information that raised questions for them. When the material has been read, invite participants to identify the information that was most surprising, or to raise the questions that the reading generated. (Reassure facilitators that they don’t have to have the answers to every question. Some questions will serve as prompts for participants to seek more information when they return home.)
- **Creating Change:** Prepare to move the discussion to how each participant individually, or a group or the congregation collectively, can create change for children by reading the following passage from Maimonides:

If one person is able to save another and does not save him, he transgresses the commandment, “Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.” (*Leviticus 19:16*) Similarly, if one person sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by wild

animals, and, although able to rescue him either alone or by hiring others, does not rescue him; or if one hears heathens or informers plotting evil against another or laying a trap for him and does not call it to the other’s attention and let him know; or if one knows that a heathen or violent person is going to attack another and although able to appease him on behalf of the other and make him change his mind, he does not do so; or if one acts in any similar way—he transgresses in each case the injunction “Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.”

(Maimonides, Code, “Laws Concerning Murder and the Preservation of Life,” Chapter 1, Sections 14 and 16)

Read through the list of suggested actions. Invite participants to add additional ideas of their own. What do they think they could do individually, or a group or the congregation could do collectively, to address the problem? You may want to consider different categories of action, including *tzedakah*, *gemilut hasadim*, and *mipnei tikkun ha-olam*. (If the discussion is being held at a time when you may write, you could write the brainstormed ideas on flip chart paper.)

Conclusion

Reconvene as one large group. If time permits, have someone from each small group briefly summarize their discussion. Invite participants to share their vision of the world repaired and made safe for our children. Invite one member of each group to read aloud the vision of a better tomorrow at the end of their material. If appropriate, find out which participants are interested in continuing to meet and work together in the coming weeks or year to create change for children, and make arrangements to be in contact about a next gathering. Be sure to coordinate this session and any follow-up that springs from it with the rabbi/s and your synagogue’s social action leadership.

Muslim Adult Discussion Guide

Prepared by Shakeel Syed, Executive Director, Shura Council of Southern California

This brief outline is merely to trigger more creative thinking to foster a dialogue about children and our responsibilities toward them.

1. Select a few verses from Qur'an about children/parents/family – e.g., 40:67; 93:9; 76:8; 25:74; 17:31; 16:72 (not in any particular order).
2. Select a few Prophetic sayings (*Hadith*) about children/parents/family.
3. Have the select verses from the Qur'an and Hadith read by participating members (Combine them—parents and single adults, young and old, in Arabic and English).
4. As the facilitator, frame the discussion in the context of (a) our responsibilities toward children; (b) the status of children in United States; and (c) what can we all possibly do as individuals, families, and as a community. See pages 14–26 of the Children's Concerns Primers.
5. Encourage everyone to participate in the discussion. Here are some examples/ideas:
 - a. Ask a parent and/or a grandparent: "What do children mean to you?"
 - b. Have a parent and/or a grandparent share how they would feel if they could not afford to provide health care for their children/grandchildren when needed.
 - c. As the facilitator, narrate/share a real-life story from someone else's life. Share the "snapshot" stories on pages 14, 20, and 23 that describe a child in poverty, without health coverage, and in the pipeline to prison. Additionally, you may want to use Google or another Internet search engine to find real-life stories; preferably try to find stories with video/audio (for example, on YouTube).
- d. Once the real-life stories are shared, ask the adults to close their eyes and reflect in a "what-if" context: What would it be like to be in the circumstances of the families in the stories that were just shared?
6. Resume the discussion. The facilitator can offer some material for discussions re: our society's neglect of children and their needs vis-à-vis our society's intense focus on material well-being at all costs, our misuse and abuse of resources, misplaced priorities (wars), etc. Draw from the material in the Children's Concerns Primers on pages 14–26. Make sure to add information/data from your own city or town (for example, numbers from budgets and other statistical information).
7. Invite everyone to reflect and lead them to acknowledge our societal obligations toward children.
8. Ask everyone to share ideas of what can and needs to be done, and how they can participate.
9. Suggest ideas, such as self education/raising awareness of the crisis in our country; volunteering for after-school teaching; donating to organizations with a focus on children and legislative advocacy. See the suggested action steps on pages 16, 21 and 25 in the Children's Concerns Primers.
10. Follow up on all of the above. Track success and/or failures and learn for the future.

Keep the struggle going.

Hindu Adult Discussion Guide

This discussion guide may be used or adapted to guide a one-hour discussion among adults about the Children's Sabbaths weekend, during a temple service or with another gathering convened just for this purpose, and should be used in conjunction with the Children's Concerns Primer presented earlier in this section.

Suggested Format

Welcome

Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and provide a brief overview of the purpose of the discussion and the context of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend.

Sit at round tables in groups of six to eight with one facilitator per table. Choose one aspect of the Children's Sabbaths weekend topic per table: children in poverty, children without health coverage, or children at risk of incarceration.

Introduce the focus: "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow" and connect it to Hindu teachings.

An Overview of the Problems Facing Children in the United States and India

- Summarize the magnitude of the problem that we are facing today, in the United States and in India, and how Hindu teachings inform and inspire us to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow.
 - In the United States: 13.3 million children in poverty; nine million children lacking health coverage, and countless incarcerated children—especially poor, Black, and Latino boys—in a pipeline to prison.
 - In America, 9.8 percent of Asian Indians live in poverty, a rate considerably lower than that of the rest of the population.
 - In India, about 470 million people are poor. India has the highest number of poor in the world. India has one of the highest rates of undernourishment among children under the age of five in the world—46 percent in 2007 (World Bank). Street children, gender discrimination, and child labor continue to be major problems.

Creating Change Based upon Hindu Teachings

The Ten Principles of Arya Samaj: Make copies of the ten principles of Arya Samaj and discuss the seventh and ninth principles that talk about social responsibility: "7. Love and Justice: Our conduct towards all should be guided by love, righteousness and justice." "9. Individualism and Altruism: No one should be content with promoting only his own good; on the other contrary, he should look for his good in promoting the good of all."

- **Daan:** Make copies of Revered Ma's teaching about *daan*. "*Daan* means service through the body, mind and intellect. *Daan* in relation to Vedanta means giving up or surrendering our body at the altar of the Lord, in His service. This can happen only if we learn to be generous and kind, even in the smallest of the things."
- Make copies of Daan Sukta of Rig-Veda and discuss it in relation to creating change for children.
- **Daya, Daan and Sewa:** Make copies of the Hindu Perspective on the 2009 Children's Sabbaths theme on pages 101–102 in this resource manual and use it as the basis of a discussion of the Hindu concept of *dayaa*, *daan*, and *sewa*. Discuss building good karma through these three practices. How does it speak to the focus of this weekend focused on children's needs? Where do they see themselves or the samaj (congregation) carrying out the work of creating change for children, especially for disadvantaged children? Where do the members see new opportunities to bring hope and a better tomorrow for children in poverty, without health care, and in the pipeline to prison?

Connect the conversation about *dayaa*, *daan*, and *sewa* to specific projects and opportunities to make a difference for children. Discuss opportunities for supporting causes in the United States, such as those found on pages 16–17, 21–22, and 25–26 in this resource manual, as well as Habitat for Humanity; soup kitchens (connect it to the Hindu practice of feeding the poor at weddings, wakes, and eclipses); health clinics that serve children and others who are uninsured; and faith-based programs for the poor. Talk about ways the Hindu community is supporting or could further support causes to help children in India, such as assisting orphanages or schools.

The Equality of All God's Children: Discuss and dispel the myth that the exploitative caste system is an article of

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

faith of Hinduism and is responsible for poverty in India. People from all sectors of society can be poor. Talk about the presence of God in every soul and, hence, equality of all God's children.

Hindu Family Values: Talk about how Hindu family values lead to good parenting and, hence, less juvenile delinquency and drug abuse, both of which can lead to imprisonment.

Hindu children are being touched by both. Hindu family values can be a model for others to follow. Should Hindu congregations have sermons for teenagers and children on these issues?

Develop an Action Plan

Engage with the material in the Children's Concerns Primer on pages 14–26 in three breakout sessions if more than 12 people, with each assigned one of the sections—children in poverty, children lacking health coverage, and children in the pipeline to prison—to develop an action plan. If not, discuss collectively. Give each participant a photocopy of their assigned section of the Children's Concerns Primer. (If your group has fewer than 12 people, you may want to stay in one large group. In that case, you may want to select just one of the three concerns—poverty, lack of health coverage, and the pipeline to prison crisis—

to discuss this time, and save the other two issues for a subsequent gathering.) The facilitators should prepare ahead of time to lead their small groups. Have a flip chart in each group to write ideas for action. Discuss how each participant individually, or a group, or the samaj (congregation) collectively, can create change for children. You could write the brainstormed ideas on flip chart paper.

Conclusion

Reconvene as one large group. If time permits, have someone from each small group briefly summarize their group's discussion. Invite participants to share their vision of the world made safe for our children. Invite one member of each group to read aloud the vision of a better tomorrow at the end of their material. If appropriate, find out which participants are interested in continuing to meet and work together in the coming weeks or year to create change for children, and make arrangements to be in contact about a next gathering. Make a social action plan for children.



SECTION 3

Planning Your Children's Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths

There are two kinds of Children's Sabbath celebrations. First, there are Children's Sabbath celebrations in your own place of worship. A Children's Sabbath in your own place of worship typically takes place during the customary time for services, prayers, or other worship, and often follows the customary order of worship although enriched with a special Children's Sabbath focus.

The other kind of Children's Sabbath is a community-wide multi-faith Children's Sabbath celebration that brings together many different places of worship. A community-wide, multi-faith service is planned for a day and time that do not conflict with customary times of worship, prayers, or services of other places of worship. As a multi-

faith service bringing together many different religious traditions, this form of the Children's Sabbath service is flexible, creative and unique to your community and the leadership involved.

Both kinds of Children's Sabbath celebrations—one held within your own place of worship for your members or one held in the community for members of many places of worship—are terrific ways to participate in the Children's Sabbaths movement. Decide what is best for you this year.

In this section you'll find:

- Steps for Planning a Children's Sabbath Celebration in Your Place of Worship
- Steps for Planning a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration in Your Community

Steps for Planning a Children's Sabbath Celebration in Your Place of Worship

❑ **Begin with prayer.** The success of the Children's Sabbath—its ability to stir the hearts and minds and hands of people to nurture and protect children—ultimately relies on God's grace. Seek God's guidance for your Children's Sabbath, turn to God for the strength and commitment to plan it, pray for partners to help you in this venture, and thank God for the precious children God has entrusted to our care. Whatever your faith tradition, and whatever words you choose to pray, know that God is with you as you embark on planning a Children's Sabbath.

❑ **Secure support from appropriate religious leaders, staff, or committees.** In addition to obtaining approval for planning a Children's Sabbath, do some preliminary investigation into potential sources of financial support for your Children's Sabbath celebration. Of course, you will have a better idea of your budget when you are further into the planning process. You may find that you can plan a Children's Sabbath with little additional expense.

❑ **Mark the date on the calendar for your place of worship.** The 2009 Children's Sabbaths weekend is October 16–18. Most Children's Sabbaths will take place on this third full weekend of October during a congregation's traditional worship and education time. If your congregation has a conflict with this date, select another. Keeping your celebration during the usual worship time promises greater participation and communicates that the Children's Sabbath is an integral part of your congregation's worship, work, and witness. If you select a time other than the traditional time for your place of worship, be prepared to do lots of extra promotion to ensure a strong turnout.

❑ **Recruit a committee to plan the Children's Sabbath and activities leading up to or following it.** Involving a broad range of people brings a wealth of gifts and experience, builds greater excitement and “ownership” of the Children's Sabbath throughout the congregation, and helps ensure that no single person gets overloaded. In addition to religious leaders and congregation staff, consider involving religious education teachers, social action committee members, children and youths, and any interested congregation members. Develop a meeting schedule that will allow sufficient planning time. Many committees

find they need more frequent meetings in September and October as the Children's Sabbath draws near.

❑ **Identify leadership within the committee.** Designate a chairperson or co-chairs to guide the planning and ensure that goals are set, responsibilities assigned and fulfilled, and that the process moves forward effectively. You also may want to name a secretary who will keep notes of committee meetings and communicate decisions and other information to those involved. (Be sure to involve or keep informed all who will be affected by Children's Sabbath activities, such as musicians, educational program teachers and volunteers, and secretaries.) A treasurer could keep tabs on the budget allotted for the Children's Sabbath and also oversee in-kind contributions donated by the community. As the Children's Sabbath planning proceeds, the chairperson(s) should assign new tasks and responsibilities as they arise.

❑ **Focus your vision for the Children's Sabbath.** What do you hope will happen during and as a result of your Children's Sabbath? Do you want the Children's Sabbath to highlight and affirm the gift and gifts of children? To underscore the responsibility of adults to nurture and protect children? Do you hope to increase awareness about the serious needs of many children today? To broaden the congregation's concern for children to encompass those in the community? Do you want to energize and increase participation in existing congregational programs serving children as a result of the Children's Sabbath? Do you hope to build excitement and commitment for starting a new congregational effort to help children? To stimulate new, individual commitments to giving time or resources to help children? Clarifying your vision for the Children's Sabbath and its impact will help guide your planning for a successful experience.

❑ **Determine the format of your Children's Sabbath.** You may decide to start small and build your celebration in future years, or you may want to plan an ambitious celebration now. Choose the approach that is right for your congregation and will provide a successful, affirming experience upon which you can build year after year. These are the major components to consider for your Children's Sabbath:

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

- **Service of worship/prayers:** This is the heart of most Children's Sabbath celebrations: lifting up, in prayer, sermon, and song, God's call to people of faith to nurture and protect children. (See Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 for ideas and resources.)
- **Educational programs:** Educational programs for children, youths, and adults help everyone learn more about the problems facing children, the faith-based call to respond, and ways to make a positive difference. Discussion guides for adults are found in Section 2 beginning on page 27. Children's lesson plans for a variety of faith traditions may be downloaded from the Children's Defense Fund website at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.
- **Advocacy and hands-on outreach activities:** When people have been inspired and called in the service of worship and have learned more through the educational programs, they are eager to start making a difference for children immediately. Providing concrete outreach and advocacy activities on the Children's Sabbath, perhaps following the service of worship, helps people respond and put their faith into action. (See Section 11 for ideas and the Children's Defense Fund website, www.childrensdefense.org, after September 1, 2009.)
- **Commitment to longer-term responses to children's needs:** This is the goal of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement. The Children's Sabbath is about more than one weekend a year; it is about inspiring new, long-term responses to the needs of children. Provide opportunities for individuals to find out about, and make commitments to, ongoing action through information tables, presentations, and sign-up sheets. The ongoing action could include participating in existing programs in your congregation, volunteering with a community child-serving program or organization, or even joining a planning committee to develop a new program in your congregation. (See Section 11 for ideas and Section 12 for resources.)

☐ **Involve children and youths.** The Children's Sabbath is an important time to highlight the gifts, contributions, and leadership of children and youths. However, the Children's Sabbath should not be completely turned over to children, with adults serving only as the advisors and "audience." The Children's Sabbath is meant to be an intergenerational event that demonstrates and celebrates how everyone—children, youths, parents, singles, and

seniors—must respond faithfully to God's call to nurture and protect children. (Other occasions celebrated by many congregations, such as Youth Sundays or Children's Day, are more appropriate times to put the service entirely in the hands of children and youths.) Be sure to involve children and youths in the planning process as well as in carrying out parts of the Children's Sabbath. The various sections of this manual offer specific suggestions on how children and youths can participate in promoting the Children's Sabbath, leading the service of worship, and engaging in outreach and advocacy activities. Be sure to solicit young people's ideas and suggestions to supplement those found here.

☐ **Involve resource people.** After you have determined the basic format and activities for your Children's Sabbath, involve resource people from the congregation and community. These may include health care professionals, public education teachers and administrators, staff of after-school programs, child care providers, Head Start teachers, staff of organizations serving families in poverty, juvenile justice professionals, police officers, staff of community organizations serving children, elected officials, and representatives of advocacy organizations working on children's behalf. Secular organizations working for children are often eager to find ways to link with religious congregations and draw on the rich resources congregations can offer. Forging these connections will not only assist you in planning your Children's Sabbath weekend, but also should create partnerships for long-term projects that build on the Children's Sabbath.

☐ **Recruit volunteers to help prepare for and conduct Children's Sabbath activities.** Some who may not have been able to join the ongoing planning committee would welcome responsibility for a specific task in preparation for the Children's Sabbath or during the weekend itself. In addition to recruiting volunteers through personal contact, publicize opportunities through the announcement time during the service, in the congregation's newsletter or bulletin, at meetings, and at gatherings. Tap seniors, children, youths, singles, parents—everyone! The Children's Sabbath is about the role each person can play to nurture and protect children.

☐ **Plan to build on the Children's Sabbath.** While you are planning the Children's Sabbath, keep your focus on the ultimate goal of stimulating new, long-term congregational and individual commitments to help children year-round. Don't wait until after the Children's Sabbath weekend to think about where you hope it will lead.

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath



Instead, make the long-term result of the Children's Sabbath a focus of the planning process. Some Children's Sabbath committees have found it useful to designate a sub-committee for follow-up to begin working on this from the start. (See Section 11 for ideas and Section 12 for resources.) As you plan long-term follow-up, make sure that you involve the necessary religious leaders, staff, and committees, as well as other interested individuals.

Your resource people can also provide input about community needs and opportunities for partnerships. Be sure you have a meeting date on the calendar after the Children's Sabbath to convene members of the Children's Sabbath Planning Committee and any others, as appropriate, to move ahead on the follow-up plans.

❑ **Take care of “wrap-up” details.** After the Children's Sabbath, be sure to attend to details to wrap things up. These may include evaluating your Children's Sabbath (what worked and what you would do differently next time); writing thank-you notes to those involved in the leadership and planning and any others who made contributions; marking next year's Children's Sabbath on the congregation's calendar; setting a date for the first planning committee meeting (even though the planning committee membership may change); and closing the books on the Children's Sabbath budget. Some congregations gather the planning committee members for a special appreciation luncheon and awards or other tokens of appreciation. If videotapes or photographs were taken during the Children's Sabbath, you may want to arrange a time to display them to extend the Children's Sabbath experience. Or, begin a scrapbook chronicling your congregation's Children's Sabbath and plan to add to it next year.

❑ **Put next year's Children's Sabbath on the calendar.** The 2010 Children's Sabbath will be held October 15–17, 2010.

Steps for Planning a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration in Your Community

The Children's Sabbath's power and inspiration comes, in large part, from the connections it makes across faith traditions, across our nation, and across generations. It is an extraordinary opportunity to recognize and celebrate our shared commitment to assuring justice and care for children and to affirm the unifying message of our religious traditions that calls us to nurture and protect those who are young, poor, sick, and vulnerable. Indeed, central to every great religious tradition is the mandate to protect the young, the weak, and the poor with justice and compassion.

Over the past 18 years, many communities have come together to proclaim and respond to that mandate through multi-faith Children's Sabbath celebrations. These community-wide Children's Sabbaths stand as an important example of the promise and power of multi-faith partnership for a common cause. If planned with care, sensitivity, and a commitment to inclusion, a multi-faith Children's Sabbath can be a time of new understanding, of celebration, and most importantly, of uniting and strengthening your community to nurture and protect children with even greater justice and compassion.

Following you will find suggestions for planning the practical aspects of a multi-faith Children's Sabbath. See Section 10 for tips on planning the content and leadership of the service, a suggested outline for a multi-faith service, and resources for a community-wide multi-faith service from which you may select and may supplement with additional resources.

Organizing a community-wide multi-faith service may sound like a daunting task, but it can be done successfully, and has been, with tremendous contributions to the communities. These are suggested ways to coordinate the event. Feel free to adapt this process to suit your needs.

□ Recruit a team. Connect with two, three, four, or more people to help you get started. Then convene an advisory committee of eight to 15 members. Strive to build an advisory committee that represents the full range of religious bodies, races, and ethnicities of your community. Be sure to involve all of the faith groups you hope to include from the outset, so no one feels like an afterthought.

□ Prepare a game plan. Develop an efficient agenda for the initial meeting of the advisory committee. A productive meeting will generate energy, enthusiasm, and continued commitment. Key items to determine include the date, site, range of events, and point people to assume responsibility for aspects of the event. You may find it helpful to use one of the Children's Sabbaths PowerPoint presentations to convey the purpose and power of the Children's Sabbath. (The PowerPoint presentation may be downloaded for free from www.childrendefense.org/childrenssabbaths.)

□ Build broad support and participation. Begin to contact as many congregations and community organizations as you can to get them on board. Be sure to invite congregations of all ethnic and racial groups. Network with ministerial, rabbinical, and interfaith associations, Islamic centers and associations of mosques, schools, social clubs, and organizations dealing with children, health care, juvenile justice, poverty, violence, hunger, homelessness, education, and parenting. Contact them by letter and include a response form for those who wish to participate. Follow up with a phone call. Make a quick reference list of those who respond affirmatively that you can add to later.

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

Even if places of worship have signed on as co-sponsors of a multi-faith service, that doesn't necessarily mean that their members will attend, so work together to identify strategies that will be most successful with each place of worship, and with potential attendees overall.

Strategies for a particular place of worship include:

- Inviting a choir to perform by itself or as part of a combined choir with other places of worship, or a dance troupe, or a step group.
- Making the multi-faith service a planned event of a group such as the youth group, women's group, or church school.
- Planning decorations that will feature the artwork of many children from each of the sponsoring congregations, with the young artists standing on-hand before the service to talk about their pictures to adults who come to view them.
- Posting a sign-up sheet for a ride in the congregation's van or in carpools.
- Posting a sign-up sheet or having a bulletin insert to fill out indicating whether a member plans to attend.
- Meeting at the place of worship before the service for an ice cream social or a simple meal like pizza or spaghetti and then traveling to the service together.
- Discussing in planning meetings how many attendees are needed from each place of worship for a desirable turnout, so each leader has a goal or sense of expectation.
- Having a light-hearted "competition" for each sponsoring place to be the "Children's Champion" by generating the greatest turnout from their members (you can weight the competition to account for the different sizes of congregations), with a "Children's Champion" plaque/statue/trophy to reside with that congregation until the next year.
- Sending out a congregation-wide email reminder the day before or the day of the community service.
- Sending notices home with the children who attend the education program, so they can encourage their families to attend.
- Talking it up during the announcement time in each place of worship for several weeks prior, and passionately conveying the urgency of the problems confronting our children, the moral imperative for people of faith to act, and the inspiration, joy, and excitement that the community service will provide

in bringing together an array of others with shared concerns and common commitment.

Turnout strategies for the community at large, if your budget allows:

- Offering fun, family-friendly activities before or after the service, like face painting, simple crafts, or balloon animals. If it is outside, you could even consider something like a hay ride.
- Providing goods or services that many children and families really need, like a health check; "dental health" goody bags donated by an area dentist with toothbrushes and toothpaste; help for eligible families to enroll in the Children's Health Insurance Program; and a chance either to serve (as a volunteer, or by making a donation) or be served by community organizations and programs.
- Arranging for simple food for purchase that can stand in as the closest meal (lunch or dinner) for time-pressed families, or providing free coffee (perhaps donated by a coffee shop in the community), juice, and water, or inexpensive, kid-popular treats like popsicles.
- Offering an inexpensive but appealing item for the first 100 people (there are several websites through which one can purchase items in quantity surprisingly inexpensively, from pencils to stickers to Frisbees to small stuffed toys to hats to tee-shirts). Talk to managers of stores in the community to see what they would be willing to donate.
- Publicizing a chance to meet and greet a well-known person after the event. This could be an elected leader like the mayor, a popular musician or athlete from the area, or a radio or television personality, for instance. You might be surprised by who on your planning committee knows someone (or knows someone who knows someone) who could be a "draw."

While you won't want to let the fun, festival-like offerings overshadow the goal of the Children's Sabbath, which is to focus attention on the serious problems facing children including poverty, lack of health coverage, and the pipeline to prison, and to urge people of faith to respond, if planned carefully you can offer a combination of appealing fun that draws families in and an important message that sends them out to act faithfully and urgently to improve the lives of children.

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

❑ **Assign areas for coordination.** Areas to coordinate include site selection, administration and funding, worship planning, music, outreach/promotion/media, and activities to raise awareness and generate service and advocacy.

❑ **Choose a good day and time.** Schedule the multi-faith service for a time that does not exclude any group's participation. For example, scheduling a multi-faith service on Saturday afternoon, during the Jewish Shabbat, would prevent some Jews from attending. Similarly, Sunday morning scheduling is likely to conflict with most church services. Sunday afternoon or evening is usually the best time for a multi-faith event. Be aware, however, that you will need to do lots of outreach and promotion to generate strong attendance for a multi-faith service, whenever it is scheduled. See the promotion suggestions later in this section and the ideas listed above.

❑ **Find a suitable location.** Seek advice from people who have done similar events and choose a site as early as possible. Feasible sites for multi-faith activities include auditoriums, hospitals, convention centers, atriums of public buildings, parks, and schools. Of course, religious places of worship are also good sites. If you use a congregation's building, be sure the religious leader is involved in the planning, since he or she will know the logistics of the site.

Consider the following in selecting a site:

- **Size:** Make sure it is large enough to accommodate the crowd you expect, but not so large that when the congregation has arrived it looks half-empty and makes your turnout appear small.

- **Staging:** Will it accommodate choirs and a procession? Is there a good sound and lighting system? Sound and, depending on the time of the service, lighting are especially important to consider if the event will be outside—which also calls for contingency plans in the event of rain.
- **Location:** Is it centrally located and convenient for all segments of the community? If not, can you arrange for shuttle buses to transport groups from other areas of the community to encourage and enable them to attend?
- **Cost:** Try to find a site that will host the service without any charge.
- **Worship space:** Is it conducive to multi-faith worship? Will it foster unity among persons who don't know each other? Consider temporary removal of symbols or objects that might cause others distress that can be easily removed. Also, consider the addition of banners and symbols or expressions of welcome that may make guests feel more at home.
- **Parking:** Is parking available or is public transportation nearby?
- **Accessibility:** Is it accessible to people with disabilities? (Remember to have a sign language interpreter for those who are deaf or hearing impaired.)





SECTION 4

Promoting Your Children's Sabbath: Ideas for All Faiths

Your Children's Sabbath will have the greatest impact if it is effectively promoted and publicized both within your place of worship and to the broader public. This chapter has suggestions and resources for:

- Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship
- Reaching Out to the Community and Media
- Reproducible Resources: bulletin and newsletter inserts and a reproducible Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer that, if appropriate for your faith tradition, may be photocopied and distributed to your members

Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship

❑ **Bulletin Inserts:** Place the first bulletin insert in this section announcing the Children's Sabbath in your congregation's bulletin or newsletter approximately one month before the date. (The second bulletin insert is intended to be distributed on the Children's Sabbath.)

❑ **Newsletter:** Include other information in your congregation's newsletter. (Adapt the sample congregational newsletter article on page 50 in this section or write your own.)

Example of what one congregation wrote last year:

Children's Sabbath at St. Mark's

Each year, during October, Children's Sabbaths are celebrated across the country. Sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths Weekend is an annual, multi-faith holiday that celebrates children as sacred gifts of the Divine, and provides the opportunity for communities of faith to renew and live out their moral responsibility to care, protect, and advocate for all children. This year's theme, based on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Call to End Poverty in America, focuses on poverty how it affects children, their health, education and opportunity, and what we do and what can do to help and lift others who are less fortunate than we are.

At St. Mark's, we join thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques and temples in this celebration by holding special worship services, education programs, and advocacy activities to engage people of faith in the lives of children and their families. More than the Sunday "where the kids get to do the whole service" (Wofie Smith), it is a time when we focus on the hopes, dreams and needs of our children and the children in our communities and around the world.

In preparation for Children's Sabbath, the Sunday School has focused on Matthew 25:40, "I tell you with certainty, since you did it for one of the least important of these brothers, you did it for me."

We have learned about how God wants us to live together and care about one another and:

Identified things all children need to live and grow—food, clothing, shelter, love, education, recreation;

Talked about how we can and do respond to the needs of others, including collecting school supplies, the socks box, and yesterday we took a tour of the FISH closet food pantry housed here at St. Mark's.

We hope that you will listen for these themes in today's service and music as:

The Youth share their summer service experience in the sermon;

We pray for all children and their families;

We hear in our music that God is ever present, learn that His sanctuary is anywhere we are, that we walk side-by-side with each other, and that we are all in His hands.

Enjoy!!

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

- ❑ **Posters:** Make posters announcing the Children's Sabbath and display them in the congregation's building. Involve the congregation's youths and children in making these posters.
- ❑ **Announcements:** Request time to make an announcement during the worship service one or two weeks before the observance.
- ❑ **Emails:** If your place of worship has an email list of members, get permission to send an email to the members reminding them of the upcoming Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Yard Sign:** Make a yard sign to place on the grounds in front of your place of worship announcing the Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Letters:** Send the bulletin insert or a letter about the Children's Sabbath home with the children who participate in your place of worship's educational programs.

After securing any needed permission to send a letter to the mailing list for your place of worship, write a letter describing the Children's Sabbath and encouraging members to join in the celebration on the designated weekend.

- ❑ **Website:** If your congregation has a website, put an announcement on the website.
- ❑ **Keep it up!** Don't forget to continue to focus attention on the Children's Sabbath and the needs and opportunities for response after the weekend itself. Use these same media channels to report on the congregation's response, announce the total items and money collected, share stories of children and families who were helped, and encourage continued action.



Sample Article for Congregation's Own Newsletter

[Name of Congregation] to Celebrate Children's Sabbath to Create Change for Children

On [date], [name of your congregation] will join with thousands of other congregations across the nation in the 18th annual multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend sponsored by the non-profit, non-partisan Children's Defense Fund and supported by [add the name of your denomination or religious tradition, if they have formally endorsed], Catholic Charities U.S.A., the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in the U.S., the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, the Union for Reform Judaism, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and more than 200 other religious organizations and denominations.

The Children's Sabbath will focus on creating change for children to bring hope and a better tomorrow. In our congregation, community, state, and nation, there are children who need us to create change for them now. Nationwide, there are 13.3 million children living in poverty, nine million children without health coverage, and countless children caught up in the pipeline to prison—a Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of going to prison in his lifetime.

As people of faith, we recognize the sacred responsibility to nurture and protect children and to work for the world God intends. On the Children's Sabbath, we will remember the children in poverty, without health coverage, and at risk in the pipeline to prison; we will reflect on the teachings of our faith that lead us to respond; and we will commit to putting our faith into action to help bring about a better tomorrow for children and for us all as we work to end poverty, ensure all children health coverage, and put children on paths of promise.

At [name of congregation], we will join in this united voice for children by [describe the events, giving dates and times]. This is [name of congregation]'s [number—e.g., first or tenth] time celebrating the Children's Sabbath. Leading the observance of Children's Sabbath here are [names of several of those who will be involved]. All are invited. This will be a good time to invite other families or children to visit our congregation. For more information or to find out how you can help, contact [name and phone number of contact person in the congregation].

Reaching Out to the Community and Media

- ❑ **Introduce the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration to clergy and interfaith associations**, civic groups, and other organizations that may be interested in supporting, attending, or publicizing your Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Mail a letter to civic, social, and religious organizations in your community**, offering to speak about the Children's Sabbath at their meetings or gatherings. For example, you might contact the PTA, Lions Club, Rotary, interfaith associations, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and others. Invite them to participate in your congregation's Children's Sabbath or to plan their own Children's Sabbath observance.
- ❑ **Attend community events** such as school open houses, local health fairs, and parades to distribute information about the Children's Sabbath, with permission of event organizers.
- ❑ **Put up posters or flyers** on community bulletin boards and in other permissible locations in the community.
- ❑ **Remember the impact of an invitation and the influence of "word of mouth."** Encourage congregation members to invite friends, neighbors, and colleagues to the Children's Sabbath. People who have written off organized religion as irrelevant to them and their lives may be pleasantly surprised to find your place of worship working joyfully for justice to improve the lives of children in our nation.
- ❑ **Adapt the sample news release in this section and submit it to the religion page of your local newspaper and to area religious newspapers or newsletters**, including denominational publications as appropriate. Follow up with a telephone call to each.
- ❑ **Reach out to a newspaper columnist.** If you have any contacts who know a columnist for the local paper, solicit their help in pitching the Children's Sabbath to the columnist.
- ❑ **Contact your local radio station** to learn the requirements and formats for having your Children's Sabbath events publicized as a Public Service Announcement (PSA) or on its community calendar or community bulletin board. You may be asked to prepare a "live read" script—a brief (10 seconds) script giving the basic information.

For example:

"[Name of congregation] located at [cross streets or address] is planning a special Children's Sabbath celebration and events on [date] to involve young and old in creating change for children to bring hope and a better tomorrow. Today in our nation, one in six children lives in poverty, one in nine children doesn't have health coverage, and a Black boy born in 2001 faces a one in three chance of imprisonment over his lifetime. On the Children's Sabbath, congregations of many faiths all across our nation are committing to create change for children so that children are lifted out of poverty, assured health care, and kept out of the pipeline to prison and put on the path to a positive future. For more information, call [name of congregation]."

Type it, double-spaced, with accurate names, times, and addresses. Be sure to include your name as a contact for the station with daytime and evening phone numbers. Send it to the station at least two weeks in advance.

- ❑ **Invite the local media—television, radio, and print—to attend and publicize your Children's Sabbath celebration.** Tell them about aspects of the events that promise to be visually interesting and emotionally compelling. Point out that the Children's Sabbath is a way to focus attention on serious problems facing children and on positive ways to make a difference. Let them know about any well-known speakers who will be participating in your Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Arrange for a local spokesperson or an interfaith panel of speakers to participate on a radio or television talk show program** about an issue of concern for the children in your community.
- ❑ **If your community has a cable or public access television station, contact the station's producers to arrange an interview.** Check if they will list the Children's Sabbath on their billboard of local events.
- ❑ **Write a letter to the editor** about the crises facing uninsured children and call for justice so that every child has health coverage. Offer the Children's Sabbath as a way to learn more and become involved. Watch the newspaper for articles about health care, poverty, and children in general, so that you can relate your letter to those articles and time it appropriately.

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

News Release for Local Media

One of the goals of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is to reach a wider, secular audience with a message about children's needs and the religious community's concern and commitment to meeting those needs. We encourage you to use the sample news release on the following page as a model for explaining the Children's Sabbath to your local newspaper's religion or community news editor and as a means of generating a news story. If you know of other congregations in your community that will also be celebrating the Children's Sabbath, contact them about preparing a joint news release.

Here are steps to follow:

- 1) Call your newspaper** to obtain the name of the religion writer or city editor. If you know someone who works for the newspaper or has contacts there, ask for his or her help in getting the news release into the right hands.
- 2) Email or fax the news release** to the right person at the paper in early October, two to three weeks before your Children's Sabbath.
- 3) Follow up with a telephone call a few days later.** Remember, the news media are looking to cover a

newsworthy story, not to promote a particular event. In your communication with them, emphasize that the Children's Sabbath is about children's issues of concern to many people and is a practical and inspiring example of how people are taking action. Emphasize that your celebration is part of a growing national movement among religious congregations to improve the well-being of America's children. Suggest that reporters contact the Children's Defense Fund's Communications Department at (202) 628-8787 for background information and a national perspective to supplement your own.

4) Send a letter of thanks to the reporter if the paper does cover your story, with copies to superiors. Building and maintaining a good relationship with the religion writer or other reporter may help gain coverage of follow-up efforts developing from your Children's Sabbath and of the Children's Sabbath in subsequent years.

5) Send a copy of any coverage you receive to the Religious Action Team at the Children's Defense Fund to assist in further promotion of the Children's Sabbath. Send information about your Children's Sabbath to CDF, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001 or email a description to sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org.

Sample News Release for Community Newspapers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October [date], 2009

[YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME] JOINS THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND IN MULTI-FAITH NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS® WEEKEND

[Name of your town, state]—[Your congregation's name] will [*describe events planned, such as holding a special worship service or conducting service and advocacy activities*] on [date and time] to draw attention to the needs of the children in our nation who suffer from poverty, lack of health coverage, and are in the pipeline to prison.

[Your congregation's name] is one of thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques, Bahá'í communities, temples, and other places of worship around the nation celebrating the Children's Sabbath this weekend as part of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s 18th annual observance. The multi-faith movement seeks to inspire congregations and religious organizations to work on behalf of children through prayer, service, and advocacy throughout the year.

The Children's Sabbaths theme this year, "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow," recognizes that there are millions of children in our nation today that urgently need adults to create change for them. More than 13 million children live in poverty in our nation—one in every six children. Nine million children lack health coverage—that means one in nine children may not be able to see a doctor when they need to. Countless children are caught in the pipeline to prison created by poverty, failing schools, lack of health and mental health coverage, racism, and other factors. A Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of imprisonment in his lifetime, and a Latino boy born that year stands a one in six chance of imprisonment.

"These statistics are not acts of God; they are the result of our political, economic, and short-sighted choices as a nation, states, and communities," asserts CDF President Marian Wright Edelman. "Religious congregations know that allowing children to be the poorest group of Americans, allowing children to suffer without health coverage, and allowing children to face a future of prison rather than promise stands against everything that they stand for and that the one they worship intends. That's why on the Children's Sabbaths weekend places of worship across the nation and across the religious spectrum are standing together and committing to create the kind of change our children need and the kind of change that will bring hope and a better tomorrow for children and for us all."

[*Add a statement from a local religious leader or young person.*]

The multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is sponsored by the non-profit, non-partisan Children's Defense Fund and supported by Catholic Charities U.S.A., the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in the U.S., the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, the Union for Reform Judaism, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and more than 200 other religious organizations and denominations.

For more information about [your congregation's name]'s celebration of the Children's Sabbath, contact [contact person's name, title, group affiliation, telephone number, and email address, if available].

###

Reproducible Resources

The following pages provide several resources that may be photocopied. No additional permission is needed. These resources can also be found at www.childrensdefense.org.

Announcement Insert (pages 55–56)

The first insert for your bulletin or newsletter is to announce to members of your congregation your plans to participate in the 2009 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend. Distribute it about one month before your Children's Sabbath events to alert your members and build excitement and participation.

This insert makes two half-page size inserts per photocopy. Photocopy these two pages back-to-back on 8 ½" x 11" paper and cut down the middle to make two inserts per photocopy.

Children's Sabbath Service Insert (pages 57–58)

This is an insert that may be used on the day you celebrate the Children's Sabbath or thereafter. Insert it into your bulletin, if your place of worship uses one, or simply hand it out at an appropriate time, perhaps as people arrive or depart.

The second announcement insert makes one folded insert with four half-size pages. Here's how to make it: Remove the page from the book (it is perforated, so you should be able to remove it easily). Make photocopies using a two-sided function on your copier, if possible. Fold each paper in the middle for a four-page insert.

If you are able, compile a list of specific ways that congregation members can serve by volunteering with or donating to community- or congregation-based programs serving

children or advocating on their behalf, with local contact information. Photocopy it and distribute along with the insert.

"Moments in America" Insert and "Each Day in America" Insert

These two inserts may be distributed at any time to raise awareness and encourage a prayerful response and commitment to act. Each of these inserts makes two half-page size inserts per photocopy. Photocopy each back-to-back on 8 ½" x 11" paper and cut down the middle to make two inserts per copy.

Reproducible Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer (pages 61–66)

While this guide will not be appropriate for every tradition, those for whom it is appropriate may wish to make photocopies and distribute it to their members the week before the Children's Sabbaths weekend to prepare their hearts and minds. To make the guide: Remove the pages from the book. Stack them on the photocopier in the order they were in the book. Use a two-sided photocopy function (two-sided to two-sided) and fold the completed stack in the middle. (Although it appears that the order of the pages is scrambled in this manual, if you keep the pages in that order and use a two-sided copying function, it will result in the pages being in the correct order for the final booklet.)

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

The 18th Annual Multi-Faith National Observance of Children's
Sabbaths® Weekend, October 16-18, 2009

What needs to change?

- More than 13 million children in our nation live in poverty.
- Nine million children in the U.S. don't have health coverage.
- A Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of going to prison in his lifetime.

When does it need to change?

Today! Children only have one childhood. We don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste.

Who is going to create the change?

We are! All across the nation, people of every religious tradition are joining in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend to bring hope and a better tomorrow for all children through serving children directly and working for justice on their behalf.

Why are we determined to create change for children today and bring hope and a better tomorrow?

Because our religious faith, our sacred texts, our religious traditions and teachings all recognize children as a sacred gift and responsibility and call us to act with justice and compassion, especially for the youngest, poorest, and most vulnerable.

What will a better tomorrow look like?

- Children and their families will have the income, nutrition, housing, and other things they need so that every child has the rich childhood experiences that help them grow and develop to their greatest potential...and our nation will be enriched by their well-being.
- Every child will have health coverage and can see a doctor to keep them healthy or to treat them when they are sick or injured...and our nation will be stronger because they thrive.
- All children will be set on paths of promise, with the family income, health and mental health care, safe and loving families and communities, and successful, supportive schools needed to put them on the path to a bright future...and our nation will be more successful through the positive contributions of every young person.

We will be joining the 18th Annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

We will join with other places of worship in:


- Learning more about the urgent needs of children in our nation, especially the needs of our nation's children in poverty, those lacking health coverage, and those in the pipeline to prison;
- Reflecting on the call of our faith to respond to the needs of those who are young, poor, and vulnerable;
- Creating change for children through hands-on service and work for justice; and
- Committing to help children throughout the year, through prayer, raising awareness, compassionate service, and justice-seeking advocacy.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

For more information or to help, contact:

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TOMORROW
THE SEA IS SO
WIDE AND
MY BOAT IS
SO SMALL


Children's Defense Fund

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

The 18th Annual Multi-Faith National Observance of Children's
Sabbaths® Weekend, October 16-18, 2009

What needs to change?

- More than 13 million children in our nation live in poverty.
- Nine million children in the U.S. don't have health coverage.
- A Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of going to prison in his lifetime.

When does it need to change?

Today! Children only have one childhood. We don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste.

Who is going to create the change?

We are! All across the nation, people of every religious tradition are joining in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend to bring hope and a better tomorrow for all children through serving children directly and working for justice on their behalf.

Why are we determined to create change for children today and bring hope and a better tomorrow?

Because our religious faith, our sacred texts, our religious traditions and teachings all recognize children as a sacred gift and responsibility and call us to act with justice and compassion, especially for the youngest, poorest, and most vulnerable.

What will a better tomorrow look like?

- Children and their families will have the income, nutrition, housing, and other things they need so that every child has the rich childhood experiences that help them grow and develop to their greatest potential...and our nation will be enriched by their well-being.
- Every child will have health coverage and can see a doctor to keep them healthy or to treat them when they are sick or injured...and our nation will be stronger because they thrive.
- All children will be set on paths of promise, with the family income, health and mental health care, safe and loving families and communities, and successful, supportive schools needed to put them on the path to a bright future...and our nation will be more successful through the positive contributions of every young person.

We will be joining the 18th Annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

We will join with other places of worship in:

- Learning more about the urgent needs of children in our nation, especially the needs of our nation's children in poverty, those lacking health coverage, and those in the pipeline to prison;
- Reflecting on the call of our faith to respond to the needs of those who are young, poor, and vulnerable;
- Creating change for children through hands-on service and work for justice; and
- Committing to help children throughout the year, through prayer, raising awareness, compassionate service, and justice-seeking advocacy.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

For more information or to help, contact:

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TO ME
THE SEER IS SO
WIDE AND
MY BOAT IS
SO SMALL


Children's Defense Fund

mentoring programs. Think through the kind of service that you will find most satisfying and sustainable and find a child-serving organization that needs that kind of help.

Speak Up.... While we work to ease children's immediate suffering through reaching out directly to them, we must speak up for justice to prevent the problems from arising in the first place. Your voice is needed to call for changes that will lift children and families out of poverty; assure that every child has health coverage, and replace the pipeline to prison with paths of promise. Connect with one or more sources of information that can alert you when advocacy actions are needed. (CDF's Action Council is one good source. Visit www.childrensdefense.org to sign up for action alerts.) Call, email, and visit your elected officials and others in leadership positions who can put the policies, systems, and structures in place to create the better tomorrow our children need and deserve.

To connect with others here who care about children and get involved in our place of worship's work for children,

contact: _____

To connect with the faith community resources and other work of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), the non-profit, non-partisan organization sponsoring the multi-faith *National Observance of*

Children's Sabbaths celebration, visit

www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths

or contact CDF's Religious Action staff

at sjacobson@childrensdefense.org.



The 2009 Multi-Faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Millions of children desperately need change:

Children living in poverty need us to create change. In our nation, one out of every six children—13.3 million children—live in families that are poor and don't have enough money for basics like nutrition, housing, utilities, and health care. Our children living in poverty need us to create change.

Children without health coverage need us to create change.

In our nation, one out of every nine children—nine million children—lack health coverage. During their most critical developmental years, uninsured children may not be able to see a doctor for check-ups to keep them healthy or for treatment when they are sick or injured. Untreated vision and hearing problems can snowball into problems learning at school where they can't see the blackboard or hear the teacher. Untreated dental problems can, at worst, lead to death, as was the case with Deamonte Driver, a 12-year-old boy in Maryland who died in 2007 from an infection caused by an abscessed tooth. Our children without health coverage need us to create change.

Children in the pipeline to prison need us to create change.

In our nation, the "land of opportunity," a Black boy born in 2001—just eight years old today—stands a one in three chance of imprisonment in his lifetime. The pipeline to prison is created by many factors, including poverty; lack of health and mental health care; abuse and neglect; inadequate schools; too few positive role models and caring adults engaged in a young person's life; and poor choices. Our children in the pipeline to prison need us to create change.

Children don't just need us to create change; they need us to create change *today*.

Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral wrote, in *Su Nombre es Hoy* (His Name is Today),

"We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow; his name is Today.'"

To the 13.3 million children living in poverty, we cannot answer, "Tomorrow;" their name is Today. Right now is the time they need nutritious food to eat, safe housing to shelter them, warm clothing to protect them, school supplies, and books and music and all of the enriching experiences that will help their minds and spirits to grow along with their bodies.

To the nine million children lacking health coverage, we cannot answer, "Tomorrow;" their name is Today. Right now is the time their bodies and minds are developing, when they need regular check-ups to keep them healthy, timely treatment when they are sick or injured, and vision and hearing screenings to ensure their learning isn't hindered.

To the children, especially Black and Latino boys, swept along the pipeline to prison by poverty, lack of health care and mental health care, abuse and neglect, poor schools, and other factors, we cannot answer, "Tomorrow;" their name is Today. Right now is the time they need families with adequate income, successful schools, health and mental health care, caring families, and safe communities to put them on a path of promise and help them succeed.

Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.

Nothing which is true and beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.

*No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint; therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.**

With hope, faith, and love, we must do what we can to help usher in a better tomorrow for our children. What can you do?

Pray.... Pray for children in need, especially children in poverty, lacking health care, and trapped in the pipeline to prison. Pray for the strength, courage, persistence, and wisdom to do all you can do to help children and work for justice. Pray for hope, faith, and love.

Learn more and tell others.... Find out as much as you can about the problems facing children and families in our nation, especially poverty, lack of health coverage, and the pipeline to prison crisis. Visit www.childrensdefense.org for information, downloadable resources, and links to other organizations working on behalf of children and families. Ask around and find out what organizations are working in your community and what kind of help they need.

Reach out.... Find an opportunity to serve children and families in need, especially those living in poverty, lacking health coverage, or in the pipeline to prison. There are countless options, from Head Start programs to health clinics to

*Reinhold Niebuhr, in *The Irony of American History*, 1952.

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Moments in America for All Children

- Every second a public school student is suspended.*
- Every 11 seconds a high school student drops out.**
- Every 19 seconds a child is arrested.
- Every 20 seconds a public school student is corporally punished.*
- Every 21 seconds a baby is born to an unmarried mother.
- Every 33 seconds a baby is born into poverty.
- Every 35 seconds a child is confirmed as abused or neglected.
- Every 39 seconds a baby is born without health insurance.
- Every minute a baby is born to a teen mother.
- Every 2 minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.
- Every 4 minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense.
- Every 7 minutes a child is arrested for a violent crime.
- Every 18 minutes a baby dies before his or her first birthday.
- Every 44 minutes a child or teen dies from an accident.
- Every 3 hours a child or teen is killed by a firearm.
- Every 5 hours a child or teen commits suicide.
- Every 6 hours a child is killed by abuse or neglect.
- Every 14 hours a woman dies from complications of childbirth or pregnancy.

*Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each)

Prayer

- O God, help us to recover our hope for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our courage for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our discipline for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our ability to work together for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our values for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our faith in Thee for our children's sake. Amen.
- (By Marian Wright Edelman)

To connect with the faith community resources and other work of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), the non-profit, non-partisan organization sponsoring the multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebration, visit www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths or contact CDF's Religious Action staff at sjacobson@childrensdefense.org.

Data calculated by the Children's Defense Fund.

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Each Day in America

- 1 mother dies in childbirth.
- 4 children are killed by abuse or neglect.
- 5 children or teens commit suicide.
- 8 children or teens are killed by firearms.
- 33 children or teens die from accidents.
- 77 babies die before their first birthdays.
- 192 children are arrested for a violent crime.
- 383 children are arrested for drug abuse.
- 906 babies are born at low birthweight.
- 1,153 babies are born to teen mothers.
- 1,672 public school students are corporally punished.*
- 1,839 babies are born without health insurance.
- 2,261 high school students drop out.*
- 2,383 children are confirmed as abused or neglected.
- 2,411 babies are born into poverty.
- 4,017 babies are born to unmarried mothers.
- 4,302 children are arrested.
- 17,132 public school students are suspended.

* Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each)

Prayer of Commitment by Marian Wright Edelman

- God did not call us to succeed,
- God called us to serve.
- God did not call us to win,
- God called us to work.
- God did not call us to live long,
- God called us to live for [God.]
- God did not call us to be happy,
- God called us to be hopeful.
- God did not call us to fame,
- God called us to faith.
- God did not call us to seek power,
- God called us to seek peace.
- God did not call us to loot the earth and each other,
- God called us to love our earth and each other. Amen.

Data calculated by the Children's Defense Fund.



Saturday (continued)

we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.” It has hung there for the nearly 20 years that I have served the Children’s Defense Fund and was there before I arrived as Marian Wright Edelman has persisted in her life’s work for justice for our nation’s children.

It is a reminder to all of us who would work to create change for our children today and bring hope for a better tomorrow that while we are responsible for the work of our hands, we rely on the everlasting love of God to prosper our work. As we join in the *National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths* weekend, and as we commit ourselves to new, faithful efforts, we must put our trust in God to make the results of our work evident to our children and our children’s children.

Prayer

Everlasting God, Thank you for loving me as a faithful mother whose love has no end. Help me to cherish and seek justice for all of your beloved children with that same persistent, faithful, enduring love. Remind me that I am called to do my best, to work as your servant, and trust you to prosper my work for the benefit of the children. Amen.

**Create Change for Children Today:
Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow**

**A Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer
For the National Observance of Children’s
Sabbaths® Celebration**

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Sunday: Create

Reading: Genesis 1:26–2:3

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” So God created humankind in [God’s] image, in the image of God [God] created them; male and female [God] created them. . . . God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1:26a, 27, 31)

Reflection

We see different things when we look into the face of a child. If it is a child in our extended family, perhaps we see a younger version of ourselves, or a grandparent’s characteristic nose, or a spouse’s smile. We might see in them the anticipation of who they will become; the embodiment of our hopes and dreams. If it is a preschooler having a tantrum in the grocery store or a child playing on a school playground or a teen laughing on the sidewalk with friends, we may focus more on the behavior and how it makes us feel about the child—irritated, delighted, anxious, uncertain, nostalgic, upset, happy, or amused. If we see the image of a child flash on the TV screen or frozen in a newspaper or magazine photo, many of us bring assumptions or expectations about who that child is and what the story will be—often based on the child’s age, race, ethnicity, and other aspects of their appearance.

Imagine if we would behold each and every child as made in the image of God. Imagine, if each time we saw a child, we heard the sound of God’s voice regarding God’s handiwork and declaring it “very good.” How differently might we nurture the children in our lives? How differently might we regard the children we encounter in public? How differently might we advocate on behalf of the children whom we will never meet, who may be represented only by a statistic or an image captured in the media, but who likewise bear the image of God?

Saturday: O Prosper the Work of Our Hands!

Reading: Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. . . . Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands! (Psalm 90:1–2, 16–17)

Reflection

“Mums don’t retire.” That’s what a group of very poor women in Nairobi told Ingrid Monroe when she announced her intention to retire from her microcredit work providing very small loans for self-employment that was helping these families move out of poverty. Their words rang true to Ingrid, and so to this day she continues her work to end poverty, expanded now to ensure health care and decent housing as well as microloans. “Mums,” or mothers, don’t retire. Twice in the second verse of this psalm, the Hebrew word for childbirth is used to describe God’s actions creating our world. God, forming the world as a mother, never retires; “from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

The psalm goes on to remind us that while God is eternal, we humans are all too finite and fallible; “our years come to an end like a sigh.” (verse 9b) We are called to do all that we can as God’s servants to work for the world that God intends, but at the end of our days—or of our lifetimes—we must rely on God to prosper the work of our hands.

As I read this psalm, it called to mind a passage from Reinhold Niebuhr that is framed and hangs in the office of Marian Wright Edelman, the Children’s Defense Fund’s president: “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore

Friday (continued)

But set aside your hopelessness and dream with the imagination of a child. What is your vision for the better tomorrow we are called to create, with God's help? What would it be like if no child is born for "calamity" but every child experiences blessing? What would it mean for us, God's people, to be "a delight"? What would we be doing, how would we be living?

There's an extraordinary new documentary, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, about the women's movement in Liberia that led to the downfall of the dictator Charles Taylor and the eventual election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. And it all started with a woman, Leymah Gwobee, who had what she described as a "crazy dream" of standing up in church and calling on the women to lead the way to peace. She acted on her dream, and not only did the women of the church respond, but a Muslim woman who happened to be there that day broadened the dream to include engaging the Muslim women as well. What ensued was long, hard, determined work, at times dangerous and at times thrilling, at times scary and at times joyous. But it started with a dream and a belief that we can act on our dreams of a better world for our children and all of us. And that better tomorrow can come.

Prayer

God of all possibility, attune my heart to your dream for our world. Move my hands to act to make it so. Open my mouth to speak up for a better world for your beloved children. Amen.

Now, what if you remembered each and every day, as you stood before the mirror while getting ready for the day, that *you* bear the image of God. What responsibility would you feel for caring for and being a worthy steward of this very good creation?

Prayer

Loving Creator, help me to see your image in the face of every child. Help me to treat all children with the love, respect, and dignity that would honor your likeness in each of them and in me. Amen.

Monday: Change

Reading: Genesis 21:8-20

And God heard the voice of the boys, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. (Gen. 21:17-19)

Reflection

Many of us are familiar with the prayer, "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other." (*The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*) It has been needle-pointed onto pillows, airbrushed on posters, shellacked onto plaques, and otherwise thoroughly domesticated! It is commonly known as the "Serenity Prayer," and it is easy, and comforting, to focus on the first phrase about accepting what we cannot change. Far more challenging is the call to find courage to change the things that should be changed, and most essential is the plea for the wisdom of discernment.

Monday (continued)

In our passage today, Hagar and her child are up against grim odds. They've cruelly been sent into the wilderness without all the resources they need to survive.

When the water runs out, Hagar is in despair and can't bear the prospect of watching her beloved child die, so she thrusts him under the bushes and sits down "a good way off," begging, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." God's word to Hagar, and to us, is that this is not the time to throw our hands up in the air, to give up in grief and despair and accept that the child must die. God hears the cries of our children and bids us to get up, lift up our children, and open our eyes to find new and unexpected resources that can save our children.

When we feel like there's nothing we can do to help our children, when we're ready to sit down and avert our eyes from their suffering, pay attention. This may be the time that God is summoning you to get up and raise up the children with you. This is the time to look with new and ever attentive eyes to find new resources and opportunities to save our children. Courage.

Prayer

God, give me the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other, for the sake of your beloved children. Amen.

right paths and restored to their families and communities as the blessings that they are meant to be. Hope. It's real, if we get to work. Hope. It's real, when we create change for our children and a better tomorrow.

Prayer

Dear God, I know your heart weeps as does my own at the loss of so many children and young people. Keep my heart tender enough to feel that grief, but guide me to do the hard work that will, by your grace, create hope for our future and bring our children home to communities of love, support, encouragement, and positive paths forward. Amen.

Friday: A Better Tomorrow

Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25

For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating: for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime.... They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well. (Isaiah 65:17-20a, 23)

Reflection

Young children are often effortless visionaries, frequent dreamers. Ask a young child how the world should be, what we should do about big problems like children going hungry or homeless, how they think God wants people to act. They will quickly paint an extraordinary vision with their words, unhampered by an adult's cynicism, despair, or self-limiting need to be "realistic." Too often, when we try to envision a "better tomorrow" that reflects God's intentions for our world, we get bogged down in hopelessness.

Thursday: Bring Hope

Reading: Jeremiah 31:15–17

Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country.

Reflection

Hope. It can sound so ethereal, so intangible, so passive, as if hope can be found by sitting around and thinking positive thoughts. Our passage from Jeremiah presents a different perspective on hope. First, hope is created here by our work. Sitting and weeping, no matter how heartfelt, isn't what creates hope. Hope comes as "a reward for your work." And that hope takes a very concrete form: The hope for our future comes in the form of our children returned to safety from an experience of exile. Hope: a reward for work. Hope: the restoration of our children to safety.

When we hear that one out of every three Black boys born in 2001 is at risk of imprisonment in his lifetime, we might well weep bitterly. Imagine, losing thousands upon thousands of young boys, bright with promise, to a grim future locked up far from those who love them and from a world to which they could contribute. Bitter weeping is understandable in the face of the overwhelming and destructive confluence of forces that make up the pipeline to prison crisis: poverty, failing schools, lack of health care and mental health care, too few positive adult influences, and the insidious influence of racism.

But our hope will come from our work to bring our children home by dismantling the pipeline to prison; our hope will come in the very real form of our children who are no longer sent into the exile of imprisonment but kept on

Tuesday: For Children

Reading: Deuteronomy 24:17–18

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

Reflection

We are called to create change for children because they bear the very image of God, and we are called to create change for children because they are among the most vulnerable for whom God demands particular protection, especially fierce defense and unassailable justice.

Again and again in scripture we hear God's demand to ensure justice for the widow, the orphan, the alien. Why? Because they were the society's most vulnerable. The orphan, like today's child, had no power to provide for herself or himself, was dependent on adults to meet her or his basic needs. With the death of her husband, the widow had lost the source of her family's income and faced the vulnerability of poverty, like many of today's families in poverty struggling with job loss or jobs that don't pay a living wage. Without income, she too relied on a principled society that ensured a minimum standard of living, that didn't ignore her difficult circumstances. The resident alien, like many of today's immigrants with various legal standings, lacked many of the connections and cultural ties to the broader society and could easily be taken advantage of or excluded.

Why must we assure justice, protect their rights, provide for the most basic needs of children, vulnerable families, and immigrants? Is it out of the goodness of our hearts, a sense of charity, a passing impulse or whim when it's convenient? No, we are called to protect the most vulnerable at all times because each of us is reminded by God that we have been dependent on God's protection, by God's standing up for us. At some time in our ancestry, at some point in our lives, as part of the history of God's people—we have been vulnerable, have shared an experience of oppression, and we have known deliverance, justice, and rescue.

Tuesday (continued)

Some years back there was a movie titled *Pay It Forward* that depicted how ordinary people, when they've been the recipients of unexpected and needed care and help, can respond by "paying it forward," expressing their gratitude by doing the same to someone else in need. Perhaps God is really just telling us, in today's lingo, to "pay it forward" through acts of compassion and justice for all children.

Prayer

Lover of Justice, you stand up for all who are oppressed and demand liberation from oppression. You have been my sure and strong defense. Help me to stand up for children, families in poverty, immigrants, and others who might be excluded. Amen.

Wednesday: Today...

Reading: Psalm 70

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me! Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire to hurt me. Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!" turn back because of their shame.

Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore "God is great!" But I am poor and needy; hasten to help me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!

Reflection

"How long, O Lord?" is a cry often heard on the lips of the psalmists. The writer of Psalm 70 urges, "Do not delay!" There is an urgency, a need for relief. That cry of pain, "How long?" might well be on the lips of our nation's nearly nine million children without health coverage, who may not be able to see a doctor when they need to. That cry of "Do not delay!" might well be on the

lips of parents and all who love and care about children suffering needlessly because they lack the health care we certainly have the capacity to provide and that many of us enjoy ourselves.

That sense of urgency is something Chilean poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature Gabriela Mistral understood. She knew the depths of loss and pain over children; her nephew committed suicide as a teen, and a child she had adopted also died. In *Su Nombre es Hoy* (His Name is Today), she wrote, "We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer, 'Tomorrow,' his name is Today."

Many things compete for our attention on an individual level: work or school deadlines, bills to pay, laundry to wash, meals to prepare. On a congregational level, we also find many demands: classes to conduct, worship to plan, committees to meet, buildings to be maintained. As a nation, our elected leaders find there is much that clamors for attention and our resources: economic woes, international crises, partisan wrangling, campaign fundraising. But to all of us, we must hear the cry, "Do not delay!" and know that as God's hands and feet on earth, we must do all we can, today, for children who are "poor and needy," in the words of the psalmist, whose need for health care and other basics remind us that we cannot answer, "Tomorrow." The child's name is Today.

Prayer

Our Help and Our Deliverer, make haste to help children in need, and use me to bring your relief to them. Keep urgency burning in my heart so that I don't delay for a moment to do all that I can for your beloved children. Amen.



SECTION 5

Bahá'í Resources for the Children's Sabbath

This section provides suggestions for learning activities for children, youth and adults, devotional and fellowship activities for the Nineteen Day Feast for the Month of 'Ilm (Knowledge), selections from the Bahá'í Writings on the theme of this year's National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration, and

resources for continuing the community's involvement in the themes of the Children's Sabbath beyond the event itself. Please utilize these as appropriate for your community. A brief Glossary is provided at the end of this section to acquaint the reader with terms that may be unfamiliar.

Suggestions for Observances and Related Activities

- **Feast of 'Ilm (Knowledge):** Because this Nineteen Day Feast falls within the timeframe of the national Children's Sabbaths observance, consider using the program described, and/or including the readings and prayers about faith in action reprinted in this section, for the devotional, consultative and fellowship portions of Feast. Include a diversity of readers, including children and youth. Consider inviting others to serve refreshments to the children and youth, and/or to those who work to fill the needs of children and youth, such as teachers, parents, grandparents, social workers and health care providers. During the administrative portion of Feast, encourage consultation about specific needs and hopes of children and youth in your community.
- **Devotional meetings:** Encourage community and individual devotional meetings during the Children's Sabbaths weekend to focus on the theme of "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow, perhaps including some of the readings and prayers reprinted in this section. Consider inviting children and youth to be involved in planning and presenting a devotional meeting on the subject of creating a better world.
- **Children's and youth classes:** Encourage children's and youth classes in the community to utilize the materials in this manual for their participation in observing the Children's Sabbath.
- **Ongoing community learning through local study groups or weekend workshops:** Consider beginning study circles in your community that help develop strong, vibrant communities and families, in which children and youth can thrive. Many Bahá'í curricula support the themes of providing for the needs of children, creating a more just and prosperous world and developing nurturing communities. For a variety of educational resources, see www.ruhiresources.org and www.core-curriculum.org.
- **Encourage families in your community to subscribe to, and read together, *Brilliant Star*** (a magazine for children ages 6–12 that emphasizes character development), *Tabula Rasa* (a Bahá'í arts magazine) or *Bahá'í Parenting* (an electronic newsletter that supports spiritual parenting). For more information, visit www.brilliantstarmagazine.org, www.tabularasaarts.com, or www.bahaiparent.com.
- **Deepen your personal understanding about the principles of justice and peace by perusing the Bahá'í Writings** through books from the Bahá'í Distribution Service at www.BahaiBookstore.com/index.cfm or talks and web resources available at www.Bahai.us/Bahai-multimedia. Of special interest: the series *In Service to the Common Good*, prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States in 2004, 2005 and 2006, with stories about effective service projects around the world. Download from www.Bahai.us/in-service-to-the-common-good or purchase from the Bahá'í Distribution Service (BDS).

Passages and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings

Related to “Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow”

O CHILDREN OF DUST! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian No. 49

O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian No. 54

They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor, for great is the honor destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience. By My life! There is no honor, except what God may please to bestow, that can compare to this honor. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 202

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 285

God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 290

The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 107

What could be better before God than thinking of the poor? For the poor are beloved by our heavenly Father. When Christ came upon the earth, those who believed in Him and followed Him were the poor and lowly, showing that the poor were near to God. When a rich man believes and follows the Manifestation of God, it is a proof that his wealth is not an obstacle and does not prevent him from attaining the pathway of salvation. After he has been tested and tried, it will be seen whether his possessions are a hindrance in his religious life. But the poor are especially beloved of God. Their lives are full of difficulties, their trials continual, their hopes are in God alone. Therefore, you must assist the poor as much as possible, even by sacrifice of yourself. No deed of man is greater before God than helping the poor. Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of

Bahá'í Resources for the Children's Sabbath

them. When one is physically destitute, spiritual thoughts are more likely. Poverty is a stimulus toward God. Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty. The greatest means for prevention is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. One of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and laborer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent—each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 216

Soon will your swiftly-passing days be over, and the fame and riches, the comforts, the joys provided by this rubbish-heap, the world, will be gone without a trace. Summon ye, then, the people to God, and invite humanity to follow the example of the Company on high. Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race.... Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 1-3

As to the difference between that material civilization now prevailing, and the divine civilization which will be one of the benefits to derive from the House of Justice, it is this: material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him. In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamored of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to whatever will bring light to the world and will further those qualities which are acceptable at the Holy Threshold of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 132

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behavior toward them – these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose.

Ridván Messages of the Universal House of Justice, Ridván 157, 2000, p. 8

FEAST of 'ILM (Knowledge) Children's Sabbath Program

(The Nineteen Day Feast is the principal gathering in each local Bahá'í community, every Bahá'í month, for the three-fold purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship.

This activity may also be used at other community gatherings.)

Preparation

- Prepare an environment that warmly welcomes friends of all ages. Consider adding color, through flowers or artwork; create inviting, comfortable areas and surfaces on which all ages can sit, including on the floor, with pillows and throws. As the friends enter, have cheerful music playing, such as melodies from different cultures or children's songs.
- In advance, make several photocopies of the previous pages, "Passages and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings Related to Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow."
- See "Fellowship Portion" on the following page for suggestions of refreshments tied to the theme, as well as stories and games to prepare.

Devotional Portion

- Lovingly introduce the theme of the evening/day's devotions: Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow. Invite readers to intone selections from the photocopied "Passages and Prayers."
- Consider using music to help set the tone, such as: "It Takes a Village," *It Takes a Village*, Joe Crone; "Care for the Stranger," "O God! Educate these Children," *Immerse Yourself, Prayers and Writings for the Young at Heart*, Joe Crone; "Behold a Candle," *Lift Up Your Voices and Sing, vol.1*

Consultative Portion

- Open the consultative portion of Feast (or other gathering) by reading aloud the last selection of "Passages and Prayers from the Bahá'í Writings," from the Universal House of Justice.
- Introduce the theme and purpose of the Children's Sabbath and suggest that consultation be centered on the needs of our children and youths and how we may respond, creating change for children today in our daily

acts of justice and compassion for the poor, vulnerable, and oppressed. How can our Bahá'í communities create an atmosphere in which children, "our most precious treasure," feel that they belong and share in its purpose, and thus ensure the character of our future society?

- Refer to "Suggestions for the Observances and Related Activities" for ideas and possible action steps or tools your community may wish to pursue after identifying issues.
- Divide into three multi-age consultation groups to address some of the issues facing children and youths and how we might respond:
 - Give each group several copies of The Bahá'í International Community's Statement on Poverty — *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*, with discussion questions.
 - Give each group several copies of **one** section from the "Children's Concerns Primer" (Section 2, Children's Sabbath Manual, Volume 18):
 - A Child Poverty Primer
 - A Children's Health Coverage Primer
 - A Pipeline to Prison Primer
- Ask each group to read these documents aloud together, consider the discussion questions, and appoint someone to record their findings and suggestions. Allow groups about 30 minutes to read and consult before returning to the large group for sharing ideas.
- Ask each group's spokesperson to summarize the issue they studied and the results of their consultation.
- Together, plan action steps that can be completed in three to six months. Decide how progress will be evaluated, and who will communicate needs and encouragement to others. Celebrate your collective dedication to our children and youths!

Fellowship Portion

■ Refreshments:

- Consider making a “friendship soup” or “friendship salad,” with many diverse vegetables or fruits representing how we each bring a special sweetness and flavor to the community. If possible, ask each person or family to bring one ingredient – these can be added to the simmering soup pot, or to the salad bowl, or salad bar, as each arrives.
- Play a cooperative game such as “Hidden Treasures” from *Brilliant Star* Nov/Dec 2008.
- Invite a Bahá'í Youth Workshop dance group to perform the “Poverty Dance” or another performance arts piece about overcoming social injustice.

■ Activities:

- Read or tell the folktale, *Stone Soup*, prior to serving the “friendship soup” or “friendship salad.” You may ask your children's librarian for a copy of this Swedish folktale.

Lesson Plans are available online at www.childrensdefense.org.

Glossary of some Bahá'í terms:

'Abdu'l-Bahá: (1844–1921) Son of Bahá'u'lláh, designated His successor and authorized interpreter of His writings. Named Abbas after His grandfather, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was known to the general public as Abbas Effendi. Bahá'u'lláh gave Him such titles as “the Most Great Branch,” “the Mystery of God,” and “the Master.” After Bahá'u'lláh's passing, He chose the name 'Abdu'l-Bahá, meaning “Servant of Bahá'u'lláh.” 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited the United States, on an extensive speaking tour, in 1912.

Báb, the: The title, meaning “Gate,” assumed by Siyyid 'Ali-Muhammad, who was the Prophet-Founder of the Bábi Faith and the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh. Born 20 October 1819, the Báb proclaimed Himself to be the Promised One of Islam and announced that His mission was to alert the people to the imminent advent of “Him Whom God shall make manifest,” namely, Bahá'u'lláh. Because of these claims, the Báb was executed by order of Náziri'd-Dín Shah on 9 July 1850.

Bahá'í Writings: The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá constitute Bahá'í Sacred Scripture.

Bahá'u'lláh: Title assumed by Mírzá Husayn-Ali, Founder of the Bahá'í Faith. Born on 12 November 1817, He declared His mission as the Promised One of all Ages in April 1863 and passed away in

Akka, Palestine, on 29 May 1892 after 40 years of imprisonment, banishment, and house arrest. Bahá'u'lláh's writings are considered by Bahá'ís to be direct revelation from God.

Local Spiritual Assembly: The local administrative body in the Bahá'í Faith, ordained in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The nine members are directly elected by secret ballot each year at Ridvan from among the adult believers in a community.

Nineteen Day Feast: The principal gathering in each local Bahá'í community, every Bahá'í month, for the threefold purpose of worship, consultation, and fellowship. The Bahá'í calendar is composed of nineteen months of nineteen days each. The names of the months are attributes of God, such as Glory, Mercy, Knowledge, etc. The months are referred to by both their Arabic names and the English translation.

Social and Economic Development (SED)

Project: An initiative designed to upraise the quality of human life. For Bahá'ís, this involves efforts to develop the capacity of the community to address its own needs and ensure the well-being of all its members through the application of spiritual principles including education, consultation, and reflection.





SECTION 6

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Worship is at the heart of most Children's Sabbaths. It is in worship that we praise God who has blessed us with children and charged us with their care. It is in worship that we hear again the prophets and their warnings against injustice and their call to justice. It is in worship that we renew our commitment to follow Jesus who said to welcome the children, because in doing so we welcome him and not just him but the one who sent him. As we go forth from worship, may we continue to praise God with our work to nurture and protect all children.

Following you will find:

- **Worship Suggestions:** Worship suggestions drawn from Children's Sabbath worship services celebrated by congregations all across the country. Use or adapt those that would be appropriate for your church.
- **Involving Children and Youths:** Suggestions for creative ways to include the children and youths of your congregation in the Children's Sabbath service. The Children's Sabbath should not be turned over to the children with adults serving only as "audience," since this is meant to be an intergenerational event that underscores the role people of all ages have to play in meeting children's needs. At the same time, it is an important time to fully engage children and youths. Be sure to involve them in the planning and leadership of the day.
- **Worship Resources:** Prayers, readings, and music from a variety of traditions: Protestant, Catholic, and Episcopal. Use or adapt them as appropriate for your congregation's tradition.
- **Sermon Resources:** Notes on the texts designated in the Episcopal, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic lectionaries, as well as sermon notes on another text for those not bound by the lectionary, and two sample children's sermons.

Worship Suggestions

- **Invite members to light candles for the 40 days leading up to the Children's Sabbath**, as suggested by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the National Council of Churches, and then light a symbolic 40th candle on the Children's Sabbath. (For more information, visit <http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/lightacandlebrochure.html>.)
- **The week before the Children's Sabbath, distribute copies of the Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer** on pages 61–66 in this resource to help adult congregation members prepare their hearts and minds for the Children's Sabbath. **First United Methodist Church of Georgetown, Texas**, distributed the daily devotional guide, focused their worship service on children's concerns, and included a presentation to the Methodist Federation for Social Action.
- **Leading up to and on the Children's Sabbath, distribute the bulletin inserts beginning** on pages 55–56. If you don't use the bulletin insert, prepare your own announcement about the Children's Sabbath to include in the bulletin so that worshipers, especially visitors, will understand the special focus and significance of the service.
- **Invite on-site child care or Head Start staff, administrators, parents, and children**, and others to attend your Children's Sabbath.
- **Decorate the sanctuary** with images and materials that bring to life the focus on children and justice.
- **Use bulletin covers that emphasize the Children's Sabbath.** **Living Waters Sanctuary in Virginia Beach, Virginia**, put the tender and captivating photo of an infant on its bulletin cover along with the question, "When will we hear Dr. King's call to end poverty in America?" **All Saints Parish in Brookline, Massachusetts**, used the materials for Episcopal liturgies from the Children's Sabbaths resource manual. On their bulletin cover, they noted, "On this Children's Sabbath we reflect on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call to build and be the Beloved Community where all people— young and old—can live out their God-given potential," which helped orient worshippers to the day's special focus.
- **On the Children's Sabbath, distribute the children's activity bulletins** in this section, along with crayons, markers, or pencils.
- **Distribute special tokens to every child** attending the Children's Sabbath, such as ribbons or stickers.
- **Use or adapt some of the prayers and other worship resources provided in this section. Or, use readings from prayer and worship books that include a social action theme, or create your own materials** on the theme of creating change for children to bring hope and a better tomorrow, especially as it relates to alleviating child poverty, ensuring children have health care, and putting children on paths of promise.
- **Explore the resources of other faith traditions** in this manual; some may be appropriate to include in your service.
- **Incorporate resources from your denomination** that focus on children and child advocacy.
- **Focus the sermon or homily on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf.** Sermon notes on the designated lectionary texts for the Revised Common Lectionary, Roman Catholic Lectionary, and the Episcopal Lectionary for the third weekend of October beginning on page 88. There are also sermon notes on other especially suitable texts for those who don't preach from the lectionary cycle. Other sections of this resource provide information and stories about children that you may want to include in your sermon or homily.
- **Invite guest speakers to preach or give another address on the needs of children and our call to respond.** Encourage the speaker to highlight opportunities for members to become involved themselves and to speak out for children. A guest speaker who is the director of community outreach for Franklin County Children's Services addressed the Children's Sabbath at **Crossroads United Methodist Church in Columbus, Ohio**. **First United Methodist Church of Dayton, Ohio**, invited the executive director of the United Methodist Children's Home to serve as the morning speaker. In **Livingston, Montana, Holbrook United Methodist Church's** Children's Sabbath featured two guest speakers who were directors of two after-school programs.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

- **Have a special “time with children” or Children’s Sermon** during the service, so that the Children’s Sabbath focus can be presented to them in an especially engaging and age-appropriate way. See the sample Children’s Sermons on pages 98–99. Or, in a role reversal, have one of the children give an “Adults’ Sermon,” a short message from a child to the adults.
- **Offer prayers for children.** Specifically name problems afflicting children in your community, as well as crises affecting children across our nation and throughout our world. Invite congregation members to pray for the children in your church, too.
- **Incorporate a special blessing of children.** For the altar call at **Trinity Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio**, all of the children and youth were asked to come to the altar. The adults were asked to surround them and a special prayer focused on children was prayed by a deacon.
- **Select hymns and anthems that focus on children and our responsibilities to them.** See the music suggestions on page 87.
- **Dedicate ministries/programs serving children or commission staff and board members of child-serving programs** affiliated with the congregation and celebrate their work as part of the congregation’s ministry.
- **Honor people who are creating change for children and bringing hope and a better tomorrow through their work with and for children.** At an appropriate point in the service, invite these professionals and/or volunteers (contacted in advance) to come forward for a brief time of recognition for their work putting their faith into action to seek justice for children, with prayers for God’s guidance in their work and prayers for the children they serve. Present them with a flower, ribbon, or other token so that later others might identify them and offer personal appreciation.
- **Collect special offerings for children and families.** In addition to monetary offerings, consider collecting items to help children and families, such as toothbrushes and children’s toothpaste, nutritious food, or diapers. Announce the special offering in advance. **Good Shepherd + St. Mark’s, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church, in Madras, Oregon**, collected toothbrushes, stuffed animals, and soft blankets for children in local foster care at their Children’s Sabbath

service. The items were brought forward during the offering and placed at the base of the altar as part of the worship. Or, collect a monetary offering designated to benefit an organization serving or working on behalf of children. The **First United Methodist Church of Bella Vista, Arkansas, and Christ Church United Methodist Women in New York, New York**, and others made donations to the Children’s Defense Fund.

- **Use various media to focus more powerfully on children and their needs.** Some congregations create PowerPoint presentations or slide shows with images of children in need.
- **Include a dramatic presentation** to especially engage children and young people, as well as adults.

Involve Children and Youths

The Children’s Sabbath, unlike a traditional Youth Sunday or Children’s Day, is intended to involve adults in the planning and leadership of the day. As members of the congregation, adults must recognize the challenges facing children in our nation and their collective responsibility to respond. However, the Children’s Sabbath is an important time to include children and youths in the planning and leadership of the worship service and all other events.

Reports **St. John’s Church in Westwood, Massachusetts**, about their fifth annual Children’s Sabbath: “We celebrated the Children’s Sabbath service on October 26th at St. John’s Episcopal, Westwood. We had a children’s sermon, and young people reading the scripture lessons and the prayers that they had written in class the week prior. We also conducted a project during the month of October: We collected school supplies for Epiphany, a tuition-free Episcopal middle school in Dorchester, Massachusetts.... We worked hard to raise awareness about issues of poverty that affect children, and had our kids show the congregation what they had learned. We have found that the adults really listen when their kids are doing the teaching... especially when it is kids teaching about kids! Now that we have been participating in the Children’s Sabbath for many years, we feel that folks of all ages are learning more about poverty in our city and are getting more involved in our various outreach programs.”

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

For example, children and youths can:

- **Prepare for the Children's Sabbath during a "Kids' Night Out," overnight, or other event.**

Reports **Sts. James-George's Episcopal Church in Jermyn, Pennsylvania**, of their fifth annual Children's Sabbath, "We always start our Children's Sabbath with a lock-in on Saturday during which the children practice for Sunday, bake for coffee hour, and make a craft to distribute to the congregation. This year, they decorated the bulletin board with helping hands—each naming a way they would help a child. They have snack, free time, and end with a movie. On Sunday, the children take the place of the choir, they read, collect the offering, and bring up the gifts."

- **Review the Children's Sabbath service and prepare the week before** (perhaps in church school classes). They can practice responses and hymns so they may join more fully in the Children's Sabbath service.
- **Design and paint the paraments** (such as the cloth draping the pulpit) **or make a special banner.** For the third Children's Sabbath celebrated by **Asbury United Methodist Church in Gahanna, Ohio**, during the service a banner was presented to the church in honor of the Sabbath Day for us to help end poverty in America, and a love offering was taken as well.
- **Draw pictures for the bulletin cover.**
- **Decorate the sanctuary** with drawings or banners that the children have made.
- **Bake the communion bread** (if appropriate for your tradition) or prepare food for the coffee hour following the service.
- **Assist and greet worshipers as they arrive or leave, light candles, or collect the offering.**

First Presbyterian Church of Glen Cove, New York, a congregation of about 80, celebrated its seventh Children's Sabbath with worship that was led almost entirely by youths. The sermon focused on justice issues for children and the congregation hosted the Choir of St. Dunstan's College, England, comprised of 36 youths, for a free concert open to the community.

- **Lead a procession** to begin the Children's Sabbath.
- **Participate through music.** The children might sing a special anthem, play an instrumental piece, or perform a song in sign language.
- **Read prayers and scriptural passages** and lead responsive readings.
- **Write a prayer** to be used in the service.
- **Deliver the sermon** or other presentation.
- **Prepare a dramatic skit for the service.** The middle school children of **Cross Lanes United Methodist Church in Cross Lanes, West Virginia**, presented the "Witness to the Word" in the form of skits, while children in Kindergarten through fifth grade served as liturgists, ushers, greeters, and instrumentalists for the prelude, offertory, and postlude.
- **During the offertory procession, place items on the altar** that serve to remind the congregation of the love and care our children require.
- **Invite friends to attend.**

Congregations whose children usually depart for church school classes during the worship service (often after the Children's Sermon or time with children) will need to reflect thoughtfully about the plan for the Children's Sabbath.

Some will choose to follow their customary schedule and have the children engage in the Children's Sabbath lesson plans while the adults remain in worship. This may free the preacher to speak more seriously to the adults about the plight of children and their responsibility to respond without concerns about trying to engage or upsetting the children. The children can learn about the concerns in an age-appropriate setting in their classes.

Other congregations will see the Children's Sabbath as a good opportunity for the children to remain in worship throughout the service. If the children are not accustomed to this, however, it will require forethought. The whole service, including the sermon, can be carefully planned to be engaging and accessible to all ages. The more children who are involved in the planning and implementation, the more interested they will be. Or activity bulletins designed for children and other quiet activities can be distributed to engage the children during the sermon and other "listening" times.

Worship Resources

Following are Christian worship resources from a variety of sources. Use or adapt any of the following resources that would be appropriate for your tradition. In addition, you may want to consider the prayers and other worship resources from other faith traditions in this resource manual to see if any would be appropriate for your service.

Call to Worship

“Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

We come here seeking change; we come here, each of us a child of God, to recognize our dependence on God.

“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me welcomes not just me but the one who sent me.”

We come here to welcome the children everywhere in God's name.

“Beloved, we are God's children now.”

We come here as children of God, secure in God's love, urged to work for God's justice, bound in one family to care for one another.

Come, let us worship the God on whom we rely, the God who bids us to welcome the children, the God who claims us all as God's children. **Amen.**

(By Shannon Daley-Harris)

Call to Worship (based on Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Child 1: Every day in our nation, more than 2,500 babies are born into poverty.

Child 2: Every day in our nation, more than 2,400 children are abused or neglected.

Child 3: Every day in our nation, 2,224 babies are born without health insurance.

Child 4: Every day in our nation, more than 75 babies die before their first birthday.

Child 5: Every day in our nation, 4,520 children are arrested.

Leader: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.”

People: We come together with hearts that weep for our nation's children.

Leader: “Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears: For there is reward for your work, says the Lord.”

People: We come together to be moved from weeping to hear the promise of the work we can do.

Leader: “[The children] shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: Your children shall come back to their own country.”

People: We come together to glimpse your vision of homecoming that would bring our nation's children from an experience of need to one of safety, plenty, and love.

Unison: Be with us in our worship and our work, O God. Prepare us by the power of your spirit that we may commit our hearts and hands and minds to realizing your vision of homecoming for the children of our nation. Amen.

(By Shannon Daley-Harris)

Call to Confession

“Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus told his followers. He wasn't telling us to act playful or childish; he was telling us that until we recognize our utter reliance on God, our weakness and vulnerability and inability to “earn” our way into God's grace, we'll never enter God's kingdom. But, once we recognize our dependence on God, once we drop the illusion that we can be perfect enough or worthy enough to merit God's grace, that's when we will experience God's grace, freely given as we are fully forgiven in Christ's name. Children of God, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, you call us to create change for children, but we're comfortable with the status quo. You call us to work for justice today, but we put it off until another day. You call us to bring hope, but inside we've really given up on making a difference. You call us to believe in a better tomorrow, but we don't always believe that it is possible.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Forgive us, we pray, for our apathy, for our procrastination, for our resignation and our limited vision. Change our hearts, O God, so that we may live boldly into your vision of justice and compassion for every child, for a bright and hopeful tomorrow that we can work for today. Amen.

(By Shannon Daley-Harris)

Prayer of Confession

God who makes all things new, we confess that we cling to the comfortable, fall back on the familiar, and allow apathy to dull our hearts and our commitment. We shrug our shoulders and say that poverty is inevitable even as it deprives children of the fullness of life that you intend and they deserve. We throw up our hands at the number of children without health coverage and accept what is unacceptable. We shake our heads over the bursting prisons but turn away from the things that push children toward prison rather than keeping them on the path to success.

Forgive us, we pray, for callousness instead of compassion, for discouragement instead of determination, for selfishness instead of service. Change our hearts, we pray, so that we can create change for your beloved children and help bring the hope and better tomorrow that you intend. These things we pray in the name of your beloved child, the hope of the world. Amen.

(By Shannon Daley-Harris)

Assurance of Pardon

Beloved, we are God's children now. Hear and believe the good news: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Amen.**

Readings on the theme, "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow"

Creating Change

"God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other."

(*The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*)

Today

Su Nombre es Hoy (His Name is Today)

"We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the

fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow,' his name is Today."

(By Gabriela Mistral)

*Hope and a Better Tomorrow*¹

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true and beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint; therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.

Prayer for Illumination

O God who came as a baby when we were expecting a king, who called us to be last when we were expecting to be first, who welcomed a child when we thought grown-ups were more important, who rose to new life when we thought death had the last word, surprise us again this day with what you have to say to us. By your holy spirit, open our ears and our eyes and our hearts to find you where we least expect you, to be led where we least expect to go, through the reading and proclamation and the living of your word. Amen.

(By Shannon Daley-Harris)

Prayer

O God, help us to recover our hope for our children's sake. Help us to recover our courage for our children's sake. Help us to recover our discipline for our children's sake. Help us to recover our ability to work together for our children's sake. Help us to recover our values for our children's sake. Help us to recover our faith in Thee for our children's sake. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Prayers for Change and Hope

Lord, please let our small mustard seeds of daily service grow into great shrubs of change and trees in whose branches the birds can nest and in whose shade our children can rest and feel safe. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

¹ By Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*, 1952. Reprinted with permission by the Estate of Reinhold Niebuhr.

O God, take our tiny acorns of service and turn them into towering oak trees of hope. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Litany of Commitment

God did not call us to succeed,
God called us to serve.

God did not call us to win,
God called us to work.

God did not call us to live long,
God called us to live for [God.]

God did not call us to be happy,
God called us to be hopeful.

God did not call us to fame,
God called us to faith.

God did not call us to seek power,
God called us to seek peace.

God did not call us to loot the earth and each other,
God called us to love our earth and each other. Amen.
(By Marian Wright Edelman)

To Trust in God, the Giver of Justice²

An Affirmation of Faith based on Psalm 146

One: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

All: **I will praise the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises to God all my life long!**

One: Do not put your trust in princes or in mortals in whom there is not help; when their breath departs they return to the earth and their plans perish.

All: **We will trust in God who is our Creator and who is the source of our help!**

One: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord who made heaven and earth, who keeps faith forever.

All: **We will trust in God who is the source of our faith and who calls us to live into hope!**

One: It is God who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry and who sets the prisoners free.

All: **We will trust in God the giver of justice who calls us to do justice!**

One: It is the Lord who opens the eyes of the blind, who lifts up those who are bowed down and heavy burdened.

All: **We will trust the Lord who heals and who calls us to be healers!**

One: It is the Lord who watches over the stranger in the land, who upholds the orphan, the widow, and the outcast.

All: **We will trust the Lord of compassion who calls us to empower the powerless and show loving-kindness to the outcasts!**

One: The Lord will reign forever; the justice of God shall be for all people and unto all generations.

All: **Praise the Lord, the giver of justice, the source of our faith, the sustainer of our hope, the Spirit of loving-kindness. Thanks be to God! Amen!**

Prayers of the People

(If the spiritual "Thank You, Lord" is not familiar to your congregation, have the choir sing the refrain with the leader at the beginning. In each instance, the people's response will be sung.)

Leader: Let us join our hearts in prayer, responding in song: Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you Lord, I just want to thank you, Lord.

For the blessing of children—from newborn to almost grown, and for the sacred charge to nurture and protect them, let us lift our hearts to God:

People: Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, I just want to thank you, Lord.

Leader: For the love of parents, a love shown in its perfect form in God, let us pray:

People: Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, I just want to thank you, Lord.

Leader: For the families who work hard yet struggle every day to make ends meet and provide for their families:

People: Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Help us be a blessing too.

Leader: For the children who are beaten down by poverty and homelessness and hunger and who suffer in innumerable ways, let us pray:

People: Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Help us be a blessing too.

² "To Trust in God the Giver of Justice" reproduced from *Prayers for the New Social Awakening*, edited by Christian Iosso and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, ©2008 Geneva Press. Used by permission of Geneva Press.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Leader: For the children who are abused and neglected, for those who are shuffled through the foster care system and those who wait longingly for permanent families, let us pray:

People: Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Help us to love all of them, too.

Leader: For the children who are victims of violence and for the children who turn to the violence they see glorified in our culture, let us pray:

People: Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Help us to love all of them, too.

Leader: For the leaders of our nation who have the choice to stand for the powerful or the powerless, the rich or the poor, the corporations or the children, let us pray:

People: Guide them, Lord. Guide them, Lord. Guide them, Lord. Help us work to guide them too.

Leader: For ourselves, that we find the vision, commitment, skills, and persistence to work for justice in our nation so that we truly leave no child behind.

People: Guide us, Lord. Guide us, Lord. Guide us, Lord. Help sustain and guide us now.

Leader: Amen.

(By Shannon Daley-Harris)

Charge and Blessing, version 1

Go forth to create change for children made in the image of our Creator;
Go forth to bring hope, in the name of the one who is the hope of the world;
Go forth to work for a better tomorrow, empowered by the spirit, the advocate, who unites us in community.

Now may the blessing of our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Advocate be with you and every child of God this day and ever more. Amen.

Charge and Blessing, version 2

Go forth to create change in the world for children made in the image of our Creator;
Go forth to bring hope to children in the name of the Christ who brought them to him for blessing;
Go forth to work for a better tomorrow, empowered by the Holy Spirit whom Jesus called our "Advocate."

Now may the blessing of the Creator, the Christ, and the Advocate be with you and every child of God this day and ever more. Amen.

(By Shannon Daley-Harris)

Charge

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

(Romans 12:9-18, 21)

Blessing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Romans 15:13)

The World Methodist Social Affirmation

We believe in God, creator of the world and of all people; and in Jesus Christ, incarnate among us, who died and rose again; and in the Holy Spirit, present with us to guide, strengthen, and comfort.

We believe;

God, help our unbelief.

We rejoice in every sign of God's kingdom: in the upholding of human dignity and community; in every expression of love, justice, and reconciliation; in each act of self-giving on behalf of others; in the abundance of God's gifts entrusted to us that all may have enough; in all responsible use of the earth's resources.

Glory be to God on high;

And on earth, peace.

We confess our sin, individual and collective, by silence or action;

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

through the violation of human dignity
based on race, class, age, sex, nation, or faith;
through the exploitation of people
because of greed and indifference;
through the misuse of power
in personal, communal, national, and international life;
through the search for security
by those military and economic forces
that threaten human existence
through the abuse of technology
which endangers the earth and all life upon it.

Lord, have mercy;

Christ, have mercy;

Lord, have mercy.

We commit ourselves individually and as a community
to the way of Christ;
to take up the cross;
to seek abundant life for all humanity;
to struggle for peace with justice and freedom;
to risk ourselves in faith, hope, and love,
praying that God's kingdom may come.

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

For Children

Great God,
Guard the laughter of children.
Bring them safely through injury and illness,
So they may live the promises you give.
Do not let us be so preoccupied with our purposes
That we fail to hear their voices,
Or pay attention to their special vision of the truth;
But keep us with them,
Ready to listen and to love,
even as in Jesus Christ you have loved us,
your grown-up, wayward children. Amen.
(From the *Book of Common Worship*)

God's Power Shown³

Leader: Out of love comes celebration

All: And God's kingdom is among us:

Men: Where peace is the means of making us one,

Women: Where truth does not stumble and justice is done.

Leader: Out of change comes possibility

All: And God's new creation is begun:

Men: Promise of splendor and signal of worth,
Women: Source of all goodness, renewing the earth.

Leader: Out of freedom comes responsibility

All: And God calls us to discipleship:

Men: In our compassion, making love known,

Women: In our conviction, God's power shown.

Leader: You did not choose me; I chose you.

All: This, then, is what I command you: Love one another.

Sample Greeting (Catholic liturgy)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

We greet you on this day that is celebrated as the Children's Sabbath by congregations of many faiths across our nation. On this Children's Sabbath, we celebrate the sacred gift of children and our solemn responsibility to nurture and protect them—not just those born into our family or here in our parish, but all children, God's beloved. In the words of His Holiness Benedict XVI, "The Creator assumed the dimensions of a child in Jesus, of a human being like us, to make himself visible and tangible. At the same time, by making himself small, God caused the light of his greatness to shine. For precisely by lowering himself to the point of defenseless vulnerability of love, he shows what his true greatness is indeed, what it means to be God."⁴ We cannot be God, but we can show our greatness through our love for children. As our Lord Jesus Christ said to those who would be his followers, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Penitential Rite (Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness, for he is full of gentleness and compassion.

Lord Jesus, you gathered the little children to yourself.

³ Kathy Galloway ©2001, taken from the *Iona Abbey Worship Book*, The Iona Community, Glasgow, www.ionabooks.com.

⁴ Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, January 11, 2009, Mass in the Sistine Chapel and Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you warned us not to put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in you. Christ, have mercy.

People: Christ, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you called us to welcome children in your name.

Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Gospel Acclamation (Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest.

(Luke 9:48)

People: Alleluia.

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) (Catholic rubric)

My brothers and sisters, in the name of Christ who came to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, let us pray to the Lord saying, O Lord, you are our hope.

For the holy Church of God, that the Spirit of the Lord rests upon us as we bring good news to the poor not in word alone but also in deed, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

For our world, in which billions of people are held captive by grinding poverty, preventable malnutrition and disease, warfare and displacement, that we work to bring release from their suffering, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

For all our brothers and sisters in need, especially children in our rich nation who are oppressed by poverty, lack of health care, and the grim prospect of prison rather than paths of promise, that we create change for children today so they may know hope and a better tomorrow, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

For our community and nation, which are so often blinded by greed, prejudice, suspicion, and self-concern, that we open our eyes to the needs of others, the inherent dignity and worth of every child, and recover our vision of the just and compassionate society you intend, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

Priest: God of love,
who shelters us like a mother hen
and welcomes us like a father,
hear the prayers of your Church
and grant us today
what we ask of you in faith.
We ask this through Christ our Brother. Amen.

Prayer over the People (Catholic)

(The following prayer may be used at the end of Mass, or after the liturgy of the word, the office, and the celebration of the sacraments.)

Lord,
Send your light upon your family.
May they continue to enjoy your favor
and devote themselves to doing good.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

May almighty God bless you,
The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

(Daily Roman Missal)

Collect of the Day: On the Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ who came to bring good news to the poor, healed the sick, proclaimed release to the captives and welcomed the children, you have revealed your intention for our life in community to be marked by justice, compassion, and inclusion. Prosper now the work of our hands that we may faithfully serve you by creating the change you desire for the least of our brothers and sisters; through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

Option 2 (Episcopal rubric):

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, you are our hope."

For the body of Christ, that we treat every child as made in your image; that we welcome every child as you welcomed the children, and that we bring good news to the poor that you announced, let us pray to the Lord,
Lord, you are our hope.

For our nation and our leaders, grant wisdom and courage to change what is unjust and recognize that until all the children are well, none of us is well, we pray to the Lord,
Lord, you are our hope.

In a world where children hunger and starve, where they sicken and die, where they face bullets and bombs, where they know the exile of prison and refugee camp, help us create change and bring hope and a better tomorrow, we pray to the Lord,
Lord, you are our hope.

For ourselves and our community, that we let our eyes weep over injustice, our hearts burn with determination, our voices speak out to demand change, and our hands move to make a difference, we pray to the Lord,
Lord, you are our hope.

On this Children's Sabbath day, for our nation's more than 13 million children in poverty, the nine million children without health coverage, and the countless children in a pipeline to prison instead of on a path of promise, that we help usher in a better tomorrow, we pray to the Lord,
Lord, you are our hope.

For all who have died, especially those who died too soon and too young, those whose lives were cut short by poverty, lack of health care, and a deadly and dead-end culture, we pray to the Lord,
Lord, you are our hope.

Leader and People:

God of all mercy,
We confess that we have failed to live our lives as ones made in your image,
We have not loved each other as sisters and brothers,
We have not welcomed all children and so welcomed you,
We have left stumbling blocks in the way of too many children.

Forgive us our sins,
As a woman searching for a cherished coin,
As a father welcoming a beloved child home,

And uphold us by your Spirit
That we may do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you,
Through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Because you sent your Son, hope of the world and herald of a better tomorrow, to bring good news to the poor and to bless the children.

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Because you have blessed us with children and have given your own child, Jesus Christ, to reveal the fullness of your love and mercy.

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Because your will is for justice, peace, and love that embraces all and exclude none, and you show special concern for those oppressed by want, war, and hate.

Eucharistic Prayer for the Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.
Celebrant: We give you thanks and praise, amazing God, who made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry; You watch over the strangers, uphold the children and most vulnerable parents, and have triumphed over sin and evil.
(from Psalm 146)

On this Children's Sabbath day, we give you thanks, O God, especially for children, for the blessing they are and the blessing we may be to them, as we seek to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

And so we join the saints and angels in proclaiming your glory, as we sing (say),

Celebrant and People:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

The Celebrant continues:

We praise you, O God,
for sending your beloved child Jesus
born as a baby
nurtured by his family,
and protected by strangers,
who grew as a child
who was taught in his temple,
surrounded by his community,
and guided by his parents,
who became an adult
who loved and blessed the children,
who cared for those who were sick,
poor, and left out,
who taught that God loves us like a parent,
and who called us his friends.
This one who was born a baby needing us
died our Savior whom we all need,
triumphant even over death,
freeing us to live as your beloved children.

(At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing the wine to be consecrated.)

On the night before he died for us, Jesus was at the table with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, and said: "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. As you do this, remember me."

As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup of wine. Again, he gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, remember me."

Around your table, as your children,
O God, we remember Jesus Christ,
Who came in love, lived in love, and died in love,
Who was and is and is to come.

We offer to you our gifts of bread and wine,
And we offer to you our lives.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ, that they strengthen us to welcome the children, to show your love, to work for your justice. Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith⁵

God has not taken the covenant people out of the world, but has sent them into the world to worship God there and serve all humankind. We worship God in the world by standing before our Lord on behalf of all people. Our cries for help and our songs of praise are never for ourselves alone. Worship is no retreat from the world; it is part of our mission. We serve humankind by discerning what God is doing in the world and joining in that work. We risk disagreement and error when we try to say what God is doing here and now. But we find guidance in God's deeds in the past and promises for the future, as they are witnessed to in Scripture. We affirm that the Lord is at work, especially in events and movements that free people by the gospel and advance justice, compassion, and peace.

⁵ From *A Declaration of Faith* (alt.), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A).

Music Suggestions

The following hymn suggestions that lift up children, families, and God's call to justice and love can be found in many hymnals including the *New Century Hymnal*, the *United Methodist Hymnal*, the *Presbyterian Hymnal*, *Chalice*, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the *African American Heritage Hymnal*, and *Worship: Hymnal and Service Book for Roman Catholics*.

Hymns of Praise

All Things Bright and Beautiful
Bring Many Names
For the Beauty of the Earth
Gather Us In
God of the Sparrow
God Whose Love Is Reigning o'er Us
God Is Here
How Can We Name a Love
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
Lift Every Voice and Sing
Let the Whole Creation Cry
Lord of Our Growing Years
My Heart Is Overflowing
O God in Heaven
Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

Hymns After Passing the Peace

A hymn such as "I've Got Peace Like a River" or "Jesus Loves Me" would be a good choice here, since the children may already know it or could learn it in preparation for the Children's Sabbath.

Hymns of Thanksgiving and Communion

For the Fruits of This Creation
God Whose Giving Knows No Ending
Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether

Hymns of Petition

God, Omnipotent, Eternal
Kum Ba Yah
Lord of All Hopefulness
O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your Face
Our Father by Whose Name
This World, My God, Is Held Within Your Hand

Hymns of Commitment and Closing Hymns

All Who Love and Serve Your City
Called as Partners in Christ's Service
Christian Women, Christian Men
Guide My Feet
Help Us Accept Each Other
Here I Am, Lord
I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me
Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love
Let Justice Flow Like Streams
Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us
Live into Hope
Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace
Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service
Lord, You Give the Great Commission
Now Praise the Hidden God of Love
O For a World
Our Cities Cry to You, O God
Song of Hope (Canto de Esperanza)
The Church of Christ in Every Age
There's a Spirit in the Air
Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples
We Are Your People
What Does the Lord Require
When a Poor One
When We Are Living

Sermon Resources

The sermon or homily is one of the most powerful opportunities to proclaim God's love and concern for all of God's children and God's call to us to put our faith into action by loving and protecting children.

The lectionary texts designated for this Children's Sabbath Sunday offer deep connections and powerful messages related to the Children's Sabbath themes for those churches that follow these designated cycles of readings. The Revised Common Lectionary, the Roman Catholic Lectionary, and the Episcopal Lectionary share a common Gospel lesson, Mark 10:35–45, and the passages from Isaiah and Hebrews overlap in the Roman Catholic and Episcopal lectionaries. Even pastors who do not follow a lectionary will find food for thought and study in these sermon resources.

Of course, countless other biblical passages also illuminate our call to nurture and protect every child. For those who do not follow a lectionary, there is a reflection on Jeremiah 31:15–17 starting on page 93. Reflections in the Daily Devotional Guide beginning on page 61 may also spark sermons on other texts.

Two sample Children's Sermons follow these sermon resources. Use or adapt one for use with children of the congregation in a special conversation or "time with children," or create your own.

Sermon Notes

Sermon Notes on the Lectionary Texts

The following texts are the designated readings for the churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, the Episcopal Lectionary, the Lutheran Lectionary, and the Roman Catholic Lectionary.

Job 38: 1–7 (34–41)

Isaiah 53:4–12 (or Psalm 104:1–9, 24, 35c)

Psalm 91:9–16

Hebrews 5:1–10

Mark 10:35–45

These lectionary texts designated for the Sunday on which Children's Sabbath falls and its focus on creating change for children in poverty, without health coverage, and in the pipeline to prison presents both opportunity and challenge for the preacher.

The opportunity is to acknowledge that suffering exists; all who care about children know too well that children suffer. Children in poverty face hunger, inadequate housing, and deficits in early childhood development; children are sick and injured and millions lack access to health care; children are pushed along a pipeline to prison by poverty, lack of health and mental health care, abuse and neglect, failing schools, and too few positive role models—finding themselves in despairing acceptance of a seemingly limited future.

We may not know the reason why, but we do know through Christ's suffering with and even for us that God knows our pain intimately and loves us through it. Furthermore, we recognize through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ that God calls us as the body of Christ to serve the last, the least, and the left behind and stand with and for all children who suffer, embodying God's love and will for justice.

The challenge, on the other hand, is to ensure that worshippers do not take away a message that suffering is simply to be accepted obediently and we should not ask the deep "why"s. In an age when we find it all too tempting to distract ourselves with nonstop entertainment, it would be tragic if Christians failed to hear the clear call to act vigorously to relieve the unnecessary and immoral suffering our indifference inflicts on innocent children. We may not be capable of ending all suffering, but we are surely called to end the suffering we *can* affect—and there is enough of that in our own communities to keep us busy for the rest of our lives.

Job 38:1–7 (34–41)

The book of Job begins with the question posed by the satan: Is Job faithful because of his good fortune? Will he lose faith when he loses those blessings? At its heart lies the question of suffering. Job speaks for all of us when he asks why people suffer. The Children's Sabbath asks more particularly, why do children suffer, what does it mean for our faith, and how are we to respond in this world in which children suffer?

Throughout the book, we hear different approaches as those involved seek answers, from the three friends' conventional wisdom and theology to Job's challenging God

to a debate in the style of a trial. Elihu offers unconventional answers as well. Finally, in our passage, God begins to provide a response. At the end of the book, however, we are not left with certainty that the divine speech is the definitive answer or with a clear understanding of what the “right” answer to the question of suffering is, in part because God affirms that Job has spoken rightly (42:7) and events turn out as the friends predicted. Notes Carol Newsome:

“To deny that there is a single definitive answer is not to say that one cannot gain insight into the problem of suffering in a world created by a loving God. What the book of Job models is a community of voices struggling to articulate a range of perspectives, each one of which contains valid insights as well as blindness to other dimensions of the problem. At different times and in different circumstances, one or another of the voices may seem more powerful, may be the word we need to hear in order to work our way through a particular experience. By refusing to give the book a neat resolution and declare one of the perspectives to be *the* solution, the book of Job draws us toward a recognition that our craving for an answer is an attempt to evade what we know to be true. Especially in times of religious crisis, richness of meaning and even a sense of peace are not to be found in a pre-packaged answer but emerge from wrestling with God.”⁶

The book of Job raises the tension between our desire for a predictable world ordered by God that fulfills our expectations and the reality of unexpected events out of our control that create anxiety and uncertainty. In our passage from Job, God gives examples of God's creative capacity beginning with laying the very foundation of the earth. Interestingly, the examples God gives underscore the existence of chaos in God's creation. “Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst out from the womb?” (v. 8) We are reminded of not only God's order but also the chaos that exists in our world.

Job gives voice to all of us who wonder about suffering in our world, all who wonder why, in the well-worn words, bad things happen to good people. When children suffer, especially, we are driven to ask with Job, why, why, why? How can one who is innocent, defenseless, vulnerable be burdened with such suffering? How can nine million

children be without health coverage and unable to see a doctor when they are sick or injured? How can 13.3 million live in poverty in the richest nation on earth? How can a Black boy born in 2001, who is just eight years old now, already face a one in three chance of imprisonment in his lifetime, or his Latino age-mate face one in six odds of imprisonment? How can this be? Where is God in all of this suffering?

God is where God has always been: God is with us. God's heart is the first to break. Friends who give us alternative explanations may do so to comfort themselves, not to comfort us. The whole of the biblical witness is that God will go to any lengths to save us. And to be God's followers is to go to any lengths to save those who suffer, especially those who do not have any capacity to save themselves.

At the end of the book of Job, as Job's family and friends gather to share a meal, offer true comfort, and provide him money and gifts, we find that God works through us as the community to provide support and help restore the fortunes of those who have suffered.

Isaiah 53:4–12

Location

Our passage is part of the fourth and last of the “servant songs.” This fourth servant song begins in Isaiah 52:13 and concludes with our text. The verses at the end of Chapter 52 state that the nations and their leaders will finally have their eyes opened, “*So shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate.*” (52:15)

The passage immediately preceding our text tells of the servant in his earliest years: “*For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.*” (53:2–3)

In our passage, which traditionally serves as the Old Testament reading for Good Friday, we encounter a portion of the fourth Servant Song that captures the major themes of the whole. One commentary notes, “1) The basic message is stated at the outset and reiterated in the conclusion (53:12a): God will vindicate and exalt

⁶The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume IV: 1&2 Maccabees, Introduction to Hebrew Poetry, Job, Psalms, p. 637.

his Suffering Servant. That point, not only in the original context but in all others, is a reversal of expectations, including those of the disciples in Mark 10:43–45. God's power and authority are manifested in weakness; God acts through one whose suffering made him repulsive to all who saw him. 2) We are asked to identify with the life of the innocent sufferer, recounted here from youth (53:2) through a trial and death (53:7–8). 3) The servant's life of suffering and humiliation is both vicarious and efficacious. It is on behalf of others, and it effectively removes their sin (53:6, 8, 12). 4) Not only will the servant be vindicated before the whole world, but also his suffering is on behalf of the transgressions of all ("the many," 53:12).⁷

Turning Things Upside Down: Reversal of Expectations

The reversal of expectations noted in the first point provides a meaningful reinforcement of the message in the passage from Mark also designated by the lectionaries (see discussion below) and relevant to the Children's Sabbath. We have to let go of our world's notions of the greatest and the least, the powerful and the powerless, the first and the last. The ones who suffer will be exalted. The last will be first. A little child will lead them. We need to be able to open our eyes to God acting through those we least expect. Can we see God acting through the hurting children who call to us? Can we see God acting through the poor, Black, and Latino children who are most likely to live in poverty, go without needed health care, and wind up incarcerated at some point in their lives? If the life of Jesus has shown us anything at all, it is that God is most likely to be present to us in the most unexpected of persons, and to call us to a ministry borne not of power but of love.

Can we accept the invitation not to power or safety or comfort, but to servant leadership, risk, and even our own suffering? Are we ready to turn things upside down? Are our nation and its leaders ready to see and finally comprehend the nature of servanthood?

Identifying with the Innocent Sufferer

Many children and youths might well identify with the experience of the suffering servant. Too many of our children are trying to take root and grow in the dry ground of poverty, dangerous, substandard housing, unsafe neighborhoods and schools, abuse and neglect, and lack of health care and mental health care. Struggling just to survive rather than thrive, too many of our children have no outward "form or majesty;" our casual glance sees

not a child of God but a scrawny kid, a sickly or wheezing teenager, a baby dulled forever by lead poisoning, a child tormented by depression or other untreated mental illness. Too many of our children and youths are despised and rejected, feel society's contempt and rejection that allows it to accept poverty as their lot, to observe preventable illness and deprivation without taking action, to assume prison as an acceptable outcome for so many. Far, far too many of our children have suffered and are acquainted with illness and infirmity. If you look at the plight of nine million children in our nation without health care coverage, you might agree that they are "held...of no account." If you look at the plight of our nation's one in six children who is poor, you might agree that they are "held...of no account." If you consider the likely fate of one in three Black boys who will be incarcerated in their lifetime unless we dismantle the pipeline to prison, you might agree that they are "held...of no account."

While children in our nation today are suffering, and may identify with the suffering of the servant, our passage does not ask them to suffer. Although the suffering of children in our nation today is *because of* others, we cannot say of our children that it is *on behalf of* others. That is, our children are not meant to be suffering servants because of our apathy, inaction, and lack of care. Their suffering is neither vicarious nor efficacious—it is not on our behalf and it does not remove our sin. Rather, it highlights the sin of a nation that does not protect the young, weak, and powerless. It is we who are adults, it is we who are strong, it is we who are powerful that are called to servant leadership and to make the suffering of others our own. The plain truth is that we either respond to that call, or we reject it. The integrity of our faith lies in the balance—our very ability to say we are "Christian" without taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Psalm 91:9–16

This psalm's assurance of God's protection against enemies, disease or sickness, and all evil (v. 3, 10) stands in tension with the reality that illness does strike us, even children, even the "innocent," even the faithful. With the reality that every day, through no fault of their own, small children are endangered by the enemy of poverty that chases them from an empty breakfast table, through substandard housing, through unsafe neighborhoods, to a failing school, and is waiting when the school day is over to continue to hunt and haunt them. With the reality that

⁷ *Preaching Through the Christian Year, Year B* by Fred B. Craddock, John H. Hayes, Carl R. Holladay, and Gene M. Tucker (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1993) p. 444.

every day, the pipeline to prison acquaints too many children with the evil of poverty, of low academic expectations and high dropout rates, of abuse and neglect, of racism, of violence that surrounds them in their neighborhoods, in the culture, in the most prevalent role models.

Standing in the good news of the resurrection's ultimate triumph over death and promise of new life in the Risen Christ we can trust in that final assurance that "Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation."

Hebrews 5:1–10

"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission." (5:7)

This passage is a powerful reminder that in Christ we have one who knows first-hand what it means, in the flesh, to be human. He probably winced over a stubbed toe, grimaced when a sharp rock sliced into his foot. He may have known the throb of a toothache. We know that he suffered the most extreme pain and suffering on the cross. Having been in the flesh, Christ knows what it is like for children today who gasp for breath against asthma's tight grip. He knows what it means for a baby crawling in a lead-laced apartment to stick chubby fingers in her mouth and become lead poisoned over time. He knows what it is like for an uninsured child to go years without seeing a doctor or dentist. He knows what it is like for a child to be in aching need of medical care but have parents who delay seeking it because they don't have the money. He knows what it is like for a youth to be in a pit of depression so deep that no one hears the cries for help. He knows what it is like to experience hunger and poverty, to be reviled and rejected, to be imprisoned and accused. He knows. He knows. He knows us and our hurts from the days of his flesh.

In Christ we have one who knows what it means to pray for relief, to pray for release from pain, to pray for an end to suffering. When we offer up prayers for ourselves or for children who hurt, who are haunted by mental illness without care, who endure worsening conditions without needed treatments, Christ hears our prayers as one who has offered up his own prayers and supplications. When

we sit hour after hour in an emergency room, finally seeking treatment that can no longer be delayed, with fervent prayers in our hearts, Christ hears. When we face unpayable bills and wonder in anguish how we will keep our children fed and housed, Christ hears. When we anguish over children who are accused and imprisoned, Christ understands.

Christ knows what it means to scream prayers for healing in anguish. To yell prayers for relief in anger. To shout loud prayers that demand answers. To sob prayers for healing in desperation. To cry prayers for the end to our child's suffering. To whisper prayers for hope when despair is overwhelming. To have a prayer so big that it can't even fit into words. Christ knows.

Christ knows, first-hand, from his own prayers and supplications, with his own loud cries and tears, that faith does not spare us from suffering but that we can trust in God's steadfast presence through it all.

This passage is frequently used in ordination ceremonies and goes to the heart of the question of vocation. From it, on this Children's Sabbath day, we may ask ourselves what it will mean for each of us to serve, to minister to children as ones who know first-hand their hurts, their prayers for help, and their tears and cries for relief.

Mark 10:35–45

Location

The location of our passage from Mark is worth noting for it reinforces a consistent witness to the nature of the ministry and service to which we are called. Earlier in this chapter we find that well-known passage in which Jesus instructs his disciples to let the children come to him, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. That scene is followed by Jesus' instructions on wealth and discipleship, and then we begin the third and final passion prediction in the verses immediately preceding this lectionary passage. Immediately following our passage is the healing of blind Bartimaeus. In just one chapter we encounter Jesus' teaching on the importance of serving those who are young, poor, and in need of healing.

Turning now to our passage, there are two themes that emerge and lend themselves to preaching on the Children's Sabbath: suffering and servant leadership.

Theme of Suffering

James and John are looking for glory and good times, and Jesus asks them if they are prepared to drink the cup that

he drinks and be baptized with the water that he is baptized with. The cup is a powerful metaphor for suffering, recalling for the reader the blood Jesus will shed, his anguished prayer to God that the cup might pass from him if God wills, and even Old Testament references to the cup as a metaphor for divine wrath. (*The New Interpreters Bible, Vol. VII*, p. 653) Linked in this passage with the cup, baptism too becomes a metaphor for suffering (with its own echoes of the overwhelming flood in Ps. 42, 69, and Isa. 43). James and John's glib assurances that they are able are met with Jesus' somber affirmation that they will indeed share that cup and baptism. And, although they do abandon Jesus at the end of his days, they will indeed later share his suffering.

There are important connections to be made on this Children's Sabbath, which looks at the suffering of children who go without the health care they need and endure pain unrelieved, illness untreated, suffering unabated. Children who suffer poverty through no fault of their own. Children who are born into a pipeline to prison, with the odds stacked against them before they can even comprehend what that means. For these children, such suffering is often preventable and needless.

We who would follow Christ are called to share his passion and his compassion—his suffering with and even for others. Do we share the suffering of children without health care in our nation? The suffering of children in poverty? The suffering of children born into the pipeline to prison? Are we feeling that pain as our own and responding as we would to our own? Are we bringing a message to all children who suffer that God knows and shares their pain, God is present with them and will not abandon them even in their most painful times?

Theme of Servant Leadership

The second theme that emerges in this passage is servant leadership. Jesus chides, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Vv. 42–45)

The disciples were as susceptible as most of us are to being influenced by conventional notions of status, standing, honor, and power. That's why angling for the best seats

seemed important to James and John, and why the other disciples were so upset about being one-upped. Do you recall one of the disciples' earlier arguments about who was the greatest, in Mark 9:33–37? Jesus responded to that argument, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all," and then put a child among them and took it in his arms saying, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." Such a lesson was—and is—hard to absorb, running so counter to the world's reckoning of who is important, who has priority. In the very next chapter of Mark, the disciples still view children as lowly annoyances not worthy of Jesus' time, so that again he must instruct the disciples to let the children come to him, for in fact the kingdom of God belongs to such as these—those without power, standing, pride of place, or prestige in the world's eyes. How hard it is for us to remember that when for six and a half days a week we hear and witness exactly the opposite! No wonder true discipleship is so difficult—so very, very difficult.

In fact, Jesus' instructions on servant leadership and true greatness are found throughout all four gospels in several places in each: Matt. 20:24–27; 23:11; Mark 9:35; Luke 9:48; 22:24–27; John 12:24–26; 13:12–16; 15:20. It was clearly a message that the earliest followers, and we who would be followers today, need to hear.

In our day, as in Jesus', those who are young, poor, without power are likely to be trampled in the stampede for the best seats, the most power, the most privilege, the most wealth, the greatest advantage.

The needs of children in America, especially the needs of one in six children in poverty, one in nine children without health care coverage, and one in three Black boys at risk of imprisonment in their lifetime, call us to demonstrate our greatness through servant leadership and service. We know that this country can afford to give them what they need. What we cannot afford is to look the other way, hiding from our calling or feeling that we are not equal to the task. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., "Everybody can be great, because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love."

Mother Teresa, who embodied servant leadership and greatness through service, once said, "Prayer in action is

love, and love in action is service. Try to give unconditionally whatever a person needs in the moment. The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions by giving your time. Sometimes this may mean doing something physical (such as we do in our homes for the sick and dying) or sometimes it may mean offering spiritual support for the shut-ins... If an ill person wants medicine, then give him medicine; if he needs comfort, then comfort him.”⁸

The service we are called to is not only to reach out with a touch of love, but also to change the structures and systems that are hurting and failing children. When children are the poorest group of Americans, when 13.3 million children are poor, there is a need for change to our nation's structures and systems. When one out of every nine children, nine million all together, does not have health coverage, there is a need for change and for justice on a broader scale. When the odds are stacked against our nation's Black, Latino, and poor children, shunting so many of them into the pipeline to prison, we need to change that system that works against their success and positive futures. Into this work for justice we also take the Gospel's teaching on suffering, for, again in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable.... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals.”

We recall finally the words of St. Francis of Assisi that speak to the profound reversals of first and last, serving and being served, that Jesus calls us to:

Lord, make me a channel of Thy peace,
That where there is hatred, I may bring love;

That where there is wrong, I may bring the spirit
of forgiveness;
That where there is discord, I may bring harmony;
That where there is error, I may bring truth;
That where there is doubt, I may bring faith;
That where there is despair, I may bring hope;
That where there are shadows, I may bring light;
That where there is sadness, I may bring joy;
Lord, grant that I may seek rather than to comfort
than to be comforted;
To understand than to be understood;
To love than to be loved.

For it is by forgetting self that one finds;
It is by forgiving that one is forgiven;
It is by dying that one awakens to eternal life.

Sermon Notes for Jeremiah 31:15–17, For Those Not Following a Lectionary

For those who don't follow a lectionary, the following sermon notes suggest how one might link this year's theme to Jeremiah 31:15–17. One appropriate New Testament text to accompany the reading from Jeremiah is Matthew 2:13–18.

Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

*Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for **there is a reward for your work, says the Lord; they shall come back from the land of the enemy; There is hope for your future, says the Lord; your children shall come back to their own country.*** (Jeremiah 31:15–17)

Location

This passage is part of the poetic and prose oracles that make up the so-called “Book of Consolation” beginning in Jeremiah 30:1 and concluding in 31:40. The focus on the Book of Consolation is the future restoration of Israel and Judah. While the date and authorship of all of the material here is uncertain, many believe that our passage (31:15–17) is authentic to Jeremiah and was most likely written after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BCE. Before the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah writes with dire warning. When it is too late to avert the disaster, the tone finally turns to one of hope. Writes R.E. Clements in *Jeremiah*, “The message of hope set out most strikingly in chapters 30–33 now forms the pivotal center for the entire book. Until the time Jeremiah received this word of hope while Jerusalem was under siege for the second time his message had predominantly been one of warning and threat. Then when disaster had become inevitable, Jeremiah held out the word of assurance and hope from God concerning a new beginning for Israel.”⁹

⁸ *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path* compiled by Lucinda Vardey, p. 114.

⁹ *Jeremiah*: Interpretation A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, R.E. Clements (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988).

The consolation that Jeremiah offers is communicated, in part, through his prophecy of salvation. The “Prophecy of Salvation,” according to the *Harper Collins Study Bible*, “contains the following parts: the appeal for attention and/or the introductory messenger formula (e.g., ‘Thus says the Lord’), the description of the present situation, the prediction of salvation, a final characterization of either God or of the message, and the concluding messenger formula (‘says the Lord’).”¹⁰

The Rachel in this passage is the matriarch of Israel, preferred wife of Jacob, mother of Joseph and Benjamin, whose story we read in Genesis 35:16–20. Patrick D. Miller, in “Jeremiah” in *The New Interpreters Bible, Vol. VI*, comments, “The passage presents a series of rich and poignant images of familial relationships. They begin with the inconsolable weeping of Mother Rachel for her children. Rachel, the wife of Jacob, was the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. The extremity of Israel’s condition is sharply depicted in this picture of the ancestral mother, disconsolate because of the destruction of her children. The setting of Rachel’s weeping in Ramah is probably to be connected to that town as the place from which the Judeans were taken into exile (40:1) The reason for such bitter and uncontrollable maternal weeping is clear: ‘They are not.’ (v. 15) Here that punishment is seen through the eyes of the mother whose children are being punished.”¹¹ The *Harper Collins Study Bible* suggests simply, “The dead Rachel is heard weeping over her children, who were either killed or deported.”

It should be noted that we will hear again of Rachel, in Matthew 2:16–18, when this passage is recalled after Herod’s order to slaughter the children in and around Bethlehem in his fury at the wise men enabling Mary and Joseph to flee to safety with the baby Jesus.

How are we to understand the hopeful future in which the children are restored that Jeremiah prophesies? *The Women’s Bible Commentary* reflects on preceding verses in Chapter 31 that describe “the return”: “The transformed society imagined in these poems provides a social vision that includes everyone not only in worship but also at the banquet of material life....The society will satisfy the basic human needs of all, and it will be characterized by justice, harmony, and peace.” Turning to the verses in 31:15–22,

the commentary continues, “In another poem announcing the return, the comforting of Rachel, mother of Israel, symbolizes that new society (31:15–22).”¹²

Theological Themes

God hears

God hears the weeping of Rachel for her children, lost and in exile, and promises that there will be a reward for her work and that her children will come back to their own country. Here, God hears the cries of a grief-stricken parent, but urges a movement from weeping to work in trust that the children will come home. The passage in Jeremiah is just one of many passages that underscore God’s attentive hearing. Throughout scripture, we are assured that God hears us in our need, when we are in painful, unjust circumstances that demand change right now.

In Genesis, God hears the cry of the child Ishmael when he’s forced into the wilderness with his despairing mother, abandoned, and given up for dead.

In Exodus we read that God says “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their task masters. Indeed I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and to bring them up out of the land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Exodus 3:7–8a) There, God hears the cry of an entire people oppressed and mistreated, exploited economically and trapped in desperate circumstances.

Jesus hears the loud cries of the blinded, in Mark identified as Bartimaeus, who refuses to be hushed despite the disapproval of others who don’t share his circumstances. He is undaunted as he seeks healing for himself with hope and determination.... Jesus hears and, unlike the bystanders criticizing Bartimaeus for his loud cries, responds with compassion. (Mk. 10:46-52; Mt. 20:29-34; Lk 18:35-43) God hears the cries of an individual seeking help for oneself.

Yes, God hears. The cries that God hears come from different places: parents, children, entire communities, and individuals with their own needs.

¹⁰ *Harper Collins Study Bible*, p. 1169.

¹¹ “Jeremiah” by Patrick Miller in *New Interpreters Bible, Vol. VI* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

¹² *Women’s Bible Commentary Expanded Edition*, Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, editors, p. 185.

God calls us to work that will create change for children.

While God hears our grief and pain at circumstances of injustice that demand change, God's response is to call on God's people to create the change that is needed. It is not enough to cry out and be heard. Rachel is told that the change will come as a reward for her work.

God responds to hearing the child Ishmael's cry and saves him by working through the mother: God offers concern, calls for courage, and prompts her to take the life-saving action: "Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand." When the mother has no longer given up in despair but is taking action, her eyes are open to life-saving resources she hadn't known before were available. God hears the cries of our children even as God urges us to be bold and lift the child up and look again for resources for rescue we hadn't seen before.

God's deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh takes place through Moses and the others sent to challenge the political leadership of his day. God hears the cries of oppressed communities and uses us—despite our sense of inadequacy—to challenge systems, structures, and leaders who seem entrenched. God sends us to challenge even those structures that at one time met our individual needs at the expense of others—just as Moses, one-time child of the palace, challenged that system of privilege for the few at the expense of the many.

Bartimaeus finds relief because he persisted in demanding help for himself even when others would hush him.

So God not only hears but, importantly, God's response to hearing our cries is to *call us to work that will create the change that is needed*; we are called as parents, as people in privileged circumstances, as future leaders who don't even recognize our potential to create change, as mothers, as individuals in difficult circumstances.

God's love is the source of our hope; we can trust in God's promises.

We are summoned out of grief to this work with a promise to sustain us in that difficult calling. The promise isn't vague or other worldly but concrete and in many instances embodied in the very real well-being of our children. The promise to Rachel is that the children will come back to their own country; that is the "hope for your future."

The hopeful future that is promised is one in which justice is restored, compassion is practiced, and the community has rededicated itself to living in right relationship with God and with each other.

The child Ishmael is promised that God will make of him a great nation, and "God was with the boy, and he grew up..." (Gen. 21:20a) The Israelites are promised God's covenantal love, "I will take you as my people, and I will be your God." (Ex. 6:7a), that will be expressed in freedom, deliverance, redemption, and a promised land of abundance. Bartimaeus' future begins right away; "Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way." (Mark 10:52b) For Bartimaeus, following Jesus became his hopeful, promised new life.

We don't arrive at this hopeful future alone or by dint of our own efforts alone; we reach a better tomorrow because we are accompanied by God who is with us and our children, who takes us as God's people, who allows us to follow Christ on the way.

Preaching the Lesson

The passage from Jeremiah offers a useful progression: the problems that make us weep for our children; the work we are to do to create a just world in which all children are safe and can thrive; and the hope for our future—that our children will be restored to their families, communities, and a nation that protect and seek justice for them, and that we all will be the better for it. A Children's Sabbath sermon on Jeremiah 31:15–17 might explore the questions: "Whose weeping does God hear today?"; "what is the work God expects of us to create change for children?"; and "what is God's promise to us and to our children for a better tomorrow?"

Whose weeping does God hear today?

God hears the grief of our nation's 13.3 million children living in poverty, cut off from the abundance that most of the nation enjoys, exiled in schools many of us would never dream of sending our children to, left in substandard child care when their hard-working parents can't find good quality care available that they can afford.

God hears the grief of our nation's nine million children without health coverage, and the parents who suffer to witness their needless suffering.

God hears the grief of children lost to the pipeline to prison and the families who mourn their exile there.

Note:

The profiles of children in Section 2 of this resource manual may help you put a real face of a child in your sermon. Perhaps there are other stories of particular children that you would share as you describe the children for whom God and we weep.

In Jeremiah, God hears the weeping of Rachel for her children lost and in exile, and promises that there will be a reward for her work and that her children will come back to their own country.

Comments Patrick D. Miller in *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. VI*, "Rachel's weeping is over the lost children regardless of who is ultimately responsible. But it may be that the ambiguity around the question of responsibility for the terror—tyrannical king or wrathful deity—is what has held the image of Rachel's weeping so powerfully in the tradition, enabling it to be recalled in the face of the terror and destruction of the Holocaust and in the depiction of the plight of the homeless. [Walter Brueggemann writes:

Mother Rachel in Ramah, moreover, is not grudging with her tears. She will weep for all her children.

The warehoused ones in New York City are present, then, with the baby at Bethlehem, and with the exiles in Babylon, and with the lost boy in Genesis. On the horizon of mother Rachel, all are the same, all her abused, destroyed children who must be grieved in perpetuity. And [Jonathan] Kozol, in an act of courageous imagination, shows us [in his book on homelessness titled *Rachel and Her Children*] that our policy on homelessness is indeed a 'final solution,' a betrayal of a beloved city, a city completely dissolved in tears."

(NIB, Vol. VI, p. 815)

Today, above the grinding noise of cement mixers and pounding hammers building new prison cells for Black and Latino sons, God hears the weeping of our mothers and others, but promises us that with our work to dismantle the pipeline there can be a reward and our children can make it back home.

So too today, God hears the cries of entire communities oppressed by poverty, lack of jobs or health care, racism, and anti-immigrant prejudice, even as God sends us to confront the powers and principalities and find a way through the wilderness so that all the people might know a promised land of plenty and justice.

In Matthew, Jesus hears the loud cries of blind Bartimaeus who refuses to be hushed as he seeks healing and a hopeful future for himself—noisy, persistent, won't be hushed, active faith, and Jesus hears and responds. When we ourselves are sitting on the sidelines out of resources; when we feel like we are in the dark and just can't see the way

ahead, if we would but call on God with fervent, won't be hushed faith, asking for God to grant us vision, by our faith and God's grace our eyes will be opened, and we will see fresh vistas and the way ahead to the glory of God.

Yes, God hears. The cries that God hears come from different places: children, entire communities, mothers, and individuals with their own needs; and yet, God's response is consistent: calling *us* to respond to the suffering and injustice that God has heard.

What is the work that God expects of us to create change for our children that will usher in God's promise of hope and a better tomorrow?

While there is much that has and should bring us to tears about the plight of children in our nation today, there is hope for a better tomorrow if we heed God's call to move from weeping to work.

True, 13.3 million children in our rich nation are living in poverty, but we know what to do to bring a better tomorrow. Children can't move out of poverty on their own, but there are effective ways that we as a nation can lift children and their families out of poverty or at least protect them from poverty's worst effects. We know what works. Programs that reduce poverty by providing cash or near-cash assistance—such as the Food Stamp Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program, and the Earned Income Tax Credit—can ease child poverty for millions of children. Government benefits (federal and state) lifted almost one of every three otherwise-poor children above the poverty line in 2003. Still, no child deserves to live in poverty, so there is more work to be done so that every family has the job training, living wage, health care, child care, and other supports they need to keep children out of poverty and ready to thrive.

Nine million children may lack health coverage today, but we have the real opportunity to ensure that every child in our nation has health coverage this year if we join our voices to demand justice and compassion. There's no mystery: Children need regular health care for their developing minds and bodies. They need timely treatment for illness and injury. By doing the right and decent thing, we not only will build stronger, healthier children—the most important reason for acting—but also ensure a healthy, productive workforce. We know that children with health coverage are healthier and do better in school. Imagine the better tomorrow when every child has the benefit of health coverage and a shot at good health.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

The statistics tell us that a Black boy born in 2001—just eight years old today—faces a one in three risk of imprisonment in his lifetime. That is true from the data we have in hand today. But we can change the odds. We can work to provide a better tomorrow for those boys and for us all. What is currently painting such a grim picture for those young boys? Poverty, lack of health and mental health care, abuse and neglect, failing schools, dangerous neighborhoods. But we know how to address and solve those problems; we know what works. Geoff Canada's Harlem Children's Zone is taking children out of the pipeline to prison and putting children on paths of promise. CDF Freedom Schools® sites have welcomed children who might have traveled through the pipeline to prison, touching the lives of more than 70,000 children since the program began in 1992 with caring college-age student leaders, reading and other enrichment, parent involvement, and community-building skills and experiences. Head Start programs have demonstrated that investing in early childhood development saves us financial and human costs, as Head Start graduates do better in school and are more likely to stay out of trouble. Innovative schools like the KIPP (Knowledge Is Power Program) Academy in 19 states and the District of Columbia and the Seed Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., have shown how innovation, high expectations, excellent teaching, and comprehensive support can fill graduation stages instead of prison cells with Black, Latino, poor and at-risk students.

We are called to this hard but hopeful work because we have been assured that God hears us, God calls us to this work, and God has promised to be with us as we work for



a better tomorrow—God is with our children as they grow, God is with our nation as we struggle to move from oppression to a land of promise and plenty for all, God is with us as we open our eyes and determine to follow Christ on the way.

Sample Children's Sermon #1

“God's Stories, Our Stories”

If possible, find an illustrated Children's Bible that has pictures of the stories mentioned below and bookmark the appropriate pages, or search the Internet for appropriate biblical images and print out the pages.

Show the illustrations as you mention the stories.

Today is Children's Sabbath, a special weekend to celebrate how wonderful children are, but also a time to remember children who have big problems, like not enough money for food or homes or doctor visits, and a time to learn and pray and talk about how God wants us to make all children's lives better.

In the Bible, there are lots of stories about children and families who are having a tough time and about the people who try hard to help families and keep children safe.

When Jesus himself was a baby, his parents had to work hard to find a safe place where King Herod wouldn't hurt him. King Herod was worried that when baby Jesus grew up, he would change things and King Herod wouldn't be in charge any more. The wise men decided not to tell King Herod where baby Jesus was, even though King Herod would be mad—that was brave of them to do the right thing even when it was hard to do! When baby Jesus' parents learned that King Herod was looking for baby Jesus, they took him to a far-away place where they knew their baby would be safe. They were brave and loving and very determined to keep their baby safe. And you know what? When Jesus grew up, he did change things! His friends learned that following God is more important than following the King.

Long before baby Jesus was born, Moses was a baby and he, like all of the Jewish boys at the time, was in danger from the Pharaoh—who was like the king. The Pharaoh was being very unfair to the Jewish people and he didn't want the children to grow up and change things to make it fair. Moses' mother and sister were very smart and brave

and they came up with a plan to keep baby Moses safe from the Pharaoh: They hid him in a basket that they gently placed in the river where he could float safely until he was rescued. A woman nearby saw baby Moses floating in the water and wanted to help keep him safe and to take care of him. The mother, the sister, and the neighbor each did their part to be sure that the baby wasn't hurt and to take good care of him so he could grow up safely. And you know what? When Moses grew up, he did change things so the Pharaoh had to stop being unfair and let the Jewish people be free the way God wanted.

Even today, there are lots of families who are raising children in neighborhoods that aren't safe and have lots of problems, and who worry and work hard to keep their children safe from harm and out of trouble. If we do everything we can to keep all children safe, by working together like the people in the Bible stories worked together to keep baby Jesus and baby Moses safe, children can grow up safely and keep changing the world, so that we follow God and work to make things fair for everyone.

Let's pray. Dear God, thank you for showing us through Bible stories how you want it to be—that children are kept safe from the things that could hurt them so they can grow up the way you want them to. Thank you for showing us we can make the world better by working together as leaders and parents and sisters and brothers and neighbors. Help us to live the way you want and to be your partners in making the world better for children and for all of us. Amen.

Sample Children's Sermon #2

“Something Beautiful”

Introduce the story by saying something like:

“This weekend is Children's Sabbath, a special time of celebrating how wonderful children are and how much God loves every single child.

The Children's Sabbaths weekend is also a time to learn about the problems and hard times many children and families are having. It is also a time to look at how, with God's help, we can all work hard to change things for children so that every child has hope, and tomorrow is better for all of us.

When you listen to the story, I want you to listen for something. [To a third of the children:] I want you to see if you hear what the story says about how wonderful children are. [To another third of the children:] I want you to listen to see if you hear what the story says about the problems and hard times children are having. [To the remaining third of the children:] And I want you to listen to see if you hear something in the story about how if we work we can bring hope to children and make tomorrow better for all of us.”

Read the story Something Beautiful by Sharon Dennis Wyeth, Illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet (New York: Dragonfly Books). Some congregations equipped to do this may want to project the images of each page so that all of the congregation members can see the pages as the story is read.

After you read the story, wonder aloud: “That's really something to think about: that each one of us has a ‘something beautiful.’ I wonder what my ‘something beautiful’ is. I wonder what your ‘something beautiful’ is. Hmm. I think this week, I'm going to think about what my ‘something beautiful’ is. And I'm going to remember that each one of us is God's ‘something beautiful.’

“Let's pray:

Dear God, thank you for making each of us in your image, something beautiful. Help us to see your beauty in each child and in each person. Help us to work hard to change the problems we see so that we can make our world look more like the way you want it to be. Amen.”

Lesson Plans are available online at www.childrensdefense.org.





SECTION 7

Hindu Resources for the Children's Sabbath

The following resources are offered to support Hindu participation in the Children's Sabbaths weekend and movement:

- Hindu Perspective
- Reflection
- Children's Activities

Please utilize these resources as appropriate for your community as you continue your work to nurture and protect all children.

Hindu Perspective on the 2009 Children's Sabbaths Theme: Compassion (dayaa), Charity (daan), and Service (sevaa)

Prepared by Dr. Vidya Bhushan Gupta

The goal of the multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend this year is to make our congregations aware of the plight of children in the United States living in poverty and without health insurance. A nation's children, rich or poor, are its most precious possession and its hopes and aspirations. The most important oblation in a Hindu religious service is offered to God *prajapati*, protector of progeny, to pray for healthy children who are givers of joy. [Rig-Veda X, 41–42] Making this wish for everyone in the society, the mantra uses first person plural “us” instead of first person singular “me.” Let us offer this oblation to almighty God *prajapati* on this weekend for all our children, those who are born in riches and those who are born in poverty, that every one of them may have all the opportunities to achieve the potential that God has endowed them with. Let us affirm our commitment to those who are born in poverty by vowing that we will contribute to their welfare in whatever way we can (*yatha-sambhav*), either in cash by donating money for the schools, orphanages, and other programs that serve them or in kind through advocacy to create opportunities for them to get a better education and health care, and to help their families move out of poverty.

Salvation or God realization in Hinduism depends upon performance of good deeds (*karma*), altruistic, for the benefit of the world at large (*shrauta karma*), and egoistic, for the well-being of oneself and one's family (*smaarta karma*). Deeds done for the poor and not-so-fortunate can be considered both *shrauta* and *smaarta*, depending upon the philosophical perspective (*darshan*) from which we conceptualize God and His children as a universal spirit pervading everything in this world (*Isha vasya idam sarvum, yat kinchit jagatyam jagat*) (*Ishwar sarva butanaam hrideshu tishatathi Arjuna*), a universal ocean in which we exist temporarily as waves, part and yet separate for a finite time (monism), or as a divine father or mother of every one of us (*sarveshaam amritsya putrah*). Each of these concepts unites us in a way that helping one another in times of difficulty is not an act of sympathy, empathy, or altruism, but an act of self-help and preservation, because

in essence we are the same. Therefore, to a Hindu the act of helping the poor is not an act of pity but a sacred duty.

At the ethical level, Rig-Veda reminds us that, “It is expected of every rich man to satisfy the poor implorer. Let the rich have foresight that the rich of today may not remain rich tomorrow because remember that riches revolve from person to person like the spokes of a wheel.” The same hymn warns us that the riches of one who gives liberally do not waste away while the one who does not give does not find anyone to console him. A person who has ample food in his store and hardens his heart against the needy person who comes in a miserable shape begging for bread to eat, will find no one to console him. It declares that bounteous is he who gives food to the needy and helps a person in need, to him there is ample recompense, and success awaits him in battle because he makes a friend of him in future troubles. [Rig-Veda X 117] In Hindu codes of ethics (*dharm*a), service (*seva*) and compassion (*daya*) are considered cardinal virtues. Satya Sai Baba, a Hindu monk, calls the service of the poor or *dridra narayana* the highest form of spiritual practice. Swamii Dayananda, a social reformer, made the welfare of everyone in the society an article of faith of his organization.

So, I urge all Hindus to reflect upon their duty to the poor and unfortunate in the society and do whatever they can to help them. In the future of our children lies the future of humankind. Service and love make us dear to the lord, as Krishna says in Gita, “The One who is not envious (*advesta sarva-bhutanam*) but who is a kind friend to all living beings (*maitrah karuna eva ca*), who does not think himself a proprietor (*nirmamo*), who is free from false ego (*nirahankarah*) and...whose mind and intelligence are in agreement with Me (*mayy arpita-mano-buddhir*), he is very dear to Me (*yo mad-bhaktah sa me priyah*).”

The following resources can be used to engage children and adults in your temple in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration. This year's activities should focus on children who are poor, lack health insurance, and are incarcerated or at risk of incarceration in their lifetime.

Reflections

Compassion (*dayaa*)

Daya dharma kaa mool hai, paap mool abhimaan

Compassion is the root of religion while arrogance is a sin.

Bada hua to kyaa hua jese ped khajoor, punchhi ko chaayaa nahin phal laage ati dur.

What is the idea of being tall like a date palm tree which does not give shelter to the birds and carries fruit too high to be accessible?

Bhunjate te twagham paapaah ye pachanty aatmakaarnaat

Those sinful ones who cook food only for their own verily eat sin. (Gita 3-13)

Piniyaadinna adha maanaay tavyaan draaghiyaasam anu pasyeta panthaam

O hi vartante rathyeva chakranyam-anyam upa tish thant raayah

It is expected of every rich man to satisfy the poor implorer, let the rich have foresight (for the rich of today may not remain rich tomorrow). Remember that riches revolve from person to person like the spokes of a wheel. (Rig-Veda X.117.5)

Charity (*daana*)

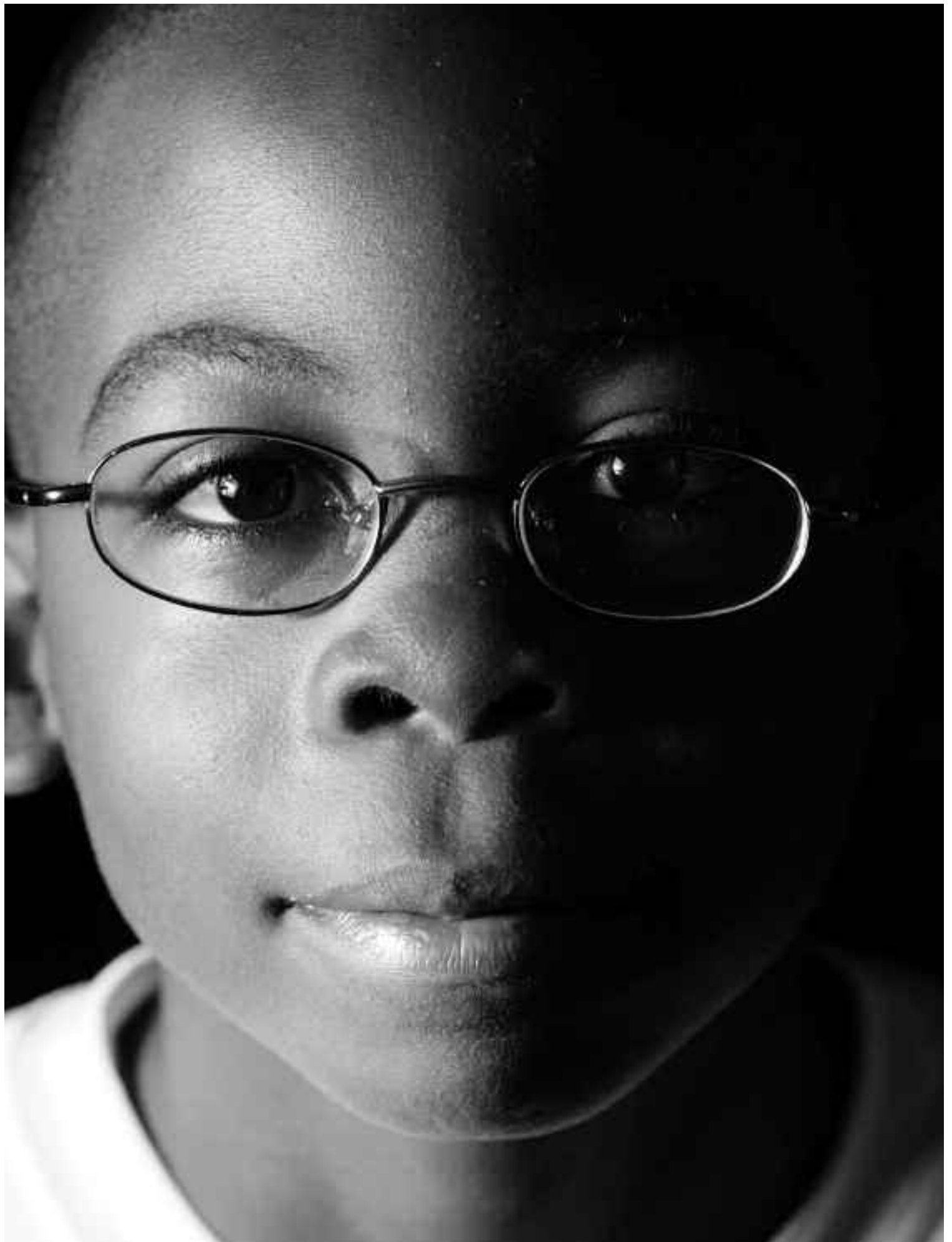
Charity is considered to be a cardinal duty of a Hindu. A Hindu is supposed to perform an *athithi* and *balivaisvadeva* sacrifice every day. The former consists of feeding a guest or a poor person and the latter feeding and taking care of livestock. Special occasions have been earmarked for charity, such as birth and marriage of a child, death of the parents, eclipses, and two seasons of *sraavana* (July–August) and *maarghshira* (November–December) both these times nature is vibrant and crops are ready. *Daana* can be given as food (*anna*), knowledge (*vidya*), land (*bhu*) for temples, clothes (*vastra*), ornaments (*svarna*), grains (*dhaanya*) and water (*jala*). Charitable acts should be done without any ulterior motive such as fame or for return of a favor.

Considerateness (from chapter 58 of Tirukkural by Tiruvalluvar translated by V.V.S. Aiyar)

574 – What is the use of eyes that merely show in the face, if they show not consideration for others according to their measure?

576 – Behold the men who have eyes, but which show not consideration towards others; verily they are no better than trees fixed in the earth.

577 – Verily they are blind, those who show not consideration towards others: and there are none that truly see but are indulgent to others' faults.



Children's Activities

Activities for Preschoolers

Offering to Help Someone

(Source: Boys' Town of America workbook)

1. Notice when someone is having a bad time.
2. Look at the person.
3. Ask if you can help.
Reason: Others will offer to help you when you are in trouble.

Sharing Things with Others

(Source: Boys' Town of America workbook)

1. Don't get upset if you are asked to share.
2. Let the other person use the item first.
3. Ask if you can use it later.
4. When you get to use it, offer it back to the other person after you have used it.
5. Take turns and play fair.
6. If a person thanks you, say, "You're welcome."

Reason: People are more likely to share something that they have with you and you will be seen as a nice person.

Practice: Ask children to write or tell about a time when they shared something with others.

Role play: Your teacher asks you to share a book, grandma asks you to share your bed, mom asks you to share a Nintendo game or TV remote control.

Showing That You Care

(Source: Boys' Town of America workbook)

1. Look at the person.
2. Say something nice.
3. Help the person if you can.

Story: The Power of Friendship (Panch Tantra)

Long ago, people in Asia used to say that an elephant and a dog cannot be friends. Elephants simply did not like dogs, and dogs were afraid of elephants. When dogs are frightened by those who are bigger than they are, they often bark very loudly to cover up their fear. When dogs barked at the elephants, the elephants got annoyed and chased them. Elephants had no patience at all when it came to dogs. Even if a dog were quiet and still, any nearby elephant would automatically attack him. This is why

everybody agreed that elephants and dogs were "natural enemies," just like lions and tigers, or cats and mice.

Once upon a time, there was a royal bull elephant who was very well fed and cared for. In the neighborhood of the elephant shed, there was a scrawny, poorly fed, stray dog. He was attracted by the smell of the rich sweet rice being fed to the royal elephant. So he began sneaking into the shed and eating the wonderful rice that fell from the elephant's mouth. He liked it so much, that soon he would eat nowhere else. While enjoying his food, the big mighty elephant did not notice the tiny shy stray dog. By eating such rich food, the once underfed dog gradually got bigger and stronger, and became very handsome looking. The good-natured elephant began to notice him. Since the dog had gotten used to being around the elephant, he had lost his fear. So he did not bark at him. Because he was not annoyed by the friendly dog, the elephant gradually got used to him. Slowly they became friendlier and friendlier with each other. Before long, neither would eat without the other, and they enjoyed spending their time together.

When they played, the dog would grab the elephant's heavy trunk, and the elephant would swing him forward and backward, from side to side, up and down, and even in circles! So it was that they became "best friends," and wanted never to be separated.

Then one day a man from a remote village, who was visiting the city, passed by the elephant shed. He saw the frisky dog, who had become strong and beautiful. He bought him from the mahout, even though he didn't really own him. He took him back to his home village, without anyone knowing where that was. Of course, the royal bull elephant became very sad, since he missed his best friend, the dog. He became so sad that he didn't want to do anything, not even eat or drink or bathe. So the mahout had to report this to the king, although he said nothing about selling the friendly dog. It just so happened that the king had an intelligent minister who was known for his understanding of animals. So he told him to go and find out the reason for the elephant's condition.

The wise minister went to the elephant shed. He saw at once that the royal bull elephant was very sad. He thought, "This once happy elephant does not appear to be sick in any way. But I have seen this condition before, in

Hindu Resources for the Children's Sabbath

men and animals alike. This elephant is grief-stricken, probably due to the loss of a very dear friend." Then he said to the guards and attendants, "I find no sickness. He seems to be grief-stricken due to the loss of a friend. Do you know if this elephant had a very close friendship with anyone?"

They told him how the royal elephant and the stray dog were best friends. "What happened to this stray dog?" asked the minister. "He was taken by an unknown man," they replied, "and we do not know where he is now." The minister returned to the king and said, "Your majesty, I am happy to say your elephant is not sick. As strange as it may sound, he became best friends with a stray dog! Since the dog has been taken away, the elephant is grief-stricken and does not feel like eating or drinking or bathing. This is my opinion."

The king said, "Friendship is one of life's most wonderful things. My minister, how can we bring back my elephant's friend and make him happy again?" "My lord," replied the minister, "I suggest you make an official announcement, that whoever has the dog who used to live at the royal elephant shed, will be fined." This was done, and when the

villager heard of it, he released the dog from his house. He was filled with great happiness and ran as fast as he could, straight back to his best friend, the royal bull elephant. The elephant was so overjoyed, that he picked up his friend with his trunk and sat him on top of his head. The happy dog wagged his tail, while the elephant's eyes sparkled with delight. They both lived happily ever after. Meanwhile, the king was very pleased by his elephant's full recovery. He was amazed that his minister seemed to be able to read the mind of an elephant. So he rewarded him appropriately.

Moral: Even "natural enemies" can become "best friends."

Activities for Elementary School Students

Values Game

(From Vedic heritage teaching program – children's workbook, part 1, Sunita and Sunder Ramaswami, Sri Gangadhareshwar Trust, Rishikesh, India)

Match the words in column A that disrobe Rama with their opposites in column B.

Column A

1. Helpful
2. Humble
3. Loving
4. Peaceful
5. Kind
6. Cheerful
7. Clean
8. Gentle
9. Wise
10. Compassionate

Column B

- grouchy
- hateful
- rough
- restless
- dirty
- untruthful
- cruel
- proud
- unhelping
- selfish

What Could We Do to Act on These Values?

For example, we could collect food and used clothing for those who are poor. What else could we do?

Story: Krishna and Sudaamaa

Krishna and Sudaamaa studied in the same class at the school of Sandeepun Rishi. Although Krishna was the son of a village chief and Sudaamaa was the son of a poor priest, they became good friends. Krishna learned about weapons to become a warrior while Sudaamaa learned about religion to become a priest. After graduation they went to their homes and they lost track of each other.

After many years Krishna became the king of Dwarka while Sudaamaa became a village priest. Krishna lived in a big palace with his wife, but Sudaamaa lived in a hut with his wife and son. Sudaamaa was poor and he could not afford to buy good food or clothes for his family. One day his wife said, "You always bragged about your classmate and friend Krishna. I have heard that he has become the king of Dwarka. Why don't you go to him to ask for a job that will pay enough money for us to eat and live better?"

Sudaamaa said, "I wonder if Krishna will remember me. He is now a famous king and I am a poor priest."

"Don't be embarrassed by poverty," his wife said. "If he is as good as you say he is, he will remember you and treat you well."

Sudaamaa agreed and got ready to go. When he was about to leave his wife gave him a bag of puffed rice to give to Krishna as a gift. "One does not go empty handed to a friend's house, but I have nothing better to give" she said.

When Sudaamaa reached the palace of Krishna, the guards stopped him at the gate. When he told them to tell Krishna that his old friend Sudaamaa has come to see him, they laughed at him, "How can you, a poor priest, be friend of the great king Krishna? Go away before we arrest you."

When Krishna heard about the noise at the palace gate, he sent a servant to ask what was going on. When the servant told Krishna that a poor priest, Sudaamaa, was claiming to be his childhood friend from the school of Rishi Sandeepun, he came down and greeted Sudaamaa.

"Never treat any guest, rich or poor, badly," he scolded the guards for mistreating Sudaamaa.

Krishna took Sudaamaa to his living room where his wife offered him water and towel to wash his face and hands. Then she brought fruits, snack and milk for him. After

Hindu Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Sudaamaa had finished eating and the two friends were talking about the old times, Krishna noticed that Sudaamaa was trying to hide a brown bag from him. He asked Sudaamaa what was in the bag. Sudaamaa offered the bag to Krishna hesitatingly, "Your bhabhi has sent this small gift for you."

Krishna took the bag and opened it to find puffed rice in it. He happily ate them and thanked his friend commenting that they were delicious, "Thank my bhabhi for such a delicious treat."

"Brother, it does not matter what gift you brought, what matters is that you brought it with love," he said.

Krishna showed him the palace and introduced him to his ministers. Seven days passed but Sudaamaa felt too embarrassed to ask Krishna for help. He bid Krishna farewell and left for his village. He was worried and sad on the way because he did not ask Krishna for a job or help and was as poor as before. When he reached his village he was surprised to see a big mansion where his hut used to be. He cautiously knocked at the door. He was overjoyed to see his wife, surrounded by his children open the door for him. They were all dressed in new clothes. Seeing him so surprised his wife told him that his friend Krishna had sent his workers with money and clothes and they worked round the clock to make the house. She told him the Krishna had also made a school in the village and offered Sudaamaa the job of head priest/teacher of the school. They all lived happily ever after.

MORAL: Treat every person, poor or rich, equally.

(After reading this story, students may wish to act it out as a skit.)



Activities for Teenagers

Story: Munna (Dr. Vidya Bhushan Gupta)

One summer morning during my last vacation to India, I was reading the Hindustan Times newspaper and sipping the *masala* tea on the porch of my sister's house when I heard a knock on the door. A scrawny swarthy youngster dressed in a light blue t-shirt and khaki trousers stood at the door with hands folded in *namaste*.

"*Namaste* sir! Is Bibiji home?"

"Who is it?" my sister called from the kitchen.

"Bibiji, I am Munna. Do you remember me?" the boy spoke loudly before I could reply.

"Munna who, I don't remember," my sister came to the door saying this.

The young man bent down and touched her feet.

"Bibiji, I am Munna. My mother, Shanti, used to work at your house." Immediately my mind raced back 20 years and visualized a young child sitting on the floor with his chin cupped in his hands watching me curiously as I opened my suitcases from America. Didi also remembered him when he mentioned his mother's name.

He used to accompany Shanti to my sister's and other houses she went for cleaning and dishwashing. He sat on his haunches in the courtyard while his mother washed the dishes and clothes, trying to do what she did, but his heart used to be in the TV that Deepak, my sister's seven-year-old son, watched after he returned from school. Sometimes he would sneak into Deepak's bedroom to get a glimpse of the TV. He sat on the floor close to the door with eyes glued to the TV but ready to sprint if my brother-in-law, whom he called *bade bauji*, saw him. Bade bauji didn't like any servant to go to the bedrooms unless they had to for cleaning the floors or bringing tea or snacks. If he caught him watching TV, he yelled, "*ullu kaa pathaa, maarunga saale ko ek thapad*" (son of an owl, I will give you a slap), and Munna ran back to his mother. When Deepak did his homework, Munna hung around looking at the books and pencils. He couldn't read and sometimes held Deepak's books upside down. Deepak didn't mind because he could order him around whenever his pencil fell on the floor or he needed water or some other supply.

Bibiji, my sister, was usually busy in the kitchen and didn't care if Munna watched TV. She was kind. Once, seeing him wearing a torn shirt, she gave him Deepak's old shirt to wear. She often gave him whatever she cooked for Deepak. Once she asked Shanti why she didn't send him to the school. At every Diwali she gave 50 rupees to him to buy toys and firecrackers. At *Holi*, too, she gave him some money for *gulaal* (powdered dye). Whenever there was *pooja* in the house or a *jaagran*, my sister gave him a few rupees. He bought marbles, tops and kites and ate *aam paaper* and *chaat* whenever he got the money.

Munna liked my sister. He always greeted her with *namaste* as soon as he came with his mother. He sprinted like a gazelle whenever he saw her carrying a tray or any other thing, took it from her hands, and gave it to whomever she wanted it to be given to.

My sister often complained about Munna's predicament to my younger sister.

"I feel bad for Munna. He is of the same age as my Deepu but doesn't go the school. Look at the mind of the poor. His parents want him to work instead of going to the school. Whenever I ask his mother to send him to school, she replies, "Bibiji! What will we, the poor, eat if we send our children to the school? I am just waiting for him to grow a little older so that he can begin working at a *dhaba*."

"Didi, why do you worry about them? They have always lived like this and always will. Moreover, if everyone goes to school, no one will be left to work in our houses and restaurants? It is the rule of nature, some are haves and some, have nots," my younger sister would say.

My brother-in-law often scolded my sister, "You are spoiling him. Treat a servant like a servant otherwise he will get on your head."

One day Munna didn't eat anything my sister gave to him, held his head and wanted to lie down. He said that his head hurt. Shanti asked him to sit quietly by her side. When my sister saw him sitting quietly next to Shanti instead of by Deepu's room, she asked Shanti, "Shanti, Munna doesn't look well. What's the matter?"

Hindu Resources for the Children's Sabbath

"Bibiji, he hasn't eaten much since morning and feels warm." After touching his forehead Didi confirmed that he had fever.

She took out a few rupees from her pocketbook and said, "Shanty, here are 50 rupees. Take him to Dr. Saluja."

"Bibiji, may God be good to you. You are a goddess," Shanti said as she took the money. Tears of gratitude rolled down her cheeks. Didi, too, was overwhelmed by this expression of gratitude by Shanti. She cleaned the corner of her eyes with her sari.

Munna did not come for the next five days. In the meanwhile Didi made a resolution. When Munna returned, Didi told Shanti, "Shanti, I shall raise your monthly salary by 50 rupees if you send Munna to the school."

"Bibiji, what're you saying. His father will not agree. He says that the schools aren't good for the children of the poor. They remain good for nothing. Neither do they perform well in the school, nor do they get jobs after they finish and nor do they want to work as servants or laborers as their parents did."

But Didi was firm. She said that he would have to go the school if Shanti wanted the raise. And if she did not send him to the school, she said she would stop giving him the gratuity at Diwali and Holi because they wasted it on trifles.

"Bibiji, how shall we pay the fees and buy school uniforms?" Shanti asked.

"Municipality schools are free and I will see if I have any old uniforms of Deepak's. If I have them, I shall give them for Munna," Didi replied.

Shanti had no choice. She spoke to her husband that night.

"These monied people always talk like that. They don't know that our children need to work to eat food and keep their bodies covered. Moreover, Munna is still very young," Bhura replied.

"But she will stop giving us the Holi and Diwali gratuities if we don't send him to the school. She has assured me that she will give old clothes for a uniform also," shanty told him.

"Moreover, he is too young to work now. We can always take him out when he is ready to work," she continued.

Munna stopped coming with Shanti from the next week.

Didi asked him to sit in the drawing room, offered him tea, and asked about his mother and his life. It had been 20 years since that fateful day when he stopped accompanying his mother to the houses where she worked.

"Bibiji, I work as a postal clerk at the post office in Naraina. My mother doesn't work anymore. My father passed away of tuberculosis. I have come to invite you to my marriage. Please do come. It is because of you that I became what I am today. But for you I would have been working at a *dhaba*. My mother wants to see you. She couldn't come because she has arthritis of the knees from sitting on the floor for too many years."

Tears rolled down my sister's eyes.

"Yes, I will come," she assured him.

Moral: Give the poor tools and opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty. "Don't give me fish but teach me how to fish," goes an old saying.

Suggested Activities:

- Present statistics on children living in poverty in the United States and India.
- Present children's Bill of Rights from the United Nations.
- Research whether there are national or international poverty reduction programs that follow the moral of the above story.



SECTION 8

Jewish Resources for Children's Shabbat

Following you will find a range of Jewish resources for your Children's Shabbat:

- Suggestions for the services
- Passages from traditional Jewish sources related to children, poverty, health care, and keeping young people on paths of promise
- Readings, reflections, and prayers for the services
- Suggested music for the services
- Sermon notes on B'reishit, the Torah portion for October 17, 2009
- A discussion guide for use with adults, in a sisterhood meeting, men's club, or other gathering convened especially for the Children's Shabbat is found on pages 34–35 and is designed to be used in conjunction with the Children's Concerns Primer in Section 2.
- Educational materials for use in religious school classes and youth groups will be available for download at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths

Suggestions for the Services

Services on the Children's Shabbat are an excellent opportunity to help focus the congregation on the links between Torah readings, Jewish tradition, and creating change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow. Children's Shabbat services also serve as a time to affirm the work of your congregation on behalf of children and to challenge members to continue and expand their responses to the needs of children locally and nationally.

The following suggestions may assist you in planning your own unique Children's Shabbat service or supplementing your congregation's weekly prayer and discussion.

- **There are several options for the services:**
 - 1) Use or adapt the service readings provided in this section;
 - 2) Develop your own Children's Shabbat that reflects the theme of children, justice, and the need for action; or
 - 3) Use readings from the prayer books that include a social action theme.
- **Determine ways in which the children of your congregation can participate in the various services on this Shabbat.** Involve children attending religious school, members of youth groups, and children who attend the day school. For example, religious school classes and youth groups could read prayers or Torah and Haftarah readings, lead songs or responsive readings, greet people as they arrive, or design and print the bulletin. Keep in mind, however, that this is a family event and should not be "given over" to children as "performers."
- **Focus the sermon, D'var Torah, or Torah discussion on children.** Emphasize creating change for children in poverty, without health care, and swept up in the pipeline to prison crisis so that together we can bring hope and a better tomorrow for all children.
- **Invite a professional from the congregation or the community who works with or on behalf of children to give the sermon.** For example, this might be a health care professional, someone working with young people in the juvenile justice system or in a program that strives to keep young people on paths of promise, or staff from an organization or agency serving low-income families.
- **Bless the children.** On Friday night, incorporate the parental blessing for children into the service. Alternatively, incorporate the need to bless all children into the Shabbat morning blessing of Bar/Bat Mitzvah children.
- **Honor congregation members who are working to nurture and protect children.** This year, invite people who are working to improve the lives of children in poverty, without health coverage, or at risk of incarceration. Ask them to lead certain prayers or give them Aliyot during the Torah reading.
- **Collect Tzedakah in religious school to benefit a program serving children,** such as a community health clinic, Head Start program, mentoring or tutoring program, shelter for homeless families, or after-school program.
- **Distribute or insert the bulletin inserts,** which can be found beginning on page 55.
- **With the help of your Cantor, prepare some new music to be sung by the children at the service.**
- **Encourage families to invite grandparents and other relatives to join them for the service.** If you wish, plan a special recognition of grandparents during the service.
- **Arrange for a special kiddush/oneg Shabbat/luncheon/se'udah shlishit in honor of the occasion.** As a resource, see "Planning a Shabbat or Holiday Family Meal" and "A Family Shabbaton," both from the Youth/School Liaison Department of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism.
- **Continue the celebration of Children's Shabbat with a M'laveh Malkah during the Saturday evening or the Sunday morning minyan/religious school sessions.**

Passages from Traditional Jewish Sources

Related to Poverty, Health and Health Care, and Keeping Young People on Paths of Promise

Poverty

Although the giving of charity is a sacred obligation, the ultimate aim of tzedakah is to abolish poverty and to enable the poor to help themselves.

(Talmud, Shabbat 63a)

If a community lacked a synagogue and a shelter for the poor, it was first obligated to build a shelter for the poor.

(Sefer Chasidim)

There is nothing in the world more grievous than poverty—the most terrible of sufferings. Our teachers said: All the troubles of the world are assembled on one side and poverty is on the other.

(Midrash Rabbah Exodus 31:12)

The highest form of charity is to help prevent a person from becoming poor. This includes offering a loan or employment, investing in a business, or any other form of assistance that will avoid poverty. This basis for this principle is the commandment in our passage: You shall strengthen the poor.

(Maimonides' commentary to Leviticus 25:35–38)

Do not neglect the children of the poor, for from them will go forth the law.

(Nedarim 81a)

Defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted and needy.

(Midrash Tehillim 82:3)

Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.

(Proverbs 31:9)

You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I enjoin you to observe this commandment...when you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

(Deuteronomy 24:17–18, 21)

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish: "He who lends money [to a poor person] is greater than he who gives charity; and he who throws money into a common purpose [to form a partnership with the poor person] is greater than either."

(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 63b)

A small bit of bread may be life to the poor; one who deprives them of it sheds blood.

(Ben Sira 34:21)

Anyone who withholds what is due to the poor blasphemes against the Maker of all, but one who is gracious unto the needy honors God.

(Proverbs 14:31)

Health and Health Care

Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.

(Leviticus 19:16)

If one person is able to save another and does not save him, he transgresses the commandment, "Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor." (*Leviticus 19:16*) Similarly, if one person sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by wild animals, and, although able to rescue him either alone or by hiring others, does not rescue him; or if one hears heathens or informers plotting evil against another or laying a trap for him and does not call it to the other's attention and let him know; or if one knows that a heathen or violent person is going to attack another and although able to appease him on behalf of the other and make him change his mind, he does not do so; or if one acts in any similar way—he transgresses in each case the injunction "Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor."

(Maimonides, Code, "Laws Concerning Murder and the Preservation of Life," Chapter 1, Sections 14 and 16)

Therefore, man was created singularly to teach you that a) whoever destroys a single soul of Israel, is considered as if he destroys an entire world, and one who saves one soul of Israel, it is considered as if he saves an entire world; b) no one could say to their fellow that my father is better

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

than your father; c) none of the heretics could say “There are many powers in Heaven”; d) again, to declare the greatness of the Holy One of Blessing, for man stamps out many coins with one die, and they are all alike. But the Ruler of all Rulers, the Holy One of Blessing, stamped each person with the seal of Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow. Therefore, each and every one is obliged to say, “For my sake the world was created.”

(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5)

Keeping Young People on Paths of Promise

[Why was there violence in Gilead?] Because they made what is primary secondary and what is secondary primary. How so? Because they loved their possessions more than their own children.

(Midrash Tanhuma, Mattot)

My chosen ones shall outlive the work of their hands. They shall not toil to no purpose; they shall not bear children for terror, but they shall be a people blessed by the Lord, and their offspring shall remain with them.

(Isaiah 65:22–23)

Whoever teaches a neighbor's child Torah earns a seat in the Academy on High.

(Metzia 85a)

One who teaches a child Torah is considered to have taught that child and that child's children and grandchildren, to the end of the generations.

(Kiddushin 30a)

Rav once came to a certain town and ordered the people to fast and pray in order to bring down rain. But no rain fell.

The Reader of the congregation then went before the Ark and recited the words from the prayer book, “God who causes the wind to blow,” and immediately the wind began to blow. He then recited, “God who causes the rain to fall,” and rain began to fall.

Rav asked him, “What special deed have you done to merit such reward?”

The Reader answered, “I teach young children, those of the poor as well as those of the rich. I take no fees from anyone who cannot afford to pay. Also, I have a fish pond, and if a child does not want to study, I give him some fishes to keep and win him over in that way so that soon he becomes eager to learn. In his day, if one had a learned father, the father would teach, and if not, one did not learn. Then they instituted a publicly funded school in Jerusalem. But those without still did not learn. They then set up a school in each district, and the children were to enter at 16 or 17, but when the teachers tried to discipline them, they rebelled and left. They then instituted publicly funded schools for any child six or older. And if there was a long way, or a bridge to cross, they could compel the town to build another school.”

(BT Baba Batra 21a)

Rabbi Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the children did not attend school, and loitered in the streets.

(Pesikta Rabbati 29b)

“They that are planted in the house of the Lord...” (Psalm 92:13). Rabbi Hanan ben Pazzi taught: “While they are yet saplings, they are in the house of the Lord; these are the children who are in school.”

(BT Baba Batra 21a)

And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the result of righteousness shall be quietness and confidence forever.

(Isaiah 32:17)

Readings, Reflections, and Prayers for the Services

The following readings, reflections, and prayers may be incorporated into your services to focus attention on the Eternal's call to justice and care for children. Choose as many or as few as is appropriate for your congregation. Each reading suggests a particular point in the service for which it may be especially appropriate (in some instances, several options are offered), but there are, of course, many ways to incorporate these resources and you should do what works best for your service.

Sample Opening

When God created the world, God made everything a little bit incomplete. Instead of making bread grow out of the earth, God made wheat grow so that we might bake it into bread. Instead of making the earth of bricks, God made it of clay so that we might bake the clay into bricks. Why? So that we could become God's partner in the task of completing the work of creation.

Tonight, as congregations across our nation join in a special Children's Shabbat to "create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow," we remember that each of us is God's partner in the task of completing the work of creation. Each of us has work to do so that every child has health care, every child is lifted from the deprivations of poverty, and every child is set on a path of promise.

There is much to be done, but God has given us all that we need to accomplish it. And so we give thanks this night for all of those gathered here and those who gather across our nation whose hearts burn with compassion for children in need, whose hands are ready to work for change, and whose voices are ready to speak out for justice to bring about a better tomorrow for all children.

Sample Opening

Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Chanina: The students of the wise increase peace in the world, as it says, "And all your children (banayich) will be taught of the Eternal and great shall be the peace of your children (banayich). Do not read banayich (your children) but Bonayich (your builders)."

Our children may be the builders of the world but we are entrusted to be the builders of our children. We are not alone. There are friends and family; teachers and mentors; health care providers and child advocates; all of whom join us in raising our children. Children reflect the lessons they learn from each of us.

Tonight we give thanks to all those who dedicate themselves to creating change for children to bring hope and a better tomorrow. They are the bonim (builders) of our banim (children). As we are grateful for the work they do, so too, we promise to work toward a day when all children shall have all they need to grow as happy, healthy children who know they are beloved by God and valued by us.

Welcome¹

There are days when we seek things for ourselves and measure failure by what we do not gain.

On Shabbat, we seek not to acquire but to share.

There are days when we exploit nature as if it were a horn of plenty that can never be exhausted.

On Shabbat, we stand in wonder before the mystery of creation.

There are days when we act as if we cared nothing for the rights of others.

On Shabbat, we remember that justice is our duty and a better world our goal.

So we embrace Shabbat: Day of rest, day of wonder, day of peace.

Reflection Before the Candle Lighting

This Shabbat let us light candles of hope for all of our children, wherever they may live. Let us light them especially for children in the shadow of poverty, lack of health care, and despair of a positive future. May each one of them feel cared for, safe, and loved and know that we are working for a better tomorrow. As we enter this sacred time of Shabbat, may each child feel the light of your justice, peace, and love.

¹ *Mishkan T'filah: The Siddur for Reform Jewish Prayer*, Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Reflection Before the Candle Lighting

As the great doors of night are opening we come into the clean, quiet room of Shabbat.

Let us be thankful as we light these candles like eyes of holiness on this moment of peace.

Let us savor the fruit of the vine, the blood of the earth that quickens us.

Let us be thankful for the grain, fruit of grasses that feed the cow, the gazelle, and us.

Let us be grateful for the children and the work of the week that are our own fruitfulness.

Let us as we eat never forget that food comes from the earth. We must cherish and heal through labor, we must respect and reward.

(By Marge Piercy. Used by permission of Wallace Literary Agency, Inc.)

A Rebbi's Proverb (from the Yiddish)

If you always assume that the person sitting next to you is the messiah just waiting for some simple human kindness— You will soon come to weigh your words and watch your hands and attend to your responsibilities— And, if he so chooses not to reveal himself in your time— It will not matter.

The Wonder of Life²

Sing a new song to God,
Give thanks for the wonders God has performed.
When we are trapped in narrow places,
Yet find strength to move forward
With confidence and trust;
When we could look the other way,
Yet take a chance to reach out to one another
With openness and compassion;
When we experience great pain or sorrow,
Yet find light in the midst of darkness;
When we recognize the Wonder of Life,
Ordinary moments become sacred.

Introduction to the Lecha Dodi

Traditionally during the last verse of “Lecha Dodi,” the congregation turns around and faces the door to welcome the Shabbat spirit into the room. Tonight, as we join with congregations throughout the nation in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, let us also turn and symbolically welcome all of those who work to create change for children so that we may usher in hope and a better tomorrow.

Responsive Reading (before the Bar'chu)

Leader: We come before the Eternal in a nation that is fractured by income, age, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender.

Congregation: **Praise the One who heals divisions and binds us together.**

Leader: We come before the Eternal with hearts broken by the wounds of children and families we advocate for and serve.

Congregation: **Praise the One who binds up the broken-hearted.**

Leader: We come before the Eternal with visions of justice that have been shattered, carrying in our hearts children whose hopes have been broken.

Congregation: **Praise the One who restores our hopes and dreams.**

Leader: Come, let us celebrate the Eternal's gift of children, and renew our commitment to cherish and protect them as we rise to be summoned and respond.
(Shannon Daley-Harris)

Reflection (following the Maariv Aravim)³

God of the generations, God of new beginnings, children are Your promise of tomorrow made in Your image, a reflection of Your divine love. Teach us to raise our children worthy of this sacred trust of life. Sustain us and our children in health and love. We are thankful for the beauty of our lives and the ability to bring new life. We are thankful to all those who help us to raise our children in love.

² Mark Frydenberg, “The Wonder of Life,” in *Siddur Chaveirim Kol Yisrael*, Ktav Publishing House, New Jersey, 2000, pg. 6 (www.chav.net/siddur). Used with permission of the author.

³ Adapted from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association *Rabbi's Manual*.

Reflection (following the Ahavat Olam)

When justice burns within us like a flaming fire, when love evokes willing sacrifice from us, when, to the last full measure of selfless devotion, we demonstrate our belief in the ultimate triumph of truth and righteousness, then Your goodness enters our lives and we can begin to change the world; and then you live within our hearts, and we through righteousness behold your presence.

(Gates of Prayer)

Reflection (following the Ahavat Olam)

Leader: When Israel was about to receive the Torah, the Holy One said to them, "I am about to give you my Torah. Bring me worthy guarantors to ensure that you will uphold it, and I will give it to you."

Congregation: They said, "Let our ancestors be our guarantors."

Leader: The Holy One replied, "I find many faults in your ancestors. Bring me better guarantors, and I will give it to you."

Congregation: They said, "Ruler of the Universe! Our prophets will be our guarantors."

Leader: Said the Holy One, "With you prophets I also find many faults. Bring me better guarantors, and I will give you My Torah."

Congregation: They said, "Our children will be our guarantors."

Leader: The Holy One replied, "Truly they are good guarantors. For their sake I will give you the Torah."

Congregation: Therefore, parents are required to introduce their child to the study of Torah and to provide good grounding in the ways of the House of Israel in order that the child may live long and well in the world.

(Shir HaShirim Rabbah, Midrashic Commentary on Song of Songs)

Reflection (following the Ahavat Olam)

Let us affirm our faith in Torah, our people's legacy of learning and faith.

There are no words more challenging than "You shall be holy!"

No command more basic than "You shall love!"

There is no insight so fundamental as "In the beginning, God,"

No words so enhancing as "You shall rest!"

No cry is more compelling than "Let My people go!"

No consolation more comforting than "I am with you in your distress."

There is no vision more hopeful than "They shall beat their swords into plowshares,"

And no summons more demanding than "Justice, justice shall you pursue!"

These words have outlived monuments and empires; We want them to live through us, for all time.

We owe it to our ancestors to keep Torah alive; They struggled and suffered to preserve our way of life, Knowing this to be their most precious gift to us.

We owe it to our children to keep Torah alive; Why should they be spiritually impoverished When they can inherit the riches of this heritage?

We owe it to the world to keep Torah alive; This is a message which the world needs to hear. For Judaism gave mankind its first civil rights program. It was expressed in the Sh'ma, the watchword of the Jewish faith: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

As God is one, humankind is one, for each is created equally in the image of God.

(Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath)

Reflection on the Sh'ma

Reader 1: You shall love the Eternal your God with all your mind, with all your strength, with all your being.

Reader 2: The path to the love of God is through the love of others; we do not love God until we love our neighbors as ourselves.

Reader 1: Set these words, which I command you this day, upon your heart.

Reader 3: Faith unites mind and heart. Even as our minds seek to understand life's meaning, so may our lives show love for all created things.

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Reader 1: Teach them faithfully to your children;
speak of them in your home and on your
way, when you lie down and when you
rise up.

Reader 4: We do not teach our children by words
alone: May we make our lives and actions
into good teachings.

Reader 1: Bind them as a sign upon your hand; let
them be a symbol before your eyes;
inscribe them on the doorposts of your
house and on your gates.

Reader 5: Let our homes glow with the beauty of
our faith in God. Let our doors be opened
wide to wisdom and righteousness.

Reader 1: Be mindful of all My Mitzvot and do
them: So shall you consecrate yourselves
to Your God.

Reader 6: Each righteous act of loving kindness is a
way to holiness. Righteous acts elevate
our humanity. Let us learn to use them to
magnify the divine in ourselves and in
the world.

(Adapted from *Gates of Prayer*)

Reflection after the V'a-havta

Love God with all the power of your heart,
With its yearnings and passions.
Love God with all you hold dear in life,
And with the fullness of whatever the world offers you,
Both joy and sorrow.

Teach children to cope,
To dream and to stretch,
To become their purpose,
To live holy lives.

Wrap these words around every deed,
A garment of holy expression.
Let these words shape your home,
A dwelling of peace.

Wherever you go,
Scatter the words as seeds,
Or as drops of water into the thirsty earth.
Nurture trees of life in your garden.

Seal these words upon your heart;
Let them course through
And cleave soul to body
That the sacred permeates all your being.

(*Mishnah T'filah*, p. 45)

After the V'a-havta

Loving life and its mysterious source
With all our heart and all our spirit,
All our sense and strength,
We take upon ourselves and into ourselves
these promises:
to care for the earth
and those who live upon it,
to pursue justice and peace,
to love kindness and compassion.
We will teach this to our children
Throughout the passage of the day—
As we dwell in our homes
And as we go on our journeys,
From the time we rise until we fall asleep.
And may our actions be faithful to our words
That our children's children
May live to know:
Truth and kindness have embraced,
Peace and justice have kissed
And are one.

(*Mishnah T'filah*, p. 157)

Geulah⁴

Leader: Those who raise children in their home
are considered by Scripture as the ones
who gave birth to them.

Congregation: In loving and protecting them, those who
raise them, bless them with the shelter of
their deeds and their name. Call their
name beloved, for they are our inheritors.

Leader: The ones who teach children Torah are
considered as the ones who gave birth to
them.

Congregation: Call their name beloved, for they are our
inheritors. By them we have been blessed
and upon their lives we have laid our
blessing.

⁴ From the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association's *Rabbi's Manual*.

Geulah/Redemption

Happy is the one whose trust is in God, who draws hope from hope's own Source.

God keeps faith forever: God will do justice for the oppressed, and give bread to the hungry.

God will set the captive free, and open the blind eye,
God will lift up the fallen, and take care of the stranger.

The Lord's spirit is in us, the Eternal has called us,

To bring hope to the oppressed, to bring healing to the broken, to proclaim liberty to the enslaved, freedom to those in shackles.

When Israel saw your might displayed in Egypt, they put their faith in You, and in Moses Your servant. Now let all be free, and let them sing as Israel did at the shore of freedom's sea.

(Gates of Prayer)

A Prayer⁵

O God, we give thanks to You for the gift of our child, who has entered into the Covenant of Abraham. Keep this child from harm, and grant that our child will be a source of joy to us and all who love him/her. Be with us and give us health and length of days. Teach us so to raise our child with care and affection, with wisdom and understanding, to be a faithful child of our people and a blessing to the world. We give thanks to You, O God, the Source of life.

After V'shamru

O God of Israel
May our worship on this day help us to grow
In loyalty to our covenant with you
And to the way of life it demands:
The way of gentleness and justice,
The path of truth and of peace.

(Mishnah T'filah, p. 53)

G'vurot

Eternal God, the power of Your spirit pervades all creation. When we open our hearts to You, we are filled with Your strength: the strength to bear our afflictions, the strength to refuse them victory, the strength to overcome them.

And then our will is renewed: to lift up the fallen, to set free the captive, to heal the sick, to bring light to all who dwell in darkness. Add your strength to ours, O God, so that when death casts its shadow, we shall yet be able to say:
O source of blessing, You are with us in death as in life!

(Gates of Prayer, p. 356)

Reflection⁶

One Yom Kippur, the great Hasidic master Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev announced that at the conclusion of the fast day he would reveal the secret phrase that would finally usher in the messianic age. With the end of the service, the congregation was enthusiastic as the Rabbi mounted the rostrum. But just as he was about to begin, a child cried out in hunger. So it was that Levi Yitzhak declared, "Feed the child. The Messiah can wait. A hungry child can't wait."

Avodah

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
So that all of us must find our own path to peace,
Within ourselves and with our neighbors.

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end hunger;
For you have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world,
If we would only use them wisely.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God,
To root out our prejudice;
For You have already given us eyes
With which to see the good in all people,
If we would only use them rightly.

*We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end despair;
For You have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope,
If we would only use our power justly.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
For You have already given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healing,
If we could only use them constructively.

⁵ From *Rabbi's Manual*, Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1988, p. 40.

⁶ From Children's Shabbat sermon by Rabbi Emeritus Michael Zedek, Temple B'nai Jehudah, St. Louis, Missouri.

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

*Therefore, we pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination, and courage,
To do instead of just to pray,
To become instead of merely to wish.*

Praised are You, O God,
You bless our people of Israel,
And all peoples, with peace.

(Adapted from Rabbi Jack Riemer)

Reflection (following the Shalom Rav)

Shabbat Bereshit: A Reflection on Creation

When God created the world, God made everything a little bit incomplete. Instead of making bread grow out of the earth, God made wheat grow so that we might bake it into bread. Instead of making the earth of bricks, God made it of clay so that we might bake the clay into bricks. Why? So that we could become God's partner in the task of completing the work of creation.

Reflection (following the Shalom Rav)⁷

True, we are often too weak to stop injustices; but the least we can do is protest against them.

True, we are too poor to eliminate hunger; but in feeding one child, we protest against hunger.

True, we are too timid and powerless to take on all the guards of all the political prisons in the world; but in offering our solidarity to one prisoner, we denounce all the tormentors.

True, we are powerless against death; but as long as we help one man, one woman, one child live one hour longer in safety and dignity, we affirm a human's right to live.

Merger Poem⁸

And then all that has divided us will merge
And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh
and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong

And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs
of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and
the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

Reflection

God, please forgive and transform our powerful nation where toddlers and school children die from guns sold quite legally.

God, please forgive and transform our rich nation that lets children be the poorest group of citizens quite legally.

God, please forgive and transform our rich nation that lets the rich continue to get more at the expense of the poor quite legally.

God, please forgive and transform our rich nation that thinks security rests in missiles rather than in mothers, and in bombs rather than in babies.

God, please help us never to confuse what is quite legal with what is just and right in your sight.

Help us to do what is just and right in Your sight for all the children of America and the world so that peace with justice will prevail and no child is left behind.

(Marian Wright Edelman, president of the
Children's Defense Fund)

⁷ *Sages and Dreamers: Biblical, Talmudic, and Hasidic Portraits and Legends* by Elie Wiesel. Copyright © 1991 by Elirion Associates, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Georges Borchardt, Inc., on behalf of the author.

⁸ Judy Chicago, 1979, Merger Poem, www.JudyChicago.com.

Reflection Before the Kaddish

Eternal God, the generations come and go before You. Brief is their time. Passing, they leave many of their tasks unfinished, their plans unfulfilled, their dreams unrealized. It would be more than we could bear, but for the faith that our little day finds its permanence in your eternity, and our work its completing in the unfolding of Your purpose for humanity.

At this sacred moment we turn our thoughts to those we love who have gone from life. We recall the joy of their companionship. We feel a pang, the echo of that intenser grief when first their death lay before our stricken eyes. Now we know that they will never vanish, so long as heart and thought remain within us. By love are they remembered and in memory they live.

O God, grant that their memory may bring strength and blessing. May the nobility in their lives and the high ideals they cherished endure in our thoughts and live on in our deeds. And may we, carrying on their work, help to redeem Your promise that life shall prevail.

(Gates of Prayer)

Blessing of the Children

(Children and child advocates or those who work for children may be called up to the bimah.)

As we reach out to bless the children in our midst, let us also reach out with our hearts to bless the children we cannot see and do not know but whom the Eternal knows and loves, as they wait and long for care, protection, and guidance.

May you live to see your world fulfilled,
May your destiny be for worlds still to come,
And may you trust in generations past and yet to be.
May your heart be filled with intuition
And may your words be filled with insights.
May songs of praise ever be on your tongue,
And may your wisdom be on a straight path before you.
May your eyes shine with the light of holy words
And your face reflect the brightness of the heavens.
May your lips ever speak wisdom
And your fulfillment be in righteousness even as you yearn
To hear the words of the Holy Ancient One of Old.

(Berachot 17a)

Final Blessing

May we go forth to celebrate the gifts of each child.
May we go forth to heal the hurts of each child.
May we go forth to seek justice for each child.
This we ask as ones who are claimed as God's children.
Amen.

(Shannon Daley-Harris)

Suggested Music for the Services

The following pieces of music are suggested by the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism for incorporation into social action-focused services because of their social justice themes. Several are based on liturgical or other Jewish texts. Many of the songs are available in *Gates of Song* or *The Complete Shireinu*, both available from Transcontinental Music (www.etranscon.com). They also have included music from new, well-known and less well-known Jewish songwriters and have given information about how to acquire their music directly from the composer.

- 1) And the Youth Shall See Visions – Friedman, *Shireinu* p. 20
- 2) *Ani v'Atah* – Arik Einstein and Miki Gavriellov, *Shireinu* p. 28
- 3) *Bayom Hahu* – Lisa Silverstein Tzur, Shir p. 32, Barry Kanarek, *Shireinu* p. 33
- 4) Blessing for Social Justice: *Lirdof Tzedek* – Jeff Klepper, sheet music in pdf available for download at <http://www.totshabbat.com/kleppersocialjustice.pdf>
- 5) *B'makom* – Michael Isaacson, *Shireinu* p. 39
- 6) Down by the Riverside – spiritual, *Shireinu* p. 56
- 7) Dreamer – Lorre Wyatt, *Shireinu* p. 57
- 8) *Hinei Mah Tov* – folksong, *Shireinu* p. 89, Steve and Marni Dropkin, *Shireinu* p. 89, M. Jacobson-Drozi, *Shireinu* p. 90, folksong, *Shireinu* p. 91
- 9) Hold Fast to Dreams – music by Jeff Klepper, lyrics by A.B. Yehoshua, Langston Hughes, *Shireinu* p. 99
- 10) If I Had a Hammer – Lee Hays and Pete Seeger
- 11) *Im Ein Ani Li Mi Li* – folksong, arr. Davidson, *Gates of Song* #146, Debbie Friedman, *Shireinu* p. 106
- 12) *Khillah Kedoshah* – Dan Nichols, from his CD, *My Heart is in the East*, sound clip and ordering information available at www.jewishrock.com
- 13) Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream – Ed McCurdy
- 14) Laugh at All My Dreams – Friedman, M. Samuels on Sachki, *Shireinu* p. 122
- 15) Let Peace Shine – Lynn Metrik, available for purchase by contacting the composer at lrmetrik@yahoo.com
- 16) *Lo Alecha* – Klepper and Frelander, *Shireinu* p. 135
- 17) *Lo Yarei'u/V'chit'u* – William Sharlin and Ezri Gabbai, *Shireinu* p. 136
- 18) *Lo Yisa Goi* – folksong, arr. Davidson, *Gates of Song* #149, folksong *Shireinu* p. 137, Shalom Altman, *Shireinu* p. 138
- 19) Make Those Waters Part – Doug Mishkin, *Shireinu* p. 144
- 20) *Nefesh Achat* – Jon Gold, Natalie Hutner, Leslie Kane, Alicia Katzman, *Shireinu* p. 154
- 21) One People – Debbie Friedman, sheet music available for purchase at www.debbiefriedman.com
- 22) Open Your Hand – Karen Daniel, sound clip and ordering information available at <http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/karendaniel>
- 23) Peace & Love & Understanding – Lynn Metrik, available for purchase by contacting the composer at lrmetrik@yahoo.com
- 24) *Pit'chu Li* – Shlomo Carlebach, *Gates of Song* #156 or *Shireinu* p. 166, Steve Dropkin, *Shireinu* p. 167
- 25) Joe Black on his CD *Leave a Little Bit Undone*, sound clip and ordering information available at www.rabbijoeblack.com
- 26) The Prophet You – Julie Silver, *Shireinu* p. 168
- 27) *Shir LaShalom* – music by Yair Rosenblum, lyrics by Ya'akov Rotblitt, *Shireinu* p. 183
- 28) *V'yashvu Ish* – Jeff Klepper and Dan Frelander, *Shireinu* p. 213
- 29) *Yad b'Yad* – Craig Taubman, *Shireinu* p. 216
- 30) *Yib'yeh Shalom* – Rick Recht, *Shireinu* p. 222
- 31) We Choose Peace – Tracy Friend, available for purchase by contacting the composer at tracy.friend@acnielsen.com

Sermon Notes

Following are two sets of sermon notes for the Torah portion B'reishit, which are useful resources from which to draw as you prepare your sermon for the 2009 Children's Shabbat on October 17. The first set of sermon notes was prepared by Rabbi Jack Moline, co-chair of the Social Action Committee of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism for the 2006 Children's Shabbat, and has been adapted to this year's theme and to incorporate updated data. The second set was prepared by Marc Katz with a focus on the health coverage portion of this year's theme, but could readily be expanded to include the focus on our nation's 13.3 million children living in poverty and the countless children, especially poor, Black, and Latino boys, in the pipeline to prison.

Sermon Notes for Children's Shabbat

Prepared by Rabbi Jack Moline, Co-Chair, Social Action Committee, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Every congregation has its own context and personality, so the message a rabbi presents must be tailored to those who listen to the teaching. Here are three different ways to approach this year's theme, "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow."

The sermons are for you to adapt to your own style without attribution. Please share your efforts with us so that we might adapt your message for others next year.

1. The Lesson of Creation

With all of the debate over the scientific implications of the first chapter of Genesis, we may have lost our focus on the moral implications. I suspect there is greater consensus on the latter.

When the work of creating a world was almost complete, God created the Earthling—perhaps the best understanding of the word "adam," meaning "from the earth." God charges this new creature, pinnacle of creation, with the responsibility to produce generations and maintain a world for their benefit. And then, in surveying the totality of six days of effort, God increases the rating of the previous days from "good" (*tov*) to "very good" (*tov m'od*). And what makes the world that much better? By rearranging the letters of "very"—*mem, aleph, daled*—you find "adam"—*aleph, daled, mem*. Like the little girl with the little curl in the middle of her forehead, when we are good, we are very, very good. Without this single human being, the world is just okay.

Perhaps the most familiar lesson of this story from the Talmud comes from Tractate Sanhedrin: "Whoever preserves a single life, it is as if he has preserved an entire world. Whoever destroys a single life, it is as if he has destroyed

an entire world." It may be sufficient to quote this much of the teaching to justify the need to extend basic life-preserving resources—health care—to the nine million American children who are without it. Let me repeat that number: nine million. And let me repeat nine million who: children. The number is even greater when we consider children living in poverty in our rich nation: 13.3 million children are poor. And countless children are in a pipeline to prison. Like the newborn Earthling plopped in the middle of a bountiful world, children are without the resources to provide for themselves. Preserving their lives means providing for them. Withholding health care resources damages or destroys nine million worlds. Leaving 13.3 million children in poverty diminishes more than 13 million worlds. Leaving countless children trapped in the pipeline to prison abandons thousands of worlds. The world each of us preserves with our lives cannot be "very good" if the way we treat the worlds around us, like the little girl with the little curl, is sometimes horrid.

You may ask, "Why is this my concern, my responsibility? I work hard to provide some very expensive health care resources for myself and my own children. I work hard to earn an income that provides my children with what they need. My children are on a path to success, not prison. Why must I also provide for others?" The very same Talmudic teaching continues to frame a worldview that prohibits us from smug satisfaction in our hard-earned blessings. "Why was all of humanity descended from a single Earthling? So that no one can say to another: My father was greater than yours." There is no such thing as a disqualification from the collective concern of society on the basis of income or pedigree. If your standard is, "I provide for my family," then my answer is, "Your family includes nine million children in America who lack health coverage, more than 13 million children in America living in poverty, and thousands of children in the pipeline to prison."

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

The story of creation we read this week depicts a pristine world that needs neither hope nor improvement. Promise is realized and the world is whole, because every child—the only child—is without need and without despair. As a congregation, we stand for a world that is once again so very good, a world in which every child is healthy and lifted out of poverty and put on a path of promise and therefore every life preserved. As a congregation, we must create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow so that the promise will be realized again and the world once more made whole.

2. Redeeming Cain

Fratricide may seem a strange place to begin a discussion of health care in America, but Torah contains lessons for us wherever we look. This week we read of an almost unimaginable crime—Cain the farmer kills his brother Abel the shepherd in what appears to be a fit of jealousy. What can the story teach us about the nine million children in this country who live without the health care resources that most of us take for granted?

You are all familiar enough with the story to know that Cain's response to God's question, "Where is your brother Abel?" has become a classic indictment of human selfishness. When Cain answers, "Am I my brother's keeper?" we are conditioned to think, "Of course you are, you moron!" But I wish to plead with you for a moment to give Cain a break. However self-centered his question may be, it is asked in innocence. He and his brother were the first children born into a new world, a world that knew neither altruism nor death. It was a world in which "love" and "betrayal" lacked even a vocabulary.

By the time Cain asks this question, he has already violated its answer out of ignorance and self-centeredness. We don't look kindly on those human qualities, but I use them non-judgmentally. In fact, they are the native human condition. We are not born wise and we are not born out-going. We learn by experience, which is just a euphemism for our mistakes—unless we are very lucky. Cain wasn't so lucky. But he was a fast learner.

When God howled in reply, "What have you done? The blood of your brother cries out to Me from the ground!" Cain was crushed. He realized immediately that he had done something terribly wrong, though he may not have even figured out what exactly it was. Instead of being angry with Cain, I am always provoked to great sadness

for his two losses—the loss of his companion Abel and the loss of his innocence.

So if I suggest to you that as Jews and Americans there is a little bit of Cain within us, I hope you will understand that my words come not as a judgment, but as a recognition that not so much has changed since creation. We are still natively ignorant and self-centered. But I like to believe that we are fast learners. If God were to shout at us right now, "the blood of your brothers and sisters cries out to Me," we would be immediately ashamed and contrite, though we might not immediately know exactly why.

Though we all fear catastrophic illness, our response to it is usually quite direct: We call our doctors. They are the health care professionals who have helped to keep us in life and sustain us through inoculations and infections and indigestions and the occasional incapacities. Though we work hard for the benefits, we accept that access to them is a default position. It is easy to remain ignorant of those unable to access an antihistamine or a flu shot because, well, I got mine.

But nine million children in this country are without the resources to keep them in life and sustain them and enable them to reach a healthy adulthood. And in their voice, God calls to us today and asks us to be ashamed. But unlike Cain, we can act to redeem ourselves by joining with others to demand that this great and good country care for those least able to care for themselves.

Cain bore the mark of his lesson all his life. It illustrated not his crime, but God's compassion in helping him to deal with the harsh lesson he learned. It inspired him and those around him to overcome ignorance and self-centeredness and consider the other person and his or her needs.

Each time you fill a prescription, each time you get an injection, each time you make your co-pay, consider the other person—one of the nine million children who call out to you. You can redeem Cain if you join with those who are creating change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow.

3. Thorns and Thistles

When Adam and Eve were created, God gave them a simple task—be fruitful and multiply. They had an abundance of comforts and an almost magical relationship with the land: Whatever they planted for food would grow, supplementing the bounty of the fruit-bearing trees.

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Shortly after this idyllic existence began, Adam and Eve sinned before God and were expelled from the Garden of Eden. The Torah reports the consequences to that first couple. Eve will have pain in childbirth, and Adam will contend with thorns and thistles as he tries to grow food.

Perhaps some other time we can talk about the justice or injustice of the expulsion. I accept it for the moment as fact. It is the consequence that interests me at the moment: the pain of childbirth and the difficulty of growing food.

The French have a saying that translates to mean, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." We may have pushed back the physical pain of childbirth with breathing techniques and drugs, but it is replaced with the myriad issues that swirl around fertility and reproduction. How, when, and whether to be pregnant is now as much a political statement as an expression of love. It is increasingly as reliant on medical miracles as it is on the miracle of biology. But this much has not changed at all: The pain of childbirth does not end when a woman delivers a baby. As you all know, what our tradition calls *tzar giddul banim*, the pain of child-rearing, has only begun with that first cry. The consequence of Eve's expulsion is not the pain of delivering a child. It is the pain of providing for a child. There is no Eden to provide a perpetual playground of plenty. Children need instruction, they need watching-over, they need the care that only adults can provide.

Likewise, Adam tilling the soil is nothing new. Before he is chased from paradise, he must already till the soil for crops. But if he decided otherwise, it would be apples and peaches for dinner instead of carrots and Brussels sprouts. But the consequence of Adam's expulsion is the competition he faces for the land he must till. Thorns and thistles seek to take over his crops, and it is hard work to eke out the bounty that he once took for granted. If Adam and his family are not to go hungry, he has to work for them.

I would never argue that God is not angry and disappointed with Adam and Eve. But neither is God punitive beyond exile. God provides instruction for the woman and the man about how to survive in a world that is not perfect while they fulfill their original mandate to be fruitful and multiply: Work hard and provide for your offspring. It won't be easy, but it will be necessary.

In the thousands of years of civilization since that story was first remembered, we have managed to juggle the roles and circumstances of the human family hundreds of

times. While men do not yet bear children, it has been a long time since every child was the offspring of a nuclear family. And certainly as we discovered more and more ways to till the soil and found the metaphoric thorns and thistles in every field of endeavor, women took their place alongside men to contribute the sweat of their brows. But this much has not changed: We are not in Eden. And while we have managed as a human family and as an American society to fulfill our role of fruitfulness and multiplication, we sometimes forget that our land of plenty still requires that we provide for the youngest among us. America is no perpetual playground of plenty. Children need food, they need education, and they need shelter. While we don't always provide for them well, we at least try to provide.

But more than 13 million children living in poverty in our nation know the pain of life in the thorns and thistles outside of Eden. The nine million uninsured children do without adequate protection from the dangers that lurk among the thorns and thistles of life in the world outside of Eden. The children in the pipeline to prison know the pain and despair of life in the thorns and thistles outside of Eden. There is no excuse for an American child to contract tuberculosis, to lose hearing to a strep infection, to lose a measure of vision to measles or mumps. If your son or daughter, your nephew or niece, or your grandchild were to contract, God forbid, a serious illness, you would move heaven and earth to get them the right health care and restore them to the full life they were promised with their first cry. There is no excuse for a child in America to suffer hunger, homelessness, and the other deprivations of poverty in our land. If your child turned to you with a stomach twisted in the tight grip of hunger, you would do whatever it took to feed them even as they knew the nourishing warm milk of infancy. You recognize it as *tzar giddul banim*, the very necessary pain of child rearing. Should the parents, the relatives, the grandparents of a child without health care access or living in poverty wish to do no less?

Good news, my friends. I am not asking you to move heaven and earth. I am just asking this congregation to join other congregations to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow for the nine million children without health coverage and the more than 13 million children living in poverty all across this land. I am asking you just to do what God told you was necessary to survive. I am asking you just to clear the thorns and thistles and let these precious flowers bloom.

“Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow”

Prepared by Marc Katz, Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, Washington, D.C.

In the Image of God

In Genesis we read that God created the human being “in his image.” The idea of *b'tzelem elohim* is a very powerful concept in Judaism. According to this concept, all of humanity is created in the image of God. Because of this, we all are endowed with an echo of divinity and a divine spark. If we take this lesson to heart, then it is immoral (or even blasphemous) to treat anyone with less than the utmost care. To let even one of our nine million uninsured children go a day further without access to quality affordable health care is to forget this important precept of humanity.

However, we are not doing a good job with realizing this. Large numbers of people in all racial/ethnic groups are uninsured, but minorities suffer the most. One in 13 White children is uninsured, one in eight Black children is uninsured, and one in five Hispanic children is uninsured.

We are taught in Genesis that God's spark does not follow racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic lines; why should health coverage?

Saving a Life

We read in Genesis, chapter 2, that God created Adam alone. Our Rabbis use this idea to teach the sanctity of life:

Therefore only one person was created to teach you that whosoever kills a single soul the Bible considers to have killed a complete world. And whosoever sustains and saves a single soul, it is as if that person sustained a whole world.

(Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5)

Later Jewish law takes this idea and elaborates on it. Not only are we obligated to save a soul if we see this person in peril, but we are commanded to provide them with medical care to safeguard their health. We read in the 16th century law code, the Shulchan Aruch:

“The Torah grants physicians permission to heal. Healing is, in fact, a religious duty that falls under the rules for saving a life. If a physician withholds treatment when he is able to give it, he is regarded as a murderer, even if here is someone else who can heal a patient, because it may be, in

this case, it is the special merit of this physician to provide the healing for this patient.”

(Shulchan Aruch, chapter 336, sec. 1)

However, we know that often saving a life is not enough. We know that health insurance alone is not enough. We know that having access to hospital emergency rooms alone is not enough. We know that we need a health care system that children can access for regular check-ups and timely care when they are sick. We need a system that does not leave families with sick children struggling to pay large medical bills or, worse, delaying care for their children because they can't afford it. We learn that not only are we commanded to save a life but also to safeguard it and provide the means for that life to remain healthy.

Partners in Creation

In Genesis 2:15 we read that God placed the human on the earth “to till and tend it.” However, while it is important to take care of the earth, this verse can be interpreted metaphorically. We are partners in creation; although Judaism views God as a healer, we are also obligated to heal our world and the people in it. The following Midrash conveys this idea:

The man strolling with the two rabbis turned to them and said, “Who made this man sick?” “The Holy Blessed One,” they replied. “And you presume to interfere in an area that is not yours?” the man remarked. “God has afflicted and you heal?” “What is your occupation?” they asked the man. “I'm a tiller of the soil,” he answered, “as you can see from the sickle I carry.” “Who created the land and the vineyard?” “The Holy Blessed One.” “And you dare to move into an area that is not yours? God created these and you eat their fruit?” “Don't you see the sickle in my hand?” the man asked. “If I did not go out and plow the field, water it, fertilize it, weed it, no food would grow!” “Fool,” the rabbis said, “the body is like a tree—the medicine is the fertilizer and the doctor is the farmer.”

(Midrash Shmuel 4)

Maimonides elaborated on this idea, writing that God endows humanity with wisdom to help all those in need; however, we must just find the will and way to get these resources to all Americans regardless of age, race, or class:

“God created food and water; we must use them in starving off hunger and thirst. God created drugs and com-

pounds and gave us the intelligence necessary to discover their medicinal properties; we must use them in warding off illness and disease.”

(Moses Maimonides Commentary on Mishnah Pesachim 4:9)

Out of Chaos

In Midrash Rabbah (Gen. Rab. 1.5) the Rabbis debated whether God created the world *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, or whether God used the chaos described in Gen. 1:1 as raw materials for the universe. Today a similar debate is raging in the policy world. Our health care system today represents the chaos of the primordial earth. Nine million children—that's one in nine—have no health insurance. A child is born uninsured every 39 seconds. And about 800,000 pregnant women are uninsured, while each year, approximately 28,000 infants die in America before they reach their first birthday. Moreover, rising health care costs affect everyone—even families with insurance because fewer businesses can afford coverage for their employees, and families that kept their employer-sponsored or private coverage are seeing increases in costs and reductions in

benefits. The result is that millions of children are underinsured and may delay or forgo preventive care and treatment due to cost or other barriers. However, should we adapt the old system to address today's challenges or scrap this system and start anew? What are the implications and challenges of each approach?

My Brother's Keeper

After Cain murders his brother, God asks him about the whereabouts of his brother Abel. In response, Cain asks the question “Am I my brother's keeper?” While this question is never answered, the implication is that yes, Cain is indeed responsible for the whereabouts and well-being of his brother. From this we learn that we all are responsible for the well-being of our “brothers and sisters.” This means that we should support programs that provide health care and health insurance for all children. Furthermore we should lobby for legislation that ensures all children have access to nutritious food and exercise programs that will keep them healthy in the future.







SECTION 9

Muslim Resources for the Children's Sabbath

In this section you will find:

- Suggested activities to engage your mosque, Islamic center, school, or group in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration
- "Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Perspective" by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Ph.D.
- Materials for khutbahs and discussions, including:
 - Passages from the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.); and
 - A sample Friday sermon/khutbah by Syed Shakeel, Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
- Two duas

Suggested Activities

- 1. A Friday sermon on the vulnerability of children and the urgent need to care for them.** Material provided here in addition to other materials from the Qur'an, Sunnah, Islamic law and biography of early Muslim generations can be used to illustrate the care given to children. One great story is that of the second great rightly guided caliph Omar when he declared that infants and children must be given allowances like adults in order to allow their parents to provide adequate care for them.
- 2. An evening or weekend congregational event** where parents and children who lack proper care, adequate education, or health insurance can speak to the community in order to raise awareness among members of the Muslim community.
- 3. A public and community-wide forum organized by the Islamic center or the Muslim community** in which experts on child poverty, childhood hunger, housing and homelessness, health care, health insurance, and school districts, and public officials can attend to provide information on existing resources and, at the same time, direct the public on productive ways of activism to change existing public policies and commit themselves to helping in these noble tasks.
- 4. A gathering of various ethnic and religious groups to raise awareness and commit themselves to producing the necessary and desirable change.** The Muslim representative can read the Islamicly based public prayer written by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy included in this section.

Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Perspective

By Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Islamic Society of Central New York

Generally speaking, children are the most precious, yet vulnerable, most innocent, yet fragile, of all age groups. The future of any nation depends greatly on how that nation educates, treats, and nurtures its children. Due to the unique position and role of the United States in the world as the sole superpower, not only the future of the United States but also that of the world will be greatly affected by the way American children are educated, nurtured, and treated today. Although the United States is the most advanced in the world industrially, scientifically, and militarily, among other things, statistics on children are not encouraging. A great percentage of American children are left in poverty, in harmful environments, and without adequate nourishment, health care, or education.

To illustrate:

In poverty:

- Every 33 seconds a child is born into poverty.
- Today, there are 1.7 million more children living in poverty than there were in 2000, an increase of 15 percent.
- Children under the age of five remain more likely to be poor than older children.
- Every year that 13 million children live in poverty costs the nation \$500 billion in lost productivity.

In health care:

- There are nine million uninsured children in America.
- Every day more than 2,200 children are born without health insurance.
- Every two minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.

In education:

- Every 10 seconds during the school year a student drops out.
- Only 14 percent of Black, 17 percent of Latino, and 42 percent of White 4th graders are reading at grade level.
- States spend on average almost three times as much per prisoner (\$22,650 a year) as per public school student.

In harmful environments:

- Every 35 seconds a child is confirmed abused or neglected.
- Every three hours a child or teen is killed by a firearm.
- In 2007, the United States' inmate population of more than 2,300,000 exceeded China's, whose general population is more than four times as large.
- On any given night, 200,000 children are homeless.

Muslim Resources for the Children's Sabbath

The Qur'an describes children's condition as that of vulnerability, weakness, and need.

The Qur'an states:

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ مِنْ نَفْسِهِ مِنْ طِينَةٍ ثُمَّ يَدْعُ بِكُمْ بِأَسْمَاءِكُمْ
يُدْعَا لَكُمْ بِأَسْمَائِكُمْ ثُمَّ يُعَلِّمُكُم مِمَّا يَشَاءُ وَيُؤْتِيكُم مِمَّا تَبْتَغُونَ مِنْهُ
وَيُؤْتِيكُم مِمَّا لَمْ تَسْأَلُوهُ مِنْهُ وَلَئِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُشْكِرُونَ ﴿١٥٦﴾

Which translates to:

It is He who has created you from dust then from a sperm drop, then from a leech-like clot; then does he get you out (into the light) as a child: then lets you (grow and) reach your age of full strength; then lets you become old—though of you there are some who die before—and lets you reach a Term appointed; in order that ye may learn wisdom.
(Qur'an 40:67)

Islam commands mercy when dealing with children and considers the way children are treated as the measure of mercy. In an authentic narration, while a man was sitting with the Prophet (peace be upon him), a child came to the Prophet, so the Prophet held and kissed him. The man asked: "Do you kiss your children? I have ten children but I've never kissed any of them." The Prophet replied: "What help I can offer to you if Allah has deprived your heart of mercy?"

This narration explains the great attention that the Qur'an gives to the care for orphans and the reward promised for treating them like one's own children.

The Qur'an states:

وَالَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ طَائِفًا مِمَّنْ كَانُوا تَائِبِينَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

Which translates to:

And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive.
(Qur'an 76:8)

The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: "I and the one who cares for the orphan in Paradise are as near as these two fingers" (while holding the index and the middle fingers).

The Qur'an forbids mistreatment of orphan children:

قَامًا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ ﴿٩٠﴾

Which translates to:

Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness.
(Qur'an 93:9)

In Islam, children who are not orphans but weak, vulnerable, and deprived should be no different. The Orphan in Islam refers to the child who lost his/her father (i.e., the breadwinner for the family). There are many children whose parents are both alive but who still can be described as "orphans" due to the lack of adequate care in various aspects of life from negligence, ignorance, or inability in the face of difficult circumstances. They are weak and vulnerable without an adequate family income, or food, or health care, or housing, or safe and nurturing care.

A Muslim poet states what could be translated to the following:

The true orphan is not the one whose father or mother has passed away and left him behind.

The true orphan is the one whose mother has become negligent or whose father has become inattentive.

Of course, many parents are trying to do the best they can for their children, yet face insurmountable challenges of unaffordable housing or health care, unavailable child care and jobs that pay a living wage, lack of job training and transportation, and all kinds of other obstacles. Despite their best efforts, these circumstances leave their children as vulnerable as the orphans we are instructed to protect, and to them, too, we must offer our care and concern.

It is the duty of every Muslim, male and female, young and old, to change the unfair and unhealthy circumstances of children of our societies and consequently of our nation. Muslims are urged to display the mercy of Islam for the vulnerable and the care for the future of our nation and for that of the world by working hard to bring this issue to the attention of the public and to the public policy makers, by raising the awareness among Muslims of the plight of children in the United States and of the need to change such conditions, and by collaborating with their fellow citizens of various religious and non-religious groups to change such oppressive and unhealthy conditions of children.

Materials for the Sermons and Discussions

Passages from the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.):

Use verses that assert the honor and dignity which Allah assigned to the human race, equality among all people, the essentiality of justice and standing for justice, the obligation to cooperate with everyone—Muslim or non-Muslim—on issues of justice and mutual good, the mercy of Islam and the kind treatment Muslims are required to give to the vulnerable and weak. Some illustrations are included below. Muslim leaders are encouraged to utilize the abundant sources in the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition to support the activities related to this program.

a. The nobility and honor bestowed on human beings

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْوَجْرِ وَالْبَحْرِ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ نَجْدًا وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا﴾

We have honored the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our creation.

(Qur'an 17:70)

b. Justice

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَتَانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا أَعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of others to you make swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

(Qur'an 5:8)

c. The Islamic obligation to support just causes regardless of religious affiliation

﴿لَا يَنْهَىٰكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُواكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ﴾

Allah forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just.

(Qur'an 60:8)

d. The mercy of Islam and kind treatment required

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَايَ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالَّذِينَ يَحْبِلُونَ لِعُنُكُم لَأَكْفُرَنَّ عَنْ أَفْحَقَاءَهُ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالَّذِينَ يَحْبِلُونَ لِعُنُكُم لَأَكْفُرَنَّ عَنْ أَفْحَقَاءَهُ وَالَّذِينَ يَحْبِلُونَ لِعُنُكُم لَأَكْفُرَنَّ عَنْ أَفْحَقَاءَهُ﴾

Allah truly enjoins justice and Ihsan (kind and excellent treatment). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: "The creatures of Allah (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of Allah, and the most beloved to Allah are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children."

Suggested Sample Friday Sermon (Khutba)

By Shakeel Syed, Islamic Shura Council of Southern California

O our Lord! Grant our spouses and offspring that are joy to our eyes, and help us to be a model among those who are conscious of You." (25:74)

It is God alone who has made for you from among yourselves pairs, male and female. And He has made for you from your mates, children and grandchildren. He has provided you, moreover, with all that is wholesome in life. Then is it in falsehood they shall believe, while in the blessings of God they disbelieve? (16:72)

These two verses reflect on the priceless gifts that the Most Compassionate God Almighty has bestowed upon us the gift of children and grandchildren.

Our most grateful response toward this awesome gift of children and grandchildren ought to be:

- In our gratefulness to God Almighty for His awesome gifts;
- In our absolute commitment to take care of these gifts by protecting and sheltering them;
- By being a source of comfort and means to their needs;
- By helping them reach their full potential;
- And, most importantly, making our lives revolve around their well-being.

Brothers and Sisters – as people of faith and people of conscience, we most regrettably are living in a society that seems to have misplaced our priorities, almost completely.

Children seem to have become the last and not the first priority of our society.

This is best demonstrated by virtue of our dismal record in protecting them:

- Records indicate that a child is killed by gunfire about every three hours.
- Data reveals that more than 13 million of our children are poor; nine million of them are without health insurance; close to one million of them are victims of abuse and neglect; more than 10 million of them live on subsistence levels receiving food stamps, and we spend on average approximately \$8,000 to educate each child but have the audacity to spend more than \$22,000 on each prisoner...and the list goes on.

As people of faith and people of conscience, brothers and sisters, we have a responsibility, and an urgent one, toward this most awesome gift from the Most Compassionate God Almighty.

We are reminded by Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) that the "best of you are those who are best to your family."

The questions we ought to ask ourselves are: Am I the parent who is best to my family? Am I the citizen who cares for my own and other children? Is the community and society that I live in the one who takes care of "all" the families and not just "some"? Have we abdicated our responsibilities or embraced our obligations?

These important and urgent questions are the need of the day, my dear brothers and sisters.

As a nation we have spent hundreds of billions of dollars for death and destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan but did not have enough to provide shelter, health care and education to our own children affected by Katrina.

As a nation we chose to remain blind to the hundreds of millions of tax dollars as bonuses to Wall Street while voiceless children and their helpless parents are being asked to remain silent.

As a nation that claims to be the "richest" and "most powerful" of the planet, how can we possibly reconcile the disparity in our priorities?

A nation that cannot take care of the most vulnerable ought to be ashamed of itself rather than boasting as a leader of the world – we have become the immoral cheerleaders of a corrupt system and a society that we lead.

Brothers and Sisters – as people of faith and conscience, we ought to uphold **"the God granted dignity and right of every child born to Adam"** (*"laqad karramna bani Adam"*) – and not only some.

Brothers and Sisters – as tax-paying citizens of this country, we ought to hold responsible the perpetrators of the crimes of highest magnitude by their neglect of our children.

Brothers and Sisters – as members of a human society, we ought not to ask whose child it is but rather embrace each one of them, with a name or no name, with a parent or none, as ours.

Muslim Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Let us remember what Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) reminded us, that those **“who take care of the orphans will accompany him just as twin fingers in the best of heavens in the eternal life here-after.”**

Let us remember that it is most noble to give before we are asked for it...

Let us remember that our gratefulness to God's awesome gifts is to protect them...

Let us remember that children are a mighty and priceless blessing to us and not a curse...

Let us remember as parents and guardians our imperative to be a source of comfort to them...

Let us remember that we'll be remembered by our care and concern for the voiceless...

Let us remember that our joy is in giving rather than in receiving...

Let us remember that in God, we seek refuge and find strength in reclaiming and restoring the lost rights of His most awesome creation and gift to us—our children.

In closing, my dear brothers and sisters, I would like you all to dedicate a day a month, if not more, to nothing else but to find ways to be a source of comfort and joy to children. I invite you to join me and Islamic Shura Council and the Children's Defense Fund to engage in this noble struggle to defend those who are defenseless, to give voice to those who are voiceless, and to be a reason for smiles and joy to those who are full of tears and without hope. Their voiceless cries must be heard because in it is our salvation and in them is our present and future!

Amen.

Two Duas

A Dua by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Ph.D., Islamic Society of Central New York

Our Creator, The Lord of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad,

Our beloved God and Our Loving God,

We know Our Lord, Most Wise, that You Created humans purposely to proliferate on Earth, to reproduce and have children and for their children, when they mature and become responsible, to have children, and it is Your Grace which has allowed us to draw from this... an immense joy.

But, we also know that along with the pleasure you have graciously planted in our hearts, Our Lord, Most Just, You have placed on our shoulders a hefty responsibility. Deeply embedded in Your Divine Purpose, is our obligation to defend all that is weak, to nurture all that is vulnerable, to protect all that is innocent, to safeguard all that is fragile and to cherish all that is precious.

And who should know better than You, O' Lord, Who is Most Cognizant, that our children are all of these things?

So graciously, O' Lord, assist us in fulfilling our duties towards them so that they can grow up to be whoever they wish to become and we hope them to be.

Please shape us into the perfect examples for them to follow as they inevitably become the adults of tomorrow.

Our Lord, Most Forgiving, we are horribly ashamed of the way in which we failed You by failing our children.

Alarming statistics of hunger, deprivation, lack of adequate health care, and closed doors of opportunities deprive us of our humanity and civilization.

Daily images of children being abducted from their homes, raped, killed, and brutally mutilated rob us all of any sense of accomplishment.

Other children indicted and convicted as adults pass the conviction to all of our societal institutions.

We have foolishly let our greed, arrogance, and apathy get the best of us by letting these vices cloud our judgment and darken our hearts and souls.

So we ask You, Mighty Lord, to turn the eagerness of our greed into a spirit of selflessness so that we may give back to our children the innocence we so voraciously took.

Please turn our arrogance and false pride into humility and servitude so that we may rightfully nurture them the way they so deserve.

And Lord, Most Gracious, please turn our apathy and inertia into empathy and compassion so that we may change the tears we so wrongfully caused into smiles our children so direly need, and the cries we so unjustly provoked into giggles and laughter carried by the gentle breeze.

After all, until our children succeed and prosper, our hearts will know no peace... and torment will continue to replace the joy that once was.

Our Lord, help us learn the lessons from all that goes on around us.

Grant our members, religious leaders, city officials, public policy makers, and national caretakers the will, strength, resolve and wisdom to nurture, educate and support our children towards excellence in life, health, the opportunity to learn and virtue in values.

Guide our society members, officials, educators, and parents to join hands in preparing the children of today to become the peacemakers of tomorrow.

Help us make the world a safer place for them.

Muslim Resources for the Children's Sabbath

A Dua by Afeefa Syeed

Our Prayer for Children: A Muslim Call to Justice

I begin with the name of God. The God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The God whose everlasting compassion and never ending mercy are the saving grace of all humanity. God who is the source of Peace and Perfection. God who is the Protector.

Our nation has been blessed with abundance. At this moment, Dear God, help us to remember and reflect on Your words:

*There will be a time We will test you with affluence—
avoid arrogance and practice justice and equality.*

Oh Lord, Oh God! To every life afflicted with senseless, mean acts, grant your everlasting Mercy. We are comforted in the thought that innocent children whose lives were ended are safe now in Your embrace.

Your Prophet, Muhammad, said,

The best community will be known because of its kindness to children.

In this time of such suffering of the children, help us to remember that our children are a trust from You. We are their guardians and You will be the judge of how we guide and protect them. Guide us to teach them how to be better than we.

Help us to teach our children that a true believer's success is how close he is to God, how relevant and beneficial he is to mankind. The more pain we inflict on fellow human beings the more distance we put between us and God.

As parents in this nation, Lord, help us to sense and know that our children are born in a state of purity and innocence. They are gifts from You.

Remind us, oh Lord, of the story when a man came to Your prophet, Muhammad, and asked "Do you kiss your children? I have ten and have never kissed them." The Prophet replied with a sorrowful tone and a clenched jaw, "That shows you have no mercy or tenderness at all. Those who do not show mercy to others will not have God's mercy on them."

Our Prophet drew great joy and happiness even in times of despair and loss at the sight of children. His supplication should be our supplication:

I commend you, oh children of this world, to the protection of God's perfect words from every evil.

Help us to raise children who are gentle and polite, not timid, afraid, or cowed down. Help us to raise children who are helpful and considerate, not arrogant and loutish.

Help us teach our children to know Your prophet's words:

*The strong person is not the one who is best at wrestling;
but the one who controls himself in anger.*

Help us as parents to be tolerant, kind, understanding, truthful, reverent so our children will be tolerant, kind, understanding, truthful, reverent. Help us, Oh Lord, to utter often the verse from the Qur'an:

God truly enjoins justice and kind and excellent treatment.

Oh Lord, those of us who carry Your trust now in our wombs pray to you. Help us to dedicate our offspring to the founding of justice. Let us take the example of Hanna, mother of Mary, who beseeched her Lord to protect and guide her child who was not yet born. Make us conscientious and steadfast parents, not accidental or incidental ones.

Lord, help us to know that Justice is Your Attribute. Justice is a balance. Most importantly, we know from Your words, Justice is a call to action.

Oh Lord, as children of this country, help us to grow as citizens who work for the betterment of our brothers and sisters—no matter how small the action.

As children of this country, guide us to be leaders who will not be blinded to the injustices of this world.

As children of this country, grant us the wisdom to know what our country must do to seek Your Pleasure.

Our nation is great. Our nation is vast. America is beautiful. Guide us, Oh Lord, to know that justice for all is not a luxury or a choice. Help us to remember You give all children the right to a good name, shelter, good health, and an education. We will work for these rights for those who are without—help us be passionate and proactive in the preservation and practice of justice.

Our children are the future, Lord. Do not let us forsake our future by harming the trust You have bestowed on us. We are ready as children and as parents of this country, as Americans all, to pass this test together.



Oh Lord! Guard our children with Your never slumbering eyes. Hold them fast with your embrace of mercy. Shower them wherever they go with love from Your bottomless well of compassion.

Let us remember the mission of all Your prophets from Adam, to Jesus, Moses, and through to Muhammad who said:

If any of you witness an injustice, he should change it with his hand, and if he is not able, then with his tongue, and if he is not able, then detest it with his heart. But that shows the weakest of faith.

Finally, we remember Your words to us:

Oh ye who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer. For God is with those who patiently persevere.

Amen.





SECTION 10

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

A multi-faith community service offers a powerful and meaningful opportunity to bring together people from all across your community who may not have ever connected before. It is a chance to highlight our shared concern—across religious traditions—for children and families in need, whether in poverty, without health care, or

at risk of incarceration. It is a meaningful time to discover what our different faith traditions hold in common as well as to learn about the unique perspectives, texts, and traditions that each brings. It is a time to unite in shared commitment to take action to solve these problems.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Be sure to read the planning steps, outlined on pages 43–45, for organizing a multi-faith community-wide service. Follow them to bring together a planning committee that represents the many religious traditions in your community.

Here you will find a suggested outline and resources for you to create your own multi-faith Children's Sabbath service that is inclusive, respectful of different traditions, focused on the Children's Sabbaths' core themes, and adaptable to your particular community and leadership.

- **The suggested outline** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service is the “recipe.”
- **Resources** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service are the “ingredients”: readings, prayers, and other resources from many religious traditions from which you may choose. Select those resources that appeal to your planning team, supple-

ment them with your own, or adapt them as desired. Add readings or prayers from other traditions as appropriate to reflect the leadership and participation in your community. You may also wish to invite one or more to offer brief (1-3 minutes) reflections on the religious traditions' call to do justice and bring hope and health care to children.

Please note: You are not expected, nor is it recommended, to use every one of the options or resources provided below, as that would make the service run too long. (Aim for a service that is about an hour. A service much longer than that may lose the attention of children and youths present—adults, too!)

Be sure to intersperse readings, prayers, and other parts of the service with musical selections sung by the congregation or choirs. This will help to keep the service lively and engage congregation members.

Suggested Outline for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

I: Gathering of the Community

The service begins with a “Gathering of the Community” that creates a sense of welcome and inclusion and affirms a sense of shared purpose. These earliest moments in the service should be planned with care to reassure people that this service is a “safe” space in which their own faith will not be denigrated and ease any anxieties that people may bring to a multi-faith experience.

The Gathering of the Community segment of the service may include some or all of the following:

- **Prelude:** Choose choral or instrumental music that either creates an atmosphere for contemplation and reflection or that builds excitement and generates enthusiasm. One or more choirs could each offer a selection, for instance, or an organist or pianist could play.
- **Opening Procession of Religious Leaders and Children:** This can provide a visual appreciation for the range of religious traditions represented and add a sense of importance and broad support for the event. You may want to include symbolic elements to the procession or other visual enhancements, like banners, liturgical dancers, drummers, candle-lighting, or another creative element.

- **Welcome:** The religious leader in whose place of worship the multi-faith service is being held may offer a very brief welcome. If the service is not being held in a place of worship, one of the key leaders involved in planning the Children's Sabbath may give a brief welcome. Or the welcome may be omitted and the service may move directly from the Opening Procession to the Gathering Words.
- **Gathering Words:** Beginning with an opening prayer, call to worship, or another form of “Gathering Words” can make people from many different communities feel united in why they are there and reassured that all are welcome. See the sample resources below for Gathering Words that can be used, adapted, or simply serve as an inspiration for your own creation.
- **Congregational Hymn or Choral Anthem:** A musical selection at this point may keep the service lively. (Remember: If *everyone* is asked to sing or say it, the words should include *everyone*. For instance, if the *congregation* will be singing, remember to select a song with inclusive words that people from many different faiths will feel comfortable singing—ensure that it does not use language specific to just one tradition, such as “Jesus Christ.” If a *choir* is presenting an anthem to

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

which the congregation will listen, singing music specific to that choir's tradition, remember to balance the choirs represented and to ensure that no anthem while specific to a tradition puts down another faith tradition.)

II: Time of Lament

This is a time to focus attention on the serious problems affecting children, to declare our concern for children's suffering, and recognize our responsibility as people of faith, adults, parents, citizens, and community members for how we have contributed to or failed to prevent or end child suffering and ensure justice and care for all children.

The time of lament portion of the service might include one or more (but not all) of the following:

- **Prayer**
- **Litany**
- **Responsive reading**
- **Creative or symbolic action**
- **Visual experience** that underscores the problems to which we have come to respond (e.g., PowerPoint or slide presentation or a brief video, liturgical dance)
- **Anthem, hymn or song**

III: Call to Service

This part of the worship service proclaims the call to justice, compassion, and faithful action for children that is central to our religious traditions.

This part of the service could include some of the following:

- **Readings from sacred texts** such as Torah and other Hebrew texts, the New Testament, Qur'an, Baghavad Gita, and others. If the readings are recited in another language, either have the readers also read the English translation or, to keep the service from becoming too lengthy, provide written translations into English in the service program.
- **Hymns, anthems, and songs focused on our call to service**
- **A reflection on the Call to Create Change for Children Today to Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow:** a brief reflection—perhaps five minutes—during which a leader reflects on the shared concerns for children and the strong call to work for change for children to achieve justice heard in our faith traditions.

IV: Commitment to Action

After the gathering, lament, and call to service, people should be ready to respond to what they've heard and experienced with a commitment to action on children's behalf. This enables them to channel the experience into a positive, forward-looking, hopeful response that puts their faith into action.

The commitment to action section of the service might include one or more of the following:

- **A Charge to the Congregation:** a brief, inspirational charge from a powerful speaker that encourages those present to respond to the call to service just heard with a commitment to action manifesting the justice and peace God intends. Five minutes may be an appropriate length to give the speaker for her/his charge.
- **Prayer of Commitment**
- **Act of Commitment:** a responsive reading that invites the congregation to respond aloud and declare their intention to act on behalf of children.
- **Symbolic action:** a creative action or response through which the people or one or more leaders make visible the commitment to act. Options include each person writing a commitment on a slip of paper that is collected with the others; distributing a small item to each person present that will serve as a reminder of their commitment; or lighting candles.
- **Song, hymn, or anthem** with words that emphasize the commitment to faithful action (e.g., "This Little Light of Mine" with words adapted for the multi-faith congregation and action for children).

V: Blessing

The last portion of the multi-faith service prepares the people to leave the time together inspired and committed to action, reassured that the gathered community will be dispersed but still joined in commitment and that they will continue to be guided and sustained by the divine.

The blessing portion of the service might include one or more of the following:

- **Blessing of the children:** Many traditions have rituals for blessing the children that could be adapted for a multi-faith gathering. Consider ways that those who have not come accompanied by children can feel part of the blessing experience.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

- **Charge:** Not as lengthy as the “charge to the congregation” in the commitment to action, this very brief charge can precede the final blessing as a reminder of what we go forth to do.
- **Final Blessing:** The last words offered by a religious leader, reminding the congregation that God goes with us as we depart to do God's work.
- **Closing hymn or song:** A final song that has a “sending forth” theme, such as the traditional spiritual, “Guide My Feet.” The religious leaders who processed in may process out during the closing hymn or remain in place.
- **Postlude:** Instrumental (or choral) music as the congregation disperses

Resources for Observances and Related Activities

In addition to the resources provided below, and those which your planning committee creates or finds, draw from faith resources offered elsewhere in this resource manual.

Remember: You are not expected to use all of the resources offered below in one service!

Unless otherwise noted, all resources were written by Shannon Daley-Harris.

Resources for the Gathering of the Community

Gathering Words/Call to Worship

All: We come with heavy hearts...

Leader: Hearts burdened by the knowledge that millions of children in our nation live in poverty, lack health coverage, and are swept along a pipeline to prison.

All: We come with hopeful hearts...

Leader: Hearts that believe that as people of faith we can unite in concern and commitment to make a life-changing difference in children's lives.

All: We come with passionate hearts...

Leader: Hearts that burn with a desire for justice for the little, the lost, the last, and the left out.

All: We come with happy hearts...

Leader: Hearts that recognize that now is the time to make a difference, here are the faithful partners for that work, and working together we can be more powerful than the problems facing our children.

All: We come with ready hearts. Let us begin.

Gathering Words/Opening Prayer

Eternal source of love and justice, we gather here from many places, different traditions, and diverse experiences. We give you thanks for the richness of our diversity and the treasured uniqueness of each one here.

We also gather here, brought together by what unites us and makes us one: concern for children in need—those pressed down by poverty, passed over for health care, pushed along a pipeline to prison. We give you thanks for planting in each of us a heart that cares for your most vulnerable children and a passion for justice so that every child may grow and flourish. We give you thanks for our shared concern and commitment.

Use us now, we pray, to create change for your children so that each will know the hope of a better tomorrow. Let all people of love and justice say, **Amen.**

Gathering Words

(For a dynamic effect, the young people could be in different locations around the worship space. The candle lighting and water pouring should take place in the front where all can see it, but the striking of the drum and the bell ringing could take place from either side, a balcony, or even in the midst of those seated. Experiment ahead of time in your worship space to see what will work best.)

Young person beats a drum: We come here to be, in the words of Martin Luther King, “drum majors for justice”!

Young person lights a candle: We come here to spread the light of love and compassion until it brightens and warms the lives of all children.

Young person rings a bell: We come to let freedom ring as we commit to freeing children from poverty, lack of health care, and all that oppresses them.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Young person pours water from a pitcher into a basin:

We come to seek ways to bring the life-giving waters of justice and compassion, faith and family, community and care to every child.

Young people (together): We come together, from different places and many faiths, to share our concern for children, our determination to create change for them, and our hope for a better tomorrow.

Gathering Words

Leader 1: Here we gather, to create change for children in poverty, children without health care, and children swept along a pipeline to prison.

Leader 2: Here we gather, to create change for children *today*, because we don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste.

Leader 3: Here we gather, to bring hope for a better tomorrow through the change we create, because we know that each child is beloved by the Holy.

Leaders (together): Here we gather, for change, for children, for hope for a better tomorrow. Let us begin.

Gathering Words

Leader: Why are we here?

All: To create change.

Leader: Who are we here to create change for?

All: We're here to create change for children.

Leader: When are we going to create change for children?

All: We're going to create change for children today!

Leader: Why are we going to create change for children today?

All: To bring hope and a better tomorrow.

Leader: As we gather here to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow, let us each seek the guidance and sustenance of our faith and the support and partnership of each other. May it be so.

Resources for the Time of Lament

Prayer: Quiet Us Now

Quiet us now, Eternal Source of Compassion. Quiet us now and help us to hear the pain in the voices of our nation's 13.3 million children living in poverty. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would the children who live in poverty say to us? *[Provide a time of silence before continuing.]*

Quiet us, Holy One. Quiet us now and help us to hear the cries of our nation's nine million children who don't have health coverage and may not be able to see a doctor when they need to. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would the children without health coverage say to us? *[Provide a time of silence before continuing.]*

Quiet us, Source of Mercy. Quiet us now and help us to hear the pleas of our nation's children pushed along a pipeline to prison by racism, failing schools, abuse and neglect, hopelessness, and poor choices. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would the children in the pipeline to prison say to us? *[Provide a time of silence before continuing.]*

Quiet us. Quiet us now and help us to hear what you would say to us. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would you say to us? *[Provide time of silence before continuing.]*

Eternal One, Lover of Justice, help us know when to be quiet and when, having heard, to speak up, to give voice to the pleas of our nation's children, to give voice to your call for justice, to give voice to our desire for a better tomorrow for all of our children. Amen.

Litany of Lament and Hope: Weeping and Work

Child 1: Every day in our nation, more than 2,500 babies are born into poverty.

Child 2: Every day in our nation, more than 2,400 children are abused or neglected.

Child 3: Every day in our nation, 2,224 babies are born without health insurance.

Child 4: Every day in our nation, more than 75 babies die before their first birthday.

Child 5: Every day in our nation, 4,520 children are arrested.

Leader: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more.

People: We have come together with hearts that weep for our nation's children.

Leader: "Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears: For there is reward for your work, says the Lord."

People: We have come together to be moved from weeping to hear the promise of the work we can do.

Leader: “[The children] shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: Your children shall come back to their own country.”

People: We have come together to glimpse your vision of homecoming that would bring our nation's children from an experience of need to one of safety, plenty, and love.

Unison: Be with us in this time together and in our days to come that we may commit our hearts and hands and minds to realizing your vision of homecoming for the children of our nation. Amen.

A Prayer from Zaire

O God,
You love justice and you establish peace on earth.
We bring before you the disunity of today's world:
The absurd violence, and the many wars,
Which are breaking the courage of the peoples of the world;
Militarism and the armaments race,
Which are threatening life on the planet;
Human greed and injustice,
Which breed hatred and strife.
Send your Spirit and renew the face of the earth;
Teach us to be compassionate toward the whole human family;
Strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and peace;
Lead all nations into the path of peace,
And give us that peace which the world cannot give.
Amen.

[from Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*]

Resources for the Call to Service

Bahá'í Readings

Options include:

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring.¹

God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger.²

The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government, the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind.³

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 285.

² Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 290.

³ Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 107.

Buddhist Reading⁴

A mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her child, her only child. In the same way should you cultivate love without measure toward all beings. You should cultivate toward the whole world—above, below, around—a heart of love unstinted, unmixed with any sense of differing or opposing interests. You should maintain this mindfulness all the time you are awake. Such a state of heart is the best in the world.

Christian Readings

Options include:

- Mark 9:33–37 (Welcome the Child)
- Mark 10:13–16 (Blessing the Children)
- Luke 10:25–37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)
- Luke 18:1–8a (Widow and the Unjust Judge)
- Luke 21:1–4 (Widow's Offering)
- Matthew 5:13–16 (Salt and Light)
- Matthew 7:12 (Golden Rule)
- Matthew 10:40–42 (Whoever welcomes you...cup of water)
- Matthew 18:10–14 (Parable of the Lost Sheep)
- Matthew 25:31–45 (Judgment of the Nations)

Jewish Readings

Options include:

- Genesis 21:8–20
- Jeremiah 31:15–17
- Isaiah 65:17–25

Muslim Reading

(If the passage is read in Arabic, either print the translation in the program or ask the leader to also read aloud the English translation.)

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do.” (Qur'an 5:8)

Native American Reading: A Prayer of the Chippewa⁵

We pray that someday an arrow will be broken,
Not in something or someone,
But by each of humankind,

To indicate peace, not violence.
Someday, oneness with creation,
rather than domination over creation,
will be the goal to be respected.
Someday fearlessness to love and make a difference

Will be experienced by all people.
Then the eagle will carry our prayer for peace and love,
And the people of the red, white, yellow, brown, and
black communities
Can sit in the same circle together to communicate in love
And experience the presence of the Great Mystery in their
midst.
Someday can be today for you and me. Amen.

Sikh Hymn

The Lord is my Mother and Father. He it is who blesses
me with sustenance.
And the Lord takes care of me. For I am the child of God.
He abandons me never and feeds me steadily,
And minds not my demerits and hugs me to His bosom,
And He blesses me with all I seek; yea, He the Bliss-giving
Father,
And He has blessed me with Words of Wisdom, yea,
the riches of the name,
And made me worthy of Himself.
And made me a partner (of His Grace) with the Guru,
and now I possess all joys.
May my Lord forsake me not; yea, He, who is my All
powerful Lord.

*(Hymn composed by Guru Arjan thanking
the Lord for the gift of life)*

Responsive Reading: “We Cannot Merely Pray to You”

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
So that all of us must find our own path to peace,
Within ourselves and with our neighbors.

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end hunger;
For you have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world,
If we would only use them wisely.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God,
To root out our prejudice;
For You have already given us eyes

⁴ From *The Buddha Speaks*, edited by Anne Bancroft, ©2000 by Anne Bancroft. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts. www.shambhala.com.

⁵ Attributed to Wanda Lawrence from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, (c)1992.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

With which to see the good in all people,
If we would only use them rightly.

*We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end despair;
For You have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope,
If we would only use our power justly.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
For You have already given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healing,
If we could only use them constructively.

*Therefore, we pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination, and courage,
To do instead of just to pray,
To become instead of merely to wish.*

Praised are You, O God,
You bless our people...
And all peoples, with peace.

(By Rabbi Jack Riemer)

Resources for the Commitment to Action

Rise Up⁶

This prayer could be read different ways. The "Leader," "All Men," "All Women," and "All Children" designations below are just one possibility. It could be read by one or several leaders with the congregation listening. Or it could be read responsively with the congregation reading some lines together—the congregation could read aloud the lines that begin "God," with individual leaders reading the pairs of lines in between, or a leader could read the lines beginning "God," and the congregation could read together the pairs of lines in between.

This prayer was inspired by Psalm 10:12, "Rise Up, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; Do not forget the oppressed."

Leader: God of justice,
Hear our prayer and rise up, we pray.

All Men: Remember the brokenhearted people
And provide them strength.

All Women: Listen to the orphans of the world
And answer their cries.

All Children: See the helpless
And lend your support.

Leader: God of the troubled,
Hear our prayer and rise up.

All Men: Remember oppressed people
And provide release.

All Women: Listen to those filled with grief
And offer comfort.

All Children: See the evil threatening life
And break it.

All Together: God of justice,
Let our prayers and your hand
Make us bold enough to rise up
And follow you.

A Prayer for Children by Ina J. Hughs⁷

This prayer could also be read different ways, including in unison, with different leaders (including children) reading sections, or alternating sections between "left" and "right" sides of your worship space (be sure to clarify with the congregation which side is which before beginning).

Leader: Let us join in this prayer with not only the words of our mouths but pledging the work of our hands.

We pray for children
Who sneak Popsicles before supper,
Who erase holes in math workbooks,
Who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those
who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,
who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,
Who never "counted potatoes,"
Who were born in places we wouldn't be
caught dead,
Who never go to the circus,
Who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children
Who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,
Who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.

And we pray for those
Who never get dessert,
Who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,

⁶ By J. Bradley Wigger, in *Together We Pray: A Prayer Book for Families*, St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2005.

⁷ "A Prayer for Children" by Ina J. Hughs. © 1995 by Ina Hughs. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Who watch their parents watch them die,
Who can't find any bread to steal,
Who don't have any rooms to clean up,
Whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
And whose monsters are real.

We pray for children

Who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,
Who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick
at their food,
Who like ghost stories,
Who shove dirty clothes under the tub,
Who get visits from the tooth fairy,
Who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool,
Who squirm in church or temple and scream in
the phone,
Whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles
can make us cry.

And we pray for those

Whose nightmares come in the daytime,
Who will eat anything,
Who have never seen a dentist
Who aren't spoiled by anybody,
Who got to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,
Who live and move, but have no being.

We pray for children

Who want to be carried and for those who must,
For those we never give up on and for those
Who don't get a second chance,
For those we smother and for those who will grab
the hand of anyone kind enough to offer it.

Prayer of Commitment: I Care and I Am Willing to Serve and Stand for Children

One leader or several can read the lines in regular type while the people respond with the words in bold, "but I care...." Perhaps before reading the prayer, the leader could invite each person present to reflect in silence what "I can't" or "I'm not" is in their head or heart that keeps them from most fully living out their calling to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow.

(As an additional activity, in preparing for the Children's Sabbath celebration, you could engage the children and young people in researching the names mentioned below—especially those that may be unfamiliar to some—and writing up a sentence or paragraph description of these courageous change-makers and heroes for justice, and create a display in the building where the Children's Sabbath will be

held. Alternatively, you could prepare a booklet or bulletin insert with their findings.)

Lord I cannot preach like Martin Luther King, Jr.
or turn a poetic phrase like Maya Angelou
but I care and am willing to serve and to stand up for children.

I do not have Fred Shuttlesworth's and Harriet Tubman's courage
or Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's political skills
but I care and am willing to serve and raise my voice with others for children.

I cannot sing like Fannie Lou Hamer
or organize like Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin
but I care and am willing to serve.

I am not holy like Archbishop Tutu,
forgiving like Mandela, or disciplined like Gandhi
but I care and am willing to serve and sacrifice to build our children a better future.

I am not brilliant like Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois or
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or as eloquent as
Sojourner Truth and Booker T. Washington
but I care and am willing to serve and use the talents I do have to keep children safe.

I have not Mother Teresa's saintliness,
Dorothy Day's love or Cesar Chavez's
gentle tough spirit
but I care and am willing to serve and make a difference for children.

God it is not as easy as it used to be
to frame an issue and forge a solution
but I care and am willing to serve and to keep struggling until we find the way to build the 21st century movement for children.

My mind and body are not so swift as in youth
and my energy comes in spurts
but I care and am willing to serve and to vote for children.

I'm so young
nobody will listen.
I'm not sure what to say or do
but I care and am willing to serve.

I can't see or hear well,
speak good English, stutter sometimes, am afraid of criticism

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

and get real scared standing up before others
but I care and am willing to serve.

God, use us as You will to save Your children today and tomorrow and to build a nation and world where no child is left behind and everyone feels welcome. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Affirming Our Commitment

Make copies of the "Affirming My Commitment to Create Change for Children Today, Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow" form below. Cut down the middle to make two forms per copy. As people arrive for the service, distribute the forms with the bulletin/program and a pencil (perhaps buy a box of short "golf pencils" which come pre-sharpened and are fairly inexpensive).

Following the "Call to Service" section of the Children's Sabbath, and perhaps preceded by a "charge to the congregation," invite participants to take a moment to reflect on their responses to the questions on the form, and then to write their response. You may have instrumental or other music playing while participants take time to reflect and write.

Resources for the Blessing

Bahá'í Blessing of the Children

Before the blessing of the children, you might invite the parents and other caregivers present to hold the hand or place a hand on the children with them as they receive this blessing:

O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handiwork of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, graciously assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity. O God! These children are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of Thy loving-kindness. Thou art the Bountiful, the All-Loving.

Charge and Blessing

Now let us go forth to create change in a world that knows injustice;

Let us go forth to create change for children, sacred gifts of the Divine;

Let us go forth to create change for children today, who don't get a second chance at childhood;

Let us go forth to bring hope to children and families that know despair;

Let us go forth to work for a better tomorrow, for all our sake.

May we go forth with the blessing of the Source of all love and justice. And let all people of compassion and commitment say, **Amen.**

Blessing

May the blessing of the divine whom we know by many names be with you and all whom you love; and with children who are loved and those who wait still to know our love. Amen.

**Affirming My Commitment to Create Change for Children Today,
Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow**

Who are the children for whom you would like to work for change?

What kind of change do you seek to create?

What will you do today to take a first step in making that change?

What is your vision of the better tomorrow that you can help bring about?

**Affirming My Commitment to Create Change for Children Today,
Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow**

Who are the children for whom you would like to work for change?

What kind of change do you seek to create?

What will you do today to take a first step in making that change?

What is your vision of the better tomorrow that you can help bring about?





SECTION 11

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Thank you for turning to this section! The actions that you plan for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend and for the year that follows are an *essential* part of the Children's Sabbaths celebration. As important as the worship experiences and educational sessions are, it is vital to plan actions that will help translate that prayer and inspiration, that awareness and information into new hands-on service and justice-seeking advocacy for children

that will create real, measurable change for children and truly bring a better tomorrow.

So, are you ready to plan? There are two kinds of actions to plan for your Children's Sabbath: hands-on service and advocacy activities for the Children's Sabbaths weekend itself, and actions that can be carried out throughout the coming year to make a lasting difference for children.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

The activities that you plan for the weekend of your Children's Sabbath are an essential way that participants can begin to create change *today*. Activities on the weekend itself provide the immediate satisfaction of responding faithfully to the message in the service of worship and the learning in the educational programs. If people only learn about the crises facing children and families, they can feel hopeless, guilty, or helpless. That's when it becomes so easy to think, "I'll just take care of myself and look out for 'my own.'" By contrast, if people are provided immediately with specific ways to help in response to these problems, they will feel hopeful, motivated, energized, and positive, and want to do even more. They will discover that they really can create change and will be all the more eager to help usher in a better tomorrow.

The Children's Sabbaths movement, of course, is not just a one-weekend event. The kind of widespread and lasting change that children need will not be accomplished in a single weekend, so it is vital to plan year-round efforts to improve the lives of children. What might that look like? It could mean:

- Reenergizing existing efforts in your place of worship that serve or seek justice for children;

- Inspiring individuals to make new commitments to volunteer, donate, advocate, or help children in need in some other way;
- Developing, as a congregation, a new program or other effort to improve the lives of children—lifting children out of poverty, ensuring all children health coverage, dismantling the pipeline to prison and putting all children on the path to success—and create communities of justice and compassion;
- Partnering with other congregations to develop a long-term effort to help children.

This section provides a range of resources to help you plan activities on the Children's Sabbaths weekend and throughout the year to create real change for children. It includes:

- Tips for Planning Children's Sabbath Activities and Actions
- Actions to Learn More and Raise Awareness
- Actions to Reach Out and Serve Children and Families
- Actions to Speak Up for Justice

Tips for Planning Children's Sabbath Activities and Actions

As you plan activities for the Children's Sabbaths weekend and for the year to come, keep the following tips in mind:

First, offer a range of activities focusing on raising awareness, hands-on service, and advocacy. Making a difference for children requires all three kinds of effort! It also enables people to choose activities based on their particular skills and interests. The action ideas that follow are organized in these three categories, so try to select one or more from each.

Second, plan some activities that can be completed on the Children's Sabbaths weekend (such as assembling care packages for children going into foster care) **and some that will lead people into long-term commitments** (such as signing up volunteers to do outreach and enrollment for public children's health coverage programs or work with a mentoring or after-school program once a week).

Third, plan activities that will engage all ages. For example, if there is a table to write letters to elected

officials, provide crayons and markers so that young children can draw pictures to enclose, or have them dictate their letters to an older child or adult.

Fourth, use the Children's Sabbath to reinforce existing congregational programs that serve children, particularly programs that promote justice and peace and work to end poverty, lack of health care, and the pipeline to prison (for example, you could highlight accomplishments, recruit new people to help, or solicit donations) **while introducing new opportunities to serve children and families, seek justice, and create change for children to bring hope and a better tomorrow.**

Finally, be sure you are prepared to guide people in the activities so that they understand the connection between the worship and the action. You may want to provide a preview of the activities on a bulletin insert or during the announcement time in worship. During the activity period, it works best to have several people at each activity who are prepared to explain and guide participation.

Actions for Children

Learn More and Raise Awareness

On the Children's Sabbaths weekend...

Set up a “Your Truth Aloud” video station. Invite members of your place of worship to come to a quiet spot you've set up with a video camera. Record each person delivering a brief statement (up to two minutes) of why they believe it is important for all children to have health care now. At the end of the day, go to www.childrensdefense.org/child-advocacy-resources-center/take-action/your-truth-aloud-speak-out-now-for-children.html for instructions on how to post the videos to help raise awareness of the need for children's health coverage.

Host a Forum on Creating Change for Children Today to Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow. Invite a panel of speakers to address child poverty, children lacking health coverage, and children in the pipeline to prison. (Alternatively, plan a series of forums so that each can cover one topic.) Possible speakers include staff from organizations and agencies serving low-income persons, such as a job training center, WIC office, or emergency food and shelter services; staff from organizations and agencies addressing children's health needs, including health clinics, emergency rooms, and pediatric practices; and staff from organizations addressing children in the pipeline to prison, including juvenile court judges, juvenile detention centers, and mentoring programs. Include a panelist who can talk about relevant initiatives in Congress and the state legislature. Ask the speakers to describe the problems (causes and effects) as well as the solutions and how people can help.

In addition to hearing from professionals working in these areas, when possible and appropriate, arrange to hear from the real “experts”: those who are personally affected by the issue (such as parents, grandparents and other relatives raising children, or youths.) Also, consider inviting legislators to serve as panelists or to respond to what the panelists present.

Sample Agenda

1. Welcome: Introduction to the Forum's purpose, introduction of panelists (10 minutes)
2. Creating Change for Children in Poverty (10 minutes per speaker, 10 minutes for discussion)
 - a. Staff from an organization serving families in poverty, such as a food pantry, WIC (Women, Infants, and Children's Food Program) office
 - b. Children's advocate familiar with policies related to child and family poverty
3. Creating Change for Children Without Health Coverage
 - a. Health care provider, such as a pediatrician from a health clinic or emergency room that treats uninsured children
 - b. Advocate for health care coverage, such as a representative of an advocacy organization
4. Creating Change for Children in the Pipeline to Prison
 - a. Juvenile court judge or juvenile detention staff person
 - b. Staff person from a program nurturing positive youth development, such as a mentoring program
 - c. Children's advocate familiar with policies relating to juvenile justice, youth development, and the pipeline to prison
5. Where Do We Go From Here?
6. Closing (thank panelists and audience)

Please Note: The kinds of activities that are appropriate and permissible at various points during the Children's Sabbaths weekend vary depending on the religious tradition of a place of worship. As you read through the suggested activities, you should select those that are appropriate for your tradition or modify the actions to make them so. Remember that the whole weekend, from Friday morning through Sunday night, is part of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, so some activities that would not be appropriate immediately following your time of worship could be planned for another day or time during the weekend. Additionally, activities can and should be planned for the year to follow, so you can plan accordingly. You know what is best for your place of worship.

Sample Letter of Invitation to Forum Panelists

Dear [name]:

I am writing on behalf of [name of place/s of worship sponsoring the forum] to invite you to participate as a panelist in a community forum, "Create Change for Children Today to Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow" on [date] from [times] at [location]. The forum is being held in conjunction with the 18th annual multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund.

The purpose of the forum is to raise community awareness of the challenges and risks to children in poverty, without health coverage, and in the pipeline to prison, and to explore ways that we as concerned individuals and as a community can work to lift children out of poverty, assure children health coverage, and put children on paths of promise. We are inviting other community leaders with expertise in child poverty, health care, the juvenile justice system, and youth development. Confirmed speakers [or, Other invited speakers] include [list several of the most recognizable names, with their affiliation, or list the other panelists who will be speaking in the same portion of the program].

We are asking each panelist to speak for 10 minutes. In that time, we hope you will include your perspective on the scope of the problem and what the major challenges are to children's well-being. We also hope you will address some of the solutions—what is working? Finally, we hope you will include a call to action: What do you think individuals or our community should do to help children in poverty, lacking health coverage, or in the pipeline to prison? What should we do to raise awareness, meet needs directly, or advocate for justice? We will close with a brief discussion on "Where do we go from here?" which is intended to prepare people to move into action. You are welcome to bring copies of materials to distribute, especially those that provide information about action steps people may take.

I will call you in the next few days to learn if you will be able to participate in this important community forum. In the meantime, you can reach me at [provide phone number and/or email address]. Together, I believe that we can increase attention to and action on children's needs and bring hope and a better tomorrow for children and for all of us.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Title, organization/congregation]

Hold an educational event to discuss the intersection of faith and public policy. Often, members of places of worship are uncomfortable with public policy concerns being discussed in a place of worship—sometimes because of confusion about what “separation of church and state” really means. Instead of avoiding the misunderstood and sometimes controversial subject, arrange a time to really explore it. As a community or congregational forum, a short-term or one-time class, or as a book group, engage participants in learning about and discussing how our faith informs our lives as citizens who vote, speak out, and seek justice in the public square. Many denominations, movements, and other faith groups have prepared excellent materials to guide such a discussion. Find out what yours provides or explore the resources of groups like the Interfaith Alliance (www.interfaithalliance.org), including *Religion and Politics: A Guide for Houses of Worship*. Or invite a speaker to address the topic. Book groups might want to tackle a book like Jim Wallis's *God's Politics*.

Organize a community forum on incarcerated youths and the funding disparities between prisons and education in our nation. Potential speakers include juvenile court judges, educators and school administrators, and others.

Introduce a child advocacy bulletin board. Choose a public gathering place for your bulletin board to share news about children in need and initiatives taken by the local, state, and federal government on economic justice and children's concerns. Contact your faith group's public policy office or other body providing legislative and justice information and post that on the bulletin board as well. Use the bulletin board to highlight ways that your congregation is already meeting the needs of children and to highlight opportunities for members and visitors to support those efforts, too. Update it regularly. For updated information on the state of children in America, visit www.childrensdefense.org.

Following the Children's Sabbaths weekend...

Encourage members to host a house party to educate others about the pipeline to prison and what they can do to dismantle it. The Children's Defense Fund has available America's *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*SM report, a moving video of images of children in the pipeline set against a stirring song, and other resources that you can draw upon (www.childrensdefense.org). Invite a speaker from the community to outline the dynamics of the pipeline and serve as a resource for your discussion about what you can do.

Explore your place of worship's rituals related to birth, coming of age, and membership (such as baptism, infant dedication, namings, bar/bat mitzvah, and confirmation). In what ways does the faith community make a commitment to the child or young person in those rituals? How can your place of worship use these occasions to deepen members' understanding of the commitment they are making to the child or young person, and how can you help them discover ways to fulfill that commitment not only in spiritual nurture and support but in other aspects of that child's life? How can these rituals and life-cycle events nurture children's own understanding of the connection between faith, justice, and compassion? Suggests the Union for Reform Judaism: “*Encourage bar and bat mitzvah students to engage in tzedakah projects as a sign that they are ready to take responsibility for their observance of the mitzvot. Instead of bima flowers, consider decorating the bima with decorative food baskets, which can be donated later to a food pantry. Books can be used as centerpieces and then donated to a needy public school library or other organization. For further bar and bat mitzvah project suggestions visit the [Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism's] Youth Mitzvah Projects site and the social action program bank.*”

Host a parent education program to equip parents with conflict resolution and other parenting skills and support them in advocating for their children's healthy development and opportunities. **Meyers Park Baptist Church in Charlotte, North Carolina**, hosts a Parenting Circle for parents of children in elementary school and younger. The week of their Children's Sabbath in 2007, parents were invited to discuss Wendy Mogel's *The Blessing of the Skinned Knee*.

Start a child advocacy book group. Host a book group in your place of worship or in partnership with other places of worship or community groups. Select a book or other resource on children's concerns and child advocacy. The resource section in this book has many suggested titles. Your faith tradition's website or publishing house may have additional resources. How you structure the book group can be tailored to suit the interests and availability of group members—for example, you could meet weekly and discuss one chapter of the resource, or monthly to discuss the entire resource.

Make sure your place of worship is connected to the Children's Defense Fund Religious Action staff. The Children's Defense Fund has long recognized the practical and moral imperative for the religious community to be at the forefront of CDF's mission to leave no child behind.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Practically speaking, every great social achievement and transformation of values and priorities in our nation has required the leadership of the religious community with its moral authority, vast infrastructure, roots in every community, and wide range of resources. From the abolition of slavery to the end of child labor in the U.S. to the civil rights movement, no great social transformation has been achieved without the leadership and partnership of the religious community.

The religious community's leadership is not only a practical necessity but also a moral imperative for the religious community, itself: How can we profess to love a God whose abiding concern for the widow, orphan, and stranger, the poor, vulnerable, and excluded is evident in every great religious tradition, if we do not stand and speak out for children? For more than three decades, CDF has had staff committed to partnership with the religious community—from national bodies to local congregations—so that together we can put faith into action and nurture and protect our children.

CDF's Religious Action Team works to build faith-based leadership in the Leave No Child Behind® movement through securing institutional support of national religious denominations, movements, and other organizations, promoting effective public witness and faithful child advocacy, strengthening state and regional religious efforts for children, cultivating a cadre of religious leaders prepared to speak and act for children, activating religious individuals and congregations to help children, and communicating the moral basis for the children's movement. Please let us know how we can support your child advocacy efforts! Feel free to contact **Scott Jacobsen**, Religious Action program associate, at sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org. Here are some ideas for building a stronger relationship:

- Designate a child advocacy liaison or team to work with CDF and bear responsibility for communicating CDF resources and calls for action to the congregation.
- Identify which committee, staff member, group, or other within your place of worship will include carrying forward the work of seeking justice for children in their scope of responsibility.
- Send CDF a description of your Children's Sabbath celebration, so we can share the information with the media, in our next Children's Sabbaths manual, or in other ways.
- Send CDF a description of a model program through which your place of worship is effectively meeting needs of children in the community, so we can share the ideas and inspiration with others.
- Let us know the children's concerns that your place of worship wants to address so we can connect you with CDF resources to help you do so.
- Encourage individual members to make use of CDF's resources.
- Designate a child advocacy resource shelf in your congregation's buildings (the library, educational room/s, social hall, office, or wherever works best). Stock it with copies of books, reports, and other resources from CDF and other child advocacy organizations and with resources related to children and justice from your faith tradition. Include brochures on your state's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and other community resources that would be helpful to members of your congregation and community.
- Link your place of worship's website to the Children's Defense Fund website (www.childrensdefense.org): Find out the latest information on national and state child statistics, child welfare policies, and advocacy actions on all the various initiatives CDF is engaged in to ensure a successful passage to adulthood for all children.
- Send leaders and members to CDF trainings and institutes. These include:
 - **Send a young person to one of CDF's Young Advocate Leadership Trainings.** Held in early spring, the Young Advocate Leadership Training (*YALTSM*) program attracts hundreds of young adults who participate in an all-expenses-paid weekend-long training program where they develop knowledge and skills in child advocacy that can be implemented in their communities and on their college campuses.
 - **Send a team of a pastor and Christian educator or lay leader to attend the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry** (www.childrensdefense.org/Proctor). Created to fill a gap in most seminary preparation for ministry, the Proctor Institute offers theological study, great preaching, and teaching to support ministers, seminarians, Christian educators, young adult leaders, and other faith-based child

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

advocates as they explore the intersection of Christian faith and child advocacy. These five days of spiritual renewal, preaching, Bible study, networking, movement-building workshops, and continuing education about children in need are not to be missed! The Proctor Institute is ecumenical, drawing participants from a wide range of churches. Young adult leaders (ages 18–25) are invited to register for the Joshua & Deborah Generation track within the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry. The Joshua & Deborah Generation track affirms the important role that the newest generation of religious leaders has to play in the movement for children, and the importance of the Moses & Miriam and Joshua & Deborah generations learning from each other and discovering unique leadership styles and opportunities.

- **Send a leader and member to CDF's multi-faith institute being planned for March 2010.** This multi-faith gathering is intended to engage members of every religious tradition as we explore the unique perspectives and resources of each tradition and identify shared concerns and commitments as we work together for justice to improve the lives of our nation's children.
- **Connect with the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign*** (<http://www.childrensdefense.org/helping-america-children/cradle-to-prison-pipeline-campaign>): Join this national call to action to stop the funneling of tens of thousands of youths, predominantly those who are poor and minority, down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration and, in some cases, death. Race and poverty are the major factors underpinning the pipeline. Other factors include: inadequate access to health care; gaps in early childhood development; disparate educational opportunities; intolerable abuse and neglect; unmet mental health needs; rampant substance abuse; and overburdened and ineffective juvenile justice systems. The urgent challenge for each of us and for our nation is to prevent this waste of

our children's lives and our nation's capabilities. We created the pipeline and we have the power, knowledge, and will to dismantle it.

Reach Out and Serve

On the Children's Sabbaths weekend...

Host a Children's Sabbaths Action Fair. Invite programs, agencies, and organizations that serve children and families or work for justice to set up information tables in a central location. Have them present information about their work and ways that individuals can get involved on a one-time or ongoing basis by donating, advocating, or volunteering. Include both congregational programs and community-based organizations. Possibilities include community health clinics, juvenile detention facilities, youth development or mentoring programs, Head Start programs, programs and agencies providing services to families in poverty such as a food pantry, and child advocacy organizations. Encourage those staffing the tables to bring photographs or other visuals to depict their work and copies of newsletters or brochures. Urge them to be specific about volunteer and other needs. When possible, encourage them to offer a variety of options for ways people can support their work, including one-time help and ongoing commitments.

Have copies of the commitment form on page 148 at each table. When a congregation member decides on a new commitment, have them fill out the form. The top portion of the form should be left with the organization or program they are planning to support, so that those coordinating the congregation's programs and community organization efforts know the support they may expect. The middle portion of the commitment form should be left with a designated representative of your place of worship. That way, your place of worship can follow up and support and celebrate individuals' commitment. Some places of worship have even celebrated these commitments at the Children's Sabbath the following year. Finally, the bottom third of the commitment form should be kept by the individuals to remind them of the new commitment they have made.

Faith in Action Fair Commitment Form

Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Phone:

Email:

Pledge of Commitment (time, goods, money):

Give the completed top portion of this form to the organization to which you will be contributing time, goods, or money.

Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

Phone:

Email:

Pledge of Commitment (time, goods, money):

Give the completed middle portion of this form to your place of worship. We will be gathering all of the forms to support you in your commitment.

My pledge of commitment:

Organization/Program/Group to which I am making the commitment:

How to contact them:

Keep the bottom portion of this form as a reminder of your commitment.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Collect items children need. Before the Children's Sabbaths weekend, contact a program serving children in poverty, without health coverage, or in the pipeline to prison—such as a Head Start program, health clinic, or juvenile justice program or youth development program. Find out what items are needed by the program or by the children they serve. For several weeks before the Children's Sabbath, publicize what items are needed and ask members to bring them on the Children's Sabbath. Collect them in a central location where members can see how many small contributions can add up to make a big difference. If possible, arrange for a representative of the program that will receive the donations to come speak to your place of worship.

Make a difference. For some people, the satisfaction of making a difference comes in part from creating something with their own hands. In consultation with a program serving children in need, come up with a hands-on project that members of all ages can engage in that will help children in poverty, without health care, or in the pipeline to prison. Examples of such a hands-on project that might be able to be completed at your place of worship include preparing food for a program serving children, youths, or families (e.g., baking cookies or making casseroles that could be frozen), assembling activity kits for the waiting room of a health clinic, making soft fleece blankets for children in foster care or juvenile detention, or writing a caring letter to youths in trouble.

Roll up your sleeves. Ahead of time, arrange for a service project that people can engage in on the Children's Sabbaths weekend (if appropriate for your religious tradition). Examples include planting bulbs in a neglected school yard serving primarily low-income students, painting a classroom in a Head Start center or low-income school, building book shelves in a youth development program, stocking shelves and packing bags at a food pantry, or sprucing up a common room at a homeless shelter or a juvenile detention center. Publicize the service project, date, and time in advance and have people register so that you can have the appropriate tools or other supplies and can make whatever transportation arrangements are needed.

Host a health fair to ensure all children who are eligible for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) are enrolled. *Before the Children's Sabbath*, contact your state's CHIP or Medicaid office. Ask if a staff person or qualified volunteer could come to your Children's Sabbath to enroll any eligible families, or if a volunteer

from the congregation could be trained to help with the enrollment process. Publicize the availability of CHIP and Medicaid enrollment assistance throughout the congregation and community, using posters, flyers, notices in community newspapers, and other channels. *On the Children's Sabbath*, provide a location in your congregation's building that will provide privacy and confidentiality to increase congregation and community members' comfort in making use of this service. Have your enrollment volunteer or staff and enrollment materials available, and be sure people know when and where to go. *After the Children's Sabbath celebration*, make arrangements to provide the service again. Consider offering it on different days of the week and different times to be accessible to members of the community as well as the congregation. Share your experience with other congregations that may want to do the same, especially those that serve populations most likely to be uninsured (African American, Latino, and low-income). If you notice members of your congregation having difficulties enrolling in Medicaid or CHIP (for example, difficulty getting to an office to sign up), consider taking steps to overcome these barriers (for instance, asking for volunteers at the church to provide transportation).

“Food, Fun, and Physicals”

That was how **Pratt United Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi**, billed the Health Fair for Children that they hosted from 9:00 until noon on Saturday of the 2007 Children's Sabbaths weekend. The children were given health checks from registered nurses. They also participated in games and enjoyed a nutritious meal. Before leaving, they viewed a DVD on good dental practices and were given a package of materials for healthy dental care as well as other health-related gifts. The following day, the church held a Children's Sabbath worship service with children and youths in leadership roles. The church plans to follow up the Children's Sabbath by monitoring the children's health with further health checks.

What's it like to be a family with uninsured children? Teresa Liborio and her husband, of Alameda County, California, are the parents of three daughters, all of whom suffer from serious medical conditions. Janneth, 16, has chronic tonsillitis; Brenda, 13, has asthma; and Guadalupe, 9, has anemia. None of the girls have health coverage. Over the past year, Janneth has missed several days of school because of fevers, frequent coughing, throat swelling, inability to eat, and weakness. This has resulted in a significant drop in her grades. An asthmatic, Brenda is unable to participate in even moderate physical activities, including physical education, because she does not have an Albuterol pump (a key asthma management medication). She worries that she may have an asthma attack and need to be rushed to the emergency room. Guadalupe misses occasional school days due to her anemia, which is a controllable illness with proper vitamins and medicine. Because her family cannot afford the medicine to treat her condition, she suffers from fatigue, loss of appetite, and hair loss. The last time all three girls had health coverage was approximately one year ago. Their mother, Teresa, reports that they lost coverage because the Medi-Cal office received her reauthorization packet late. Teresa confides that she is worried. Last year, the last time Janneth was seen by her medical provider, she was advised to have her tonsils removed because of her chronic tonsillitis. But because Janneth lost her health coverage, she has not been able to have the operation. Teresa also worries about how to meet all of her family's basic needs, since she had to leave her job at a fabric factory to care for her sick daughters. Her husband works but does not earn enough to cover all the family's expenses, and they now have additional debt because of unpaid medical expenses from the past year. Teresa says, "I just don't know how we are going to pay for rent, utilities, food, and everything else. I'm always stealing from Peter to pay Paul." When asked what she would say to elected officials about health care for children in the U.S., she replies, "Help us! The application process needs to be easier. One year without health insurance—who knows how my daughters are really doing?"

Following the Children's Sabbaths weekend...

Adopt a child-serving organization. Identify an organization serving children and families in need in your community or one nearby (if the need is greater there), and provide a range of assistance such as financial support, donation of goods, and professional expertise in fundraising, promotion, or management, in addition to other forms of volunteer service. Regularly publicize needs and opportunities for involvement so that many members can contribute in ways that best suit their time, gifts, and interests.

In Connecticut, Covenant to Care for Children's Adopt a Social Worker (AASW) program matches individual religious congregations of any faith tradition with a child protective services social worker. "The purpose of the match is to support that worker and to meet the unmet needs of abused, neglected, and severely impoverished children in the local community. Due to the increasing numbers of children living in these situations, many churches and synagogues are needed to help... Most of the needs identified by the adopted social worker can be met through the abundance in the homes of congregation members: the extra blankets and sheets, the outgrown snowsuit, the discarded juvenile furniture, the baby sweater knit by a caring grandmother. Through this partnership, we are building stronger connections between congregations and their communities, reducing the negative consequences that poverty has on the nurturing children receive in their homes, and providing hope for families who experience the support they need from caring neighbors." (www.covenanttocare.org) Imagine the satisfying difference your congregation could make if you forged a relationship with an organization or staff person serving children!

Host "Families Care Days." One of the best ways for children to learn compassion, generosity, responsibility, and other positive values is to see adults put them into practice and to do the same. One weekend a month (or quarterly), arrange an opportunity for all ages to work together to meet a need in the community. This may be preparing a meal in a community kitchen for people who are hungry, helping build a Habitat for Humanity house, cleaning up a playground, or painting over graffiti.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Host a Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® program. The CDF Freedom Schools® program provides summer and after-school enrichment through a model curriculum that supports children and families around five essential components: high quality academic enrichment, parent and family involvement, civic engagement and social action, intergenerational leadership development, and nutrition, health and mental health. In partnership with community-based organizations, faith institutions, schools, colleges and universities, the *CDF Freedom Schools* program boosts student motivation to read, generates more positive attitudes towards learning, and connects the needs of children and families to the resources of their communities.

A Day in the CDF Freedom Schools® Program

As children enter a *CDF Freedom Schools* site, they are greeted and served a **nutritious breakfast or snack** by caring adults. The children and young adults then move on to ***Harambee!***, a time of informal sharing when children and staff come together to celebrate themselves and each other.

In the classroom where servant leader interns facilitate classes of no more than 10 students, children are engaged in reading and theme-based, hands-on activities as outlined in the **Integrated Reading Curriculum (IRC)**. Reading is a cornerstone of the program. Servant leader interns lead the children in reading excellent books throughout the summer or after school. These books feature heroes, heroines, and settings that reflect the children's cultural images and encourage them to think about how they can make a difference in their own lives. Classroom activities related to the day's reading use a variety of teaching models, including cooperative learning, role playing, group discussions, reading aloud, paired reading, creative writing, and visual arts. The range of activities ensures that children with diverse experiences, talents, and levels of confidence in reading and verbal expression are actively engaged.

During the summer program as the morning draws to a close, **Drop Everything And Read (D.E.A.R.)** time is announced and shared by everyone. To emphasize the importance and joy of reading, children and adults alike "Drop Everything And Read" silently for 15 minutes, choosing from a rich selection of reading material available from the *CDF Freedom Schools* site library. At lunchtime the feeling of family and community spirit continues as the children join adults to eat a **nutritious**

meal. After lunch, children participate in *CDF Freedom Schools* **afternoon activities**. These are well-planned music, dance or other culturally enriching activities that are related to the themes presented in the Integrated Reading Curriculum, including field trips that expand the children's horizons. The children also may engage in social action projects and rehearse for the summer finale that is performed for parents, friends, and members of the community.

Once the day has ended for the children, *CDF Freedom Schools* staff meet for the **daily debrief** to process the day's activities, discuss the day's successes and challenges, focus on site logistics and planning, and re-energize for the next day.

What difference does participation in the CDF Freedom Schools program make?

- In New Orleans, 71 percent of Level 2 and 3 children reported they could do most things if they tried, an increase of 30 percent.
- In Newark, New Jersey, 81 percent of parents attended parent-teacher conferences and 96 percent brought home materials for their child to read.
- In Rochester, New York, the number of children physically fighting decreased by 26 percent.
- Although children in New Orleans maintain relatively high levels of depression symptoms, the number of children experiencing positive mental health indicators increased. The number of children stating "I felt like I was just as good as other children" (26.2 percent) and "I had a good time" (5.7 percent) increased. By the end of the program, 85.7 percent of the children reported that they felt happy.
- At a Washington, D.C., site that serves homeless children, fewer children reported feeling like they couldn't pay attention, and 100 percent of younger children reported feeling happy (a 21.4 percent increase).

October 30, 2009, is the application deadline for summer 2010 operation. To learn more about the *CDF Freedom Schools* program and the impact it has had on children throughout the country, please visit www.childrensdefensefund.org/freedomschools.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Provide free tax filing assistance to low-income working families.

Before your Children's Sabbath, find out about Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites in your community or other places that are conducting outreach and enrollment efforts to help low-income families receive the benefits for which they are eligible. On the Children's Sabbaths weekend, sign up volunteers for these existing outreach projects. To find a nearby VITA site:

- Call the IRS at 1 (800) TAX-1040 or 1 (800) 849-1040.
- Visit the AARP's website (<http://www.aarp.org/money/taxaide>) or call their toll-free hotline for information: 1 (888) 227-7669.
- Visit the American Bar Association's website at <http://www.abanet.org/tax/sites.html>.

Ahead of time, arrange for a trainer to come and train members as VITA volunteers to work at local VITA sites to assist eligible families in getting the Earned Income Tax Credits they are due. Call CDF at (202) 662-3542 for help arranging for a trainer.

What difference can free tax filing assistance make to a low-income family?

Vivian, a single mother of three, earns \$35,000 as an office manager. Two years ago she went to a large tax preparer and paid \$182 to have her taxes completed and to receive a Refund Anticipation Loan. She also paid an additional \$99 in bank fees for the transfer—all to get her money in two days. If she had known that it takes Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites approximately 14 days to get her refund with direct deposit and electronic filing, she would not have visited a paid preparer. Last year, Vivian had an appointment at the free VITA site near her home, which saved her the \$281 she had paid in preparation and Refund Anticipation Loan fees the prior year. She plans to return to a VITA site again this year. She is saving the money from the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and free tax filing last year and this year to help her make a down payment on a house so that she can keep her children safe and secure.

Vivian's experiences getting her taxes done at a paid preparer are not unusual. Millions of low- to moderate-income families will claim billions of dollars in EITC

refunds this tax season. A large percentage of these taxpayers will pay outrageous fees to have their taxes prepared and to receive their refund more quickly. According to data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), recent success in promoting the EITC has been accompanied by losses to commercial tax preparers and Refund Anticipation Loan lenders:

- More than 22 million taxpayers received the EITC in 2005, with an average benefit amount of \$1,894. This represents a \$41.8 billion investment in children, families and the communities in which they live, work and play.¹
- In California, about 2.4 million taxpayers received the EITC, representing a \$4.4 billion investment. Still, Californians lost roughly \$320 million to tax preparation fees, Refund Anticipation Loans, and other commercial products.²

Support for Working Families

For the most recent year for which data are available, the EITC lifted 4.4 million Americans above the poverty line, including 2.4 million children.³ Its contribution to the well-being of lower-wage, working families is significant—giving working parents an opportunity to support their families and infusing money into the local economy. Without the crucial income supplement the EITC provides, it is estimated that the child poverty rate would be one-fourth higher.

For tax year 2008, the EITC federal tax credit is worth up to:

- \$4,824 for families with two or more children;
- \$2,917 for families with one child; and,
- \$438 for individuals between the ages of 25 and 64 with no children.

In addition, many EITC recipients are eligible for other credits such as the Child Tax Credit (CTC). The CTC is a federal tax credit for working families with children and incomes above \$8,500. It is worth up to \$1,000 for each child claimed in tax year 2008. Overall, it has been estimated that the CTC adds as much as 40 percent to the refunds of EITC-eligible tax filers.

¹ Children's Defense Fund, "Avoiding the Pitfalls of Refund Anticipation Loans," 2008.

² Children's Defense Fund, "Avoiding the Pitfalls of Refund Anticipation Loans," 2008.

³ Robert Greenstein, "The Earned Income Tax Credit: Boosting Employment, Aiding the Working Poor," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 17, 2005.

Bridge to Benefits (www.bridgetobenefits.org) is a multi-state project by Children's Defense Fund–Minnesota to improve the well-being of families and individuals by linking them to public work support programs and tax credits.

To see if you or someone else may be eligible for public work support programs, click the “start” button on the website home page to use the Eligibility Screening Tool. Bridge to Benefits will ask a few simple questions but will NOT ask for information that identifies the user. It's easy, confidential, and free!

Arrange to have volunteer “pew parents” who sit in a designated pew with children during the worship service so that an exhausted parent or caregiver can sit on their own on occasion and use that time for renewal. If children attend your place of worship unaccompanied by adults, this can also provide them with an important sense of connection. Publicize the availability of pew parents so that visitors and new members know they are available.

Sponsor a parents night out to give parents and other caregivers a chance to recharge their batteries. Publicize it to the community at large so that any stressed, short-handed parent can take advantage of the respite.

Start a support group for single parents or kinship care families (those headed by a grandparent or other relative). Publicize it to the community beyond just your congregation.

Prepare care packages of new clothes, personal toiletries, and/or a welcome gift for children placed into foster care homes. Contact the Division of Youth and Family Services to find out the best way to contribute this way.

Provide internships, year-round and summer job opportunities, or job-shadowing experiences and guidance for families and youths in need. Partner with other places of worship, community organizations, and area high schools to pool the opportunities and to identify those who might benefit from them.

Publicize free family-friendly events offered by your place of worship or in the community. Make all feel welcome.

Partner with other places of worship and community organizations to combine resources, meet needs, and build connections. Working through the appropriate staff and committees in your own place of worship, assess the interests, resources, needs, and partners available for a new or expanded effort to improve the lives of children:

- **Interest:** What is your congregation already doing to serve or advocate on behalf of children? How are their needs included and met through your place of worship? What past or current efforts have been most successful? Why do you think that is? What past or current efforts were not successful? Why do you think that is? What methods, programs, and events have been most successful in motivating and empowering members of your congregation to act on behalf of others?
- **Resources:** What resources are available in your congregation to meet the needs of children and families? What resources are already committed to children and social justice? What are potential resources that might be committed? In addition to financial resources, consider your physical resources—buildings, vans, playground, audiovisual, and the like. Think about your people resources. What kinds of skills, experience, contacts, time, and interests do your members have that could be contributed to an effort to help children and families?
- **Needs:** What are the needs of children and families in your community, state, and nation that your congregation might feel called to help meet? There are many resources to help you develop an understanding of urgent unmet needs your congregation might address. Those that touch members themselves are powerfully motivating. There are also needs that are evident through the media and others identified by community organizations. Conversations with community members are a vital way to learn what problems are pressing on others but of which your members might not be aware.
- **Partners:** Who in the community might become your partners in a new effort or join you to strengthen an existing effort? Concern for children is a powerful unifying force. Make the most of this opportunity to build relationships with other places of worship and with community organizations and leaders to improve the lives of children. Develop a list of effective organizations, agencies, and programs in the community that might welcome a partnership with your place of worship. Develop another list of other places of worship that might be good partners. Each partner might bring



something different to the relationship—varied interests and resources, different reach into communities that would benefit from the new services or effort, unique perspectives on the problems and what is needed. Invest time in listening to and learning from each other and developing a shared plan in which all feel ownership.

Speak Up for Justice

On the Children's Sabbaths weekend...

Launch a Justice for Children letter-writing table that is available to congregation members every week or once a month. Supply it with paper, pens, envelopes, and action alerts or other advocacy information from your faith group's Washington or public policy office or a children's concerns group like the Children's Defense Fund. See pages 165–166 for information. In addition to

writing or calling when legislation is coming up and their vote is important, remind members to contact legislators after the vote to congratulate them for their leadership on behalf of children or to express disappointment and urge better leadership the next time. Let them know that you are watching what they do and will hold them accountable. Review CDF's non-partisan voting record to see how your elected officials stood for children at www.childrensdefense.org.

Tip: Set the table up in a location like the fellowship or social hall, library, or another gathering spot where it will be convenient to stop by. Provide informational materials and letter-writing supplies that can be used right away or, if your tradition requires, taken home to be used at another time, as soon as permissible.

Tips on Writing Letters to Your Members of Congress

- **Be brief.** Address only one issue. A letter need not be longer than four or five sentences.
- **Be specific.** If you are writing about specific legislation, include its bill number or title.
- **Write your own letter,** adapting a sample letter as appropriate. Form letters do not receive the same attention as individually written letters.
- **Be positive and constructive.** Try to say something complimentary in the first paragraph. It is just as important to thank members of Congress for voting the right way as to criticize them for voting the wrong way.
- **Say in your own words why the legislation matters to you and to children.** Clearly state your reason for supporting or opposing the bill or issue you are writing about.
- **If you have a personal story about children in poverty, without health coverage, or in the pipeline to prison, consider sharing it.** These personal stories are the most effective way for your legislator to truly understand the issue and the impact it has on real lives.
- **If you have particular knowledge or expertise, describe it.** Relating the bill to local or state conditions is especially effective.
- **If you wish, feel free to include a copy of a report, a newsletter story, or a local survey to support your arguments.** Don't presume that the legislator is aware of such information, even if you think it is common knowledge.
- **Be sure to sign your name legibly and include your address and telephone number** so your Representative or Senator can respond.
- **If possible, fax the letter** (since postal mail may be delayed by screening procedures) or **send the letter electronically.** Your legislator will likely have a link on his or her website directing constituents to "contact us."

Step-by-Step Sample Letter

(Please note: This is written as an example only. Please feel free to write your letter in your own words to reflect your concerns, experience, and perspective.)

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Or:

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

1. Introduce yourself. My name is *Janet Doe* and I am a member of *Mytown Congregation* in *Mytown*. I appreciate your commitment to public service and desire to do the right thing.

2. Share your concern for children. I am writing out of concern for uninsured children in our community and throughout America, most of whom live in working families.

3. Share your vision for children. As a person of faith, I believe providing health coverage for all of our nation's children is our moral obligation and the right thing to do. I believe every child needs and deserves health care coverage so they can get the health care they need when they are sick and for preventive care.

4. Talk about the solutions and urge action on them. Public children's health insurance should be simplified and consolidated into a single program that guarantees all children in America affordable health coverage for all medically necessary services. It should also improve children's access to health services by increasing the level of reimbursement to providers. I hope that you will support proposals by the Children's Defense Fund that will provide health coverage for all our children. *[Visit the Children's Sabbath Action Page at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths after October 1 for the latest information on legislation and needed action and an updated sample letter.]*

5. Thank the Member of Congress and ask for a reply. Thank you for your attention to our community's children and the nine million children who are uninsured. I look forward to your reply informing me of how you will address these concerns so that all children have the health coverage they need and deserve.

Sincerely,

Your name

Your address

Your telephone number

How to address your envelope:

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Or:

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Encourage members to speak up on behalf of children in the local newspaper to influence many others. After they've written a letter to a member of Congress or other elected leader, members can take a little time and turn the letter into a Letter to the Editor or op-ed for the local paper. Encourage them to think about a current "hook," an article recently published in the paper that relates to the topic or a recent or upcoming event, to make it

timely. Perhaps keep copies of recent papers on the letter-writing table set up in the congregation's building. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr urged religious leaders to step into the pulpit with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. Now, we can take that newspaper and bring our moral voice and call for leadership that upholds a priority for children and the poor to its readers. See below for more tips on writing Letters to the Editor.

Tips on Writing a Letter to the Editor

(Adapted from *Reclaiming Our Democracy: Healing the Break between People and Government* by Sam Daley-Harris)

- 1. Respond to a recent news story or editorial.** A good letter might begin, "Your article on the new health statistics ('More Americans Are Uninsured,' Oct. 4) was excellent. Readers might want to know that of those 45 million uninsured Americans, nine million are children...." You don't have to agree with the article, editorial, or column. Say respectfully whether you think they got the story right or not and assert your views.
- 2. Make your letter short.** Check your local paper for submission criteria; a letter should contain 200-300 words. Provide a few striking facts that might surprise an editor or a reader. ("One out of every nine children in the United States is uninsured. Most of them have parents who work.")
- 3. Use descriptive words that communicate your passion about the issue.** Don't be dry. ("Imagine walking into a classroom of 27 second grade students. Could you look around and pick out three children in that room who don't deserve health insurance?")
- 4. Offer a solution to the problem.** "The Children's Defense Fund's proposed plan would simplify and consolidate children's health coverage into a single federal program that guarantees all children in America access to health coverage for all medically necessary services. The proposal also improves children's access to health services by increasing the level of reimbursement to providers."
- 5. Review.** Re-read your letter and check for any spelling or grammatical mistakes before you submit it. Include your address and day and evening phone numbers; editors usually verify the identity of the writer before they print the letter.

Following the Children's Sabbaths weekend...

Build relationships with elected leaders to help them be voices for children's justice. Plan a visit with others in your place of worship. If there is someone in your congregation or community who has met previously with their member of Congress, you may want to invite them to describe their experience and guide the group through its first visit. Make appointments to visit your members of Congress in their home district offices. (You don't have to go to Washington, D.C., to meet with your elected officials, and, in fact, visits when they are home in their district can be more influential than being just one of the many groups of tourists who stop by for a photo-op while in the nation's capital). Share with them your concerns about the problems facing children in your community and state. Talk about your values and priorities for how we protect children, especially those who are poorest and most vulnerable. Ask what leadership they will provide on the issues that concern you most. When key justice concerns arise, you'll be ready to gather those concerned members to visit your elected officials again and urge specific action. The box on the following page provides tips for arranging an effective visit with your elected officials. Contact your faith group's Washington or public policy office, if it has one, for information on key concerns and legislative action alerts. The Children's Defense Fund also provides information and alerts. Visit www.childrensdefense.org and click on "Action Center."

Invite your elected officials and other decision-makers and opinion-shapers (like the media) to visit programs sponsored by your congregation or programs in your community, like a juvenile detention facility, that demonstrate the challenges children face, as well as sites that show what works, like an after-school tutoring program or a school-to-work program. Put a human face on problems affecting children that otherwise might just be a statistic to them.

Join the Children's Defense Fund's Health Coverage for All Children Campaign

(www.childrensdefense.org/healthychild): The nine million uninsured children in America and the millions more who are underinsured need your voice to move Congress to guarantee every child and family in America access to quality, affordable, comprehensive health coverage.

You can be a voice for parents like Blanca and Marisol.

Blanca Valerio of Los Angeles has two daughters, Mayra, age 17, and Paola, age 18. Mayra has asthma, and while it is currently under control, between birth and age 12 she suffered from attacks more than once a week. Mayra and Paola's father earns \$1,400 per month as a driver. His employer does not offer coverage for either Mayra or Paola. In 2005, Mayra and Paola lost their Medicaid coverage as a result of an increase in their father's salary. When this occurred, there was a delay in enrolling for Healthy Families (California's CHIP program); however, with the assistance of a social worker at their local health clinic, the process was expedited. Since then, there have been additional lapses in health coverage, and Blanca has had to reapply many times. During these lapses in coverage, Blanca and her husband accumulated debt as a result of their children's medical bills.

Marisol, another California mother of two uninsured children, knows the stress the Valerios endure. She says of her own children, "When they are sick, I can't take them to the doctor. I stay at home with them and hope and pray to God that it passes. But sometimes it doesn't, so we have to take them to the doctor, and then I get into more debt but with less money because I missed one day's work."

Meeting with Your Legislators

Before Your Visit

Begin planning for your visit. Don't worry if you have butterflies in your stomach at the thought of meeting with your legislator for the first time. It would be unusual if you didn't. Know that the best way to communicate with your legislator is to make a personal visit. You probably will enjoy the experience—and the legislator will appreciate the time you spent communicating your views. So, take a deep breath and begin planning! First, decide on the issues you want to discuss.

Make an appointment. When making an appointment, explain what issue you would like to discuss. If the legislator is unavailable, the aide who deals with your issue often will be knowledgeable and influential in helping to form the member's views. Don't feel slighted if you end up meeting with the aide. He or she can be very influential and, if your meeting goes well, may also encourage your legislator to meet with you in person the next time.

Do your homework. Study the legislator's voting record on a number of issues using the Children's Defense Fund Action Council® Nonpartisan Congressional Scorecard and other sources, so you can comment on something positive, if possible, and know if the particular issue is one on which the legislator tends to agree or disagree with you. If there is a bill that interests you, know its status and whether your legislator has taken a position on it.

Remember the experts! Parents, grandparents, service providers, educators, religious and business leaders, police officers, doctors and nurses, and others who witness children's needs on a daily basis are children's best advocates. They really are the experts when it comes to how bills and policies will affect children, and it's important that policy makers have a wide variety of people to call upon when they have questions about their work's impact on children. Children's advocacy groups often seek out these everyday experts to present the most compelling information during legislative visits. Tell of personal experiences you have had, if possible, to illustrate your point.

Be prepared. Before meeting with the legislator or aide, plan and organize your presentation, and practice what you are going to say. If you are going with other people to the meeting, get together beforehand to make sure that you all have the same purpose. Take along helpful information to back up your arguments: newspaper articles about the problems children face, statistics, or a fact sheet. (CDF can provide some of the information you need. Call the Religious Action Team at (202) 662-3579 or visit CDF's website at www.childrensdefense.org.)

During Your Visit

Make your message concise. You may think your meeting is for 30 minutes and then arrive to find the legislator's schedule so tight that you get only five minutes. Know exactly what you want to say and be prepared to say it quickly, if circumstances demand that.

Present solutions. People often feel overwhelmed by problems they consider too massive and diverse for corrective action, so don't just talk about the problem. Share one or two concrete ideas for ways to improve the lives of children in your community. Tell your legislator what it will take to ensure that no child is left behind.

Talk about what works. Using success stories of real children and families who are being helped by Head Start, child care, job training, or health insurance will strengthen your argument and counter claims that all government programs are ineffective.

Search for common ground. Don't be exclusive or judgmental. Keeping in mind the wide range of viewpoints in Congress and in every community and state legislature, frame your messages carefully to include words and themes that will reach new audiences and persuade them to become new allies. Children's advocates care as much as anyone about efficiency, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and personal responsibility. Use themes like these to frame your message.

Be honest. It's fine to say you don't know the answer to a question and to promise to provide information later, by phone, fax, or email. This also gives you another opportunity to contact the office.

Following Your Visit

Build a relationship. The better your communication, the more seriously you will be taken, and the more willing the representative and his or her staff will be to rely upon you and your judgments.

Follow up your visit with a letter thanking the legislator for the time spent listening to your concerns. Enclose any documentation you had agreed to provide to bolster your position, and briefly restate your views.

Provide additional information. Send articles, write letters with further information, or offer assistance in thinking through solutions that could work in your community.

Call periodically with updates.

Invite them to speak. Invite the representative or the staff person who handles children's issues to speak before your congregation or a community group in which you are involved.

Invite them to a site visit. Invite the legislator to visit a successful child-serving program with which you work, such as an after-school program, conflict resolution program, or Head Start class.

Show broad support for your concerns. If your legislator or aide disagrees or is noncommittal, don't threaten or argue after you have made your case, because it is counter-productive. A better strategy is to plan another visit with others to show more community support for your position, to put together a bunch of letters from constituents, or to think of another tactic such as a letter to the editor. Persistence often pays.

Watch how your legislator votes and respond. If the legislator votes with your position on the issue, recognize that vote with a written "thank you." Such recognition may influence his or her next vote on children's issues. It also lets your legislator know that you are watching closely. If the legislator votes against your position, write or call to express your disappointment, and urge reconsideration of the issue the next time it comes up for a vote.



SECTION 12

Resources for Faithful Child Advocates

The following resources may be useful to you and your place of worship as you work to create change for children today and bring hope and a better tomorrow. In this section you will find:

- Resources from the Children's Defense Fund
- Resources from Other Sources
- Resources from the Bahá'í Community
- Resources from the Catholic Community

- Resources from the Protestant Community
- Resources from the Jewish Community
- Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Community
- Resources for Children

In addition to exploring the resources from your own religious tradition, you may find that resources from another tradition are informative and useful as well.

Resources from the Children's Defense Fund

Unless otherwise noted, all of the following may be ordered by visiting the CDF web store at www.childrensdefense.org or by calling (865) 457-6466. Many of the publications can be downloaded for free at www.childrensdefense.org/Publications.

NEW! *The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation*
by Marian Wright Edelman

A call to action for all Americans to address the urgent needs of the country's youth, this book is a series of letters to a variety of audiences—educators, faith leaders, youths, mothers, elected officials and concerned citizens nationwide—that reflect on the social and economic progress as well as the setbacks since Dr. King's death 40 years ago. Mrs. Edelman challenges each audience to step up and take action at this pivotal moment to ensure a level playing field for the next generation. Hyperion, 147 pages, 2008. \$19.95. Available in stores and on-line at amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, and borders.com.

NEW! *The State of America's Children 2008*

This edition of CDF's analysis of the status of children in America puts a special focus on child poverty and the more than 13 million children who are poor, and includes the latest developments and data related to family income, child welfare, child health and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), early childhood development, education, and juvenile justice. Foreword by Marian Wright Edelman offers both vision and challenge. The 2008 edition can be downloaded from CDF's website at www.childrensdefense.org.

*Did Your Members of Congress Protect Children?
The 2007 Children's Defense Fund Action Council®
Nonpartisan Congressional Scorecard*

This Scorecard documents how well your state's congressional delegation voted to protect the children in your state and the nation in 2007. Based on crucial votes that affected the lives of millions of children in America, the CDF Action Council names the best and worst Senators and Representatives in protecting children. Download this edition for free at <http://www.cdfactioncouncil.org/>.

America's Cradle to Prison PipelineSM Report

This report documents an urgent national crisis at the intersection of poverty and race. The report includes an overview of the major factors behind the pipeline, photographs that show the faces of children in the pipeline, case studies describing how the pipeline affects children, calls for the hard work and persistence needed to build a transforming movement to dismantle the pipeline, descriptions of some promising approaches to help keep children out of the pipeline, and research tables and state-by-state data of key child indicators. CDF, 234 pages, 2007. \$9.95

Protect Children, Not Guns 2008

CDF's annual report about the toll gun violence is taking on our children and society. Contains tables and graphs outlining the latest data for firearm deaths of children and teens, as well as action steps that you can take to help prevent this senseless loss of lives. CDF, 16 pages, 2008. Available for free by calling (865) 457-6466.

Katrina's Children: Still Waiting 2007

In 2006, CDF released *Katrina's Children: A Call to Conscience and Action*, a report highlighting the trauma and heartrending stories of young Katrina evacuees struggling with their devastating losses. As our nation's attention has moved on to the next big story, thousands of Katrina survivors are still scattered across the country or crowded into "temporary" trailers waiting to return home. This second "call to conscience and action" looks at what still needs to be done to help them get their lives back and address their health and mental health needs, especially as it relates to chronic and acute traumatic stress disorder. Report is available for free by calling (865) 457-6466.

When Will We Hear Dr. Martin Luther King's Call to End Poverty? 2008 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

by Shannon Daley-Harris

Focusing on the theme, "When Will We Hear Dr. Martin Luther King's Call to End Poverty?" this multi-faith, easy-to-use resource manual provides congregations everything they need to plan, promote, and present a Children's Sabbath celebration. CDF, 190 pages, 2008. \$8.00. You can also download the manual at www.childrensdefense.org.

In Harm's Way: True Stories of Uninsured Texas Children

Texas has the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation, 20.2 percent, compared to 11.6 percent nationally. In this report from CDF-Texas, families lacking health coverage tell their stories, from frustrating to frightening, of the overwhelming obstacles they encountered in trying to get medical care and health insurance for their children. This report is dedicated to Devante Johnson, who went without health coverage for four months while struggling against cancer of the kidneys. He died at the age of 14 in March 2007. Report can be downloaded for free from CDF's website at www.childrensdefense.org.

Hold My Hand: Prayers for Building a Movement to Leave No Child Behind

by Marian Wright Edelman

An inspiring collection of Marian Wright Edelman's heartfelt prayers of thanksgiving, prayers of petition, and pledges of commitment that will move and encourage you. CDF, 92 pages, 2001. \$6.95

Holding Children in Prayer: A Lenten Guide by Shannon Daley-Harris and Eileen W. Lindner, eds.

Each spring renew your spirit and your commitment to children with this Lenten Guide offering daily lessons, reflections, and prayers to encourage and strengthen your commitment to continue serving and advocating for children. Contributors to this collection include Dr. Samuel DeWitt Proctor, Dr. Diana Garland, Dr. Rebecca Davis, Dr. Eileen W. Lindner, and Shannon Daley-Harris. CDF, 60 pages, 1997. \$2.00

Holding Children in Prayer: An Advent Guide by Shannon Daley-Harris

During the holiday season, keep children in your thoughts and prayers with this Advent Guide. Includes Lighting the Advent Candle, scripture readings, reflections, prayers, and Acts in Faith for every day of Advent. CDF, 72 pages, 2001. \$2.00

I Can Make a Difference: A Treasury to Inspire Our Children

by Marian Wright Edelman

Marian Wright Edelman has drawn from a variety of cultures and peoples to compile these timeless stories, poems, quotations, and folktales that speak to all children to let them know they can make a difference in today's world. Illustrated by Barry Moser, the book highlights 12 values children and youths can aspire to achieve. Harper Collins Publishers, 112 pages, 2005. Hardcover. \$19.99

Lanterns: A Memoir of Mentors by Marian Wright Edelman

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, shares powerful stories about the mentors in her life from her childhood through the Civil Rights Movement to the founding and building of CDF. She pays tribute to the extraordinary personal mentors who helped light her way: Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy, Fannie Lou Hamer, William Sloane Coffin, Ella Baker, Mae Bertha Carter, and many others. She brings home the importance of mentoring, caring about, and standing for children every day. Beacon Press, 180 pages, 1999. Hardcover \$20.00, softcover \$14.00

The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours

by Marian Wright Edelman

A touching and moral message from Marian Wright Edelman to her sons—a message both introspective and compelling that all of us can use in our daily struggle to find the right balance. She passes on a family legacy based on service to others and the 25 lessons for life she wants most to impart to her sons. Beacon Press, 97 pages, 1992. \$9.00

Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children

by Marian Wright Edelman

Marian Wright Edelman offers inspiration, prayers of thanksgiving, pleas for guidance, and pledges of commitment. Beacon Press, 210 pages, 1995. Hardcover \$17.95, softcover \$10.00

I'm Your Child, God: Prayers for Our Children by Marian Wright Edelman

Contemporary, multi-cultural prayers for children and teens dealing with the complexities of growing up in today's world, accompanied by stunning illustrations by Caldecott Honor Medal winner Bryan Collier. Hyperion, 90 pages, 2002. \$19.99

Dream Me Home Safely: Writers on Growing Up in America

This book tells the stories of the many ways children make a place for themselves in their families' hearts and in the world. With insight, skill, great humor, and zestful candor, the writers offer a glimpse of their childhood selves. Written by some of America's most outstanding authors (Anna Quindlen, Alice Walker, Joyce Carol Oates, and many others), this compilation highlights the complexities and preciousness of childhood and the importance of family and rituals in the lives of children. Houghton Mifflin, 244 pages, 2003. \$13.00

Resources for Faithful Child Advocates

“A Prayer for Children” video

This moving poem by Ina Hughs is read by Marian Wright Edelman, along with footage of children, creating an inspirational three-minute video that may be used in worship, educational programs, or to begin or end a meeting. \$6.00

Resources from Other Sources

***Together We Pray: A Prayer Book for Families* by J. Bradley Wigger**

Prayers inspired by the psalms for use by families, organized by table prayers for mealtimes, devotional prayers of joy and care, and memory bedtime prayers. Wigger uses language that is familiar to Jews and Christians alike, and suitable for any family that draws from the rich resources of the psalms. Chalice Press, 98 pages, 2005.

NEW! ***Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* by Eboo Patel**

Eboo Patel, the founder and executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core, a Chicago-based international non-profit dedicated to building the interfaith youth movement, has written this remarkable account of coming of age and coming to understand what led him toward religious pluralism rather than hatred. His story is a hopeful and moving testament to the power and passion of young people and to the nation, that we find the fulfillment of our identities in the work we do in the world. Readers of many faiths will come to a better understanding of the experience of one young Muslim and be inspired by what young people of a variety of faiths are accomplishing as they come together through the Interfaith Youth Core. A Discussion Guide from Interfaith Youth Core can guide a group in discussing Patel's story. Beacon Press, 189 pages, 2007. Softcover \$13.00

NEW! ***Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America* by Paul Tough**

The question that Geoffrey Canada found himself asking was “What would it take to change the lives of poor children—not one by one, through heroic interventions and occasional miracles—but in big numbers and in a way that could be replicated nationwide?” The question led him to create the Harlem Children's Zone, a 97-block laboratory in central Harlem where he is testing new and sometimes controversial ideas about poverty in America. His conclusion: If you want poor kids to be able to compete with their middle-class peers, you need to change every-

thing in their lives—their schools, their neighborhoods, even the child-rearing practices of their parents.

Whatever It Takes is an inspired portrait by Paul Tough, an editor at the *New York Times Magazine*, not only of Geoffrey Canada but also of the parents and children in Harlem who are struggling to better their lives, often against great odds. Carefully researched and deeply affecting, this is a dispatch from inside the most daring and potentially transformative social experiment of our time.

***Our Day to End Poverty: 24 Ways You Can Make a Difference* by Shannon Daley-Harris and Jeffrey Keenan with Karen Speerstra**

Imagine ending poverty at home and around the globe in our own lifetimes. With creativity this book invites us to look at our very ordinary days, from waking up in the morning to going to bed at night, and to begin to think about combating poverty in new, inventive ways. Includes guides for using the book with places of worship, schools, and the workplace. Berrett-Koehler, 232 pages, 2007. Softcover \$14.95

***Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation* by Jonathan Kozol**

This book draws extensively upon poverty as spoken through the voices of children and their families who live in the South Bronx, the poorest Congressional district in the United States. Crown, 1995.

***You Can't Be Neutral on a Moving Train: A Personal History of Our Times* by Howard Zinn**

Acclaimed historian Zinn has both chronicled and participated in some of the most important social movements of our time. His experiences speak to the future as much as to the past, showing in vivid detail how small actions can effect historic change. Beacon, 1995.

***The People Speak: American Voices, Some Famous, Some Little Known* by Howard Zinn (ed.)**

Collected dramatic readings that celebrate the enduring spirit of dissent. Here, in their own words, are: Christopher Columbus, an unnamed Lowell mill girl, Frederick Douglas, John Brown, Mark Twain, Malcolm X, a Gulf War resister, a family member of a victim of the September 11 Twin Towers attack, and many others. Includes commentary by Zinn. Harper Collins Publishers, 2004.

Resources from the Bahá'í Community

The following resources all are available from Bahá'í Distribution Service: 1(800) 999-9019 or www.bahaibookstore.com/index.cfm:

- *In Service to the Common Good by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the U.S.*, 56 pages, 2004.
- *For the Betterment of the World* by the Bahá'í International Community, 32 pages, 2002.
- *Foundations for a Spiritual Education, Research of the Bahá'í Writings*
- *Family Life and Bahá'í Education*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
- *To Be a Mother* and *To Be a Father*, both compiled by Wendi Momen, George Ronald Press
- *When We Grow Up* by Bahiyyih Nakhjavani, George Ronald Press
- *The Brilliant Stars: The Bahá'í Faith and the Education of Children* by H.T.D. Rost, George Ronald Press
- *The Virtues Project Educator's Guide: Simple Ways to Create a Culture of Character*, Jalmar Press
- *Healing Racism: Education's Role*, Editors: Nathan Rutstein, Michael Morgan, Whitcomb Publishing
- *On the Front Lines: Bahá'í Youth in Their Own Words*, Editors: Heather Brandon, Aaron Emmel, George Ronald Press
- *ONE Magazine: Wealth & Poverty*, Vol. 2.5, Editor: The Bahá'ís of Eliot, Maine
- *Youth: Channels for Change: A Compilation of Extracts from the Writings of the Bab, Baha'u'llah, Abdu'l-Baha, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice Relating to Youth*

Resources from the Protestant Community

NEW! *Weaving a Just Future for Children: An Advocacy Guide*

by Diane C. Olson and Laura Dean F. Friedrich

In *Weaving a Just Future for Children*, Olson and Friedrich use the image of weaving to bring together biblical and theological imperatives for caring action (the loom), various tools and issues for child advocacy (the warp), and specific productive ways that individuals and churches can advocate for children (the weft). Newcomers to advocacy will feel welcome, and longtime activists will learn new takes on both advocacy and recruiting others to the work. The authors give a broad perspective on the problems children face worldwide and offer researched, thoughtfully structured faith responses to issues. A study guide is included to assist groups of adults and youth groups to study the

book in three sessions. Discipleship Resources, 208 pages, 2008. Softcover \$15.00

NEW! *Child Poverty: Love, Justice, and Social Responsibility*

by Pamela Couture

A tool for those who wish to become instigators of love and justice in the world. Developed from a nine-year task force for the United Methodist Bishops Initiative on Children and Poverty, *Child Poverty* explores the possibilities for the church to assume a responsibility for children with needs in the local community, state, nation, and around the world. Children who are economically poor face many of the same problems as children with more economic means, yet poverty concentrates problems in the lives of poor children. Problems that should be merely an inconvenience turn out to be life threatening for some children. Through analysis of concrete cases and ministries, *Child Poverty* demonstrates that the flourishing of poor children and all children is best supported by interdependent conditions of both love and justice. Just as children and poverty are interconnected, so too should be love and justice. Chalice Press, 2008.

NEW! *Prayers for the New Social Awakening*
Christian Iosso and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, eds.

A compilation of nearly 100 prayers on social justice themes including poverty, economic justice, and care for the environment from well-known church and community leaders in honor of the 100th anniversary of the 1908 Social Creed and the development of a Social Creed for the 21st century. These prayers reflect the diversity of the Christian faith and call for the church to be awakened to meet the social challenges of the 21st century. Contributors include Marian Wright Edelman, Walter Brueggemann, Tony Campolo, Katie Geneva Cannon, and others. Westminster John Knox Press, 185 pages, 2008.

Hope for Children in Poverty: Profiles and Possibilities, edited by Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Unruh, foreword by Marian Wright Edelman

Editors Ron Sider and Heidi Unruh have drawn together the expertise of academics, activists, clergy, and social service professionals to consider—biblically, educationally, physically, sociologically, politically—the special concerns of children living in poverty. Discover ways you, your church, and your community can transform the world for America's children. Free study guide available online at www.judsonpress.com. Judson Press, 168 pages, 2007.

NEW! *Raising Children to Love Their Neighbors*

by **Carolyn C. Brown**

Practical plans with reproducible activities and outlines for classroom and service experiences for children ages 3 to 12 to nurture mission-minded children. “How to” plans that churches can build into their current programs, with a hands-on enrichment curriculum for grades 1–5, more than a year of monthly service projects for preschoolers, mini-workshops for teachers, and newsletter blurbs about the program. Abingdon Press, 114 pages, 2008.

Thus Far On the Way: Toward a Theology of Child Advocacy

by **Dr. Eileen W. Lindner**

Based on sermons and speeches that Rev. Lindner delivered over more than a decade at CDF’s Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry each July, this superb book develops a theology of child advocacy, skillfully weaving together theology, church history, biblical exegesis, and more, with Lindner’s classic stories and humor that move the reader through laughter and tears to faithful action. Foreword by Marian Wright Edelman. Presbyterian Publishing House, 116 pages, 2006. Available from Presbyterian Distribution Services at 1 (800) 524-2612 and www.amazon.com.

Congregational Health Ministries Resource Packet

An information packet containing resources useful in developing congregational health ministries using the parish nurse, lay counselor, participatory approach and congregations as healing community models. Packet available through the United Methodist Church, www.umc.org.

Health for All: A Congregational Health Ministries Resource

Manual for congregational use exploring health issues and factors that promote a healthier life for all. Each chapter contains a Bible study, information case study, discussion questions, and suggestions for action. Available through the United Methodist Church, www.umc.org.

A Church for All God’s Children

In 1996 the Council of Bishops called upon the United Methodist Church to reshape its life in response to the crisis among children and the impoverished and in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. Congregations are invited to undertake specific actions to make their churches more responsive to the needs of children and their families in the church and community. This packet contains

resources (checklist, guidelines, resource list, and reporting form) for churches that want to participate and to qualify as a “Church for All God’s Children.” The packet, which was sent to every United Methodist congregation, is available on the United Methodist website at <http://archives.umc.org/initiative/pdf/cp.pdf>.

Putting Children and Their Families First: A Planning Handbook for Congregations

This book offers strategies for assessing children’s needs in the congregation and the community; identifying the strengths and assets of children, families, and communities; and developing a plan for comprehensive ministries. It also provides a biblical framework for ministry and suggestions for implementing new ministries. General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church. To order, call 1 (800) 305-9857.

Community with Children and the Poor: A Guide for Congregational Study

This six-session study guide for use by small groups in a congregational setting is based on the United Methodist Bishops’ Letter Community with Children and the Poor and was prepared by the Task Force for the Bishops’ Initiative on Children and Poverty. Sessions focus on the Bishops’ Initiative, Community with the Poor, Economic Globalization, Global Debt, the State of Poor Children in the U.S., and Where Do We Go from Here. Cokesbury, 2003. To order, call 1 (800) 672-1789.

The Child-Friendly Church

by **Boyce Bowdon**

One hundred and fifty examples of how churches of various sizes and settings are faithfully ministering to and with children and the impoverished. Models include ways churches attract children and their families, models that help children grow as disciples of Christ, models that enable churches to minister to their communities, and models for ministry to and with the poor. Concludes with consideration of what it takes to make a child-friendly church. Abingdon Press, 142 pages, 1999.

Children’s Ministries: Ministries That Help Children Grow in Faith

by **Mary Alice Gran**

A practical resource that helps children’s ministries leaders understand elements of that ministry and how it fits within the mission of the congregation and the United Methodist Church. Sections include children in the life of the congregation, ministry in the community and world, and more. Cokesbury, 40 pages, 2004.

Listen to the Children! (35-minute video)

This video takes a look at the lives of children—their needs, fears, and hopes. To create this video, children at four church settings in diverse communities were given video cameras. Hear children's own messages to us through singing, dance, drama, and interviews. To order, call the United Methodist Church at 1 (800) 305-9857.

The United Methodist Women's Campaign for Children, Phase III

The third phase of this campaign is focused on advocacy in public school education. A "how to" booklet (#3223 for \$5.00) is available from the Mission Resource Center, 1221 Profit Drive, Dallas, Texas 75247-3191 or call 1 (800) 305-9857.

United Methodist Women's Division Action Alerts

Alerts provide updates on legislative issues that address concerns of United Methodist Women including children's issues. Receive by contacting the Women's Division, Office of Public Policy, 100 Maryland Ave., N.E., Suite 530, Washington, DC 20002 or call (202) 488-5660. For other information about current campaigns related to children's issues, contact the Women's Division, Office of Community Action, CCUN/UMOUN, 777 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017 or call (212) 682-3633.

Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty

by Pamela D. Couture

A holistic theology that incorporates the reality of poverty and the plight of children, this book is a resource for theologians, pastors, and other church leaders. Abingdon Press, 144 pages, 2000.

Introducing Caring for Health bulletin insert

Bulletin insert offering suggestions for bringing the social statement to life in your congregation. Download from www.elca.org/socialstatements/health/bulletin.

Decade of the Child

A brochure, newsletter, and range of other resources are available to help congregations participate in the General Assembly designated "Decade of the Child" and lift up the special gifts and needs of children and youths, birth to 18, within the church, beyond the church, and throughout the world. For more information, call 1 (888) 728-7228 and ask for the Presbyterian Child Advocacy Office or write to: The Decade of the Child, The Child Advocacy Office, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

NEW! ***Presbyterians in Covenant with Children Intro Booklet***

This booklet presents an invitation for PC (USA) groups or congregations to become a part of a network of Presbyterians who care about children and who want to make a difference with and for them. The booklet includes a three-session discernment study to help congregations reflect on what they are already doing and what further steps God is calling them to make with and for children. Order from Presbyterian Distribution Service, PDS#24-354-08-002, or download in pdf format at www.pcusa.org/children. Free.

NEW! **www.presbykids4kids.org**

This website for older elementary children is designed to empower kids to take action on behalf of other kids. Children can read stories, play games, and engage in other activities to learn more about the needs of children both here and worldwide and to take action on their behalf. Includes a section for parents and leaders.

Light a Candle for Children Prayer Vigil Project

This brochure provides information about the Ecumenical Light a Candle for Children project begun by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This project leads up to and brings attention to the Children's Defense Fund's *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration. During the vigil, congregations are encouraged to pray for children and learn more about children's needs. People in the congregation and/or community are invited to take one of the 40 days to light a candle and spend the day in prayer for children. For information, visit www.homelandministries.org/FamilyandChildren/candle.htm. To download a generic copy of the brochure, visit <http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/lightacandlebrochure.html>.

Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy

This guide offers everything you'll need to create a congregation that builds assets—young people's strengths. Perfect for youth workers, clergy, volunteers, and others, this practical book includes: worksheets for assessing and planning your current priorities and programs; strategies and ideas for introducing assets into youth programs; tips for creating intergenerational programs and parent workshops; and ten reproducible bulletin inserts. Search Institute, 176 pages, 1998. #113. To order, call 1 (800) 888-7828.

Resources from the Catholic Community

Health Care for All Campaign brochure

Introduced at the 2005 Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, it is available for download at www.usccb.org.

Health and Health Care: A Pastoral Letter of the American Catholic Bishops

This statement issued in 1981 addresses the message of the Gospel and tradition, responsibility for health, formal health apostolate, and public policy. It is available for download at www.usccb.org.

Catholic Campaign for Children and Families: Parish Resource Manual

This comprehensive resource includes practical planning and support materials, clip art, bulletin quotes, liturgical and preaching guides and models to help parishes integrate a focus on children and families into all aspects of parish life. Includes the Bishops' Statement, "Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for Our Church, Nation, and World," a resource developed by committees on domestic social policy, international policy, and marriage and family life. A video is also available. Also available in Spanish, \$6.95. To order, call the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops at 1 (800) 235-8722 and ask for publication number 525-9.

Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops addresses the call to personal discipleship, evangelization, and leadership. Offered as a "blueprint" for the continued development of effective ministry with young and older adolescents, this framework is an affirmation of the faith, gifts, energy, and fresh ideas of young people, a Christ-centered vision, and a call to empower young people. Available in English and Spanish, 61 pages., \$5.95. To order, call 1 (800) 235-8722.

Organizations

The following key national Catholic social ministry organizations are associated with the USCCB and provide valuable resources to support the Catholic community in its work on poverty and health-related concerns:

Catholic Campaign for Human Development: For information and educational materials on poverty in the United States, go to www.povertyusa.org. For information on the Church's program to support self-help groups in low-income neighborhoods, go to www.usccb.org/cchd.

Catholic Charities USA: For parish social ministry resources, advocacy materials, and information on how the

Catholic community serves people in need throughout the United States, go to www.catholiccharitiesusa.org.

Catholic Health Association: For resources and information on Catholic health care and efforts to provide accessible and affordable health care for all, go to www.chausa.org. Its framework for health care reform published in April 2000 is "Continuing the Commitment: A Pathway to Health Care Reform." In addition, it has an extensive resource catalog of health-related publications and other resources for the Catholic community.

Catholic Relief Services: For advocacy and educational materials on international issues as well as information on the relief and development efforts of the Church in the United States at sites around the world, go to www.catholicrelief.org.

USCCB Department of Social Development and World Peace: For parish resources and educational materials as well as advocacy resources and general information on the U.S. bishops' efforts to address issues of justice and peace, go to www.usccb.org/sdwp.

USCCB Migration and Refugee Services: For parish resources, advocacy materials, and general information on programs of the Church in the United States to support and resettle immigrants and refugees, go to www.usccb.org/mrs.

There are many additional organizations within the Catholic community and beyond that offer programs and resources for understanding and responding to poverty. Throughout the country, there are many diocesan and parish programs that offer essential help to poor people who are struggling to live in dignity. In addition, state Catholic conferences and diocesan social ministry offices work on justice issues and provide helpful information to schools and parishes. Catholics join with many ecumenical, interfaith, and other groups to defend human dignity. For more information, go to www.usccb.org/sdwp.

USCCB Statements on Health Care, Economic Issues, and Other Justice Areas

USCCB documents outlining policy criteria on a range of key issues related to health care and poverty include:

- *Health and Health Care*
- *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform*
- *A Catholic Framework for Economic Life*
- *A Commitment to All Generations: Social Security and the Common Good*

Resources for Faithful Child Advocates

- *A Decade After “Economic Justice for All”: Continuing Principles, Changing Context, New Challenges*
- *A Jubilee Call for Debt Forgiveness*
- *Called to Global Solidarity*
- *Economic Justice for All*
- *Food Policy in a Hungry World*
- *Homelessness and Housing: A Human Tragedy, a Moral Challenge*
- *In All Things Charity*
- *Moral Principles and Policy Priorities for Welfare Reform*
- *Putting Children and Families First*
- *Welcome and Justice for Persons with Disabilities*

These documents can be ordered from USCCB Publishing by calling toll-free 1 (800) 235-8722 or by visiting the U.S. bishops’ website. Also available on the USCCB website (www.usccb.org) are recent testimony and action alerts on these and related issues.

Resources from the Jewish Community

The Religious Action Center website, www.rac.org, has a variety of advocacy resources including information on issue areas including children and poverty, legislative reviews and agendas, and links to write letters to the President and Congress. You can also join RAC’s Advocacy Network and sign up to receive emails; RACNews delivers Chai IMPACT Action Alerts, the RAC’s Weekly Legislative Update, all RAC press statements, program announcements, Web updates, and other timely information to anyone with an email address. “Social Action” is an interactive electronic social justice activists’ discussion group, where you can share your successes, learn from others, and discuss pressing issues of the day with other committed social justice activists.

Social Action Blessing Cards

In an effort to bind our pursuit of justice more explicitly with our tradition, the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism and the URJ-CCAR Commission on Religious Living have created a series of b’rachot blessings that can be recited when performing mitzvot of social action.

A Guide To Synagogue Tzedakah Collectives

View this guide produced by the Commission on Social Action and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism on how your Synagogue can create a *Tzedakah* Collective.

Mitzvah Day Manual

Mitzvah Day is a program that sets aside one day during the year when all congregants—adults and children, social action mavens and novices—take part in one of several social action projects in their city or town.

K’hilat Tzedek: Creating a Community of Justice

K’hilat Tzedek is a discussion guide intended to help congregations through a process of reflection to determine where their social action programs fit into the scheme of congregational life, and how they can become models of integrated, justice-seeking congregations. The K’hilat Tzedek process will invigorate and deepen your congregation’s social justice work.

Speak Truth to Power: A Guide for Congregations Taking Public Policy Positions

A publication to assist congregations in taking public policy positions, created by the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism (CSA) and the Ida and Howard Wilkoff Department of Synagogue Management of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ).

Lirdof Tzedek: A Guide to Synagogue Social Action by Evely Laser Shlensky, Rabbi Marc D. Israel, ed.

Whether you are looking to expand a successful social action program or are working to build one, this guide is an important resource for you and your congregation. Lirdof Tzedek provides step-by-step guidelines for all aspects of synagogue social action programming, from establishing the appropriate structures within the congregation to effecting change on the local, regional, and national levels. UAHC Press, 112 pages, 2001.

Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Community

In Our Hands, Grades 4-6: A Peace and Justice Program by Barry Andrews and Pat Hoerlender

Explores the concepts of peace and justice in 16 sessions. Unitarian Universalist Association, 1990.

*** The Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander: From Preschool to High School – How Parents and Teachers Can Help Break the Cycle of Violence by Barbara Colorosa*

It’s a deadly combination: bullies who get what they want, victims who are afraid to tell, bystanders who either watch, participate, or look away, and adults who see these incidents as a normal part of childhood. Parenting educator Colorosa provides the tools to break this cycle of violence. Quill, 2003.

** Resource for teachers and parents

Resources for Faithful Child Advocates

***In Our Hands, Grades 1-3: A Peace and Justice Program* by Samuel Goldenberg, et al.**

Explores peace and fairness through active learning in 16 sessions. Unitarian Universalist Association, 1989.

Race to Justice: A Racial Justice and Diversity Program for Junior High

by Robin F. Gray and José A. Ballester y Marquez

Fifteen-session program affirms human diversity through role-playing, real-life stories, and games. Unitarian Universalist Association, 1995.

Weaving the Fabric of Diversity

by Jacqui James and Judith A. Frediani

Take stock of the “isms” that may be holding you back from embracing diversity: racism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, and ageism. Eight-session program for adults to learn strategies for increasing diversity in their congregation. Unitarian Universalist Association, 1996.

The following are Unitarian Universalist Association resources and/or other resources available through the UUA Bookstore. Phone: 1 (800) 215-9076 or email: bookstore@uua.org

***Common Fire* by Laurent A. Parks Daloz, et al.**

Landmark study reveals how we became committed to the common good and sustain our commitments in a changing world. Beacon, 1997.

***The Best Things in Life Aren't Things: Celebrating What Matters Most* by Joann Davis**

Through inspirational essays on family, faith, friends, virtue, service, community, and the beauty of the natural world, the author explores and celebrates the real stuff of life. She reminds us that life is a spiritual exercise that brings fulfillment when we savor the intangibles that are often right in front of us. Beacon Press, 2003.

***How Much Do We Deserve? An Inquiry into Distributive Justice* by Richard Gilbert**

“It is my intent to bridge the gap between scholars in economic and theological/ethical disciplines and concerned laity and clergy.” Draws on Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, humanist, and other traditions to reflect on ethical and economic issues. Can be ordered online at www.uua.org. Skinner House, 2001.

***The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice* by Richard Gilbert**

Explores the connection between spirituality and social action. Helpfully presented in two parts, “Theoretical Foundations” and “Social Gospel in Practice.” Contains

vital advice and models to help congregations engage in effective justice work. Can be ordered online at www.uua.org. Skinner House, 2000.

***Bucketful of Dreams: Contemporary Parables for All Ages* by Christopher Buice**

A charming cast of characters brings values such as diversity, justice, faith, and empowerment to life in 18 original parables. Playful cartoon illustrations by the author. All ages. Skinner House, 1994.

What If Nobody Forgave? And Other Stories

by Colleen M. McDonald (ed.),

“From Buddha to Jesus to the Sufi masters, spiritual teachers have used stories to convey basic messages about truth and right living.” This edition contains 11 new stories (19 in all) that echo the seven Unitarian Universalist Principles. Each story is followed by discussion questions, activities, and a reading list. All ages. Skinner House, 2002.

Resources for Children

Something Beautiful

by Sharon Dennis Wyeth, illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet

A young girl longs to see beyond the scary sights in her neighborhood and angry graffiti on the wall. After her teacher writes the word “beautiful” on the chalkboard, she sets out to find her “something beautiful.” Along the way, she discovers what others in her neighborhood find beautiful. Newly hopeful, she sets about creating positive changes in her neighborhood and feels powerful. She envisions how she will engage others to create further change. The story ends as she discovers that she is her mother’s “something beautiful.” Dragonfly Books, 1998. \$6.99

***Black Is Brown Is Tan* by Arnold Adolf**

The winning portrayal of a loving family—a brown-skinned mother, white-skinned father, two children, and their various relatives—beautifully illustrated with watercolors by Caldecott Medalist Emily McCully. Ages 4–8. Harper Trophy, 2002.

The Kids' Guide to Working Out Conflict: How to Keep Cool, Stay Safe, and Get Along

by Naomi Drew

Proven, practical ways to avoid conflict and defuse tough situations. Includes tips for how to counter bullying, calm down, reduce stress and tension, let go of anger, and eliminate put-downs and other hurtful language. Free Spirit, 2004.

What Do You Stand For? A Kid's Guide to Building Character

by **Barbara A. Lewis**

Guided exploration of issues of honesty, empathy, integrity, respect, and more. With quotations, activities, problem-solving exercises, true stories, and reproducible handouts. Ages 11 and up. Free Spirit, 1997.

Different Just Like Me

by **Lori Mitchell**

While April is waiting for the days to pass before she visits her grandmother, she encounters all sorts of different, interesting people. By the time she returns from her visit, she realizes that people—like the flowers in her grandmother's garden—have different needs and come in many colors, shapes, and sizes. Ages 4–8. Charlesbridge, 1999.

Ten Amazing People and How They Changed the World

by **Maura Shaw**

Profiles of Black Elk, Dorothy Day, Malcolm X, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Janusz Korczak, Mother Teresa, Albert Schweitzer, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Desmond Tutu show kids that spiritual people can have an exciting impact on the world around them. Includes a map showing the place of origin for each individual and a timeline. Ages 6–10. Skylight Paths, 2002.

If the World Were a Village

by **David J. Smith**

What if we imagine the whole world as a village of just 100 people? The shrunk-down statistics about everything from religion to language, electricity to water quality, and literacy to money help children gain a better understanding of the world's peoples and their ways of life. Includes two pages of games, activities, and thought-provoking questions to teach “world-mindedness.” Ages 7 and up. Kids Can Press, 2003.

Briefly Noted:

The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child

by Francisco Jimenez

Smoky Night by Eve Bunting

The Wall by Eve Bunting

Click, Clack, Moo (Cows That Type) by Doreen Cronin

That's Good, That's Bad by Marge Cuyler

She Is Wearing a Dead Bird on Her Head by Kathryn

Lasley

The Misfits by James Howe

Swimmy by Leo Lionni

Frederick by Leo Lionni

Baseball Saved Us by Ken Mochizuki

Passage to Freedom by Ken Mochizuki

Honest-to-Goodness Truth by Patricia McKissack

Prejudice – A Story Collection by Daphne Muse

A Step from Heaven by An Na

Sitti's Secrets by Naomi Nye

Don't Hold Me Back: My Life and Art by Winfred Rembert

The Real Thief by William Stieg

Sneetches and Other Stories by Dr. Seuss

Horton Hears a Who by Dr. Seuss

The Lorax by Dr. Seuss

The Butter Battle Book by Dr. Seuss

Appendix

National Organizations Endorsing the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Movement

- African American Women's Clergy Association
African Methodist Episcopal Church, Women's
Missionary Society
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian
Education Department
American Baptist Churches, USA
Anti-Defamation League
Armenian Apostolic Church of America
Armenian Orthodox Church
Association of Brethren Caregivers
Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America
Benedictine Sisters, Queen of Angels Monastery
B'nai B'rith International
Border Association for Refugees from Central America, Inc.
Bread for the World
Catholic Charities USA
Center for Ethics and Economic Policy
Center for Ministry Development
Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic
Violence
Christian Children's Fund
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Church of the Brethren
Church Women United
Communities of Christ
Congregations Concerned for Children, Child Advocacy
Network
Congress of National Black Churches
Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries
Council of Bishops of the United Methodist Church
Council of Christian Communions
Covenant to Care, Inc.
Cross-Lines Cooperative Council
Ecumenical Child Care Network
Episcopal Church Center, Children's Ministries
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Division for
Church in Society
Faith Institute for Black Catholics
Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and
Havurot
For the Love of Children
Inner City Renewal Society
Interfaith Resource Center
International Institute for Islamic Thought
International League of Muslim Women
Islamic Society of North America
Jesuit Social Ministries, National Office
Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
Jewish Women International Leadership Conference
Lexington Theological Seminary
Metropolitan Ecumenical Ministry
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
National Farm Worker Ministry
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís in the
United States
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Network of Religious Communities
Parenting for Peace and Justice Network
Pax Christi USA
Peace with Justice Week, National Council of the
Churches of Christ in the USA
The Piarist Fathers
Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Child Advocacy Office
Presbyterian Health, Education, and Welfare Association
Presbyterian Women in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A
Rabbinical Assembly

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association
Reformed Church in America
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism Service
Employees International Union
Seventh Day Adventist Church, North American Division
Sikh Council on Religion and Education
Sisters of Charity, BVM, Women's Office
Sojourners
Solid Ground Ministry
The Swedenborgian Church in North America
Trinity College, Campus Ministry
Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United Church of Christ, Office of Church in Society
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church
and Society
United Methodist Church, General Board of Global
Ministries, Women's Division

United Methodist National Youth Ministry Organization,
Steering Committee
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Voices for Illinois Children
Women of Reform Judaism
Women's League for Conservative Judaism
World Vision Relief and Development

**For a full list of organizations endorsing CDF's
National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebration,
please visit www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.
Don't see your national, regional, or local faith com-
munity listed? Visit this website and fill out an easy
form for your organization to endorse this celebration.**

Commitment Form for Endorsers of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Movement (for local, state, regional, and national religious organizations)

Yes! We will commit to strengthening this year's National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration.

Name of Endorsing Organization: _____

Name of Contact Person: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

Contact information for Media/Communications Staff

Person: _____

Please check the boxes below to indicate the support you plan this year:

- We will distribute Children's Sabbaths manuals to our members.
- We will distribute Children's Sabbaths flyers with ordering information to our members. Please send.
- We will print a camera-ready box about the Children's Sabbaths manual in our publication. Please send.
- We will link our website to yours. Please send the necessary information.
- We will include the Children's Sabbath date on our calendar this year and next year. (Next year's Children's Sabbath dates are October 15–17, 2010.)
- We are interested in having a Children's Sabbath workshop at a meeting, conference, or convention. [Please contact the Religious Action Team at (202) 662-3641 to discuss dates, times, locations, and other logistics.]

**Please return this form to Children's Defense Fund, Religious Action Team.
It may be faxed to (202) 662-3570 or mailed to 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001
Questions? Call the Religious Action staff at (202) 662-3641.**

2009 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Weekend

Evaluation Form

Let us know how you celebrated the Children's Sabbath!

Please detach and return this evaluation form to: **The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths
Children's Defense Fund
25 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001**

About You and Your Congregation

Name

Address

City, State, Zip

Congregation (if not part of address) and Religious Affiliation

Telephone (indicate day or evening)

Fax

Website

Email

Please describe your congregation: its membership (number, racial/ethnic makeup, number of children, and so forth) and location (urban, suburban, rural) _____

Is this the first time your congregation has celebrated a Children's Sabbath? Yes No

If not, in which years (1992-2008) has your congregation participated? _____

About Your Children's Sabbath

Who took the lead in proposing and planning the Children's Sabbath in your congregation?

(Please describe their role, e.g., senior pastor or rabbi, lay person, committee member, youth group leader) _____

How many other people helped significantly in the planning? _____

How did your congregation observe the Children's Sabbath? What activities, services, or events were held, and approximately how many persons participated in each?

Please underline all that apply to your celebration:

1. Focused the worship service, liturgy, or prayer service on children through sermon, prayers, music, or other.
Was it for a single congregation, ecumenical group (different Christian congregations), or interfaith gathering (Christians, Jews, Muslims, and members of other faith groups)?
2. Involved children and youth more fully in the service.
3. Led educational programs focused on children's concerns for preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, and adult classes.
4. Held special outreach and advocacy activities.

Briefly describe any or all of these events (use additional paper if necessary). Please feel free to enclose any bulletins or other materials from your Children's Sabbath. We would love to see what you did!

What follow-up is planned? That is, how will your congregation incorporate the commitment to children generated by your Children's Sabbath into the ongoing life of your congregation this year? Please be specific.

What support would you like from CDF for your follow-up efforts or your involvement in the Children's Sabbath next year? _____

Did any other congregations in your community hold Children's Sabbaths events? Tell us about them if possible.

About the Children's Sabbaths Manual

Please rate the Children's Sabbaths manual sections.

- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Very useful | 2. Somewhat useful | 3. Not very useful | 4. Didn't use | 5. Plan to use at later date |
| ____ Section 2 | ____ Section 3 | ____ Section 4 | ____ Bahá'í Resources | ____ Christian Resources |
| ____ Hindu Resources | ____ Jewish Resources | ____ Muslim Resources | ____ Multi-Faith Resources | ____ Section 11 |
| ____ Section 12 | | | | |

What resources or changes would you like to see in the Children's Sabbaths manual?

About Spreading the Word

How did you learn about the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend?

1. Denomination/faith group _____
2. Religious organization or community group (specify which) _____
3. CDF (publication, mailing, meeting, Internet website, other) _____
4. Media coverage (please specify) _____
5. Other _____

How did you publicize your Children's Sabbath events? (Underline all that apply)

1. Print coverage: (name and date of publication; send clipping if possible)
Community newspaper
Denominational newspaper/faith group newspaper
Congregational newsletter or bulletin
Other _____
2. Broadcast coverage (name of television/radio station) _____
3. Other _____
4. Did not actively publicize the Children's Sabbath.

What individuals do you know or what professional networks are you a part of that might be interested in receiving material about the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration?

Organization	Denomination/Affiliation	
Address		
City	State	Zip
Telephone	Fax	
Website	Email	

ORDER YOUR CHILDREN'S SABBATHS MANUAL TODAY!

Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual, Vol. 18

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round Child Advocacy

The Children's Sabbaths manual serves as a guide for you and your faith community to celebrate the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, October 16–18, 2009, and to engage in year-round child and family advocacy work. The manual includes resources for worship services, education programs, direct service activities, and social justice initiatives for your congregation, organization or community.

The theme of the 2009 Children's Sabbaths weekend is "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow." With millions of children living in poverty, lacking basic health coverage, and being funneled into a pipeline to prison, we know that children in our nation desperately need change—and they need us to create that change today. We must step forward now to strengthen families, call for health care for all children, and create paths of promise for every young person. Creating change for children today brings hope and a better tomorrow for all of us.

This easy-to-use reference manual provides worship materials for Bahá'í, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and other faith traditions, and resources for a multi-faith event. It also includes bulletin inserts, ideas for hands-on service and advocacy efforts, guidance for strengthening your efforts for children throughout the year, and much more.

**To order, please contact Ken Libby at
(865) 457-6466 or mail form below.**

Quantity: _____
 Subtotal _____
 Shipping and Handling (see chart) _____
 Total _____

Check enclosed
 Bill my credit card Visa MasterCard Discover American Express
 Credit card number _____ Expiration date _____
 Cardholder signature _____

Name _____ Org. _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____ Email _____

Please fax to (865) 457-6464 or mail to: CDF Order Fulfillment
 1000 Alex Haley Lane, Clinton, TN 37716
 For more information or for bulk orders, contact Kenneth Libby
 Phone: (865) 457-6466 • Email: CDFHaley@childrensdefense.org



Children's Sabbaths Manual Pricing Information

Quantity	Price (for each)
1–49	\$8
50 or more	5

Standard shipping via UPS:
 Please add the appropriate amounts for shipping and handling.

Subtotal of Order	Add
\$0–\$10	\$3.50
\$10.01–\$30.00	\$5.50
\$30.01–\$60.00	\$7.50
\$60.01–\$100.00	\$9.00
Over \$100.00	10% of merchandise total
Overseas/FedEx Shipping (please ask for details)	Extra

