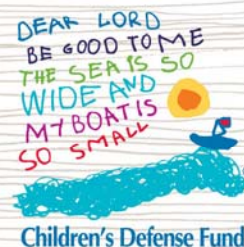


Children's Defense Fund

# National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Weekend

October 16–18, 2009



## What is the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend?

Sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, the **National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend** is an annual, multi-faith holiday that celebrates children as sacred gifts of the Divine and provides the opportunity for communities of faith to renew and live out their moral responsibility to care, protect and advocate for all children. Through the service of worship, educational programs and congregational activities, you can affirm what your place of worship already does with and for children while challenging members to take new actions and commit to new efforts to meet the needs of children in your community, state and our nation. In some communities, local congregations work together to sponsor a multi-faith service to which the entire community is invited.

This weekend is part of a broader Children's Sabbaths movement that aims to unite religious congregations of all faiths across the nation in shared concern for children and a common commitment to improving their lives and working for justice on their behalf. In that respect, each action is bigger, more powerful and more inspiring than the efforts of any one celebration. Children's Sabbaths is supported by Catholic Charities U.S.A., the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in the U.S., the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, the Union for Reform Judaism, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and more than 200 other religious organizations and denominations.

To guide and resource faith communities in their Children's Sabbaths weekend and year-round advocacy work, CDF produces the **National Observance of Children's Sabbaths manual**. The theme of the 2009 Children's Sabbaths weekend is "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow." With millions of children living in poverty, lacking basic health coverage and being funneled into a pipeline to prison, we know that children in our nation desperately need change, and they need *us* to create change *today*. We must step forward now to strengthen families, call for health care for all children, and create paths of promise for every young person. Creating change for children today brings hope and a better tomorrow for all of us.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Is the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, or Children's Service?

Though there are some similarities, the Children's Sabbaths celebration is unique in two ways. First, this event focuses attention on the urgent problems facing children across our nation and provides a call and support to respond to improve children's lives. Second, Children's Sabbaths is an intergenerational event drawing on the leadership and involvement of all ages, because its message is that each of us, no matter our age, has a role to play in nurturing and protecting children and working for justice.

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

No problem. Just choose an alternate date! While it's great to celebrate on the same weekend as thousands of other places of worship, what's most important is to participate in the children's movement at a time that works for your place of worship.



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

Both are valuable. A service in your own place of worship communicates that this concern is an integral part of the life of your congregation and makes it easier to plan follow-up efforts. A community-wide service is an exciting experience and expression of the shared concerns and common commitment to children of many faith traditions. It can create new partner-

ships for effective community efforts to help children. At the same time, it can take a lot more work to plan and generate turn-out!

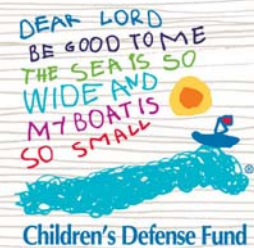
## Should we participate in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration if my congregation already hosts activities and programs for children?

The Children's Sabbaths celebration is an opportunity to affirm what we already do and at the same time deepen our understanding both of God's call and the current crises facing children so that we may more fully, persistently, effectively and faithfully live out that calling not only on the Children's Sabbaths weekend but throughout the year. There is an extraordinary power in participating in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, knowing that all across the country, in congregations of many different faiths, we are united in our concern for children and in our commitment to respond.

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

- **Begin with prayer.** The success of the movement—its ability to stir the hearts and minds and hands of people to nurture and protect children—ultimately relies on God's grace.
- **Order your Children's Sabbaths manual.** This manual provides planning suggestions, promotion ideas, worship resources, educational resources, activity ideas, and suggestions for building on your Children's Sabbath to help children throughout the year. To order your manual today, call (865) 457-6466 or visit [www.childrensdefense.org/Childrens\\_Sabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/Childrens_Sabbaths).
- **Determine the format of your Children's Sabbath celebration.** Decide whether to plan an event just for your congregation or to join with congregations of other faiths or denominations to plan a multi-faith or ecumenical Children's Sabbaths celebration in your community.
- **Secure support from appropriate religious leaders, staff or committees.** In addition to obtaining approval for planning a Children's Sabbath, do some preliminary investigation into potential sources of financial resources for your event.
- **Recruit a committee to plan your Children's Sabbath celebration and activities leading up to and following it.** Involving a broad range of people brings a wealth of gifts and experience, builds greater excitement and "ownership" of the event throughout the congregation or community, and helps ensure that no single person gets overloaded.

# Examples of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebrations from Previous Years



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

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

1. **Fulford United Methodist Church in Miami Beach, Florida**, included in their bulletin a history of the Children's Defense Fund and highlighted the quote from Marian Wright Edelman: "If every one of us looked at each child as a child of God, we wouldn't stand for the injustice that kids suffer." They observed a moment of silence at the start of the worship service. The church bell chimed once at 11 seconds, then at 33 seconds, at 35 seconds, 39 seconds. Next, someone stood and stated: "Every 11 seconds of the school day a high school student drops out. Every 33 seconds a baby is born into poverty. Every 35 seconds a child is abused or neglected. Every 39 seconds a baby is born without health insurance." The service concluded with a blessing of the children at the altar. Resources and representation from various community organizations that meet children's needs were available after worship.
2. **Christ Episcopal Church in Springfield, Missouri**, used lessons from the Children's Sabbaths manual. The executive director of the Community Partnership of the Ozarks spoke to adult classes. Following worship, there was a community BBQ dinner. The afternoon featured a Fun Day of games and events in the park for children in the community. Other members of the congregation did basic home repairs and clean-up for community residents.
3. Shakeel Syed, Executive Director of the **Islamic Shura Council of Southern California**, reports that over 20 mosques participated in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration on Friday, October 19, 2007. Khutbahs focused on the more than nine million children in America without health insurance, and statistics were used from the 2007 Children's Sabbaths manual to illustrate the need for Muslims to encourage their state and federal elected officials to pass comprehensive health legislation that covers all children. The success of the Children's Sabbath celebration led the Shura Council of Southern California to host a follow-up conference highlighting, from faith perspectives, the voiceless plight of children.
4. **The Benedictine Sisters of Mt. Angel, Oregon**, held a prayer service for the welfare of children that raised awareness for children's advocacy.
5. **Temple Emmanu-El in Edison, New Jersey**, invited a speaker from the Children's Defense Fund to speak at their Children's Shabbat. The ongoing refrain was, "How is it for the children?" Following the service, people signed up for a letter-writing campaign to elected officials. The Social Action Committee of the synagogue will focus on children's justice for their upcoming Mizpah Days event and are planning a community Children's March.

6. **Greater St. Mark AME in Georgetown, South Carolina**, had an entire weekend of events with a Friday “Night Out of Fun” for community children and a Saturday community “Harvest Fest.” Children led the Sunday worship service, and school supplies were collected and sent to victims of Hurricane Katrina.
7. **Newport Lutheran Church in Newport, Minnesota**, involved the youth group in the worship service. The youth made and presented a Power Point presentation on the needs and concerns of children. The Sunday School classes made quilts that included positive messages of hope and blessing to children. These quilts were displayed during the service, blessed and then given to the local St. Joseph Home for Children. The congregation made the Children’s Defense Fund their mission focus for the month of October. Money raised during the month would be split between the Children’s Defense Fund and the St. Joseph Home for Children.
8. Everyone was welcome at the Interfaith Children’s Sabbaths service celebrated in Elmwood Park, Virginia! The service was drawn from the Children’s Sabbath manual and enlivened by the talents of the Praise Dancers and Youth Choir of **Kingdom Life Ministries**, the Children’s Choir of **Louden Avenue Christian Church**, and music from the Kemp family. The outdoor event included a host of children’s activities under tents, from storytelling and crafts to a juggler and face painting. The coalition of community groups and places of worship that sponsored the service included **Mental Health America, Temple Emmanuel, Clarence Sabree Islamic Center, Old Southwest Congregation in Action, National Alliance of the Mentally Ill-Roanoke, Local Colors, New Horizons, and Valley Character**. An article in the *Roanoke Times* noted, “Representatives of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist faiths were on hand for the afternoon gathering. ‘This is a symbolic effort to show a commitment to unity,’ said the Rev. Kirk Ballin, chairman of the interfaith committee for Valley Character, one of the sponsoring organizations. ‘Hopefully this is the beginning of an annual event. The idea is that as a diverse community made up of diverse faith groups, there are certain values that we share in common,’ he explained, specifically citing, ‘the health and welfare of all the children of our community.’”
9. The United Methodist Women of **First United Methodist Churches of Beach Haven Terrace and Kynett in Longbeach Township, New Jersey**, coordinated their 2007 Children’s Sabbath and incorporated its theme, “My Boat Is So Small: Creating a Safe Harbor of Hope and Health Care for All Children” throughout their service. A string of colored origami boats with children’s drawings was hung from the altar rail, alongside life jackets, fish nets and oars. During the Children’s Sermon, the leader folded an origami boat as she talked with the children about our nation’s nine million children without health insurance. At the conclusion, each child received a boat as a reminder to pray for children. The church convened a team to follow up on the Children’s Sabbath by finding ways they can help connect eligible families with the state Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).
10. **The United Church of Hayward, United Church of Christ, in Hayward, California**, has a long and strong Children’s Sabbaths celebration tradition upon which they continue to build. In 2004, 40 backpacks filled with school supplies were collected, blessed and sent to Fresno International Refugees Ministries for Hmong refugees; in 2005, they adopted an inner-city Oakland classroom as one of their members; and in 2006, they explored unique ways in which they could respond to their young neighbors. This past year, they collected food and funds for an emergency food pantry serving hundreds of children and their families each month. The Children’s Sabbaths event follows 40 Days of Prayer, a UCC and Disciples of Christ-sponsored event that culminates with the Children’s Sabbath each year. The sermon, prayers and music all focused on children and justice. The church prepared a news release to share their inspiring observance with the broader community.

# National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Weekend! October 16-18, 2009

Unite with Thousands of Religious Communities  
Across the Nation in Celebrating Our Children

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To guide and resource your celebration, CDF produces the Children's Sabbaths Manual.



National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual  
A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round Child Advocacy

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

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

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



Children's Defense Fund

**ORDER YOUR CHILDREN'S SABBATHS MANUAL TODAY!**

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

### National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual, Vol. 18

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round Child Advocacy

The Children's Sabbaths manual serves as a guide for you and your faith community to celebrate the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, October 16-18, 2009, and to engage in year-round child and family advocacy work. The manual includes resources for worship services, education programs, direct service activities, and social justice initiatives for your congregation, organization or community.

The theme of the 2009 Children's Sabbaths weekend is "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow." With millions of children living in poverty, lacking basic health coverage and being funneled into a pipeline to prison, we know that children in our nation desperately need change—and they need us to create that change today. We must step forward now to strengthen families, call for health care for all children, and create paths of promise for every young person. Creating change for children today brings hope and a better tomorrow for all of us.

This easy-to-use reference manual provides worship materials for Bahá'í, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and other faith traditions, and resources for a multi-faith event. It also includes bulletin inserts, ideas for hands-on service and advocacy efforts, guidance for strengthening your efforts for children throughout the year, and much more.

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