

Christian Education Resources for the Children's Sabbath



Every congregation participating in the 2015 Children's Sabbath is encouraged to lead a study session on CDF's report *Ending Child Poverty Now*. A suggested session outline and materials are provided in the Actions Section of the 2015 Children's Sabbath materials. You may use those materials for an Ending Child Poverty Now class with adults, with high school students, or for a combined, intergenerational session. In addition, churches may want to use the following lesson plans, based on the 2015 theme text from Habakkuk, with their children.

The following Christian Lesson Plans are designed for a one-hour class. They may be used instead of your regular curriculum on the Children's Sabbath, incorporated into your curriculum, or used during a special Children's Sabbath educational session on the Children's Sabbath weekend or on a weekend or weeknight preceding the Children's Sabbath.

Several of the lesson plans have activities with end products that can be shared with the whole congregation, such as a mural, a rally, and a dramatic dialogue. Decide in advance how and when these results might be shared with the church. Will you present them after the education hour or after worship on the day of your Children's Sabbath? Will you extend the focus on children in need and share the created end products the following week? Or you may want to use these lessons the week before the Children's Sabbath so that, for example, the dramatic dialogue could be incorporated into the Children's Sabbath service.

Please note: Whenever you raise problems facing children, there is the possibility that your own students are facing some of these concerns themselves. This calls for two kinds of preparation. First, you want to be sensitive to the students so they don't feel embarrassed or ashamed if you are talking about a problem that they are facing themselves. Second, you need to be prepared to respond to disclosures that may be prompted by the discussion, such as a conversation about children who experience violence in their home or community. Know in advance how you would respond to a disclosure and what resources you would turn to, such as the pastor or a child welfare hotline. Contact a director of an early childhood program or after-school ministry, a scout leader, or the local office of child welfare for information on how to get help in your community. Please don't let this caution deter you from raising these topics; just be prepared. You may end up making more of a difference in the life of a child than you could have imagined.

Preschool Lesson Plan (ages 3-5)

Theme: “Share a Picture of God’s World”

Scriptural Passages: Habakkuk 2:2, John 14:27

Focus: Discovering the kind of world God wants children to grow up in and how we can help

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Think about the good things God wants all children and families to have
- Discuss things that keep children safe and healthy
- Participate in an active response to help other children be healthy and feel safe

Materials

- Dollhouse-sized figures of a family, doctor or nurse, police officer, food, house (check with a local preschool or child care program to borrow these or purchase them from a toy or craft store or, alternatively, cut out magazine pictures of these things and glue them onto stiff paper or use felt-board figures)
- Collage materials: long strip of mural paper; child-safe scissors; glue, glue sticks, or paste; lots of pre-selected magazine pictures of children, parents, health care providers, police officers, fire fighters, religious leaders, and nutritious food
- Nutritious snack foods, such as fruit slices, cheese, and whole grain crackers
- Cut and Scrape First Aid Kit materials: resealable plastic bags, preferably the sandwich size; adhesive bandages of various sizes (regular strips plus the larger squares for scraped knees); individual packets of antiseptic wipes and antibiotic ointment (if individual packets are not available, get tubes of antibiotic ointment)
- Stuffed toy donation materials: Soft, stuffed toys such as teddy bears, one per child in the class plus a few extras for unexpected visitors (note: you have the option of inviting each child to bring in a new toy to donate rather than purchasing these for the class); ribbon; stiff paper such as oaktag or file folders; hole puncher; crayons and markers, plus glitter sticks or any other decorating supplies desired

Teacher Preparation

- Review the lesson and gather the needed materials. If desired, use a highlighter to make the suggested teacher lines easy to read during the lesson and/or adapt the suggested lines to suit your style.
- For the mural, print the following heading along the top edge of the mural paper: “A Picture of God’s World: Children Are Healthy, Safe, and Loved!” Locate and cut out magazine pictures of diverse children, parents, and grandparents, fire fighters and police officers, health care providers, religious leaders, children’s medicine, nutritious food, children exercising, houses and apartments, and other images that show the things children need to be healthy, safe, and loved.
- For the following heart tag preparation, prepare enough to have one for each child plus a few extras for unexpected visitors: cut small hearts — approximately four inches high — out of the stiff paper. With the hole puncher, make a hole at the top of each heart. Print “God Loves You!” on each with a colorful marker. Cut the ribbon into lengths that will go through the heart tags and tie around the stuffed toys. (Leave threading the ribbon through the tags before tying it around the toys for the children to do.)
- Gather supplies for decorating noted in “Materials.”

- Two weeks to a month before using the lesson, contact a foster care agency or children's hospital to arrange a donation of new (or gently used) stuffed toys. Also, arrange to donate the Cut and Scrape First Aid Kits through your congregation's food pantry or through an organization serving families in need, such as a homeless shelter or family resource center.
- For a week or two before using this lesson plan, invite the children to bring in new stuffed toys. Send a letter or a flyer home for their parents. Alternatively, purchase the stuffed toys for the children to prepare for donation, or invite the congregation members to donate them. In addition, ask each child to bring in their own favorite stuffed toy or blanket to show the other children (they will take these back home with them after class).

Overview

1. Activity For Early Arrivers
2. Opening and Introduction to the Message (5 minutes)
3. Exploring the Message (30 minutes total) Creating a Dollhouse Community (10 minutes)
Making a Collage Picture of God's World (10 minutes) Song & Snack (10 minutes)
4. Responding to the Message (20 minutes total) Assembling Cut and Scrape First Aid Kits (10 minutes) Preparing Cuddly Toys for Donation (10 minutes)
5. Closing (5 minutes)

1. Activity for Early Arrivers

Invite children arriving early to class to color a picture of something they do to stay healthy.

2. Opening and Introduction to the Message

Greet the children and gather them in a circle on the floor or around a table, whichever is customary for your class. Tell them that today is a special day at church. It is a day to remember how special and terrific children are. It is a day to remember that God thinks children are very, very important. God wants everyone to help take very good care of children and make sure that all children are healthy and safe. The name for this special day is "Children's Sabbath."

Ask, "Who knows what it means to be healthy?" (Supplement as needed with the following: To be healthy means that you are not sick or hurt, that you have all the things you need to grow big and strong, like good food and a doctor to take care of you when you need it and time to play and use your body.)

Ask, "Who knows what it means to be safe?" (To be safe means that you have people who take care of you and keep you from being hurt or scared.)

Allow an opportunity for children to talk about times when they have been scared or have gotten hurt.

3. Exploring the Message

Creating a Dollhouse Community

All of the following should be dollhouse-sized: figures of a family (adults and children) and a doctor or nurse and a police officer, a house or apartment building (perhaps drawn on shoe-boxes), food (fruit & vegetables if possible).

Show the children one of the child-sized figures. Say, "Let's pretend this little girl (or boy) is named [choose a name appropriate for the children's racial/ethnic community]. What does she (or he) need to be healthy and safe? (Ask questions to elicit the following kinds of responses: parents/ grandparents to take care of her,

perhaps a babysitter or child care teacher to take care of her while her parents are at work, a place to live, food to eat, a doctor to take care of her when she's sick or hurt, a good school when she's older, no fighting, police officers and other people like firefighters to keep the neighborhood safe. Such questions might be: who might take care of her during the day? What does she need to eat to grow healthy and strong?) As responses are given, add the appropriate prop to the scene (the parent figures, house, food, etc.).

Allow the children some unstructured time to play with the dollhouse figures. If available in the classroom, allow the children to use the play kitchen area to pretend to make healthy foods, use the building center to build a hospital, fire station, and other related buildings, and the creative play area to make pretend foods out of Play-Doh.

Making a Collage Picture of God's World

Gather the children around the prepared mural paper that is either hung low on a wall or stretched out on a table or the floor. Read the heading: "A Picture of God's World: Children Are Healthy, Safe, and Loved!" Remind the children that this is the kind of world God wants, where every child is healthy, safe, and loved.

Invite the children to glue or paste the pre-cut magazine pictures onto the mural. As they do so, talk about the pictures and how they show people and things that children need to be healthy and safe.

Song

Tell the children that the class will be learning a new song, with some words that might be new to them. Explain to the children that peace is when we are safe and there is no fighting. Tell them that joy is when we feel very, very happy and know that God loves us. Explain that our soul is the deep down part of ourselves that feels happy or sad. Tell the children that when we are safe and healthy and taken care of, and when we know God loves us, we feel peace and joy and love. Teach them the song "I've Got Peace Like a River." (Music is printed on page 6.)

I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river in my soul.

(Repeat.)

Verse 2: I've got joy like a fountain. . .

Verse 3: I've got love like an ocean. . .

Optional (if time permits): After the children have learned the words, you may want to teach them hand motions to accompany it: flowing hands like a river, hands spraying up like a fountain, hands making waves like an ocean. Or, have them join hands and walk in a circle while singing it, or dance.

Snack

Gather the children for a healthy snack, such as fruit slices, cubes of cheese or cheese sticks, and whole grain crackers. Talk about how these are the kinds of foods that help children be healthy.

4. Responding to the Message

Tell the children that some children are sick or hurt or don't feel safe. They can help these children feel better!

Assembling Cut and Scrape First Aid Kits

Ask, "If someone fell down and hurt themselves on the playground, how could you help them feel better?" (Responses may include: help them stand up, get a grown-up to help, give them a hug.) Add that having a Band-Aid and the right things to clean up a cut or scrape also can help someone feel better. Tell the children that they will be making "Cut and Scrape First Aid Kits" that will be given to families who may not have Band-Aids and other things they need to take care of their children when they get hurt.

Have the children make "Cut and Scrape First Aid Kits." Give each child a resealable plastic bag, preferably the sandwich size. Into the bags, have each child put six adhesive bandages of various sizes (regular strips plus the larger squares for scraped knees). If possible, have them add individual packets of antiseptic wipes and antibiotic ointment. If individual packets are not available, have them include a tube of antibiotic ointment. Arrange to donate the Cut and Scrape Kits through your congregation's food pantry or through an organization serving families in need, such as a homeless shelter.

Preparing Cuddly Toys

Ask, "When you are feeling scared, what helps you feel better?" (Responses may include: going to a grown-up they trust, getting a hug, holding a favorite toy or blanket, telling someone how they are feeling.)

After they have had time to respond, ask, "How could you help another child who was feeling scared?" Allow time for responses.

Invite each child to show their own favorite stuffed animal or blanket that they brought in. If they want, they can tell a little about it, such as who gave it to them or why it is extra-special.

Tell them that some children feel scared, and don't have anything to cuddle and help them feel better, like a teddy or a blanket. Say that today, they are going to get some soft toys ready to give to children who are feeling really scared and need something to help them feel better. Tell them where you have arranged to distribute the toys.

If you asked the children to bring in new stuffed toys, ask each child in turn to show the toy they brought. (If possible, have a few extra toys on hand for newcomers or those who forgot.) If you are supplying all of the toys, distribute them to the children now so that each child can have one to "get ready." Give children the prepared heart tags. Tell them that the words say "God Loves You!", and explain that knowing God loves us can help us feel safe when we are scared. Invite them to decorate the tags with markers, crayons, glitter, or whatever supplies you have provided. If the tags are large enough, children could be helped to sign their names. Then, have them thread the tag onto a length of ribbon. When the ribbons and tags are ready, tie them on the neck of each toy. Talk about how good a child will feel to have the toy to hug and to hold. If younger children have a hard time parting with the new toys, remind them of their own special toy or blanket which they brought, and that they will get to take it back home with them.

5. Closing

Tell the children how proud of them you are for the ways that they are helping other children to feel safe and healthy. Tell them that God is proud of them too. Sing "Peace Like a River" again. Then, pray for each child to have peace, to share joy with others, and to share God's love, and that all children will be healthy and safe.

I've Got Peace Like a River

African-American spiritual

7.7.11

African-American spiritual

1. I've got peace like a riv - er, I've got peace like a
 2. I've got joy like a foun-tain, I've got joy like a
 3. I've got love like an o - cean, I've got love like an

riv - er, I've got peace like a riv - er in - a my
 foun-tain, I've got joy like a foun-tain in - a my
 o - cean, I've got love like an o - cean in - a my

soul. I've got riv - er in - a my soul.
 soul. I've got foun-tain in - a my soul.
 soul. I've got o - cean in - a my soul.

Elementary Lesson Plan

Theme: "It's Not Fair. . . So What Are You Going to Do About It?"

Scriptural Passages: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Focus: Making the world a better, safer, healthier and more just place for children

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Study a scriptural passage and understand its original meaning and application today
- Learn more about needs of children
- Develop a vision of how children's lives today could be improved
- Participate in an active response to help children in need

Materials

- Mural paper and markers or crayons
- Masking tape
- Construction paper or poster board (for relay game signs)
- Healthy snack food and beverages, such as fruit chunks, cheese and crackers, cut vegetables and dip, and 100 percent fruit juice
- Depending on which of the activities you choose to do in the "Responding to the Message" section, you may need the following materials:
 - Fairness Fund materials: a clean, empty container for each child, such as oatmeal canisters, frozen juice containers, milk cartons, glass jars with lids, shoe boxes, or yogurt containers with snap on lids; stickers, glue, glitter, paper, and markers
 - Sidewalk chalk (at least one stick per student)
 - Letter writing materials: paper, pencils and pens, envelopes, and stamps

Teacher Preparation

- Review the lesson and gather the needed materials. If desired, use a highlighter to make the suggested teacher lines easy to read during the lesson and/or adapt the suggested lines to suit your style.
- Prepare the mural paper with the heading "God's Vision for Our World" or "The Way God Wants Our World To Be."
- Make signs on construction paper or poster board for the relay game. Make one sign per team. Number of teams will be determined by class size; each team should have at least three students. Print the signs with marker in large, easily readable letters. Possible messages for the signs include: God Loves Children; God Wants Peace; Love One Another; God Loves Poor Children; Be Fair to All; God Feels Our Hurts; God Cares for Everyone. (Note: If you often have children who arrive early to class, you may want to have them prepare the signs while waiting for the other class members to arrive.)
- Depending on which of the "Responding to the Message" activities you select, you may need to:
 - 1) research organizations helping children that might receive "Fairness Fund" donations, such as a program serving poor children. Have three options for the children to select from;
 - 2) secure permission from the appropriate church staff person/s for the children to draw on an outside walkway to the church (and ask the pastor to invite congregation members to review the drawings as they leave church); and/or
 - 3) review the information about writing to members of Congress provided on pages 19-21 of this manual.

Overview

1. Activity for Early Arrivers: Sign Making
2. Opening and Introduction to the Message (5 minutes)
3. Exploring the Message (15 minutes)
4. Relay Game and Snack (15 minutes)
5. Responding to the Message (20 minutes)
6. Closing (5 minutes)

1. Activity For Early Arrivers

Guide children who arrive early to class in making the signs for the relay game, as described in the Teacher Preparation section. Provide the paper, markers or crayons, and selected phrases for them to copy.

2. Opening and Introduction to the Message

Greet the students and remind them that today is the Children's Sabbath, a special day celebrated by churches all across the country to focus attention on the problems facing children and to urge people to help solve the problems. The church believes children are a gift from God and that God charges us with nurturing and protecting that gift.

Ask, "When do you say something is not fair?," or, "Give me an example of something that is not fair." Allow time for the children to respond. Note that we often say something is not fair about ourselves, when we don't get to do or have something that we want. But sometimes, we can look around at other people, and see that other people are having a hard time and it's not fair that they don't have what they need.

Tell the students that Habakkuk was a man who lived hundreds of years before Jesus. He looked at the world around him and wanted to shout out "It's not fair!" He saw injustice, things that weren't fair, all around him. He saw people who were weak and helpless being hurt. He saw all kinds of wrong-doing and trouble. He saw the lawyers and the judges in the courts becoming corrupt and full of injustice. *(If necessary, add that being corrupt might mean accepting bribes, which means getting money from someone and then doing something wrong in exchange for the money you got.)* He saw people who had lots of money being unfair to people who didn't have much money. He saw the "bad guys" always coming out ahead of the "good guys." He wanted to shout "It's not fair!" and he asked God how long things would keep going like this, how long before God would put a stop to the unfairness.

God's answer was pretty surprising. Instead of just telling Habakkuk what God would do to fix the problems and the unfairness, God started by telling him what Habakkuk should do! And so God told Habakkuk to write down God's vision of a world where people were loving and fair to each other and then run with the message to tell all the people.

3. Exploring the Message

Guide the students in responding to the following sentence starters. Write their ideas (perhaps just the key words or phrase) on mural paper. (If you do not have enough time to discuss all of the questions below, select just a few for the children to respond to.)

- Say, "It's not fair that some children can't see a doctor when they are hurt or sick because their parents don't have enough money to pay the doctor."
Then, ask the children what they think would be more fair; what does God want for sick and hurt children?

Tell the children to complete the sentence, "God wants every child to..."

After the children have had a chance to share their ideas, you may want to add, "God wants every child to be able to see a doctor for check-ups to keep them healthy and for help when they are sick or hurt."

- Say, "It's not fair that some children have kind parents or babysitters or teachers to take care of them during the day, while other children don't have a safe place with nice babysitters or teachers to go to while their parents work."

Then, ask the children what they think would be more fair, and how God wants every child to be taken care of. Remind them to complete the sentence, "God wants every child to..."

After the children have had a chance to share their ideas, you may want to add, "God wants every child to have parents who love them, and caring babysitters and teachers to take care of them when their parents are away."

- Say, "It's not fair that some children don't have enough food to eat or a house or apartment to live in or other things that they need, because their parents don't have jobs or don't have jobs that pay enough money."

Then, ask the children what they think would be more fair, beginning, "God wants every child to..."

After the children have had a chance to share their ideas, you may want to add, "God wants every child to have enough food to eat and the other things they need to be safe and healthy."

- Say, "It's not fair that some children live in neighborhoods where there is lots of fighting and guns that could hurt them, or that some children are hurt by grown-ups."

Then, ask the children what they think would be more fair, what God would want to keep all children safe. After the children have had a chance to share their ideas, you may want to add, "God wants every child to feel safe and be safe in their home and neighborhood and school."

- Say, "It's not fair that some children know that God loves them and have grown-ups who teach them to do the right thing, while other children don't know they are loved by God and don't have grown-ups to show them how to do the right thing." Then, ask the children what they think would be more fair.

After the children have had a chance to share their ideas, you may want to add, "God wants every child to know that God loves them, and God wants grown-ups to help children know how to do the right thing."

Now, give the children markers or crayons and invite them to illustrate the ideas they just came up with. Some may want to draw pictures of the problems, and then draw a red circle with a line across it to show that is what we don't want. (Teach younger children about that symbol if they are unfamiliar with it.)

4. Relay Game and Snack

Remind the students that a prophet — like Habakkuk — was a messenger who was sent by God to share God's message with people everywhere. God told Habakkuk to write the vision, or the message, so plainly and clearly that he could run with it and take it for all the people to see. Tell them that in this game, they are going to be the prophets who run with God's message to share it with others.

Divide the group into several relay teams (the number of teams should be determined by your class size. Have at least three students per team). Using masking tape, mark two lines on the floor, a good distance apart. (You may need to move into the hallway, out of doors, or to another suitable area for this game.) Have the teams line up behind one of the masking tape lines. Give the first member of each team a different sign to hold. Instruct them that they must hold the sign up using both hands and the words must face out so that others can read them. (If you are teaching younger children who are beginning readers, read together what each sign says.)

Tell the children that the cue to start running is when you say, "Write the vision, make it plain." They should run as soon as you say the word "plain."

Each relay team member must then run, holding the sign in both hands, to the second line marked on the floor, call out the words on their sign, and then run back and give the sign to the next member of their team, who proceeds likewise. If desired and if time permits, you can announce different awards for each team: the fastest, the most enthusiastic, the loudest, the most supportive, the most persistent (this could be saved for the slowest team!), and so on.

If time and interest permit, mix up the teams and play again. When the game is over, have a break for a healthy snack.

5. Responding to the Message

Select one or more of the following activities for the class to do.

- **Fairness Fund:** Tell the children that they will be making collection containers for a "Fairness Fund." For the next month, they are encouraged to invite others (family members, neighbors, church members, classmates) to contribute to their "Fairness Fund." At the end of the month, the class will bring in their containers so the money can be given to a group that helps children. Tell the students about the three organizations helping children that are possibilities to receive the Fairness Fund donation. Have the class decide what group they would like to support. Have each child select a container that you have provided. (Alternatively, during the preceding few weeks ask each child to bring in a container, being sure to provide extras for those who forget or for visitors.) Give them assorted materials such as stickers, glue and glitter, papers and markers to decorate their containers. Have them label the containers "Fairness Fund."
- **Sidewalk Chalk Messages:** With advance permission from the appropriate church staff person/s, take the children outside to the walkway to the church. Give the children a supply of sidewalk chalk, and have them draw pictures of people helping and caring for children. Help them come up with messages and slogans to write on the sidewalk too. Remind them to "make it plain"; they may make their drawings and messages very large. (You may want to use the messages from the relay game.) Talk about how they are helping to write the message and make it plain for church members when they leave the church today, and for other people who will be walking by on the street. (If it is a rainy day, have the children draw on paper and then tape the drawings throughout the church building for church members to discover after the service.)
- **Write Letters:** Assist the children in writing letters to their members of Congress, describing what is happening that is not fair to children and explaining what they think would be more fair (drawing upon the discussion earlier). Encourage them to end their letter by asking their representatives what they will do to make things more fair for all children. The children may want to illustrate their letters or enclose a separate drawing.

6. Closing

Teach the children this cheer:

"Write the vision, make it plain.
Care for children. Say it again!"

Have them repeat it several times. Try starting soft and getting louder, or having half the group say one line and the other half say the other line.

Close with a prayer.

Middle School Lesson Plan

Theme: "It's Not Fair. . . So What Are You Going to Do About It?"

Scriptural Passages: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Focus: Working for a better world for children

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Read a scriptural passage and learn about its original meaning and application today
- Learn more about needs of children
- Develop a vision of how children's lives today could be improved
- Participate in an active response to help children in need

Materials

- Mural paper, markers or crayons, masking tape
- Five index cards
- Two Bibles or two copies of Habakkuk 1:1-4 and 2:1-4
- Poster board; sticks or poles to attach to poster board signs (optional)
- White paper for informational flyers

Teacher Preparation

- Review the lesson and gather the needed materials. If desired, use a highlighter to make the suggested teacher lines easy to read during the lesson and/or adapt the suggested lines to suit your style.
- Hang the mural paper on a wall with masking tape. If desired, title it "It's Not Fair. . ." This will be the Graffiti Wall.
- Write the statistics about children listed below on index cards.
- Secure permission from appropriate church staff for students to stage the protest rally described in "Responding to the Message."

Overview

1. Opening and Introduction to the Message (15 minutes)
2. Exploring the Message (5 minutes)
3. Responding to the Message (25 minutes)
4. Closing (15 minutes)

1. Opening and Introduction to the Message

As students arrive, direct them to the Graffiti Wall. Ask them to write or draw what they consider to be some of the most serious problems facing children and young people today. When a student is done writing, she or he can take a few moments to read what others have written.

When all of the students have arrived, gather them together. Greet the students and remind them that today is the Children's Sabbath, a special day celebrated by churches and synagogues and other places of worship all across the country to focus attention on the problems facing children and to urge people to help solve the problems. Congregations are doing this because we believe children are a gift from God and that God charges us with nurturing and protecting that gift.

Gather by the Graffiti Wall, and invite the students to name the problems they have highlighted. Say that there are other problems facing children today. Ask for volunteers to add this information to the Graffiti Wall after you read it from the index cards:

- Every 3 hours and 35 minutes, a child or teenager is killed by guns.
- Over 7 percent of children in our nation don't have health insurance, and can't see a doctor when they are sick or hurt.
- Every 47 second, a child is confirmed as abused or neglected.
- Nearly 1.7 million children live in homes in which there is a gun stored unsafely.
- There are more than 14.7 million poor children in our nation, who are at greater risk of injury and illness and many other problems.

2. Exploring the Message

Tell the students that they are about to hear a conversation between a prophet named Habakkuk and God. Tell them that Habakkuk lived hundreds of years before Jesus, and was upset by the unfairness he saw all around him: there was violence against those who were weak and helpless, judges and lawyers and courts were unjust, unfair, rich people were taking advantage of poor people. . . it seemed like the “bad guys” were always coming out ahead of the “good guys.”

Have one person, “Habakkuk,” read aloud Habakkuk 1:1-4, and another person, “God,” read aloud Habakkuk 2:1-4.

Explain that some biblical experts believe God's reply was directing Habakkuk to write out God's vision of how the world is supposed to be, and then to run with the message to spread God's vision far and wide to all the people. Prophets were considered messengers who ran to take God's message to the world.

3. Responding to the Message

Ask if any of the students have ever been to a protest or a rally for a cause or seen one on television. Have them describe it and the ways that people got their message across. Supplement descriptions, if necessary, by mentioning that when a group protests an injustice, they often make and carry signs that say what is wrong and call for what is needed, and sometimes pass out flyers with information. Often, there are speakers who talk powerfully about the problems and needed action. Sometimes, there is a dramatic, symbolic, or visual action—perhaps lighting candles, wearing ribbons, or marching to a symbolic place.

Invite the students to plan a protest rally to raise awareness and spur action on problems facing children. They can stage their rally for the other church members at a pre-arranged time (for instance, after church or during the social hour). Or, if they are really motivated, they can plan to hold their rally for the community or school.

Have the students divide into groups to prepare. Small groups might include Protest Signs (written on poster board); Informational Flyers (they can use the index cards with statistics for information); Speaker (planning remarks themselves or brainstorming about who could be a powerful speaker); and Dramatic Actions. Circulate to provide information and guidance to the small groups as necessary. Have a representative from each small group report their plans to the whole class. (Note: Part of the next class session may be used to review plans. Remind students of the rally date and time.)

4. Closing

Tell the students that music and chants are often a powerful part of protest rallies. Give them this example:

“Write the vision, make it plain: Care for children, say it again!” Have them chant it several times in various ways (softer to louder, one half saying the first part and the other saying the second part, and so forth).

Next, teach them the song “We Shall Overcome.” Tell them that during the Civil Rights Movement, when people were protesting segregation and injustice against black Americans, this song was sung at many, many protest rallies, marches, and church services.

1. We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome someday
Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.
2. We'll walk hand in hand . . . today
3. God is on our side . . . today
4. We are not afraid . . . today
5. We shall live in peace . . . someday

Challenge the students to come up with their own protest chant or song (adding new lyrics to an old song, or writing a new song if they wish).

Finally, close in prayer, inviting students who wish to add their prayers for justice and an end to child poverty and other problems facing children.

High School Lesson Plan

Note: You may wish to combine the high school and adult classes for an intergenerational session on the Children's Sabbath using the lesson plan on *Ending Child Poverty Now* provided in the Action Section.

Theme: "Making Plain God's Vision for Children/Talking with God"

Scriptural Passages: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Focus: Ways to make the world better for children and to enact God's vision

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

- Study a lament from Habakkuk
- Consider causes for lament today, especially regarding the plight of children
- Explore the concept of dialogue with God and write their own conversation with God
- Participate in an active response to the lesson which will help spread its message

Materials

- Portable CD player or other means to play the song
- CD or other recording of Tracy Chapman's song "Why?" on *Tracy Chapman*
- Bibles or copies of Habakkuk 1:1- 2:4, one per student
- Flip chart paper and markers, and tape to post sheets of paper on the walls
- Copies of the handout "How Long, O Lord?" on page 18, one per student
- Paper and pens (enough for all students)
- Mural paper (long enough for all students to write on) and markers
- Materials for activity options under "Responding to the Message" (below)

Teacher Preparation

- Review the lesson and gather the needed materials. If desired, use a highlighter to make the suggested teacher lines easy to read during the lesson and/or adapt the suggested lines to suit your style.
- Make copies of handouts.
- Test operation of CD player and cue CD to song.
- Write a heading on the mural paper: "Write the Vision and Make It Plain."
- Put supplies for each chosen activity under "Responding to the Message" in different areas or activity centers.

Overview

1. Opening and Introduction to the Message (5 minutes)
2. Exploring the Message (15 minutes)
3. Talking with God (10 minutes)
4. Activity (15 minutes)
5. Responding to the Message (15 minutes)
6. Closing (2 minutes)

1. Opening and Introduction to the Message

Greet the students and remind them that today is the Children's Sabbath, a special day celebrated by churches and synagogues and other places of worship all across the country to focus attention on the problems facing children and to urge people to help solve the problems. We believe children are a gift from God and that God charges us with nurturing and protecting that gift.

Invite the students to listen to a song by Tracy Chapman that expresses her concern about problems in the world. Play the Tracy Chapman song "Why." Read aloud or, if possible, photocopy the lyrics for the students to follow along.

Invite the students to talk about the song briefly — how does it make them feel? What is she trying to say?

Say it seems that people have forever been crying out about the suffering of children — from the time of the Hebrew prophets like Habakkuk (whom we will be studying today), to the lyrics written by Tracy Chapman more recently, to our own questions and concerns expressed in the Children's Sabbath today.

2. Exploring the Message

Read aloud the first portion of the Habakkuk lesson, 1:1-1:4, letting the drama and emotion come through.

Ask the students what words they would use to describe Habakkuk's tone or feelings. (*Possible answers may include angry, blaming, frustrated, despairing.*)

Point out that while the prophet is angry and blaming God, he is nonetheless directing his question to God. That is, he is not afraid to pour out his strong, negative feelings to God; he does not try to bury them or "pretty them up" or turn himself away from God. He recognizes that God is able to accept our strongest, angriest feelings and questions.

Have the class make a list of the problems facing children and families today about which they feel anger, frustration, fear, or despair. Record the ideas on newsprint.

Have they ever felt the emotions Habakkuk felt when they look at the world around them and the problems children and young people face? What emotions are most common or strongest for them when they think about children dealing with poverty, hunger, violence, and sickness?

Distribute the handout "How Long, O Lord?" to provide additional information about the problems children face. Have class members take turns reading from the handout. Afterward, allow a moment for the students to share any thoughts or feelings this has evoked.

3. Talking with God

Direct the students' attention back to the Habakkuk text and point out that it is a conversation between Habakkuk and God. As just discussed, Habakkuk is speaking in 1:1-4, complaining about the political leaders, the courts, and the economy being unjust in his own society. Tell them that God replies in 1:5-11, announcing God's judgment on the corrupt government: allowing it to fall at the hands of a foreign army, the Chaldeans. Habakkuk is the speaker in 1:12-17, the second time he addresses God, complaining about the "wicked"—who in this address are most likely the Chaldeans (even though we just learned that the Chaldean Empire was the instrument of God's judgment!). God's second reply to the prophet's complaint begins with chapter 2, verse 1.

Ask for a volunteer to read 2:1-4. Then, ask the participants to paraphrase God's response to the prophet. Add any clarifications or information needed. Ask the class how they understand 2:2. Tell them that there are at least two ways to understand it. The first is that the prophet should write the vision so plainly that even one who is running past it may read it — like a billboard on the highway that can be read by drivers today. The other interpretation is that the one who is running is the prophet or messenger bearing the message. The New International Version translation supports this interpretation: “. . . make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.” In other words, Habakkuk is told by God to write down God's vision in order to carry it and announce it to the people.

Note that the prophet is engaging in dialogue with God. It is not a one-way conversation with him shouting questions into a void nor is it an instance of him waiting silently for directions. He is seeking and expects active, dynamic interaction with God — like we can today.

4. Activity

Have the students write a dialogue between a teenager and God, talking to God about the problems facing children today. Depending on the number of students in your class, you may do this as a large group, in several small groups, or with the students working in pairs. After the dialogue/s have been written, invite those who wish to act it out or simply read it aloud.

5. Responding to the Message

Depending on your class size, time, and resources, you may wish to offer one or more of the following activity options as a way of writing God's vision and making it plain for others to see:

a. Create a mural

Invite the students to write, with markers on the prepared mural paper posted on the wall, what they believe is God's vision for children and families and our world. Encourage them to write the vision in the present tense, as if it is already true and has already come to pass. For instance, one might write “In our world, every child has enough food to eat and clean water to drink,” or, “In our community, no teenager is killed by guns and everyone feels safe and loved.” Artistically inclined students may want to draw the vision. When they are done, allow a few minutes for people to view what others have written or drawn. You might arrange to display the mural in the church building where others may see the students' vision.

b. Prepare a dialogue presentation

Have the students rehearse a dramatic presentation of one of the dialogues written earlier. The dialogue can then be videotaped in class to be shown to other classes or groups in the church, or it could be presented live to the congregation or a class or group within it at another time. (Have a video camera and blank tape on hand if it will be videotaped. If you will have them present it to another group, find out in advance when and to whom you may present it.)

c. Write a church newsletter article or item for the church website

Using the information about children in need from the handout “How Long, O Lord?,” have the students draft a short article for the church newsletter or website that is geared to raise awareness about problems and motivate people to active responses. (Beforehand, check with the appropriate staff or committee person for guidelines on article length and when it could be placed in the newsletter or website.) Have an extra copy of a recent newsletter or posted on the website on hand or access to view the website so the students are clear about what they are writing for. Also provide paper and pens for drafting the article.

d. Write a letter to a member of Congress

Using the information about children in need from the handout “How Long, O Lord?,” have the students write a letter to their members of Congress, expressing concern about the problems facing children and urging their representatives to take leadership in helping solve them. Provide copies of page 21, which shows a sample format for such a letter. Be sure to have on hand paper, envelopes, stamps, and the name of your senators and representative[s].

e. Make posters or a banner

Have the students make posters to be placed in the church buildings. Have them draw attention to the problems facing children, God’s vision for children’s well-being, and the need for faithful response. Have poster board, markers, and other craft supplies on hand for making the posters. If students will be making a banner to hang outside the church building (or somewhere within it), have a large piece of fabric or old sheet and fabric paints or markers. Remind them to “make it plain” and write the vision large. (In advance, check with the appropriate church staff for permission to hang the posters and/or banner.)

6. Closing

Gather the students back together and teach them this cheer to close the session:

“Write the vision and make it plain!
If you didn’t hear me, I’ll say it again!”

Have them repeat it several times. You might have them start chanting it softly, and then get louder each time they repeat it. (If students arrive early at the start of class, you may want to recruit several of them to learn the chant and teach it to the others.) You could also teach the following motions to accompany the cheer: writing “in the air” (write the vision); cup hands around mouth as if shouting (make it plain); cup hand behind ear (if you didn’t hear me); cup hands around mouth (I’ll say it again).

How Long, O Lord?

Each Day in America for All Children

Every 2 seconds a public school student is suspended.*

Every 24 seconds a child is arrested.

Every 35 seconds a child is born into poverty.

Every 47 seconds a child is confirmed as abused or neglected.

Every minute a baby is born without health insurance

Every 9 seconds a high school student drops out.*

Every 68 seconds a child is born into extreme poverty

Every minute and a child is born at low birthweight.

Every 2 minutes a baby is born to a teen mother.

Every 30 seconds a public school student is corporally punished.*

Every 4 minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense.

Every 8 and a half minutes a child is arrested for a violent crime.

Every 22 minutes a baby dies before his or her first birthday.

Every 30 minutes a child or teen is injured or killed with a gun.

Every 69 minutes a child or teen dies from an accident.

Every 3 hours and 35 minutes a child or teen is killed by a firearm.

Every 4 hours and 5 minutes a child or teen commits suicide.

Every 5 hours and 48 minutes a child is killed by abuse or neglect.

Every 11 hours and 8 minutes a mother dies from complications of childbirth or pregnancy.

*Based on 180 school days a year.

Tips on Writing Letters to Your Elected Officials and Members of Congress

- **Be brief.** Address only one issue. A letter need not be longer than four or five sentences.
- **Be specific.** If you are writing about specific legislation, include its bill number or title.
- **Write your own letter,** adapting a sample letter as appropriate. Form letters do not receive the same attention as individually written letters.
- **Be positive and constructive.** Try to say something complimentary in the first paragraph. It is just as important to thank members of Congress for voting the right way as to criticize them for voting the wrong way.
- **Say in your own words** why the legislation matters to you and to children. Clearly state your reason for supporting or opposing the bill or issue you are writing about.
- **If you have a personal story about children in poverty, without health coverage, or in the pipeline to prison, consider sharing it.** These personal stories are the most effective way for your legislator to truly understand the issue and the impact it has on real lives.
- **If you have particular knowledge or expertise, describe it.** Relating the bill to local or state conditions is especially effective.
- **If you wish, feel free to include a copy of a report, a newsletter story, or a local survey to support your arguments.** Don't presume that the legislator is aware of such information, even if you think it is common knowledge.
- **Be sure to sign your name legibly and include your address and telephone number** so your representative or senator can respond.
- **If possible, fax the letter** (since postal mail may be delayed by screening procedures) or **send the letter electronically.** Your legislator will likely have a link on his or her website directing constituents to "contact us." To find the contact information for your legislator, visit www.congressmerge.com.

Sample Email Urging Congress to End Child Poverty Now

Background: The United States has the second highest child poverty rate among 35 industrialized countries despite having the largest economy in the world. A child in the United States has a 1 in 5 chance of being poor and the younger she is the poorer she is likely to be. A child of color, who will be in the majority of U.S. children in 2020, is more than twice as likely to be poor as a White child. This is unacceptable and unnecessary. Growing up poor has lifelong negative consequences, decreasing the likelihood of graduating from high school and increasing the likelihood of becoming a poor adult, suffering from poor health, and becoming involved in the criminal justice system. These impacts cost the nation at least half a trillion dollars a year in lost productivity and increased health and crime costs. Letting a fifth of our children grow up poor prevents them from having equal opportunities to succeed in life and robs the nation of their future contributions.

The U.S. can end child poverty by investing more in programs and policies that work. For the first time, the Children's Defense Fund 2015 report, *Ending Child Poverty Now*, shows that by investing an additional 2 percent of the federal budget into existing programs and policies that increase employment, make work pay, and ensure children's basic needs are met, the nation could reduce child poverty by 60 percent and lift 6.6 million children out of poverty immediately.

Sample Email Message for Senators and Representatives, and local elected officials:

Message line: Invest in Programs that Work to Reduce Child Poverty in the U.S.

Dear [*name of your Senator, Representative, or elected official*]:

As your constituent, I urge you to support the policies and programs we know work to reduce our morally obscene level of child poverty in America. One in five children is poor despite our having the largest economy in the world. I ask you to read and share with your colleagues the Children's Defense Fund 2015 report *Ending Child Poverty Now*, that shows how, for the first time, we can reduce child poverty 60 percent and improve the economic circumstances for 97 percent of poor children right now.

Specifically I urge you to raise the minimum wage to at least \$12.00 an hour so no one working full-time earns below poverty wages; support permanently extending the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit improvements due to end soon, so that children in low-income working families will continue to benefit from the extra income boost these improvements provide; and boost, rather than cut programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and housing subsidies that keep millions out of poverty every year and are crucial supports to American children and families.

These investments are important to me, and the right and smart thing to do. Together we CAN end child poverty in America.

Sincerely,
[Your name]
[Your address]
[City, State, Zip]
[Your email]

Step-by-Step Sample Letter

(Please note: The examples written in the parentheses are meant as examples only. Please feel free to write your letter in your own words to reflect your concerns, experience, and perspective.)

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Or:

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator _____: or Dear Representative _____:

- 1. Introduce yourself.** (My name is Janet Doe and I am a member of Mytown Congregation in Mytown. I appreciate your commitment to public service and desire to do the right thing.)
- 2. Share your concern for children.** (One in five children under age 5 is poor — more than 4 million children in our rich nation. Many children in low-income families do not have access to high quality early childhood development and learning opportunities, putting them at a disadvantage from the start. Only 48 percent of poor children are ready to learn at age 5, compared to 75 percent of children from families with moderate and high incomes.)
- 3. Share your vision for children.** (Every child has equal value and all children should enter school ready to learn and succeed. High quality early childhood development and learning opportunities effectively prepare children to succeed in school and in life, and provide a substantial economic return to society. A safe, nurturing, stable and stimulating environment is crucial to ensuring that a child's brain develops appropriately during these earliest years of rapid development. I am committed to seeing our nation realize the potential of all of our children and believe it is time to invest in the success of our most vulnerable children.)
- 4. Talk about solutions and urge action on them.** (I urge you to co-sponsor the Strong Start for America's Children Act. The legislation invests in and encourages expansions of high quality home visiting programs, Early Head Start, Head Start, child care, pre-kindergarten (pre-K) and quality kindergarten programs to reach poor and low-income children birth through age 5. I urge you to co-sponsor the legislation.)
- 5. Thank the member of Congress and ask for a reply.** (Thank you and I look forward to hearing how you will take leadership on this vital concern.)

Sincerely,

Your name

Your address

Your telephone number

How to address your envelope:

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Or:

The Honorable _____
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515