

Resolve to Do a New Thing for Our Children

By Matt Rosen

It is time to open our eyes to the crises endured by too many children every day in America— crises resulting in heartbreak and lost potential in their lives—and realize we don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste before we resolve to do a *new thing* to bring help and hope to our nation's children.

When we live in a society that glorifies violence above cooperation, promotes individual consumption over communal responsibility and seeks quick pleasures instead of enduring love, we become aware that these shameful statistics reveal not a problem with our children, but a problem with our adults. Children model the behavior of the generation ahead of them. If our actions towards children do not reflect Jesus' commandment to love God and love neighbor as we love ourselves, how can we expect our children to behave differently?

To make "every day in America" an opportunity for all children to fulfill their God-given potential, we need to create living and learning environments that celebrate children as sacred gifts. This effort requires us regularly to examine our behavior to determine if and how we contribute to our children's crises or to building the loving relationships to which God calls us. We can further establish the Beloved Community by engaging in one of the following twenty-five actions focused on our children, thereby modeling what it means to live as a child of God. The Children's Defense Fund wants to work in partnership with you as you and your congregation resolve to do at least one *new thing* to improve the lives of children.



Learn about the State of Your Local Children

1. What are the graduation and drop out rates of the public and private high schools within a 10-mile radius of your church?
2. What free after-school and summer programs are available for children in your neighborhood?
3. How many Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program eligible children in your area are not enrolled?
4. What is the breakdown of arrests and incarceration of minors by age, gender, race/ethnicity, and offense in your city?
5. Within your congregation and surrounding area, how many children are being reared in the foster care system or by someone other than their parent (such as a grandparent or friend of the family)?

Mentor a Child or Young Adult

6. Show interest by initiating an on-going conversation with a child on their school and home life.
7. Promote learning by starting or volunteering at an after-school tutoring program for youth.
8. Open minds by exchanging music, books, and movies with a youth and following up with a discussion on how it impacts one's life.
9. Prepare the future by working with local businesses to start a young adult apprentice program.
10. Raise expectations by inviting a youth to events at the next educational level (e.g., taking a high school student to a college play).

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Become a mentor to the children living in your community

Promote Public Benefits for Low-Income Families

16. Host a health fair to ensure all children who are eligible for Medicaid or your State Children's Health Insurance Program are enrolled.
17. Provide free tax filing assistance to low-income working families to ensure they take advantage of the Earned Income and Children's Tax Credits (increasing the family income up to 40%).
18. Ready materials explaining where and how families can apply for Food Stamps, Head Start, Federal Nutrition Programs and other similar benefits.
19. Support your local food pantries and shelters that serve low-income families.
20. Create and distribute a calendar of free family-friendly community events.

Provide Respite for Kinship and Foster Care Providers

21. Encourage families to spend quality time together by hosting a movie or game night at your church.
22. Start a support group for single parents, kinship care providers and foster families.
23. Invite a child of an overexerted care provider to sit with you during the worship service.
24. Prepare care packages of new clothes, personal toiletries and a welcome gift for children who are placed into foster care homes without their own belongings during emergency situations.
25. Create a college scholarship fund specifically for children in foster care and kinship care families.

Advocate on Behalf of Children

11. Register with CDF (www.childrensdefense.org) and learn about how you can lead your congregation's participation in the Children's Defense Fund's interfaith National Observance of Children's Sabbath® celebration and attend the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Institute for Child Advocacy Ministry.
12. Write, call and meet with your local, state and national elected officials about how we can best serve our children so they can grow and thrive.
13. Work with others to make sure that at least one caring community member attends every public school student suspension hearing.
14. Host candidate forums for your local school board races and talk about the issues that need to be addressed for all children to be able to learn.
15. Vote in every election based in part on the candidate's priority of improving the wellbeing of all children.

Every Day in America

4	children are killed by abuse or neglect.
5	children or teens commit suicide.
8	children or teens are killed by firearms.
32	children or teens die from accidents.
78	babies die before their first birthdays.
155	children are arrested for violent crimes.
296	children are arrested for drug crimes.
928	babies are born at low birthweight.
1,154	babies are born to teen mothers.
1,511	public school students are corporally punished.*
2,145	babies are born without health insurance.
2,421	children are confirmed as abused or neglected.
2,467	high school students drop out.*
2,483	babies are born into poverty.
3,477	children are arrested.
4,184	babies are born to unmarried mothers.
18,221	public school students are suspended.*

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

From Children's Defense Fund's website, www.childrensdefense.org (3/08).

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This article is featured in the Spring 2008 edition of The Children's Corner, a newsletter published by National Ministries, American Baptist Churches USA. Some facts have been updated. View the article at: http://www.nationalministries.org/children/docs/Childrens_Corner_2008spring.pdf