

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

Dear Faithful Friend of Children,

Thank you for joining in this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend. Throughout the two decades that the Children's Sabbath has been celebrated, religious congregations of many faiths have learned more about the urgent problems facing children in our nation, explored the texts and teachings of their faith traditions that call us to respond to children's needs with justice and compassion, and, most importantly, reached out to improve the lives of children and spoken out for justice on their behalf. Countless individuals and places of worship have initiated, renewed, or extended their efforts for children as a result of joining in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths.

Yet we have so much work to do to fulfill America's promise to all our children and to live out our faith commitments to embody the justice, compassion, and commitment to the common good that God intends.

Many changes have occurred since the Children's Sabbath began. Back in 1992, faxes still seemed like a fast and efficient way to communicate, the internet was in its infancy, and cell phones were relatively scarce and about the size of a pound of butter. Yes, some things have changed.

But other things—far more important and urgent—haven't changed. When the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths began in 1992, an American baby was born into poverty every 32 seconds, joining the one in five children living in poverty at the time. Today, our nation's child poverty rate is still one of every five children and children are the poorest age group in America. Worse, the number of children living in extreme poverty has grown and the gap between rich and poor is the highest ever recorded.

And for the youngest children, in their most crucial developmental years, the odds are even worse. Poor children at nine months are already behind their higher income peers in cognitive development; the gap is even wider by 24 months. Early Head Start and Head Start and good quality, affordable, accessible child care can help ensure that poor children don't start off behind, but too few young children are able to participate in these rich early learning experiences.

Children in poverty and children of color face other disparities that can push them off the path of healthy development and into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline. The poverty gap contributes to and stems from other gaps in family structure, early childhood development, abuse and neglect, health, and more: children in poverty are more likely to live in fragile families, to lag in early childhood development, suffer abuse and neglect, be uninsured and in poor health, and experience other gaps that put them far behind children who aren't poor.

By the time children reach kindergarten, children who have been living in poverty are already falling behind their non-poor peers and it is extremely difficult for poor children to catch up. Can you imagine what it feels like to be five years old and already have the odds stacked against you?

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The gaps get bigger as children progress through school. In fourth, eighth, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, more than 60 percent of America's children of all racial and income groups are not reading and doing math at grade level. For Black and Hispanic students the achievement levels are even more dismal: nearly 80 percent of poor and minority children are reading and doing math below grade level.

Pervasive inequities in educational funding, resources, and opportunities have placed millions of poor and minority children in low-performing schools with inadequate facilities and ineffective teachers. The overrepresentation of poor and minority children in grade retention, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions and special education have interacted with low teacher expectations which contribute to poor and minority children's discouragement, low self esteem and disengagement from school.

The education gap leads to an income gap. Low levels of school completion have lifelong economic implications. The median income for adults 25 years of age and older with less than a high school diploma is about \$19,500. This contrasts sharply with a median income of about \$27,400 for those with a high school diploma, and \$46,900 for those with a bachelor's degree. Attainment of at least a high school diploma is the single most effective, preventive strategy against adult poverty.

It's not just our children who are failing; *we are failing*—as adults, as citizens, as people of faith—if we let these unacceptably low levels of student achievement and high levels of poverty persist and if we allow the unfair gaps separating minority and poor children from their better off and White peers to continue and grow. We are *all* created in the image of God, and we say we love and trust and praise a God who cherishes each and every child. If that is true, we can't stand by as some children fall behind and through the cracks—even if our “own” children are doing well.

The best hope children have of lifting themselves out of poverty is a quality education with a good job at the end of the line. That's why the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary Children's Sabbath focuses on closing the education achievement gap so that *all* children learn, succeed, and can look forward to a future free of poverty and bright with hope and promise. Please read my article, “The Law of Unintended Consequences” that follows this letter for a deeper look at what's wrong and, importantly, what we can do to make it right.

In closing, I offer this prayer that each of us will draw on our faith to help us do what God expects of us as we pursue justice and protect children.

O God, by faith, like Abraham, let us obey Your call to leave our comfortable homes and set out for strange places although we do not know for certain where we are going.

*Embolden us to venture to our legislators' offices, struggling schools, and communities burdened by poverty to seek justice and strengthen children.*

By faith, like Noah, let us heed Your signs and warnings and build sturdy arks to rescue our children from current and coming floods.

*Mobilize us now to respond to the rising tide of poverty in which too many children are drowning and the achievement gap tsunami that swallows up millions of poor and minority children.*

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By faith, like Isaac and Jacob, let us seek Your blessings on our children's futures.

*Open our eyes now to see how we can assure all children the gift of a good education so they can realize their promise.*

By faith, like Moses, let us leave Pharaoh's house and head across the wilderness to lead our oppressed children to freedom.

*Help us to improve early childhood experiences and education so that every child's potential is unlocked.*

By faith, like Joseph, let us turn evil into good and welcome our erring brothers and kin with a spirit of reconciliation and love.

*Help us to cherish each child and never give up on a single one.*

By faith, like the child David, let us go out without fear to face the Goliaths of our day with slingshots of righteousness and justice confident of Your divine guidance and protection. *Amen.*

(Adapted from *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children* by Marian Wright Edelman)

God has created each and every child as a treasure and expects us to love and protect and seek justice for each and every one. We don't have a moment to wait or a child to waste. The Children's Defense Fund looks forward to working with you to make our nation and world worthy of its children. May your Children's Sabbath celebration be an inspiring weekend that engages each of your members in action to pursue justice for our children all year and throughout the years to come.

In faith and hope,



Marian Wright Edelman

## Law of Unintended Consequences

By Marian Wright Edelman

Posted on The Huffington Post Feb. 11, 2011

The federal government should be the engine of equality, not the locomotive of inequality. With the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Congress has the opportunity to fundamentally transform American education and set it on the path towards equality and excellence for all children.

When ESEA was last reauthorized by Congress in 2002 with overwhelming bipartisan support, the Bush administration called the new law the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB)—a play on the Children Defense Fund’s trademarked mission statement to “Leave No Child Behind.”

To many, the rhetoric of the new law’s title promised to match the reality: it aimed at measuring the progress of every child, in every school, every year; data would be broken down to identify racial/ethnic and socioeconomic achievement gaps. Schools, districts, and states would document and track the academic performance of all groups of students including students with disabilities who were not counted at all for so long. Every child was to be held to high standards and supported. Surely, no child would be left behind.

But it soon became clear that NCLB’s titular promise was merely a rhetorical fig leaf covering up new ways for our nation’s schools to leave millions of children behind. NCLB’s narrow focus on “high stakes” testing and its overreliance on sanctions that punish struggling schools encouraged states to lower standards, districts to narrow the curriculum, schools to push at-risk children out of school by suspending or expelling them prior to test day, and teachers to teach to the test. No child—regardless of background—benefits from mindless test preparation day in and day out at the hands of often overwhelmed, underprepared, and poorly supported teachers.

Under NCLB, most children in America have been left behind.

U.S. students, who once led the world in academic achievement, are behind their counterparts in other countries, performing in the “average” or “below average” range on the most recent (2010) Programme for International Student Achievement (PISA ). The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results are equally discouraging: more than 60 percent of students in grades four, eight, and 12 are unable to perform at grade level. More than 25 percent of all high school students drop out or do not graduate on time. For minority students the results are far worse: 80 percent in grades four, eight, and 12 cannot perform at grade level, and more than 40 percent later drop out or do not graduate on time. Many students who do graduate lack the skills necessary for college or entry-level jobs in civilian and military life.

Our country is falling behind in the globalized, competitive economy as well. Citing our comparatively poor graduation rates and weak academic performance, Stanford Professor Linda Darling-Hammond predicts that America’s workforce will not qualify for many U.S. jobs in the very near future. In *The Flat World of Education* (2010), she writes: “If these trends continue, by 2012, America will have 7 million jobs in science and technology fields, ‘green’ industries, and other fields that cannot be filled by U.S. workers who have been adequately educated for them.”

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If NCLB is not changed and changed soon, the outlook for America and America's children is grim indeed.

Fortunately, we do not need to "wait for Superman" to turn American education around and provide all America's children a high quality education. The 112<sup>th</sup> Congress can and must save the day by enacting a bipartisan reauthorized ESEA that strengthens the law's focus on accountability and does away with its disabling sanctions, replacing them with incentives for states and districts to dramatically improve student learning.

The administration's Blueprint for Education Reform provides a framework for a reauthorized ESEA that does just that, and the Children's Defense Fund urges Congress to use the Blueprint as a starting point.

To ensure that the new law truly leaves no child behind, Congress will need to go beyond the Blueprint and include provisions for education excellence for our most vulnerable children: children in concentrated poverty, children in need of full-day kindergarten, children at risk of dropping out or being pushed out of school, children in juvenile detention, and children in foster care. These children are most at risk of dropping out of school and into the cradle-to-prison pipeline which leads to dead-end lives, costing their families and communities heartache and costing the nation billions of dollars.

NCLB was enacted with overwhelming support, and its framers dreamed of a law that would give every child an even start with a good education as a foundation. But the law's unintended consequences have undermined our children's learning and America's standing in the world. Now, in 2011, it is time to turn American education around and make the dream a reality. Join us in urging Congress to act now to reauthorize ESEA in a way that truly leaves no child in America behind.

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“Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue:” Answering God’s Call to Protect Children is the theme of the 2011 *National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths* weekend that this year will focus 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.

With the authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Congress has the opportunity to set American education on the path towards equity and excellence for all children. To ensure that the new law truly leaves no child behind, Congress will need to go beyond the President’s Blueprint for Education Reform and include provisions for education excellence for our most vulnerable children: children in concentrated poverty, children in need of full-day kindergarten, children at risk of dropping out or being pushed out of school, children in juvenile detention, and children in foster care. These children are most at risk of dropping out of school and into the cradle-to-prison pipeline that leads to dead-end lives, costing their families and communities heartache and costing the nation billions of dollars.

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.

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Others join with one or more places of worship in shared services bringing their congregations together. In some communities all of the congregations work together to sponsor an interfaith service to which the entire community is invited. Often, local organizations serving children or working on their behalf join in the planning of these community-wide multi-faith Children's Sabbaths.

A Children's 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](mailto:SDaleyHarris@childrensdefense.org).

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

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

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

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.

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### **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 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

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facing children across our nation and provides a call and support to respond to improve children's lives. And while Children's Day is more typically celebrated only in churches, from the start the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend has been a multi-faith movement.

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

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

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

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 are in Planning Your Children's Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths available for download from the Children's Defense Fund's Web site, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org). 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!

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### **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.

### **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 Have Celebrated the Children's Sabbath**

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.

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

**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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What will your place of worship plan? 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 2011 *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](mailto:SDaleyHarris@childrensdefense.org).