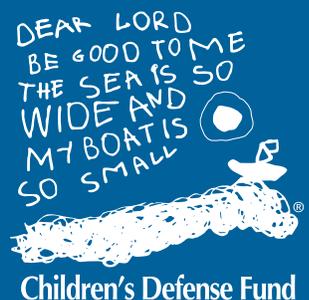


25TH ANNIVERSARY



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

CHILDREN OF PROMISE: CLOSING OPPORTUNITY GAPS

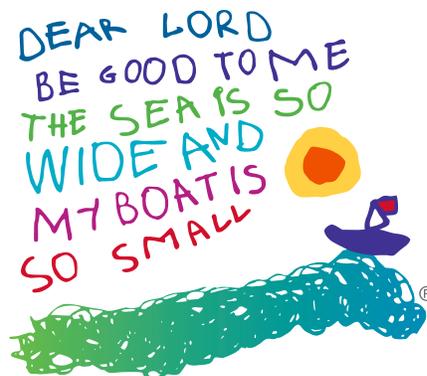


CHILDREN OF PROMISE: Closing Opportunity Gaps

**National Observance of
Children's Sabbaths® Celebration**
A Multifaith Resource for Year-Round
Child Advocacy

Volume 25

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Children's Defense Fund

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration



Thank you for your interest in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration. Whether you are ready to start planning right away or are just beginning to learn about the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths*, this section is a great place to start. In this section you will find:

- A letter from Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund.
- Welcome to the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths*, an overview that explains what the Children's Sabbath is and answers frequently asked questions.
- Examples of Children's Sabbaths celebrated in 2015, which will give you a glimpse of the varied and inspiring ways that places of worship bring their concern, commitment, and creativity to planning Children's Sabbaths.

A Letter from Marian Wright Edelman

Dear Faithful Friend of Children:

Thank you for joining in this 25th annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebration, "**Children of Promise: Closing Opportunity Gaps.**" Whether you have been part of this observance for the past quarter-century or are joining for the first time, we are grateful for your concern for children and your commitment to create more just, significant, and lasting change that improves the lives of children. All across our nation, in places of worship across the religious spectrum, people of faith will be drawing on the texts and teachings of their religious traditions to hear and respond to the holy and eternal call for love and justice that urges special care and protection for children, especially those who are poor. Together we can and must change the odds for America's children with urgency and persistence. Every child should have an equal opportunity to succeed regardless of family income, race, disability, or zip code. To level the playing field we need to close the opportunity gaps by ending child poverty *now* and ensuring every child a strong foundation for success.



"Promise" is a rich word with layers of meaning. **One meaning is the potential for future success and achievement — as in "a promising student."** Truly each and every one of our children is a child of promise, born with the potential to achieve and become all they are meant to be. But that inborn promise cannot be fully realized for millions of our children because of the deprivation, pitfalls, and obstacles put in their way. We are squandering and hindering our children's promise when we allow:

- *more than one in five to live in poverty;*
- *one in seventeen to lack health coverage;*
- *one in nine to be at risk of hunger;*
- *two in five 8th grade public school children to read or compute below grade level; and*
- *nearly one in five children to drop out of high school.*

On this Children's Sabbath weekend, we are dedicated to removing the obstacles and closing the opportunity gaps hindering millions of children in realizing their promise.

Another meaning of promise, of course, is an assurance or a declaration of commitment - what we say we will do. In America, we are good at making promises but far less good at keeping them. We promise all children a free and equal education, but millions of children are consigned to failing schools bereft of adequate resources. We promise families that if they work hard and play by the rules they can get ahead, but millions of hard-working parents find that a minimum wage doesn't lift their family above the poverty line. We promise that all people are created equal with a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but children find that the lottery of birth and geography gives some enormous advantages while others face hindrances, and we allow those gaps to grow wider rather than narrower over time.

On the Children's Sabbath weekend and in the years to come, we promise to work to close the opportunity gaps so that each and every child has a fair chance to succeed.

An election year is especially rife with promises. Candidates assure us of what they will do to improve the lives of children and families as they kiss babies and pause for photo ops with cute children. Will those promises be kept after the ballots are cast? On this Children's Sabbath weekend, we must commit to pay attention to the promises politicians are making to children and families and to hold them accountable — to keep our attention focused on policy decisions long after the election spotlight has switched off.

Dr. Martin Luther King was aware of the huge gulf between what our nation, elected leaders, and citizens' promise and what we do. In his last sermon at Washington National Cathedral, Dr. King announced he would be returning to Washington leading a Poor People's Campaign:

"We are going to bring the tired, the poor, the huddled masses . . . We are going to bring children and adults and old people, people who have never seen a doctor or a dentist in their lives . . . We are not coming to engage in any histrionic gesture. We are not coming to tear up Washington. We are coming to demand that the government address itself to the problem of poverty. We read one day, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.' But if a man doesn't have a job or an income, he has neither life nor liberty nor the possibility for the pursuit of happiness. He merely exists."

"We are coming to ask America to be true to the huge promissory note that it signed years ago. And we are coming to engage in dramatic nonviolent action, to call attention to the gulf between promise and fulfillment; to make the invisible visible. Why do we do it this way? We do it this way because it is our experience that the nation doesn't move around questions of genuine equality for the poor and for black people until it is confronted massively, dramatically in terms of direct action . . . And I submit that nothing will be done until people of goodwill put their bodies and their souls in motion."

As always Dr. King's voice and vision were prescient and right – and speak to where our nation is today. On the Children's Sabbath weekend and throughout the year and years to come, people of faith and goodwill must put their bodies and souls in motion to curb morally obscene and indefensible child poverty rates; wealth and income inequality; massive miseducation of poor children of color; preventable hunger and homelessness; mass incarceration and unjust criminal justice systems that criminalize the poor; and bullying and demagogic politicians encouraging assault of nonviolent protesters. The time is ripe right now to do what is right and reject the ugliness, violence, demagoguery and greed that have permeated far too much of our political discourse. We must move forward and not backward and teach our children how to disagree strongly without disagreeing wrongly.

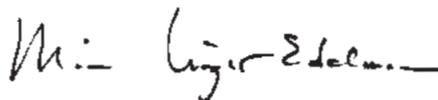
The word "promise" has Latin roots that literally mean "to send forth." On this Children's Sabbath weekend, let us send forth the declaration that we will close opportunity gaps. Let us close those opportunity gaps so that all children can reach adulthood with the education, experiences, support, spiritual grounding, and resources to live the lives for which they were created.

Our promise at the Children's Defense Fund is to work tirelessly to Leave No Child Behind® and to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. Our promise is to provide a strong, effective and independent voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We promise to pay special attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and those with disabilities, and encourage preventive investments in children before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

Since inception, we have partnered with the religious community to put faith into action with and for children. For the past quarter-century, we have been blessed to join places of worship across our nation in the National Observance of Children's Sabbath. Places of worship have rich understandings of promise — including the promises made to that which is holy, to each other, and to the children with whom we have been blessed.

On this 25th annual Children's Sabbath weekend and in the year and years to come, what will your promise be?

In hope and faith,



Marian Wright Edelman

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

Welcome to the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* manual. Whether this is your 24th celebration or your first, we are so grateful that you are a part of this multifaith effort. You make a difference in the lives of children and in the life of your place of worship — by connecting the two, you can improve the lives of children in your place of worship, community, and across our nation and bring new inspiration and excitement to your worshipping community.

By participating in the multifaith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, you are part of a powerful, diverse multifaith voice for children spanning our nation and crossing all lines of income, race, ethnicity, and political party. What unites us is the belief that God calls us to protect children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and the conviction that our faith calls us to live out God's justice and compassion.

This inspiring weekend focuses attention on the urgent plight of children in our nation and calls us to put our faith into action to meet children's needs through direct service and work for justice. Through the service of worship, educational programs, and activities, you can affirm what your place of worship already does with and for children while challenging members to take new actions and commit to new efforts to meet the needs of children in your community, state, and our nation.

The 2016 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* title is “*Children of Promise: Closing Opportunity Gaps*” Together, people of faith and places of worship will celebrate the promise inherent in every child and commit to closing opportunity gaps. As Marian Wright Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund has said, “Together we can and must change the odds for America's children. Children don't come in pieces. Every child should have an equal opportunity to succeed regardless of family income, race, or zip code. To level the playing field we need to close the opportunity gaps by ending child poverty now and ensuring every child has a strong foundation for success.”

What is the Children's Sabbath?

The Children's Sabbath is a weekend that unites places of worship of all faiths across the nation in shared concern for children and common commitment to improving children's lives and working for justice on their behalf. In that respect, it is bigger and more powerful and more inspiring than the efforts of any one congregation on its own. On the Children's Sabbath, places of worship have a strong sense of participating in a larger movement for children. Some places of worship plan services, educational sessions, and activities for their own place of worship. Others join with one or more places of worship in shared services and activities. In some communities all of the faith communities work together to sponsor a multifaith service to which the entire community is invited. Often, local organizations serving children or working on their behalf join in the planning of these community-wide multifaith Children's Sabbaths.

A Children's Sabbath weekend typically has four elements:

- 1) **A service of worship or prayers**, during which the divine mandate to nurture and protect children calls us to respond to the needs of children today;
- 2) **Educational programs**, during which people of all ages learn more about the needs of children today and the sociopolitical structures that keep children in need, explore the sacred texts, teaching, and traditions that lead us to serve and seek justice for children, and develop specific, active responses to help children;
- 3) **Activities** that immediately engage participants in compassionate service to help children and in action to seek justice (such as writing letters to elected officials); and
- 4) **Follow-up actions** that use the inspiration, information, and motivation of the Children's Sabbath weekend to lead individual members and places of worship as a whole into new, effective efforts to improve the lives of children in the congregation, community, and nation throughout the year.

The Children's Sabbath is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, guided by a multifaith advisory committee, and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations. The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by individual donations, foundation, corporate and government grants.

From its inception, CDF has recognized the importance of the faith community's partnership in building a movement to *Leave No Child Behind*. A nation that lets its children be the poorest citizens has at its heart a spiritual and ethical crisis. Thus, the religious community must help to transform our nation's priorities so that we defend those who are youngest, weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable. For many years CDF has worked to support denominations and religious organizations as they develop and maintain child advocacy campaigns. The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration was launched in 1992 to coalesce these efforts into a united moral witness for children that crosses all lines of geography, faith tradition, race, and ethnicity.

The Children's Sabbath observance is guided by a multifaith advisory committee with Muslim, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Bábá'í, and Sikh members. It is endorsed by more than 200 denominations, faith groups, and religious organizations. If you are interested in having your organization become an official endorser of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement, please email sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org

The Children's Sabbath is a mix of joy and sorrow, celebration and sober commitment. To be sure, a Children's Sabbath exudes the happiness of a wonderful celebration. Children delight in their roles of the day, parents hug children a little tighter, more conscious of the gift that they are, balloons may adorn buildings, children's artwork may brighten hallways, child-friendly snacks may replace the usual after-services fare. It is a day that children and families look forward to, and those without children at their side can also appreciate the extra energy and excitement of the event.

At the same time, the Children's Sabbath is sobering, as the service and activities deepen our understanding of the terrible plight facing millions of children in our country and the injustice that we have left unchallenged. It is painful to think about children who are hungry or homeless, without access to health care, abused or neglected, victims of gun violence, without good quality child care, or denied a place in Head Start. The Children's Sabbath can be an eye-opening experience. And done properly, the Children's Sabbath will do more than open eyes to the problems facing children — it also will lift up new ways to help children and families and inspire and motivate people to respond and get involved.

The Children's Sabbath is an annual event. The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is designated for the third weekend of October each year.

Because it is an annual event, places of worship participating for the first time can just “stick a toe in the water” and participate in small, simple ways... although some want to jump in completely right from the start. Others build their participation year by year, adding more elements to their observance. Because it occurs annually, places of worship have the opportunity to evaluate what worked well and what didn't and improve their plans for the following year.

Most importantly, because the Children's Sabbath takes place each fall, children look forward to it from year to year, having a consistent experience of their place of worship as community that cares about children and is committed to nurturing and protecting them.

The Children's Sabbath is flexible. While there is a suggested theme each year, places of worship are encouraged to focus on the most urgent problems confronting children and families in their communities. The Children's Sabbath downloadable resources are chock full of materials from which you can pick and choose those best suited to your places of worship. Most can be used as is, or adapted, or simply serve as inspiration for you to create your own materials. Materials prepared for one faith tradition may be enriching for another tradition.

And while the suggested date is the third weekend of October, if that date doesn't work for your place of worship's calendar, pick a different date that does. What is most important is finding a time to focus on the needs of children and our responsibility to nurture and protect them.

The Children's Sabbath is a time to...

Celebrate and strengthen existing efforts for children

The Children's Sabbath seeks to affirm and celebrate the important work that places of worship are already doing with and for children. The faithful, week-in and week-out efforts of places of worship make an enormous difference in children's lives, and the Children's Sabbath seeks to highlight, applaud, and build even greater support for those important, ongoing efforts. Hopefully, by the end of the Children's Sabbath weekend, existing efforts in your place of worship to help children and families will have more visibility, new volunteers, increased resources, and fresh energy.

Discover new opportunities to help children

The Children's Sabbath provides an opportunity for each place of worship to consider in what new ways they might work — as a body or as individuals — to help children not only in your midst, but in the community and across the nation. Religious leaders, committees, and members may discover additional problems confronting children — like poverty, lack of health care, or violence — and come up with new ways to respond to them. This might include starting a new program sponsored by your place of worship. Or it might mean exploring and promoting opportunities for individual members to commit their time, services, or resources. Or it might mean forging a new partnership with another place of worship or community organization to help children. It could mean establishing a new child advocacy committee to guide your work for justice for children.

Pray, study, and reflect

The Children's Sabbath is a time to look deeply at what one's faith tradition says about our responsibility to nurture and protect children. This is done through the worship service — in prayer, readings, songs, and sermon or other aspects of your place of worship's devotional life. It is also done in educational sessions, whether classes for children and youths or adult forums or inter-generational discussions.

Take action

The Children's Sabbath is a time for action that springs from that faithful study and reflection. It is not only a time to pray, but also a time to put prayer into action. It is not only a time to study, but also a time to serve children directly. It is not only a time to sing, but also a time to speak out to elected leaders and others about the need for justice. So on the Children's Sabbath weekend, after worship/prayers or at another time, members and leaders should join in hands-on activities to help children as well as engage in working for justice — perhaps writing letters or planning a visit to an elected official.

Commit to new, long-term efforts

The Children's Sabbath is intended to inspire new long-term efforts to help children and families. However wonderful the weekend celebrations may be, what matters most is what individuals and places of worship do in the following weeks and months and years to help children. Some places of worship will start new service or advocacy efforts (on their own or in partnership with other places of worship or community organizations), such as an after-school tutoring program or housing a Head Start program or an outreach and enrollment campaign to help uninsured children get health care. Other places of worship will work to encourage individual members to find new ways to volunteer time or resources to help children and change the systems that keep children in need.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Children's Sabbath

Is the Children's Sabbath the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, Tot Shabbat or Children's Service?

The Children's Sabbath shares some aspects of Children's Day, Youth Sunday, Tot Shabbat, and children's services, but it is distinct and unique in some vital ways.

Some congregations celebrate June Children's Day, often to congratulate and celebrate youngsters who have completed Sunday school. Like a Children's Day, the Children's Sabbath celebrates the gift of children and has a sense of hopefulness and joy. But the Children's Sabbath also focuses attention on the urgent problems facing children across our nation and provides a call and support to respond to improve children's lives. And while Children's Day is more typically celebrated only in churches, from the start the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend has been a multifaith movement.

Many congregations have Youth Days when they turn the service over to the young people to plan and lead. Like a Youth Day, on the Children's Sabbath children and youths often participate in the planning and leadership of the day. But on the Children's Sabbath, the adults aren't only the "audience," because the Children's Sabbath is an intergenerational event drawing on the leadership and involvement of *all* ages to convey its message that each of us, no matter our age, has a role to play in nurturing and protecting children and working for justice.

Some places of worship have separate services designed just for children to attend. Like those "children's services," or a 'Tot Shabbat,' worship on the Children's Sabbath is intended to be engaging and meaningful to the children who attend. But the Children's Sabbath is a service for everyone, and it aims to speak to all ages.

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

Reviewing these Children's Sabbath resource materials is the first important step in getting involved in the Children's Sabbath, so you are already on your way!

The next planning steps can be found in the "Planning Your Children's Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths" section of this resource. One of the first decisions you and those who join you in the planning will need to make is whether to plan a Children's Sabbath just for your place of worship or to join with other faith communities or denominations to plan a multifaith or ecumenical Children's Sabbath in your community. Either option is a valuable way to participate. You should determine what is right for your place of worship this year.

These Children's Sabbath resource materials provide planning suggestions, promotion ideas, worship resources, educational resources, activity ideas, and suggestions for building on your Children's Sabbath to help children throughout the year.

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

Choose an alternate date! While it's great to celebrate on the same weekend as thousands of other places of worship, what's most important is to participate in the movement at a time that works for your place of worship.

Which is better to do, a Children's Sabbath in my own place of worship or a multifaith, community-wide service?

Both are valuable. A service in your own place of worship communicates that this concern is an integral part of the life of your congregation and makes it easier to plan follow-up efforts. A community-wide service is an exciting experience and expression of the shared concerns and common commitment to children of many faith traditions. They can create new partnerships for effective community efforts to help children. But they can also take a lot more work to plan and generate turn-out!

We just heard about the Children's Sabbath weekend and don't have much time left to plan. What can we do?

There are a couple of options. You could schedule your celebration for a later date to allow for more planning time. Or, you could still plan to participate on the third weekend of October, but just start with what is quickest and easiest to do, such as photocopying and distributing one of the bulletin inserts, or including one of the prayers or readings provided in the Children's Sabbath resource materials. (You might still have time to invite a guest speaker who is engaged in work to improve the lives of children.) Then, you could plan an educational program or activities to serve or seek justice for children to take place in the months and year that follow.

Should we bother participating in the Children's Sabbath celebration if my place of worship already cares about children?

The Children's Sabbath is an opportunity to affirm what we already do and at the same time deepen our understanding both of God's call and the current crises facing children so that we may more fully, persistently, effectively, and faithfully live out that calling not only on the Children's Sabbath weekend but throughout the year.

There is an extraordinary power in participating in the Children's Sabbath, knowing that all across the country, in places of worship of many different faiths, we are united in our concern for children and in our commitment to respond.

Examples of Children's Sabbaths Celebrated in 2015

What a joy to see the varied ways that places of worship celebrated the Children's Sabbath last year! Like our children, each celebration was unique and wonderful in its own way. Read on for inspiration and ideas for how you might celebrate this year. Brief descriptions of various Children's Sabbaths are below, followed by three articles—the first describing Philadelphia's multi-faith community-wide celebration, the second describing a day-long workshop organized by a Board of Child Care, and the last a blog post reflecting on the perfect imperfection of a Children's Sabbath.

Please send us an email describing what you are planning for your Children's Sabbath celebration. We would love to hear about your plans in advance, and then would welcome copies of your sermon, homily, khutbah, bulletin, newsletter, or any other resources from your Children's Sabbath events afterwards. Please send them to Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris at sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org.

Coral Gables United Church of Christ in Coral Gables, Florida, planned a special Children's Sabbath worship service featuring moving music inspired by children, prayers for children, and more. Third graders received Bibles at the service, and the bulletin included this prayer note: After the 11 a.m. service, families with young children gathered at the Early Childhood Center Playground for lunch and playground fun. Later that afternoon, the church hosted a program, with light lunch, featuring Cecilia Gutierrez-Abety, President and CEO of the Miami Children's Initiative. They wrote, "On this Children's Sabbath, the Board of Justice and Witness invites you to come and learn more about the Miami Children's Initiative (MCI), a nonprofit organization focused on transforming Liberty City into a prosperous community. MCI believes that Liberty City's strength lies in the undeveloped potential of its youth and that through focused strategic work the potential of each child can be unleashed."

Chester United Methodist Church in Chester, Virginia, wrote of their 2015 Children's Sabbath: "We dedicate this Sunday for the children and youth to lead the liturgy, as well as sing and dance during the 8:30 and 11:00 worship services. Rather than a performance, this is an opportunity for us to learn from and be blessed by the gifts of our children and youth. Sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, the national observance of the Children's Sabbath calls people of all faiths to improve the lives of children and to work for justice on their behalf." The church displayed children's artwork in the atrium and featured a child's drawing on the bulletin cover. The Children's Sabbath worship service drew on the resources provided in the Children's Sabbath manual. The third, fourth, and fifth grade students collected worshippers' loose change as part of the Children's Sabbath worship. The money collected was used to support the church's Stop Hunger Now event the following summer to provide meals for children in extreme poverty.

The 2015 Children's Sabbath at **St. Giles Presbyterian Church in Greenville, S.C.** included a family-friendly worship service followed by a congregational potluck. The children of St. Giles and St. Giles Preschool participated in a "Share the Warmth" campaign kicked off on the Children's Sabbath. The children and families collected warm clothing and blankets, scarves, mittens, sweaters, and other warm garments for infants, children, teens, and adults. On the Children's Sabbath, the

children brought forward their donations during the “Word for Children.” Additional donations were brought forward at the end of the campaign several weeks later and commissioned for distribution to the community.

Auburn First Baptist Church in Auburn, Alabama sent out a warm invitation to their Children's Sabbath: “Come and Belong. Join us as our children lead worship. As a special offering this day, the children invite the congregation to bring pencils and stickers for the Backpack Ministry in Auburn. Following worship, everyone is invited to a church-wide picnic at MLK park. We will provide chicken and drinks. Please bring side dishes and desserts... Don't forget to bring your lawn chair!”

University Christian Church in Fort Worth, Texas, had a playful take on the Children's Sabbath in 2015. The church's elementary children created a “Cardboard Arcade” using boxes to create games for all ages to play. Money raised by the Cardboard Arcade was donated to a local project supporting children in the community. In addition, the children led both worship services and sang with the adult choir for the morning anthem.

Amity United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill, N.C., held a book drive as part of their 2015 Children's Sabbath, collecting books in a “boat” in the rear of the sanctuary. The collection continued through the spring when the books were then distributed to elementary-aged children in the community to read during the summer. They also kicked off Operation Christmas Child on the Children's Sabbath weekend. Special child-friendly treats were served after the Children's Sabbath service at Amity.

St. Francis Lutheran Church in San Francisco held its Children's Sabbath in partnership with the Friends of St. Francis Child Care Center.

St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Metairie, Louisiana, invited a guest speaker—a local school principal — for their Children's Sabbath focused on ending child poverty.

First Christian Church in Winston Salem, NC, led up to the Children's Sabbath by participating in Light a Candle for Children. They also collected school supplies and gently used clothing for a local elementary school with which they partner through the Backpack Program.

St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, included a copy of the denomination's resource on child advocacy in its bulletin leading up to the 2015 Children's Sabbath weekend.

JEWISH EXPONENT

— WHAT IT MEANS TO BE JEWISH IN PHILADELPHIA —

AdarII 7, 5776

Enlarge Image »Rabbi Julie Greenberg was one of the speakers at the Children's Sabbath service. Photo provided by POWER.

Religious leaders from all different backgrounds came together on Oct. 11 to call for an end to children's poverty.

Leaders from the Jewish, Catholic, Christian, Islam, Mormon, Hindu, Buddhist and the Baha'I communities gathered at the Cathedral Basilica of Saints Peter and Paul among about 550 people in attendance for the 22nd annual Children's Sabbath.

The event included a multidenominational liturgy that related to issues affecting children. Each year focuses on a different issue, this year's being children's poverty.

Donna Cooper, executive director of Public Citizens for Children and Youth, said the issue of children's poverty is an important one and hits home because Philadelphia has one of the highest poverty rates of any major city in the country.

Sister Mary Scullion, co-founder of Project HOME and the keynote speaker, told the crowd that it is everyone's obligation to ask with mercy and justice to meet the needs of every child.

"It rejuvenated my energy to continue to push for better services for children in our city and improve their lives," Cooper said. "It also showed me that there's a large community of people in Philadelphia who feel the same way."

The event included several performances by local children's choirs Keystone State Boychoir, Pennsylvania Girlchoir, Singing City Children's Choir and the Archdiocesan Children's Choir. Clergy leaders also read liturgy from their religious backgrounds relating to the cause.

This Sabbath is part of a larger organization, the National Observance of the Children's Sabbaths, which is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund.

Cooper noted that among the Jewish representatives at the event, many members of Congregation Rodeph Shalom were in attendance, among other synagogue members.

She said being a part of the Jewish community is a way to be part of a bigger family and community in Philadelphia that shares the same values of really caring for each other.

"I really do believe that our religious traditions call on us to be better people than we would be otherwise," she said.

Rabbi Julie Greenberg, the leader of Leyv Ha-Ir-Heart of the City in Rittenhouse Square, was one of the many different faith leaders who read a passage.

She has also been involved with Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower and Rebuild (POWER) since its start four years ago, which forges bonds between religious leaders of all backgrounds.

Greenberg emphasized that supporting causes like this one is a part of the common good, which is also a Jewish moral understanding.

“Our Jewish prophets called on each and every person to be part of the solution,” she said. “I think the Jewish community really has a, as the pope calls it, ‘intergenerational solidarity.’ We understand the meaning of l’dor v’dor, from generation to generation, and that we have a moral commitment to the next generation to make sure it’s educated — and every single child is included in that opportunity.”

Contact: rkurland@jewishexponent.com; 215-832-0737

2015 Children's Sabbath Workshop Recap

Posted on December 21, 2015 at 4:39 pm.



How long must a child cry for help?

That was the question and theme of the Board of Child Care's second annual Children's Sabbath workshop, hosted at BCC's Baltimore campus on Saturday, October 17, 2015.

Rev. Stacey Nickerson, BCC's Director of Church and Community Engagement, said the program reached attendees on a deeper level.

"There's a lot of people who don't understand what children and young adults at BCC have been through, what they're afflicted by, and what BCC's programs actually do for them," said Nickerson. "The Children's Sabbath represents so much of who and what we are at Board of Child Care. We are advocates for children who need a voice."

"It can be transformative when people see firsthand what we do," said Nickerson, who served as emcee for the workshop. "For most people it's the first time they've been on one of our campuses."

BCC President & CEO, Laurie Anne Spagnola, attended the program and spoke to the group.

"To have her out there with us was great because she's one of our biggest assets in a context like that – she's so engaging," Nickerson said. "She sits with people, has real conversations, shows genuine interest and makes such a difference for us."

The celebration moved Eboni Roach, one of the attendees, to offer her thanks in a letter to Spagnola.

“I was just inspired and richly blessed during 2015 Children's Sabbath,” Roach said. “I am still taking in the impact the meeting has made and what impact it will make for my future.”

During the program, children from Ames Memorial UMC in Baltimore sang in a music ensemble (pictured above) – directed by Rev. Randy Hudson – the same children who attended Camp Life, a camp funded by both a monetary grant and also the use of some BCC social workers and staff from BCC.

A sermon was offered by Rev. Michael A. Parker, II from Ames United Methodist Church in Bel Air, MD (pictured above). Parker's perspective was unique because his cousin was a former resident at BCC. Following a served lunch, a panel convened to engage discussion about ending child poverty issues.

Nickerson offered special thanks to Darlynn McCrae, a staffer from the Baltimore Region of the United Methodist Church, Parker and Spagnola.

“One of the things we're focused on is measuring outcomes ... I think events like this help us learn how spirituality fits towards achieving better outcomes,” Nickerson said.

A very special thank you to all the participants who came out for the 2015 Children's Sabbath Workshop. We hope to see you all again next year!