

# 2008 Children's Sabbath Christian Lesson Plans for All Ages

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**The following Christian Lesson Plans are designed for a one-hour class.  
They may be used in a variety of ways:**

- Use the lesson plans instead of your regular curriculum on the Children's Sabbath;
- Incorporate parts of the lessons into your regular curriculum;
- Use the lessons during a special Children's Sabbath weekend; or
- Use on a weekend or weeknight preceding the Children's Sabbath.

The lesson plans for young children and elementary children use the scripture from Isaiah for the Peaceable Kingdom and focus on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision for the Beloved Community. The lesson plans for middle and high school students and adults use Luke 16: 19-31. If your church has a multi-age Sunday School, read over the plans for all ages of children and choose activities that best fit the ages of the children in your group.

Most of the lesson plans have activities whose end result is a product that can be shared with the entire congregation. Decide in advance how and when these results might be shared. Will you present them after the education hour or after worship on the day of the Children's Sabbath? Could you use them as part of the Children's Sabbath service of worship? Will you extend the focus on children in need and share the creative end products the following week? Or you may want to use these lessons the week before the Children's Sabbath so you can incorporate the creative results into the Children's Sabbath celebration.

Each lesson plan includes as a response communicating with Members of Congress about the needs of children. If you like, add a service component as well: Have classes assemble packets of supplies for children in hospitals, collect baby care products for families in homeless shelters, collect school supplies or have a canned food drive. Tailor the specific act of mercy to the unique needs of children and families in your community. Check the Children's Sabbaths Manual to get other ideas.

**In the years since Dr. King sounded the alarm about the triple evils of racism, militarism, and materialism, the interaction of these factors and their effects have only gotten more entrenched. Whether we realize it or not, all of us have been shaped by these forces in complex ways. The power of racism and its intersection with poverty are undeniable, but painful to explore. As you plan, spend time in prayer. Seek discernment so that you may plan the most constructive ways to help children, youth, and adults alike to confront these issues in ways that will move your congregation to action on behalf of children.**

# Young Children's Lesson Plan: Living Together and Helping Other Children

## Preschool (Ages 3-5)

**Scripture Passages:** Isaiah 11:1-9; Luke 6:31

**Focus:** God wants us to live together in peace. God wants all children to have what they need to live and grow. God wants us to treat others the way we want to be treated.

### Lesson Objectives

Children will:

- Hear about how God wants us to live together and care about one another.
- Hear Jesus' Golden Rule for living together.
- Identify things all children need to live and grow.
- Respond by making their voices heard in a group letter.

### Materials

- Colored felt-tipped markers
- Cut-out magazine pictures of all kinds of people
- Instant camera or digital pictures of each child
- Length of clear self-adhesive shelf liner, or sheet of mural paper
- Masking tape
- Variety of stuffed animals, enough for each child to play with one
- Poster, "God's Peaceable Place"
- Prepared sheet of newsprint for experience story/letter (see teacher preparation)
- Simple line drawings of the animals named in the story poem (*optional*)

### Teacher Preparation

- Read the two scripture passages. Imagine for yourself what the Peaceable Kingdom as envisioned in Isaiah would be like. Then imagine what it would be like to live as a part of Dr. King's Beloved Community. Pray for yourself, the children in your group and children everywhere.
- Review the lesson plan and gather necessary materials.
- Decide how you will create the mural. Using a

length of clear self-adhesive shelf liner makes this an easy activity for young children. Without removing the paper backing, tape a three- or four-foot section of the plastic to a wall at child's eye level with the paper backing facing out. When it is time to make the mural, gently pull off the paper backing so the sticky surface is revealed. Children can then easily attach cut out magazine pictures to the surface. If you decide simply to use mural paper, tape it to the wall at child's eye level.

- Make a title sign for the mural: "God's Peaceable Place"
- Also talk with parents and get permission to take an instant camera or a digital picture of each child, or request a small photo from home. These pictures will be included in the mural.
- Prepare a sheet of newsprint for the letter writing activity. Using manuscript printing (upper and lowercase letters), print something like the following:

Dear Grown-ups,  
We are children in the \_\_\_\_\_ class. We have learned that God wants us to live together. God wants us to get along. God wants children to have the things they need to live and grow. Here are some things all children need:

- Set aside a space in the room for God's Peaceable Place. Use colored masking tape to make a circle on the floor and place some floor cushions around inside. On poster board, make a sign that reads "God's Peaceable Place" and post it in the area.
- Gather an assortment of stuffed animals, including those that would normally be predators and prey (lions, rabbits, lambs, bears and so forth).
- Get animal crackers or teddy grahams for a snack. Also have napkins, cups and cold water available.
- Read over the story poem, written in the form of "*The House That Jack Built*." If desired, locate and download from the Internet simple line drawings of the animals in the poem. You may also be able to find line drawings in children's coloring books.

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

### Overview

- Activity for Early Arrivers
- Opening (5 minutes)
- Introduction to the Message (15 minutes)
- Exploring the Message (15 minutes)
- Snack (10 minutes)
- Responding to the Message (10 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

### Activity for Early Arrivers

As the children arrive, welcome them and invite them to choose a stuffed animal to play with. If the children are not part of a regular church school class and do not know one another or the teachers, make nametags for each child. Print the child's name in manuscript printing (using upper and lower case letters) and attach to his or her clothing.

If possible and if you have the permission of the child's family members, take an instant or digital photograph of each child as he or she arrives (unless you have requested a photo from home). If this is not an option, give each child a 3 x 5 card or sheet of paper and markers and suggest that they draw a picture of themselves. Print the child's name on the bottom of his or her self-portrait.

If your group includes young three-year-olds, be aware that children of this age often are more intent on scribbling with crayons or markers or may draw a simple mandella shape when asked to draw themselves.

### Opening

When most children have arrived, invite them to join you inside the circle. Encourage them to bring their stuffed animal with them. Show the children the poster you made and tell them that the circle is "God's Peaceable Place," a place where the children can get along with one another without fighting and where children can get the things they need to live and grow.

Play a simple game using the animals. Say, for example: **If you have a lion, stand up.... If you have a bear, stand up.... If you have a bunny, stand up....**

Ask: **Which of these animals do you think would not get along? If a bunny saw a lion, what do you think the bunny would do?**

Encourage children's responses and comments about how some animals are scary to others or some animals don't like or trust others.

### Introduction to the Message

Say: **Today is a special day called Children's Sabbath. Our church is learning more about what we can do to be sure all children have the things they need to live and grow.**

### Hear a Bible Story

Say: **We know that some animals are afraid of others because they know certain animals might hurt them. And some animals just don't like other animals. But in the Bible, there is a wonderful story about a time to come when animals will get along with one another. People will get along with one another, too, and every child will have all the things he or she needs to live and grow.**

Show the children where the story is found in Isaiah. Holding the Bible in your lap, tell the following story poem (which is structured like "*The House That Jack Built*"). If you have been able to get line drawings or clip art of the animals named in the poem, show them to the children at the appropriate time, or give the drawings to the children and let them hold them up when they are named. Encourage the children to join in on the phrase, "in God's Peaceable Place."

## God's Peaceable Place

This is God's Peaceable Place.  
Here are the wolf and the baby sheep  
who live together in God's Peaceable Place.  
Here is the leopard with spotted skin,  
who yawns and stretches and lies down in  
the place where the kid is going to sleep,  
where the wolf is living with the baby sheep  
in God's Peaceable Place.

Here is the lion and here is the calf.  
Together they eat and together they laugh,  
and here is the leopard with spotted skin,  
who yawns and stretches and lies down in  
the place where the kid is going to sleep,  
where the wolf is living with the baby sheep  
in God's Peaceable Place.

Here is the cow, along with the bear,  
side by side they are grazing there,  
while their babies are sleeping side by side,  
without the need to run and hide.  
While, like the ox, the lion will munch,  
on straw for his breakfast and straw for his  
lunch.  
Babies and children are playing around  
the holes where snakes live underground.  
And here is the lion and here is the calf,  
Together they eat and together they laugh,  
as well as the leopard with spotted skin,

who yawns and stretches and lies down in  
the place where the kid is going to sleep,  
where the wolf is living with the baby sheep  
in God's Peaceable Place.

And who do you think is showing the way,  
for living together every day?  
It's a little child, like you (*point to child*) and  
you, and you and you and you and you!  
A little child is helping to show,  
the way that God wants us all to go.  
And here is the cow, along with the bear,  
side by side they are grazing there,  
while their babies are sleeping side by side,  
without the need to run and hide.  
While, like the ox, the lion will munch,  
on straw for his breakfast and straw for his  
lunch.  
Babies and children are playing around  
the holes where snakes live underground.  
And here is the lion and here is the calf,  
Together they eat and together they laugh,  
as well as the leopard with spotted skin,  
who yawns and stretches and lies down in  
the place where the kid is going to sleep,  
where the wolf is living with the baby sheep  
In God's Peaceable Place.

## Exploring the Message

### Make a Mural

Remind the children that God wants all kinds of people to live together and to get along, and God wants all children to have all the things they need to live and grow. Invite the children to sort through the magazine pictures of people and choose some to make a mural. They can either simply stick the picture to the self-adhesive shelf liner or use a glue stick to glue the picture to a piece of mural paper. Also cut out the photo of the child (or the picture the child drew) and invite each child to add his or her picture to the mural.

### Conversation

When the mural is done, look at all the different pictures of people. Talk together about the people whose pictures the children put on the mural, pointing out the likenesses and differences the children see.

Say: **All kinds of people can live together in God's Peaceable Place, but it's not always easy to work or play together with others. There are all kinds of people on our mural, and there are all kinds of people who need to learn to live and work and play together. And all those people, not just some, must have everything they need to live and grow.**

Point out the pictures of the children themselves. Say that we are a part of God's Peaceable Place, too.

Ask:

- **What are some of the things you need to live?**  
(Some possible responses are: *food, a place to live, toys, a cozy bed to sleep in, and so forth.*)
- **Suppose someone in God's Peaceable Place doesn't have any breakfast to eat when other children do. Or suppose someone is sick and can't get medicine to get better, or doesn't have any toys to play with. What do you suppose we should do? What can we do to help children who need food or a place to live or medicine?**

Tell the children that they do not have to do this all by themselves; it takes children and youth and adults working all together to do what needs to be done. Children can do many things: They can tell a grown-up if they see a child who needs help; they can help a child who has fallen down; they can hug a child who is crying.

Tell the children that Jesus had a special rule called the Golden Rule that tells us how we should live together in God's Peaceable Place: **Do to others as you would have them do to you.**

Teach the children a simple rhythmic chant, asking them to repeat each word or phrase and the motions after you:

Do (*clap twice*)

Do to others (*point index fingers away from self to others with both hands*)

As you would have. . . (clap) them. . . (clap) do. . .

(clap) to . . . (clap) you (*point back to self with both thumbs*).

### Prepare a Partner Snack

Have the children wash their hands or use hand wipes. Say that before eating a snack, you will thank God for it. Ask the children to bow their heads and say a brief blessing, such as the following:

**Thank you, God, for this snack, and thank you for the cold water we'll drink. We know some children do not have good food to eat or cold water to drink. Some do not have a warm bed to sleep in. Help us to find ways to help other children. Amen.**

Pair each child up with a partner (if you have an uneven number of children, pair up with a child yourself). Give each child a small paper cup with some teddy grahams or animal crackers, as well as an empty paper cup. Say that in God's Peaceable Place, children share with one another. Invite each child to pour his or her snack cookies into the partner's cup. In turn, the partner will pour his or her snack into that child's empty cup. Have available cups of cold water for the children who want something to drink.

### Responding to the Message

#### Write a Group Letter Together

Tell the children that they can help children who need help by writing a letter to grown-ups to let them know what things children need to live and grow. Show the children the newsprint you prepared. Read the beginning lines to the children.

Then ask: **What are some things children need to live and grow?**

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As each child suggests something children need, print his or her name and the suggestion. When everyone has had a chance to make a suggestion, end the letter by printing, "Help us to help children. Your friends, the \_\_\_\_\_ Class." Read the entire letter to the group.

Give each child the opportunity to print his or her name at the end. Print the name yourself of any child who is not yet writing.

Plan to display the children's letter where the adults in your congregation can read it. You might even plan to send a copy to your Members of Congress.

### Closing

#### Pray Together

Pray the following prayer:

**Thank you, God for...** (invite the children to suggest things they are thankful for).

**Help us, God, to find ways to help children who do not have all the things they need to live and grow.**

**Amen.**



# Lesson Plan: Living, Helping and Caring Together

## Early Elementary (Grades 1-2)

**Scripture Passages:** Isaiah 11:1-9; Luke 6:31

**Focus:** God wants us to live together in peace in a caring community where all children have what they need. God wants us to treat others the way we want to be treated.

### Lesson Objectives

Children will:

- Hear a Bible story about how God wants us to live together in community and care about one another, and that God says that children can take the lead.
- Hear Jesus' Golden Rule for living together, treating one another as we want to be treated ourselves.
- Identify things children need to live and grow.
- Respond by making their voices heard for other children.

### Materials

- Drawing paper, scissors, crayons, felt-tipped markers
- Copies of Handout: "Paper Doll Children"
- Bibles
- Simple biblical costume and a walking stick (for "Isaiah") (or coat hanger puppet)
- Poster with the words "God's Peaceable Place"
- Small pieces of poster board folded in half to make stand-up placards (or discarded colored file folders with the tabs cut off)
- Plastic sandwich bags, assortment of snack foods like raisins, goldfish, chocolate or butterscotch chips, dried cranberries, small pretzels (avoid nuts because of the possibility of food allergies), water, cups, small bowls, plastic spoons, disposable gloves (if possible)

### Teacher Preparation

- Read the two scripture passages. Imagine for yourself what the Peaceable Kingdom as envisioned in Isaiah would be like. Then imagine what it would be like to live as a part of Dr. King's Beloved Community. Pray for yourself, the children in your group, and children everywhere.

- Review the lesson plan and gather necessary materials.
- Display the poster with "God's Peaceable Place" in the area where the children will gather.
- Decide if you will invite another adult or a young person to play the part of Isaiah and present the story as a first person account. If so, give that person a copy of the story. Encourage him or her to dress in simple biblical costume and to carry a walking stick. If you are unable to recruit an actor, present the story yourself using a simple coat hanger biblical puppet. See the directions for creating one below.
- On individual index cards, print the words to the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." If your group is larger than eleven, make two or more sets of the cards.
- Gather the supplies to make food snack bags. In advance, pour the separate ingredients into individual bowls.
- Locate a recipient for the snack bags, such as a homeless shelter where families are housed, an after-school or summer program for children, or another agency that serves children.

### Overview

- Activity for Early Arrivers
- Opening (5 minutes)
- Introduction to the Message (10 minutes)
- Exploring the Message (20 minutes)
- Snack (10 minutes)
- Responding to the Message (10 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

### Activity for Early Arrivers

As the children arrive, greet them and point out the poster with the words "God's Peaceable Place." Give each child a poster board placard or colored file folder. Encourage them to print a phrase or draw a picture showing one way they think we can make our world a peaceable place. Remember that first graders or beginning readers may be more comfortable drawing than writing. As children work, circulate among them. If a child so desires, print a caption for his or her picture.

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

### Opening

When most children have arrived, invite them to come to your gathering space, bringing their placards with them. Invite those who would like to share how they think we can make the world more peaceable. Place the placards on tables or around on the floor.

### Introduction to the Message

#### Hearing the Bible Story

Show the children where the passage this story is based on is found in the book of Isaiah.

Say: Imagine you are a child living a very long time ago, long before Jesus was even born. A man named Isaiah comes to speak. He is a prophet, one who tells the people how God wants them to live. Then have the person who is playing the part of Isaiah enter the room (or use the coat hanger puppet to tell the story).

#### *Isaiah enters*

Greetings, dear friends. I am so glad to find you waiting here for me! I see you have named this place "God's Peaceable Place." As it happens, I have a special message from God to share with you, and it's all about God's peaceable place. And I'm really glad to see you children here, because this message is just for you.

God wants such a wonderful world for us! And God is sending someone to teach us all about how this world might be better. This person will teach us how to love and live together in peace. In the kind of world God wants, everyone will care for everyone else. Even the animals will love each other. The wolves and lambs will live together. The cows and the bears will share their food. The leopards and goats will lie down together. The lion will eat straw just like the ox. All the animals will live in peace together.

But it won't just be the animals who live in peace. We will live in peace together. I can see you have been doing some thinking about that. What did you write on your placard? What do you think it means to live in peace? (*Accept all the children's responses.*) Yes, those are all good answers. But living in peace is not just about not fighting with other people. It's about caring about them, sharing what we have with them, and being sure everyone has the things they need to grow and live. Everyone—not just the people we know or who are like us.

And here's the best part! God says that children will show the way to love and peace. It won't be easy, and sometimes we will not agree. But if we work hard, we can have a world like that. What a wonderful world that will be!

Well, it is time for me to go. Don't forget this message. Don't forget that God is depending on you to lead the way! But you won't have to do it alone—many people are working to see that we can have this kind of world. And remember, God is always with you, too. Farewell!

#### *Isaiah exits*

### Exploring the Message

#### Talking About a Bible Verse

Ask: Who do you think the person is that Isaiah says is coming to teach us all about how this world might be better? Who is the person who will teach us how to love and live together in peace?

If no one answers, say that there are many people over the years who have tried to help the world live the way God wants—other Jewish prophets like Isaiah, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man who lived in India named Mahatma Gandhi, and many others. But of all the people, when we hear these words from Isaiah, we think especially of Jesus. Jesus taught many things about how we should care about others.

One thing Jesus said is called the Golden Rule. Hand out the index cards with the words to this Bible verse. Invite the children to try to put the words in the right order. If your group is larger than eleven, divide into two or more groups to do this activity with a leader for each group.

At the beginning, hint and remind the children that the first word in a sentence is capitalized. When the children have lined the words up in the correct order, read the verse together.

Note: All the words of this verse are found on lists of common "sight words," so most second graders and many first graders will be able to read the words. If your group includes older and younger children, you might ask a more skilled reader to be a helper in each group.

### Make Paper Doll People

Give each child a copy of the handout, "Paper Doll Children." Invite them to use the markers and other art materials to make each of their three "children" different. They might make one a boy and two girls; they might make their children of different races or nationalities or of differing abilities—anything to show that the three dolls are distinctively different. Some might be obviously in need of medical attention or wearing worn clothing. Then show them how to cut out the paper doll people, being careful not to cut on the fold where the hands join.

When the children are finished, talk together about the people they have created. Ask:

- How is each of your children different from the others?
- What is the same about your children?
- Which children do you think need food? Water? A place to live? A school to go to?
- Which ones need to be able to go to the doctor if they are sick?

### Snack

Have the children wash their hands or distribute hand wipes. If you have disposable gloves available, also have each child put on a pair. Invite them to make snack bags by combining the individual snack ingredients in the sandwich bags. Be sure they use the plastic spoons to transfer ingredients into the bags. Plan to deliver the completed snack bags to a homeless shelter, an after-school program for children, or whatever place you have identified.

Say a blessing together, such as the following:

**Thank you God, for this snack, and thank you for the cold water we'll drink. We pray for the children who will also receive this snack. Help us to find other ways to help children. Amen.**

Invite the children to enjoy the contents of a snack bag.

### Responding to the Message

Recall for the children the things they named that all children need. Make a list of those things on a chalkboard or a sheet of newsprint. Invite them to print on the back of each of their paper doll children something that all children need to live and grow, using the list as a guide. If you have children who do not yet write, print their responses for them.

Tape all the completed paper doll children together. Tell the children that you will hang the chain where the adults of your congregation can see both the fronts and read the responses of the children on the backs. Following the Children's Sabbath you might consider sending the chain to one of your Members of Congress with a letter explaining that it represents what the children in your church wanted to communicate about what all children need.

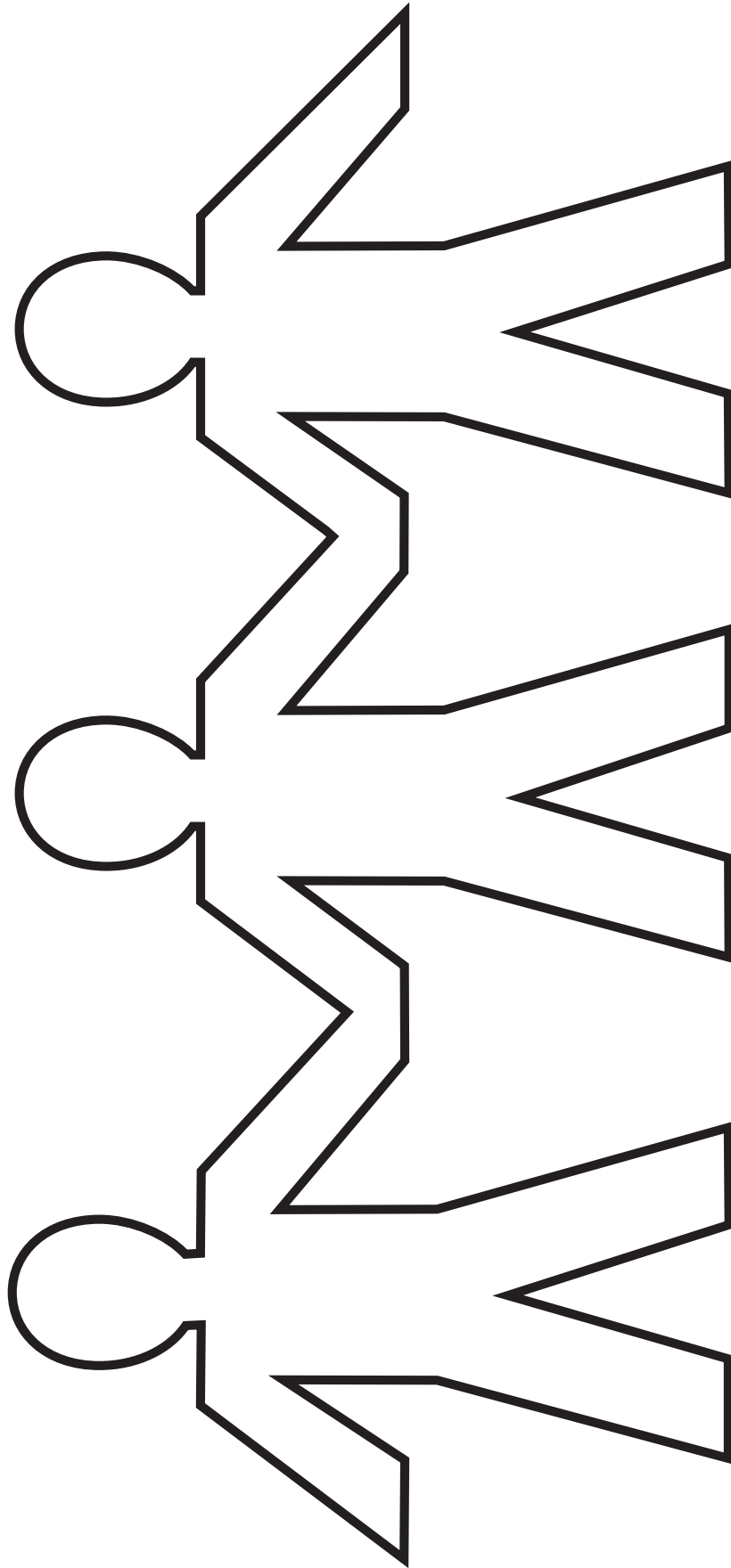
### Closing

Pray the following:

**Dear God, we have heard that you want a wonderful world for us! We know you sent Jesus to teach us all about how this world might be better and to show us how to love and live together in peace. We know that in the kind of world you want, everyone will care for everyone else. Help us to find ways to help all children in your wonderful world to have what they need. Amen.**

### Directions for Coat Hanger Puppet:

On a large paper plate, draw Isaiah's face with a felt-tipped marker. Draw on hair and a beard, or glue on yarn. Tape to the handle of a wire coat hanger. Drape a long piece of cloth over the hanger portion of the hanger and secure from behind with a safety pin. Hold the completed puppet from the back.



# Lesson Plan: Helping to Bring God's Shalom for All Children

## Older Elementary (Grades 3-5)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 11:1-9

**Focus:** God wants us to live together in shalom in a caring community where we are concerned with well-being and justice for all. Because God wants us to treat others the way we want to be treated, we should work to see that all children have what they need to live and grow.

### Lesson Objectives

Older elementary children will:

- Hear a Bible story about how God wants people to live together in community.
- Explore the meaning of shalom, where well-being and justice are for all people, not just for some.
- Be introduced to Dr. King's vision of the Beloved Community and explore what it would mean to live in that way.
- Respond by participating in an activity that makes their voices heard on behalf of other children.

### Materials

- Bibles
- Copy of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson (optional)
- Props for on-the scene interviews (real or fake microphone, real or fake video camera)
- Copies of handouts, "On-the-Scene Interviews" and "Tips for Writing a Letter to Members of Congress" and pens or pencils
- Paper and felt-tipped markers or crayons, scrap paper for composing letters, envelopes and stamps
- Prepared newsprint sheet (see teacher preparation)

### Teacher Preparation

- Read the scripture passage. Imagine for yourself what the Peaceable Kingdom as envisioned in Isaiah would be like. Then imagine what it would be like to live as a part of Dr. King's Beloved Community. Pray for yourself, the children in your group and children everywhere.

- Review the lesson plan and gather necessary materials.
- Make copies of the two handouts for each child.
- If possible, obtain a copy of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson (optional)
- On newsprint, make a list of some of the items from the handout, "Each Day in America." Post it where it can be easily seen.
- Gather props for the on-the scene interviews: a real or fake microphone and a real or fake video camera. If you have access to a real video camera, decide if you will actually tape the interviews to present later to the congregation.
- Locate the names of the Senators and Representatives for the districts where your group lives. Go to [www.Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org) or <http://vote-smart.org> and enter the zip codes where your youth live.

### Overview

- Activity for Early Arrivers
- Opening (5 minutes)
- Introduction to the Message (10 minutes)
- Exploring the Message (20 minutes)
- Responding to the Message (20 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

### Activity for Early Arrivers

As children arrive, ask them to get with a partner and come up with a list of four choices for one of the categories in the ice-breaker activity: favorite snack, favorite thing to do for exercise, favorite thing to do to relax.

### Opening

When most of the children have arrived, invite them to join you in the gathering space. Try this ice breaker activity: Designate the four corners of your space as #1, #2, #3 and #4. Tell the children to listen to the choices, then to go to the corner of that choice. Encourage them to make a choice even if their actual favorite is not listed. Read the choices generated by the early arrivers for the three categories.

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

### Introduction to the Message

Tell the group that today's lesson is a part of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration. Say that Children's Sabbaths are celebrated by congregations of many faiths all across this nation on the third Sunday in October. If your congregation is observing the Sabbath on a Sunday other than the October date, point out that, like yours, many congregations choose to celebrate the Children's Sabbath at another time. The purpose of the Sabbath is to spend some time learning about the problems of children who live in poverty in our nation. It is a time to think about what God is calling us to do, and then to do something to help.

### Read the Bible Passage

Distribute Bibles. Help the children to find Isaiah in the Bible, and ask the group to read Isaiah 11: 1-9 silently. Then tell the group you will read the passage aloud from another version of the Bible and ask them to listen carefully. Read the passage from *The Message*.

Ask the group if they have ever seen a tree stump with a green shoot of a new tree sprouting out of it. Then ask:

- **Who is the green shoot that will sprout from Jesse's stump?**

Remind the group that Jesse was David's father, and that David was an ancestor of Jesus. Then ask:

- **How does Isaiah describe this person?**
- **If we think of Jesus when we read these words, what does that tell us about how we should treat people who are poor?**

Say that Isaiah is telling us that if we treat poor people justly, we will go a long way toward achieving God's Peaceable Kingdom, which is described in verses 6-9.

If your group includes third graders, the metaphor of the green shoot sprouting from the stump may be a stretch. Explain that this is just Isaiah's way of explaining that Jesus will be born into the family of Jesse and David, who are his ancestors. The children may be familiar with the phrase "family tree." A family tree is sometimes drawn to show the great-grandparents as the trunk of the tree, and then their children are the branches, and their children's children are twigs coming off of those branches, and so forth.

### Exploring the Message

#### On-the-Scene Interviews

Assign the roles on the handout, "On-the-Scene Interviews," to volunteers. Children who want a non-speaking role can hold the microphone or pretend to operate the video camera (unless you have decided to actually tape the scene). The rest of the group can be people in the crowd. Allow a little time for the "actors" to read over their parts. Then present the on-the scene interviews. You may want to present the interviews again later (or plan to show the tape) for the whole congregation.

#### Unpack the Interviews

On newsprint, print the words, "The Peaceable Kingdom" and "The Beloved Community." Say that this passage in Isaiah is often described as presenting the vision of the peaceable kingdom. In this kingdom, animals that are normally predators and prey live in harmony without harming one another. It is a world where a child takes the lead.

Say:

**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., talked about a vision for the whole world, too. His idea was that all people, not just a few, can share in the wealth of the earth. He believed that problems like poverty, hunger, racism, and homelessness would not be tolerated in what he called the Beloved Community. But Dr. King also believed that not getting along with others is a natural part of life; what is important is learning how to deal with it without using violence. That means working out our differences without fighting.**

On the newsprint, print the word "shalom." Tell the group that this word doesn't just mean that people don't fight. Shalom means well-being and justice for everyone, not just for a few.

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

Call the attention of the group to the ice-breaker activity you used at the beginning of the session. Ask the group to think silently about the following:

- **What if you were unable to have any kind of snack because your family barely has enough money to buy food for meals? What if your parents can't afford a trip to the doctor so that you can get the medical forms signed to play soccer or basketball? Or what if there is no money to buy a bike and no safe place to ride it if there were? Suppose you have to babysit your younger brother instead of talking with friends or playing video games because your parents are at work?**

Then ask the group to respond to the following:

- **What are some things children need just to live?**  
List those on a sheet of newsprint. Then ask:
  - **What things do children in this country need in order to grow up to be the people they want to be to meet their full potential?**

Add those to the list.

### Responding to the Message

#### One Day in the Life

Call the attention of the group to the newsprint list from the handout, "Each Day in America." Say that this list gives us a good idea of what happens when some people choose not to make sure all children and youth benefit from God's shalom. Distribute paper and crayons or markers and invite each member of the group to choose one of the facts on the list to illustrate. If your group is very large, pairs of children might work together. If the group is small, each child can choose one or more facts to illustrate.

#### Write Letters

Explain to the children that Members of Congress are people who are elected to represent us in Washington, D.C., to make laws so that our country is a fair, safe, good place to live. Members of Congress want to know what the people they represent think about important things like protecting children. When they receive letters from the people they represent (that's us!), it helps them know what is important to us and what kind of leaders we expect them to be.

Distribute copies of the handout, "Tips for Writing a Letter to Your Member of Congress." Go over the tips, then generate some possible sentences that might be included in a letter. Ask the children to use scrap paper to compose a letter to one of your Members of Congress, then print or write it carefully on the reverse side of their illustration. To find out the names of the Senators and Representatives for the districts where your group lives, go to [www.Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org) or <http://vote-smart.org> and enter the zip codes where your youth live.

Collect the letters and fax them to the appropriate offices. Or if your Representative has an office near you, plan to deliver the letters in person.

### Closing

Tell the children that these words from the Children's Sabbaths Manual are part of Dr. King's vision for a Beloved Community:

One day youngsters will learn words they will not understand.

Children from India will ask:

What is hunger?

Children from Alabama will ask:

What is racial segregation?

Children from Hiroshima will ask:

What is the atomic bomb?

Children at school will ask:

What is war?

You will answer them:

Those words are not used any more.

Like stage coaches, galleys or slavery

Words no longer meaningful.

That is why they have been removed from dictionaries.

[http://www.unicef.org/tz/resources/assets/pdf/assembly\\_sec\\_martinlutherkingday\\_jan15.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/tz/resources/assets/pdf/assembly_sec_martinlutherkingday_jan15.pdf)

Pray together:

**Dear God, help us to make it so, and soon—for children everywhere. Amen.**

## Handout: Tips on Writing a Letter to Your Member of Congress

**Introduce yourself.** Begin by saying who you are: "I am a nine-year-old boy who lives in your district." Members of Congress often pay attention to letters that come from children.

**Be brief.** Like a good paragraph, a letter to your Member of Congress should be about just one topic. It doesn't need to be any longer than four or five sentences.

**Be specific.** If you are writing about a piece of legislation, include its bill number or title.

**Write the letter in your own words.** Ask the advice of a parent or teacher, but make this your letter. (You could suggest to your mom or teacher that they write a letter, too!)

**Say why the issue or the piece of legislation matters to you.** "I am worried because the children in my school don't get to have art class anymore." "A child I know had an ear infection and his parents couldn't afford to go to the doctor." Say why you want him or her to vote for or against the bill or do something about the issue.

**Be positive and constructive.** Members of Congress are just like everyone else—they like to be appreciated. You might begin by thanking your Member of Congress for working hard for the people in your district or state.

**If you wish, include some facts from the newspaper** or some place else to back up what you are saying. Even people elected to Congress don't know all the facts about every issue.

**Jot down your letter on scrap paper first.** When you are satisfied with it, type it carefully or write it in your best handwriting. If you are sending an e-mail message, ask someone to read it over first or use Spell Check.

**Use e-mail or fax your letter.** Every piece of mail to a legislator must be checked to see that it is safe. So letters that go through the mail may take several weeks to reach your Member of Congress. Ask a teacher or parent to fax your letter or use an e-mail message instead.

(Adapted from the information for adults from the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* Manual.)

## Handout: On-the-Scene Interviews

**Anchor Person:** We go now to our reporter in the field for a breaking story about an event that has just ended. With the story is \_\_\_\_\_, our on-the-scene reporter. \_\_\_\_\_, what can you tell us?

**Reporter:** This is \_\_\_\_\_, JUDAH3 reporter live on the scene where the prophet Isaiah has just made an electrifying speech. Let's get some reactions from the crowd. Sir, can you tell us what you thought of Isaiah's words?

**Man #1:** Well, I was excited to hear the news of someone who is to come who will have God's spirit with him—no, actually resting on him. He sounds like a real leader, somebody who will be wise and strong and understanding, and well, perfect for these hard times we're in. I can't wait to meet him!

**Reporter:** Thank you, sir. Our viewers are certainly going to be looking forward to meeting him as well. But here's a woman who seems eager to speak with us.

**Woman #1:** You know, what I liked was that this Coming One isn't going to judge people by how they look. Isaiah says he won't decide about things based on what others tell him, either. He's going to do what's right for the poor and needy. That sounds good to me!

**Woman #2:** (interrupts) Yes, and this One to Come is actually going to work for the people, not just talk about it. Sounds like he'll want to put things right around here!

**Reporter:** Let's talk with another eyewitness to get his take on the speech. Sir, what can you tell us?

**Man #2:** To me, the most dramatic part of the speech was the last part. At the end, he was talking about his vision of how the world will be after this mysterious One comes. And frankly, I'm not sure I can buy it. I mean, a wolf romping with a lamb? Sure, a wild beast might chase a woolly little lamb, but the romping will be over just as soon as it pounces. A leopard sleeping with a kid? Not likely, I say. And calves and lions and bears all eating together, and not eating each other? It's a nice picture, but not too realistic.

**Reporter:** I appreciate your insight on this, sir.

**Child:** (tugging on reporter's sleeve) Excuse me. . .

**Reporter:** Yes? Do you have something to say?

**Child:** Everyone seems to be forgetting the most important part—the part I liked the best. He said a little child will take the lead! People are always forgetting that children can play an important part in making the world better. Isaiah gets it. He really gets it!

**Reporter:** Well, that's the story. Back to you in the newsroom.

# Lesson Plan: The Beloved Community for All God's Children

## Middle School

**Scripture Passage:** Isaiah 11:1-9

**Focus:** It is God's plan for us to live together in shalom in a caring community where we are concerned with well-being and justice for all. In the Beloved Community, we are called to work to see that all children have what they need to meet their fullest potential.

### Lesson Objectives

Middle schoolers will:

- Reflect on the biblical vision of the Peaceable Kingdom.
- Explore Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the Beloved Community.
- Examine those places where youth see the absence of God's shalom.
- Formulate action plans for ensuring that the voices of children and youth are heard.

### Materials

- Copies of the Bible for participants
- Copy of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson (optional)
- Large sheets of newsprint, markers, crayons, other art materials
- Prepared newsprint sheets (see teacher preparation)
- Writing paper and pencils or pens
- Drawing paper
- Small soft ball, playground ball or balloon

### Teacher Preparation

- Pray for yourself and for the leaders and youth in your group. Also pray for the children and youth in the United States who live at the intersection of poverty and race.
- Read over the entire lesson plan.
- If possible, in addition to copies of the Bible for each youth, obtain a copy of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson.
- Collect the materials you will need (see materials list).
- Post a graffiti sheet (a sheet of newsprint) headed with the words, "The Groups in My School."

- Also on newsprint, print the two litany responses the group will read: "Dear Lord, be good to them. The sea is so wide and their boat is so small"; and "So the whole earth will be brimming with knowing God Alive, a living knowledge of God, ocean-deep, ocean-wide."
- On six to eight sheets of newsprint, draw a simple outline of a large generic human figure. Over the head of the outline, draw a bubble such as one finds in a comic strip.
- Locate the names of the Senators and Representatives for the districts where your group lives. Go to [www.Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org) or <http://vote-smart.org> and enter the zip codes where your youth live.

### Overview

Activity for Early Arrivers

- Opening (5 minutes)
- Introduction to the Message (15 minutes)
- Exploring the Message (25 minutes)
- Responding to the Message (10 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

### Activity for Early Arrivers

As middle schoolers arrive, call their attention to the graffiti sheet headed, "The Groups in My School." Invite them to jot down on the sheet the names of groups in their school. If your group includes young people from several middle or junior high schools, group names may vary a little, but chances are the categories are pretty similar from school to school.

### Opening

When most youth have arrived, invite them to join you in a circle. If this group of youth is not normally in a class together, introduce yourself to the group by saying something like, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my favorite (TV show, music group, sport) is \_\_\_\_\_. Toss the ball to one of the young people and invite him or her to do the same. Continue until every middle schooler and leader has had a turn.

## Prayer

Pray the following prayer or one of your own choosing:

**Gracious God, we like to talk a lot. We like to listen to our music. We like the sound effects on our video games. We keep our cell phones glued to our ears, listening to what our friends have to say. Sometimes we forget that other kinds of listening can be important, too. Just for now, quiet us down. Open our ears to the cries of other children who are hungry or lonely or sad. Open our eyes to children who are left out because of the kind of clothing they wear or where they live, or who are limited in fulfilling their dreams by the color of their skin or the income their parents make. In your name we pray, Amen.**

## Introduction to the Message

### Introduction to Children's Sabbath

Tell the group that today's lesson is a part of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration. Say that Children's Sabbaths are celebrated by congregations of many faiths all across this nation on the third Sunday in October. If your congregation is observing the Sabbath on a Sunday other than the October date, point out that, like yours, many congregations choose to celebrate the Children's Sabbath at another time. The purpose of the Sabbath is to spend some time learning about the problems of children and youth who live in poverty in our nation. It is a time to think about what God is calling us to do, and then to do something to help.

## Exploring the Message

### Peer Group Person

Look together at the graffiti sheet. Read over the names of the groups the children identified. Then divide the group into pairs or small groups and give each one a sheet of newsprint on which you have drawn the outline of a person. Assign one peer group name from the graffiti sheet to each pair or small group. Ask them to turn the generic outline into a person (either a boy or a girl) who is a member of that group. For example, if the participants identified skaters as a subgroup in their school, they would outfit the outline in the clothing a skater would wear and give him the appropriate accessories. In a bubble over the head of the skater person, the small group would print something a skater might say.

Be clear with the group that they are to avoid caricaturing their "person." The object is not to make fun of a particular group, but to produce an accurate snapshot of an individual person of that group to the best of their ability.

When the groups have had time to finish their person, gather the group together again. Invite pairs or small groups to describe what a member of that particular school grouping is like. Remind the group that this is not a time to make fun of a particular group or stereotype that group, or to name specific names of people in a particular group. Then discuss the following:

- In your school, which of these groups get along with one another? Are there groups that definitely don't get along or who actually fight? Which ones? For what reasons do certain groups get along or not get along with each other? Which groups do you identify with?
- Talk about how groups coexist in the schools your youth attend. Do they actually work together in relative harmony, or is it an uneasy truce? Do kids from different groups interact in meaningful ways, or do they ignore one another?
- What is it like for kids who try to be part of more than one group? Is there pressure to just choose and stick with one group?
- What factors make it difficult for kids to get along? Does the color of a person's skin or the language they speak influence how they fit in? What about the clothing they wear or the electronic stuff they own? Does poverty keep some kids from being included?

## Explore the Biblical Story

Tell the group that the prophet Isaiah had a vision of what living together in the world could be like. Distribute Bibles and ask the group to read Isaiah 11:1-9 silently. Then say that they will hear the same passage read from another version of the Bible and invite them to listen as you read aloud (or ask a volunteer to read) Isaiah 11:1-9 from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson.

Then say: **The prophet Isaiah was looking forward to a Coming One who would save his people. How does the prophet describe this person? According to Isaiah, what will this Coming One do?**

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

Say that when Christians read these words, they think of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. We often read this passage in the weeks of Advent leading up to the celebration of Christmas. Then say: **If we are called to follow Jesus Christ and be his body in the world, how do you think we are supposed to act? What clues do we find in the first five verses?**

Now discuss Isaiah's vision in verses 6-9. Ask:

- **Do you think this is a realistic vision for the world? Why or why not?**

Refer the group to the "person" they created to represent a group at school. Ask:

- **What would it take for the groups in your school or city to live the way Isaiah describes?**

Say that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of a similar vision for the world, the Beloved Community. But Dr. King believed that achieving this kind of community was a realistic goal. He believed that with hard work, people could learn to live together in this way. He also believed that conflict was a normal part of trying to live together with many different kinds of people in a community. The important thing is to learn how to work through that conflict in ways that are helpful, not harmful.

Say: **Many people call Isaiah's vision the peaceful kingdom. There are even paintings titled, "The Peaceable Kingdom."**

Ask the group to define what they think peace is. Then say: **When the Bible speaks of peace, biblical writers often use the word "shalom." This word means more than the absence of war or other conflict. It means a condition of wholeness and well-being and justice, where everyone, not just some people, have the things they need to live—both the basic things they need for their physical needs and the love and security they need to grow up to become the people they are meant to be.**

### Rewriting the Scripture

Distribute paper and pencils or pens. Invite the group to rewrite Isaiah's vision, substituting people or groups of people who have trouble getting along for the animals named in the vision. Some youth may prefer to draw a picture of how they envision the Beloved Community. After allowing time for the group to work, invite volunteers to read their visions.

### Responding to the Message

#### One Day in the Life Letters

Remind the group of the meaning of the word "shalom."

Ask:

- **What are the basic things all children and youth need just to live?**

List those on a sheet of newsprint. Then ask:

- **What things do children and youth in this country need in order to grow up to be the people they want to be—to meet their full potential?**

Add those to the list.

Distribute the handout, "Each Day in America." Say that this sheet gives us a good idea of what happens when some people choose not to make sure all children and youth benefit from God's shalom. Invite each youth to choose one of the facts on the handout to include in a letter to a Member of Congress. If your group is very large, pairs of young people might work together. If the group is small, each youth can choose one or more facts to include.

Remind the group that this year's Sabbaths theme is "When Will We Hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Call to End Poverty in America?" Invite them to think about what they want their Representatives and Senators in Congress to hear from them about the needs of children, including the fact they chose from the handout. Then distribute paper, pens and pencils and encourage them to write a letter to their Members of Congress. To find out the names of the Senators and Representatives for the districts where your group lives, go to [www.Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org) or <http://vote-smart.org> and enter the zip codes where your youth live.

Collect the letters and fax them to the appropriate offices. Or if your Representative has an office near you, plan to deliver the letters in person.

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

### Closing

#### Prayer of Commitment

Ask for one volunteer to read the facts from "Each Day in America" or have members of the group take turns reading the facts.

Call the group's attention to the two responses for the litany. Tell them that the first is an adaptation of the Children's Defense Fund motto, which is a Breton fisherman's prayer: "Dear Lord, be good to me. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small." The second is from the version of the scripture in Isaiah from *The Message*.

**Leader:** Gracious God, we have heard the facts about children and youth in America today.

**Group:** Dear Lord, be good to them. The sea is so wide and their boat is so small.

**Leader:** We know you want all children and youth to live in your shalom. But sometimes the Beloved Community seems like a distant dream, for we know that for many children and youth in need, life is a nightmare.

**Group:** Dear Lord, be good to them. The sea is so wide and their boat is so small.

**Leader:** Today our ears have been opened, and we hear. Our eyes have been opened, and we see. Now open our hearts and lead us to action for other children and youth.

**Group:** So the whole earth will be brimming with knowing God Alive,  
A living knowledge of God, ocean-deep,  
ocean-wide.



## Handout: Each Day in America

- 2 **mothers** die from complications of pregnancy or childbirth.
- 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.
- 2,467 **high school students** drop out.\*
- 2,421 **children** are confirmed as abused or neglected.
- 2,483 **babies** are born into poverty.
- 3,477 **children** are arrested.
- 18,221 **public school students** are suspended.\*

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

Retrieved from the Children's Defense Fund website, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)

# Lesson Plan: Responding to Threats at the Intersection of Race and Poverty

## Senior High

**Scripture Passage:** Luke 16:19-31

**Focus:** We are called by God to expose the threats that lie at the intersection of race and poverty, and to respond out of our faith to the needs of America's children and youth.

### Lesson Objectives

#### Youth will:

- Reflect on the biblical story of The Rich Man (Dives) and Lazarus.
- Expand the iconic image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to explore the relationship between the triple evils of materialism, militarism and racism first articulated by Dr. King 40 years ago.
- Examine how these threats are damaging children and youth across the spectrum of class, culture and race in America.
- Formulate action plans for working to achieve the most critical priorities for children.

### Teacher Preparation

- Pray for yourself and for the youth and leaders who will be in your group. Also pray for the children and youth in the United States who live at the intersection of poverty and race.
- Read over the entire lesson plan.
- If possible, obtain a copy of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson.
- Make copies of the Reader's Theater, "The Dives Dilemma." Also make copies of "Invest in Every Child: Secure the Future; Immediate Priorities for All Children" (pp. 39-40, Section 2, in the Children's Sabbaths Manual, Vol. 17).
- From the Internet, download and make copies of information about the federal budget. One source is <http://www.nationalpriorities.org/>, where you can find pie charts that illustrate the proposed federal budget for 2008.
- Collect the materials you will need: paper and pencils or pens, news and fashion magazines read by youth (with plenty of pictures and advertisements), ads

downloaded from the Internet, glue, scissors and newsprint.

- Post a graffiti sheet (a sheet of newsprint) headed with the words, "Back in 1968. . ."
- Also make three additional sheets with the headings: materialism, militarism and racism.
- Obtain a small soft ball, playground ball or bean bag to use in the community-building activity. You could also use a small balloon.
- On newsprint or a chalk or white board, print the following quotations from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

"Dives didn't go to hell because he was rich; Dives didn't realize that his wealth was his opportunity to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother Lazarus. Dives went to hell because he allowed his brother to become invisible..."

"This is America's opportunity to bridge the gulf between the haves and the have nots.... There is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will."

### Materials:

- Bibles
- Copy of *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson (optional)
- Copies of handout, "The Dives Dilemma"
- Copies of "Invest in Every Child: Secure the Future; Immediate Priorities for All Children" (Section 2, pp. 39-40, in the Children's Sabbaths Manual, Vol. 17)
- Copies of information about the U.S. budget (see preparation)
- Newsprint and markers
- Prepared newsprint sheets (see teacher preparation)
- Paper and pencils or pens
- News and fashion magazines, scissors (enough for every two or three participants), glue (optional: ads downloaded from the Internet)
- Small soft ball, playground ball or balloon

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

### Overview

- Activity for Early Arrivers
- Opening (5 minutes)
- Introduction to the Message (10 minutes)
- Exploring the Message (25 minutes)
- Responding to the Message (15 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

### Activity for Early Arrivers

#### Back in 1968

As youth arrive, call their attention to the graffiti sheet headed "Back in 1968. . ." Invite them to jot down on the sheet any event, song, clothing style, hair style, slang or cultural phenomena they associate with the sixties. If they are unable to come up with anything, leaders might "jump start" the process by listing rock groups like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones or events like the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

#### Opening

When most youth have arrived, invite them to join you in a circle. If these youths are not normally in a class together, introduce yourself to the group by saying something like, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and my favorite thing to do is \_\_\_\_\_." Toss the ball to one of the young people and invite him or her to do the same. Continue until every young person and leader has had a turn.

#### Prayer

Pray the following prayer, or one of your own choosing:

**Gracious God, we would often prefer talking to listening. Sometimes we let the sound of our music or the cheers at a ball game or the comments of our friends drown out any message you may have for us. Just for now, quiet us down. Open our ears to the cries of children who are hungry or lonely or sad. Help us to be aware of the pain of youth who are excluded because of the color of their skin or the kind of clothing they wear. In your name we pray, Amen.**

### Introduction to the Message

#### Introduction to Children's Sabbath

Tell the group that today's lesson is a part of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration. Say that

Children's Sabbaths are celebrated by congregations of many faiths all across this nation on the third Sunday in October. If your congregation is observing the Children's Sabbath on a Sunday other than the October date, point out that, like yours, many congregations choose to celebrate the Sabbath at another time. The purpose of the Sabbath is to focus on the situation of many children and youth in our nation who live in poverty. It is a time to reflect on what our faith is calling us to do, and to decide how we might respond on behalf of children in need and their families.

#### Then and Now

Look together at the graffiti sheet. Ask:

- **What do you know about that was happening in 1968?** (Possible responses might be to name popular rock groups or stars like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, or the Who; the Vietnam War was at its height and anti-war protests were going on; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated.)

Tell the group that in one of Dr. King's last sermons he talked about Rip Van Winkle, the character who supposedly fell asleep and slept for many years, only to awaken and discover a very different world from the one he remembered when he dozed off. Ask them to imagine the same thing happening to them; that they fell asleep in 1968 and awakened in 2008.

Ask:

- **What things do you think would have changed since 1968?** List the responses on a sheet of newsprint.

Then ask:

- **What things would seem very much the same? What problems that existed in 1968 are still around today?** Also list those responses on newsprint.

### Exploring the Message

Ask the group to think about what they know about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Ask them to respond, popcorn-style, to the following open-ended prompt:

One thing I remember about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is. . .

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

Depending on your group, youth might name quotations from the "I Have a Dream" speech or events they remember from King's life, the civil rights movement, letters from the Birmingham jail, and so forth.

Then say: **Would it surprise you to hear that Dr. King came out strongly against the Vietnam War in the last few months of his life?**

Say that in one of Dr. King's final sermons he spoke about what he called the triple threats of materialism, militarism and racism. Today we might also call materialism "consumerism."

### Make Collages

Divide the group into three smaller groups and assign to each group one of the three threats identified by Dr. King. Ask them to go through the magazines and the material you downloaded from the Internet, find examples they think illustrate that threat, and tape or paste it to the appropriate newsprint sheet. As they work, they may also think of other instances that illustrate that threat; for example, lyrics of music or video games they know of that are racist or glorify war or violence; letting what we own or wear define who we are.

### Examine What the Collages Tell Us

When the groups have had time to complete their collages, invite everyone to move around the room looking at each one. Then gather together as a total group.

Ask:

- **How do you think each threat affects children and youth who are poor? What kind of damage are militarism, materialism and racism doing to poor kids?** (*Possible responses might be that the enormous amount of money being allocated to military spending is keeping our nation from investing in programs and benefits that would assure that children in poverty have the food, health care, housing and other things they need; materialism and its relentless advertising make children believe they need expensive stuff to be happy; and racism continues to limit the opportunities available to children of color.*)
- **What about you? How are these three threats hurting you?** (*Depending on your group, possible responses might be that military spending limits funding to schools or to loan programs for higher education;*

*consumerism encourages kids to believe they need certain expensive brands of clothing, shoes or electronics to be cool; racism continues to be a gulf that keeps people divided.*)

### Explore the Biblical Story

Tell the group that in that same sermon Dr. King spoke of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, found in Luke's gospel. Ask the group to turn to Luke 16:19-31 and invite them to follow along in their Bibles as a volunteer reads the passage. If you were able to obtain a copy of *The Message*, ask another volunteer to read the same passage aloud from that paraphrase of scripture.

Tell youth that there is no subject of more concern to the gospel writer Luke than possessions and the role they play in the life of a person of faith. This parable of the rich man (Dives) is addressing how the wrong use of money is spiritually fatal.

Possibly because of the popularity of the "Left Behind" series of books and movies, many young people are fascinated with speculating about the end of the world and the afterlife, particularly on the nature of heaven and hell. They may be tempted to get hung up on discussing the aspects of this parable that relate to that subject. Encourage them to save such a discussion for another time. The discussion in which you want to engage them has to do with the implications of our national priorities on how we use our financial resources. Not only do our decisions as a nation about how we use our money have eternal consequences for our nation's very soul, but they have life-or-death consequences right now for many children in the richest country on earth.

Call the attention of the group to the quote you posted from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

"Dives didn't go to hell because he was rich; Dives didn't realize that his wealth was his opportunity to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother Lazarus. Dives went to hell because he allowed his brother to become invisible..."

Ask:

- **Do you ever look—really look—with the kind of seeing that goes past the surface to see another's**

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humanity and uniqueness, at kids who are not dressed well or who live in another part of town or are somehow different from you in some other way? Or are they invisible to you? Who are the kids we really do not see? If you listened to what they have to say, what do you think they would tell you about their lives? How can we hear what they have to say? How can we help the people who make decisions in our state capitals and in Washington hear their stories?

**Additional Activity:** If your group is made up of older or more mature teens, invite them to bring recordings of rap or hip hop music that gives a sense of some of the problems children and youth on the margins are facing. Encourage youth to choose selections carefully, avoiding as much as possible music with profanity or demeaning images of women or that glorifies violence. Then discuss the lyrics and what they have to say about those living on the margins.

### Do a Readers' Theater

Read the readers' theater "Dives' Dilemma." Ask for volunteers to read the parts of the narrator, the readers, Father Abraham, Dives, Lazarus and the chorus. (Although most of these characters are male, either girls or boys can take the parts.) The rest of the group can read the part of the chorus. If your group is small, double up on parts or enlist an adult group to join in the reading. After the initial read-through, if you plan to use this piece as a part of the Children's Sabbath service or present it in some other way for the congregation, read through it again.

If you have additional time, encourage the group to rewrite the readers' theater to reflect contemporary realities. Ask:

- Who might Dives be today?
- How might he be dressed, and what possessions might be indicative of his wealth?
- Who might Lazarus be?

## Responding to the Message

### Comparing Priorities

Look together at the second quote from Dr. King:

"This is America's opportunity to bridge the gulf between the haves and the have nots.... There is

nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will."

Distribute copies of "Invest in Every Child: Secure the Future; Immediate Priorities for All Children" (Section 2, pp. 39-40, in the Children's Sabbaths Manual, Vol. 17) and the information about the proposed federal budget for 2008 that you downloaded from the Internet. Ask the group to compare the way our nation is spending its tax dollars with the list of urgent priorities for children. **In what section of the pie chart would expenditures to meet the urgent needs of children fit? What percentage of the budget is this? What does our budget reveal about our will?**

### Write Letters

Invite youth to think about what they want their Representatives and Senators in Congress to hear from them about the needs of children. Then distribute paper, pens and pencils and encourage them to write a letter to their Members of Congress. To find out the names of the Senators and Representatives for the districts where your group lives, go to [www.Congress.org](http://www.Congress.org) or <http://vote-smart.org> and enter the zip codes where your youth live.

Collect the letters and fax them to the appropriate offices. Or, if your legislators have an office near you, plan to deliver the letters in person.

## Closing

### Prayer of Commitment

Ask the group to quietly reflect on what they are willing to do to serve a movement for all children. Then use the prayer, "I Care and I Am Willing to Serve and Stand for Children," as a closing litany. Invite a leader to read the first two lines in each portion of the prayer. Then the participants can read the final line as a response (*"but I care. . ."*).

## Handout: Readers' Theater: Dives' Dilemma

*(If your group is small, combine the parts as necessary.)*

- Narrator:** Jesus once made these comments:
- Reader #1:** If you're honest in small things, you'll be honest in big things.
- Reader #2:** If you're a crook in small things, you'll be a crook in big things.
- Reader #3:** If you're not honest in small jobs, who will put you in charge of the store?
- Narrator:** No worker can serve two bosses;
- Reader #4:** He'll either hate the first and love the second,
- Reader #5:** Or adore the first and despise the second.
- Readers #1-5:** You can't serve both God and the Bank!
- Chorus:** **There once was a rich man, a rich man, a rich man, a rich man, a rich man, a rich man...** *(Begin with loud volume, then get softer and softer until the words "a rich man" are a whisper.)*
- Narrator:** There was once a rich man, expensively dressed in the latest fashions, wasting his days in conspicuous consumption.
- Chorus:** *(chanted)* **Conspicuous consumption, conspicuous consumption, conspicuous, conspicuous, conspicuous consumption. . .**
- Narrator:** A poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, had been dumped on his doorstep. All he lived for was to get a meal from scraps off the rich man's table. His best friends were the dogs who came and licked his sores. *(pause)* Then he died, this poor man, and was taken up by the angels to the lap of Abraham. *(pause)* The rich man also died and was buried. In hell and in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham in the distance and Lazarus in his lap. He called out:
- Dives:** Father Abraham! Mercy! Have mercy!
- Chorus:** *(loudly)* **Mercy! Have mercy!**
- Dives:** Send Lazarus to dip his finger in water to cool my tongue. I'm in agony in this fire.

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- Abraham:** Child, remember that in your lifetime you got the good things and Lazarus the bad things. It's not like that here. Here he's consoled and you're tormented. Besides, in all these matters there is a huge chasm set between us so that no one can go from us to you even if he wanted to, nor can anyone cross over from you to us.
- Dives:** Then let me ask you, Father: Send him to the house of my father, where I have five brothers, so he can tell them the score and warn them, so they won't end up here in this place of torment.
- Abraham:** They have Moses and the Prophets to tell them the score. Let them listen to them.
- Dives:** I know, Father Abraham, but they're not listening. If someone came back to them from the dead, they would change their ways.
- Abraham:** If they won't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they're not going to be convinced by someone who rises from the dead.
- Chorus:** **There once was a rich man. . . (pause) a rich man. . . (pause) a rich man . . . (pause) a rich man. . .** (*Begin with loud volume, then get softer and softer until the words "a rich man" fade to nothing.*)

Slightly adapted from *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* by Eugene Peterson into Readers' Theater by Martha Bettis Gee.

# Lesson Plan: Responding to Threats at the Intersection of Race and Poverty

## Adults

**Scripture Passage:** Luke 16:19-31

### Lesson Objectives

#### Participants will:

- Reflect on the biblical story of The Rich Man (Dives) and Lazarus.
- Explore the relationship between the triple evils of materialism, militarism and racism first articulated by Dr. Martin Luther Kings 40 years ago.
- Examine the implications of how we fail to respond to the poverty crippling millions of children in the United States today.
- Formulate action plans for working to achieve the most critical priorities for children.

### Materials

- Bibles
- Copies of Section 2 of the Children's Sabbaths Manual ([www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbathsManualOnline](http://www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbathsManualOnline))
- Copies of handout
- Newsprint and markers
- Prepared newsprint sheet (see teacher preparation)
- Paper and pencils or pens
- News and fashion magazines, scissors (enough for every two or three participants), glue

### Teacher Preparation

- Pray for yourself and for the participants. Also pray for the children in the United States who live at the intersection of poverty and race.
- Read over the entire lesson plan. Decide whether you will use just this general lesson plan or if you want to plan a more in-depth study of the triple evils Dr. King warned against. See the suggestions for more exploration of the issues.
- Make the needed number of copies of Section 2 of the Children's Sabbaths Manual. While you will not use all of the material in the lesson, you can encourage participants to take it home to read and reflect on the issues raised.

- On newsprint, print the following words of Marian Wright Edelman from Section 2 of the Sabbaths Manual:

“We are living in a time of unbearable dissonance between promise and performance; between good politics and good policy; between professed and practiced family values; between racial creed and racial deed; between calls for community and rampant individualism and greed; and between our capacity to prevent and alleviate human deprivation and disease and our political and spiritual will to do so.”

- Collect the materials you will need: paper and pencils or pens, news and fashion magazines (with plenty of pictures and advertisements), glue, scissors and newsprint sheets. Make three sheets of newsprint with the headings: militarism, materialism and racism and post where they will be readily accessible by the group.
- Since Dr. King first warned against the dangers of materialism, militarism and racism, these elements have become ever more interrelated and entrenched. For good or ill, every person in the United States is impacted by that relationship. Those of us who benefit in material ways or because of privilege may find it difficult to confront our own complicity in how these structures work against those who do not benefit. Some may even have trouble in objectively reflecting on those structures in which our lives are so imbedded. Encourage members of the group to enter into this lesson prayerfully, seeking discernment about how to respond.

### Overview

- Opening (5 minutes)
- Introduction to the Message (5 minutes)
- Exploring the Message (20 minutes)
- Responding to the Message (20 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

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### Opening

#### Welcome participants

If the adults in this group are not members of an ongoing class and do not know one another well, invite them to introduce themselves and respond to the following open-ended prompt: "I hear that children in our community need. . ."

#### Pray together

Pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

**Gracious God, open our ears, that we may hear the voices of children in crisis, voices that often go unheard. Open our ears to cries for compassion and mercy. Open our ears to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call to end the systems and structures that undergird poverty in our land. Open our ears to your scriptures that we might hear your call for shalom—justice, peace—and wholeness for all your children. Amen.**

### Introduction to the Message

#### Introduce Children's Sabbath

Provide a brief introduction to the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration of which this lesson is a part. Say that Children's Sabbaths are celebrated by congregations of many faiths all across this nation on the third Sunday in October. If your congregation is observing the Sabbath on a Sunday other than the October date, point out that, like yours, many congregations choose to celebrate the Children's Sabbath at another time. The purpose of the Sabbath is to focus on the plight of too many children in our nation who live in poverty, to reflect on what our faith is calling us to do, and to respond out of that deepest commitment on behalf of children in need and their families. This year, on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Sabbath focuses on Dr. King's call to end poverty by addressing the triple evils that undergird it: racism, materialism and militarism.

### Exploring the Message

#### Faithful Reflection on Biblical Passages

Explore the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. Set the context for the scripture reading by giving the following background:

This parable is part of a section of Luke's gospel in which Jesus begins his final journey to Jerusalem, where his ministry will culminate in his crucifixion and death.

Luke's gospel reflects an understanding that issues of wealth and poverty are both complex and central to living a faithful life, and this parable is paired with another on wealth that precedes it.

First read aloud verse 14 and point out that the parable the group is about to hear was addressed to the religious leaders who were ridiculing Jesus because of his views about material possessions. Say that this parable is the only one in which a character (Lazarus) is identified by name (Dives is actually not a name; it means "rich man"). Then have a volunteer read Luke 16:19-31 aloud. Divide into three small groups or pairs of participants and assign to each pair or group one of the quotations on the participants' handout. After allowing five minutes or so for discussion, call the group back together. Invite each small group or pair to share their responses to the questions they were assigned. Record their responses on newsprint.

As a total group, reflect on the following:

- What message or messages do you hear this passage communicating? What voices that may be muffled in our society are trying to be heard in the scripture?
- Do you think this parable is about the afterlife? The consequences of choices made in this life?
- What might be the implications of Lazarus being the only person identified by name in a parable? How does this contrast with a tendency to treat people who are poor as nameless, faceless abstractions?

#### Explore the Triple Threats

Call the attention of the group to the posted quotation. These words of Marian Wright Edelman summarize where we are at the present time. To explore our situation in more depth, say that you will spend some time reading and reflecting on Mrs. Edelman's reflection. Distribute copies of Section 2 of the Sabbaths Manual, "Where Are We? Where Do We Go from Here?" Ask the group to spend a few minutes silently reading the first three sections of the reflection ("When Will We Hear and Heed Dr. King's Call to End Poverty?" "Where Have We Come From?" and "Where Are We Today?") Discuss the following:

- What facts or insights particularly struck you?
- What questions do you have?
- What surprised you? Disturbed you? Challenged you?

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Point out the newsprint sheets headed “Materialism,” “Militaryism” and “Racism.” Ask the group to peruse the magazines and to cut or tear out pictures, words or phrases that seem to exemplify these three threats and to glue them to the appropriate newsprint sheet. After allowing five or ten minutes for participants to add to the sheets, discuss the following:

- **Dr. King identified these triple threats 40 years ago. In your opinion, what has changed? What has remained the same? Are these factors less of a threat than before, or more?**
- **Who is threatened by these factors? Is it just people who are poor or people of color? How are these factors affecting our society as a whole?**
- **If Dr. King were here today, what do you think his message to us would be?**

### Responding to the Message

#### Identifying Immediate Priorities for Children

Ask the group to turn to the section, “Invest in Every Child: Secure the Future.”

Depending on the size of your group, assign each one of the priorities to an individual, a pair or a small group. Allow time for group members to scan the information, then ask each to summarize what they have read, as well as respond to the following:

- **What more do I need to know about this priority or about the specifics of why it matters and what must be done in order to act?** (*Responses might include, for example, that participants might be unclear about what the Earned Income Tax Credit is and may need to research it and find out who qualifies for it.*)
- **Where can I get the information I need?**
- **What are some specific actions I might take?**

Record this information on newsprint.

#### Consider What We Can Do to Move Forward

Call the attention of participants to the section, “What Can We Do to Move Forward?” Invite volunteers to read in turn the seven steps listed by Mrs. Edelman to build the next transforming movement. Invite participants to read, “Beginning. . . Renewing. . . Organizing the Children's Movement,” by Matt Rosen, to get specific ideas about how to move forward.

Point out to the group that it is easy to get overwhelmed by the magnitude of the crisis children face, and by the entrenched and interrelated structures of materialism, militarism and racism. Encourage them to begin with prayer and discernment. Then they can take small steps toward educating themselves on just one aspect, such as health care or education or a just living wage and move from there into acts of both mercy and justice on that issue. Because all the problems that face children today are part of a matrix of crises, there are many entry points for making a difference.

### Closing

#### Scripture and Reflection

Read aloud Isaiah 11:6-9. Then say that we often interpret the words of the prophet to be painting a picture of a kind of utopian vision of community exemplified in the paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom, with predators coexisting in harmony with their prey. But Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of the Beloved Community, which he conceived of as an achievable, realistic goal. Such a community would not be without conflict, but it could be realized by people joining together to address conflict constructively, committed to wiping out prejudice, bigotry and greed.

Now read the following words of Dr. King quoted by Mrs. Edelman on p. 37. (“One day, he said, youngsters will learn words they will not understand. . .”)

#### Completing an Open-Ended Prompt

Recall for participants the open-ended prompt to which they responded at the beginning of the lesson. Now ask them to respond to the following:

- “I hear that children in our community and in our nation need \_\_\_\_\_, and I will respond by \_\_\_\_\_.”

#### Closing Prayer of Commitment

Ask the group to quietly reflect on what they are willing to do to serve a movement for all children. Then use the prayer, “I Care and I Am Willing to Serve and Stand for Children” (p. 38), as a closing litany. Invite a leader to read the first two lines in each portion of the prayer. Then the participants can read the final line as a response (“*but I care. . .*”)

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### Additional Exploration

If your group would like to engage in more in-depth learning experiences, they may want to explore the following:

#### Explore Materialism

1. From magazines, tear pages of advertisements for consumer products. You could also download ads from Internet sites. After allowing the group time to examine the ads, ask:

- What evidence of the sexualization of children do you see?
- What is the message of the marketing industry about what kind of lifestyle we should lead? About what kind of goods we should purchase?
- What is the effect on children of being targeted as a niche market for consumer products?
- What evidence do you see that sexism, racism and classism are being perpetuated in consumer ads?

2. Read Matthew 6:19-21. Discuss the following:

- What are the “treasures” of our consumer culture? How are our values being distorted by storing up treasures here on earth?
- What do our national budgetary priorities say about where our heart is as a nation?

3. Download statistics about child poverty from [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org). Discuss the drive for more and more consumerism against the stark realities of poverty. How are children living on the margins being affected? How are children of affluent households being affected?

#### Explore Militarism

1. From the Internet, download and print out statistics on the percentage of the federal budget allocated to military expenditures. Compare the cost of military expenditures with the expenditure needed to eliminate child poverty.

2. Use “Protect Children, Not Guns” (2008, Children's Defense Fund; available for download at [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)) as the basis for a discussion about gun violence and how we should respond.

3. Read Micah 4:1-4 and discuss the following:

- The prophet speaks of beating swords into ploughshares. In what ways is America doing exactly the opposite?
- What is the cost of “swords” to America's children?
- What are our children learning about how to respond to threats? About arbitration as opposed to war?

#### Explore Racism

1. Use the “Fact Sheet on the Cradle to Prison Pipeline” to explore the ramifications of the Pipeline for children of color.

2. Discuss the following:

- Dr. King spoke of the distinction between desegregation and true integration. Forty years after his death, what does our society reflect?
- What evidence do you see of resegregation in our neighborhoods? Our schools? Our churches? Our attitudes?

3. Read Galatians 3:28 and reflect on the meaning of The Beloved Community. Download more information on Dr. King's vision for community at <http://www.thekingcenter.org/prog/bc/index.html>.

## Handout: Reflections on Luke 16

Discuss the following observations made by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his sermon "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution":

1. Dives didn't go to hell because he was rich; Dives didn't realize that his wealth was his opportunity.

- What kinds of opportunities are ours as a nation because of our wealth? How are we using our wealth?
- What kinds of national priorities are reflected in how we allocate our financial resources?

2. [Dives' wealth] was his opportunity to bridge the gulf that separated him from his brother Lazarus.

- What are the gulfs that separate us from children and families in need?
- What kinds of policies do we need in order to bridge that gulf?

3. Dives went to hell because he allowed his brother to become invisible.

- Who are the invisible in our nation today?
- What are the invisible problems that add up to a moral crisis for our children? How might we make those problems more visible?