Worship is at the heart of most Children’s Sabbaths. It is in worship that we praise God who has blessed us with children and charged us with their care. It is in worship that we hear again the prophets and their warnings against injustice and their call to do justice. It is in worship that we renew our commitment to follow Jesus who said to welcome the children because in doing so we welcome him and not just him but the one who sent him. As we go forth from worship in the power of the Holy Spirit, may we continue to praise God with our work to nurture and protect all children.

This section provides worship resources for Christian congregations. It includes:

- Suggestions for the worship service, including ways to involve children and youths
- Sample Children’s Sabbath liturgies for Roman Catholic parishes, Episcopal parishes and Protestant churches to use or adapt to be appropriate for your particular congregation
- Additional prayers
- Additional worship materials
- A sample Children’s Sermon
- A Children’s Sabbath Discussion Guide to engage adult and older youth participants. (Note, a version of this discussion guide for use with participants from many faiths is also available.)
Suggestions for the Worship Service on Children’s Sabbath

- Use the bulletin inserts in the Promoting Your Children’s Sabbath Section available for download at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

- Use or adapt one of the sample worship services provided in this section.

- Create your own materials on the theme of children, ending poverty and closing the opportunity gaps so that every child may realize their promise and potential.

- Use readings from worship and prayer books that include a social action theme.

- Incorporate resources from your denomination that focus on children and child advocacy. For example, the Presbyterian Church (USA) has a Vision Statement on ministry to children, The Episcopal Church has an Episcopal Charter for Children, The United Methodist Church uses The Bishops’ Initiative on Children and Poverty, and the Roman Catholic Church has the Bishops’ statement “Putting Children and Families First: A Challenge for our Church, Nation and World.” These could be used in place of a more traditional affirmation of faith, as an act of commitment, or incorporated in another part of the service.

- Select hymns and anthems that focus on children and our responsibilities to them. (The sample worship services include music suggestions.) Glory to God: Hymns and Songs for Children and Families “Singing Faith All Day Long” is a new CD from Presbyterian Publishing that includes many songs ideal for use with children and adults for Children’s Sabbath worship, education, and activities and for year-round use.

- Focus the sermon or homily on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf. If appropriate, draw on the Sermon Notes on texts designated in the Revised Common Lectionary, Roman Catholic Lectionary, Lutheran Lectionary and Episcopal Lectionary for October 22, 2017 (the Gospel and Epistle readings coincide in all four lectionaries; the Old Testament lessons and Psalms differ).

- Use or adapt the suggested Children’s Sermon in this section. Or, in a role reversal, have one of the children give an “Adults’ Sermon”— a sermon from a child addressed to adults.

- Include a commissioning service for those whose work or volunteer efforts are devoted to ending child poverty. Following the sermon, these professionals or volunteers (contacted in advance) may be invited to come forward for a brief service that recognizes their work as a form of ministry, with prayers for God’s guidance in their work and prayers for the children whom they serve.

- Commission staff and board members of child-serving programs affiliated with the congregation, and celebrate their work as part of the congregation’s mission.

- Include prayers for children who are in need. Specifically name problems afflicting children in your community, as well as crises affecting children across our nation and throughout our world.

- Invite a speaker from a program serving children to deliver a “minute for mission” during your announcement time or to speak at another point in the service. Encourage the speaker to highlight opportunities for members to become involved themselves and to speak out for children.
Collect a special offering to benefit a program serving children or families, such as a program serving children in poverty, an after-school program, mentoring and tutoring program, community health clinic, or Head Start program. Announce the offering in advance so that members will be prepared. Dedicate the offering during the service. The offering could be in the form of money or items such as children’s books, diapers or other needed items.

Invite on-site child care staff, administrators, parents and children to attend your Children’s Sabbath, or invite the children, parents, staff and administration from neighborhood schools.

Involve Children and Youths

The Children’s Sabbath, unlike a traditional Youth Sunday or Children’s Day, is intended to involve adults in the planning and leadership of the day. As members of the congregation, adults must recognize the challenges facing children in our nation, and their collective responsibility to respond. However, the Children’s Sabbath is an important time to include children and youths in the planning and leadership of the worship service and all other events. For example, children and youths can:

- Have an overnight “lock in” at the church beforehand to learn about worship and plan their parts in the Children’s Sabbath.
- Design and paint the paraments (e.g., cloth draping the pulpit).
- Draw pictures for the bulletin cover.
- Assist and greet worshippers as they arrive or leave, light candles or collect the offering.
- Begin the Children’s Sabbath by entering in a procession. The children could carry a banner they made.
- Read prayers and scriptural passages and lead responsive readings.
- Write a prayer to be used in the service.
- Present a short drama or liturgical dance as part of the service.
- Sing a special anthem, play an instrumental piece or perform a song in sign language.
- Remain throughout the entire service instead of departing for church school classes. If the children remain throughout, ensure that the worship service appropriately engages them.
- Have adults “adopt” children to sit with during the service.
This sample liturgy provides suggestions for incorporating the focus of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® celebration into the standard liturgy for the 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A, which falls on October 22, 2017.

Introductory Rites

Entrance Song: “All Are Welcome” (Marty Haugen), “God Is Here!” (#667; this and all other hymn numbers refer to Worship, GIA Publications) or “Gather Us In” (#665).

Greeting:
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit
Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. And also with you.

Today marks the 26th annual National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebration, titled “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child.” We join with the faithful across our nation and with people of every religious tradition to work for a hopeful future in which no child suffers poverty. In our rich nation today, one out of every 5 children lives in poverty. One out of every 75 seconds lives in extreme poverty. Pope Francis observed:

…[L]ittle by little we are growing immune to other people’s tragedies, seeing them as something “natural.” We are bombarded by so many images that we see pain, but do not touch it; we hear weeping, but do not comfort it; we see thirst but do not satisfy it. All those human lives turn into one more news story. While the headlines may change, the pain, the hunger and the thirst remain; they do not go away.

We need to “de-naturalize” extreme poverty, to stop seeing it as a statistic rather than a reality. Why? Because poverty has a face! It has the face of a child; it has the face of a family; it has the face of people, young and old. It has the face of widespread unemployment and lack of opportunity. It has the face of forced migrations, and of empty or destroyed homes. (6/13/16)

On this Children’s Sabbath weekend and throughout the year to come, people of faith are responding to the reality of poverty seen in the faces of children and families, drawing on the sacred texts, teachings and traditions that call us to love and seek justice for children, and moving forward with hope to put faith into action. Pope Francis, meeting with school children, said: “Poverty calls us to sow hope. . . . Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures.” Today, on this weekend marked as Children’s Sabbath in religious traditions across our nation, we unite to sow hope by ending child poverty and working for a time when every child will experience love and justice.”
Penitential Rite

Priest: Coming together as God’s family, with confidence let us ask the Father’s forgiveness, for God is full of gentleness and compassion. Lord Jesus, you came as a child in the fullness of humanity that we may know God’s love for us. Lord, have mercy.
People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you called the children to you and blessed them that we may know God’s love for children. Christ, have mercy.
People: Christ, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you will judge us by how we care for the least of these our brothers and sisters. Lord, have mercy.
People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
People: Amen.

Gloria

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God,
our source of power and inspiration,
give us strength and joy
in serving you as followers of Christ
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Reading 1 –Isaiah 45:1, 4-6

Thus says the LORD to his anointed, Cyrus,
whose right hand I grasp,
subduing nations before him,
and making kings run in his service,
opening doors before him
and leaving the gates unbarred:
For the sake of Jacob, my servant,
of Israel, my chosen one,
I have called you by your name,
giving you a title, though you knew me not.
I am the LORD and there is no other,
there is no God besides me.
It is I who arm you, though you know me not,
so that toward the rising and the setting of the sun
people may know that there is none besides me.
I am the LORD, there is no other.
Responsorial Psalm: PS 96:1, 3, 4-5, 7-8, 9-10

R. (7b) Give the Lord glory and honor.
Sing to the LORD a new song;
sing to the LORD, all you lands.
Tell his glory among the nations;
among all peoples, his wondrous deeds.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.
For great is the LORD and highly to be praised;
awesome is he, beyond all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are things of nought,
but the LORD made the heavens.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.
Give to the LORD, you families of nations,
give to the LORD glory and praise;
give to the LORD the glory due his name!
Bring gifts, and enter his courts.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.
Worship the LORD, in holy attire;
tremble before him, all the earth;
say among the nations: The LORD is king,
he governs the peoples with equity.

R. Give the Lord glory and honor.

Reading 2–1 Thes. 1:1-5b

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians
in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
grace to you and peace.
We give thanks to God always for all of you,
remembering you in our prayers,
unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love
and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ,
before our God and Father,
knowing, brothers and sisters loved by God,
how you were chosen.
For our gospel did not come to you in word alone,
but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with much conviction.

Alleluia Phil. 2:15D, 16A

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
Shine like lights in the world
as you hold on to the word of life.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.
**Gospel Matthew 22:15-21**

The Pharisees went off
and plotted how they might entrap Jesus in speech.
They sent their disciples to him, with the Herodians, saying,
“Teacher, we know that you are a truthful man
and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.
And you are not concerned with anyone’s opinion,
for you do not regard a person’s status.
Tell us, then, what is your opinion:
Is it lawful to pay the census tax to Caesar or not?”
Knowing their malice, Jesus said,
“Why are you testing me, you hypocrites?
Show me the coin that pays the census tax.”
Then they handed him the Roman coin.
He said to them, “Whose image is this and whose inscription?”
They replied, “Caesar’s.”
At that he said to them,
“Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar
and to God what belongs to God.”

**Homily**
*(See Sermon Notes on pages 27-39)*

**Profession of Faith**

**General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful)**

**Priest:**
The love of God is manifest in the Word made flesh and revealed as God’s own child. As brothers and sisters of Jesus, let us bring before God our prayer for all children, saying, “Lord, hear your children’s prayer.”

For the holy Church of God, that we follow ever more closely Christ Jesus who taught us that whoever would be first must be last of all and servant of all, we pray to the Lord:

**Lord, hear your children’s prayer.**

For all the peoples of the world; especially the billion children and families who live on less than one dollar a day, we pray to the Lord:

**Lord, hear your children’s prayer.**

For those who serve in elected office; that they may lead with courage and wisdom, reflecting the Church’s teaching that the moral test of our society is how the weak, the poor, and the vulnerable are faring, we pray to the Lord:
Lord, hear your children’s prayer.

For those who are suffering from poverty and injustice; that our actions lead to change that helps them live in dignity, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children’s prayer.

For ourselves and our community; that we recognize your image in every child, that we work to bless all children as Jesus welcomed them, and that your spirit unites us to work for justice, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children’s prayer.

For all who have died; especially the children who died from causes we could have prevented or injustice we could have ended, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, hear your children’s prayer.

Priest:
God of love,
who shelters us like a mother hen
and welcomes us like a father,
hear the prayers of your Church
and grant us today
what we ask of you in faith.
We ask this through Christ our Brother. Amen.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts  (Involve children and youths in bringing up the bread and wine for the celebration of the Eucharist and gifts for the needs of children in poverty).

Offertory Song: “Praise the Lord! You Heavens, Adore Him” (#529)

Prayer Over the Gifts
Lord God,
may the gifts we offer
bring us your love and forgiveness
and give us the freedom to serve you with our lives.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Eucharistic Prayer

Communion Rite

The Lord’s Prayer

Doxology

Sign of Peace
Breaking of the Bread

Communion

Communion Song: “The Harvest of Justice” (David Haas), “I Come with Joy to Meet My Lord” (#726)

Song of Praise: “We Are Called” (David Haas), “Go Make a Difference” (Steve Angrisano)

Prayer after Communion

Let us pray. Lord, may this Eucharist help us to remain faithful. May it teach us the way to eternal life. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Concluding Rite

Greeting

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Blessing

Bow your heads and pray for God’s blessing. Jesus taught us that whoever welcomes one such child in his name welcomes him, and whoever welcomes him welcomes not him but the One who sent him. May God grant you compassion and courage to serve with love and call for justice so that all children may thrive. May almighty God bless you, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

PovertyUSA is the domestic anti-poverty program of the U.S. Catholic Bishops. An initiative of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), PovertyUSA seeks to educate and promote understanding about poverty and its root causes. PovertyUSA has a variety of education programs and activities for children and adults that may be helpful additions to your celebration of the 2017 Children’s Sabbath with our focus on ending child poverty. Visit www.povertyusa.org

“A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being.” (Pope Francis, Address to the Food and Agricultural Organization, 6/20/13)

“Poverty calls us to sow hope. . . . Poverty is the flesh of the poor Jesus, in that child who is hungry, in the one who is sick, in those unjust social structures.”

(Pope Francis, Meeting with Students of Jesuit Schools — Q & A, 6/7/13)

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops also has many resources focused on Faithful Citizenship that may be helpful to focus on values that protect and seek justice for people in poverty, especially children.
Episcopal Liturgy for Children’s Sabbath

This sample liturgy provides suggestions for incorporating the focus of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebration into the standard Episcopal liturgy for Proper 24, Year A, which falls on October 22, 2017.

Throughout the liturgy, we have provided two options, one from The Book of Common Prayer and the other from Enriching Our Worship: Supplemental Liturgical Materials prepared by The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music of The Episcopal Church.

The Word of God


Opening Sentences

Option 1: (From The Book of Common Prayer, hereafter referred to as BCP)

Celebrant: Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

People: And blessed be His kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Option 2: (From Enriching Our Worship: Supplemental Liturgical Materials prepared by The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, hereafter referred to as EOW)

Celebrant: Blessed be the one, holy, and living God.

People: Glory to God forever and ever.

Celebrant may say: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.


The Collect of the Day

Option 1: (BCP)

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

The Collect: Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Option 2: (EOW)

Celebrant: God be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.
On the Children’s Sabbath

Eternal God, you sent us Jesus, hope of the world, who came to us first as a child in poverty. Help us to follow him through works of faith, labors of love, and steadfastness of hope to bring your love and justice to children; through Jesus Christ your Child who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

Option 3: (BCP)

For Social Justice:

Almighty God, who created us in your own image: Grant us grace fearlessly to contend against evil and to make no peace with oppression; and, that we may reverently use our freedom, help us to employ it in the maintenance of justice in our communities and among the nations, to the glory of your holy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Lessons


12 Moses said to the Lord, ‘See, you have said to me, “Bring up this people”; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, “I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.” 13 Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.’ 14 He said, ‘My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.’ 15 And he said to him, ‘If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. 16 For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.’

17 The Lord said to Moses, ‘I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.’ 18 Moses said, ‘Show me your glory, I pray.’ 19 And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, “The Lord”; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But’, he said, ‘you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.’ 21 And the Lord continued, ‘See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; 23 then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.’

Alternate:

1 Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus,
   whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
   and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him—
   and the gates shall not be closed:
2 I will go before you
   and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
  and cut through the bars of iron,
3 I will give you the treasures of darkness
  and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the Lord,
  the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
4 For the sake of my servant Jacob,
  and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
  I surname you, though you do not know me.
5 I am the Lord, and there is no other;
  besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
6 so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
  and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the Lord, and there is no other.
7 I form light and create darkness,
  I make weal and create woe;
  I the Lord do all these things.

Option 1:
(BCP) After each reading, the Reader says: The Word of the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.

Option 2:
(EOW) After each reading, the Reader says: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.
People: Thanks be to God.

Psalm: Ps. 99 [Alternate: Psalm 96:1-9, (10-13)]

1 The Lord is King;
let the people tremble; *
  he is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.
The Lord is great in Zion; *
  he is high above all peoples.
3 Let them confess his Name, which is great and awesome; *
  he is the Holy One.
4 “O mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity; *
  you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.”
5 Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
  and fall down before his footstool; *
  he is the Holy One.
6 Moses and Aaron among his priests,
  and Samuel among those who call upon his Name, *
  they called upon the Lord, and he answered them.
Epistle: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace. 2 We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 3 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, 4 because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of people we proved to be among you for your sake. 5 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, 6 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. 7 For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place where your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. 8 For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, 9 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-22

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16 So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, ‘Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality,’ 17 Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?’ 18 But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, ‘Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?’ 19 Show me the coin used for the tax.’ And they brought him a denarius. 20 Then he said to them, ‘Whose head is this, and whose title?’ 21 They answered, ‘The emperor’s.’ Then he said to them, ‘Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ 22 When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Option 1:
(BCP) The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to St. Matthew.
People: Glory to you, Lord Christ.

Option 2:
(EOW) The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ, according to St. Matthew.

The Sermon
(See Sermon Resources on Pages 27-39)
The Nicene Creed

The Prayers of the People and Confession of Sin

Option 1:
Form II, Form IV, or Form VI which follows: (BCP)

In peace, we pray to you, Lord God.

Silence.

For all people in their daily life and work;
For our families, friends, and neighbors, and for those who are alone.
For this community, the nation and the world;
For all who work for justice, freedom, and peace.
For the just and proper use of our creation;
For the victims of hunger, fear, injustice, and oppression.
For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble;
For those who minister to the sick, the friendless, and the needy.
For the peace and unity of the Church of God;
For all who proclaim the Gospel, and all who seek the Truth.
For [N. our presiding Bishop, and N. our Bishop(s); and for] all bishops and other ministers;
For all who serve God in his Church.
For the special needs and concerns of this congregation.

Silence.

The people may add their own petitions.
Hear us, Lord;

For your mercy is great.
We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life.

Silence.

The people may add their own thanksgivings.
We will exalt you, O God our King;
And praise your Name for ever and ever.
We pray for all who have died, that they may have a place in your eternal kingdom.

Silence.

The people may add their own petitions.
Lord, let your loving-kindness be upon them; Who put their trust in you.
We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.

Silence may be kept.

Leader and People
Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; in your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone; And so uphold us by your Spirit that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Prayers of the People**

*Option 2*

On this weekend celebrated as Children’s Sabbath in congregations across the land, trusting that God hears both the prayers we offer in the silence of our hearts and those we voice together, let us pray for the Church and for the world. The psalmist praised God as a Mighty Ruler, Lover of Justice. When I say “Mighty God, Lover of Justice,” let us all respond, “hear our prayers.”

Grant, O God, that all who gather in Christ’s name will throw wide our doors and our hearts and lift our hands and voices to proclaim your promise of love and will for justice, especially for those who are young, poor, vulnerable, and oppressed.

*Silence*

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

**Hear our prayer.**

Guide our nation and its leaders, that they will champion justice for those who need it most and keep their promises to children and families.

*Silence*

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

**Hear our prayer.**

Bless the families of our world, especially the billion who lack the income, clean water, health care or education needed to live into the fullness of life.

*Silence*

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

**Hear our prayer.**

Strengthen us to move forward with hope to end child poverty and create a nation and world of justice so that every child may live into the fullness of life.

*Silence*

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

**Hear our prayer.**

Comfort all who suffer, especially those who are hungry, lack health care, or struggle without a job or enough income to meet their needs.

*Silence*

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

**Hear our prayer.**
Gather to yourself all who have died, especially those who died from poverty and other causes we could have prevented.

_Silence_

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

**Hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, Lover of Justice, hear these the prayers of your children and grant them for the sake of your beloved child Jesus Christ our Lord. _Amen._

**Absolution**

*Option 1: (BCP)*

_The Bishop when present, or the Priest:_

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord, Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. _Amen._

*Option 2: (EOW)*

Almighty God have mercy on you, forgive you all your sins through the grace of Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. _Amen._

**The Peace**

_The Celebrant says to the people:_

Let us share the peace of Christ with one another, and give thanks for the children among us who show us new ways to walk in peace together.

*Option 1: (BCP)*

**Celebrant:** The peace of the Lord be always with you.

**People:** And also with you.

*Option 2: (EOW)*

**Celebrant:** The peace of Christ be always with you.

**People:** And also with you.

**The Holy Communion**

**Offertory Hymn:** “When the Poor One” (#802 WLP), “As Those of Old” (#705)

*(You may wish to include the Act of Commitment as a way for parishioners to make an offering of themselves — their time, commitment, voices.)*

**The Great Thanksgiving**

*Option 1: Eucharistic Prayer C (BCP)*

*Proper Preface for Children’s Sabbath*

Because you have blessed us with children and have given your own Child, the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, to reveal the fullness of your love and mercy.

*Option 2: Eucharistic Prayer for the Children’s Sabbath*

**Celebrant:** The Lord be with you.

**People:** And also with you.
Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.
Celebrant: We give you thanks and praise, amazing God, who made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry; You watch over the strangers, uphold the children and most vulnerable parents, and have triumphed over sin and evil. (from Psalm 146)

On this Children’s Sabbath day, we give you thanks, O God, especially for children, for the blessing they are and the blessing we may be to them, as we seek to heed your prophets and beat swords into plowshares and do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

And so we join the saints and angels in proclaiming your glory, as we sing (say),

Celebrant and People: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.

The Celebrant continues: We praise you, O God, for sending your beloved child Jesus born as a baby nurtured by his family, and protected by strangers, who grew as a child who was taught in his temple, surrounded by his community, and guided by his parents, who became an adult who loved and blessed the children, who cared for those who were sick, poor, and left out, who taught that God loves us like a parent, and who called us his friends. This one who was born a baby needing us died our Savior whom we all need, triumphant even over death, freeing us to live as your beloved children.

(At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it, or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing the wine to be consecrated.)

On the night before he died for us, Jesus was at the table with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, and said: “Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. As you do this, remember me.”

As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup of wine. Again, he gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: “Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, remember me.”

Around your table, as your children, O God, we remember Jesus Christ, Who came in love, lived in love, and died in love, Who was and is and is to come. We offer to you our gifts of bread and wine, And we offer to you our lives.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ, that they strengthen us to welcome the children, to show your love, to work for your justice, to bring your peace. Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.
The Lord’s Prayer

The Breaking of the Bread

Option 1: (BCP)
Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

Option 2: (EOW)
We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ. We who are many are one body, for we all share in the one bread.


Post Communion Prayer

Option 1: (BCP)
Let us pray. Eternal God, heavenly Father, You have graciously accepted us as living members of your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ, and you have fed us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood. Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Option 2: (adapted from EOW)
Loving God, we give you thanks for restoring us in your image and nourishing us with spiritual food in the Sacrament of Christ’s Body and Blood. Now send us forth a people, forgiven, healed, renewed; that we may proclaim your love to the world through serving the children and continue in the risen life of Christ our Savior. Amen.

The Blessing (adapted from EOW)
The Wisdom of God the Love of God and the Grace of God strengthen you to be Christ’s hands and heart in this world, reaching out especially to our children, in the name of the Holy Trinity. Amen. (source: Celtic)

The Dismissal
Celebrant: Remembering especially all our children, go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
People: Thanks be to God.
2017 Children’s Sabbath Protestant Service:
Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child

Call to Worship
We gather with love, in the name of God who loves each and every child.
We gather with hope, as the body of Christ who is the hope of the world.
We gather with justice, called by the Spirit whom Jesus called the Advocate
Come, let us worship on this Children’s Sabbath day with love, hope and justice.

Hymn of Praise
Possibilities include: “Gather Us In” (Marty Haugen), “Womb of Life and Source of Being” (Ruth Duck),
“God the Sculptor of the Mountains” (John Thornburg), “Bring Many Names; God, You Spin the
Whirling Planets” (Jane Parker Huber), “For the Beauty of the Earth; Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us”
(Daniel Bechtel), “God of Great and God of Small” (Natalie Sleeth)

Call to Confession
The word “repent” in Hebrew means “to turn in a new direction.” When we sin or fall short, we don’t
need to hide. We don’t need to run away. God invites us to confess our sin and then to turn in a new
direction to live with God and each other the way God wants. Trusting in God’s mercy and forgiveness, let
us confess our sin first in silence and then together.

Prayer of Confession
God,
We confess that our world does not fully reflect your love and justice.
We know that you do not want any of your beloved children to suffer hunger or poverty.

Yet there is much that keeps us from creating the change you desire…
  We think about child poverty and want to place blame, or feel shame.
  We get overwhelmed and discouraged.
  We feel helpless or hopeless.
  We seek distractions or distance ourselves from “other people’s” problems.

But we know we are all your people.

Forgive us, O God.
Help us to turn in a new direction.
Show us how to move forward
working with faith, love, and hope
to end poverty and pursue justice
to create the world you intend.

We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, hope of the world. Amen.
Assurance of Pardon
Listen! I have something to say! God sent God’s own child Jesus that we might know ourselves to be loved and forgiven children of God. Hear and believe the good news: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The Peace

Time with Children/Children’s Sermon
(See sample Children’s Sermon on page 37-38)

Anthem/Hymn
One possibility is Live Into Hope

Prayer for Illumination
God, by the power of your Spirit, calm and quiet our souls like a child with its mother that we may hear with love and trust your word to us this day. Amen.

Old Testament Reading

New Testament Reading

Sermon (See Sermon Resources on pages 26-27)

Hymn
Possibilities include: “Together We Serve” (Daniel Charles Damon), “The Church of Christ Cannot Be Bound” (Adam M. L. Tice), “When All Is Ended” (Brian Wren), “We’ve Come This Far By Faith, Called as Partners in Christ’s Service” (Jane Parker Huber)

Affirmation of Faith (Select one from your tradition that most closely relates to the day’s theme.)

Other Liturgical Responses to the Word
(According to your tradition, one or more of the following may be incorporated into the service: Act of Commitment, baptism, reaffirmation of baptismal vows, or other pastoral rite of the church.)

Offering

Prayers of the People
A psalmist long ago lifted prayer and praise to God, calling God “Mighty King, Lover of Justice.” Trusting that now as then God is ruler of all and a lover of justice, let us lift our prayers first in silence and then aloud, responding in one voice, “hear our prayer.”

We pray that you will help us truly be your Church by living into your upside-down reign in which the last are first and the least are lifted up.

silence

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.
We pray for our world in which a few have so much while many are in poverty. Help us to close those gaps with justice and compassion.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our nation and our leaders, at a time when it is easier to play on fears and division than work with hope and unity to achieve the change that you, O God, intend. Help us to urge our leaders to end child poverty and other injustice.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our communities,

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those in need, especially babies and toddlers without the care they need to develop, children in poverty and parents who struggle to find work or make ends meet, young people in schools with too few resources and too low expectations.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves, for love that embraces all children, for hope that presses us forward in seeking justice, and faith that guides and sustains us.

Mighty God, Lover of Justice, **hear our prayer.**

These things we ask in the name of God’s own beloved child, Jesus — Love incarnate, Hope of the world. **Amen.**

**The Eucharist**

*Congregations that will be celebrating the Lord’s Supper should incorporate the appropriate liturgical material. See the Episcopal Liturgy on pages 32-36.*

**Communion Hymn Options include:** “For Everyone Born” (Shirley Erena Murray), “Give Thanks” (Henry Smith), “I Come with Joy” (Brian Wren), “In Remembrance of Me” (Ragan Courtney), “Taste and See” (James E. Moore, Jr.), “Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ” (Fred Kaan), “Draw Us in the Spirit’s Tether” (Percey Dearmer), “Rise, O Church, like Christ Arisen” (Susan Palo Cerwien) “When the Poor Ones/Cuando el Pobre” (Jose Anonio Olivar and Miguel Manzano)
Closing Hymn
*Suggested: “May the God of Hope Go With Us/Canto de Esperanza” (Alvin Schumaat)*

Charge and Benediction
Go forth to be the arms of God’s love for every child.
Go forth to extend Christ’s welcome to every child.
Go forth to be a voice for justice in the power of the Spirit.

May God of love, hope, and justice
be with you and each child of God
this day and forevermore.
Additional Worship Materials

Prayer for Children
Great God,
guard the laughter of children.
Bring them safely through injury and illness
so they may live the promises you give.
Do not let us be so preoccupied with our purposes
that we fail to hear their voices,
or pay attention to their special vision of the truth;
but keep us with them,
ready to listen and to love,
even as in Jesus Christ you have loved us,
your grown-up, wayward children. Amen.

(From Presbyterian Church (USA) The Book of Common Worship)

O God, help us to recover our hope for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our courage for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our discipline for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our ability to work together for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our values for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover a spirit of sacrifice for our children’s sake.
Help us to recover our faith in You for our children’s sake.

(Marian Wright Edelman, Guide My Feet)

Prayer of Confession
God of all and not just some,
We confess that when some have too much and others too little,
    we have not proclaimed your justice.
When some have been surrounded by love and others excluded,
    we have not reached out with your radical inclusion.
When some have been set on easy paths forward and others left to stumble over obstacles,
    we have not cleared the way as Jesus admonished.
When some are nurtured and others abandoned,
    we have not embraced them with your love.
When some are encouraged and others disheartened,
    we have not spoken your word of hope.
Forgive us, we pray, for the ways we have not lived up to
    the scope of your vision,
    the depth of your love,
    the wideness of your embrace.

God of all and not just some,
    help us to embody your love and speak your justice
until every child may live into the fullness of the promise
for which you created them.

We pray these things in the name of Jesus who came for all and not just some. Amen.
Litany of Response
Leader: Who is the greatest?
All: The one who can change.

Leader: Who is the greatest?
All: The one who can become like a child.

Leader: Who is the greatest?
All: The one who becomes humble.

Leader: If we cause a child to stumble,
All: We will be blocking the best hope of this world.

Leader: If we welcome a child,
All: We will be welcoming you, O God.

Leader: Our Never-ending Hope,
All: The eternal God-child, even Jesus the Christ.

(From the United Methodist Women’s 2002 Assembly)

Oh I Am Who I Am,
Hear the cries of Your children
who are ravaged by violence, poverty, racism and neglect,
scared, profiled, arrested, and imprisoned by those in authority
ignored by those with power as they languish in crumbling schools and neighborhoods
labeled often by some entrusted with their education as dumb, disruptive, retarded, and failures
marginalized by those who vote and are elected because they cannot make campaign contributions
resented by some of those forced to care for them in our often inhumane child welfare and juvenile
justice systems.

Hear our cries for our children, all-powerful God.
Fight their battles,
turn the hearts and transform the actions of those who will not let our children escape the darkness
of violence and drugs and poverty.
Open the Red Sea to their opportunity.
Send them Your manna in the wilderness and
lead us and our children into the promised land.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

O God, forgive and transform our rich nation where small babies die of cold quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation where small children suffer from hunger quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation where toddlers and school children die from guns sold quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation that lets children be the poorest group of citizens quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation that lets the rich continue to get more at the expense of the poor quite legally.
O God, forgive and transform our rich nation which thinks security rests in missiles and in bombs rather than in mothers and in babies.

O God, forgive and transform our rich nation for not giving You sufficient thanks by giving to others their daily bread.

O God, help us never to confuse what is quite legal with what is just and right in Your sight.  

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

God our Mother and Father, we come to you as children.  
Be with us as we learn to see one another with new eyes,  
hear one another with new hearts,  
and treat one another in a new way. Amen.

(Corrymeela Community, in United Methodist Book of Worship, p. 463)

Prayer for Leaders
O God, as you anointed leaders and called prophets of old,  
lead us to recognize our true representatives and authentic leaders:  
men and women who love your people and can walk with them,  
who feel their pain and share their joys,  
who dream their dreams and strive to accompany them  
to their common goal.  
In your fire, with your Spirit, embolden and commission us  
to transform our political system, to serve your people,  
and to bring real glory to your name. Amen.

(Philippines, 20th Cent., in United Methodist Book of Worship, p. 544)

Benediction
Go out into the world  
to love children as God loves you,  
To seek justice for children as God requires of you  
To reveal your faith by what you do and how you live.

Benediction
Go forth to hear the voices of children made in God’s own image;  
Go forth to bear the love of Christ who sided with the poor;  
Go forth to seek justice as the Spirit moves in and through you.  
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you and each child of God now and forever more. Amen.
Sermon Resources for the Children’s Sabbath
October 22, 2017

The sermon or homily is one of the most powerful opportunities to proclaim God’s love and concern for all of God’s children and God’s call to us to put our faith into action by loving and protecting children.

The lectionary texts designated for this Children’s Sabbath Sunday, October 22, 2017, offer deep connections and powerful messages related to the Children’s Sabbath themes. All of the lectionaries (Episcopal, Lutheran, Revised Common and Roman Catholic) share the same Epistle and Gospel lesson, with notes provided below. Several of them also share the Old Testament passage for which sermon notes are also provided. Even pastors who do not follow a lectionary will find rich food for thought and study in these sermon resources.

- The late Rev. Dr. Fred B. Craddock, Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Emeritus, in the Candler School of Theology at Emory University and Director of The Craddock Center, prepared sermon notes on the Revised Common Lectionary texts: First Thessalonians 1:1-10, Exodus 33:12-23, and Matthew 22:15-22.


Additionally, sermons may be sparked by the meditations in Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press) by the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris, CDF Senior Religious Advisor and author of the Children’s Sabbath resource manual. Each of the 12 meditations is based on a biblical text and was originally preached as a sermon. Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children is available on-line http://www.childrensdefense.org/HopeForTheFuture, and through Amazon and other on-line retailers.

A sample Children’s Sermon follows these sermon notes for use with the children of the congregation in a special conversation or “time with children.”
Sermon Notes on the Lectionary Texts

Episcopal Lectionary: Proper 24, Year A
Isa. 45:1-7
Ps. 96
1 Thess. 1:1-10
Matt. 22:15-22

Revised Common Lectionary:
Exod. 33:12-23 (Isa. 45:1-7)
Ps. 99 (Ps. 96:1-9)
Mt. 22:15-22
1 Thess. 1:1-10

Roman Catholic Lectionary: 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
Isa. 45:1.4-6
Ps. 95
1 Thess. 1:1-5
Matt. 22:15-21

Lutheran Lectionary: Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost Year A
Complementary Series Isa. 45:1-7
Ps. 96:1-9 [10-13]
1 Thess. 1:1-10
Matt. 22:15-22
Semi-continuous Series
Exod. 33:12-23
Ps. 99
First Thessalonians 1:1-10
While it is sometimes a stretch for a preacher to move from a biblical text to the current need to be addressed, such is not the case today. Directly and indirectly, all these texts (Exod. 33:12-23; 1 Thess. 1:1-10; Matt. 22:15-22) speak to the concerns of the Children’s Sabbath. In fact, the Epistle lesson, 1 Thess. 1:1-10, contributes the theme. It seems appropriate, therefore, to begin our reflections on the texts with 1 Thessalonians, moving then to Exodus and to Matthew, rather than in the usual order of Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel.

We look at 1 Thess. 1:1-10 first through a wide-angle lens. The Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) ended with the conclusion that Jews and Gentiles alike had equal access to the grace of God. Paul, a missionary to Gentiles, must have been pleased, but he knew that there is often a great distance between official church pronouncements and the lives of parishioners. Paul’s subsequent confrontation with Simon Peter in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-21) is a case in point. Even so, with zeal to continue his work, Paul chose Silvanus (Silas, Acts 15:22) and later Timothy (Acts 16:1-5) to join him in establishing churches in Europe, beginning in Macedonia and Achaia (comprising modern Greece). Moving from north to south they worked primarily in the larger cities: Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth (Acts 15:40-18:21). Paul was only briefly in Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia, a large multi-cultural city and the seat of Roman government for the area. Paul was concerned about his brief stay lest they think he was one of those popular preachers going from town to town lining his pockets. Unable to return himself (1 Thess. 2:18; he was now in Athens), Paul sent Timothy (1 Thess. 3:1-6) who returned with good news of the health of the church. Paul and companions moved farther south to Corinth where he wrote this letter to the Thessalonians, probably 49-50 CE. This letter is the first of Paul’s epistles and, therefore, the earliest Christian document in existence.

Now we zoom in for a closer look at the text. In 1:1-10 we meet what became Paul’s trademark epistolary beginning: the signature, address, and salutation “Grace and peace,” a joining of the common Greek and Hebrew greetings; in other words, total inclusivity. Then follows the Thanksgiving (1:2-10), a common feature of correspondence of the day, but in Paul’s hands, a summary of praise to God, recital of his relation to the readers, their situation, and the work before them. The letter was to be read in the worship service of the church. However, the most striking feature of the Thanksgiving (1:2-10) is that Paul has already settled on a way of framing the Christian life, which he was to repeat in this and later correspondence: the triad of faith, love, and hope (1 Thess. 5:8; Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6). But in this his first letter he is clear that faith, love, and hope are not to be understood by his readers as personal qualities, virtues to be cultivated in private exercises of polishing one’s soul, of thinking good thoughts, of feeling good within one’s self. Faith, love, and hope are not qualities to be possessed but tasks to be done. Putting too much stress on the inner life can be paralyzing, resulting in a subjective captivity of the Gospel.

It is not so with Paul; for him these words have perspiration on them, working not watching, emptying their pockets for other people’s children. These words are not standing still. Listen to Paul: “Your work of faith, your labor of love, your steadfastness of hope” (v.3). When Paul repeats the triad later he uses verbs, not nouns: to turn, to serve, to wait (v.9). The church, which uses this triad to understand itself will not, cannot, be content to sing “Jesus loves the little children of the world”; it will not, cannot, simply pray for
the children; it will not, and cannot, only shed a tear in sorrow for the children. That church will act out of faith, serve in love, and anticipate a better future with steadfastness.

**Exodus 33:12-23**

This extraordinary text consists of a conversation between God and Moses, a conversation which takes place at a very critical time in the life of Israel. God heard the cries of Israel in bondage and delivered the people from the Pharaoh of Egypt. On their way toward the land of promise, they arrive at Mount Sinai where, through their leader Moses, they receive the commandments by which they are to live as the people of God (Exod. 20-23). A covenant is sealed between God and Israel (Exod. 24) and all seems well. Instructions are given for building the tabernacle, a sacred place of meeting between God and the People (Exod. 25-32).

Then everything breaks loose. Moses is on the mountain forty days and nights receiving revelations, but that is a time too long, say the people. They feel abandoned by God and Moses and revert to idolatry. Aaron, the priest and brother of Moses, leads Israel in this violation of the law and the covenant (Exod. 32). Aaron is the epitome of those clergy in every age who cater to the worst in people for the ego satisfaction and monetary gains that follow. Moses is angry, coming down the mountain, shattering the two tablets containing the law. God is angry, ready to destroy the people and begin anew with Moses to create a new people (Exod. 32).

Now comes the conversation between God and Moses (Exod. 33:12-23). The conversation is possible because they are not strangers: God and Moses have been talking since the experience of the burning bush. The conversation is vigorous because they have a history of trying to persuade each other. They, in fact, argued. This vigorous feature of Jewish prayer life is often missing from Christian piety which embraces silent acquiescence as the better expression of faith. We might do well to recapture the prayer life of Moses, and of Jacob who wrestled all night, or of Paul who asked the church in Rome to “Agonize with me in prayer” (Rom. 15:30), or of Jesus who pictured prayer as a widow with bloody knuckles knocking on the locked door of a heartless judge (Luke 18:1-18). Harsh as it may sound, maybe the prayer life of silent acquiescence is born not so much of reverence but of a hesitation to include in our time of study and meditation the really tough issues that hurt and destroy life. Small matters can be handled, thank you, Jesus, but 14.5 million children in gnawing poverty, that is too big as a prayer alone; it is also an assignment. And since first grade we have resisted assignment. It is easier to argue over prayer in public school than it is to see that all children are able to go safely and happily to school.

Read again Exod. 33:12-23. Moses has two issues to be taken up with God: Will God continue to lead the people to the land of promise, and will God assure Moses that Moses is in God’s favor? Both are critical matters. The first because God has become angry with unfaithful and idolatrous Israel and has threatened to end their relationship here and now. Moses knows that God has both wrath and mercy, that God’s moral imperatives are to be obeyed or dire consequences will follow, but also that God shows mercy and forgives, entering into new covenants with the very people who broke the old. Moses presses God: Will you in your wrath remember mercy? “Mercy it will be,” says God, and “I will be with my people as the journey continues.” In other words, the leader of the people is their intercessor, their mediator. No, he is more than that: he is their advocate. The leader of a faith community has no more important role than this. On critical issues that face the faith community, or rather the whole nation, the leader cannot be content to moderate a mild afternoon debate; the leader must speak a Yes or a No; must advocate, not moderate. Especially when there are millions who have no voice unless it is the voice of an advocate.
The second issue in the conversation between Moses and God is also important: Will God give Moses personal assurance of favor? This is not a selfish request. Moses knows the continued effectiveness of his work is directly dependent on his own relation to God. The leader is not a retailer of religion to others. Many a pastor has suffered the slow death of the soul while busy as a bee taking care of the souls of others. As a civil rights worker sighed over the failure of a major project: “We had too many people sign up to do the Master’s work who didn’t know the Master.”

Matthew 22:15-22

We come now to the Gospel reading, a reading which speaks to the theme of Children’s Sabbath with yet another voice, not that of Paul or of Moses but of Jesus himself.

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem in the manner commemorated by the church on Palm or Passion Sunday. The days that follow are filled with a number of controversies between Jesus and lay and clergy leaders of the religious establishment. These verbal clashes are not true debates that function to inform an audience or to pursue the truth. Rather, these skirmishes are designed to ensnare Jesus in a wrong or at least an unpopular answer. The goal is to paint Jesus into a corner and then to say triumphantly, “Gotcha!” Jesus, Matthew says, was fully aware of the malicious intent of his interrogators (v.18). Their transparent flattery when approaching Jesus hardly concealed their motive (vv. 16-17).

The question brought to Jesus was one which, when free of traps and snares, deserved serious consideration. Very likely it was addressed frequently by rabbis and scribes knowledgeable in the law of Moses. “Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not?” A straightforward answer would be, “There is nothing in the law of Moses that forbids the payment of tribute to the governing authorities.” However, Jesus is not engaged in a straightforward discussion but one filled with strong emotion and treacherous intent. Consider the tax itself. The “census” or “head” tax was instituted in 6 CE when Judea became a Roman province. The tax was offensive; that it could be paid only with a Roman coin was doubly offensive. Adding insult to injury was the inscription on the coin: “Tiberius Caesar, August son of the Divine Augustus, High Priest.” Mention the tax and emotions boiled. More than anything else, this tax created the nationalistic Zealot movement, the activities of which led to the 66-70 CE war and the destruction of Jerusalem. The moment Jesus met his questioners could have been incendiary.

Who were these interrogators? Matthew says they were disciples of the Pharisees along with Herodians. Unfortunately, “Pharisee” is among many Christians a pejorative term when, in fact, they were in many ways kin to Jesus. They focused on Scripture and considered it primary that God’s people know and do God’s will. As all Christians are not alike, neither were all Pharisees, and some of them intensely disagreed with Jesus’ interpretation of certain Scriptures and with the company Jesus kept. To these, Jesus destabilized the religious community. Surprisingly, they join forces with Herodians, supporters of the Herod dynasty, more political than religious, and unlike the Pharisees, probably supported the tax.

What a strange sight! Here stands Jesus in the temple area, teacher, healer, lover of the least and the lost, embracer of the poor and the marginalized, friend of sinners, and toward him comes an angry coalition. Pharisees and Herodians, in other words, church and state temporarily dropping their differences to join forces in order to get rid of Jesus. They think they have him in the crossfire; however he answers the question will be wrong. He will either be not religious or not patriotic. Their question is not, “Jesus, what can we do to help the painfully needy in our community?” Their question is rather, “Jesus, what do you think about the tax?” Pardon me, but is not the question not “what do you think about ---?” but rather “what are you doing about ---?” Somehow all this sounds too familiar.
Jesus is patient with his opponents, although he must have enjoyed the moment when he asked for a coin and they produced the very coin that was the issue, and there in the sacred temple. Jesus’ answer, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s” was not a clever move, not an attempt to be evasive, not a definition of how one handles church and state. What he says is that in every situation, each person must make the decision about priorities. The decision is mine; not even Jesus can decide for me.
Isaiah 45:1-7 Cyrus, God’s Instrument

Nature, Style, and Context of the Passage:
The book of Isaiah’s prophetic voice expresses outrage over the numerous injustices of Israel’s society and consistently holds the people of Israel accountable to God for these injustices. Israel’s disobedience, God’s judgment, and God’s redemption are frequent themes in Isaiah.

To fully appreciate Isaiah 45:1-7, we need to remember that at the time of this prophecy the city of Judah lay in ruins. Even Jerusalem’s temple, their once magnificent symbol of national power and godly favor, had been destroyed. Furthermore, the leaders of Judah and most of the populace were in exile in Babylon, where public foreign rites declared that the Babylonian God Marduk had crushed Yahweh and his people. Despair ran rampant throughout the scattered Jewish community.

In Isaiah 45:1-7, the prophet declares that despite apparent failure, neither Yahweh nor his people have been defeated. Israel correctly understands that Yahweh is the one and only omnipotent deity, and that Israel’s exile results from Yahweh’s decision to discipline his people for their callous treatment of the poor and needy. For Isaiah, the seemingly hopeless situation of Israel’s exile contains both God’s chastisement of Israel and God’s plan to restore her. Isaiah asserts that it is precisely because Yahweh is so powerful that he can use people like Cyrus, who do not worship him, to bring a reign of righteousness, justice, and mercy to Israel. Cyrus, a political-military leader who was impressing the ancient world with his successes, was first and foremost an instrument of Yahweh: “… for the sake of Israel, my chosen… I call you (Cyrus) by name, though you do not know me.” (Isaiah 45:4)

Theological Themes:  
**Human sin and God’s desire for justice**
Much of the book of Isaiah is devoted to spelling out the corrupt and selfish actions of Israelite society and the inevitable punishment God would visit upon them. During Isaiah’s time, a new elite class had developed, and the gap between rich and poor had become enormous. Greed for luxury goods and material possessions blinded people to the acute need and abiding hunger of the poor. Widows and orphans were mistreated in the law courts, innocent people were abused in public, and many people were dishonest in their daily dealings. Finally, Israel had developed a false sense of security, arrogantly imagining that her intimate relationship with God made her invincible. Isaiah is clear that God desires Israel to turn from her selfish ways and return to providing justice and care to her poorest and most vulnerable members.

**God cannot be thwarted or controlled**
The Book of Isaiah affirms that God acts in history and that God’s actions unfold in the public areas of society, economics, and politics, as well as in the private areas of prayer, friendship, and family life. Because nothing is more powerful than God, neither human beings nor their false idols can control God or triumph over God. No force of nature can compete with God’s omnipotence; no greed, or fear, or cruelty is stronger than God’s ability to overcome it or create a true good from it. No false idol — such as wealth, power, or prestige — can stand up to the cosmic power of God. Because of this omnipotence, God can act in surprising ways, using unexpected events or people to teach God’s people. Individuals who appear strange or foreign to us, like Cyrus, can be messengers of God’s redemption and God’s blessing.
God’s abiding love for God’s people
According to Isaiah, God drives his people into exile in order to discipline them, not to forsake them. God’s actions, however mysterious, are undertaken in order to restore Israel, not to destroy her. Throughout her exile, God continues to yearn for Israel’s transformation into a community of righteousness and wholeness. Because of his love for them, God will never abandon God’s people.

Preaching the Lesson: Standing strong in the face of injustice
Since the times of Isaiah, people have wondered whether forces of evil, or bad luck, or blind fate have taken control of their lives when they are faced with desperate situations. When violence or tragedy devastates communities, good people ask if God has forsaken them, and some despair. It is tempting, and even understandable, to give in to despair. During the Babylonian exile, many did despair; in our own day, in the face of natural disaster, human evil, and seemingly random tragedy, many still do despair. Nevertheless, as people of faith, we are called upon to make a different choice. We are called upon to persevere in the face of injustice, and to stand strong while we address the violence of our own day. We are called upon to proclaim our Christian conviction in God’s final victory of justice over evil. We are meant to emulate Isaiah’s unyielding conviction that God’s final plan is a restored world of righteousness and mercy. When we resolve to persist, we are empowered to seek out the injustice that afflicts our communities and replace it with just and merciful options. As God exposes the failures of our society, our trust in God allows us to use the tools of truth and justice to act as agents of restoration. Much of the violence in our own day is targeted at children. Our nation allows millions of children to be hungry, homeless, uninsured, abused, and at high risk for a violent death. The Children’s Defense Fund compiles shocking facts about the devastation in the lives of America’s children. Among them are:

- Persistent Hunger – day after day, hope-draining hunger affects the lives of 8.3 million American children.
- Deep Poverty – the humiliations and pains of abiding need haunt the lives of 7.1 million children in our rich nation.
- Gunfire Violence – suicides, accidents, and homicides take the lives of seven children a day.

Some will respond to these facts with apathy or despair; we know a better way. As people of faith, we can dare to comprehend the scope of injustices our children face because we know that, with God’s help, we can address them. We can help to bring about change and restoration. The Children’s Sabbath is a good opportunity to reassess the needs of children in your church, community, and state. You and your congregation can use this manual to expand your knowledge and inspire your action. The lions of justice in our past century — Bishop Desmond Tutu, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi — did not succumb to persecution, or to powerful forces of injustice, or to personal doubts; they were agents of transformation because they dared to be. Some were Christians, some, like Cyrus, worshipped other Gods, but the presence of God in their lives was unmistakable. Like them, we are actual human beings with the full range of strengths and weaknesses, and like them, we are called to be God’s agents in the world. We don’t need to be perfect; we need to be perfectly ready to act. We are all called to participate in God’s plan of compassionate restoration. God never forsakes us, and we need not forsake each other.
Matthew 22:15-22: “Give to God the things that are God’s.”

**Nature, Style, and Context of the Passage:**
According to Matthew, the question of paying Roman taxes is brought to Jesus by a coalition of Herodians and Pharisee. The Herodians, supporters of Herod the Great’s successor to rule Palestine, were pro-Roman, and favored the tax. The Pharisee tended to be silent objectors who deeply resented the Roman occupation but accepted it as a necessary evil. They counseled their people to submit to the tax, but viewed it as an unjust burden. Both groups came together because of their common opposition to Jesus. They intended to place Jesus on the horns of a dilemma in a public place. If he argued against paying the taxes, they would be able to accuse him of anti-Roman behavior and report him to Pilate. If Jesus supported the tax, he would lose favor with much of the general public, for whom the tax was an economic hardship and a hated example of their submission to Rome.

Jesus doesn’t take the bait; instead of discussing the legal issues of their question, he moves the conversation in a different, and more profound, direction. “Whose head is on the coin?” he asks. His opponents answer, “Caesar’s.” A good paraphrase of Jesus’ final reply to them might be: “Then give to Caesar the things stamped in his likeness that are Caesar’s, and give to God the things that are stamped in his likeness that are God’s.”

Jesus’ response carries us all the way back to the Garden of Eden, where Genesis 1:27 teaches us that men and women were created in the image of God. In his slightly cryptic answer to the Pharisee and Herodians, Jesus wants his audience to understand that just as coins stamped with Caesar’s image belong to Caesar, so do human beings, stamped with God’s image, belong to God. Jesus is telling his audience to treat Caesar’s coins as Caesar would have them be treated, and to treat God’s “coins” (human beings) as God would want them to be treated. In Jesus’ response, the question of taxes becomes a trivial matter, and the imperative shifts to focus upon the hearer’s responsibility to provide justice and mercy to God’s people.

**Theological Themes:**

*Human beings have value beyond measure*
In a moment of petty squabbling about taxes, Jesus pulls his audience back into considering the cosmic mystery of men and women being minted in God’s image. Then God said, “Let us make human kind in our image, according to our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26) If we accept that God’s likeness dwells within human beings, then we must also acknowledge the sacredness of all human life. Not just some of us, but all of us are sacred. Each child on this planet is of infinite value. Stamped with God’s image, each of us is indescribably precious, valuable beyond our earthly ability to measure value.

Since the days of Tertullian and other early church fathers, interpreters of scripture have heard echoes of Genesis 1:26-27 in Jesus’ words and found great comfort in them.

*Doing God’s will is better than doing well*
When we do well, we increase our own financial standing; when we act with justice, mercy, and compassion, we change lives for the better, often changing our own in the process. Some of the Pharisees, anxious to trap Jesus, argue about Caesar’s taxes, but Jesus refuses to weigh in on either side of the argument. Instead, he reframes the argument to focus on what is most important to God. Jesus deftly points out to his adversaries that they are busy splitting hairs over a political question when they should be focusing on the larger issues of serving their neighbors and living in right relationship to God. In effect,
Jesus is saying, “If Caesar wants a few pieces of silver from you, give them freely. Your act will remind you that a person’s value is not determined by the amount of their material goods.” Real abundance is found only in living in accordance with God’s will.

**Creative Kingdom Thinking**

It is the responsibility of every person of faith to participate in God’s restoration of the world, but sometimes we can find ourselves paralyzed by doubts or frozen by some intense infighting within our own communities. Jesus models for us the focused mind and the humorous attitude which can bypass trivial battles, damaged egos, or the general malaise of the status quo. With the flip of a coin, Jesus breaks free of the traps meant to damage him and refocuses himself and his community on how to fulfill God’s will.

**Preaching the Lesson**

**Choose Life**

“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” Jesus’ response does not offer us clear-cut guidance on how to balance secular and religious commitments; it does not tell us how much we are to contribute to the poor and the needy. Instead, it pulls us more deeply into discerning for ourselves what we owe to beings who carry God’s image within them. Jesus isn’t saying, “There is a secular realm and there is a religious realm and equal respect can be paid to each.” For Jesus, there is no neutral territory; there is no place on heaven or earth where God’s justice and mercy are not meant to reign. Jesus’ statement leaves us with a question: When, in God’s name, will we give up our blindness to injustice, and our docile relationship to the status quo? It is hard to engage the broken places of creation, but that is one of the tasks God gives us.

The people of Haiti live in grinding poverty; they live in the poorest of the poor countries in the Western Hemisphere. They understand what the poorest children in our nation live without. When asked by tourists to explain how God could permit such great misery, they often answer with a proverb: “Bon dye konn bay men li pa koon separe.” In literal translation it means “God gives, but doesn’t share.” What it means is “God gives us human beings everything we need to flourish, but God isn’t the one who is supposed to divvy up the loot. That charge is laid upon us.” (Kidder, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, p. 79)

Restoration, hope, life for our nation’s at-risk children is possible, but we must pray for it, work for it, even sacrifice for it. Mahatma Gandhi tells us “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” We can be; all we need to do is to look around our church, our community, or our state and take on one new action on behalf of children. Your congregation can choose to reinforce or expand the work it already does to help children and families. What new opportunities are there for individuals in your church, or the congregation as a whole, to bring justice to children in need? This manual has a whole section dedicated to follow-up possibilities for your congregation to consider. (See Actions for All Faiths section) Food pantries, clothing and book drives, educational circles, and legislative lobbying work are some of the options.

We do not have to be cynical or carelessly optimistic about the needs of America’s poor children. The psalm appointed for today, Psalm 96, exhorts us to “Sing a new song,” and we can, if we choose to do so. When we can dare what we haven’t dared before we begin to transform both the world and our own hearts. Each action we take to improve the lives of at-risk children will bring both them and us one step closer to compassionate and righteous restoration.
Out of clutter,  
Find simplicity.  
From discord,  
Find harmony.  
In the middle  
Of difficulty,  
Lies opportunity.  
(by Albert Einstein)

Sample Children’s Sermon
Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child

Good morning. I need your help for our time together this morning. Show me how you would look if you were angry. [Allow time for children to show their “angry expressions.”] If we were moving forward, walking ahead, while we were angry, I wonder if we might stomp like this. [Demonstrate an angry, stomping walk, but have the children remain seated.]

Now, show me how you might look if you were scared. [Allow children to show you their “scared” expressions.] When people are scared, sometimes instead of moving forward they move back, like this. [Demonstrate backing away as if in fear, while children remain seated.]

Show me how you would look if you felt sad. [Allow time for children to show you their “sad” faces.] Sometimes when people feel sad, they don’t want to move at all…not forward or backward. They just sort of stay stuck in one place feeling sad. [Demonstrate standing in one place, shoulders slumped, looking sad and dejected.]

Now, show me how you would look if you felt hopeful — like something good is ahead. Can you show me your faces looking hopeful? [Allow time for children to show you.] Sometimes when we feel hopeful, we walk fast or even run ahead.

I’ll tell you why I asked these questions. Today is a special day called Children’s Sabbath when people who love God are thinking about how God wants us to love all children and make things fair for all children, so every child has the things they need like a home, food, and doctor visits when they need them.

It’s a big, important job to make things fair when so many children right now don’t have what they need. It will take lots of people, young and old, working together to make things fair.

Sometimes when there’s a big job to do, people can feel discouraged. Or Angry. Or scared. Or sad. Or worried.

But we can feel hopeful as we try to do this big job of making things fair for children. We can feel hopeful as we work to make sure every child has the love and food and other important things they need.

We can have hope because we don’t have to do this alone. This weekend, all across the United States people in churches and synagogues and other places where people go to worship are saying they think it is important to take care of all children and they are going to work to make things better. So we can have hope because we have other people to help us.

[If possible, describe some of the specific ways that your church is working to help children including some of the activities or actions that the children will be involved with in their church school classes or after worship today.]

And, we can have hope because we have God to help us. We don’t have to do this big job alone because God is with us. God will help us to be kind and loving and work to make things fair so that children aren’t left out or hungry or sad.

Let’s have a prayer:
Dear God,
Thank you for being with us always. Thank you for helping us be kind and loving. Thank you for the grownups and kids in many places who are working like us to make things fair so that all children can have what they need. Help us to move forward with hope, remembering that you are with us. Amen.
Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child
Children’s Sabbath Discussion Outline
for Use in Churches

This discussion guide can be used to plan a session with adult and older youth participants from your church or with adults and youths from various churches. (A discussion guide for use with participants from many different religious and ethical traditions is also available in the Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Resources Section.) It is designed as a 60-minute session. Adapt as appropriate for your group to reflect the number and age of participants and the time available.

Preparation:

- **Get an Overview:** Read through the materials to familiarize yourself with the flow and content.

- **Prepare Handouts:** Make copies of the handouts for the anticipated number of participants (plus extras, or participants can share if necessary.)
  - Make two-sided copies of Handouts 1, 3, and 4.
  - Handout 2 is Moments for America’s Children. If you prefer, you can visit the Children’s Defense Fund website (www.childrensdefense.org) and download Moments for children in your particular state. Make the appropriate number of copies.
  - Alternatively, you could plan to project all of the handout materials on a screen so all may read along.

- **Plan for Follow-Up Action:** Plan for the final segment to give participants the opportunity to learn more about and commit to active responses to care and seek justice for children and work to end child poverty. Identify action steps that participants can take in your church and community. If appropriate, invite local organizations, programs, and agencies serving and seeking justice for children to provide materials, a speaker or be present at tables following the discussion so participants can learn more and get involved. Consider having index cards available on which participants would write their vision of a future of hope for children and their concrete commitment of what step they will take to move forward toward that vision.

- **Publicize the program**

**Children’s Sabbath Discussion Outline for Churches**

**Introduction (10 minutes)**

1. **Introduction to Session**
   Introduce the purpose of the time together. You could say something like:

   “This weekend marks the 26th annual *National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths* celebration. It is an occasion when people of all faiths across our nation focus on their shared concern for children in poverty and who face other serious problems. It is a time when people of different religious traditions focus on the shared values of love, justice and protecting children. And, it is a time when people of faith and places of worship commit to new responses to love and protect children, end child poverty and pursue justice.”
In our gathering here today, we will have a chance to learn more about the problems facing children in our state and nation and to share our particular concerns for children. Then, we’ll have a time to share how each of us is guided, sustained, or challenged by our faith to love and seek justice for children. Finally, we’ll have a chance to discuss what steps we can take after we leave to move forward with hope to seek love and justice for every child.”

2. **Participant Introductions**
   Invite participants to introduce themselves, sharing their name and something they hope to take from the time together. If the group is small (12 or fewer people), the sharing can be done with the whole group. If the group is larger, it may work best to ask people to turn to several others near them and share in groups of four.

**Sharing Concern for Children (20 minutes)**

3. **“From Weeping to Work” (5 minutes)**
   Read aloud the excerpt from *Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children* on Handout 1. (You as the facilitator can read it aloud. Alternatively, if it is a smaller group you can invite participants who wish to take turns reading paragraphs.)


4. **Moments for America’s Children (5 minutes)**
   Distribute copies of *Handout 2 Moments for America’s Children* (below) or in advance download and print out copies of Moments for Children specific to your state. They can be found at [www.childrensdefense.org/library/state-of-americas-children/](http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/state-of-americas-children/) Allow a minute for participants to read through the Moments silently. You can invite them to jot notes or mark the statistics that surprise them, affect them most deeply, or other responses.

5. **Our Particular Concerns (10 minutes)**
   Invite participants to share about a child or children for whom they have special concern.
   Questions to prompt responses might include:
   - Who are the children for whom you weep?
   - When have you felt such sadness, pain or numbness at the suffering of children that you have turned away? When have you let yourself feel that pain at children’s suffering? What has made the difference between the two experiences?
   - What other feelings or experiences arise for you at injustice affecting children?

   Again, in groups larger than a dozen, invite participants to share in groups of three or four with those seated near them. Let them know in advance that there is about 10 minutes for this sharing. Provide a two-minute alert before the time is up to ensure that all members of the group who wish have an opportunity to share.
6. **Moving Forward with Hope (5 minutes)**
   Read aloud the excerpts from *Hope for the Future*, “There is Hope for Your Future: Your Children Shall Come Back,” on Handout 3.

7. **Sharing from Our Faith (10 minutes)**
   Distribute copies of Handout 4 with passages which may stimulate or supplement responses. Tell participants that in a moment you will be inviting them to share what from their faith gives them hope and guidance for the work of justice and care for children. Note that what they share doesn’t have to be from a sacred text but it could be a practice or a teaching. (Also, they absolutely do not need to be restricted to the passages on the handouts. This is a time for open sharing.)

   Allow a few moments for participants to reflect on what they will share and to look over the passages on the handout, if they wish.

   Invite sharing. If the group is large, invite people to form groups of three or four.

   (If the group is large and has divided into smaller groups, as the time to end this segment nears, invite all back into one large group. If time allows, you could invite several people to share any insights or takeaways from the sharing time, to give the whole group a glimpse of what was shared in other groups.)

8. **Responses to Seek Justice and Care for Children (10 minutes)**
   Open up discussion about what participants intend to do to move forward with hope and seek justice and love for every child. You might say:

   “Rachel is told that change will come as a reward for her work. ‘There are many more children,’ the Village of Hope worker said, ‘and God is working through a lot of people to show us what to do next.’ What work do you feel that you are being led to do next? How will you make your voice heard as you call for justice and for change? What new opportunities for action do you see before you?”

   Offer information about a variety of ways that participants can be involved in long-term responses to seek justice and care for all children. Consider preparing handouts or inviting organizations, agencies, and programs to provide handouts or set up tables with information that participants can visit, or have a number of speakers provide a brief (minute or two) introduction to their work and opportunities to be involved.

   One possibility for follow-up is to have monthly study and action groups, using additional chapters from *Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children* as the basis of discussion and then learning about pressing children’s concerns and timely actions to take such as communicating with legislators, using resources from the Children’s Defense Fund. More information about holding such study and action groups is available on CDF’s website under “Faith-based Programs.”
9. **Envisioning the Restoration of Children to Community (5 minutes)**
   
   If time permits and it fits with the flow of the preceding discussion: say,
   
   “God’s promise is embodied in the very real well-being and restoration of our children. The promise to Rachel is that the children will come back to their own country; that is the ‘hope for your future.’
   
   Close your eyes, if that’s comfortable for you, and envision what the promise of children restored to their community would look like for us in our day. What does ‘hope for your future’ look like to you?
   
   Allow a few minutes for participants to do so in silence.
   
   Then ask again, for responses aloud summarized in a word or phrase: What does hope for the future look like to you, when you think about children and justice?
   
   Consider having index cards available on which participants would write their vision of a future of hope for children and their concrete commitment of what step they will take to move forward toward that vision. Post them somewhere in the church building where they can inspire others.

---

**A Question for Reflection for Parents and Other Caregivers:** Often our desire is to shield our children from news stories or information that would make them sad or anxious, especially when it concerns other children. Children have a natural well-spring of empathy. How have or how could you connect your child’s empathy with real problems facing other children in a way that is empowering, hopeful, and helpful?
Handout 1:

“From Weeping to Work,”
Excerpt from *Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children*
by Shannon Daley-Harris (Westminster John Knox Press, 2016)

Thus says the LORD:
A voice is heard in Ramah,
lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
she refuses to be comforted for her children,
because they are no more.
Thus says the LORD:
Keep your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears;
for there is a reward for your work,
says the LORD;
they shall come back from the land of the enemy;
there is hope for your future,
says the LORD;
your children shall come back to their own country.

(Jer. 31:15–17)

It was a beautiful October morning, and I stood in line at the neighborhood Starbucks, thinking about my half-caf, iced, venti, skim, two-pump, no-whip mocha. The line was long and moved slowly as the baristas made other people’s equally high-maintenance orders, so I picked up a copy of the *New York Times* and began to read. I read, that is, until the print began to swim in front of my tear-filled eyes. This is as far as I got:

Kete Krachi, Ghana — Just before 5 a.m., with the sky still dark over Lake Volta, Mark Kwadwo was roused from his spot on the damp dirt floor. It was time for work.

Shivering in the predawn chill, he helped paddle a canoe a mile out from shore.
For five more hours, as his co-workers yanked up a fishing net, Mark bailed water to keep the canoe from swamping.

He had last eaten the day before. His broken wooden paddle was so heavy he could barely lift it. But he raptly followed each command from Kwadwo Takyi, the powerfully built 31-year-old in the back of the canoe who freely deals out beatings.

Mark Kwadwo is 6 years old. About 30 pounds, dressed in a pair of blue and red underpants and a Little Mermaid T-shirt, he looks more like an oversized toddler than a boat hand.
He is too young to understand why he has ended up in this fishing village, a two-day trek from his home.

But the three older boys who work with him know why. Like Mark, they are indentured servants, leased by their impoverished parents to Takyi for as little as $20 a year.¹

**Weeping**

I stood there in line at the Starbucks weeping, overcome by such a painful sense of despair and helplessness at changing the child’s circumstances, at bringing him home to his family, that I could read no more.

I wasn’t the only one who wept over Mark Kwadwo. The *New York Times* got many letters in response to the article, including this one from a teacher. She wrote, in part,

> There are moments when there is value in simply feeling the deep pain of another’s situation. But in an age when most of us . . . already feel powerless about what happens in the world, a little bit of guidance toward action — anything to hang on to — would have been both kind and potentially helpful for all.²

Have you ever felt that way? That you cannot bear to let yourself feel another’s pain when you feel helpless to ease it?

It is not just the suffering of a six-year-old half a world away that is cause for weeping and lament today. Here, even here in our nation, more than fifteen million children live in poverty and suffer undeserved deprivation and limitations and obstacles.³

Here, even here, more than four and a half million children don’t have health coverage and may not be able to see a doctor when needed.⁴

Here, even here, children — especially black and Latino boys — are being pushed along a cradle-to-prison pipeline so that a black boy still in elementary school today faces a one-in-three risk of incarceration in his lifetime.⁵

---


³ The Children’s Defense Fund, *The State of America’s Children 2014* (Washington, DC: Children’s Defense Fund, 2015), 4. These and all following data are from *The State of America’s Children 2014*, which made calculations based on the poverty data from 2012—the most recent available. Visit the Children’s Defense Fund website at [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org) for additional information and data, which are updated annually or as new numbers become available.

⁴ Ibid, 6.

Here, yes, even here, there are children facing enormous odds against them—poverty and violence and lost childhood—with only their faith and their families to cling to. Children like eight-year-old Gail, who was asked to write an essay about her Chicago neighborhood for a contest sponsored by a bank. The bank had expected to receive essays telling of friendly postmen and games of hopscotch; instead they received essays like this one from Gail:

In my neighborhood there is a lot of shooting and three people got shot. On the next day when I was going to school I saw a little stream of blood on the ground. One day after school me and my mother had to dodge bullets — I was not scared. There is a church and a school that I go to in my neighborhood. There are a lot of stores in my neighborhood also. There are robbers that live in my building, they broke into our house twice. There are rowhouses in my neighborhood and a man got shot and he was dead. By King High School Susan Harris got shot and she died. It was in the newspaper. When me and my mother was going to church we could see the fire from the guns being shot in 4414 building. I was not scared. In my neighborhood there are too many fights. I have never been in a fight before. There are many trees in my neighborhood. God is going to come back one day and judge the whole world. Not just my neighborhood. I know these are really, really bad things, but I have some good things in my neighborhood. Like sometimes my neighborhood is peaceful and quiet and there is no shooting. When me and my mother and some of my friends go to the lake we have a lot of fun. Sometimes the children in my building go to Sunday School with me and my mother. Also the building I live in is so tall I can see downtown and the lake. It looks so pretty. I believe in God and I know one day we will be in a gooder place than we are now.

Sometimes the stories are so sad and the pain is so great that we turn away. Have you ever felt that way? Sometimes the numbers are simply numbing, and we can’t even cry. Have you ever felt that way? And then sometimes we let ourselves feel that pain and let our hearts weep. Have you ever felt that way? God has and God knows; the God who became incarnate and suffered the depths of human pain hears us and weeps with us and with our children.

**From Weeping to Work**

Yet that God of compassion is also a God of action and a God of justice, and so it is not enough merely to sit dissolved in compassionate tears. “Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears,” says our God. “There is a reward for your work” (Jer. 31:16).

While God hears our grief and pain at circumstances of injustice that demand change, God’s response is to call on God’s people to create the change that is needed. It is not enough to cry out and be heard. Rachel is told that the change will come as a reward for her work.

For her work? For our work? Yes, we are called to work: the real work of restoring justice, returning to covenant community that protects the children, those who are poor, and the strangers, loving our God with all our heart and mind and strength and our neighbors as ourselves — our neighbors like Mark in Ghana, our neighbors like Gail in Chicago, our neighbors even in our own communities.

---

The Women’s Bible Commentary reflects on the “return” that God promises as a reward for our work:

The transformed society imagined in these poems provides a social vision that includes everyone not only in worship but also at the banquet of material life. . . . The society will satisfy the basic human needs of all, and it will be characterized by justice, harmony, and peace. . . . The comforting of Rachel, mother of Israel, symbolizes that new society.7

The hopeful future that is promised, for which we must work, is one in which justice is restored, compassion is practiced, and the community has rededicated itself to living in right relationship with God and with one another.


Handout 2:

Moments in America

Every 2 seconds during the school year a public school student receives an out-of-school suspension.
Every 9 seconds during the school year a public high school student drops out.*
Every 20 seconds a baby is born to an unmarried mother.
Every 24 seconds a child is arrested.
Every 27 seconds during the school year a public school student is corporally punished.*
Every 37 seconds a baby is born into poverty.
Every 47 seconds a child is abused or neglected.
Every 64 seconds a baby is born without health insurance.
Every 75 seconds a baby is born into extreme poverty.
Every 3 minutes a baby is born to a teen mother.
Every 2 minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.
Every 4 minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense.
Every 9 minutes a child is arrested for a violent offense.
Every 23 minutes a baby dies before his or her first birthday.
Every 32 minutes a child or teen is killed by guns.
Every 66 minutes a child or teen dies from an accident.
Every 3 hours and 33 minutes a child or teen commits suicide
Every 5 hours and 33 minutes a child is killed by abuse or neglect.
Every 11 hours and 8 minutes a baby’s mother dies due to complications from pregnancy or childbirth.

* Based on 180 school days a year. See Endnotes at www.childrensdefense.org/library/state-of-americas-children/ for The State of America’s Children for citations.

Learn more about what every moment brings for

- American Indian and Alaska Native Children
- Asian and Pacific Islander Children
- Black Children
- Hispanic Children

Learn more stats about the state of children in America at www.childrensdefense.org/library/state-of-americas-children/each-day-in-america.html on our Each Day in America page.
Handout 3:

“There Is Hope for Your Future: Your Children Shall Come Back,”

Excerpt from *Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children*

We are summoned out of grief to this work with a promise to sustain us in that difficult calling. The promise isn’t vague or otherworldly — it’s not the “gooder place” that Gail believes is her only hope. No, God’s promise is embodied in the very real well-being and restoration of our children. The promise to Rachel is that the children will come back to their own country; *that* is the “hope for your future.”

*There is hope for your future, says our God.* True, more than fifteen million children in our rich nation are living in poverty, but we know what to do to bring a better tomorrow. Children can’t move out of poverty on their own, but there are effective ways that we as a nation can lift children and their families out of poverty or at least protect them from poverty’s worst effects. We know what works. Programs that reduce poverty by providing cash or near-cash assistance — such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, commonly known as food stamps), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (commonly called welfare), and the Earned Income Tax Credit — can ease the worst effects of poverty for millions of children. Government safety-net programs lifted nine million children from poverty in 2012. Child poverty would have been 57 percent higher without government tax credits and food, housing, and energy benefits, and extreme poverty would have been 240 percent higher. Still, no child deserves to live in poverty, so there is more work to be done so that every family has the job training, living wage, health care, child care, and other supports they need to keep children out of poverty and ready to thrive.

*There is hope for your future, says our God.* Four and a half million children may lack health coverage today, but we have the real opportunity to ensure that every child in our nation has health coverage if we join our voices to demand justice through affordable, available coverage and reach out to ensure that families get enrolled in the coverage that is available. There’s no mystery: children need regular health care for their developing minds and bodies. They need timely treatment for illness and injury. It will save our nation money in the long run, but more importantly it will save lives and is the right thing to do. Imagine the better tomorrow when every child has the benefit of health coverage and a shot at good health.

*There is hope for your future, says our God.* It is true that a black boy born in 2001 faces a one-in-three risk of imprisonment in his lifetime, but we can *change* the odds. We can work to provide a better tomorrow for boys of color and for us all. What is currently painting such a grim picture for young boys of color, pushing them along the pipeline to prison? Poverty, racism, lack of health and mental-health care, abuse and neglect, failing schools, dangerous neighborhoods. But we know how to address and solve those problems; we know what works. CDF Freedom Schools® sites have welcomed children who might have traveled through the pipeline to prison, touching the lives of more than 137,000 pre-K-12 children since 1995, and more than sixteen thousand college students and recent graduates have been trained by CDF to deliver this empowering model with reading and other enrichment, parent involvement, and community-building skills and experiences. Head Start programs have demonstrated that investing in early childhood development saves us financial and human costs, as Head Start graduates do better in school and are more

---

likely to stay out of trouble. Innovative schools have shown how high expectations, excellent teaching, and comprehensive support can fill graduation stages instead of prison cells with black, Latino, poor, and at-risk students. Even something as simple as mentoring a young person as a Big Brother or Big Sister can transform his or her life . . . and ours, too.

*There is hope for your future, says our God. Your children shall return to their own country.* As for Mark Kwadwo, the six-year-old boat hand in Ghana—someone read about his story and didn’t just weep but got to work. In Missouri, Pam and Randy Cope read the *New York Times* story about Mark and wanted to help. The parents of four had suffered a devastating loss when their fifteen-year-old son, Jantsen, died suddenly from an undetected heart defect in 1999. After weeping, they got to work. In Jantsen’s memory, Pam and Randy launched Touch a Life Ministries, an organization helping children in dire situations in Cambodia, Vietnam, Nicaragua, and elsewhere. “Their grief — and hope — have led them on a journey to try to care for hurting children of the world,” said Randy’s brother, the Rev. Mike Cope.10

After learning of Mark Kwadwo’s plight, Pam teamed up with a small nonprofit in Ghana, Pacodep, run by a Kete Krachi school teacher and a Dutch volunteer. Together, they rescued not only Mark but the other children indentured to the same master, “paying for new nets, boat repairs, and other needs in exchange for the children’s freedom.” The freed children, whose destitute parents could not provide for them at home, now enjoy the security of shelter, meals, schooling, and recreation in a Christian-run orphanage.11

A staff member who works at the orphanage prays for the children still in bondage — and for their masters. “For slavery to end, the people who exploit children also must be changed, the missionary said. ‘There are many more children,’ he said, ‘and God is working through a lot of people to show us what to do next.’”12

The name of Mark’s new school? The Village of Hope. *There is hope for your future, says our God.* We are called by the God of hope to embody a village, nation, and world of hope. We are called to this ministry by God, who created every child in God’s own image. We are called to this ministry by Jesus, who told us that whenever we welcome one such child in his name we welcome him and not only him but the one who sent him. We are sustained in this ministry by the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who calls us into community and sends us out to work for justice.

*There is hope for your future.* You, whose voice God has heard weeping, how will you make your voice heard as you call for justice and for change? You, whose eyes have been full of tears: what new opportunities for action do you see before you? You who have wept for the suffering of children: what is the work you are called to do? You who have lamented the children who are lost: what is the hope for their future that will sustain you?

A voice is heard in Ramah, in Washington, in your community: what will you proclaim?

Adapted from *Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children.*

---


12 Tryggestad, “Oprah Winfrey.”
Handout 4:
Sacred Texts on Love and Justice for Children

Following are biblical excerpts related to love, justice, care for those in poverty, and protecting children. There are, of course, many more passages as well as teachings, creeds, and church practices and history related to poverty, love, justice, children, faith, and action. What inspires, guides, or sustains you?

Then someone came to him and said, ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’ And he said to him, ‘Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ He said to him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ The young man said to him, ‘I have kept all these; what do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (Matthew 19:16-22)

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16-21)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (Matthew 25:31-40)
Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
    for yours is the kingdom of God.
“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
    for you will be filled.
“Blessed are you who weep now,
    for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich,
    for you have received your consolation.
“Woe to you who are full now,
    for you will be hungry.
“Woe to you who are laughing now,
    for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

(Luke 6:20-26)

Thus said the Eternal: A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone. Thus said the Eternal: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; for there is reward in your labor — declares the Eternal. They shall return from the enemy’s land, and there is hope for your future — declares the Eternal, and your children shall return to their country. (Jeremiah 31:15-17)

You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow’s garment in pawn. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I enjoin you to observe this commandment...when you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

(Deuteronomy 24:17-18, 21)