



National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round Child Advocacy

*Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor
with Urgency and Persistence*

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.

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round
Child Advocacy

Volume 21

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Children's Defense Fund

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

"..[T]hey have become great and rich...they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan,...and they do not defend the rights of the needy...shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?"
(Jeremiah 5:27-29)

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." (Franklin Delano Roosevelt)

"Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive..." (Deut. 16:20 JPS translation)

Dear Faithful Friend of Children:

Thank you for your interest in participating in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths and for your commitment to *Pursuing* Justice for Children and the Poor with *Urgency* and *Persistence*. Never have your voice and leadership been more needed by children—our poorest group of Americans.

A nation-threatening toxic cocktail of poverty, racial disparities in child serving systems, poor education and racially unjust zero tolerance school discipline policies, arrests and unjust sentences is fueling a Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis, which is funneling millions of poor children and adults of color into dead-end, powerless, and hopeless lives. We must confront these realities with resolve and end the morally indefensible and economically costly poverty afflicting 16.4 million children, many hungry and homeless, in the richest nation on earth. We must communicate and organize more effectively, go beyond our current comfort and courage zones and do whatever is necessary to protect children.

Your plan to participate in the Children's Sabbath says that you are ready for faithful and sustained struggle—unafraid of the hard work of protecting decades of hard-earned progress and of sowing new seeds to move our children and our nation forward. We must all be undeterred by the fierce political thunder and lightning of powerful special interests that are trampling on the survival needs of our struggling children and poor and middle-income neighbors in America in a time of deep economic downturn they did not cause. We must stand together and fearlessly demand justice for the most vulnerable among us.

I hope that you will use the Children's Sabbath weekend to focus your place of worship on the sacred charge to nurture and protect children and the poor, to equip members with new understanding about the huge threats facing children and democracy, and to join together as a place of worship and with other places of worship in your community and across our nation to ensure a level playing field for every child. I hope you will form a Children's Action Team (CAT) to make your community a safe and positive space for all children. And I hope you will use the Children's Sabbath to reach out to new partners to pinpoint your community's existing strengths and needs and develop action strategies to fill in the gaps. The Children's Sabbath, of course, is about much more than one weekend—it is about the long-term action for which the Children's Sabbath weekend equips and inspires us.

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

Whether this is your first time celebrating a Children's Sabbath or your 21st, it is an extraordinary occasion that stretches across our nation and reaches across every religious tradition, race, ethnicity, income group, political party, and region to unite in a weekend of prayer, worship, study, action, and most especially new, long-term, faithful commitment to making a difference in children's lives and pursuing justice with and for them. We are eager to know what you plan. Share your plans with the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris, CDF's Religious Action Advisor, at SDaleyHarris@ChildrensDefense.org. Our children are counting on you. We don't have a moment to wait or a child to waste.

In hope and faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marian Wright Edelman" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marian Wright Edelman
President
The Children's Defense Fund

P.S. Following this letter I share with you a sermon preached by the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris. The title of the 2012 Children's Sabbath is drawn from her sermon. After her sermon, you will find three pieces that will fill you with the urgency of now. The first outlines dire budget threats to child investments when child needs have never been greater and our new campaign to protect children from budget cuts called, "Be Careful What You Cut". The second provides an overview of inequality in education, and the third an overview of the importance of dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™ and replacing it with a highway to college and productive work. Draw on these resources along with others on CDF's website as you plan your Children's Sabbath worship, education, and action events.

Is This As Fast as It Goes?

By the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

(Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

It was a foggy day at Washington's Dulles airport. I boarded the plane bound for Florida to give a speech. On my sixth flight of the month, I settled myself into my seat and immediately buried myself in some work.

As I did so, a father and his young son, maybe three years old, entered the row in front of me. On what was clearly his first ever airplane ride, the little boy eagerly clambered into his window seat, pushed up the plastic shade and peered out the window with great excitement and anticipation.

Well, the deep fog that day had delayed many flights. Our plane was way at the back of a long line of planes waiting for their turn on the runway. So you know what that means: the plane at the front of the line would take off and the rest of us in this long line of planes would roll slowly forward a few feet and then stop and wait some more. Then the next plane would take off and we would inch forward, stop, wait, and so on. Buried in work, I scarcely paid attention as for half an hour or more we continued inching forward like this.

Suddenly I heard the voice of the little boy turn to his dad and ask with dismay and deep disappointment: *is this as fast as it goes?*

I wonder if our nation's 16.4 million children who live in poverty, who are waiting for us to end child poverty in our rich nation, would turn to each of us and ask "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to end poverty while their childhoods slip by?

I wonder if the hungry children whose parents are waiting to hear if the SNAP program—food stamps—will be cut or preserved, whose meals depend on the decision of a budget so-called Super Committee, would they turn to our legislators and ask, "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to protect children from cuts?

I wonder if the three-year-old waiting for a place in Head Start to be funded, or the toddler waiting for a quality child care spot, or a child at the bottom of the list for affordable housing...would they ask us all "Is this as fast as it goes?"

I wonder if the nation's uninsured children, who rely on Medicaid which is now in jeopardy, on health reform threatened with repeal, would they turn to pundits and pastors, congregations and candidates and Congress, and ask "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to protect every child with health coverage?

Is this as fast as we can go?

Pursuing Justice

Our passage from Deuteronomy this morning warns against distorting justice and the things that can fog our leaders' clarity about the right thing to do, slowing our progress toward justice. Babies, now as then, aren't very good at making bribes; children don't make campaign contributions, or vote, or lobby, or do much of anything to tip the scales in their favor or just keep the scales even. Children and their cause are outweighed by contributors, campaigners, corporations, and constituents. It's an old, old story. Isaiah, using the same Hebrew word for "pursue" as the Deuteronomist, says of the nation's leaders, "Everyone loves a bribe and runs after—*pursues*—gifts. They do not defend the orphan and the widow's cause does not come before them." (Isaiah 1:23b) Both writers warn of a nation headed fast in the wrong direction and of children and poor parents being left behind.

In our passage today, we are not only warned of the dangers of distorting or subverting justice. We are told to *pursue* justice. To *pursue* it—there can be nothing accidental or incidental, apathetic or apolitical, about *pursuing* justice. Rabbi Abraham Heschel knew something about pursuing justice. He said once, after marching with Dr. King in Selma, "It felt as if my feet were praying." Of this passage in Deuteronomy, Rabbi Heschel wrote "The term 'pursue' carries strong connotations of effort, eagerness. This implies more than merely respecting or following justice"; we must actively pursue it.¹

The Deuteronomist couldn't have envisioned, precisely, our burgeoning email inboxes, phones that ring off the hook, computers waiting for us to finish memos or sermons or grant reports...but maybe he knew, nonetheless, that there would always be competition between our to-do lists and the call to do justice, and that if we are not to be forever distracted and derailed from doing justice by the rest of our over-full lives and competing demands, then we would have to pursue, actively pursue, justice with focus, urgency, energy, imagination, and determination.

So how fast are we going to get to work? How fast are we going to tell our nation's leadership to get moving? How are we going to remind them that their first responsibility is to defend the orphan—that is, our nation's poorest and most vulnerable children, and to respond to the widow's cause—that is, the parents who are most impoverished, most lacking in community and economic supports? How much urgency and focus will we help our congregations bring to the pursuit of justice at this crucial time?

Victor

Maybe you remember the story in the news last October of Victor Perez, an immigrant here legally, a construction worker by trade but unemployed for three years who picked grapes to try to make ends meet for his family. On this fall day he was standing outside his house in Fresno, California, talking with his cousin about a recent Amber Alert for an 8-year-old girl who had been abducted. As they were standing there talking, he spotted a vehicle that looked like the one in the Amber Alert.

So Victor leapt into his own car and took off in pursuit, even though he was nervous that the abductor might have a weapon. Each time Victor pulled up to try to cut off the abductor's vehicle, the man driving protested "I don't have no time," and sped up to try to get away.

Victor later said, "The second time I reached him, the way he acted—yes, I was, for a split second I was nervous until I saw the little girl and all fear was out the window after that, I didn't have no fear. I wasn't thinking of me no more. I was just thinking we need to get that little girl to safety." He added, "I wasn't going to give up.... I couldn't give up." So Victor kept pursuing him.

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

The driver was pushing the little girl down, trying to hide her. Victor said, "He kept getting away. He kept going round my truck. The last time I completely said, 'Either he crashes into me or he stops.'" Finally, on his fourth attempt, Victor forced the vehicle to stop and the abductor shoved the child out. She was saved.

Afterward, the aptly named Victor humbly said, "I just felt like I was doing my part.... I just felt like everybody should step up in their own communities and when something like this happens, come together and try to do your part to help out. And, you know," Victor concluded, "I just thank that God I was put in the right situation to do what I did. Thank the man above for that." ²

Amber Alert Time for Our Nation's Children

When a child is in absolute jeopardy, mortal danger, we put out an Amber Alert—we tell the whole community that we are in pursuit of the child and the one who is endangering her, it is a time of utmost urgency and everyone has to get involved, everyone is expected to be aware, to look out for the child, to do what they can to help rescue the child in danger.

This, my friends, is Amber Alert time for our nation's children. Everyone in our communities of faith needs to be on the lookout for the child, needs to help in the pursuit, to bring the child to safety, to see that justice is done. We need to protect children from cuts, invest in their development, and see that the rich and powerful contribute their fair share.

In an Amber Alert, the child's face, name, story, is plastered on telephone poles, on TV, and in the newspaper. In this Amber Alert time for our nation's children, we won't get to see the faces of 16.4 million children in poverty, or the millions without needed health care, or those without a spot in Head Start or child care, or the countless faces of children who go to bed hungry. We won't come to know their names or faces as intimately as we do when an Amber Alert goes out for a single child. But God knows each of their names, their faces, their stories. And God calls us to go in pursuit of justice on their behalf. How fast are we willing to go? Justice, only justice, shall you pursue. May it be so. Amen

¹ Etz Hayim; Torah and Commentary, The Rabbinical Assembly, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2004, p. 1088-1089

² From reports "Samaritan Hero: God 'Put Me Here' to Rescue Girl" Oct 6, 2010 , AOL News, and "Victor Perez Hailed as Hero for Rescue of Abducted 8-Year-Old Calif. Girl" by Naimah Jabali-Nash, CBS News, October 8, 2010.

Be Careful What You Cut

by Marian Wright Edelman

Right before the U.S. House of Representatives left for the summer to go home to campaign for your vote, they voted to extend the Bush era tax cuts for the richest Americans millionaires and billionaires. For more than ten years the richest one percent have received almost \$750 billion from these tax cuts. Income and wealth inequality have grown astronomically threatening the very fabric of our democracy. The top one percent in our nation now possesses more net worth than the bottom 90 percent combined. In 2008, the 400 highest-income taxpayers earned as much as the combined tax revenue of 22 state governments with almost 42 million citizens. It's way past time to reset our moral and economic compass, demand a more just tax system where those with the most pay their fair share, and stop the reverse Robin Hood policies that take from the poor and young to give to the rich and powerful.

There should not be one new dime in tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires as long as millions of children in America are poor, hungry, uneducated and without health coverage. A nation that does not stand for its children does not stand for anything and will not stand tall in the future. Like Thomas Jefferson, I tremble for my country when I think that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.

Yet the extension of the tax cuts for the wealthiest American, especially on top of the cuts approved in the Ryan budget, passed by the full House defies the prophets, apostles and tenets of all great faiths as well as common decency and economic common sense. The most recent vote continues to give huge tax breaks to those who need them least while shaving away lifelines of survival from those who need them most. It would cut eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), two of the most effective investments we have that lift children out of poverty, and from the American Opportunity Tax Credit which helps struggling families pay for their children's college. These cuts would push 900,000 children into poverty and at least 6.4 million children into deeper poverty an unconscionable act when 16.4 million children are living in poverty 7.5 million in extreme poverty.

This is a year of stark political, economic and moral choices. Those who caused the deficit should be asked to pay to close it and not be rewarded with more tax breaks which will increase the deficit and shave already inadequate safety investments. Children under five are the poorest age group in America, and one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development. If you believe as I do that we have more just and sensible choices like helping babies during their early childhood development years rather than helping billionaires who need not one additional material thing, then speak up and fight back.

Cascading federal, state, county and city budget cuts adding up to hundreds of billions of dollars are being pushed by lawmakers pursuing a toxic ideological agenda of no new revenues, expanded tax cuts for the top one percent of Americans and billions of cuts for poor children and families. Our nation's greatest deficit is not one of money but of values and priorities that leave millions of children without hope or a vision of the future worth striving for in our militarily and materially powerful but spiritually anemic nation.

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

That's why the Children's Defense Fund has launched a new campaign to protect children from budget cuts at the national, state and local levels. The "Be Careful What You Cut" campaign lays out the irrefutable economic case that cutting children from the budget now costs all of us more later. It's a simple calculation really. Protect children now or pay later. The campaign is grounded in three provocative ads created by our award winning pro-bono advertising agency partner Fallon Worldwide. The head of a child is on the body of an adult. The images show what happens later if you cut child investments now as the House of Representatives and their allies are bent on doing.

For all of you who care about children, here's what you can do. Arm yourself with the facts about children in your community from the CDF's *State of America's Children® 2012 Handbook* at www.childrensdefense.org/soac, download questions for candidates from the becarefulwhatyoucut.com website, then go to town hall meetings or visit your member of Congress while they are back home campaigning and hold them accountable to ensure they treat babies as fairly as billionaires. If candidates want your vote on Election Day make sure they answer your questions and put children first rather than last on the agenda.

Join the "Be Careful What You Cut" campaign. Help us spread the word by getting pro-bono space in your local newspapers to run the advertisements. Spread the word through your social media networks. Show your support by visiting www.becarefulwhatyoucut.com and changing your profile picture on Facebook and your avatar on Twitter. Donate to the Be Careful What You Cut Fund, so that we can run a second wave of ads in the late fall before the lame duck Congress makes final budget decisions for next year. Together we can and must fight for justice for our children and protect them from draconian tax cuts and budget choices that threaten their survival, education and preparation for the future. If they are not ready for tomorrow, neither is America.

America's Public Schools: Still Unequal and Unjust

by Marian Wright Edelman

Millions of children in America are denied the opportunity to receive a fair and high quality education. In March, the U.S. Department of Education released new information showing that children of color face harsher discipline, have less access to rigorous course offerings, and are more often taught by lower paid and less experienced teachers.

Inequities in funding and educational resources place poor children in low-performing schools with inadequate facilities and often ineffective teachers. Practices such as tracking, grade retention, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and one-size-fits-all zero tolerance policies continue to contribute to the discouragement, disengagement, and eventual dropout of countless children in America to their detriment and to all of us who need a competitive future workforce. Instead of serving as "the great equalizer," American public education is serving as a portal to the cradle-to-prison pipeline for millions of poor children of color, stunting their lives by school dropouts, arrests, and incarceration. The struggle to make sure a quality education is available to every child—and not just a privilege for a few—is the unfinished and critical business before the nation for it will determine America's future place on the global stage in a rapidly changing competitive world.

The 2009-2010 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection survey, the most expansive of its kind, covered 85 percent of the nation's students and was the first release of this crucial federal data since 2006 when it was suspended by the Bush Administration. The results from the schools surveyed show public school systems where Black students represented 18 percent of students but 46 percent of those suspended more than once and 39 percent of those expelled. One in five Black boys and one in nine Black girls received an out-of-school suspension compared to nine percent of Hispanic boys and four percent of Hispanic girls and seven percent of White boys and three percent of White girls. Disabled students were more than twice as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions. One in eight students in the study reported having a disability and nearly 18 percent of those students were Black boys. Black and Hispanic students represented more than 70 percent of those involved in school-related arrests or referrals to law enforcement—an astonishing number that requires rigorous examination of the reasons why and action to change unfair racial practices in the application of discipline.

Children of color were also at a disadvantage in access to academic opportunities. Fifty-five percent of the low-minority high schools surveyed offer calculus but only 29 percent of high-minority high schools do. Similarly, 82 percent of low-minority schools offer Algebra II compared to 65 percent of the high-minority schools. Black and Hispanic students represented 44 percent of the students in districts offering gifted and talented programs but only 26 percent of the students in those programs and were overrepresented when it came to repeating a grade. Across all grades, Black students were nearly three times as likely and Hispanic students were twice as likely as White students to be retained. More than half of all fourth graders retained in the reporting districts were Black and although Black students were only 16 percent of middle school students surveyed, they were 42 percent of those who repeated a grade.

Teacher experience and salaries varied widely. In schools with the highest Black and Hispanic enrollment, 15 percent of teachers were in their first or second year in the profession compared with eight percent of teachers in schools with the lowest minority enrollments. And teachers in high-minority elementary schools were paid on average \$2,251 less a year than their colleagues in low-minority schools in the same district.

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

The Department of Education, and its Office for Civil Rights, is to be applauded for reinstating this crucial data collection survey and creating an extensive data tracking system. But that is just one crucial step. It's time for all of us to use these numbers as a spring board for robust examination of and discussion about school discipline policies and practices and how they are contributing to school dropouts and the school to prison pipeline, and systematic and sustained action where required.

We all must support strong, consistent and fair discipline policies in our schools and classrooms where learning can occur for all children. At the same time we must raise important questions about how to make those policies work for children of color and all children, rather than against them. Why are so many children being suspended for offenses that used to result in a trip to the principal's office? Do principals and teachers have too much discretion in deciding who should be suspended or expelled? Is there a need for rethinking and greater clarity about the range of nonviolent offenses that can result in suspensions or expulsions? Should children be suspended for nonviolent offenses like truancy and tardiness? I have never understood what good it does to put a child out of school for not coming to school. Are our young inexperienced teachers getting enough training in classroom management? Are teachers getting the cultural competence training needed to understand and address the behavior of all their children? Do policies require that a child's parent or caregiver be notified before a child is excluded from school? Or is the child sent to the streets without the parents' knowledge?

As Education Secretary Arne Duncan correctly said about his department's findings, "The power of the data is not only in the numbers themselves, but in the impact it can have when married with the courage and the will to change. The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise. It is our collective duty to change that." (*Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.*)

Ending the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and Mass Incarceration—the New American Jim Crow

By Marian Wright Edelman

A Black boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime and a Latino boy a one in six chance of the same fate. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world: 7.1 million adult residents—one in 33—are under some form of correctional supervision including prison, jail, probation, or parole. Michelle Alexander writes in her bestselling book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that there are more adult African Americans under correctional control today than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began. In 2011, our state and federal prison population exceeded that of all European nations combined. Something's very wrong with this picture.

The numbers are frightening—and there's more. This epidemic of mass incarceration has created one of the most dangerous crises for the Black community since slavery and affects everyone in our nation. Black males have an imprisonment rate nearly seven times higher than White males, and Hispanic males have an imprisonment rate over twice that of White males.

Mass incarceration is tearing fathers and mothers from children, and economically and politically disempowering millions by taking away the right to vote and ability to get a job and public benefits in some states after prison terms are served. One in nine Black, one in 28 Hispanic and one in 57 White children have an incarcerated parent.

Mass incarceration has also become a powerful economic force and drain on taxpayers. Annual state spending on corrections tops \$51 billion and states spend on average two and a half times more per prisoner than per public school pupil. I think this is a very dumb investment policy. Federal spending on prisons totaled \$6.6 billion in fiscal year 2012. An added danger driving mass incarceration is the privatization of prisons for profit. The Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison corporation, has proposed to 48 state governors that it will operate their prison systems for 20 years with a guaranteed 90% occupancy rate. A majority of all those incarcerated have committed nonviolent offenses. Some young prisoners I recently visited are in prison for use or possession of marijuana.

The toxic cocktail of poverty, racial disparities in child serving systems, poor education, zero tolerance school discipline policies, racial profiling, unbridled prosecutorial discretion, and racial disparities in arrests and sentencing are funneling millions of young and older poor people of color, especially males, into dead end, powerless and hopeless lives

It's time to reroute our children, youths, and parents from prison to college and productive work. And it's way past time to stop the uniquely American blight of mass incarceration permanently.

NOTE: CDF brought together an extraordinary group of experts and advocates at our national conference this July 2012 in Cincinnati for the “Ending the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and Mass Incarceration—the New American Jim Crow” plenary session. The panel discussed how to halt the mass incarceration epidemic and get our nation back on course and our children into a pipeline to college and productive work. They shared their thoughtful research and experience about how to better ensure public safety through prevention and early intervention and fairer law enforcement policies. They also examined mass incarceration as a continuing method of racial control and discrimination and recommend measures to replace the Cradle to School to Prison Pipeline one to college and productive work.

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

The panel led into an interactive town hall discussion with added speakers, including formerly incarcerated participants, to focus on how we can close off the major feeder systems fueling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™ and mass incarceration and create new hope and opportunity for children in their place.

DVDs of the session are available for purchase through the Online Store on our website. It is an extraordinary chance to hear from leading experts, identify how we've reached this point, and determine how together we must build a focused, effective movement to say *no more*.

The moderator and speakers on the panel are listed below:

Moderator:

- **Charles Ogletree**, Jesse Climenko Professor at Harvard Law School; Founder and Executive Director, Harvard's Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice

Speakers:

- **Michelle Alexander**, Legal scholar and author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*
- **The Hon. Patricia Martin**, Presiding Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois Child Protection Division; President, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- **The Hon. Michael A. Nutter**, Mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors
- **Bryan Stevenson**, Executive Director, Equal Justice Initiative, Montgomery, AL
- **The Rev. Janet Wolf**, National Program Coordinator and Director of Nonviolent Organizing to End the Cradle to Prison Pipeline, CDF Haley Farm
- **Ndume Olatushani**, formerly incarcerated prisoner for almost 28 years; 19 years on death row
- **Preston Shipp**, former prosecutor in Nashville, Tenn. and currently Disciplinary Counsel at the Board of Professional Responsibility of the Supreme Court of Tenn.

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

P*ursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence* is the theme of the 2012 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend. The theme and focus will build on last year's Children's Sabbath, "*Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: Answering God's Call to Protect Children.*" The pursuit of justice is not a dash but a long-distance run, and the theme is still timely and needs us to pursue it with urgency and persistence. The 2011 Children's Sabbath focused on the closing the achievement gap in education that currently has children in poverty and children of color falling further and further behind, and ensuring that education becomes the engine of equality, not inequality. Level of educational achievement is the best predictor of future income; ensuring that every child gets a high quality education is the best poverty-prevention program we have. The 2012 Children's Sabbath will continue that focus on education and closing the achievement gap, with a particular focus this year on ending the criminalization of children. As these words were written, a morning news story reported on a six-year-old child who was suspended from school for "sexual harrassment." Surely we as adults have more appropriate and effective ways of teaching children and managing behavior that put all children on the path to success and keep them out of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline.

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 and excitement to your worshipping community.

By participating in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, 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.

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.

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

A Children's Sabbath 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 socialpolitical structures that keep children in need, explore the sacred texts, teaching, 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 Sabbath 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 (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 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 or into trouble, drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown. CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundations and corporate grants and individual donations.

From its inception, 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 Sabbath observance is guided by a multi-faith advisory committee with Muslim, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Báhá'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 email SDaleyHarris@childrensdefense.org.

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.

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

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.

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. The Children's Sabbath downloadable resources are 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 doesn't 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.

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 Sabbath 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 they 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

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

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 Sabbath weekend, after worship/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.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Children's Sabbath

Is the Children's Sabbath the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, or 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

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

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?

Reviewing these Children's Sabbath resource materials is the first important step in getting involved in the Children's Sabbath, so you are already on your way!

The next planning steps can be found in the "Planning Your Children's Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths" section of this manual. 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.

These Children's Sabbath resource materials provide 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, what's most important is to participate in the movement 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 Sabbath 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 the Children's Sabbath resource materials. (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.

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

Should we bother participating in the Children's Sabbath 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 Sabbath 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 the Children's Sabbath resources, 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.

The Children's Agenda re-introduced the Children's Sabbath to the Rochester, NY community in 2011, with 19 participating faith communities from a variety of faith traditions - Jewish, Presbyterian, Hindu, Episcopal, and Catholic. The initiative was very successful, particularly given the limited staff time available to support it. As a result of the advocacy component, a total of 251 letters were sent to the Monroe County Executive, urging her to preserve stable funding for the Nurse Family Partnership home visiting program for first-time, low-income mothers and their infants up to age 2. In the context of a worsening fiscal situation and cuts to other programs, 2012 County funding was indeed kept at a steady level. In addition to this victory, The Children's Agenda added more than 160 individuals to its online Advocacy Network and built the base for an ongoing advocacy partnership for kids with the faith community. As a result, 2012 sponsors of the Children's Sabbath include: ***Faith in Action Network/GRCC; Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester; Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester; Presbytery of the Genesee Valley; First Unitarian Church; The American Baptist Churches of the Rochester-Genesee Region; Urban Presbyterians Together; Interfaith Forum; The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester; Genesee Finger Lakes Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; First Universalist Church of Rochester; Episcopal Diocese of Rochester; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; United Church of Christ; Temple Sinai; Brennan Goldman Institute for Jewish-Catholic Understanding and Dialogue; The Rochester Commission on Christian Jewish Relations; Temple B'rith Kodesh; NEAD CDF Freedom Schools; Temple Beth***

David; Pentecostal Power of Deliverance Church; Hindu Temple of Rochester; The M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence; Temple Beth-El; The Genesee Valley District of the United Methodist Church

First Baptist Church of Greenville South Carolina participated in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths for the 15th time in 2011, combining their Children's Sabbath celebration with Family Dedication. Children's choirs sang, the sermon was titled "A Little Child Shall Lead Us," and the congregation followed worship with a church picnic. Throughout the month of October, the congregation was invited to contribute to The Frazee Dream Center which offers "after-school care and love" for children ages 6-13 in downtown Greenville. Congregation members were invited to donate no-sugar apple juice boxes, children's athletic socks, Play-Doh®, staplers/staples, and other items. The congregation also contributes nutritious food to the Mission Backpack program and participates in Operation Christmas Child to extend their care for children in the community throughout the year.

Memorial United Methodist Church in Thomasville, N.C., collected items for Thomasville Primary School as part of their 2011 Children's Sabbath. They also planned worship using resources from the Children's Sabbath including Prayers of the People and an Act of Commitment.

Durham County, N.C., celebrated a community-wide, interfaith Children's Sabbath in 2011. Rev. Laura J. S. Benson, Executive Director of Durham's Partnership for Children, delivered the main message with a team of diverse faith representatives presenting other parts of the service. The service included a performance by KidZnotes, a call to action and affirmation of commitment, as they shared facts about Durham's children in poverty. Durham's Children's Sabbath 2011 was co-sponsored by **Durham's Partnership for Children, End Poverty Durham, and Durham Congregations in Action**. Also in Durham, *The Herald-Sun* newspaper noted, "The plight of Durham children will be discussed at **First Presbyterian Church** on Sunday as part of Children's Sabbath observances. Ted Whiteside of Durham's Partnership for Children will lead a discussion on "The State of Durham's Children"....[including] issues related to child abuse and neglect, and poverty and health in Durham, with emphasis on birth to five years. The public is invited." **Trinity United Methodist Church** and other congregations in Durham also celebrated the Children's Sabbath during their customary worship time.

Bon Air United Methodist Church, Richmond, Va., joined the celebration of the National Observance of Children's Sabbath on October 2, 2011. The speaker for the service was the Director of Communities in Schools for Chesterfield County. Families from Bon View School for Early Childhood Education, an NAC accredited ministry of the church, were especially invited to the service.

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

First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Tenn., celebrated the 2011 Children's Sabbath with a worship service and engaged leadership of children and youths. They promoted their Children's Sabbath plans in the newsletter, writing "On October 16, First Presbyterian Church, along with other churches across the nation, will celebrate the *National Children's Sabbath*. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. More than ever, children need the

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

voice of the faith community to be strong, and for the actions of congregations on behalf of vulnerable children to be a vital witness. In our congregation, our worship that day will include leadership by some of our children, and reminders of our call to care for the children of the world. Make plans to be here!" During the worship service, the children joined the pastor in providing the sermon, "Children of God," sang, and the children "adopted" a service project. The congregation extends its care for children into the community and throughout the year with Snack Back Packs for local school children who at risk of hunger over the weekend, a Parenting Class, "Threads of Love" handmade burial garments donated to a hospital for babies that die in infancy; and participating in "Room in the Inn," a rotating shelter program for homeless families and individuals, and more. They also encourage kid-friendly donations to the food pantry including macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, and jelly.

A youth delivered the sermon at **St. James Episcopal Church's 2011 Children's Sabbath** in Gates Ferry, CT. They then posted the young person's sermon on YouTube to spread the message further.

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church encourages congregations celebrating Children's Sabbath to make it an "Undie Sunday" by collecting new underwear to be distributed by the clothing closets of various mission projects. **Wesley United Methodist Church in Morgantown, W.V.**, was just one of the many who responded. In addition to collecting new underwear, they made the Morgantown Ronald McDonald House the focus of their Children's Sabbath caring response. They set a goal of filling the sanctuary with balloons on the Children's Sabbath, with each balloon signifying a donation to the Ronald McDonald House in honor or memory of someone.

First Central United Church of Christ in Omaha, Neb., joined in the 2011 Children's Sabbath celebration and helped spread the word about their participation and the justice concerns of the service through their blog.

Franklin Circle Christian Church in Cleveland, Oh., celebrated the Children's Sabbath for the first time in 2011 with a Family Fun Night in the park on Oct. 15 a special worship service on Oct. 16. They also participated in the Light a Candle for Children: 40 Day Vigil leading up to the Children's Sabbath, an initiative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)

For the Children's Sabbath at **First United Methodist Church of Oak Ridge, Tenn.**, the children drew covers for the bulletin, helped lead worship, 3rd graders received Bibles, and sang. Two weeks before the Children's Sabbath they held a Pizza and Planning Party for the children to provide a fun and festive opportunity for children to learn about the roles they could play in the day and prepare for leadership.

The Jackson, Mississippi **Congregations for Children (CFC)**, an ecumenical children's advocacy program sponsored by the United Methodist Conference and Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jackson, encourages congregations throughout the region to participate in the Children's Sabbath each year.

Dallas United Methodist Church in Dallas, Tex., celebrated the 2011 Children's Sabbath to "celebrate the children in our midst and renew our commitment to nurture and protect all children." The children's choir sang and there was a special skit involving the children. Their on-going efforts for children included providing a "Foster Parents Night Out" to give foster parents a break while the children were "happily entertained with Wii games, a Halloween cookie decorating contest," and more.

A letter from the pastor of **Haddonfield United Methodist Church** in the church newsletter reminded congregation members of the sobering statistics about the state of children in America and in our world, and then invited them, "On **Children's Sabbath**, make a renewed commitment to pray, give time and talent, and financial resources to ministries that better the lives of children. When we think about the good we can do on behalf of children, of the lives we can influence God-ward – well, the lines to help in Sunday School, Nursery School, Youth Fellowship, and Youth Choirs ought to be a mile long. The following are a few reminders of opportunities for worship, nurture, service and witness....

1. "How Are The Children?" – Children's Sabbath Sermon Consider reading and reflecting on Mark 10:13-16 where we read: "Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them." How are we, followers of Christ, blessing children? How do we give witness to life as followers of Christ to the children in our lives and children whose future may well be diminished by poverty, violence, lack of family, and few opportunities to be encouraged in education? How are the children? Not just ours, but the children of our 'village'. Jesus loves the little children of the

world...Do we? **2. Benefit Concert for the Neighborhood Center – Saturday, Oct. 22nd** Gospel singer and comedienne, Sue Duffield, will offer a performance at HUMC on Saturday the 22nd at 8:00 p.m. for the benefit of the Neighborhood Center. **3. Family Skating Party – Sunday, Oct. 23rd**

Did you notice the word 'family'? That means everyone in the church family!! This is for all ages." In addition, the pastor invited members to an education session on supporting families living with mental illness and also joining in the hospitality ministry to greet newcomers.

Amber Alert Time for Our Nation's Children

When a child is in absolute jeopardy, mortal danger, we put out an Amber Alert—we tell the whole community that we are in pursuit of the child and the one who is endangering her, it is a time of utmost urgency and everyone has to get involved, everyone is expected to be aware, to look out for the child, to do what they can to help rescue the child in danger.

This, my friends, is Amber Alert time for our nation's children. Everyone in our communities of faith needs to be on the lookout for the child, needs to help in the pursuit, to bring the child to safety, to see that justice is done. We need to protect children from cuts, invest in their development, and see that the rich and powerful contribute their fair share.

In an Amber Alert, the child's face, name, story, is plastered on telephone poles, on TV, and in the newspaper. In this Amber Alert time for our nation's children, we won't get to see the faces of all 16.4 million children in poverty, or the millions without needed health care, or those without a spot in Head Start or child care, or the countless faces of children who went to bed last night hungry. We won't come to know their names or faces as intimately as we do when an Amber Alert goes out for a single child. Maybe we can meet just a few:

Shoes tell the story of the McKee family's descent into poverty. Those of Skyler, who is 10, and Zachery, who is 12, are falling apart—tops flapping loose above the worn remnants of soles from which they have largely detached. When their big sister, Jordan, 14, plays on her school's volleyball team, she wears the varsity coach's shoes.

Less visible is hunger. The children and their parents, Tonya and Ed McKee, who live in Michigan, sometimes went without food this summer when Ed's unemployment insurance ran out and the family

was not yet receiving food stamps. Skyler said he gave the birthday money he got at church to his mom for groceries "and I told her she didn't have to pay me back." Skyler confided that sometimes his stomach has growled. "It's hard not easy like it was before where we had money and could do stuff. Now we don't go anywhere... Sometimes we don't have food and we just don't eat."

Their mother Tonya shared, "Ed and I went hungry some nights so we could feed the kids. A lady here in town has brought us food several times and went shopping for us several times. And our parents helped when they could. Otherwise, we didn't know where the next meal would come from. One of my friends brought over some cereal and milk one day and the boys said, 'Wow! We get cereal!'"

I can imagine that you, too, have children in difficult or desperate circumstances—that you hold in your heart. The way that you know them—their names, stories, faces, or even this glimpse of the McKee children—that's more than we'll get of most of our nation's millions of children imperiled in this Amber Alert time for our nation. We'll never come to know all 16.4 million children personally, but, friends, *God* knows each of their names, their faces, their stories. And God calls us to go in pursuit of justice on their behalf.

Godspeed

Back in the Middle Ages, people used the expression "Godspeed;" it was shorthand for "God speed you." "Godspeed," they would say, meaning God send you swiftly on your way; it was a wish for success and a prosperous journey, a hope that you would quickly reach your desired destination, get to your goal. "Godspeed."

We don't have time to move at the world's sluggish pace to rescue our children. We don't have time for filibustering in Congress and for frittering away our own time; we don't have time for business-as-usual foot dragging in at the Capitol or slogging our way through our own routines. We can't keep moving at the world's pace if we are going to protect children as God expects of us. This *isn't* a fast as it goes. As we pursue justice as God intends, we need, my friends, to say to each other as blessing, as reminder, as prodding: "Godspeed." Would you turn to your neighbor and bid them Godspeed? Turn to your other neighbor and as we prepare to pursue justice for children, bid them Godspeed.

Justice, only justice, shall you pursue. May it be so. Godspeed.

What will your place of worship plan? Explore the other downloadable sections of the Children's Sabbath resource manual, 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 2012 *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, D.C. 20001, or email a description to SDaleyHarris@childrensdefense.org.



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 but is 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 the 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 and one held in the community for members of many places of worship—are terrific ways to participate in the Children's Sabbath 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. 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 2012 Children's Sabbath is October 19-21. 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

Planning Your Children's Sabbath

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:

- ***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 the downloadable worship and education resources for various faiths on CDF's website 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 and 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 downloadable section, Action Ideas. Also, check the CDF's website, www.childrensdefense.org in early October for any new action alerts or other timely advocacy actions needed.)
- ***Commitment to long-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 downloadable section Actions Ideas for ideas and 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,

Planning Your 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. 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 Action Ideas section available for download on CDF's website for ideas and 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 the 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 2013 Children's Sabbath will be held October 18-20, 2013.

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, and vulnerable. Indeed, central to every great religious tradition is the mandate to protect these who are young, vulnerable, and poor with justice and compassion.

Since 1992, 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.

Below you will find suggestions for planning the practical aspects of a multi-faith Children's Sabbath. See Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Worship Resources, available for download from CDF's website, 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 fifteen 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.
- ❑ **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 or email 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 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 religious education program.
- 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; school supplies; "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 and tea (perhaps donated by a coffee shop in the community), juice, and water, or inexpensive, kid-popular treats like popsicles.

Planning Your Children's Sabbath

- 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, 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.

- ❑ **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 Ideas section downloadable from CDF's website 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, or public buildings, parks, and schools. Of course, religious places of worship are also good sites. If you use a place of worship, 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?

Planning Your Children's Sabbath

- *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.)





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

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 in this section or write your own.)
- ❑ **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.
- ❑ **Social Media:** Use various forms of social media such as Facebook pages, blogs, Twitter accounts and other forms of social media to spread the word about your Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **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

Something is terribly wrong when our political leaders are putting billionaires before babies. There is no denying we need to get our budget priorities straight in this time of soaring deficits, but anyone who cares about children knows it would be a mistake to cut child investments, especially those that lift children out of poverty. When 16.4 million children in America are poor, and children under five are the poorest age group in the country, we have a crisis. Yet the U.S. House of Representatives has passed a budget that would not only extend the Bush-era tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, but would give them an even bigger tax cut on top of it and make deep cuts in food stamps, health coverage and education for children to pay for it. Now is the time for action to protect child investments from budget cuts before it is too late.

On [date], [name of your congregation] will join with thousands of other congregations across the nation in the 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 2012 Children's Sabbath, "*Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence*" will focus on protecting children from budget cuts at the federal, state and local levels and closing the education achievement gap that leaves too many children, especially poor and minority children, reading and doing math below grade level in the fourth, eighth, and 12th grades if they have not already dropped out of school into the pipeline to prison. As a nation we are spending on average two-and-a-half times as much per prisoner as we spend on public school students. It is time to reorder our priorities and focus on prevention, not punishment, so that every child is set on the path to a promising, productive future that God intends for each and every one.

Unless we focus our efforts on early intervention and prevention, rather than punishment, we are robbing thousands of youths each year of their futures and our country of vital human resources. We must 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.

To get there, we will need to pursue God's standard of justice with urgency and persistence.

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 Children's Sabbath 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 focus on ending the criminalization of children and closing the education achievement gap. Today, 60 percent or more of fourth, eighth, and 12th grade students—and over 75 percent of Black and Hispanic children—are reading or doing math below grade level. A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of incarceration in his lifetime. On the Children's Sabbath, congregations of many faiths all across our nation are committing to work so that prevention, not punishment and prison, is our priority; education is the engine of equality, not inequality; and every child is prepared for a promising, productive future. Through worship services, education programs, and activities [congregation] invites young and old to seek justice so that all children have the great education they need to succeed. 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.

Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

- ❑ **Invite the local media—television, radio, and print—to attend and publicize the Children's Sabbath.** 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 education achievement gap and call for education to be the engine of equality, not inequality, so that every child is prepared for a productive, promising future. Offer the Children's Sabbath as a way to learn more and become involved. Watch the newspaper for articles about education, poverty, and children in general so that you can relate your letter to those articles and time it appropriately.

News Release for Local Media

One of the goals of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths 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 below 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 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) 662-3585 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 followup 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 Division of 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, D.C. 20001 or email a description to religiousaction@childrensdefense.org.

Sample News Release for Community Newspapers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October [date], 2012

[YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME] to Hold Children's Sabbath Service

Joining the Children's Defense Fund Multi-Faith National Observance 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] that will focus on protecting children from federal, state and local budget cuts and closing the achievement gap in education to keep children out of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™ so that every child is set on the path to a promising, productive future.

[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's annual observance. The multi-faith weekend seeks to inspire congregations and religious organizations to work on behalf of children through prayer, service, and advocacy throughout the year.

The Children's Sabbath theme this year, "*Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence*" urges everyone—young and old—to reach out and speak out to help protect children from budget cuts at a time when child needs have never been greater.

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, states, "The most dangerous place for a child to grow up in America today is at the intersection of race and poverty. With more than 16.4 million children living in poverty, and children of color at a far greater risk of being born poor, 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. Incarceration is becoming the new American slavery and poor children of color are the fodder. We must act now to stop the growing criminalization of children at younger and younger ages. We can and must do better for our children by investing in early childhood development and education to provide an equal opportunity for all children and invest in the health and mental health care children need for healthy development."

[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.

Announcement Inserts (Page 8)

The first insert for your bulletin or newsletter is to announce to members of your congregation your plans to participate in the *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 Page 8 and use those two copies of Page 8. Using the one-sided to two-sided function on a photocopier, place those two copies of Page 8 in the copier to make two-sided copies on 8 ½" x 11" paper and cut down the middle to make two inserts per photocopy.

Children's Sabbath Service Insert (Pages 9 to 12)

The following inserts may be used on the day you celebrate the Children's Sabbath or any time to raise awareness and encourage a prayerful response and commitment to act. 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.

Each of these insert pages are formatted horizontally to include two panels per 8 ½" x 11" page. Make two-sided photocopies of the bulletin inserts, and fold down the middle to create two sets of 5 ½" x 8 ½" four-page bulletin inserts.

“Justice and only justice shall you pursue...”

(Deuteronomy 16:20a)

We will be joining religious communities of every faith all across our nation for

The 2012 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths Weekend

as we affirm our commitment to

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

For more information or to help, contact:



Children's Defense Fund

God calls us and America's children need us to pursue justice with urgency and persistence.

“The most dangerous place for a child to grow up in America today is at the intersection of race and poverty. With more than 16.4 million children living in poverty, and children of color at a far greater risk of being born poor, 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. Incarceration is becoming the new American slavery and poor children of color are the fodder. We must act now to stop the growing criminalization of children at younger and younger ages. We can and must do better for our children by investing in early childhood development and education to provide an equal opportunity for all children.”

Marian Wright Edelman,
President, the Children's Defense Fund

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, established in 1992 by the Children's Defense Fund and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations, unites religious communities of every faith in celebrating the blessing of children, focusing attention on the urgent problems facing our nation's children, affirming the divine charge to nurture, protect, and seek justice for children, and putting faith into action through direct service and advocacy with and for children and their families.

“Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue...”

Congregations and Communities

- Organize a forum on incarcerated youth and the funding disparities between prisons and education in our nation.
- 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 youth in need, include summer job opportunities for youth.
- 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 youth 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 youth.
- Start a halfway house and counseling program for youth who have run away.
- Create and distribute a community resource manual so that parents know where to turn for help for their families.

Learn more at www.childrensdefense.org

2012 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths:

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

Every child has been made in God's image. God looked upon creation and declared it "good." Yet today, some children are treated like treasures while others are treated like trash. Some children are set on paths of promise while others are shunted into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline.

Nationally, 1 in 3 Black and 1 in 6 Hispanic boys born in 2001 are at risk of imprisonment during their lifetime. Although the majority of fourth graders cannot read at grade level, states spend on average two-and-a-half times as much money per prisoner as per public school pupil.

This is America's pipeline to prison—a trajectory that leads to marginalized lives, imprisonment and often premature death. Although the majority of fourth graders cannot read at grade level, states spend about three times as much money per prisoner as per public school pupil.



“Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue...”
(Deut. 16:20)

The Children’s Defense Fund’s Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign seeks to reduce detention and incarceration by increasing preventive supports and services children need, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and accessible, comprehensive health and mental health coverage.

As communities, states, and a nation, we must shift our emphasis to prevention, not prison, for the sake of our children and our nation’s future, for our own sake and for God’s sake. We don’t have a minute to wait or a child to waste.

Visit <http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/cradle-to-prison-pipeline/> for more information and to find out what you can do to help.



What Can We Do to End the Cradle to Prison Pipeline?

Individuals

- Mentor a child.
- Volunteer at an after-school program for youth.
- Vote in every election and advocate for children.
- Educate elected officials about the Pipeline.
- Host a house party to educate others about the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and what they can do to dismantle it.
- Volunteer with children who are homeless or in foster care.
- 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 (e.g., taking a high school student to a college basketball game).

Families

- Spend quality time with your family (e.g., family game night, eating meals together). Have fun together.
- Join the PTA, a parent support group, or other school group. Attend school activities and/or volunteer in the classroom.
- Consistently praise your child’s achievements in school and extracurricular activities.
- Establish and maintain a supportive home learning environment. Create daily homework routines and limit television viewing and other kinds of “screen” time.
- Offer tutoring and homework help to your children or younger siblings.
- Talk and actively listen to children in your extended family.
- Show affection, love and respect to your child every day.
- Adopt a foster child or become a foster parent.



The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, established in 1992 by the Children's Defense Fund and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations, unites religious communities of every faith in celebrating the blessing of children, focusing attention on the urgent problems facing our nation's children, affirming the divine charge to nurture, protect, and seek justice for children, and putting faith into action through direct service and advocacy with and for children and their families.

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

2012 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths

Communities of Faith Must Come Together to Stop the Criminalization of Children at Increasingly Younger Ages and Invest in Prevention and Early Intervention.

A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance, a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance and a White boy a 1 in 17 chance of going to prison in his lifetime. A Black girl has a 1 in 17 chance, a Latino girl a 1 in 45 chance and a White girl a 1 in 111 chance. In 2010, almost 9,500 girls were incarcerated—1 in every 8 juveniles in residential placement is a girl.



States spend on average two-and-a-half times as much money per prisoner as per public school pupil.

We must 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.

**Communities of Faith Must Come Together to
Close the Education Achievement Gap**

For far too long, millions of children in America have been denied the opportunity to receive a high quality education. Inequities in funding and resources place poor children in low-performing schools with inadequate facilities and often ineffective teachers. Practices such as tracking, retention, out-of-school suspensions, and one-size-fits-all zero tolerance policies continue

to contribute to the discouragement, disengagement, and eventual dropout of countless children in America. Instead of serving as “the great equalizer,” American public education has served as a portal to the Cradle to Prison Pipeline, leading poor and minority children to lives marked by school dropout, arrest, and incarceration.



We must commit to improving outcomes for children in school and in life by working to transform American education and set it on the path toward equity and excellence for all children.

**To learn more about how you can help,
visit www.childrendefense.org**

Moments in America for All Children

- Every second and a half during the school year a public school student receives an out-of-school suspension.*
- Every 8 seconds during the school year a public high school student drops out.*
- Every 17 seconds a child is arrested.
- Every 19 seconds a baby is born to an unmarried mother.
- Every 29 seconds a child is born into poverty.
- Every 30 seconds during the school year a public school student is corporally punished.*
- Every 47 seconds a child is abused or neglected.
- Every 67 seconds a baby is born without health insurance.
- Every 85 seconds a baby is born to a teen mother.
- Every 2 minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.
- Every 3 minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense.
- Every 6 minutes a child is arrested for a violent offense.
- Every 21 minutes a baby dies before his or her first birthday.
- Every hour and a half a child dies from an accident.
- Every 3 hours a child is killed by a firearm.
- Every 5-and-a-half hours a child is killed by abuse or neglect.
- Every 8 hours a child commits suicide.
- Every 10 hours a baby's mother dies due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth.

* 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.childrendefense.org/childressabbaths

Data calculated by the Children's Defense Fund.



Christian Worship 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. Remember: The Children's Sabbath should not be turned over to the children with adults only serving 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. Remember, too, that while worship is at the heart of the Children's Sabbath it should be a beginning and not an end, inspiring action to help children on the Children's Sabbath weekend and throughout the year. We must not love children in word alone, but also in deed.
- **Sample Worship Service:** *Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence.* Use or adapt all or portions of the service as appropriate for your particular denomination or tradition.
- **Additional 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, Lutheran, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic lectionaries, two sample sermons, and a sample children's sermon.

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.ncccusa.org/pdfs/lightacandlebrochure.html>.) **Franklin Circle Christian Church in Cleveland, Oh.**, celebrated the Children's Sabbath for the first time in 2011, leading up the the Children's Sabbath with the Light a Candle for Children: 40-Day Vigil and culminating with a Family Fun Night in the park on Oct. 15 and a special worship service on Oct. 16.
- **The week before the Children's Sabbath, distribute copies of the Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer** (available for download from www.childrensdefense.org) 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 in the Promoting Your Children's Sabbath section available for download from www.childrensdefense.org**. 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, Head Start, and school staff, administrators, parents, and children**, and others to attend your Children's Sabbath. **Bon Air United Methodist Church, Richmond, Va.**, joined the celebration of the National Observance of Children's Sabbath on October 2, 2011. The speaker for the service was the Director of Communities in Schools for Chesterfield County. Families from Bon View School for Early Childhood Education, an NAC accredited ministry of the church, were especially invited to the service.
- **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.**
- **On the Children's Sabbath, distribute the children's activity bulletins** at the end of 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 pursuing justice as we seek to answer God's call to protect children and close the education achievement gap, end the criminalization of children, and assure that every child has an equitable and excellent education.
- **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, education, and justice.

- **Focus the sermon or homily on children and our responsibility to pursue justice and answer God's call to protect them.** 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 are found in this section. There are also two sample sermons on other especially suitable texts for those who don't preach from the lectionary cycle. Other Children's Sabbath resources on CDF's website 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. In 2011, the plight of children in **Durham, N.C.**, was discussed at **First Presbyterian Church** as part of Children's Sabbath observances. Ted Whiteside of Durham's Partnership for Children led a discussion on "The State of Durham's Children"....[including] issues related to child abuse and neglect, and poverty and health in Durham, with emphasis on birth to five years. They invited members of the community to attend in addition to congregation members.
- **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 in this section. 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 in this section.
- **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. The 2011 Children's Sabbath service at **First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Tenn.**, included a time when the children of the congregation "adopted" a service project.
- **Honor people who are pursuing justice and answering God's call to protect children through their work or volunteer engagement.** 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 school supplies, books, or warm clothing. One congregation held an "Undie Sunday" to collect new children's underwear and socks to donate to a homeless shelter. Announce the special offering in advance. **Good Shepherd + St. Mark's, affiliated with the**

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church, in Madras, Ore., 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 under-resourced school or an organization serving or working on behalf of children. **Wesley United Methodist Church in Morgantown, W.Va.**, made the Morgantown Ronald MacDonald House the focus of their Children's Sabbath caring response. They set a goal of filling the sanctuary with balloons on the Children's Sabbath, with each balloon signifying a donation to the Ronald MacDonald House in honor or memory of someone.

- **Create a Patchwork Quilt of Promise**, as did **Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Freemont, Calif.** Distribute a square of construction paper and a crayon to each person during the service, or in the bulletin, or place them in the pews in advance. At a designated time, invite each person to draw or write a response to "One thing I can do to pursue justice for children..." Then invite everyone to come forward (perhaps pew by pew) to tape their square on a paper quilt pattern.
- **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.

CDF has provided two PowerPoint presentations that may be used in your Children's Sabbath worship service this year. The first, "Moments in America for Children," combines statistics about children, images of children, and a sung response by the congregation, and may be downloaded here: <http://bit.ly/RDzr2n>. The second, "This Moment in America for Children," combines a quote by Pablo Casals with images of children, and may be downloaded here: <http://bit.ly/Pgyhu3>.

- **Include a dramatic presentation** to especially engage children and young people, as well as adults. Some of the scripture passages designated in various lectionaries for the Children's Sabbath Sunday lend themselves to a dramatic reading with several readers taking part.

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, Mass.**, 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, Mass..... 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."

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, Pa.**, 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.

For the 2011 Children's Sabbath at **First United Methodist Church of Oak Ridge, Tenn.**, the children drew covers for the bulletin, helped lead worship, third graders received Bibles, and sang. Two weeks before the Children's Sabbath they held a Pizza and Planning Party for the children to provide a fun and festive opportunity for children to learn about the roles they could play in the day and prepare for leadership.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

- **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 the congregation 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.**
- **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.

Aldersgate United Methodist Church had its Young Dancers offer a Dance of Praise and all of its children's choirs came together to offer an Act of Praise in their 2011 Children's Sabbath service.

The **Lutheran Church of Honolulu** featured the musical gifts of children in its Children's Sabbath this past year.

- **Read prayers and scriptural passages** and lead responsive readings.
- **Write a prayer** to be used in the service.
- **Deliver the sermon** or other presentation.

A youth delivered the sermon at **St. James Episcopal Church's 2011 Children's Sabbath in Gales Ferry, Conn.** They then posted the young person's sermon on YouTube to spread the message further.

- **Prepare a dramatic skit for the service.**

The middle school children of **Cross Lanes United Methodist Church in Cross Lanes, W.Va.**, 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.**

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

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 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.



Sample Children's Sabbath Service

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

(modify as appropriate for your congregation)

Prelude

Call to Worship

(From Deut. 10:17-21, New Revised Standard Version)

"...[T]he LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing."

We come to praise God who executes justice for children and poor families and loves the stranger.

"You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

We come to follow God, seeking justice and showing love as God does.

"You shall fear the LORD your God; [God] alone you shall worship; to [God] you shall hold fast, and by [God's] name you shall swear. [God] is your praise; [God] is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen."

We come to worship and hold fast to God who is our praise and has done for us great things.

Hymn of Praise: (For example, *Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee*; *He Has Done Great Things*; or other appropriate hymn of praise.)

Time of Confession: Moments for America's Children

NOTE: A Powerpoint presentation for this Time of Confession: Moments for America's Children is available at www.childrensdefense.org/faiht/childrenssabbaths

After the "moments" are read, let us respond together singing words from God of Justice, God of Mercy by Jane Parker Huber to the tune Hyfrydol

Leader: Every 29 seconds a child is born into poverty.

Leader: Every 67 seconds a baby is born without health insurance.

Leader: Every 85 seconds a baby is born to a teen mother.

(Together, sing)

God of justice, God of mercy,

Make us merciful and just!

Help us see all your creation

As from you a sacred trust.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Leader: Every hour and a half a child dies from an accident.
Leader: Every 3 hours a child or teen dies from a gun.
Leader: Every 8 hours a child commits suicide.
Leader: Every 47 seconds a child is abused or neglected.
Leader: Every 5-and-a-half hours a child is killed by abuse or neglect.

(Together, sing:)

**And when people cry in anguish
For their own or others' pain,
Show us ways to make a difference,
O dear God, make us humane!**

Leader: Every second and a half during the school year a public school student receives an out-of-school suspension.
Leader: Every 8 seconds during the school year a public high school student drops out.
Leader: Every 30 seconds during the school year a public school student is corporally punished.
Leader: Every 17 seconds a child is arrested.

(Together, sing)

**How can we, as people chosen
by your grace for service here—
How endure another's hardship
without offering hope or cheer?
God, forgive us, we beseech you,
When our love fails to empower.
Teach us how to be more faithful
In this present crucial hour.**

(Time for silent prayers.)

**Grant all people work with meaning,
Strength to care for those they love.
Food for table, truth for telling,
Challenges to rise above.
But remind us, God of justice,
This is now our work, our call!
Changing life's oppressive systems
Into ones empowering all.**

New Testament Reading: Luke 18:1-8a (NRSV)

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to God's chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them.

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 16:18-20 (NRSV)

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Sermon on God's Call to Pursue Justice

Prayers of the People

Leader: Let us now pray to God, Lover of Justice, Protector of the Poor, trusting Jesus' promise that God will grant justice to God's people who cry to God. For the faithful, that we rightly worship God by doing justice for the poor, loving kindness and caring tenderly for the children, and walking humbly with God, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: **Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.**

Leader: For all peoples of the world, in which disease knows no boundary, suffering is a shared language, and poverty is a common pain, that we come together to work so that no one suffers injustice or oppression, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: **Protector of the Poor, hear our prayer.**

Leader: For our nation, especially our elected leaders and those who would serve, that we uphold peace with justice, unite instead of divide, and demonstrate greatness by serving the last, the least, the lost, and the left behind, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: **Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.**

Leader: For ourselves and our community, that we work passionately for justice with our voices and our votes, that we reach out with tender kindness and care for children in need, and that our hearts faithfully seek to do God's will for the children and the poor, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: **Protector of the Poor, hear our prayer.**

Leader: For all children, especially those who long for justice or kindness or someone to believe in, that we and our leaders and our nation hear their cries, meet their needs, and help them to know that they are beloved by God, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: **Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.**

Leader: We offer these prayers in confidence that God hears our prayers before they even reach our lips, and that God charges us to make our lives a living prayer for justice.

People: **Amen.**

Congregational Song: Somebody Prayed for Me

Verse 1, traditional Spiritual. Sung by young voices.

Verses 2-5, adapted. Congregation invited to join in.

Somebody prayed for me,
had me on their mind,
they took the time and prayed for me.
I'm so glad they prayed,
I'm so glad they prayed,
I'm so glad they prayed for me.

**Somebody cared for me,
Had me on their mind,
They took the time and cared for me.
I'm so glad they cared,
I'm so glad they cared,
I'm so glad they cared for me.**

**Somebody spoke for me...
Somebody served with me...
Somebody stood with me...**

Prayer before the Offering

Christ Jesus,
 you look with favor
 on any gift given from the heart.
You praised the generosity
 of the despised Samaritan.
You rejoiced when Zaccheus turned
 from grasping wealth.
You marveled at the widow
 who shared out of her poverty.
You blessed the apostles
 who had neither silver nor gold,
 but the desire to share
 your healing power.
Teach us gratitude for the gifts
 of others and for our own;
that, respecting the variety of gifts,
 we might ever grow
 in our ability to give
 as well as to receive.
In the name of God,
 giver of every good gift; Amen.

(From *Pour Yourself Out for the Hungry: A Resource for Worship*, Julie Eileen Ryan, ed. Copyright 1993 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Any part of this material may be reproduced further, provided that copies are for local use only and are not sold, and that each copy carries the copyright notice printed above.)

Affirmation of Commitment

Leader: Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral spoke to the urgency with which we must pursue justice when she wrote:

*Somos culpables de muchos errores y faltas,
pero nuestro mayor delito es abandonar los niños, descuidando las fuentes de vida.
Muchas cosas pueden esperar.
El niño no.
Ahora es el momento en que sus huesos se forman,
su sangre se constituye y sus sentidos se desarrollan.
No les podemos contestar mañana.
Su nombre es hoy.*

*We are guilty of many faults and errors,
but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life.
Many 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 [the child] we cannot answer "Tomorrow."
[The child's] name is "Today."*

Leader: Friends, the one we call Holy, the Eternal Source of Love and Justice, calls us to pursue justice with urgency and persistence for all children whose name is "Today."

How will you speak out with and for children and families whose voices have too long been ignored, who struggle in poverty, without health coverage, in a chasm of inequity and a widening academic achievement gap, at risk in the Cradle to Prison Pipeline? How will you speak out with them for justice?

People: **"With urgency and persistence!"**

Leader: How will you reach out to children who need our care—those vulnerable to abuse and neglect, those who are hungry and homeless, those who are suspended and incarcerated? How will you reach out to children who need rich early learning experiences, strong schools, and caring communities?

People: **"With urgency and persistence!"**

Leader: How will you pray for children being left behind?

People: **"With urgency and persistence!"**

Leader: How will you pursue justice so that every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life?

People: **"With urgency and persistence!"**

Leader: The pursuit of justice is a marathon, not a sprint. Let us draw on our own deep commitment, on the support and companionship of others in the race, and on the guidance and sustenance of the Holy as we look to reaching the finish line so that every child of God experiences love and justice.

Song: Guide My Feet

Guide my feet, while I run this race.
Guide my feet, while I run this race.
Guide my feet, while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain.

Search my heart...
I'm your child...
Hold my hand...

Charge and Benediction: *This Moment for America's Children*

NOTE: A Powerpoint presentation for this Charge: *This Moment for America's Children* is available at <http://bit.ly/RDzr2n>.

Leader: Hear these words from cellist and composer Pablo Casals as we prepare to pursue justice for children with urgency and persistence:

*Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe,
a moment that will never be again.*

*And what do we teach our children?
We teach them that two and two make four,
and that Paris is the capital of France.*

*When will we also teach them what they are?
We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are?
You are a marvel. You are unique.
In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you.
Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move.*

*You may become a Shakespeare, a Michaelangelo, a Beethoven.
You have the capacity for anything.
Yes, you are a marvel.*

*And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel?
You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children.*

We don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste. May each of us go forth to work to make this world worthy of our children.

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ who cherished and blessed the children; may the love of God who created each child in God's own image; and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus called the Advocate, be with you and each child of God now and forevermore. Amen.

Postlude

Additional Worship Resources

Following are additional 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 available for download from CDF's website to see if any would be appropriate for your service. **Unless otherwise noted, all prayers are written by Shannon Daley-Harris.**

Call to Worship (from Psalm 99:2-5)

Before starting, have the worship leader tell the children that the congregation's response will be "Holy is God!" so that they can join in the call to worship.

Leader: God is great in our land;
God is supreme over all the peoples.
Let everyone praise your great and awesome name.

People: Holy is God!

Leader: Mighty Ruler, lover of justice,
you have established fairness;
you have done justice
and goodness in those who have gone before.

People: Holy is God!

Leader: Praise our God;
worship before God's throne.

People: Holy is God!

Call to Worship

Leader: Jesus said, Let the little children come to me...

People: We come, each of us a child of God.

Leader: Jesus said, Do not stop them.

People: We come to remove obstacles before children.

Leader: Jesus said, It is to such as these that the reign of God belongs.

People: We come to recognize that each child is already part of God's realm.

Leader: Jesus said, Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the reign of God as a little child will never enter it.

People: We come to worship with the trust and vulnerability and dependence of a child.

Come, let us worship God.

Call to Worship

Leader: Come praise God the Creator who made each child in God's image!

People: We will praise our Creator by recognizing each child's sacred worth.

Leader: Come praise the Christ who blessed the children!

People: We will praise Christ by being a blessing to children in need.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Leader: Come praise God the Holy Spirit who moves among us!

People: **We will praise the Holy Spirit by working for justice.**

Leader: Come praise the triune God who created us, redeemed us, and sustains us!

People: **We will praise God by putting our faith into action to seek justice for children.**

Call to Confession

Like the prodigal son, we stray from the lives God wants us to lead and follow our own selfish pursuits. When we recognize that we have lost our way, God welcomes us with open arms and joyous celebration. So with confidence, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

Prayer of Confession

For our incapacity to feel the suffering of others,
And our tendency to live comfortably with injustice,

God forgive us.

For the self-righteousness which denies guilt,
And the self-interest which strangles compassion,

God forgive us.

For those who live their lives in careless unconcern,
Who cry out "Peace, peace" when there is no peace,

We ask your mercy.

For our failings in community,
Our lack of understanding,

We ask your mercy.

For our lack of forgiveness, openness, sensitivity,

God forgive us.

For times when we are too eager to be better than others,
When we are too rushed to care,
When we are too tired to bother,
When we don't really listen,
When we are too quick to act from
Motives other than love,

God forgive us.

(Based on Jeremiah 6:13-15; 8-11, from the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness, South Africa)

Prayer of Confession

Creator God, you have made each of us in your image, and yet we fail to reflect your love and justice. You have created every child in your image, and yet we don't treat every child as a precious reflection of you. We see some children as valued treasures, and others as lost causes. We invest our time, money, and hopes in some children, while we squander the great potential of others. Open our eyes, we pray, to see that every child is made in your image and belongs to you. Help us to love, protect, and nurture all children. We pray these things in the name of the One who came to us as a child. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Listen! I have something to say! Our past is behind us. We are free to live new lives, be new people, try again to be who God intends us to be. Rejoice! I say again, rejoice!

Call to Confession

Jesus told this story: if a shepherd had a hundred sheep, and one of them was lost, the shepherd would go out and look for the one that was lost. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, the shepherd would carry it home rejoicing. Jesus told this story so we would know that God rejoices when we, who have lost our way, turn in a new direction and feel ourselves caught up in God's loving embrace. Let us now confess our sins with confidence that God rejoices when we turn in a new direction.

Confession

God of new beginnings, we confess that we are stuck in our old ways. You taught us about an upside down reign, and yet we still live our lives seeking power, wealth, and status. We have failed to protect those who are most vulnerable, to stand with and for those who live in poverty, to put children first. Forgive us, we pray. Shake us up, open our hearts and our hands, our eyes and our ears that we hear again your calling and live our lives in grateful obedience. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Like a parent racing out to welcome home the prodigal child who had lost his way, God greets our return with joy and love. Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Prayer of Confession

Eternal God, you call us to the hard work of justice, and we look for an easier task. You expect us to persist and we want to give up. You call for courage and we worry about criticism. You ask us to protect the most vulnerable, and we mostly look out for ourselves and our "own." Forgive us we pray. Instill in us determination, persistence, courage, and selflessness, that our lives may be a more true reflection of the one we claim to follow and in whose name we pray, your own beloved child Jesus.

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.

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.

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.

Assurance of Pardon

Beloved, we are God's children now. Hear and believe the good news:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Amen.

Litany

Leader: In this season of vineyard labor, let us call to mind the prophet's vision: If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,

People: **Then you will call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help and [the Lord] will say, Here I am.** [Isaiah 58:9]

Leader: Let us pray, O God, you are the true bread that comes down from heaven and gives life; hear, now, the prayers of your people for the hungers of this world.

People: **God, have mercy upon us.**

Leader: We remember all who labor but go hungry to their rest;

We remember those who cannot find work for their hands;

We remember the children who go unfed, and we ask:

People: **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader: We remember all who hunger and thirst for justice;

We remember the victims of oppression;

we remember those who have placed their trust in you, and we ask:

People: **Christ, have mercy.**

Leader: We remember all who live upon the bread of affliction; we remember those whose tears are their food;

we remember the homeless and the poor, and we ask:

People: **Lord, have mercy.**

Leader: As we remember the suffering and want of others,

we acknowledge our own hunger and need.

People: **When we are empty of hope, fill us;**

when we are worn from care, renew us;

when we fail to love, forgive us.

Leader: Bring us to your table and feed us with bread for the journey. Strengthen us and gladden our hearts; that we might taste and see your goodness, that our lives might be as bread that is broken and wine that is poured, and that we might work in hope for the day when all are fed. This we ask in the name of Christ;

People: **Amen.**

(From *Pour Yourself Out for the Hungry: A Resource for Worship*, Julie Eileen Ryan, ed. Copyright 1993 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Any part of this material may be reproduced further, provided that copies are for local use only and are not sold, and that each copy carries the copyright notice printed above.)

Prayer for Illumination

O God, you speak to us in so many ways: through the voices of children, in the stirrings of our hearts, in the silence after the last bedtime story has been read. By your Holy Spirit, speak to us now through the Word read and proclaimed that we may hear and heed your call on behalf of the children. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Eternal God, we hear your Word of love in a parent's conversation with a child. We glimpse your Word of hope as a young person gets a fresh start. We encounter your Word of justice as people stand with and for those in poverty. By the power of your Spirit, attune us this day, in scripture read, proclaimed, and lived, to hear your Word of love, hope, and justice. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Living God, by the power of your Spirit let your Word ring in our ears, open our minds, and set our hearts afire so that we are transformed from hearers into doers of your Word. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

As we hear your word read, O God,
By your Spirit
Tug on our hearts, like a child tugging a parent's sleeve,
Whisper in our ear, like a child sharing an important secret,
Clamor for our attention, like a young one who can't wait any longer,
Redirect our sights, like a child pointing out a wonder we almost missed.
Don't let us miss your Word to us this day, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, by your Spirit help us to listen for your word to us today
With the openness and trust of a child
With the questioning mind of a youth
With the discerning heart of one grown to maturity
With the wisdom of one seasoned by years. Amen.

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.

Prayers of the People

(Before the prayers of the people, pass baskets containing crayons, pencil stubs, chalk, Band-Aids®, pennies, and pens along the pews. Invite each congregation member to take one item. These items will be referenced in the Prayers of the People. Afterward, encourage members to take the item home and to pray for those it symbolizes.)

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Almighty God, the challenges facing children and those who care for them can seem so huge and so abstract that we lose touch with reality. Help us to remember that the needs and prayers of each child, each parent, each teacher, each caring person are as real and as individual to you as the items in our hands.

(Holding up a crayon)

And so we pray this day for the child care providers and parents who provide safe, warm, stimulating environments to spark a love of learning and fuel the curiosity of our youngest children as they scribble with crayons, pet the hamster, and try to taste the Play-Doh®. We pray especially for those providers who are underpaid and undervalued, for those parents who can't find quality, affordable care for their children while they work, and for the children whose potential is squelched in poor care. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a piece of chalk)

We pray for the teachers, covered in chalk dust, who devote themselves to educating our children and helping them flourish to their potential. For their dedication, imagination, and concern we give you thanks. We pray especially for those teachers who have given up on themselves or on the children, those who feel unsafe, those who feel unappreciated. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a pencil stub)

We pray for students gripping pencils as they strive to learn, especially those faced with the challenges of disability, unsafe schools, low expectations from their parents, teachers, and selves, and inadequate resources. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a Band-Aid®)

We pray for children who are sick and injured, whose ability to learn is hampered by vision and hearing problems or illness. We pray especially for those children who don't have health insurance to get the care they need, and for their parents who worry about what to do, who rely on temporary solutions when prevention or treatment is needed. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a penny)

We pray for the youths who are preparing for the world of work, that you will guide them in discovering their gifts and talents, skills and aptitudes, and surround them with teachers and adults who will get them ready to succeed. We pray especially for those young people who fear they will not be able to find work and earn a living, who don't have adults to help them prepare, and who despair of ever succeeding. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a pen)

We pray for our leaders in government, business, and the media, that the laws they write, the bottom lines that are inked, and the stories they pen will demonstrate an investment and priority in our children today for our future tomorrow. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

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.**

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.

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)

¹ From *Reaching for Rainbows*. © 1980 Ann Barr Weems. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press. www.wjkbooks.com

Act of Commitment

The following Act of Commitment was prepared by a coalition of Durham children's organizations (Durham's Partnership for Children, End Poverty Durham, and Durham Congregations in Action) for their 2011 Children's Sabbath. Adapt this for your own place of worship, or use it as inspiration to create your own.

2011 CHILDREN'S SABBATH CELEBRATION

"Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: Answering God's Call to Protect Children" Durham County, North Carolina

"One dollar up front prevents the spending of many dollars down the road."

Marian Wright Edelman

Will you answer God's call to protect children? Children wait for our answer. Children, caught in the crossfire of wars that are raging in our neighborhoods and nations, wait for peace. Together, places of worship and people of faith must commit to working for peace in neighborhoods and among nations. Will you answer the call?

YES, WE WILL.

Children, caught in the jaws of poverty that impacts bodies, minds, and spirits, wait for justice. Together, places of worship and people of faith must commit to working to end poverty so that every child's needs are met, and so that, from food and housing to quality healthcare, child care, and education, children are able to attain everything they need to survive and thrive.

Will you answer the call?

YES, WE WILL.

Children, caught in the stranglehold of racism that chokes hopes, opportunity, dignity, and dreams, wait for love and respect. Together, places of worship and people of faith must commit to challenging racism and assuring that every child is treated as a beloved child of God, given the love, respect, and opportunities they deserve. Will you answer the call?

YES, WE WILL.

We celebrate children as sacred gifts, and our solemn responsibility to nurture and protect every one of them - not just those who are born into our families or are a part of our congregation.

GOD CALLS US TO SHOW HIS GREATNESS THROUGH OUR LOVE FOR ALL CHILDREN.

Your voice and resources are needed to lift children and families out of poverty in Durham and around the world. Will you use your voice and the resources you have as people of faith to protect our children through answering God's call?

YES, WE WILL.

There are 25,218 children birth to age 5 in Durham County. Half of our community's children live in low income homes, one quarter live in poverty. Without a healthy start and a safe environment children will not live to their full potential. Let's commit to helping families give their babies a healthy start so each child can fulfill their dreams.

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)

Prayer for Children²

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.
(*The Book of Common Worship*)

A Prayer for Parents³

Almighty God, from whom we receive our life,
you have blessed us with the joy and care of children.
As we bring them up, give us calm strength and patient wisdom,
that we may teach them to love
whatever is just and true and good
following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.
(*The Book of Common Worship*)

Prayer for Teachers and Students

Holy and life-giving God,
the source of all wisdom and understanding:
enlighten by your Holy Spirit those who teach
and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth,
they may worship You with joy,
proclaim the Good News with faithful obedience,
and serve you from generation to generation;
through the one who came among us as your Wisdom incarnate, Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.
(From the 1998 installation of the academic dean at Wesley Theological Seminary)

² From *The Book of Common Worship*

The Children⁴

Rushing to school, their faces red and expectant,
Dancing and smiling through the classroom doors,
Hopeful for another day, another chance
To live, to grow, to learn.

Many come from loving families,
Eager for new adventures.
For others, school is a welcome change,
A haven from chaos and fear.

A few come in anger and rage,
Daring another one to disappoint,
Afraid to try, to trust, to care
Their hatred masking years of hurt.

How to reach you, little child,
How to touch your heart with peace,
How to remove the hurts ingrained,
How to give your spirit release.

Our God, the answers lie with you.
Let your love and wisdom flow through me.
I place each precious one in your hands.
Give me courage and strength to do your work.
(By Celeste Rossetto Dickey)

Charge and Blessing

Go forth to answer God's call;
Go forth to protect children;
Go forth to pursue justice.
Now may the blessing of God who calls us,
Of Christ who welcomed the children into his protective embrace,
And of the Spirit who moves in and through us as we work for justice
Be with you and every child of God now and forever more. Amen.

Charge and Benediction

Go forth recognizing each child as a blessing from God.
Go forth knowing yourself to be blessed by God.
Go forth to be a blessing in God's name.

Now may the blessing of God
Who created each child in God's image
Who redeemed us through God's own Child,
Who works through us to seek justice for every child
Be with you and every child of God this day and ever more. Amen.

³ From *The Book of Common Worship*. © 1993 Westminster John Knox Press. Used by permission. www.wjkbooks.com

⁴ Celeste Rossetto Dickey, reprinted with permission of the author cdickey@uoregon.edu

Charge and Blessing

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.

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 hear anew God's charge to pursue justice and our solemn
responsibility answer God's call and to protect children, especially those who are not receiving the education
they need to fulfill their potential. 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."

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 have gathered on this special day to mark the 20th National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. Today,
we join our hearts, hands, and voices with people of faith in thousands of congregations nationwide to lift
up the needs of children and commit faithfully to respond to God's call to pursue justice and protect chil-
dren. Every child is wonderfully made in God's image. Yet for millions of children in our nation, the bright
promise of childhood is dimmed by struggling schools, lack of access to Head Start, poor quality child care,
poverty, violence, and lack of health care. Let us be the people of God who recognize that all children are
wonderfully made in God's image. Let us offer our prayers and our promises to remove these obstacles and
help all children learn and succeed.

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 and blessed them.

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.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

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

People: Lord, have mercy.

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 came as a child in the fullness of humanity that we may know the Father's love for us.
Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you called the children to you
and blessed them that we may know God's love for children. Christ, have mercy.

People: Christ, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you will judge us by how we care for the least of these our brothers and sisters. Lord,
have mercy.

People: Lord have mercy.

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

People: Amen.

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.

Gospel Acclamation (Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. (Lk. 18:17)

People: Alleluia.

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

My brothers and sisters, through this common prayer, let us pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, not only for ourselves and our own needs, but for all people, young and old, near and far.

For the holy Church of God, that we manifest your love for all children, not just this Children's Sabbath day but every day, and so become living witnesses to the Christ who welcomed the children to him, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all the peoples of the world, especially the children in countries where labor replaces learning, in lands where the education of girls is valued less than that of boys, in places where malnutrition and preventable disease stunt minds and bodies and cut short learning and lives, that all children may one day learn and thrive, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

For our nation, that we fulfill the promise of opportunity by helping all children learn and succeed, and for our leaders, that they lead by serving and demonstrate greatness by protecting the least of these, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For our brothers and sisters in need, especially the more than 15 million children living in poverty in our rich land, that they find justice and comfort in you, in their families, and in the care of congregations and communities, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For ourselves and our community, especially the teachers and school administrators, child care providers, Head Start staff, parents, mentors, and all who help our children learn, that they find satisfaction in their work and appreciation from the community as they guide the discoveries of children, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all children—the smallest baby learning to recognize his or her father's voice, the preschooler stooping to examine a bug, the kindergartner learning to manage milk money, the middle school student wrestling with the challenges of school and peer groups, and the high school students whose gazes are drawn toward the future that for some looks bright and others looks dim—that every child know the love of you, of family and friends, of congregation and community as we help them to learn and succeed, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all who have died, especially those who died too soon and too small, and the children who have died from illnesses we could have prevented, guns we could have controlled, poverty we could have abated, and despair we could have lifted, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

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 Lord. Amen.

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

My brothers and sisters, in the name of Christ who told his followers to welcome the children and who blessed the children, let us pray to the Lord saying, Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For the holy Church of God, that we open wide our arms of blessing to embrace all of your children in word and deed, with justice and mercy,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For our world, where millions of children suffer, sicken, and starve, where millions yearn for safety, schooling, and sustenance, that we find ways to share your bounty with all, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For all our brothers and sisters in need, especially children living in poverty who bear its heavy burden and worry about what tomorrow will hold, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

For our community and nation, that we feel a holy dissatisfaction with the way things are, with imbalance between rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, the corporations and the children, and that we work to better reflect your intentions for justice and love, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

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.

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, that we work so that all have enough, 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 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)

Gracious and almighty God, source of all wisdom, love, and justice: Help us on this Children's Sabbath to hear your call to care for the children. Strengthen our hands and embolden our hearts that we may act with your love and speak with your justice, to the end that all children may learn, succeed, and live out the lives for which they were created; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

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

Almighty and everlasting God, you have blessed us with children and called us to be a blessing. In Christ who came to bring good news to the poor and welcomed the children, you have revealed your intention for justice and compassion. Prosper now the work of our hands that we may faithfully serve you by lifting up the next generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

The Prayers of the People (Episcopal rubric)

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord, saying "Lord, bless the children."

For the Universal Church, that we manifest your love for all children not just this Children's Sabbath day but every day, and so become living witnesses to the Christ who welcomed the children to him, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For our nation, that we fulfill the promise of opportunity by helping all children learn and succeed, and for those in authority, that they lead by serving and demonstrate greatness by protecting the least of these, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For children everywhere, in countries where labor replaces learning, in lands where the education of girls is valued less than that of boys, in places where malnutrition and preventable disease stunt minds and bodies and cut short learning and lives, that all children may one day learn and thrive, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

For our local community, especially the teachers and school administrators, child care providers, Head Start staff, parents, mentors, and all who help our children learn, that they find satisfaction in their work and appreciation from the community as they guide the discoveries of children, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all children—the smallest baby learning to recognize his or her father's voice, the preschooler stooping to examine a bug, the kindergartner learning to manage milk money, the junior high students wrestling with the challenges of school and peer groups, and the senior high students whose gazes are drawn toward the future that for some looks bright and others looks dim—that every child know the love of you, of family and friends, of congregation and community as we help them to learn and succeed, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For those who suffer, especially the more than 15 million children living in poverty in our rich land, that they find justice and comfort in you, in their families, and in the care of congregations and communities, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all who have died in the hope of the resurrection, and for all the departed, especially the children who have died from illnesses we could have prevented, guns we could have controlled, poverty we could have abated, and despair we could have lifted, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.

Leader and People:

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Prayers of the People (Episcopal rubric):

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing."

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, bless us that we may be a blessing.

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

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, bless us that we may be a blessing.

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 protect and defend them, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

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, bless us that we may be a blessing.

On this Children's Sabbath day, for our nation's more than 16.4 million children in poverty, that we use all that we have and all that we are to raise up the next generation, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For all who have died, especially those who died too soon and too young, those whose lives were cut short by poverty, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

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, who came as a baby, who studied in Temple and grew, who called the children to him and blessed them, who gave himself that we may know the fullness of your love for us, your 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 embrace all and exclude none, and you show special concern for those oppressed by poverty.

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, living and loving God,
for calling our world into being—
for making earth and water, plants and animals, and then
for making each and every one of us in your image—
every woman and man, every girl and boy,
of every race and place, rich and poor.

We give you thanks
for loving each of us
as a mother loves her children,
for promising to be our God no matter what—
welcoming us as a father
even when we have done wrong.

On this Children's Sabbath day,
we thank you especially for children,
for the ways they are eager to learn and for the things that they teach us,
for the challenges that don't stop them and for the successes they celebrate,
for the way in which each one is
wonderfully made, a gift from 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,
You sent your beloved child Jesus
to enter our world as a baby,
to grow as a child in mind and body,
to teach others that God loves us as a parent,
to hug the children close and bless them,

to tell all people that it is only by being like a child that we may enter God's reign,
to heal children and adults who were sick in their bodies, minds, and hearts,
to be a friend to people who were poor, looked down upon, left out by others.

Jesus went even to the cross
that we may know your love,
triumphant even over death,
that frees 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 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.

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.

The Blessing⁵

The Wisdom of God
the Love of God

and the Grace of God
strengthen you
to be Christ's hands and heart in this world,
in the name of the Holy Trinity. Amen.

(from *Enriching Our Worship*)

The Dismissal

Option 1:

Celebrant Remembering especially all our children, let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

Option 2:

(adapted from 15th century Gaelic blessing)

God be in your heads and in your understanding of children's needs.

God be in your eyes and in your beholding the wonder of children.

God be in your mouths and in your speaking to and on behalf of children.

God be in your hearts and in your love for all children.

God be in your hands and in your serving children.

God be at your end and at your departing.

People Thanks be to God.

Affirmation of Faith

God has not taken God's 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.

(From *A Declaration of Faith*)

Benediction

Let us go forth
To love, serve, and seek justice
For all of God's children.

Now may the God who
Watches over us
Came for us and
Works through us
Be with you, beloved children of God. Amen.

⁵ From *Enriching Our Worship* © 1997 by Church Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Music Suggestions

This collection of songs was created by Darrell and Joy Faires offer simple, yet meaningful “child-size” music to enrich the programs and worship services of the Children's Sabbaths. The songs were composed for the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths and the Light a Candle for Children Prayer Vigil. “Children's Sabbaths Songs” is packaged in a loose-leaf binder. It includes printed music with permission to copy for the Observance, a CD of the songs, suggestions for planning, preparation and other creative resources. The 31-page resource is \$18.00 plus shipping from Shalom Publications, 7225 Berkridge Dr., Hazelwood, MO 63042, (314) 521-6051 or shalomusic@earthlink.net.

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
Earth and All Stars
For the Beauty of the Earth
Gather Us In
God of the Sparrow
God Whose Love Is Reigning o'er Us
God Is Here
Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather
How Can We Name a Love
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
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
Living Word of God Eternal
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
Child of Blessing, Child of Promise (*traditionally a baptismal hymn, it may be sung on the Children's Sabbath by the congregation to affirm the promises of God and of the congregation that we make in baptism.*)

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
Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ
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 pursue justice and protect children. To help you prepare the sermon or homily for the Children's Sabbath, we have provided several resources:

- Sermon notes based on the Revised Common, Roman Catholic, Episcopal, and Lutheran lectionaries designated for October 21, 2012.
- Two sample sermons to provide varied examples of preaching on Deuteronomy 16:20 that lift up the Children's Sabbath theme of pursuing justice for children and the poor. First is a video clip of a sermon delivered by the Rev. Dr. James Alexander Forbes Jr., Harry Emerson Fosdick Professor of Preaching at Union Theological Seminary, at the Children's Sabbath service opening the Children's Defense Fund's National Conference in July 2012. You may watch it at bit.ly/PrURwn. The second is a sermon by the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris, CDF's Religious Affairs Advisor, titled "Is This As Fast As It Goes," found on Page 3 of the Welcome section.
- A sample children's sermon to talk about pursuing justice during a special time with children.

Sermon Notes

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.

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 present 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.”¹

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 16.4 million live in poverty in the richest nation on earth? How can a Black boy born in 2001, who is 11 years old now, already face a one in three chance of imprisonment in his lifetime, or his Latino counterpart face a 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)

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

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 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).²”

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

² *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.

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 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 five children in poverty, one in 10 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,

Christian Worship Resources for the Children's Sabbath

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."³

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 16.4 million children are poor, there is a need for change to our nation's structures and systems. When one out of every 10 children, almost eight 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.

³ *Mother Teresa: A Simple Path* compiled by Lucinda Vardey, p. 114.

Sample Sermon on Deuteronomy 16:18-20

Is This As Fast as It Goes?

By the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

It was a foggy day at Washington's Dulles airport. I boarded the plane bound for Florida to give a speech. On my sixth flight of the month, I settled myself into my seat and immediately buried myself in some work.

As I did so, a father and his young son, maybe three years old, entered the row in front of me. On what was clearly his first ever airplane ride, the little boy eagerly clambered into his window seat, pushed up the plastic shade and peered out the window with great excitement and anticipation.

Well, the deep fog that day had delayed many flights. Our plane was way at the back of a long line of planes waiting for their turn on the runway. So you know what that means: the plane at the front of the line would take off and the rest of us in this long line of planes would roll slowly forward a few feet and then stop and wait some more. Then the next plane would take off and we would inch forward, stop, wait, and so on. Buried in work, I scarcely paid attention as for half an hour or more we continued inching forward like this.

Suddenly I heard the voice of the little boy turn to his dad and ask with dismay and deep disappointment: *is this as fast as it goes?*

I wonder if our nation's 16.4 million children who live in poverty, who are waiting for us to end child poverty in our rich nation, would turn to each of us and ask "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to end poverty while their childhoods slip by?

I wonder if the hungry children whose parents are waiting to hear if the SNAP program—food stamps—will be cut or preserved, whose meals depend on the decision of a budget so-called Super Committee, would they turn to our legislators and ask, "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to protect children from cuts?

I wonder if the three-year-old waiting for a place in Head Start to be funded, or the toddler waiting for a quality child care spot, or a child at the bottom of the list for affordable housing...would they ask us all "Is this as fast as it goes?"

I wonder if the nation's uninsured children, who rely on Medicaid which is now in jeopardy, on health reform threatened with repeal, would they turn to pundits and pastors, congregations and candidates and Congress, and ask "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to protect every child with health coverage?

Is this as fast as we can go?

Pursuing Justice

Our passage from Deuteronomy this morning warns against distorting justice and the things that can fog our leaders' clarity about the right thing to do, slowing our progress toward justice. Babies, now as then, aren't very good at making bribes; children don't make campaign contributions, or vote, or lobby, or do much of anything to tip the scales in their favor or just keep the scales even. Children and their cause are outweighed by contributors, campaigners, corporations, and constituents. It's an old, old story. Isaiah, using the same Hebrew word for "pursue" as the Deuteronomist, says of the nation's leaders, "Everyone loves a bribe and runs after—*pursues*—gifts. They do not defend the orphan and the widow's cause does not come before them." (Isaiah 1:23b) Both writers warn of a nation headed fast in the wrong direction and of children and poor parents being left behind.

In our passage today, we are not only warned of the dangers of distorting or subverting justice. We are told to *pursue* justice. To *pursue* it—there can be nothing accidental or incidental, apathetic or apolitical, about *pursuing* justice. Rabbi Abraham Heschel knew something about pursuing justice. He said once, after marching with Dr. King in Selma, "It felt as if my feet were praying." Of this passage in Deuteronomy, Rabbi Heschel wrote "The term 'pursue' carries strong connotations of effort, eagerness. This implies more than merely respecting or following justice"; we must actively pursue it.¹

The Deuteronomist couldn't have envisioned, precisely, our burgeoning email inboxes, phones that ring off the hook, computers waiting for us to finish memos or sermons or grant reports...but maybe he knew, nonetheless, that there would always be competition between our to-do lists and the call to do justice, and that if we are not to be forever distracted and derailed from doing justice by the rest of our over-full lives and competing demands, then we would have to pursue, actively pursue, justice with focus, urgency, energy, imagination, and determination.

So how fast are we going to get to work? How fast are we going to tell our nation's leadership to get moving? How are we going to remind them that their first responsibility is to defend the orphan—that is, our nation's poorest and most vulnerable children, and to respond to the widow's cause—that is, the parents who are most impoverished, most lacking in community and economic supports? How much urgency and focus will we help our congregations bring to the pursuit of justice at this crucial time?

Victor

Maybe you remember the story in the news last October of Victor Perez, an immigrant here legally, a construction worker by trade but unemployed for three years who picked grapes to try to make ends meet for his family. On this fall day he was standing outside his house in Fresno, California, talking with his cousin about a recent Amber Alert for an 8-year-old girl who had been abducted. As they were standing there talking, he spotted a vehicle that looked like the one in the Amber Alert.

So Victor leapt into his own car and took off in pursuit, even though he was nervous that the abductor might have a weapon. Each time Victor pulled up to try to cut off the abductor's vehicle, the man driving protested "I don't have no time," and sped up to try to get away.

Victor later said, "The second time I reached him, the way he acted—yes, I was, for a split second I was nervous until I saw the little girl and all fear was out the window after that, I didn't have no fear. I wasn't thinking of me no more. I was just thinking we need to get that little girl to safety." He added, "I wasn't going to give up.... I couldn't give up." So Victor kept pursuing him.

The driver was pushing the little girl down, trying to hide her. Victor said, "He kept getting away. He kept going round my truck. The last time I completely said, 'Either he crashes into me or he stops.' Finally, on his fourth attempt, Victor forced the vehicle to stop and the abductor shoved the child out. She was saved.

Afterward, the aptly named Victor humbly said, "I just felt like I was doing my part. ... I just felt like everybody should step up in their own communities and when something like this happens, come together and try to do your part to help out. And, you know," Victor concluded, "I just thank that God I was put in the right situation to do what I did. Thank the man above for that." ²

Amber Alert Time for Our Nation's Children

When a child is in absolute jeopardy, mortal danger, we put out an Amber Alert—we tell the whole community that we are in pursuit of the child and the one who is endangering her, it is a time of utmost urgency and everyone has to get involved, everyone is expected to be aware, to look out for the child, to do what they can to help rescue the child in danger.

This, my friends, is Amber Alert time for our nation's children. Everyone in our communities of faith needs to be on the lookout for the child, needs to help in the pursuit, to bring the child to safety, to see that justice is done. We need to protect children from cuts, invest in their development, and see that the rich and powerful contribute their fair share.

In an Amber Alert, the child's face, name, story, is plastered on telephone poles, on TV, and in the newspaper. In this Amber Alert time for our nation's children, we won't get to see the faces of 16.4 million children in poverty, or the millions without needed health care, or those without a spot in Head Start or child care, or the countless faces of children who go to bed hungry. We won't come to know their names or faces as intimately as we do when an Amber Alert goes out for a single child. But God knows each of their names, their faces, their stories. And God calls us to go in pursuit of justice on their behalf. How fast are we willing to go? Justice, only justice, shall you pursue. May it be so. Amen

¹ Etz Hayim;; Torah and Commentary, The Rabbinical Assembly, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2004, p. 1088-1089

² From reports "Samaritan Hero: God 'Put Me Here' to Rescue Girl" Oct 6, 2010 , AOL News, and "Victor Perez Hailed as Hero for Rescue of Abducted 8-Year-Old Calif. Girl" by Naimah Jabali-Nash, CBS News, October 8, 2010.

Sample Children's Sermon

Following is an example of how a special Time with Children during the Children's Sabbath service might introduce the concept of pursuing justice. Feel free to use, adapt, or create your own.

The Importance of Justice (Deut. 16:20)

(In advance, you can make posters with "Justice and only justice should you work hard for." The first one would have JUSTICE written in capitals both times; the second poster would have justice underlined. The third poster would have justice and you can highlight it with a highlighter pen as you talk with the children. Have a Bible with a bookmark at Deuteronomy 16:20.)

When a word in a book is really important, there are ways to make readers pay attention. You can write it in CAPITALS. You can underline it. Some people use highlighters to make important words stand out. Or you can repeat the word, use the same word twice to show how important it is.

In our Bible verse today, God uses the same word two times to show how important it is. Listen and tell me if you can hear the same word two times: "Justice, and only justice should you work hard for."

What word did I say two times? (*Justice.*)

Justice is so important to God, the word is used two times in one sentence. So what is justice and why does it matter so much to God? Why should it matter to us? Justice means making things fair especially for people who are having the hardest time because they are very young or very poor or others don't respect or care about them. Justice is so important to God, that in this Bible verse God's people are told to work hard for justice two times: it says, "Justice, and only justice, should you work hard for."

Today is Children's Sabbath and we are praying and talking and working together as a church for justice, to make things fair for children and families who are poor and to show we care. And we are going to keep working for justice all year long and even after that.

Let's have a prayer.

Dear God,

Thank you for caring about us and for caring about all children.

Help us to work together for justice, to make things fair for children and families that are having a hard time.

Amen.



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 related to children, education, and social justice from traditional Jewish sources
- Readings, reflections, and prayers for the services
- Suggested music for the services
- Sermon notes on the torah portion
- Educational materials for use in religious school classes and youth groups.

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 the charge to pursue justice and protect children. One vital way we can pursue justice and protect children is to halt the increasing criminalization of children and work for equitable and excellent education for every child. 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. The Shabbat Tzedek evening and morning services prepared for the 50th anniversary of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism available at <http://rac.org/social/worship/> are also great justice-focused resources.

- **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.”
- **Introduce the special Children's Shabbat focus at the beginning of the service.** The Union of Reform Judaism's on-line resources for Social Action Worship note, “The beginning of the service is the time to set the tone. By opening with a special reading, the congregation knows that the service has a special theme and we can consider how we might focus our prayers differently during this service. What is the connection between our prayers and our pursuit of *tikkun olam*? An introductory reading might help us begin to answer that question. In addition, candle lighting during Friday night services would also be an appropriate time to include a special reading. With the lighting of the candles, we reflect on what it means for us to be an *Or Lagoyim*, a ‘light unto the nations,’ and how that shapes our actions.”
- **Focus the sermon, D'var Torah, or Torah discussion on children, justice, and education.** Emphasize how we can pursue justice and protect children by working to halt the criminalization of children and close the education achievement gap and assure an equitable and excellent education for every child.
- **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 teacher, a Head Start teacher, a tutor or mentor from an after-school program, a community organizer or child advocacy staff working for systemic change to help families whose children are at risk of falling into the education achievement gap, or a staff person from an agency or organization serving low-income families.

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

- **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 educators and other congregation members who are working to nurture and protect children.** This year, invite teachers and other people who are working to close the education achievement gap and assure every child an excellent, equitable education. 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 struggling public school, a 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 in Promoting Your Children's Sabbath at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.
- **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 the Torah, Prophets, and Talmud

On the Importance of Children

And Israel beheld Joseph's sons and said, "Whose are these?" And Joseph said to his father, "These are my children, whom the Lord has given me in this place." And he said, "Bring them to me, and I will bless them."

Genesis 48:8-9

Thus said the Eternal: A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone. Thus said the Eternal: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; for there is reward in your labor—declares the Eternal. They shall return from the enemy's land, and there is hope for your future—declares the Eternal, and your children shall return to their country.

Jeremiah 31:15-17

When the children are blessed, the parents by this very token are blessed.

Zohar, i, 227b

The accursed Emperor Hadrian was once walking along the road to Tiberias when he saw an old man standing and cutting down shrubs in order to plant saplings. He said to him, "Old man! Old man! What is your age?" He answered, "One hundred." "You are 100 years old and you stand here cutting down trees in order to plant saplings? Do you think you will eat of their fruits?" He replied, "If I am worthy, I shall eat; if not, just as my parents toiled for me, so shall I toil for my children."

Kohellet Rabba

Rabbi Meir said: When the Israelites came to receive the Torah, God said to them, "Bring me good sureties that you will observe it." They answered, "Our ancestors shall be our sureties." God replied, "Your sureties need sureties themselves. I have found fault with them." They answered, "Our prophets shall be our sureties." God replied, "I have found fault with them also." Then the Israelites said, "Our children will be our sureties." They proved acceptable, and God gave Israel the Torah.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah

On the Importance of Education

"At the age of five, (one is ripe) for Bible; at 10 for Mishnah, at 13, for mitzvot, at 15, for Talmud; at 18 for the marriage canopy; at 20 for pursuit; at 30, for vigor; at 40, for understanding; at 50 for counsel; at 60, to be an elder; at 70, for grey hair; at 80, for strength, at 90, to bend over; at 100, as if he had died and passed away and disappeared from the world."

BT Shabbat 19b

Rabbi Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because the children did not attend school, and loitered in the streets.

Pesikta Rabbati 29b

The flowers (of the great menorah of the Sanctuary): These are the children who learn in school.

Numbers Rabba 3:1

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

"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

Raba said: The number of students for one teacher should be 25. If there are 50 students, they appoint two; if there are 40, they appoint an assistant, who is supported by the funds of the town.

BT Ta'anit 24a

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 with parents were brought up to Jerusalem, and 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."

Baba Batra 21a

On Social Justice

Speak up for [those unable to speak], for the rights of all the unfortunate. Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31: 8-9

And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the result of righteousness shall be quietness and confidence forever.

Isaiah 32:17

Suggested Music for the Erev Shabbat Service

"And the Youth Shall See Visions" by Debbie Friedman. Contact Sounds Write Productions, Inc., San Diego, Calif., or call (619) 697-6120.

The following suggestions appear in *Shireinu: Our Songs*, available from Transcontinental Music Publications by calling (800) 455-5223.

- "Ani V'Atah" by Arik Einstein
- "Kaddish D'Rabbanan" by Debbie Friedman
- "Hineh Mah Tov," a traditional folk song
- "The Dreamer" by Lorre Wyatt

An Erev Shabbat Service

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

Friday, October 19, 2012

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)."

Berachot 64a

Our children may be the builders of the world but we are entrusted to be the builders of our children. Fredrick Douglass once observed, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." On this weekend that is celebrated all across our nation in congregations of every faith as the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, we renew our commitment to building strong children. Together with urgency and persistence we will heed the instruction "justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you." As we do so, we are not alone. There are friends and family; child care providers and coaches; teachers and mentors, all of whom join us in raising our children and seeking justice with and for them. Children reflect the lessons they learn from each of us.

Tonight we give thanks to all those who dedicate themselves to serving and seeking justice for our children. 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 access to what they need to grow and become healthy, happy children of God.

Candle Lighting

הדלקת נרות שבת

Hadlakat Neiroi Shabbat

O Source of light and truth,
Creator of the eternal law of goodness,
Well-spring of justice and mercy,
Help us to find knowledge by which to live.
Lead us to take the words we shall speak
Into our hearts and our lives.

Bless all who enter this sanctuary in search and in need,
All who bring to this place the offering of their hearts.
May our worship here lead us to fulfill our words and our hopes
With acts of kindness, peace, and love.

(From *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*)¹

¹ Excerpt from *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

Baruch atah Adonai Elohaynu melech ha'olam
asher kideshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu
lehadlik ner shel shabbat.

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם, אשר קדשנו במצותיו,
וצונו להדליק נר של שבת.

We praise You, Eternal God, Sovereign of the universe:
You hallow us with Your Mitzvot, and command us to kindle the lights of Shabbat.

לכה דודי

L'cha Dodi

Traditionally, during the last verse of “L'cha 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 celebrating the 2012 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths*, let us also turn and symbolically welcome all of those who dedicate themselves to teaching our nation's children.

L'cha dodi likrat kalah, p'nei Shabbat n'kab'lah

לכה דודי לקראת כלה. פני שבת נקבלה:

Shamor v'zachor b'dibur echad,
Hishmianu El ham'yuchad;
Adonai echad, ush'mo echad,
L'shem ul'tiferet v'lit'hilah.

שמור וזכור בדבור אחד.
השמיחנו אל המיוחד.
יי אחד, ושמו אחד.
לשם ולתפארת ולתהלה:

Lik'rat Shabbat l'chu v'neilcha,
ki hi m'kor hab'rachah
meirosh mikedem n'suchah,
sof maaseh b'machashava t'chilah.

לקראת שבת לכו ונלכה.
כי היא מקור הברכה.
מראש מקדם נסוכה.
סוף מעשה במחשבה תחלה:

Hitor'ri, hitor'ri
ki va oreich—kumi ori
uri uri, shir dabeiri;
k'vod Adonai alayich niglah.

התעוררי, התעוררי
כי בא אורך—קומי אורי.
עורי עורי, שיר דבירי
כבוד יי עליך נגלה:

All rise and face entrance to welcome the Sabbath Bride:

Bo-i v'shalom, ateret ba'lah;
gam b'simchah uv'tzoholah
emunei am s'gulah,
bo-i challah! Boi challah!

בואי בשלום עטרת בעלה.
גם בשמחה ובצהלה.
תוף אמוני עם סגלה.
בואי כלה! בואי כלה!

Beloved, come to meet the bride; beloved come to greet Shabbat.

“Keep” and “remember”: a single command the Only God caused us to hear;
the Eternal is One, God's Name is One, honor and glory and praise are God's.

Come with meet to meet Shabbat, forever a fountain of blessing.
Still it flows, as from the start: the last of days, for which the first was made.

Awake, awake, your light has come! Arise, shine, awake and sing:
The Eternal's glory dawns upon you.

Enter in peace, O crown of your husband; enter in gladness, enter in joy.
Come to the people that keeps its faith. Enter, O bride! Enter, O bride!

Shalom Aleichem

Illuminations

I begin with a prayer of gratitude
for all that is holy in my life.
God needs no words, no English or Hebrew,
no semantics and no services.
But I need them.

Through prayer, I can sense my inner strength,
my inner purpose,
my inner joy, my capacity to love.
As I reach upward in prayer,
I sense these qualities in my Creator.

To love God is to love each other,
to work to make our lives better.
To love God is to love the world God created
and to work to perfect it.

To love God is to love dreams of peace and joy
that illumine all of us,
and to bring that vision to life.

(By Ruth F. Brin)²

Chatzi Kaddish

חצי קדיש

Yit-ga-dal v'yit-ka-dash sh-mei ra-ba b'al-ma di-v'ra
chi-r'u'tei, v'yam-lich mal-chu-tei b'cha-yei-chon
u'v-yo-mei-chon u'v'cha-yei d'chol beit Yis-ra-eil,
ba-a-ga-la u-vi-z'man ka-riv, v'i-m'ru: A-mein.

יתגדל ויתקדש שמה רבא. בעלמא די ברא כרעותה, וימליך
מלכותה בחייכון וביומיוכון ובחיי דכל בית ישראל. בעגלא
ובזמן קריב ואמרו אמן:

Y'hei sh'mei ra-ba m'va-rach l'a-lam u-l'al-mei
al-ma-ya.

יהא שמה רבא מברך לעלם ולעלמי עלמיא:

Yit-ba-rach v'yish-ta-bach v'yit-pa-ar, v'yit-ro-mam,
v'yit-na-sei, v'yit-ha-dar, v'hit-a-leh, v'yit-ha-lal sh'mei
d'kud-sha, b'rich hu, l'ei-la min kol bir-cha-ta v'shi-
ra'ta, tush-b'cha-ta v'neh-cheh-ma-ta da-a-mi-ran
b'al-ma, v'i-m ru: A-mein.

יתברך וישתבח, ויתפאר ויתרומם ויתנשא ויתעלה
ויתהלל שמה דקדשא בריך הוא לעלא (בעשיית ולעלא מכל)
מן כל ברכתא ושירתא, תשבחתא ונחמתא, דאמירן בעלמא,
ואמרו אמן:

Let the glory of God be extolled, and God's great name be hallowed in the world whose creation God
willed. May God rule in our own day, in our own lives, and in the life of all Israel, and let us say: Amen.

Let God's great name be blessed for ever and ever.

Beyond all the praises, songs, and adorations that we can utter is the Holy One, the Blessed One, who yet
we glorify, honor and exalt. And let us say: Amen.

² "Illuminations" by Ruth F. Brin is reprinted by permission of the publisher from *Harvest: Collected Poems & Prayers* (Holy Cow! Press, 1999, www.holycowpress.org) Copyright © 1999 by Ruth F. Brin.

Bar'chu

Bar'chu et Adonai ham'vorach.
Praise the Eternal, to whom all praise is due.

בְּרַכּוּ אֶת יְיָ הַמְבָרָךְ :

Baruch Adonai ham'vorach l'olam va'ed.
Praise the Eternal, to whom all praise is due now and forever.

בְּרוּךְ יְיָ הַמְבָרָךְ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד :

Ma'ariv Aravim

מעריב ערבים

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheynu melech ha-olam asher
bi-d'varo ma-ariv aravim, b'chochma potey-ach sh'arim
u-vitvuna m'shaneh itim, u-macha-lif et ha-z'manim
u-m'sadeyr et ha-kochavim b'mish-m'ro-teyhem
ba-rakia kir-tzono. Borey yom va-laila, goleyl or mipney
cho-shech v'cho-shech mipney or.

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ , אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר בִּדְבָרוֹ מַעְרִיב
עֲרָבִים, בְּחָכְמָה פּוֹתֵחַ שְׁעָרִים, וּבִתְבוּנָה מְשַׁנֶּה עֵתִים, וּמַחְלִיף
אֶת הַזְּמָנִים, וּמַסְדֵּר אֶת הַכּוֹכָבִים, בְּמִשְׁמְרוֹתֵיהֶם בְּרַקִּיעַ
כְּרָצוֹנוֹ. בּוֹרֵא יוֹם וְלַיְלָה, גּוֹלֵל אוֹר מִפְּנֵי חֹשֶׁךְ, וְחֹשֶׁךְ מִפְּנֵי אוֹר.

U-ma-avir yom u-meyvi laila, u'mavdil beyn yom
u-veyn laila, Adonai tz'vaot sh'mo.
Eyl chai v'kayam tamid yimloch aleynu l'olam va-ed.
Baruch ata Adonai, ha-ma-ariv aravim.

וּמַעְבִּיר יוֹם וּמַבִּיא לַיְלָה, וּמַבְדִּיל בֵּין יוֹם וּבֵין לַיְלָה, יְיָ צְבָאוֹת
שְׁמוֹ. אֵל חַי וְקַיָּם, תָּמִיד וְקִלּוֹךְ עֲלֵינוּ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ,
הַמַּעְרִיב עֲרָבִים :

Blessed are You, Eternal One our God, Sovereign
of all worlds,
by whose word the evenings fall.
In wisdom You open heaven's gates.
With divine discernment You make seasons change,
causing the times to come and go, and ordering the stars on their appointed paths
through heaven's dome, all according to Your will.

Creator of the day and night,
Who rolls back light before the dark, and dark before the light,
Who makes day pass away and brings on night, dividing between day and night:

The Leader of the Throngs of Heaven is Your name!
Living and enduring God, rule over us, now and always.
Blessed are You, Almighty One, who makes the
evenings fall.

Reading

One must repeat from time to time: The world was created for my sake. Never say: What do I care about this or that? Do your part to add something new, to bring forth something that is needed, and to leave the world a little better because you were here briefly.

– Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav

Reflection

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.

(Adapted from *Rabbi's Manual* by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association)³

Ahavat Olam

אהבת עולם

Ahavat olam beyt yisra'el amecha ahavta.
Torah u'mitzvot chukim u'mishpatim otanu limad'ta.
Al ken Adonai Eloheynu besochbenu
u'v'kumenu nasiach be'chukecha
v'nishmach b'divrey toratecha
u'v'mitzvatecha le'olam va'ed ki hem chayeynu
v'orech yameynu u'vahem nehgeh yomam valaylah.
V'ahavatecha al tasir mimenu l'olamim.
Baruch ata Adonai ohev amo Yisra'el.

אהבת עולם בית ישראל עמך אהבת, תורה ומצוות, חקים ומשפטים, אותנו למדת על כן יי אלהינו, בשכבנו ובקומנו נשים בחקיד, ונשמח בדברי תורתך ובמצוותיך לעולם ועד. כי הם חיינו וארץ זמינו, ובהם נהגה יומם ולילה, ואהבתך אל תסיר ממנו לעולמים. ברוך אתה יי, אוהב עמו ישראל:

Your everlasting love for the house of Israel,
Torah and mitzvot, laws and justice You have taught us.
And so, Dear One our God, when we lie down and when we rise up, we reflect upon Your laws.
We take pleasure in Your Torah's words and Your mitzvot, now and always.
Truly, they are our life, our length of days.
On them we meditate by day and night.
Your love will never depart from us as long as
worlds endure.
Blessed are You, Beloved One, who loves Your people Israel.

Sh'ma

Sh'ma Yis-ra-eil, Adonai Eh-lo-hei-nu, Adonai Eh-chad!
Hear, O Israel, the Eternal One is our God, the Eternal God alone!
Ba-ruch shem k'vod mal-chu-to l'o-lam va-ed!
Blessed is God's glorious majesty for ever and ever!

שמע ישראל יי אלהינו יי אחד:

ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד:

Reflection on the Sh'ma God Is with Us

- Reader:** You shall love the Eternal your God with all your mind, with all your strength, with all your being.
- Response:** The path to the love of God is through the love of others; I do not love God until I love my neighbor as myself.
- Reader:** Set these words which I command you this day, upon your heart. Jewish faith unites mind and heart.

³ From the *Rabbi's Manual*. Reprinted with permission of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

Jewish Resources for the Children's Sabbath

- Response:** Even as my mind seeks to understand life's meaning, so may my life show love for all created things.
- Reader:** 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.
- Response:** We do not teach our children by words alone. May I make my life and actions into good teachings, for in my conduct I must exemplify Torah.
- Reader:** 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.
- Response:** Let my home glow with the beauty of our heritage. Let my doors be opened wide to wisdom and to righteousness.
- Reader:** Be mindful of all My Mitzvot and do them: so shall you consecrate yourselves to your God.
- Response:** Each Mitzvah is a way to holiness. The Mitzvot elevate our humanity. Let me learn to use them to magnify the divine in myself and in the world.

(From *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*)⁴

V'A-Havta

V'ahavta et Adonai Ehlohehcha b'chol l'vav'cha
u'v'chol nafsh'cha u'v'chol m'odehcha.

וְאַהַבְתָּ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ, בְּכָל-לֵבְבְךָ, וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ, וּבְכָל-מַאֲדְךָ.

V'hayu ha-d'varim ha-eileh asher anochi
m'tzav'cha ha-yom al l'avvehcha.

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם, עַל-לֵבְבְךָ:
וְשָׁנָתָם לְבָנֶיךָ, וְדִבַּרְתָּ בָם בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ בְּבֵיתְךָ, וּבִלְכֹתְךָ בַּדֶּרֶךְ
וּבְשֹׁכְבְךָ, וּבְקוּמְךָ. וְקִשְׁרָתָם לְאוֹת עַל-יָדְךָ, וְהָיוּ לְטָטְפֹת בֵּין
עֵינֶיךָ, וּכְתִיבָתָם עַל מְזוֹזֹת בֵּיתְךָ וּבְשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

V'shinantam l'vanehcha v'dibarta bam
b'shivt'cha b'veitehcha u'v'lecht'cha
vadehrech u'v'shochb'cha u'v'kumehcha.

U'kshartam l'ot al yadehcha v'hayu l'totafot bein einehcha,
u'ch'tavtam al m'zuzot beitehcha u'vish'
arehcha.

L'ma-an tizk'ru va-asitem et kol mitzvotai,
vi-h'yitem k'doshim leiloheichem. Ani Adonai
Ehloheichem asher hotzeiti etchem m'eretz mitzrayim
lih'yot lachem leilohim. Ani Adonai Ehloheichem.

לְמַעַן תִּזְכְּרוּ וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֶת-כָּל-מִצְוֹתַי, וְהָיִיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים
לְאֱלֹהֵיכֶם: אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם, לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים, אֲנִי יְיָ אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

You shall love your Eternal God with all your heart,
with all your mind, with all your being.
Set these words, which I command you this day, upon your heart.

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.

Bind them as a sign upon your hand.

⁴ Excerpt from *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook* © 1975; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

Let them be symbols before your eyes.
Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates.

Be mindful of all My mitzvot, and do them,
so shall you consecrate yourselves to your God.
I am your Eternal God who led you out of Egypt
to be your God.
I am your Eternal God.

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.

(From *Mishnah T'filah: A Reform Siddur*)⁵

⁵ Excerpt from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

גאולה

G'ulah Redemption

- 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.

(From *Rabbi's Manual* by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association)⁶

Mi Chamocha

Mi chamocha ba'elim Adonai? Mi kamocha
nedar bakodesh
nora tehilot osey feleh?
malchut'cha ra'u vanecha, boke'a yam lifnei
Moshe zeh Eli anu v'amru:
Adonai yimloch l'olam va'ed.
V'ne-emar ki fadah Adonai et Ya'akov u'galo
miyad chazak mimenu.
Baruch atah Adonai ga'al Yisra'el.

מי כמכה באלים יי,
מי כמכה נאדר בקדש,
נורא תהילת, עשה פלא:

מלכותך ראו בניך, בוקע ים לפני משה, זה אלי ענו ואמרו:
יי? מלך לעולם ועד.

ונאמר: כי פדה יי את יעקב, וגאלו מיד חזק ממנו. ברוך אתה
יי, גאל ישראל:

Who is like You, Eternal One, among the gods
that are worshipped?
Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome
in splendor, doing wonders?
In their escape from the sea, Your children saw
Your sovereign might displayed.
"This is my God!" they cried. "The Eternal
will reign for ever and ever!"
Now let all come to say:
The Eternal has redeemed Israel and all the oppressed.
Blessed is the Eternal God.

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.

(Elie Wiesel, *Sages and Dreamers*)⁷

⁶ From the *Rabbi's Manual*. Reprinted with permission of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

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.

השכיבנו

Hashkivenu Help Us

Hash-kiveynu Adonai Eloheynu l'shalom,
v'ha-amideynu malkeynu l'chayyim.
Ufros aleynu sukat sh'lomecha, v'tak-neynu
b'eytzah tovah mil-fanecha
v'hoshi-eynu l'ma-an sh'mecha.
V'hageyn ba-adeynu, v'ha-seyr mey-aleynu oyeyv,
dever, v'cherev, v'ra-av, v'yagon, v'ha-seyr satan
mil-fa-neynu umey-ach-reynu,
uv-tzeyl k'nafecha tas-tireynu ki Eyl shom-reynu
u'matzileynu ata, ki
Eyl melech chanun v'rachum atah.

U'sh-mor tzey-teynu uvo-eynu l'chayyim
ul'shalom mey-ata v'ad olam.
Uf-ros aleynu sukat sh'lomecha.
Baruch ata Adonai, ha-poreys sukat shalom
aleynu v'al kol amo
Yisrael v'al Y'ru-shala-yim.

Grant O God that we may lie down in peace,
And raise us up, O Guardian, to life renewed.
Spread over us the shelter of Your peace;
Guide us with Your good counsel;
And for Your Name's sake, be our help.
Shield us from hatred and plague;
Keep us from war and famine and anguish.
Subdue our inclination to evil.
O God, our Guardian and Helper,
Our gracious and merciful Ruler,
Give us refuge in the shadow of Your wings.
Guard our coming and going,
That now and always we have life.

השכיבנו יי אלהינו לשלום, והעמידנו מלכנו לחיים ופרוש
עלינו סבת שלומך, ותקננו בעצה טובה מלפניך, והושיענו למען
שםך, והגן בעדנו, והסר מעלינו אויב, דבר, וחרב, ורעב ויגון,
והסר שטן מלפנינו ומאחורנו, ובצל כנפיך תסתירנו. כי אל
שומרנו ומצילנו אתה, כי אל מלך חנון ורחום אתה, ושמור
צאתנו ובואנו, לחיים ולשלום, מעתה ועד עולם. ופרש עלינו
סבת שלומך. ברוך אתה יי, הפורש סבת שלום עלינו ועל כל
עמו ישראל ועל ירושלים.

V'shamru

ושמרו

V'shameru v'ney Yisrael et ha-shabbat, la-asot et
ha-shabbat l'dorotam b'rit olam.
Beyni uvey n'ney yisrael ot hi l'olam ki shey-shet
yamim asa Adonai et ha-shamayim v'et
ha-arets u'va-yom ha-sh'vi-i shavat va-yina-fash.

ושמרו בני ישראל את השבת, לעשות את השבת לדורתם
ברית עולם: ביני ובין בני ישראל אות היא לעולם, כי ששת
ימים עשה יי את השמים ואת הארץ, וביום השביעי שבת
וינפש.

The people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath,
Observing the Sabbath in every generation for all time.
It is a sign forever between Me and the people of Israel,
For in six days the Eternal God made heaven and earth,
And on the seventh day, God rested from all labor.

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.

(From *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*)⁸

Amidah Standing in Prayer

עמידה

Prayer invites
God's presence to suffuse our spirits,
God's will to prevail in our lives.
Prayer might not bring water to parched fields,
nor mend a broken bridge,
nor rebuild a ruined city.
But prayer can water an arid soul,
Mend a broken heart,
rebuild a weakened will.
Who rise from prayer better persons,
Their prayer is answered.

*Pray as if everything depended on God.
Act as if everything depended on you.*

⁸ Excerpt from *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

Avot Ve'imot The Ancestors

Baruch atah Adonai, Elohaynu vaylohei
avoteinu v'imoteinu
Elohay Avraham Elohay Sarah
Elohay Yitzchak Elohay Rivka
Elohay Yaakov Elohay Rachel
Vey-lohay Leah

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו ואמותינו,
אלהי אברהם, אלהי שרה,
אלהי יצחק, אלהי רבקה,
אלהי יעקב, אלהי לאה,
ואלהי רחל,

Ha-eil ha-ga-dol ha-gibor v'ha-nora,
Eil elyon gomeil chasadim tovim,
v'konei ha-kol, v'zo-cheir chas'dei avot ve'imot,
v'mei-vi g'u-la li'v'nei v'nei-hem, l'ma-an sh'mo,
b'ahava.
Melech o-zeir u'mo-shi-a u'ma-gein.
Baruch ata Adonai, ma-gein Avraham v'ezrat Sarah.

האל הגדול הגבור והנורא, אל עליון, גומל חסדים טובים,
וקונה הכל, וזוכר חסדי אבות ואמהות, ומביא גואל לבני
בניהם למען שמו באהבה: מלך עוזר ומושיע ומגן:
ברוך אתה יי, מגן אברהם ועזרת שרה:

Open my mouth, Beloved One, and let my
mouth declare Your praise.

Blessed are You, Eternal our God God of our fathers and mothers,
God of Abraham, God of Isaac and
God of Jacob,
God of Sarah, God of Rebekah, God of Rachel, and God of Leah;

Ha'El: great, mighty awesome, God beyond all that is,
Compassionate One, embracing all.
You take note of our ancestors' deeds,
Redeeming their descendants lovingly, for the sake of Your Name.
Attentive Sovereign, Helper and Shield,
Blessed are You, Eternal One,
Helper of Sarah, Abraham's Shield.

G'vurot

A-ta gi-bor l'o'lam, Adonai, m'cha-yei ha-kol a-ta,
rav l'ho-shi-a.
M'chal-keil cha-yim b'cheh-sed, m'cha-yei
ha-kol b'ra-cha-mim ra-bim. So-meich no-f'lim
v'ro-fei cho-lim, u-ma tir a-su-rim, u-m'ka-yeim
eh-mu-na-to li-shei-nei a-far. Mi cha-mo-cha ba-al
g'vu-rot, u-mi do-meh lach, meh-lech mei-mit
u-m'cha-yeh u-matz-mi-ach y'shu-a?

אתה גבור לעולם, אדני, מחיה הכל אתה, רב להושיע.
מכלכל חיים בהסדר, מחיה הכל ברחמים רבים. סומך
נופלים, ורופא חולים, ומתיר אסורים, ומקים אמונתו
לישני עפר.
מי כמותך, בעל גבורות, ומי דומה לך, מלך ממית ומחיה
ומצמיח ישועה?
ונאמן אתה להחיות הכל. ברוך אתה, יי, מחיה הכל.

גבורות

V'neh-eh-man a-ta l'ha-cha-yot ha-kol. Ba-ruch
a-ta Adonai, m'cha-yei ha-kol.

Eternal is Your might, O God; all life is Your gift; great is Your power to save!
With love You sustain the living, with great compassion give life to all.
You send help to the falling and healing to the sick.
You bring freedom to the captive and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.
Who is like You, Mighty One, Author of life and death, Source of salvation?
We praise You, O God, the Source of life.

Reflection

In a world where the weak were tormented by oppressors, our Torah taught us to love the poor and the stranger.
A heritage of justice has come down to us.
Where the sword was sovereign, we were commanded to seek peace and pursue it.
A heritage of peace has come down to us.
All this now is ours. Ours the teaching, ours the task, to make the heritage live.
For it is our life, and the length of our days!

(From *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*)⁹

K'dushat HaShem

קדושה

A-ta ka-dosh v'shim-chah ka-dosh u-k'do-shim b'chol yom y'halle-lu-chah, selah. Ba-ruch a-ta Adonai ha-el ha-ka-dosh.
אתה קדוש ושמך קדוש וקדושים בכל יום יהללוך, סלה. ברוך אתה יי, האל הקדוש.

You are holy, Your name is holy, and those who strive to be holy declare Your glory day by day.
Blessed are You, Adonai, the Holy God.

A Blessing

Berachot 17a
Eruvin 54a

May your eyes sparkle with the light of Torah,
and your ears hear the music of its words.
May the space between each letter of the scrolls
bring warmth and happiness to your soul.
May the syllables draw holiness from your heart,
and may this holiness be gentle and soothing
to you and all God's creatures.
May your study be passionate,
and meanings bear more meanings
until Life itself arrays itself before you
as a dazzling wedding feast.

⁹ Excerpt from *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook* © 1975; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

And may your conversation,
even of the commonplace,
be a blessing to all who listen to your words
and see the Torah glowing on your face.

(By Danny Siegel, from *Unlocked Doors: The Selected Poems of Danny Siegel*.)¹⁰

On Public Education

At first, if a child had a father, the father taught him, but if he had no father, he received no education.

Then it was decreed that teachers of children would be appointed in Jerusalem and fathers would take their sons to Jerusalem to be taught. But, again, fatherless children received no instruction.

Then it was resolved that teachers would be appointed in each district and that boys would receive formal education from the age of sixteen or seventeen.

Finally Joshua ben Gamla organized an educational system in which teachers were appointed in every district and every town, and children entered school at the age of six or seven.

Shalom Rav A Blessing of Peace

שלום רב

Shalom rav al yisra'el am'cha tasim l'olam.
Ki atah hu melech adon l'chol ha-shalom.
V'tov b'eynecha l'varech et am'cha Yisrael
b'chol eyt u'v'chol sha-ah bishlomecha.
Baruch atah Adonai ha-m'varech et amo Yisrael
ba-shalom.

שלום רב על ישראל עמך תשים לעולם, כי אתה הוא
מלך אדון לכל השלום. וטוב בעיניך לברך את עמך
ישראל, בכל עת ובכל שעה בשלומך. ברוך אתה יי,
המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום.

Grant abundant peace eternally for Israel, Your people.
For You are the sovereign source of all peace.
So, may it be a good thing in Your eyes to bless
Your people Israel, and all who dwell on earth, in every time and hour, with Your peace.

Blessed are You, Compassionate One, who
blesses Your people, Israel, with peace.

Ashrei adam matza chochma
V'adam yafik t'vunah.
Ki tov sach'rah mis'char kasef
Umecharutz t'vu'a'ta.
Yekara himipninim
V'chol chafatzeicha lo yishvu-va.

Happy is the one who finds wisdom,
The one who gains understanding;
For its fruits are better than silver,

¹⁰ Danny Siegel from *Unlocked Doors: The Selected Poems of Danny Siegel*. The Town House Press, 1983. Reprinted with permission of the author.

Its yield more than fine gold.
It is more precious than rubies,
No treasure can match it.

When Torah entered the world, freedom entered it.
The whole Torah exists only to establish peace.
Its highest teaching is love and kindness.
What is hateful to you, do not do to any person.

That is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.
Those who study Torah are the true guardians of civilization.

Honoring one another, doing acts of kindness,
and making peace: these are our highest duties.
But the study of Torah is equal to them all,
Because it leads to them all.
Let us learn in order to teach.
Let us learn in order to do!

(From *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*)¹¹

Aleinu

Aleinu l'sha-beyach la-adon ha-kol
La-teyt g'dula l'yotzer b'reyshit.
Shelo asanu k'go-yey ha-aratzot,
V'lo samanu k'mish-p'chot ha-adama.
Shelo sam chel-keynu ka-hem,
V'gora-leynu k'chol hamonam.
Va'anachnu kor-im u'mishtachavim u'modim
Lifnei melech malchey ha-m'lachim
Ha-kadosh baruch hu.

We must praise the God of all,
The Maker of heaven and earth,
Who has set us apart
Form the other families of earth,
Giving us a destiny unique
Among the nations. Therefore we bow in awe and thanksgiving
Before the One who is Sovereign over all,
The Holy and Blessed One.

(From *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*)¹²

עלינו

עלינו לשבח לאדון הכל, לתת גדלה ליוצר בראשית, שלא
עשנו כגויי הארצות, ולא שמנו כמשפחות האדמה, שלא שם
חלקנו בהם, וגרלנו בכל המונים.
ואנחנו כורעים ומשתחווים ומודים, לפני מלך, מלכי
המלכים, הקדוש ברוך הוא.

¹¹ Excerpt from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

¹² Excerpt from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

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 intense 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.

(From *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook*)¹³

Mourner's Kaddish

קריש יתום

Yitgadal v'yitkadash shemey raba b'alma divra
chirutey v'yamlich malchutey, b'chayeychon
u'v'yomeychon u'v'chayey d'chol beyt yisrael ba'agala
u'vizman kariv v'imru, amen.

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שֵׁמֶה רַבָּא. בְּעֻלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְּרַעֲוִיתָהּ, וְיִמְלִיךְ
מַלְכוּתָהּ בְּחַיֵּיכוֹן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוֹן וּבְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל. בְּעֻלְמָא
וּבְזִמְנָא קָרִיב וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Yehey shemey raba m'varach l'alam ul'almei almay.

יְהֵא שֵׁמֶה רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעָלָם וּלְעֻלְמֵי עֻלְמֵינָא:

Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa'ar v'yitromam v'yitnasey
v'yit-hadar v'yitaleh v'yit-halal sh'mey d'kudsha b'rich
hu l'ela min kol birchata v'shirata tushb'chata
v'nechemata da'amiran b'alma v'imru amen.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה
וְיִתְהַלָּל שֵׁמֶה דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא לְעָלָא (בְּעֻשִׁיית וּלְעָלָא מְכַל)
מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא וְשִׁירָתָא, תִּשְׁבַּחְתָּא וְנִחְמַתָּא, דְּאִמְרוּ בְּעֻלְמָא,
וְנִחְמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Yehey sh'lama raba min shemaya v'chayim
aleynu v'al kol yisrael ve'imru amen.

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאִמְרוּ
אָמֵן:

Oseh shalom bimromav hu ya'aseh shalom
aleynu ve'al kol yisra'el ve'al kol yoshvey tevel v'imru
Amen.

עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְמְיוֹ הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל,
וְאִמְרוּ אָמֵן:

Let God's name be made great and holy in the
world that was created as God willed.
May God complete the holy realm in your own
lifetime, in your days,
and in the days of all the house of Israel,
quickly and soon.
And let us say: Amen.

May God's great name be blessed, forever and as
long as worlds endure.

¹³ Excerpt from *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayerbook* © 1975; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

May it be blessed, and praised, and glorified, and held in honor, viewed with awe, embellished, and revered; and may the Blessed Name of holiness be hailed, though it be higher than all the blessings, songs, praises, and consolations that we utter in this world. And let us say: Amen.

May Heaven grant a universal peace, and life for us, and for all Israel. And let us say: Amen.

May the One who creates harmony above, make peace for us and for all Israel, and for all who dwell on earth. And let us say: Amen.

Blessing of the Children

We call upon the educators in the congregation and their children to come to the bima and lead us as together we bless our children.

Blessed is the parent, and blessed the child, when their hearts are turned to one another. Blessed is the home filled with gladness and light, the spirit of Shabbat. May God bless you and guide you. Seek truth always, be charitable in your words, just and loving in your deeds. A noble heritage has been entrusted to you; guard it well.

For a Boy

Y sim'cha Elohim k'ephraim u' menasheh

May God inspire you to live in the tradition of Ephraim and Menasheh, who carried forward the life of our people.

For a Girl

Yismech Elohim k'Sarah, Rivkah, Leah, v'Rachel

May God inspire you to live in the tradition of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, who carried forward the life of our people.

For Both Boys and Girls

Y'varech'cha Adonai veyishm'rehcha
Yair Adonai panav eleycha vichuneka
Yisa Adonai panav eleycha veyasem lecha shalom

May God bless you and keep you.
May God look kindly upon you and be gracious to you.
May God reach out to you in tenderness and give you peace.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יי וַיְשִׁמְרֶךָ
יָאֵר יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְחַנֶּךָ
יִשָּׂא יי פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּשֵּׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

(From *On the Doorposts of Your House*)¹⁴

¹⁴ Excerpt from *On the Doorposts of Your House* © 1994; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.



Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

The actions that you plan for the Children's Sabbath weekend and for the year that follows are an essential part of the Children's Sabbath. 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, end the criminalization of children at younger and younger ages, close the education achievement gap, and justice-seeking advocacy to protect children from budget cuts

and assure that every child has an equitable, excellent education that puts them on the path to a promising and productive future.

So, are you ready to plan? There are two kinds of action to plan for your Children's Sabbath: hands-on service and advocacy activities for the Children's Sabbath weekend itself, and actions that can be carried out throughout the year to come to make a lasting difference for children.

The activities that you plan for the weekend of your Children's Sabbath are an essential way that participants can begin to seek justice and protect children 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 with specific ways to help in response to these problems right away, they will feel hopeful, motivated, energized, and positive, and want to do even more. They will discover that they really can pursue justice and they really can protect children and help assure an equitable, excellent education for all children.

The Children's Sabbath, 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, and so it is vital to plan year-round efforts to improve the lives of children. What might that look like? It could mean:

- Re-energizing 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, lift children out of poverty, create more equitable and excellent educational opportunities for all children that put them on the path to a positive and productive future, 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 Sabbath weekend and throughout the year to pursue justice and protect children. It includes:

- Tips for Planning Children's Sabbath Activities and Actions
- CDF's Be Careful What You Cut Campaign
- Actions to Pursue Justice with and for Children
- Actions to Learn More and Raise Awareness
- Actions to Reach Out and Serve Children and Families

Tips for Planning Children's Sabbath Activities and Actions

As you plan activities for the Children's Sabbath 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 below 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 Sabbath 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 work to end poverty (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, protect children, and lift up the next generation.**

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.

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.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

If you do nothing else this year around the Children's Sabbath Service, please organize and build the public will in your community to protect children from budget cuts. Read this column by Marian Wright Edelman, share it with your full faith community, and activate your social networks around the Be Careful What You Cut campaign. Invite your legislators to the Children's Sabbath Service, and arrange for visits after. Let us know what actions you take.

Be Careful What You Cut

by Marian Wright Edelman

Right before the U.S. House of Representatives left for the summer to go home to campaign for your vote, they voted to extend the Bush era tax cuts for the richest Americans millionaires and billionaires. For more than ten years the richest one percent have received almost \$750 billion from these tax cuts. Income and wealth inequality have grown astronomically threatening the very fabric of our democracy. The top one percent in our nation now possesses more net worth than the bottom 90 percent combined. In 2008, the 400 highest-income taxpayers earned as much as the combined tax revenue of 22 state governments with almost 42 million citizens. It's way past time to reset our moral and economic compass, demand a more just tax system where those with the most pay their fair share, and stop the reverse Robin Hood policies that take from the poor and young to give to the rich and powerful.

There should not be one new dime in tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires as long as millions of children in America are poor, hungry, uneducated and without health coverage. A nation that does not stand for its children does not stand for anything and will not stand tall in the future. Like Thomas Jefferson, I tremble for my country when I think that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.

Yet the extension of the tax cuts for the wealthiest American, especially on top of the cuts approved in the Ryan budget, passed by the full House defies the prophets, apostles and tenets of all great faiths as well as common decency and economic common sense. The most recent vote continues to give huge tax breaks to those who need them least while shaving away lifelines of survival from those who need them most. It would cut eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), two of the most effective investments we have that lift children out of poverty, and from the American Opportunity Tax Credit which helps struggling families pay for their children's college. These cuts would push 900,000 children into poverty and at least 6.4 million children into deeper poverty an unconscionable act when 16.4 million children are living in poverty 7.5 million in extreme poverty.

This is a year of stark political, economic and moral choices. Those who caused the deficit should be asked to pay to close it and not be rewarded with more tax breaks which will increase the deficit and shave already inadequate safety investments. Children under five are the poorest age group in America, and one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development. If you believe as I do that we have more just and sensible choices like helping babies during their early childhood development years rather than helping billionaires who need not one additional material thing, then speak up and fight back.

Cascading federal, state, county and city budget cuts adding up to hundreds of billions of dollars are being pushed by lawmakers pursuing a toxic ideological agenda of no new revenues, expanded tax cuts for the top one percent of Americans and billions of cuts for poor children and families. Our nation's greatest

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

deficit is not one of money but of values and priorities that leave millions of children without hope or a vision of the future worth striving for in our militarily and materially powerful but spiritually anemic nation.

That's why the Children's Defense Fund has launched a new campaign to protect children from budget cuts at the national, state and local levels. The "Be Careful What You Cut" campaign lays out the irrefutable economic case that cutting children from the budget now costs all of us more later. It's a simple calculation really. Protect children now or pay later. The campaign is grounded in three provocative ads created by our award winning pro-bono advertising agency partner Fallon Worldwide. The head of a child is on the body of an adult. The images show what happens later if you cut child investments now as the House of Representatives and their allies are bent on doing.

For all of you who care about children, here's what you can do. Arm yourself with the facts about children in your community from the CDF's *State of America's Children® 2012 Handbook* at www.childrensdefense.org/soac, download questions for candidates from the becarefulwhatyoucut.com website, then go to town hall meetings or visit your member of Congress while they are back home campaigning and hold them accountable to ensure they treat babies as fairly as billionaires. If candidates want your vote on Election Day make sure they answer your questions and put children first rather than last on the agenda.

Join the "Be Careful What You Cut" campaign. Help us spread the word by getting pro-bono space in your local newspapers to run the advertisements. Spread the word through your social media networks. Show your support by visiting www.becarefulwhatyoucut.com and changing your profile picture on Facebook and your avatar on Twitter. Donate to the Be Careful What You Cut Fund, so that we can run a second wave of ads in the late fall before the lame duck Congress makes final budget decisions for next year. Together we can and must fight for justice for our children and protect them from draconian tax cuts and budget choices that threaten their survival, education and preparation for the future. If they are not ready for tomorrow, neither is America.



Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year



Cutting him from the budget now

costs all of us later.

When it comes to fixing the deficit, be careful what you cut. Eliminating early education investments now would increase his chances of going to prison later by up to 39 percent. And paying for that prison will cost us nearly three times more a year than it would have cost to provide him with a quality early learning experience. [Learn more about the high costs of cutting at *becarefulwhatyoucut.com*.](http://becarefulwhatyoucut.com)

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND



Cutting him from the budget now

costs all of us later.

When it comes to fixing the deficit, be careful what you cut. Eliminating the Earned Income Tax Credit now would increase child poverty by 23 percent in the future. And since poor children are more likely to drop out of high school, they are less likely to find steady work as adults. Not to mention that paying for each year of high school dropouts costs us more than \$125 billion over the course of their lifetimes. [Learn more about the high costs of cutting at *becarefulwhatyoucut.com*.](http://becarefulwhatyoucut.com)

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year



Cutting her from the budget now

costs all of us later.

When it comes to fixing the deficit, be careful what you cut. Cutting just \$4,000 of Medicaid and food stamps from a girl in a low-income family negatively impacts her health and nutrition in the future. This can lead to poor performance in school, which increases her chances of getting pregnant as a teenager. And paying for teen pregnancies costs the rest of us \$10 billion a year. [Learn more about the high costs of cutting at *becarefulwhatyoucut.com*.](http://becarefulwhatyoucut.com)

CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND

Actions to Learn More and Raise Awareness

On the Children's Sabbath weekend...

Hold a Forum on Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor

Invite a panel of speakers to address different facets of the topic, including early childhood learning (at home, in child care programs, in Head Start, and in after-school programs), strong schools, and the challenges to children's learning posed by poverty, violence, and lack of health care. Encourage each speaker to talk about the problems, solutions, and ways that people can help. Possible speakers include: teachers, school administrators, students, child care providers, Head Start teachers, parents (both those who work outside the home and in it), people working to transform the juvenile justice system and those working to end Zero Tolerance discipline policies, health care providers, and staff or volunteers from an after-school program, and legislators. 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.

Honor the people who help our children learn

Plan a celebration to recognize and support congregation members who are child care providers, Head Start teachers, and school staff. Also acknowledge the irreplaceable role that parents play as children's first and most important teachers. Perhaps have the children make, in advance, special buttons or ribbons to give to the honorees.

Create a "Legacy Wall"

In the room where the congregation gathers for socializing or activities on the Children's Sabbath, post a long sheet of mural paper on the wall, with the following quote from educator Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune written across the top in large letters: "I leave you love. I leave you hope. I leave you the challenge of developing confidence in one another. I leave you a thirst for education. I leave you a respect for the use of power. I leave you faith. I leave you racial dignity. I leave you also a desire to live harmoniously with your fellow man. And I leave you finally a responsibility to our young people."

Underneath the quote, write "How will you give these gifts to children?" Leave crayons and markers nearby, and invite congregation members to write their responses to the question on the paper. Responses under "I leave you faith" might include praying for children and accompanying the youth group on a trip. Responses to "I leave you a thirst for education" might include reading to or with children and volunteering in a classroom. Responses to "I leave you a respect for the use of power" might include talking with young people about Congress and legislation when it comes up on the evening news, or planning a joint visit to a legislator's office, or conversations about how to deal peacefully and effectively with a school bully.

Tour a program serving children

Take interested people on a tour of a child care program, Head Start site, public school, juvenile detention center, or after-school program. If your congregation houses a child care, Head Start, or after-school program, that is a good place to start. Arrange for an administrator, a teacher, a parent, and a child to talk to your group. It is best to plan the visit for a day that the program or school will be in session. Prepare questions to ask the speakers, like what population they serve, what their greatest needs and challenges are, their successes, and what kind of support (donations, volunteers, advocacy) would help them serve children better.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Mark the importance of reading.

Involve all ages in making bookmarks. Supply stiff paper (cardstock or file folders) to be cut into strips for bookmarks, scissors, markers and crayons to write on the bookmarks, stickers or stars to decorate, clear adhesive paper to cover the bookmarks (alternatively, rent or borrow a laminating machine), hole-punch and yarn for attaching a tassel. Possible quotes for the bookmarks include: "Children are important at [name of your congregation]" and "Reading: A Path to Learning and Success."

Express gratitude to those who helped you learn and succeed.

Offer the opportunity for people of all ages to thank the individuals who have helped them learn and succeed. Provide an assortment of note cards, paper, envelopes, pens, crayons, and markers, and invite people to write a note of thanks to someone who helped them learn and succeed. It could be someone in their life now, or a teacher or mentor from the past. Encourage people to write someone even if they don't have their address—they can either do some detective work later to track down that teacher from years ago, or simply find that writing the note, is a valuable experience of gratitude even if it never gets mailed.

Following the Children's Sabbath weekend...

Publicize and support activities sponsored by schools and early childhood programs.

Let congregation members know about concerts, performances, fund-raisers, and other school, child care, and Head Start program activities and encourage their support and participation. This will build bridges and a sense of continuity for the children and youths, to bring together their congregational family and their school and weekday program experiences. Show that you care about what happens to your congregation's children during the week as well as on the weekend.

Celebrate success.

Recognize students' school accomplishments, for instance through notices on a bulletin board, notes in the congregational bulletin or newsletter, announcements at an appropriate time during the service, or a celebratory coffee hour or Oneg Shabbat.

Start a short-term book group or adult study class on *The New Jim Crow: America in an Age of Color-Blindness* by Michele Alexander or *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* by Jonathan Kozol. Use the book as a springboard for discussion about the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™, increasing criminalization of children, and challenges to children's preparedness to learn and succeed. As a group, ask yourselves how the children in the book have been affected by poverty, violence, lack of health care, and lack of positive early learning at home, in child care, or in Head Start. Ask yourselves what you can do as individuals or as a congregation about the problems identified.

Start a child advocacy library. Designate a child advocacy resource shelf in your congregation's buildings (the library, educational rooms, 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.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

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.

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 participate in one of CDF's *Young Advocate Leadership Trainings (YALT®)* programs. Held in early spring, the *Young Advocate Leadership Training* attracts hundreds of young adults who participate in a 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 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 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 and Miriam and Joshua and Deborah generations learning from each other and discovering unique leadership styles and opportunities.
- **Connect with the 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 fueling 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. Learn more and get involved at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/helping-americas-children/cradle-to-prison-pipeline-campaign>.

Actions to Reach Out and Serve Children and Families

On the Children's Sabbath weekend...

Host a Children's Sabbath 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 schools, Head Start programs, child care centers, community health clinics, juvenile detention facilities, youth development or mentoring programs, agencies and programs 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 the next page 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 congregations 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, 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

Fill a gap

Contact a school, child care program, Head Start program, juvenile detention facility or after-school program and find out what needs they have that your congregation could fill. This may include collecting supplies such as art materials and books or donating computers. Publicize the needed items in advance of the Children's Sabbath, and then collect them on the Children's Sabbath weekend. If possible, display photographs of the children from the school or program. You also may want to invite staff, parents, and children from the selected program to participate in your Children's Sabbath.

Arrange fix-up fun

Arrange to fix up a school, child care center, or Head Start classroom. Find one that would welcome a fresh coat of paint, playground clean-up, or a new garden. Schedule the fix-up for the Children's Sabbath weekend, and let congregation members know in advance so that they can sign up and bring the needed tools, supplies, and a change of clothes. Be sure to take "before" and "after" pictures of the site, as well as lots of photos of members during the fixing up process. Display the photos the following week.

Give the gift of reading

Collect quality children's books to distribute through schools, Head Start programs, child care programs, health clinics, and hospitals (books for babies could be given to new parents to encourage them to read to their child from the start). Before the Children's Sabbath, call the organization and ask if they would like to receive such a donation, and find out the age range of the children they serve. Then invite congregation members to bring in new books to donate on the Children's Sabbath. Encourage them to select books that feature illustrations depicting a range of races and ethnicities. If possible, have a small group deliver the books on the Children's Sabbath weekend as part of the activities.

Set up a reading corner

One of the best ways to foster children's learning is to read to them and to encourage them to read. On the Children's Sabbath, set up a cozy reading corner where children can gather to have books read to them. Invite a range of people to be the readers, including parents, seniors, and youths. If possible, place the reading corner in or near the room where everyone gathers after the service, so that the children feel like part of the activity. Consider leaving the Reading Corner up for the long-term. Remind parents, through a poster or flyers to hand out, that reading to their children from the earliest ages on is vital to learning.

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. 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.

Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton, N.J., celebrated its 2009 Children's Sabbath with worship services focused on children's needs, a month-long education series for adults, and an intergenerational afternoon of service and advocacy activities. One group went to a community child care program serving low-income children, and repainted its kitchen cabinets and planted flower bulbs on the grounds. This spring, long after the Children's Sabbath weekend, the children and their parents were greeted by the sight of blooming flowers as they approached the center each day.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Roll up your sleeves. Ahead of time, arrange for a service project that people can engage in on the Children's Sabbath 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, 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 (Black, Hispanic, 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).

Following the Children's Sabbath Weekend...

Adopt a school or another child-serving organization. Identify an organization serving children and low-income families 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.

ChildServ is a child and family services network that reaches children and families facing adversity in the Chicago area with a range of in-depth support services. Here is how they describe the support that congregations can provide to the families they serve and how the organization can be a resource to congregations. Consider how these might apply to a partnership you forge with a child-serving organization in your area:

There are many opportunities for your congregation:

- Give to ChildServ through your mission budget, Fifth Sunday Appeal, Rainbow Covenant, or Special Collection
- Recruit individual volunteers to become mentors, tutors or child care assistants
- Sponsor group projects, such as field trips, holiday parties or site improvement work

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

- Host a baby shower, a linen shower or a housewarming party for a teen mom or a group home resident
- Collect school supplies and backpacks in time for the start of school
- Give new toys, dolls or games through our annual holiday gift-giving project
- Donate children's books and other early literacy materials
- Join with ChildServ to educate legislators and policy makers on issues related to children and youth in Illinois.

ChildServ can support your mission endeavors by providing:

- Speakers for Sunday worship services
- Programs on pertinent topics for women's programs, men's breakfasts, Lenten spiritual growth series
- Agency display with staff for mission fairs or other special events
- Technical assistance on setting up a child advocacy initiative
- Workshops on critical child-and-family issues with mission committees, youth groups, parent support groups (from www.childserv.org)

Adopt a Juvenile Detention Facility. Connect your congregation to a juvenile detention facility and find out how you can help, whether it is visiting young people, tutoring, or offering support to them when they return home. Include the names of those who are incarcerated on your congregation's prayer list of the sick and shut-in, if you have one.

Grow Food for Growing Children. Emergency food pantries often distribute highly processed foods and have limited supplies of fresh produce. Unfortunately, fresh produce is also in short supply in many urban areas that have poorly stocked corner markets instead of supermarkets. As a congregation, come up with ways to provide fresh produce for children in poverty. Possibilities include partnering with schools serving primarily low-income children to create school-yard gardens, donating produce to emergency food pantries, planting a vegetable garden on the congregation's grounds and donating the harvest to families in need, and creating a farmers' market in the parking lot of a congregation situated in an urban area (your own or in partnership with another congregation) to make fresh produce at reasonable prices available to families who would otherwise have difficulty purchasing it.

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 toward learning, and connects the needs of children and families to the resource of their communities. Visit www.freedomschools.org or contact Ali Merfeld at amerfeld@childrensdefense.org for additional information.

A Day in the CDF Freedom Schools® Program

As children enter a *CDF Freedom Schools* program site, they are greeted and served a **nutritious breakfast or snack** by caring adults. The children and young adults 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, read 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* program, 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* program **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* program staff will 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 try, an increase of 30 percent.
- In Newark, N.J., 81 percent of parents attended parent-teacher conferences and 96 percent brought home materials for their child to read.
- In Rochester, N.Y., the number of children physically fighting decreased by 26 percent.
- Although children in New Orleans maintain relatively high levels of depression symptoms, the number 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 they felt happy.
- In 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).

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

October 19, 2012, is the application deadline for summer 2013 operation. To learn more about the *CDF Freedom Schools* program and the impact it has had on children, please visit www.childrensdefensefund.org/freedomschools.

Start a tutoring program in your congregation, or arrange to connect volunteers from the congregation with an existing tutoring program in another congregation or the community. If you start your own program, look for a particular need to fill. For example, are there students with learning disabilities or other special needs for whom you could provide qualified tutors? Are the tutoring needs greatest for younger children or teens in your schools? Could you set up a foreign language tutoring program to help children with French or Spanish classes, or are there many students who speak other languages that need extra help with English?

Consider whether your congregation is able to provide a weekday child care program in your facilities. Helping Churches Mind the Children: A Guide for Church-Housed Child Care Programs is a resource for Christian congregations. The Jewish Child Care Association is a resource for Jewish congregations. (see Resource section for contact and ordering information).

Start or provide volunteers for a mentoring program, to provide one-on-one supportive friendships for children and youths. Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America at (215) 665-7778 is a national organization that supports mentoring. Learning doesn't stop after school. Provide a rich, stimulating after-school program that helps young people continue learning and engage in productive activities. If your congregation can't sponsor its own program, partner with another congregation, or find ways to support an existing program. **Encourage congregation members to volunteer in the *CDF Freedom Schools* program, classrooms of a school, child care program, Head Start, or after-school program, as an extra pair of hands for the teacher or for something more specific such as reading with the children. Learn more about the *CDF Freedom Schools* program at www.childrensdefense.org/programs-campaigns/freedom-schools/participate/.**

Demonstrate a skill for students. Connect congregation members with a school, child care program, Head Start class, or after-school program to teach or demonstrate a particular skill to the students on a one-time basis. This may be more realistic for some members than an on-going tutoring or volunteer commitment.

Support struggling students. Recognize that school troubles constitute a real crisis for many children and parents. Offer clergy counseling and support as needed to children who have been held back a grade, are rejected by colleges or vocational preparation programs, or are having a hard time dealing with other serious disappointments or crises.

Facilitate involvement in Back-to-School Night. Make sure that parents in your community can attend Back-to-School night to promote their involvement in their child's school. Talk to parents, teachers, and community groups to learn what hinders parents from attending, and provide what is needed. This may include child care for siblings, transportation to the school, or even a free or low-cost hot dinner before Back-to-School night to encourage parents to attend. Consider offering similar support during parent-teacher conference week.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Sponsor vision and hearing screening or immunization clinics. Good health—especially vision and hearing—is important for students' learning, and children must be up-to-date on their immunizations in order to enroll in school. However, millions of children in the U.S. do not have any form of health insurance, public or private. Offer a free “back to school” immunization clinic and vision and hearing screening for children in the community. Work with health professionals in your congregation to contact appropriate agencies for guidance. Publicize the clinic at community swimming pools and recreation programs, and anywhere else children and parents may be during the late summer.

Provide free tax filing assistance to low-income working families.

Before the 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 Sabbath, 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.

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, users click a “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.

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.

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.

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:

1. **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?
2. **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?
3. **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. Conversation with community members is a vital way to learn what problems are pressing on others but about which your members might be unaware.
4. **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.

Actions to Speak Up for Justice

As Congress struggles over deficit reduction and the budget, we must ensure that the needs of children will not be sacrificed to protect the richest and most powerful citizens and corporations. Contact your members of Congress and tell them to protect children's safety nets and to invest in their health, education and well-being. Include a personal story or one relevant to your congressional district or state to give your message more of an impact.

On the Children's Sabbath weekend...

Launch a Justice for Children letter-writing table that is available to congregation members every week or once a month. Make copies of the Tips on Writing Your Elected Officials and the Step-by-Step Letter to guide participants in composing their own letters. 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. 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.cdfactioncouncil.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 Elected Officials and 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." To find the contact information for your legislator, visit www.congressmerge.com.

Step-by-Step Sample Letter

(Please note: The examples written in the parentheses are meant as examples 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

Dear Senator _____: or Dear Representative _____:

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 the children who are not receiving an equitable or excellent education. As you and your colleagues debate ways to reduce the national debt, I urge you to consider children first and make them your top priority in your budget decisions. More than 75 percent of minority children in fourth, eighth, and 12th grade are reading and doing math below grade level, and more than 30 percent do not graduate from high school within four years.)

3. Share your vision for children. (As a person of faith, I believe putting children first and investing in their health, safety, and development is our moral obligation and the right thing to do.)

4. Talk about the solutions and urge action on them. [*Visit the Children's Sabbath Action Page at www.childrendefense.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 and I look forward to hearing back from you about this urgent issue.)

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

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 poverty statistics ('Poverty Remains High' Oct. 4) was excellent. Readers might want to know that level of educational attainment is the best predictor of future income. The best poverty prevention strategy we know for our children today is ensuring that every child gets an equitable, excellent education. However, today too few children are reading or doing math on grade level...." 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 100-200 words. Provide a few striking facts that might surprise an editor or a reader. ("More than 60 percent of all fourth, eighth, and 12th graders are not reading or doing math on grade level.")
- 3. Use descriptive words that communicate your passion about the issue.** Don't be dry. ("Imagine walking into a classroom of 20 hopeful, eager second grade students. In just two years, 12 of them will already be behind, and five won't graduate from high school within four years.")
- 4. Offer a solution to the problem:** "The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act gives us the opportunity to make it right, by...."
- 5. Review:** Re-read your letter and check for any spelling or grammatical mistakes before you submit it. Include your address, day, and evening phone numbers; editors often verify the identity of the writer before they print the letter.

Sample Letter to the Editor:

Look for articles in your local paper about budget cuts, unemployment, hunger and homelessness—then reference that article at the top of your letter to the Editor.

Dear Editor:

In response to the recent article, insert title of article and date, about proposed budget cuts to _____ it is important to remember that children and families have been already been battered by a deep recession and slow recovery. A series of budget cuts from the national, state and local level has created more hardship for families struggling to stay afloat.

With 16.4 million poor children in America, and 7.4 million living in extreme poverty, too many of us don't understand the long-term budget implications of cutting programs that move at-risk children to productive lives. For instance, did you know that eliminating early education investments now increases the chance a boy will go to prison later by 39 percent? Paying for that prison will cost us nearly three times more each year than it would have cost to provide him with a quality early learning experience. Investments in children do matter. It's a simple calculation, really. Protect now or pay later.

SAMPLE OP-ED

Be Careful What You Cut

During these volatile and politically polarizing times, we hear political candidates make all sorts of promises. Promises to jump start the economy and to cut the deficit. Promises to help the middle class, and cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans and the richest corporations. It's long past time to hear our candidates make and keep promises to protect our voiceless, voteless children from budget cuts.

With a record 16.4 million children poor in America, and 7.4 million living in extreme poverty, there is no denying our country needs to get its budget priorities straight. Children under five are the poorest age group in America and one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development. Shockingly, only three percent of eligible infants and toddlers are served by Early Head Start due to limited funding. Without high-quality early childhood intervention, an at-risk child is 25 percent more likely to drop out of school. But too many of us don't understand the long-term budget implications of cutting programs that move vulnerable children to productive lives.

Did you know that eliminating early education investments now increases the chance a boy will go to prison later by 39 percent? Paying for that prison will cost us nearly three times more each year than it would have cost to provide him with a quality early learning experience.

The cradle to prison pipeline crisis leaves a Black boy born in 2001 with a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime and a Latino boy a one-in-six risk of the same fate. The pipeline is fueled by pervasive poverty, racial disparities, inadequate physical and mental health care, gaps in early childhood development, disparate educational opportunities, chronic abuse and neglect, and overburdened and ineffective juvenile justice systems. To replace the cradle to prison pipeline with a pipeline to college and productive work, our political leaders at all levels must invest in children, protect them from budget cuts, and ensure that the wealthiest Americans help by paying their fair share.

Children need our help early and they need it now. All children in America deserve a healthy, safe and fair start in life. Our children's future and America's future depend on it. All adults who care about children and who care about our country should be able to agree this not only makes economic sense, it's the right thing to do. During this political year, use your vote for children.

It's a simple calculation, really. Protect now or pay later.

Following the Children's Sabbath weekend....

Reach out to your local print publications. Ask for donated space, and help us spread the message. Choose an ad from the Children's Defense Fund's "Be Careful What You Cut" Campaign and send the entire file to your local newspaper or magazine publication. The ad files can be downloaded at www.becarefulwhatyoucut.com.

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 below 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. Ask them to join your efforts in getting the "Be Careful What You Cut" Campaign out. The Children's Defense Fund also provides information and alerts. Visit www.childrensdefense.org and click on "Take Action."

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 that demonstrate the challenges children face, like a struggling school or a juvenile detention facility, 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.

Engage the congregation in school board concerns. Host school board candidate forums, publicize elections, highlight important issues docketed for upcoming meetings, and communicate key decisions made. Encourage congregation members to consider running for the school board. Even if your congregation is affiliated with a parochial or other religious school, remind congregation members that it is important to ensure that the public school system is strengthened so that all children can get the best education possible.

Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

Convene a community coalition to strengthen schools. Convene a community coalition to support and strengthen the schools in your area. Invite other congregations, social service agencies, health care providers, police, neighborhood groups, and voluntary organizations to join.

Advocate for School Breakfasts. Advocate for your public schools to take advantage of the federal School Breakfast program so children will get the sound nutritional start to their day that will help them learn best. More and more studies show that a good breakfast helps children learn more and behave better in school. Some schools are serving breakfast free to all children because the advantages are so great. Make sure your schools have a breakfast program and are taking steps to get children to participate. For more information about how you can advocate on this concern, contact the Food Research and Action Center at (202) 986-2200.

Advocate for the Summer Food Program. Make sure that your community offers the federal Summer Food program so that children who receive free or reduced-price lunches during the school year don't go hungry during the summer. (Also see the information above on the *CDF Freedom Schools* program, which is structured around the Summer Food Program to ensure that children are fed in mind, body, and spirit throughout the summer.)

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 lawmaker'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 CDF's nonpartisan Congressional Voting Record 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. Talk about 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. 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 e-mail. 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.

Suggestions for Making Your Congregation a Place of Learning and Success for Children

This year's Children's Sabbath looks at getting children ready to learn and succeed, with a particular focus on early childhood development, preschool programs, and education. It is important, however, that we also look "closer to home" to make sure that our congregations are also places that prepare children to learn and succeed through nurture and positive learning experiences. The following suggestions are starting points to ensure that your congregation is a learning environment. Look at your congregation's programs for children and youths—religious education programs as well as youth groups, retreats, and other activities—and consider these questions.

Understand Learning Differences

- Does your congregation appropriately and supportively accommodate children with learning disabilities/dyslexia, cognitive, physical, and emotional disabilities?
- Has your staff—clergy, education staff, teachers, secretaries, congregation—been exposed to and had consciousness raised regarding variation in learning and responding?
- Does the staff lead the congregation in an environment that allows for inclusion of the diverse learner?
- Are teachers/staff members trained to provide experiences that help children with learning disabilities or other challenges to learn and succeed?
- Are religious education classes and services planned to encourage and incorporate a variety of learning methods?
- Are congregation members viewed as members of a support team for each other and are they open to providing the necessary supports to families and individuals with special needs?
- Are parents viewed as partners who can provide information about their children and as part of the leadership, planning, and support team guiding teachers?

Value Learning

- Do the children have an opportunity to share their learning with their parents?
- Do the children have an opportunity to share their learning with the congregation? Are their artwork and other projects displayed where the congregation can see them?
- Does the religious education program take place at a time that many children can participate?
- Is there a recognition ceremony at the end of the year celebrating the children's participation in, and completion of, the education program?
- Does your congregation celebrate children's secular education accomplishments, such as making the honor roll, moving on to the next grade, going off to college, or completion of a vocational education program? (Don't overlook the accomplishments of children who are not on "the college track;" celebrate young people who are preparing to enter the work world, too.)
- Does your congregation offer clergy support and counseling for children and parents who are wrestling with academic problems and disappointments, such as having to repeat a grade or not being accepted into college or a work education program?

Value Teaching

- Are the religious education teachers and others working with children and youths publicly recognized and thanked by the congregation?
- Are new volunteers recruited each year to avoid “burning out” the same teachers year after year?
- If the children's religious education program takes place during the service of worship, are the teachers remembered? (For instance, does someone bring them communion if appropriate in your tradition?)
- Do the teachers receive appropriate training, curriculum, and resources to help them do their job well?





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 justice and protecting and nurturing children. 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 for organizing a multi-faith community-wide service, which are outlined in the “Planning Your Children's Sabbath” section of this manual. Follow them to bring together a planning committee that represents the many religious traditions in your community.

Following, you will find materials to help to create your own multi-faith Children's Sabbath service that is inclusive, respectful of different traditions, focused on the Children's Sabbath core themes, and adaptable to your particular community and leadership.

- **A sample multi-faith Children's Sabbath service** that can be used “as is” or adapted;
- **A suggested outline** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service;
- **Resources** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service including readings, prayers, and other resources from many religious traditions from which you may choose. Select those resources that appeal to your planning team, supplement 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 (one to three minutes) reflections on the religious traditions' call to do justice and protect 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 to engage congregation members.

Sample Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor—with Urgency and Persistence **Community-Wide Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service**

Prelude

(Choral selections from adult and children's choirs)

Procession

(Broad range of religious leaders may vest and process, and then be seated in special area at the front of the worship space.)

Welcome

Gathering Words

(May use multiple leaders, different faith traditions)

Leader: We come from north and south and east and west...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor
with urgency and persistence.

Leader: We come from church and temple, gurdwara and masjid, community and congregation...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor
with urgency and persistence.

Leader: We come from serving children, speaking out for children, loving children, living as children...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor
with urgency and persistence.

Leader: We come disappointed and determined, heavy hearted and hopeful, seeking sustenance and sharing strength, naming God's vision and claiming our voice...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor
with urgency and persistence.

Leader: Come, let us worship—coming together in wondrous diversity to celebrate the unity of our conviction that the eternal source of love and justice calls us to pursue justice for children and the poor.

Song

Moments for America's Children

(You may use a PowerPoint which combines statistics from the Children's Defense Fund's Moments for America's Children with images of children and a sung response by the congregation using verses from the hymn God of Justice, God of Mercy sung to the tune Hyfrydol. The PowerPoint may be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/RDzr2n>)

Readings, Music, and Prayers from Various Traditions:

Baha'i reading:

O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of my lovingkindness. Set it then before thine eyes." (Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*, Arabic No. 2)

Buddhist Reading:

Arouse your will, supreme and great,
Practice love, give joy and protection;
Let your giving be like space,
Without discrimination or limitation.

Do good things, not for your own sake
But for all the beings in the universe.
Save and make free everyone you encounter,
Help them attain the wisdom of the way.
(Prajnaparamita, from *The Buddha Speaks*)

From Hindu Tradition:

āno bhadraṃ kratavoyantu viśvataḥ |
(Rig Veda 1.89.1a)

May noble thoughts come to us from every side.

īśavāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ
yatkinca jagatyāṃ jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjīthā
māgṛdhaḥ kasya sviddhanam ||
[īśa (eesha) Upanishad -1]

Lord permeates everything in this ever changing world. Enjoy your blessings with detachment.
Don't be greedy after someone else's share.

iṣṭānbhogān hi vo devāḥ
dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ |
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo
yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ ||
(Bhagavad-Gītā 3:12)

One who enjoys his blessings accorded by gods without giving back anything in return is indeed a thief.

sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ
sarve santu nirāmayāḥ
sarve bhadraṇi paśyant
mā kaścit duḥkhabhāg bhavet
(Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upanishad 1.4.14)

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

May all be happy
May all be healthy
May all be prosperous
May none suffer.

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

(Traditional epilogue)

Om peace peace peace.

(May the peace in the three realms: Mental, physical and in the atmosphere prevail)

From the *Qur'an*: (5:8)

O you who believe! Stand firmly for God, as witnesses in fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and be God conscious, for God is well-acquainted with all that you do.

From the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scriptures:

Bilaaval, Mehala 5

(To be Sung in Bilaaval Raga, written by the Fifth Master, Guru Arjan Dev Ji)

Mother, father, children and all material wealth, will not accompany you hereafter.

In the Company of those Saintly Souls, all pains and afflictions will be erased. 1.

The Almighty Being is One – pervading within all of Creation.

So, with your tongue, chant the Name of the Lord.

Thus, pain will not overcome you. 1. Pause and Reflect.

One who is engulfed by the terrible fires of thirst, hunger and desire,

Becomes cool by chanting the Praises of the Ultimate Being. 2.

Even through millions of rituals, Inner Divine Peace cannot be obtained;

But the mind is at true bliss when it sings the Glorious Praises of the Lord. 3.

O' God, O' Knower of Hearts, Please bless me with True Devotion,

Nanak* says: This alone is my prayer, O' Master. 4.5.10.

*Guru Nanak (1469-1539) is the Founder of Sikhism.

From the New Testament: Luke 18:1-8a

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to God's chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them (New Revised Standard Version).

From the *Torah*: Deuteronomy 16:18-20

You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Jewish Publication Society Translation)

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Reflection

(A brief reflection—perhaps five minutes— on the call to pursue justice for children and the poor heard in sacred texts and religious tradition.).

Song

Prayers of the People

Leader: Let us now pray to God, Lover of Justice, Protector of the Poor, for the needs of our whole human family. For the faithful, that we rightly worship God by doing justice for the poor, loving kindness and caring tenderly for the children, and walking humbly with God, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.

Leader: For all peoples of the world, in which disease knows no boundary, suffering is a shared language, and poverty is a common pain, that we come together to work so that no one suffers injustice or oppression, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Protector of the Poor, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our nation, especially our elected leaders and those who would serve, that we uphold peace with justice, unite instead of divide, and demonstrate greatness by serving the last, the least, the lost, and the left behind, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.

Leader: For ourselves and our community, that we work passionately for justice with our voices and our votes, that we reach out with tender kindness and care for children in need, and that our hearts faithfully seek to do God's will for the children and the poor, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Protector of the Poor, hear our prayer.

Leader: For all children, especially those who long for justice or kindness or someone to believe in, that we and our leaders and our nation hear their cries, meet their needs, and help them to know that they are beloved by God, let us pray to the Eternal

People: Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.

Leader: We offer these prayers in confidence that God hears our prayers before they even reach our lips, and that God charges us to make our lives a living prayer for justice.

People: Amen.

Congregational Song: Somebody Prayed for Me

(Verse 1, traditional Spiritual. Verses 2-5, adapted. Perhaps have first verse sung by children's choir. This might be a good place to have liturgical dancers interpret the words of the song.)

Somebody prayed for me, had me on their mind,
they took the time and prayed for me.
I'm so glad they prayed,
I'm so glad they prayed,
I'm so glad they prayed for me.

Somebody cared for me...
Somebody spoke for me...
Somebody served with me...
Somebody stood with me...

Charge to the Congregation

(A brief charge—perhaps five minutes—that urges and inspires participants to go forth to pursue justice with urgency and persistence.)

Song

Affirmation of Commitment

Leader: Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral spoke to the urgency with which we must pursue justice when she wrote:

Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral spoke to the urgency with which we must pursue justice when she wrote:

*Somos culpables de muchos errores y faltas,
pero nuestro mayor delito es abandonar los niños, descuidando las fuentes de vida.
Muchas cosas pueden esperar.
El niño no.
Ahora es el momento en que sus huesos se forman,
su sangre se constituye y sus sentidos se desarrollan.
No les podemos contestar mañana.
Su nombre es hoy.*

*We are guilty of many faults and errors,
but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life.
Many 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 [the child] we cannot answer "Tomorrow".
[The child's] name is "Today".*

(Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral)

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Every child's name is today. There are particular children you hold in your heart, who need us to act with urgency and persistence to bring joy and justice to their lives. Aloud or in silence, let us lift up those names. *[Moment for names to be called out.]*

Leader: Friends, the one we call Holy, the Eternal Source of Love and Justice, calls us to pursue justice for children with urgency and persistence, today and every day.

How will you speak out with and for children and families whose voices have too long been ignored, who struggle in poverty, without health coverage, in a chasm of inequity and a widening academic achievement gap, at risk in the Cradle to Prison Pipeline? How will you speak out with them for justice?

People: “With urgency and persistence!”

Leader: How will you reach out to children who need our care—those vulnerable to abuse and neglect, those who are hungry and homeless, those who are suspended and incarcerated? How will you reach out to children who need rich early learning experiences, strong schools, and caring communities?

People: “With urgency and persistence!”

Leader: How will you pursue justice so that every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life?

People: “With urgency and persistence!”

Leader: The pursuit of justice is a marathon, not a sprint. Let us draw on our own deep commitment, on the support and companionship of others in the race, and on the guidance and sustenance of the Holy as we look to reaching the finish line so that every child of God experiences love and justice.

Song: *Guide My Feet*

Guide my feet, while I run this race.
Guide my feet, while I run this race.
Guide my feet, while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain.

Search my heart...
I'm your child...
Hold my hand...

Sending Forth: This Moment for America's Children

(A PowerPoint presentation pairing the words with images of children is available for download at <http://bit.ly/Pgvhu3>)

Leader: Hear these words from cellist and composer Pablo Casals as we prepare to pursue justice for children with urgency and persistence:

*Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe,
a moment that will never be again.*

*And what do we teach our children?
We teach them that two and two make four,
and that Paris is the capital of France.
When will we also teach them what they are?*

*When will we also teach them what they are?
We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are?
You are a marvel. You are unique.
In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you.
Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move.*

*You may become a Shakespeare, a Michaelangelo, a Beethoven.
You have the capacity for anything.
Yes, you are a marvel.
And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel?
You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children.*

Leader: We don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste. May each of us go forth to work to make this world worthy of our children.

Recessional

Postlude

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:** 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 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.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

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 theme "Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence":** 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.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

- **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.

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.
- **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

Sample Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

In addition to the resources provided below, and those which your planning committee creates or finds, draw from faith resources offered in other sections of the Children's Sabbath resource manual on CDF's website at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

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

Opening Prayer

O Holy One, we know you by many different names and worship you in many different ways. Yet together we believe that you alone are the source and meaning of our existence, and it is your call that we must heed. Help us in this time together to hear your call to help the children...to help them be ready to learn and to succeed.

Disturb our hearts with the harsh reality of poverty, sickness, and violence confronting so many children today and hindering their readiness to learn and succeed. Trouble our consciences that millions of children are left in unsafe and unstimulating situations: in some child care programs, schools, and after school, delaying their readiness to learn and succeed.

Lift up our spirits with examples of people and services that make a difference and are getting children ready to learn and succeed. Strengthen our hands to reach out and our voices to speak up on behalf of children. Finally, we pray that you will inspire us by your divine presence to commit ourselves to serving your children so that each child may learn and succeed and live out the life for which you created them. Amen.

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 left behind by inequitable education, 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 seek justice and protect children so that each is educated and encouraged, prepared for a future bright with promise. Let all people of love and justice say, **Amen**.

Resources for the Time of Lament

The Children¹

Rushing to school, their faces red and expectant,
Dancing and smiling through the classroom doors,
Hopeful for another day, another chance
To live, to grow, to learn.

Many come from loving families,
Eager for new adventures.
For others, school is a welcome change,
A haven from chaos and fear.

A few come in anger and rage,
Daring another one to disappoint,
Afraid to try, to trust, to care
Their hatred masking years of hurt.

How to reach you, little child,
How to touch your heart with peace,
How to remove the hurts ingrained,
How to give your spirit release.

Our God, the answers lie with you.
Let your love and wisdom flow through me.
I place each precious one in your hands.
Give me courage and strength to do your work.
(By Celeste Rossetto Dickey)

Resources for the Call to Service

Following are resources from a variety of faith traditions: the Bahá'í faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Native American traditions, Shinto, Sikhism, and Unitarian Universalism. For each tradition, there is a passage from sacred texts or other writings central to the tradition, a prayer, and a reflection.

These resources may be used in a multi-faith Children's Sabbath service, to spark a Children's Sabbath in congregations of these traditions, or to enrich the Children's Sabbath of congregations from other traditions. They also may be used in an interfaith educational program you develop for your Children's Sabbath.

The Bahá'í Faith

A Bahá'í Reading

The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favour of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory. If a child be trained from his infancy, he will, through the loving care of the Holy Gardener, drink in the crystal waters of the spirit and

¹ By Celeste Rossetto Dickey, reprinted with permission of the author cdickey@uoregon.edu

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

of knowledge, like a young tree amid the rolling brooks. And certainly he will gather to himself the bright rays of the Sun of Truth, and through its light and heat will grow ever fresh and fair in the garden of life.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*)²

Bahá’í Prayers

O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from *Prayers For Young Bahá’ís* —Compiled from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, the Bab, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and the Greatest Holy Leaf)³

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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from *Prayers For Young Bahá’ís* —Compiled from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, the Bab, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and the Greatest Holy Leaf)⁴

A Bahá’í Reflection

Philosophy of Bahá’í Education

Among the greatest objectives of humanity is the education and training of children. This education ensures human progress, and prepares each soul for its entry into the next level of existence.

Education must therefore be divine as well as material. Spiritual education embodies those virtues or attributes which, when enkindled in the hearts and minds of children, not only guide their morals, but also enhance their material education. ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke of this dual necessity, and its benefit: “If...the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.”

(From *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*)⁵

The Bahá’í writings state that, before all else, children must be taught to love and obey God. This love and obedience is represented to a great extent in a child’s relationship with his or her parents and in service to humankind. Because service to the world of humanity is the highest station to which a person can aspire, spiritual education programs must have service to the world of humanity as both a foundation and an outcome.

(From *Summary of the Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education by the National Bahá’í Education Task Force*)⁶

² *Selections from the Writing of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

³ *Prayer for Young Bahá’ís*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

⁴ *Prayer for Young Bahá’ís*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

⁵ *Selections from the Writing of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

⁶ *Summary of the Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education by the National Bahá’í Education Task Force*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

Buddhism

A Buddhist Reading

If educational institutions are narrowly focused or their spirit is confined by the boundary of self and others, then the world's civilization will be held back. Our aim is to advance the world's civilization by expanding educational institutions, transcending the boundary of self and others, widely educating future generations, and enabling all human beings to lead an ideal life.

- 1) As we have entered an era when the defects of education are removed, we ought to educate the children of others as if they were our own children whether or not we have children of our own. For the realization of this ideal, we must support educational institutions as far as we can and we must educate as many children as we can as if they were our own children.
- 2) A nation and society must establish a wide variety of educational institutions and carry out the educational plan successfully.
- 3) In religious orders, societies, nations, and the world, those who carry out the ideal of educating the children of others should be recognized and rewarded for their meritorious deeds.

(From the Scripture of Won Buddhism)

A Buddhist Reading:

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.

(From *The Buddha Speaks*, edited by Anne Bancroft)⁷

A Buddhist Prayer

May Dharmakaya Buddha nurture in us concentration, wisdom, and compassion.

We pray everyone becomes emboldened in heart to see the path that leads to love and peace.

May we spend more time in meditation and silence to see the truth: the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, and the truth about the universe for the benefit of the earth community.

Let us find the faith and courage to plant seeds of hope for children and thus flourish as one Family in One World.

May we recognize interdependency and interconnectedness: that humanity is one family and the world is the house we share. May we become co-workers on earth among congregations and communities to foster the quality of children's life. May the ... Children's Sabbath deepen and strengthen our love for all children.

(By the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee)⁸

⁷ *The Buddha Speaks*, edited by Anne Bancroft, © 2000 by Anne Bancroft. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publication Inc., Boston, MA.
www.shambhala.com

⁸ Reprinted with permission of the author, the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee, Won Buddhism United Nations Office, New York, NY

A Buddhist Reflection

Education, Children, and Responsibility

Buddhists believe in Law of Causality and Rebirth. This understanding invites us to have long-term vision of past, present, and future generations. According to the concept of rebirth, it is our own duties and responsibilities to educate and protect future generations since we want to come back to a happier house and more enlightened society. Therefore, it is everyone's responsibility to create a loving and nurturing environment for children. Since future generations will become our future parents, it is crucial to provide good education and health care for them. It is especially critical to give quality education for all girl children of future generations because they will become our future mothers. The quality of their life and education will have direct impact on our future.

We must understand that the education, health, and welfare of all children is our shared responsibility. The Scripture of Won Buddhism stresses that in order to enhance the world's civilization and endow all human beings with a blessed life, the public is to educate all younger generations, expanding the educational opportunity for spiritual, mental, and physical growth and transcending the boundary between oneself and others. Transforming these words into practice, schools, congregations, community, and government must address the special needs of children, especially those that fall beyond existing safety nets. To eradicate the problems plaguing young people, we must unite at a grassroots level for change. If we can replace our disbelief and disillusion with faith and courage, entering a level of selflessness, we will awaken ourselves to the fact that our youth is our future, and our future is hopeful.

(By the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee)⁹

Christianity

A Christian Reading

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to [God's] chosen ones who cry to [God] day and night? Will [God] delay long in helping them? I tell you, [God] will quickly grant justice to them.

(*Luke 18:1-8a*)

A Christian Prayer

Prayer 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,

⁹ Reprinted with permission of the author, the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee, Won Buddhism United Nations Office, New York, NY

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

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)

Christian Reflection

What do children and youth need from religious leaders and people of faith today? They need us to be present and to care—day in and day out—as they struggle to make it through childhood to adulthood, and to lead in reweaving the fabric of community so essential to family stability. They need the integrity of our lived example of what it means to be a person of faith....

Children need our caring presence and support when the adults in their families fail, hurt, or cannot care for them. They need our rituals, moral clarity, and examples in a faithful community of disciplined caring. And parents, and increasingly grandparents, need our ongoing support as they try to raise children in these challenging times.

Children need our affirmation when they do well and loving and constructive admonitions when they stray....

Children need assurances that God will never abandon or leave them alone through our unfailing presence as God's surrogates in the world. They need adults to see and speak to, smile at and compliment them....

Children need our continuous countercultural voices, examples, and guidance in a world awash with false prophets spouting false values, and they need constant reminders that they are sacred children of God—each equal to all others. Children of color especially need to know their great heritage and that they are made in the image of God and not BET and the latest American definitions of external beauty....

Children need Christian faith leaders to work harder to end the reality that 11 a.m. on Sunday morning is still the most segregated time in America. They need to see you and all faiths reaching out to the needy, the stranger, and partnering with congregations and community institutions of different races, ethnicities, and faiths.

Beyond the charity and service all faiths demand, children need faith institutions to speak and stand up to those who treat them unjustly.... The faith community has extraordinary power and resources to save children and end poverty if it would mobilize and use them effectively.

(By Marian Wright Edelman, excerpted from The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation)

Hinduism

Hindu Readings

I am firmly seated in the hearts of all. From Me comes knowledge and memory and the departing of doubts. I am the Knower and Knowledge of the Vedas. I am the author of Vedanta (the sacred Upanishads and their teachings, the means to spiritual salvation/liberation).

—From the Bhagavad-Gita, XV:15 (God, as Krishna, speaking)

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Oh Brahman Supreme! Formless and colorless are you. But in mystery, through your power you transform your light and radiance into many forms and colors in creation. You bring forth the creation and then withdraw them to yourself. Fill us with the grace of your auspicious thoughts and vision....You are in the woman, in the man. You are in the young boy, in the youthful maiden. You are in the old man who walks with his staff...You are in the dark butterfly, in the green parrot with red eyes...You are without beginning, infinite, beyond time and space. All the worlds had their origins in you.

—From Svetasvatara Upanishad, IV:1-4

Hindu Prayers

āno bhadraṇ krataṇvayantu viśvataḥ |
(Rig Veda 1.89.1a)

May noble thoughts come to us from every side.

īśavāsyam idaṇ sarvaṇ
yatkinca jagatyāṇ jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjīthā
māgrdhaḥ kasya sviddhanam ||
[īśa (eesha) Upanishad -1]

Lord permeates everything in this ever changing world. Enjoy your blessings with detachment. Don't be greedy after someone else's share.

iṣṭānbhogān hi vo devāḥ
dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ |
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo
yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ ||
(Bhagavad-Gītā 3:12)

One who enjoys his blessings accorded by gods without giving back anything in return is indeed a thief.

sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ
sarve santu nirāmayāḥ
sarve bhadraṇi paśyantu
mā kaścit duḥkhabhāg bhavet
(Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad 1.4.14)

May all be happy
May all be healthy
May all be prosperous
May none suffer.

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ
(Traditional epilogue)

Om peace peace peace.

(May the peace in the three realms: Mental, physical and in the atmosphere prevail)

A Hindu Reflection

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ambitious, comprehensive, and laudable effort to protect, preserve, and enlarge the welfare of children. The quality of human life in the 21st century will depend almost entirely on what the world community will do to its children today. In the classical Hindu tradition, however, it is not simply [a matter] of rights but a question of duty, obligation, and virtue which has characterized human relations in Hindu society. [This] is the overarching principle that should govern relations between persons and collectives.

(Dr. Anand Mohan-Hindu)

Islam

Amir Al-Islam
The Muslim Center for Civilizational Dialogue
New York, NY

An Islamic Reading

“Read! In the name of the Lord and Cherisher, Who created—created human beings from a [mere] clot of congealed blood: Read! And thy Lord is Most Beautiful, He who taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not.”

—From the text of the Holy Qur'an, (Chapter 96 verses 1-5)

These were the first verses of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, which is an indication of the importance that Islam places on knowledge of education, particularly for children. The training of children is one of the most sacred acts in Islam, and one that is said to be particularly pleasing to Allah. Throughout all its chapters and verses, the Qur'an emphasizes the significance of knowledge and encourages Muslims to learn and to acquire knowledge, not only of God's laws and religious injunctions, but also of the world of God's creation. The Qur'an is replete with verses inviting human beings to use their intellect, to ponder, to think and to know, for the goal of human life is to discover the Truth. It places the gaining of knowledge as the highest religious activity and one that is most pleasing to God.

An Islamic 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)

Islamic Prayers

“O Allah! You are our Creator. You are our provider and sustainer. All things are in Your hands and all authority rests with You and You alone. You have no helpers and need no assistance. Without Your guidance and light, we are in darkness. Help us. Without Your help, we are helpless. We depend solely on You.”

“O Allah! You know that the children are our future, and we have not done what you have commanded us to do. Have mercy on us and overlook our faults. Protect the children, Allah, for surely you are the only protector. Give us the wisdom and the strength to work together for the welfare of all of our beloved children. O Allah! Save the children.”

An Islamic Reflection

Philosophy of Islamic Education

Islam is a way of life based on knowledge of and belief in the oneness of God, an understanding of God, an understanding of God's laws and religious teachings, and a commitment to implement those instructions in one's life. These teachings are embodied in the sacred text of the Holy Qur'an. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the actual Word of God revealed through the archangel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad(s) and it is the source of all Islamic doctrines and ethics. Muhammad (God's peace and blessings be upon him), the last Prophet of God, was entrusted with explaining, interpreting, and living the teachings of the Qur'an. This body of teachings and practices is embodied in literature that Muslims call Hadith.

The Hadith literature is full of references to the importance of knowledge and education. Prophet Muhammad(s) said, “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” And these teachings have echoed throughout the history of Islam and have inspired Muslims to seek knowledge wherever they can.

According to Islam, education is obligatory for every Muslim, male and female. And the primary objective of education is to teach human beings about the nature of their existence and the objective for their creation, which is to worship and obey God in all of their affairs. Muslims understand that the most important knowledge is that which teaches about the oneness of Almighty God, His laws and religious injunctions. However, Muslims are also exhorted to study the world of nature. The Qur'an constantly refers to the importance of seeing, contemplating, and reasoning about the world of creation and its diverse phenomena.

It is critical that we understand that the education, health and welfare of children are our collective responsibility. Children represent the hope of our future, and it is critical that we educate them properly in order to prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. In Islam, proper education entails teaching children first to love and obey God. This is the foundation of their learning and provides them with understanding of their relationship and obligation to humanity.

Many children in America are suffering from neglect, which threatens to undermine our society's future. If we expect to survive as a human family, we must embrace all children, particularly those unfortunate ones who are on the margins of society.

Note: The Islamic reflection provided by Habibe Ali at the CDF Conference workshop Hearing and Heeding God's Call to Pursue Justice will be posted separately on the website.

Judaism

A Jewish Reading

"You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20 JPS)

A Jewish Prayer

O Source of light and truth,
Creator of the eternal law of goodness,
Well-spring of justice and mercy,
Help us to find knowledge by which to live.
Lead us to take the words we shall speak
Into our hearts and our lives.

Bless all who enter this sanctuary in search and in need,
All who bring to this place the offering of their hearts.
May our worship here lead us to fulfill our words and our hopes
With acts of kindness, peace, and love.

(From *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*)¹⁰

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.

(Adapted from *Rabbi's Manual* by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association)¹¹

Jewish Reflections

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 with parents were brought up to Jerusalem, and those

¹⁰ Excerpts from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

¹¹ From the *Rabbi's Manual*. Reprinted with permission of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

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.”

Baba Batra 21a

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.

(From *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*)¹²

Native American Traditions

A Native American Hymn

(Traditional Choctaw, sung to the tune of “Amazing Grace.”)

Choctaw:

1. Shee-lom-bish Ho-lee-to-pah-mah!
Ish meen-tee pol-lah chah,
Hah-tahk eel-buh-shah pee-ah hah
Ish pee yok-pah-lah-shkee.
2. Pee chok-osh no-see ah-tok-mah
Ahnt ish ok-chuh-lah-shkee,
Ish pee yo-bee-ee-cheek-bah-no;
Ee cheem ah-uh-neh-shkee.

¹² Excerpts from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

3. Shee-lom-bish Ho-lee-to-pah mah!
Peem ah-nok-fee-lah huht
Ok-theel-it kuh-nee-uh ho-kah,
Ish-pee on to mah-shkee.

4. Pee chok-ush nok-hahk-lo yo-kah
Ahnt pee ho-po-luh-chee;
Eel ah-uh-shuh-chee-kah yo-kah,
Ish pee kah-sho-fah-shkee.

English:
(English paraphrase by Harry Folsom)

1. Come, O Holy Spirit! Come to us who are poor in spirit. Bless us!
2. Come and awaken our hearts. Give us your peace, we implore you.
3. O Holy Spirit! Our minds are clothed in darkness. Enlighten us!
4. Our hearts are filled with sorrow. Come and comfort us, sinners that we are. Cleanse us!

A Native American Prayer

O Great Spirit,
Whose breath gives life to the world and
whose voice is heard in the soft breeze,
We need your strength and wisdom.
May we walk in beauty.
May our eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.
Make us wise so that we may understand what you have taught us.
Help us to learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.
Make us always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes
So when life fades, as the fading sunset, our spirits may come to you without shame.

A Native American Reflection

The whole community sits around a circle called a Medicine Wheel. Around that wheel are representatives of all the different aspects of the community. In the East, there's the fool. In the West, there's the witch. In the South, there's the hunter. In the North, there's the creator. Others positioned around the circle are the shaman, the politician, etc. And in the center of the circle is the children's fire. Next to the children's fire sit the grandfather and grandmother.

If you want to build a condominium in the community of Spirit Lake, you have to enter the Medicine Wheel in the East, at the position of the fool. The Question you ask is, "May I build a condo on Spirit Lake?" The fool takes your question, turns it around backwards and asks, "What would Spirit Lake say about such a condo?" You then have to take the question the fool gives you to everyone around the Medicine Wheel. Each will respond to you according to their position in the community. The last people you must ask the question to are the grandmother and grandfather who guard the children's fire. If these two decide that the request is not good for the children's fire, then the answer is "no." They are the only ones in the circle who have veto power. The concept of the ultimate question is simple. Does it hurt or help the children's fire? If it can pass the test of the children's fire, then it can be done.

(Excerpted from materials by Congregations Concerned for Children. This story was told to Magaly Rodriguez Mossman by Robin Van Doren, who heard it from elders of the Hopi nation.)

Shintoism

A Shinto Reading and Reflection

Shintoism believes it is important to transmit faith to children. Parents are taught that a goal in faith should be to rectify their own minds and nurture good children. Konko Kagamitaro (the fourth patriarch of Konkokyo) has expressed the essence of parent-child relations in the following terms:

Both father and mother
And child as well, must be born and raised as one
Father, mother, and child.

While this simple verse speaks of the father, mother, and child being born together, it doesn't refer to literal simultaneous birth, but rather to the fact that the relationships involved all come about at one and the same time. Accordingly, the child must grow at the same time—and at the same rate—as the parent grows. In Shinto today, children are viewed as beings in relation to parents; the perception is thus that the “problems of children” are at one and the same time the “problems of parents.”

(By the Very Rev. Tatsuo Miyake–Shinto)¹⁴

Sikhism

Amrit Kaur
Guru Gobind Singh Foundation
Washington, D.C.

A Sikh Reading

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 the Wares 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.

—From the *Guru Granth Sahib*

A Sikh Hymn

You are the Father, the Mother, we are Your children
In Your grace lies our whole joy.
No one knows Your limits, O Lord,
You, the maker of our destiny, are
the highest of the high.
All Your creation is strung on Your thread:
And all you have created is in Your command.
You alone know Your end and state:
So, Nanak, Your servant, is forever sacrifice unto You.

¹⁴ The Very Rev. Tatsuo Miyake–Shinto–WCRP President and Chief Senior Minister Designated, Konko Church of Izuo, Japan.

A Sikh Reflection

Sikh religion started in India in the 15th century. The founder was called Guru Nanak, who was succeeded by nine other Gurus who radiated the same divine light that manifested in Guru Nanak. Sikh scripture is a magnificent collection of spiritual poetry, rendered in Classical raags. Liturgy and hymns are inseparable in Sikh scripture. This massive volume of inspirational and devotional hymns is revered by the Sikhs as Guru (Divine Master) and is addressed as Guru Granth Sahib. Hence kirtan (Sikh way of singing hymns) is an integral part of worship. Sikh places of worship are called Gurdwara. There is no Sabbath Day designated in Sikhism. One is supposed to have constant remembrance of God always, though there are special morning and evening prayers.

Sikh children are taught these prayers at an early age. They are also taught kirtan (hymn singing) in classical raags to the accompaniment of musical instruments (mainly harmonium and Tabla). In Gurdwaras, classes are held for children to teach them Punjabi, the language of scripture and Sikh philosophy. They are also taught the Sikh history. At many places summer camps are conducted to enthuse the children, to educate them, and to inspire them to be good Sikhs and equally good citizens. These camps are held in natural environments to bring them in tune to the Creator and also to make them aware of the abundant blessing of Nature, for the Sikhs believe that this whole universe is the manifestation of the same divine light who is the Creator, Nourisher, and Protector. Strong emphasis is laid on character building and in developing leadership qualities. Sikhism believes in the equality of mankind and advocates strongly that all the human race is one. To perpetuate this concept Sikh youths are sent to inter-religious youth retreats and camps.

In some educational centers many modern techniques, such as computers, slide shows, and live discussions are employed for the purpose of education. Since gurdwaras are the center of religious growth, many times youths are encouraged to conduct, participate in, and perform in regular congregations. In Sikhism, there is equality of sexes so male and female children alike can participate in all the events. Children can lead in prayer service, sing hymns, recite anecdotes from the biographies of the Gurus, and perform other tasks required of them. Like all other religious communities, Sikhism believes that children will be the torch-bearers for tomorrow and they have to be trained in the ways of religious traditions while being part of the mainstream American society.

Unitarian Universalism

A Unitarian Universalist Prayer

Giver of all life and love,
You, who are creator of all natural beauty,
Your, who are creator of all living things,
We your children thank you for all you have given us.
Help us to dedicate our lives to nurturing children;
To instill in them the sense of value they need;
To design and build for them communities of love.
Help us to be responsible for meeting their needs;
To teach by example so they may grow in their own right;
To provide the resources to improve and sustain their lives.
Help us to be sensitive listeners, and respectful of differing opinions;
To work with patience and gain understanding;

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

To learn from our children how to live with loving hearts.

Giver of all life and love,

May we share all your gifts with the children,

And may they share theirs, now and in the future.

A Unitarian Universalist Reflection

The Great End in Religious Instruction

The great end in religious instruction is not to stamp our minds upon the young, but to stir up their own;

Not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own;

Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire a fervent love of truth;

Not to form an outward regularity but to touch inward springs;

Not to bind them by ineradicable prejudices to our particular sect or peculiar notions,

But to prepare them for impartial, conscientious

judging of whatever subjects may be offered to their decision;

Not to burden the memory, but to quicken and strengthen the power of thought;

Not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, but to awaken the conscience, the moral discernment.

In a word, the great end is to awaken the soul, to excite and cherish spiritual life.

(By William Ellery Channing from *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Resources for the Commitment to Action

Prayer of Commitment

God of justice and mercy, we come before you now with a strong sense of the fierce urgency of now.

Hear our prayers as we offer them to you.

Let us pray for the end of child poverty now... *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for comprehensive health and mental health coverage and access for every child and pregnant woman. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for the protection of every child from abuse and for the connection of all children to caring, permanent families. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for the provision of quality early childhood education and development programs for every child. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for the kind of public education that ensures that every child can read and that all young people graduate from high school. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for an end to the criminalization of children and for the provision of prevention and early intervention.. . *(silence)*

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

And now, gracious God, we offer to you our commitments to action. By your spirit, help us to pursue justice for children and families in our nation. Give us the strength of will to sustain our own responses, both individually and together. Amen.

(By Martha Bettis Gee)

Prayer of Commitment

Leader: Let us pray, turning our hearts to the one we call holy.

For our nation's more than 16 million children living in poverty and for the parents who work and still are poor,

People: We pray for justice.

Leader: For our nation's children being pushed along the Cradle to Prison Pipeline rather than set on paths of promise,

People: We pray for justice.

Leader: For our nation's millions of children in schools with too few resources and too much discouragement, who flail and fail without the support and opportunity to achieve,

People: We pray for justice.

Leader: For the children who are hungry and homeless,

People: We pray for mercy.

Leader: For the children who are hurt by violence in their homes or schools or neighborhoods,

People: We pray for mercy.

Leader: For all—young and old and in-between—who suffer in mind, body, and spirit,

People: We pray for mercy.

Leader: For the children who don't think they matter and don't know they are beloved by you,

People: We pray for faith.

Leader: For the parents and teachers and social workers and others caring for children who have given up on themselves or their children,

People: We pray for faith.

Leader: For ourselves, when we feel like we can't make a difference,

Leader: We pray for faith.

Leader: These things we pray trusting in the holy one who was and is and ever will be. Amen. *(Before the prayers of the people, pass along the pews baskets containing crayons, pencil stubs, chalk, Band-Aids®, pennies, and pens. Invite each congregation member to take one item. These items will be referenced in the Prayers of the People. Invite them to respond to each petition "hear our prayer." Afterward, encourage members to take the item home and to pray for those it symbolizes.)*

Prayer of Commitment

Eternal Source of Love and Justice, the challenges facing children and those who care for and about them can seem so huge and so abstract that we lose touch with the reality. Help us to remember that the needs and prayers of each child, each parent, each teacher, each caring person are as real and individual to you as the items in our hands.

(Holding up a crayon)

And so we pray this day for the child care providers and parents who provide safe, warm, stimulating environments to spark a love of learning and fuel the curiosity of our youngest children as they scribble with crayons, pet the hamster, and try to taste the Play-Doh®. We pray especially for those providers who are underpaid and undervalued, for those parents who can't find quality, affordable care for their children while they work, and for the children whose potential is squelched in poor care. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a piece of chalk)

We pray for the teachers, covered in chalk dust, who devote themselves to educating our children and helping them flourish to their potential. For their dedication, imagination, and concern we give you thanks.

We pray especially for those teachers who have given up on themselves or on the children, those who feel unsafe, those who feel unappreciated. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a pencil stub)

We pray for students gripping pencils as they strive to learn, especially those faced with the challenges of disability, unsafe schools, low expectations from their parents, teachers, and selves, and inadequate resources. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a Band-Aid®)

We pray for children who are sick and injured, whose ability to learn is hampered by vision and hearing problems or illness. We pray especially for those children who don't have health insurance to get the care they need, and for their parents who worry about what to do, who rely on Band-Aids® when prevention or treatment is needed. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a penny)

We pray for the youths who are preparing for the world of work, that you will guide them in discovering their gifts and talents, skills and aptitudes, and surround them with teachers and adults who will get them ready to succeed. We pray especially for those young people who fear they will not be able to find work and earn a living, who don't have adults to help them prepare, and who despair of ever succeeding. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a pen)

We pray for our leaders in government, business, and the media, that the laws they write, the bottom lines that are inked, and the stories they pen will demonstrate an investment and priority in our children today for our future tomorrow. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.** Amen.

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
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)

Candle-Lighting and Commitment to Action

Reader 1: "It is better to light a single candle than to sit and curse the darkness."
(Reader 1 lights a candle.)

Readers 2 and 3: "Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." (Margaret Mead)
(Readers 2 and 3 light their candle from Reader 1's candle.)

Reader 4: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)
(Reader 4 lights candle from reader 3's candle.)

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Reader 5: "Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God." (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)
(Reader 5 lights candle from reader 4's candle.)

Reader 6: "In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth."
(Mahatma Gandhi.)
(Reader 6 lights candle from reader 5's candle.)

In silence, let us each seek the path we will follow from this place to be a blessing to children and raise up the next generation.

(silence)

As we now share the light and illumine our paths forward, let us sing together.

(Readers disperse with lit candles to light candles of those in the front row, who will pass the light to those next to them. If circumstances in your setting do not permit lighting candles among those gathered, omit the group candle lighting other than the readers, and simply move to the song.)

Congregation (sings): This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. (x3) let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Shine to help end poverty...
Shine it for the children...
Shine to be a blessing...

A Prayer for Children by Ina J. Hughs

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 also by 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.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

And we pray for those
Who never get dessert,
Who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,
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 pursue justice and protect children.

(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
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)

Resources for the Blessing

Charge and Blessing

Go forth from this place to answer God's call:
Go forth from this place to pursue justice;
Go forth from this place to protect children.

Draw strength from each other;
Draw strength from your faith;
Draw strength from the knowledge that children are counting on you.

And may the blessing of the Holy
surround and sustain you and every child,
this day and forever more. Amen.

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.

Sending Forth

Friends, with God's grace we are ready, ready to go into the world and help all children learn and succeed.
We are ready, ready to spread the word of God's love for children.
We are ready, ready to support and uphold each other as we serve children and speak out for them.
Know that you go into a world ready and waiting, urgently waiting, for your loving service.
And know that God goes with you, even before you, into that world and work. 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.



Children's Defense Fund