Action Ideas for the Children’s Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

The National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths is about more than worship — even though worship is central to the occasion. The weekend, with the insight and inspiration from the experience of worship, aims to generate powerful, faithful sustained action to improve the lives of children.

The Children’s Sabbath resource manual usually offers dozens of ideas and suggestions for actions that places of worship might take on the Children’s Sabbath weekend to learn more and raise awareness, reach out and serve directly, and raise voices for justice.

* Note: Please download CDF’s *Ending Child Poverty Now* report and the accompanying Brief for use throughout this section of the manual. The report can be found on the Children's Sabbath manual homepage, and at www.EndingChildPovertyNow.org.
This year we are focusing on five key actions. We hope every place of worship will hold a “Bending the Arc Study & Action Circle” to study and act on CDF’s 2015 Ending Child Poverty Now report. Never has it been more important to prevent threatened federal budget cuts to the programs we know lift children out of poverty — ending child poverty requires more investment in these programs, not less. We hope you will also take one or more of the other actions. This focused, united action will amplify the impact of the Children’s Sabbath weekend and strengthen the connection across faith traditions as we unite to improve the lives of children throughout the year.

So, are you ready to help us amplify the voices of children in poverty and amplify the voice of faith communities speaking out in unison for an end to child poverty? Read on for how you can take these 2015 Children's Sabbath actions:

1. **Hold a Bending the Arc Study & Action Circle** to study and act on CDF’s Ending Child Poverty Now report. Make a commitment to hold regular follow-up meetings to join CDF in building the public will for action and investment to end child poverty.

2. **Conduct a Listen and Learn Family Supper or Lunch** in your community to learn from the “experts by experience” and support families as they find their voice and take collective action to make changes they want to see. This might turn into a regularly scheduled series of events throughout the year, and provide a wonderful opportunity to learn how to listen to and support those in need.

3. **Connect with Care**: Complete a special series of leaflets that connect the vital caring services your place of worship provides (such as a food pantry or child care program) with the policy changes that will help end child poverty now (such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and child care subsidies). Distribute the completed leaflets through your place of worship to raise awareness and ask members of your congregation to write to policymakers about the need for change to end child poverty. Also provided here as a resource is a list of 40 Ways to Connect with Care — ideas to spark new caring action to serve children and families directly.

4. **Plan a Visit with Your Members of Congress** when they are in their district offices the week of October 12 — which is the week leading up to Children’s Sabbath. As a separate action you may want to invite your member of Congress to attend or speak during your Children’s Sabbath celebration. This does not replace the office visit, which is very important, but offers another opportunity for relationship building.

5. **Join CDF in a National Tweet Chat to End Child Poverty Now**. Together we can raise our voices in harmony. Imagine youth groups and members of your congregation taking action with similar groups all across the country. Many young people are already on Twitter, so this empowering activity allows youth to lead. CDF’s National Office in Washington, D.C. will organize the tweet chat to take place the week of October 12. Your youth groups and members of your congregation can then follow CDF on Twitter (www.twitter.com/childdefender) and Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/childrensdefensefund/) and continue to take actions with us throughout the year to amplify our voices as we continue our call for an end to child poverty now. CDF will send details on the Twitter chat closer to the time. Please sign up at www.childrensdefense.org/TweetChatSignup if you or your congregation would like to participate.
ACTION 1: Hold a Bending the Arc Study & Action Circle to Study and Act on CDF’s report Ending Child Poverty Now

The user-friendly curriculum, provided here, includes:

- How to Plan and Lead this Session
- Suggested Session Outline
- CDF’s Ending Child Poverty Now Report (use the link here to download the report and the accompanying shorter brief free of charge and then make copies — one per participant) www.endingchildpovertynow.org
- CDF’s Bending the Arc Study & Action Circle videos (https://youtu.be/MLrTZ51G_Eg) to use in the session

How to Plan and Lead this Session

1. **Review Ending Child Poverty Now report and sessions outline and watch the video on child poverty.** Decide how to adapt the session to the style and setting of your particular place of worship. You know best what will work in your context. (The session is outlined as a 2-hour session. If you only have one hour, you could plan it as a two-part session or decide which sections you will shorten or omit.)

2. **Decide whom to invite.** Decide if the session will be offered to a group from your place of worship (or perhaps a combined group, like the youth group and adult education class members), a joint group of several places of worship, or the broader community for a multifaith session. Then, schedule the date, time and location accordingly.

3. **Invite speakers or resource people.** If you are planning to use an outside speaker (an option suggested in two places in the session outline below, but not required), invite them and take time to discuss the session, share the materials, and align your expectations and goals for the session.

4. **Promote the session to build turnout.** Write an announcement for your place of worship’s bulletin, newsletter, or website or to send to a community newsletter or newspaper to publicize the session if it will be open to the broader community.

5. **Gather equipment and materials needed.** Materials needed are: index cards and pencils/pens; flipchart paper and marker; a large screen computer or projector to show the child poverty video; and copies of the Ending Child Poverty Now report or accompanying brief (http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/ending-child-poverty-brief.pdf) one per participant.

6. **Secure necessary permission and support for follow-up.** Ahead of time, talk with leadership or appropriate committees for your place of worship about how you could support follow-up action after the session. Secure any formal or informal permission or support needed to be able to take action as a result of the session.
Bending the Arc Study & Action Circle:
Ending Child Poverty Now

Suggested Session Outline

1. **Welcome (15 minutes)**
   a. Welcome participants and introduce yourself.
   b. Depending on numbers, have participants introduce themselves to the whole group (for groups smaller than 10 people) or introduce themselves to someone next to them (for groups larger than 10). Invite them to share their name, a word or phrase to describe how they feel about child poverty and the prospect of ending it, and one thing they hope to get out of the session. Ask them to limit their sharing to one minute per person.
   c. Introduce the purpose of the session and the agenda.

2. **Vision and Values (10 minutes)**
   a. Ask each person to write, on one of two index cards distributed ahead of time, their vision of what our nation will be like when we have ended child poverty. How will it be different, how will the end of poverty have changed things? On the second card, ask them to write something from their faith or values that shapes how they understand their role in working for the end of child poverty. Is there a text or teaching or understanding that most powerfully guides their perspective on ending child poverty? Allow about five minutes for this.
   b. Have participants form groups of three to share what they have written. This is not a time for debate or discussion, but a time to listen and be heard.

3. **Child Poverty: “A National Moral Disgrace” (5 minutes)**
   a. Ask participants to turn to Marian Wright Edelman’s Foreword to the Children’s Defense Fund report, *Ending Child Poverty Now*. Ask for a volunteer or volunteers to read it aloud as participants silently read along in their own copies of the report. Before the reading starts, invite participants as they listen to mark up their own copies of the report: put an exclamation mark by anything that surprises them, a question mark by anything they want to learn more about or consider further, and a star by what is most powerful or persuasive to them.

4. **Poverty Hurts Children (15 minutes)**
   a. Put a face on it: play the short child poverty video from the Children’s Defense Fund to hear the voices of children and families in poverty. (You can play it from the Children’s Defense Fund YouTube Channel at: https://youtu.be/MLrTZ51G_Eg). Or, in advance, invite someone who has experienced poverty firsthand to share their experience.
   b. Invite participants to name some of the ways they think poverty hurts children. Jot down the ideas on flipchart paper as they are named.
   c. Ask the participants to turn to Chapter 1 of the poverty report, “Poverty Hurts Children and Our Nation’s Future.” Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the bolded headings on pages 11 through 13. Add any new facts about the harms of child poverty to the list.
   d. Ask participants to look at the list and identify ways that poverty’s harm to children — which is reason enough to end it — additionally harms our nation’s future.
5. **Compassion and Justice: Why Direct Service and Policy Changes Are Both Needed**
   (10 minutes)
   a. People of faith and places of worship have a long history of providing services directly to children and families facing economic hardship and other crises. Such personal, loving and compassionate service is for many a faith imperative and personal calling. Working for changes in policy to create more justice and less poverty may not be initially or easily embraced by some. Invite a discussion of why “both/and” rather than “either/or” is a faithful response. What can policy change do that direct service can’t? What can direct service do that policy change can’t? What tends to hold us back from providing direct services to families in need and from seeking justice?

6. **Delving Deeper: Understanding Policy Changes that Could Reduce Child Poverty Right Now**
   (25 minutes)
   a. Divide participants into nine groups, and assign each group one of the policy changes explained in Chapter 2 of the report (Earned Income Tax Credit Increase; Minimum Wage Increase; Subsidized Jobs Program; Child Care Subsidy Expansion; Child Care and Dependent Care Tax Credit Expansion; SNAP Benefit Increase; Child Tax Credit Expansion; Housing Subsidies Expansion; Child Support Pass-Through and Disregard). Give each group 10 minutes to read and discuss their assigned policy change and the related “faces of poverty” story in the report. Ask that one member of each group be prepared to summarize and explain the policy change to the large group.
   b. After 10 minutes, reconvene into one large group. Have a reporter from each group explain the policy and tell the child’s story. Identify what further study or explanation may be needed.
   c. Alternatively, invite an outside speaker to talk to the group for about 20 minutes, explaining at least several of the proposed policy changes to reduce child poverty and how they would positively impact children and their families.

7. **Impact and Trade-Offs**
   (10 minutes)
   a. Take a look at the bar graph in Figure 3.1 on page 30 of Ending Child Poverty Now report. Compare the costs of ending child poverty with the costs of child poverty, the federal budget and our country’s gross domestic product. Also discuss one or two of the tradeoffs at the top of page 31 that could be used to pay to end child poverty. How do our values guide us to prioritize investments in our nation’s children?

8. **What Can We Do?**
   (25 minutes)
   a. Invite participants to re-read their index cards with their visions for our nation without child poverty and the faith/values statements that guide or inspire them.
   b. Open a discussion of what participants think they could do — individually, as a group, or enlisting the whole place of worship — to work for the federal policy changes that could help end child poverty or the state or local version of some of them. (See the final page of the Ending Child Poverty Report for a summary of policy changes and three broad steps advocates can take). Jot down ideas on two sheets of flip chart paper — one for individual actions, one for collective action ideas. Decide how any of these ideas will be pursued and what the next steps are.
c. Visiting Your Member of Congress: Collect names of those interested in scheduling a visit with their members of Congress when they are back home in their district (not in Washington, D.C.). This group should meet again to plan for the visit — defining message, assigning and practicing parts, calling for an appointment, and so forth. See “Action 4” in this resource for more information on how to prepare for your visit, on page 20. For support in preparing for your visit, feel free to contact Kathleen King with the Children’s Defense Fund at kking@childrensdefense.org.

9. Closing (5 minutes)
   a. If appropriate for the tradition(s) of participants, close in prayer.
   b. Optional: You could gather the “Vision” and “Values” index cards that participants completed earlier and arrange to display them in your buildings to inspire and remind your faith community of the Children’s Sabbath commitments. Alternatively, participants could take home their cards and post them as a visual reminder to themselves of the vision and values they are committed to working toward.
**ACTION 2: Listen and Learn Sessions**

To help our action be most appropriate, effective, and ensure it addresses the deepest needs with our most useful resources, we can start by listening to and learning from those most directly affected by poverty.

Listen and Learn Sessions involve a “Children’s Action Team” from your place of worship (or several places of worship) going into community settings, in strong partnerships with service organizations or other groups and with an authentic sense of respect and humility, to hear firsthand from people affected by poverty and economic injustice. The goal is to learn about what challenges people are facing, what the daily struggles are, what the community resources and assets are, and what they feel others can do to be most helpful in partnership and support.

These sessions should then be followed up with discussions within the action teams to synthesize and absorb what was learned and discern what sort of active response is appropriate.

The Listen and Learn team, in partnership with the service organizations and people they heard from, may decide to plan a town hall forum of sorts, some kind of public event where people with formal power are invited to come hear from people who are facing poverty and economic injustice. Its goal would be to help bring concerns about child poverty to the attention of those with formal power in the community and provide an opportunity to discuss potential solutions.

If your place of worship is interested in learning more about, and then planning, a Listen and Learn Session, please send an email to Dr. Janet Wolf, Director of CDF Haley Farm and National Director of Nonviolent Direct Action Organizing for the Children’s Defense Fund at JWolf@childrensdefense.org. This will help us identify the communities in which Listen and Learn sessions are happening and offer additional resources and support for your planning. Please also refer to the Rev. Wolf and National Nonviolent Organizing Team’s *Family Suppers manual* (www.childrensdefense.org/FamilySuppers) as an additional resource and sustained action you and your community can take.
ACTION 3: Connect with Care

Almost every place of worship is engaged in directly meeting the needs of children and families in poverty, serving with compassion and care. The 2015 Children’s Sabbath is an important time to celebrate and generate fresh support for the ways that your congregation is already meeting the immediate needs of children and families with direct, caring services. It is also a vital opportunity to make connections between the direct service you provide and advocacy or justice work that is needed to prevent or lessen children’s needs from arising in the first place.

The following leaflets are designed to be tailored to your particular place of worship. The front of each leaflet describes a particular program your place of worship hosts or supports (such as a food pantry) and the back describes how members can contribute (for instance, by making donations or volunteering time). For the inside of each leaflet, we have provided information about a policy change that is needed to provide systemic change or help (such as an increase in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly referred to as food stamps) and how members can lift their voices to seek justice for that change.

The process of preparing the front and back of the leaflet, describing a direct service program run or supported by your place of worship, can be a valuable learning experience. Consider giving the youths of your congregation this responsibility, although it could also be done by religious leaders, staff, committee members, or by staff or volunteers serving that particular program.

To complete the front and back of the leaflet, whoever takes on this project should do the following:

- First, identify the programs through which your place of worship is directly meeting the needs of children and families in poverty.
- Then, gather the necessary information by interviewing religious leaders, program staff (if any), volunteers, and — if appropriate and with permission — one of the families served by the program.
- Next, write up the findings for the leaflet to provide the information in a compelling way.
- Make two-sided photocopies. Place the sheet of paper you prepare (format it horizontally, in two columns, as you will see with the leaflet pages we prepared below) and the inside leaflet we prepared on the photocopier. Use the setting for one-sided to two-sided copies. Make one test copy to ensure the layout works. Fold the completed two-sided copy in half, so that the personalized information appears on the outside front and back and the CDF-provided material appears on the inside left and right. Make additional copies.
- Finally, arrange for the leaflets (with the write-up specific to your place of worship on the front and back with the corresponding policy piece on the inside) to be photocopied and distributed on the Children’s Sabbath weekend and after.

On the following pages you will find:

- A template for the front and back
- A completed sample front and back
- The insides of the leaflets:
  - Leaflet 1: Every Child Deserves a Home: Housing Subsidies
  - Leaflet 2: No Child Deserves to Be Hungry: SNAP Increases
  - Leaflet 3: Caring for Children: Child Care Subsidies and Tax Credit
  - Leaflet 4: Let’s Work to End Child Poverty: Subsidized Jobs
  - Leaflet 5: Making Work Pay: Earned Income Tax Credit
  - Leaflet 6: It’s Time for a Living Wage: Minimum Wage Increases
Template for the Front of the Leaflet:
The front of the leaflets should include information about a program that your place of worship runs or supports that directly meets the needs of children and families in poverty. Include the following information:

Name of program run or supported by your place of worship that meets the needs of children and families in poverty.

Brief description of the needs of children and families being met.

Share a story or quote, if possible: If appropriate, with permission and without identifying personal information, share a story or a quote from a family being served by the program.

Describe the service the program provides.

Contact Information:
Provide the contact information to help people follow up with support, such as a contact person’s name and phone number or email address and the organization’s website.

Describe how people can help. For instance, are there volunteer opportunities? Items to be donated? Ways to contribute money? Upcoming events to support?

Template for the Back of the Leaflet:
The back of the leaflets should include information about the program and how people can help.

Describe how people can help.

For instance, are there volunteer opportunities? Items to be donated? Ways to contribute money? Upcoming events to support?

Contact Information:
List information to help people follow up with support, such as a contact person’s name and phone number or email address and the organization’s website and mailing address.
Crisis Ministry of Princeton and Trenton is an outreach effort supported by Nassau Presbyterian Church and other congregations in our area.

In Trenton, there are high levels of family poverty. In Princeton, too, many families struggle to put food on the table and turn to Crisis Ministry for help — especially at the end of the month as SNAP benefits (what many of us know as “food stamps”) run out. Here’s the difference our congregation is helping to make through Crisis Ministry:

A manager for 10 years at a telecommunications company, Christina was laid off from her job and is glad that the Crisis Ministry is here for her during a difficult time. Thanks to back rent assistance from our Homelessness Prevention team she and her children remain in their apartment. Through the Crisis Ministry’s Client Choice pantry, she has access to healthy food for her family.

Though Christina is busy seeking employment and caring for her children, she makes time to volunteer for the Crisis Ministry. Equipped with excellent customer service skills honed during her years as a manager, she shares her naturally friendly manner with clients and, as a speaker of four languages, can jump in when needed to translate from Spanish, Creole, or Portuguese.

“The Crisis Ministry has helped me and a lot of people in the community,” Christina says. “When I first came here for help, I was under so much stress with my eviction notice. But I was told, ‘Don’t worry, it’s going to work out.’ I am treated well here. There is always a smile to welcome me.”

Every year, more than 5,000 families are served through Crisis Ministry.

You Can Help!

You can help us continue this important work, with financial donations, providing needed items, or volunteering your time.

In a given week, some 30 to 50 volunteers help our staff to operate smoothly and effectively. They enhance the high level of professional service we provide to our neighbors in need. Opportunities include direct client service, administrative assistance, stocking shelves as needed, and preparing Home Food Delivery. Sites include our three pantries, our downtown Trenton community garden, community outreach events, and even your home for some administrative or communications duties.

For specific needs you can help fill, visit the website www.thecrisisministry.org or stop in at the Crisis Ministry office downstairs in our building.

Crisis Ministry is working hard to meet the needs of its thousands of clients. Its staff knows, however, that they can never fully meet the needs. That’s why they support our justice-seeking work to make lasting changes to food stamps, affordable housing, and other policies that would help their clients — and thousands of others — find more lasting security.
Every Child Deserves a Home

In the summer of 2012, Craig Phillip was looking forward to his junior year at Boys and Girls High School in Brooklyn, New York. But after Craig tried to protect his mother from his father in a violent domestic confrontation, his father kicked them out of the house. Craig said, “Ever since that point, life has just never been the same.” Craig, his mother and older brother ended up in a homeless shelter for his junior and senior years of high school. His mother continued to work as a habilitation aide for Cerebral Palsy of New York. His brother and Craig worked too. But their combined salaries were not sufficient to afford an apartment in New York City. Finally, Craig and his family were able to move into their own home, a state-subsidized apartment in the city of New York. Finally, Craig and his family were able to move into their own home. Craig beat the odds and graduated high school and continued his freshman year of college. Craig said, “Ever since that point, life has just never been the same.” Craig, his mother and older brother ended up in a homeless shelter for his junior and senior years of high school. His mother continued to work as a habilitation aide for Cerebral Palsy of New York. His brother and Craig worked too. But their combined salaries were not sufficient to afford an apartment in New York City. Finally, Craig and his family were able to move into their own home, a state-subsidized apartment in the city of New York. Finally, Craig and his family were able to move into their own home.

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WE CAN END CHILD POVERTY NOW! Go to endchildpoverty.org to send a message to your Members of Congress to help end child poverty. 20.8 percent and lift 2.3 million children out of poverty. This housing subsidy expansion would reduce child poverty by their income.

Housing assistance is the single largest expense for most families and is growing increasingly out of reach. Because of funding limitations only 1 in 4 eligible families with children receives housing vouchers available to households with children with income below 150 percent of the fair market rent. This housing subsidy expansion would reduce child poverty by their income.

We can help ensure that children’s basic needs are met by ending child poverty now. Go to endchildpoverty.org.
Shoes tell the story of the McKee family’s descent into poverty. Those of Skyler, 10, and Zachary, 12, were falling apart in 2011. Their sister, then 14 years old, wore the varsity coach’s shoes when she played on her school’s volleyball team. Less visible was hunger. Tonya and Ed McKee, of Dowagiac, Michigan, sometimes went without food after Ed lost his job in 2009 and the unemployment insurance ran out, before the family started receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. Skyler said he gave the birthday money he got at church to his mom for groceries, “and I told her she didn’t have to pay me back.” Skyler confided that sometimes his stomach growled. “It’s hard, not easy like it was before where we had money and could do stuff. Now we don’t go anywhere… Sometimes we don’t have food and we just don’t eat.”

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a crucial safety net program for children. SNAP helped combat hunger among 20.5 million children in fiscal year 2012, over a quarter of all children in the nation, and kept 2.1 million children from poverty in 2013.

However, SNAP benefits average less than $1.40 per person per meal — not enough for low-income families who often lack access to affordable nutritious food.

Increasing the value of SNAP benefits by almost 30 percent to cover a larger portion of the nutrition needs of children would decrease child poverty by 16 percent.

Ask your members of Congress to help us end child poverty now. Go to www.childrensdefense.org/EndChildPovertyNow to send a message to your Members.
Rita Ngabo lost her marriage, a home and found herself jobless with a 9-month old baby. According to the National Women's Law Center, with a child care subsidy and temporary cash assistance Rita was able to help herself and her daughter. Rita took classes to develop work skills. She got a job as a child care case worker in Maryland helping others who were in her shoes. But Rita couldn't help most of the parents who came to her because Maryland, as many states have, made cuts to the child care program. In 2012 the Center found almost 19,000 children in Maryland were on the waiting list for child care assistance.

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To work, parents need access to affordable high-quality child care. Center-based care for infants in 2013 cost more than in-state college tuition in 31 states and the District of Columbia.

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Let’s Work to End Child Poverty

In Cincinnati, Ohio, Christopher Rogers, 13, sometimes used the $3 an hour he earned cutting grass and working on a candy truck to pay the phone and electric bills when money ran short. He and his mother, Ana Cohen, were occasional welfare recipients, with Ana going off welfare when she finds work and then back on again when the jobs end or the hours and pay don’t add up to a livable income. “The way they have it now, the system is based on work but when there isn’t any work, it doesn’t work,” Ana said.

We can end child poverty. 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.

The best solution to poverty remains a job that pays enough to raise a family. Publicly funded (or subsidized) jobs are effective for providing income and building skills among the unemployed and underemployed. Subsidized jobs programs were most recently deployed during the 2008-2009 Great Recession through funding from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Emergency Fund. These programs were shown to benefit the long-term unemployed the most and increase employment and income even after participation ended.

A subsidized jobs program that would provide minimum-wage jobs to unemployed or underemployed individuals ages 16-64 in families with children for 30 weeks at a time, with the possibility of renewal after four weeks searching for unsubsidized employment, would reduce child poverty by 11 percent, and by 29 percent among children living with adults who aren’t currently working.

Ask your members of Congress to help us end child poverty now. Go to www.childrensdefense.org/EndChildPovertyNow to send a message to your Members.
Making Work Pay

The Nailors are better off than many. They live in a house with a yard in a small town in Middle America — the sort of place that might have been featured in a Norman Rockwell painting. Beneath the veneer of the middle class image, the family struggles. In 2011, Amanda, 4, and Emily, 3 wore hand-me-downs and played with secondhand toys. Their father, John Nailor, owned a computer repair business in Evart, Michigan but made less than $22,314 a year, the poverty level for a family of four at the time. The family was on a budget so tight that by the end of the month they were down to dimes and pennies. They didn't have cable television. They never went out. "If it weren't for food stamps and the income tax credit, I don't know where we'd be," he said. "We would be lost."

We can end child poverty. 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. We must not lose any more precious childhoods to poverty.

Moderately increasing the value of the federal EITC for low-wage workers and expanding state and local EITCs would help reduce child poverty. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is one of the nation's most effective tools for ending child poverty. Income workers with children would reduce child poverty by 9 percent and lift 1 million children above poverty. Expanding the EITC would reduce child poverty by 8 percent and lift 1.2 million children above poverty. The EITC is one of the nation's most effective tools for ending child poverty. Income workers with children would reduce child poverty by 9 percent and lift 1 million children above poverty.

We must not lose any more precious childhoods to poverty. We can end child poverty now. Go to www.childrensdefense.org/EndChildPovertyNow to send a message to your Members of Congress to help us end child poverty.
It’s Time for a Living Wage

Maria Fernandes struggled to survive, working three minimum-wage jobs at three different Dunkin’ Donuts shops. Five days a week she worked the afternoon shift in Newark, the overnight shift in Linden, and then weekend shifts in Harrison. She earned just over $8.25 an hour, New Jersey’s minimum wage, but sometimes fell behind on the $550 monthly rent for her garden apartment. She dreamed of moving to Pennsylvania. According to The New York Times, since her death from gas fumes while sleeping in her car between shifts in August 2014, Fernandes has become a symbol of the hardships facing the nation’s low-wage workers.

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A parent with two children working full-time at the federal minimum wage of $7.25 an hour currently earns $4,700 below the poverty level. Nearly 70 percent of the 14.7 million poor children in America live with an adult who works, and 30 percent live with an adult who works full-time year-round. Increasing the minimum wage to $10.10 by 2016 would lift 900,000 people above the official poverty threshold, estimates the Congressional Budget Office. The minimum wage increase would reduce child poverty by 4 percent and move 400,000 children out of poverty. It would reduce poverty by 8 percent among children living with a full-time, year-round worker. Raising the minimum wage to $12.00, as is being proposed in Congress now, would likely have an even larger impact.

Ask your members of Congress to help us end child poverty now. Go to www.childrensdefense.org/EndChildPovertyNow to send a message to your Members.
ACTION 3, (Continued) 40 Ways to Connect with Care

There are countless ways that individuals, groups, and your place of worship can directly serve children and families in poverty. Here are 40 ideas to spark your own thinking and caring action. Add to the list and share your ideas with us, you can email them to SDaleyHarris@childrensdefense.org.

**Housing:**
- Create a Housing Emergency Fund to help families in crisis with rent, utilities, security deposits and other housing needs.
- Volunteer with the children at a shelter for children and families who are homeless; read to them or provide help with homework.
- Donate needed books, clothing, personal care items and others to shelters for children and families who are homeless.
- Participate in a congregation-based shelter project, if your community has one, through which places of worship take turns sheltering families and providing meals for a month at a time.
- Explore partnering with other places of worship to buy housing to rent at affordable rates to low-income families.
- Give “Welcome Home” gifts to provide needed items and support for families transitioning from homelessness to housing, such as kitchen items, bedding or gift cards to an accessible home goods store.
- Provide volunteers for a Habitat for Humanity build.
- Organize a service corps combining ages, skills and experience to repair housing of low-income families or kinship care families in which a grandparent or other relative is caring for children, who would welcome such help.
- Arrange to meet with parents and children who live in low-income housing to find out what they think would improve their housing situation and how your place of worship could help, whether working to install a playground, fix up a community room, provide books for children, or provide support for their advocacy for systemic change.
- A high percentage of older youths who “age out” of foster care experience homelessness. Recruit one or more families in your congregation with a spare room to offer temporary housing to a young person leaving foster care.

**Hunger:**
- Sponsor a food pantry to help meet emergency food needs of low income families, or donate food and volunteer time to community food pantries.
- Provide volunteers or food for community kitchens (soup kitchens). Encourage volunteers to engage in meaningful conversation with clients.
- Find out if there are summer feeding sites in your community where school children can receive federally-funded breakfast and lunch during the long summer months when many children go hungry; provide volunteers, or find out how your place of worship can host or support such a program.
- Find out if the local schools are taking advantage of the federally-funded school breakfast program, and, if not, work with local school leaders to offer that important resource.
- Make information about SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program commonly known as food stamps, and WIC, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, available for families at your place of worship.
• Participate in a “blessings in a backpack” program to provide backpacks filled with food for the weekend so that children who qualify for free or reduced price lunches during the school week don’t go hungry over the weekend.

• Get a taste of eating on a SNAP budget. Challenge members of your place of worship to spend a week preparing food using $1.40 per person per meal — the average SNAP benefit. At the end of the week, share what was learned, and steps your place of worship might take to help those for whom hunger is an ongoing challenge and reality, not an exercise.

• Partner with schools or community groups to plant vegetable gardens to provide fresh produce to children and families of low-incomes.

• Cook and Play: Offer a monthly session at your place of worship, or by partnering with others, where parents can come to cook and children can come to play. Volunteers can play with the children while the parents work together in the kitchen to prepare meals to take home to be eaten later in the week.

• Explore ways your place of worship can assist low-income families in urban or rural “food deserts” without easy access to well-stocked grocery stores with transportation or other help in obtaining healthy foods.

Income, Jobs, and Benefits:

• Provide internships and job-shadowing experiences for youths and young adults in need; the guidance, experience and connections can be invaluable.

• Provide year-round and summer job opportunities for families and youths in need. Partner with other places of worship, community organizations, and area high schools to pool opportunities and identify those who might benefit from them.

• Provide space for or host a “job seekers” support group where those who are unemployed can gather for support, encouragement and to discuss job search and interview strategies.

• Provide a resume workshop where community members seeking employment can come get help polishing their resumes. Or, provide job search mentors to help job seekers develop internet job search skills, complete internet and paper job applications, and improve interview and communications skills.

• Collect work-appropriate clothing for men and women who are job seekers and newly employed to donate to programs in your community.

• Create a transportation fund to give the newly employed subway or bus fare cards or gasoline cards to help with expenses while transitioning into the workforce.

• Provide free tax filing assistance to low-income working families. Serve as a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site to help low-income families fill out their tax forms and apply for Earned Income Tax Credit refunds they may be eligible for.

• Provide volunteers for an existing VITA site. To find out more, visit http://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep/

• Publicize the availability of the Earned Income Tax Credit so low-income families don't miss out on this valuable help. Include notices in bulletins, newsletters, and around your buildings.

• Model just employment practices, and ensure those employed by your place of worship are paid a fair wage, with a minimum of $10.10/hour and more in some cities.
Child Care:

- If your congregation has unused space during the week, consider housing a child care program to provide more affordable, accessible, good quality child care for low-income families.
- Raise money to create a child care “scholarship” fund to help low-income families pay for child care.
- Maintain a list of emergency babysitters who could be contacted at no cost to help a family with a sick child who cannot be taken to a child care program. Many low-income families have jobs with no flexibility to stay home in such circumstances.
- Donate books and other needed items to child care programs serving low-income children.
- Help fix up a child care program serving low-income children; help paint classrooms, create a vegetable garden or make minor repairs.
- Run an after-school tutoring or mentoring program so children have a safe, nurturing place to go after school while their parents are at work.
- Support after-school programs run by other places of worship to serve low-income children by providing volunteers, money or needed items.
- Start a Book Buddies program that matches children in your place of worship with children in a child care program. Once a month or every two months, children in your place of worship can donate a new or gently used book to their “book buddy.” Plan to bring the children and their “book buddies” together periodically.
- Sponsor or support a CDF Freedom Schools® program in your place of worship or community during the summer and/or after school. For more information, visit: www.freedomschools.org
- Set up a toy lending library in your place of worship or in an organization serving poor children. Invite congregation members to donate new or gently used toys — especially those that encourage learning an imaginative play such as puzzles and costumes. Families or child care providers may “check out” a set number of toys for a certain length of time.
ACTION 4: Connecting with Your Member of Congress at Home

Congress will be on recess the week of October 12 and members of Congress will be returning to their home districts. This is the perfect time to pull a group together to meet with your members of Congress to urge their leadership to end child poverty. Your Senators and Representative are there to represent you and you have a right and responsibility to let them know what you believe they should prioritize. Visit www.childrensdefense.org/EndingChildPovertyNowTalkingPoints to get talking points about ending child poverty that will be most relevant to members of Congress in the Fall. Generally though the goals of your visit could include:

- Sharing with your member the needs of poor children you see in your community. Ideally share stories of individuals, or have individuals who are willing to share their story come to the meeting. Personal stories are the most powerful way to convince policymakers of the need for action.
- Asking your Representative/Senator what s/he is doing to end child poverty.
- Asking your Representative/Senator to invest more in the nine recommendations in Ending Child Poverty Now (or focus on specific recommendations that reflect particularly acute local needs):

1. Increasing employment and making work pay more for adults with children
   - Increasing the Earned Income Tax Credit for working families with children.
   - Increasing the minimum wage from $7.25 to $12.00, as others in Congress are recommending.
   - Creating subsidized jobs for unemployed and underemployed individuals ages 16-64 in families with children.
   - Making child care subsidies available to all eligible families with children below 150 percent of poverty.
   - Making the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit refundable with a higher reimbursement rate.

2. Ensuring children’s basic needs are met
   - Increasing SNAP benefits 30 percent for families with children.
   - Making the Child Tax Credit fully refundable.
   - Making housing vouchers available to all households with children below 150 percent of poverty for whom fair market rent exceeds 50 percent of their income.
   - Requiring child support to be fully passed through to TANF families, fully disregarded for TANF benefits, and partially disregarded for SNAP benefits.
As early as possible, have the lead organizer for this action call the district office of your member of Congress to request an appointment the week of October 12 to discuss child poverty with the member. Make the request now so you will know if you have an appointment scheduled for October. If your member of Congress is not available that week, be open to meeting with the district aide who works on child poverty concerns or arrange an appointment with the member of Congress at a different time. Plan for your meeting in advance. Read the guide on pages 22 – 23, *Meeting with Your Legislators*, to help prepare for the meeting. If you have questions or need support, please don't hesitate to contact Kathleen King at the Children's Defense Fund at kking@childrensdefense.org. CDF is happy to answer questions and support your important advocacy efforts.

When members are back in their districts this may also be an opportunity to attend their town hall meetings and speak up about the need to end child poverty in your community. You may decide to attend as a group, with t-shirts or other clothing that identifies you as a member of your congregation, to show that you are committed to ending child poverty. Be ready to talk about how poverty harms children.

Having members at home also provides an opportunity to have your member of Congress attend your Children’s Sabbath celebration or speak at an educational event or forum before or after the Children’s Sabbath service. Invite them now for best chance of engaging them. If the invitation is to speak at a forum or educational event, you might want to team up with other places of worship to increase the audience size and appeal of the invitation. Be clear in the invitation that you are inviting the member of Congress to address ending child poverty and the leadership they have provided and will provide to help end it.
Meeting with Your Legislators

Before Your Visit

Begin planning for your visit. Don’t worry if you have butterflies in your stomach at the thought of meeting with your legislator for the first time. It would be unusual if you didn’t. Know that the best way to communicate with your legislator is to make a personal visit. You probably will enjoy the experience — and the legislator will appreciate the time you spent communicating your views. So, take a deep breath and begin planning! First, decide on the issues you want to discuss.

Make an appointment. When making an appointment, explain what issue you would like to discuss. If the legislator is unavailable, the aide who deals with your issue often will be knowledgeable and influential in helping to form the lawmaker’s views. Don’t feel slighted if you end up meeting with the aide. He or she can be very influential and, if your meeting goes well, may also encourage your legislator to meet with you in person the next time.

Remember the experts! Parents, grandparents, service providers, educators, religious and business leaders, police officers, doctors and nurses, and others who witness children’s needs on a daily basis are children’s best advocates. They really are the experts when it comes to how bills and policies will affect children, and it’s important that policy makers have a wide variety of people to call upon when they have questions about their work’s impact on children. Children’s advocacy groups often seek out these everyday experts to present the most compelling information during legislative visits. Talk about personal experiences you have had, if possible, to illustrate your point.

Be prepared. Before meeting with the legislator or aide, plan and organize your presentation, and practice what you are going to say. If you are going with other people to the meeting, get together beforehand to make sure that you all have the same purpose. Take along helpful information to back up your arguments: newspaper articles about the problems children face, statistics, or a fact sheet (CDF can provide some of the information you need. Visit CDF’s website at www.childrensdefense.org).

During Your Visit

Make your message concise. You may think your meeting is for 30 minutes and then arrive to find the legislator’s schedule so tight that you get only five minutes. Know exactly what you want to say and be prepared to say it quickly, if circumstances demand that.

Present solutions. People often feel overwhelmed by problems they consider too massive and diverse for corrective action, so don’t just talk about the problem. Share one or two concrete ideas for ways to improve the lives of children in your community. Tell your legislator what it will take to ensure that no child is left behind.

Talk about what works. Using success stories of real children and families who are being helped by Head Start, child care, job training, or health insurance will strengthen your argument and counter claims that all government programs are ineffective.
Search for common ground. Don’t be exclusive or judgmental. Keeping in mind the wide range of viewpoints in Congress and in every community and state legislature, frame your messages carefully to include words and themes that will reach new audiences and persuade them to become new allies. Children’s advocates care as much as anyone about efficiency, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and personal responsibility. Use themes like these to frame your message.

Be honest. It’s fine to say you don’t know the answer to a question and to promise to provide information later, by phone, fax, or e-mail. This also gives you another opportunity to contact the office.

Following Your Visit

Build a relationship. The better your communication, the more seriously you will be taken, and the more willing the representative and his or her staff will be to rely upon you and your judgments.

Follow up your visit with a letter thanking the legislator for the time spent listening to your concerns. Enclose any documentation you had agreed to provide to bolster your position, and briefly restate your views.

Provide additional information. Send articles, write letters with further information, or offer assistance in thinking through solutions that could work in your community.

Call periodically with updates.

 Invite them to speak. Invite the representative or the staff person who handles children’s issues to speak before your congregation or a community group in which you are involved.

 Invite them to a site visit. Invite the legislator to visit a successful child-serving program with which you work, such as an after-school program, conflict resolution program, or Head Start class.

Show broad support for your concerns. If your legislator or aide disagrees or is noncommittal, don’t threaten or argue after you have made your case, because it is counter-productive. A better strategy is to plan another visit with others to show more community support for your position, to put together a bunch of letters from constituents, or to think of another tactic such as a letter to the editor. Persistence often pays.

Watch how your legislator votes and respond. If the legislator votes with your position on the issue, recognize that vote with a written “thank you.” Such recognition may influence his or her next vote on children’s issues. It also lets your legislator know that you are watching closely. If the legislator votes against your position, write or call to express your disappointment, and urge reconsideration of the issue the next time it comes up for a vote.
**ACTION 5: Amplify the Voices of Children in Poverty**

On the Children’s Sabbath weekend, we will connect our voices, faces, and stories across the internet as we ask — with children in poverty — “How Long Must I Cry for Help?” and call on everyone to help “Bend the Arc Toward God’s Vision of Justice for Children” through a tweet chat led by the CDF National Office in Washington, D.C. As the weekend approaches, check your email (sign up at www.childrensdefense.org/TweetChatSignup to be added to the list) for more information about the tweet chat and the questions for the tweet chat that relate to how people of all faiths can lift up children in their communities and work together to end child poverty.

In the meantime, see the Twitter and Facebook toolkit (www.childrensdefense.org/EndingChildPovertySocialMediaToolkit) CDF prepared to accompany the Ending Child Poverty Now report, to help build awareness and attention leading up to, during and after the Tweet Chat.

Using the Twitter and Facebook toolkit is easy! Simply copy and paste a message into the message sharing area (Share Post on Facebook and Share Tweet on Twitter), and hit share! If you want to share any of the great images we have available just make sure you use #EndChildPoverty in your message.

You can also share pre-written messages on Twitter from the CDF National Team Tweet Chat page (www.childrensdefense.org/EndingChildPovertyNowTweetChat). All you have to do is hit the Twitter icon next to the message you want to share.

On the following pages you will find signs that you can use for social media posting.

Here’s what you can do:

1. The week before and on the Children’s Sabbath weekend (if permitted in your religious tradition) set up a spot in your building for this Amplify the Voices effort.
2. Print multiple copies of the signs on the next three pages and have markers available.
3. Invite adults, youths and children (with parents’ permission) to choose one of the signs to hold.
4. Offer the opportunity for any who wish to personalize their message, by writing a line or two about their own experience, or an inspirational quote that speaks to their faith or values as it relates to ending child poverty, on the blank center portion of the sign.
5. Take digital photos of each person holding a sign. (Alternatively, you could take a group photo — of a class or members — holding signs inside or outside your place of worship, ideally in a location that shows the name of your place of worship.)
6. With appropriate permissions, post the photos on an individual’s Facebook account, on your place of worship’s Facebook account, send them to the Children’s Defense Fund Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/childrensdefensefund/), or upload them on any other of your social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram), and include a message that includes #EndChildPoverty.

(Note: Many young people are already on Twitter, so this empowering activity allows the youth to lead. To be inclusive of everyone for this action, have members who do not have social media accounts write or type posts out on paper, and share them with those who do use social media, so your faith community is working together. Young people can also lead by helping other members of the community set up social media accounts.)
How long must I cry for help?

1 in 5 children in our rich nation is poor.

#EndChildPoverty

How long must I cry for help?
How Long Must I Cry for Help?

Poverty hurts children and America’s future.

#EndChildPoverty
How Long Must I Cry for Help?

We know how to reduce child poverty by 60 percent.

#EndChildPoverty

We know how to reduce child poverty by 60 percent.

How Long Must I Cry for Help?
How Long Must I Cry for Help?

1 in 2 Black babies is born into poverty.

#EndChildPoverty

Children’s Defense Fund
How Long Must I Cry for Help?

America's poor children did not ask to be born poor.

#EndChildPoverty