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

MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE:
LOVE AND JUSTICE FOR EVERY CHILD

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

Volume 26
By Shannon Daley-Harris
Welcome to the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration

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

■ A letter from Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children’s Defense Fund.

■ Information about a new resource, Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children, that congregations may use for small groups, sermon development, educational programs, social justice committee, and more.

■ Welcome to the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths, an overview that explains what the Children’s Sabbath is and answers frequently asked questions.

■ Examples of past Children’s Sabbaths celebrations which will give you a glimpse of the varied and inspiring ways that places of worship bring their concern, commitment and creativity to planning Children’s Sabbaths.
A Letter from Marian Wright Edelman

Dear Faithful Friend of Children:

Welcome to the 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration, “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child.” For more than 25 years, people of faith across the religious spectrum have been uniting through the Children’s Sabbath in shared concern for the problems children and families endure and shared conviction that each of our great religious traditions calls us to acts of love and justice — especially for those who are young, impoverished, vulnerable, marginalized and excluded. They also share the commitment to responding with action (on the Children’s Sabbath weekend and throughout the year) to reach out and speak up for justice to improve the lives of children. Together, year after year, people of faith and houses of worship participating in the Children’s Sabbath weekend embody through their words and work, partnership and proclamation that diversity is our strength, respect is mutual, and the only way we will make the transformative change our nation needs to serve and protect children is by coming together across religion and race, income and ethnicity, generation and geography. Thank you for joining in the 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths, whether this is your first time or your 26th. Welcome.

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

We know that children don’t come in pieces, and that we must work together to ensure every child has the comprehensive support they need to thrive. There are many ways that children’s well-being is jeopardized. Children need a Healthy Start, but threatened repeal of the Affordable Care Act and destruction of Medicaid will make the number of uninsured children soar. Children need a Head Start, but it will require our loud, persistent voices to ensure our nation makes needed investments in Head Start, Early Head Start, and affordable, accessible child care when parents are employed. Children need a Fair Start, so we must be vigilant to guard against tax cuts that advantage the wealthy and give crumbs to low- and middle-income families, and protect important safety net programs while also advocating for needed increases in the living wage. Children need a Safe Start that includes curtailing the proliferation of guns with common sense gun safety measures, and dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® crisis that criminalizes Black and Brown children at alarming rates through zero tolerance discipline policies, racial profiling, mass incarceration, and more. And now more than ever, our children need a Moral Start which begins with seeing the adults in their homes, communities and places of worship living out the values of our great religious traditions including love, justice, respect, and welcome — most especially for those who are young, impoverished and marginalized.
There is so much to do. No one person or one place of worship or one religious tradition can do it all — but we can all do something, and together our efforts can make a tremendous difference. Joining together in the 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths weekend is one way we can unite our efforts, amplify our voices, and proclaim in word and action that there is hope for our future when we work for justice and care for all our children.

As I wrote in December, this has been a trying year for so many children in America — confused, consumed by and afraid of the intolerance, hatred and anger of adults. How do we keep the promises we have made to our children? How do we make a better America that values each and every child, regardless of skin color, faith, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or immigration status? How do we remind our political leaders with unwavering clarity that every child is sacred and that God did not make two classes of children? This is not a time to weep. This is a time for work to ensure justice.

Here are a few prayers to help guide us for the work ahead. I hope that you will use them to strengthen you in the planning of your Children’s Sabbath and share them in your Children’s Sabbath services and other events to encourage others who will join you in this vital work.

O God, help us recover our hope for our children’s sake.
Help us 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 Thee for our children’s sake.

We pray and stand for children blessed by parents who care and for children without a parent or anyone who cares at all.
We pray and stand for children filled with joy and for children whose days and nights are joyless.
We pray and stand for children with hope and for children whose spirits have been dimmed and dashed.
We pray and stand for children high on play and study and laughter and for children high on pot, heroin, cocaine, and prescription opioids.
We pray and stand for children for whom we pray every day and for children who have no one to pray them along life’s way.
We pray and stand for children poised by circumstance to soar and conquer life’s challenges and for children bogged down by the pain of survival.
We pray and stand for children who love to read and for children who can’t read at all, for children who learn with excitement and for children told by adults that they cannot achieve.
We pray and stand for children who expect and are helped to succeed and for children whom no one believes in or helps to succeed.
We pray that we will be a help and not a hindrance to children we call our own and to all the children You created who are part of our family too.
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 and powerful nation which thinks security rests in missiles and 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.
Help us to stand together and vote to make America just and right for all Your children.

Our strength comes from the Eternal and from each other. Please let us know now that you will be joining in the Children’s Sabbath by emailing Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris at sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org so we can know and share the depth and breadth of participation in the Children’s Sabbath this year. Thank you for your commitment to stand together with us on Children’s Sabbath weekend this October and in the months and years to follow.

In hope and faith,

Marian Wright Edelman
New Resource for Child Advocates


“Whether a parent or pastor, child advocate or Christian educator, professional or volunteer working with children, we yearn for both comfort and challenge, vision and validation, hope and help as we seek to make a difference in the lives of children.

*In Hope for the Future*, Shannon Daley-Harris draws from over twenty-five years of work with the Children’s Defense Fund to offer twelve meditations for those working to create a better world for our children. Each meditation focuses on passages of Scripture and weaves together moving stories of children, startling statistics about the challenges facing children, and inspiring examples from other movements and faithful leaders that came before us. Questions for faithful response after each meditation will prompt further reflection and action.

This inspirational book can be used as a devotional, in Bible study discussion, or during a social action committee’s discernment.”

Get your copy of *Hope for the Future* today. You can order copies of *Hope for the Future* through CDF’s on-line store [http://www.childrensdefense.org/HopeForTheFuture](http://www.childrensdefense.org/HopeForTheFuture).
Praise for Hope for the Future:

“If your work is related to children in any shape, form or fashion, I urge you take a look at Daley-Harris’ book, Hope for the Future. I think you’ll find it an important contribution to a topic all of us should care deeply about.”


“Activist, preacher, thought leader, and compassionate human being, Daley-Harris has crafted a book our evolving democracy desperately needs to embrace. Read and be enlightened by this powerful voice of justice.”

— Otis Moss III, Senior Pastor, Trinity United Church of Christ

“Through fascinating stories, imaginative exegeses and gems of wisdom from our little ones, Daley-Harris makes a convincing case that the future will be brighter for us all if we set our children free to be effervescent channels of divine light and love.”

— James Alexander Forbes, Jr., Senior Minister Emeritus, The Riverside Church

“What does it mean to weep for our children? What does it mean to hope for our children? What does it mean to listen to the deep needs of our children? Daley-Harris brings us reflections that move us beyond what we know to be true about the state of children in our communities to a place that challenges how we live into our responsibilities as children of God. Through current stories that echo Scripture, these meditations inspire teachers, pastors, caregivers, and parents to look, listen, and ‘move our feet’ in order to care for all of God’s ‘little ones.’ I encourage congregations to use these meditations and questions as they advocate for compassion and justice for all children.”

— Melanie C. Gordon, Director of Ministry with Children, Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church

“In these twelve compelling meditations, Daley-Harris gives us a glimpse of the faith and conscience that animates the tireless and strategic work of the Children’s Defense Fund. She has deftly woven together poignant scriptural texts, inspirational stories from Movement history, and reality-checking reports about the current health and welfare of the ‘least’ among us. May these elegant reflections and focalizing discussion questions fire your imagination about how to become a better ‘torch bearer and torch sharer’ with the Children’s Defense Fund in the holy work of justice and compassion.”

— Ched Myers, activist theologian and author
Welcome to the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration

Whether this is your 26th celebration or your first, we are so grateful that you are a part of this multifaith effort. You make a difference in the lives of children and in your place of worship — by connecting the two, you can improve the lives of children in your place of worship, community, and across our nation and bring new inspiration and excitement to your worshipping community. We encourage you to use the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths manual in your planning.

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

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

The 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths title is “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child.” Many places of worship will focus on ending child poverty while others will address other areas of concern as children and families face many threats and challenges this year.

As Marian Wright Edelman wrote in her Welcome letter:

“We know that children don’t come in pieces, and that we must work together to ensure that children have the comprehensive support that they need to thrive. There are many ways that children’s well-being is jeopardized at this time. Children need a Healthy Start, but with the threatened repeal of the Affordable Care Act the number of uninsured children will soar. Children need a Head Start, but it will require our loud, persistent voices to ensure that our nation makes the needed investments in Head Start, Early Head Start, and affordable, accessible child care for children of employed parents. Children need a Fair Start, so we must be vigilant to guard against tax cuts that advantage the wealthy and give crumbs to low- and middle-income families, and protect important safety net programs while also advocating for needed increases in the living wage. Children need a Safe Start that includes curtailing the proliferation of guns with common sense gun safety measures, and also dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® that criminalizes Black and Brown children at alarming rates through zero tolerance discipline policies, racial profiling, mass incarceration, and more. And now more than ever, our children need a Moral Start which begins with seeing the adults in their homes, communities, and places of worship living out the values of our great religious traditions including love, justice, respect, and welcome — most especially for those who are young, impoverished, and marginalized.
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There is so much to do. No one person or one place of worship or one religious tradition can do it all — but we can all do something, and together our efforts can make a tremendous difference. Joining together in the 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths weekend is one way that we can unite our efforts, amplify our voices, and proclaim in word and action that we can move forward with hope to assure love and justice for every child."

What is the Children’s Sabbath?

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

A Children’s Sabbath weekend typically has four elements:

1) A service of worship or prayers, during which the divine mandate to nurture and protect children calls us to respond to the needs of children today;

2) Educational programs, during which people of all ages learn more about the needs of children today and the sociopolitical structures that keep children in need; explore the sacred texts, teaching, and traditions that lead us to serve and seek justice for children; and develop specific, active responses to help children;

3) Activities that immediately engage participants in compassionate service to help children and in action to seek justice (such as writing letters to elected officials); and

4) Follow-up actions that use the inspiration, information, and motivation of the Children’s Sabbath weekend to lead individual members and places of worship as a whole into new, effective efforts to improve the lives of children in the congregation, community and nation throughout the year.

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

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by individual donations, foundation, corporate and government grants.
From its inception, CDF has recognized the importance of the faith community’s partnership in building a movement to \textit{Leave No Child Behind}. A nation that lets its children be the poorest citizens has, at its heart, a spiritual and ethical crisis. Thus, the religious community must help to transform our nation’s priorities so that we defend those who are youngest, weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable. For many years, CDF has worked to support denominations and religious organizations as they develop and maintain child advocacy campaigns. The \textit{National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths} celebration was launched in 1992 to coalesce these efforts into a united moral witness for children that crosses all lines of geography, faith tradition, race, and ethnicity.

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

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

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

\textbf{The Children’s Sabbath is an annual event.} The \textit{National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths} weekend is designated for the third weekend of October each year.

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

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

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

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

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

**Celebrate and strengthen existing efforts for children.**

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

**Discover new opportunities to help children.**

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

**Pray, study, and reflect.**

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

**Take action.**

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

**Commit to new, long-term efforts.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Choose an alternate date! While it’s great to celebrate on the same weekend as thousands of other places of worship, what’s most important is to participate in the movement at a time that works for your place of worship.
Which is a better to do, a Children’s Sabbath in my own place of worship or a multifaith, community-wide service?

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

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

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

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

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

There is an extraordinary power in participating in the Children’s Sabbath, knowing that all across the country, in places of worship of many different faiths, we are united in our concern for children and in our commitment to respond.
What a joy to see the varied ways that places of worship celebrate the Children’s Sabbath! Like our children, each celebration was unique and wonderful in its own way. Read on for inspiration and ideas for how you might celebrate this year.

First United Methodist Church of Park Ridge, IL, celebrated their 2016 Children’s Sabbath Sunday on Oct. 9. They wrote:

“Our annual Children’s Sabbath Sunday will have some special guests this year. ChildServ President & CEO Dan Kotowski & Director of Advocacy Kim Caffing will be with us in worship at 9:30 a.m. and for an after church forum at 11 am. “Through its mission, ChildServ has established itself as a strong advocate for children and families, and to work for justice in the use of resources and provision of services. This means proclaiming the importance of each child and fulfilling a commitment to work for a nurturing environment at the family, community, state and national levels. Families must have the essential resources they need to care for their children. ChildServ’s boards, staff and volunteers work with coalitions on behalf of vulnerable children and their families. ChildServ also promotes child advocacy in local congregations of the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church by participating in United Voices for Children, a coalition of the four United Methodist agencies serving children in northern Illinois.” Caffing will be our guest preacher at the 9:30 am service. She previously served as an assistant general secretary of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women in The United Methodist Church. Kotowski joined ChildServ in 2015 after serving nine years in the Illinois State Senate in the 28th District, during which he championed numerous laws to improve the safety of children and families.”

Temple Emanuel in Greensboro, NC, marked the Children’s Shabbat with guest speaker Sharon L. Contreras, Guilford County Schools’ new superintendent.

First Presbyterian Church of Dallas described their 2016 Children’s Sabbath events in their newsletter:

“Children’s Sabbath Children of Promise: Closing Opportunity Gaps” - Sunday October 23rd, First Presbyterian Church will celebrate Children’s Sabbath. Children’s Sabbath is a way for faith communities to celebrate children and provides the opportunity for houses of worship to renew and live out their moral responsibility to care, protect, and advocate for all God’s children. Faith Communities of all kinds around the country are celebrating Children’s Sabbath. The theme this year is “Children of Promise: Closing Opportunity Gaps.” Our Music Makers Children will participate as leaders in worship, there will be a “Time with Children” and a Minute for Mission highlighting Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Service. In preparation for Children’s Sabbath, consider using the devotional guide which will be available to you on a table in Anderson Common. This guide will help you think about advocating for and praying for all of God’s Children. On Oct. 23, in Anderson Common, you will also find displays highlighting how FPC supports children and youth in our congregation, Stewpot Children and Youth Programs, our Developmental Day School as well as a display will be available with information about Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Service.”
St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Atlanta featured the leadership of children and youths in their Children’s Sabbath. A young person preached the sermon, and the many musical gifts of children and youths were featured throughout. St. Paul’s includes a service project following the Children’s Sabbath every year. They prepared “Blessing Bags” for their 2016 Children’s Sabbath activity.

First United Methodist Church of McKinney, TX, focused on domestic violence in their Children’s Sabbath, and shared information about community resources to turn to for child abuse, trafficking, and other concerns.

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Atlanta helped spread the word about the Children’s Sabbath event planned by Big Bethel AME in Atlanta:

Children’s Sabbath Informational Forum at Big Bethel on Oct. 22 to Focus on Issues Facing Families in this Election Year

Our good friend Rev. Bessie Donaldson, Associate Minister of Big Bethel AME Church in downtown Atlanta — and the driving force behind the Big Bethel Saturday School, one of our three Partners in Education — has asked us to spread the word about an important upcoming program.

Big Bethel will be observing its eleventh Annual National Children’s Sabbath Weekend on Oct. 22 and 23. Each year the Informational Forum addresses serious concerns that children and youth face each and every day. This year—an election year — it will deal with key legislation that will dramatically affect our children, youth and families.

The Informational Forum on Saturday, Oct. 22, will primarily focus on Amendment I (the “Opportunity School District” proposal) and Amendment II (Safe Harbor for Sexually Exploited Children).

The forum will also address bullying, gang/gun violence, education and academic achievement, police and the community, and peer pressure. Panel participants include Senator Vincent Fort, Solicitor General-Elect Keith Gammage, retired probation officers Roy Williams and Bessie Shavers, retired APS counselor Joanne Jackson-Jones, Pamela Perkins-Carn, coordinator for the Interfaith Children’s Movement, and Jarvis Davis, an up and coming community organizer for youth. There will be breakout discussion sessions for children and youth.

Congregation Rodeph Shalom hosted Philadelphia’s multifaith Children’s Sabbath celebration in 2016. The multifaith, community-wide service, Philadelphia’s 23rd Children’s Sabbath, featured a keynote address from Kevin Johnson, President and CEO of Opportunities Industrialization Center, and music by the Keystone and New Jersey Boychoirs, Pennsylvania and Garden State Girlchoirs, and the Youth and Children’s Choir of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints.

Grace University Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, MN, highlighted the Children’s Sabbath theme at the top of the bulletin. Children sang and provided other forms of leadership throughout the service. During the time of prayer, the bulletin noted, “We sing the names of all the children at Grace ages 18 and younger — and pray for children throughout the world.” The sung response was “peace be yours” with the refrain, “For all children near and far, we pray to you, O God. Bless the children ev’rywhere, they are precious in your sight.” During the week after the Children’s Sabbath, the Lutheran Campus Ministry hosted a forum, “Faith, Politics, and Finding Common Ground” featuring two state senators — one a Democrat, one a Republican, both Lutheran — sharing how “faith informs their vocation as an elected official” followed by a conversation about “what shared values inform their work together.”
The Congregational Church of Belmont in Belmont, California, held a Children’s Sabbath service in which the children lit altar candles, served as greeters, sang and led throughout the service. Instead of a traditional “time with children” in which the pastor interactively addresses young ones, they had a “time with adults” in which a young person engaged the adults. Then, the traditional sermon was given by another youth.

Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, incorporated special music, readings, and a sermon focused on the Children’s Sabbath theme. In their bulletin, they included statistics about the county’s children from Kids Count, writing:

“As we ponder today the reality of children living in poverty, statistics for our own county and the realities that children face right here at home are below. Pray for these situations as together we seek wisdom about how we might be part of addressing these concerns.”

Union Church in Berea, Kentucky, printed an excerpt from Marian Wright Edelman’s letter in the Children’s Sabbath materials in its bulletin for “Meditation” before worship. At the end of the bulletin, they included information about the Children’s Sabbath, CDF and core facts about child poverty. Union Church then used its website to follow up on the Children’s Sabbath with suggestions for prayer and action:

“This week we joined thousands of other churches, synagogues, mosques and temples in celebrating International Children’s Sabbath: giving thanks for children and youth, and pledging ourselves to their wellbeing and fair treatment.”

In Church the children helped Rev. Kent tell the story of the widow who knocked and knocked and knocked on the unjust judge’s door until he finally gave what was right. We need people of promise and persistence to keep knocking every day to help others get what is just and fair. So this week there are both prayers of the heart to say, and “prayers in action” that we can take as a way of putting faith into deed.

Children’s Sabbath is the inspiration of Marian Wright Edelman, president and founder of the Children’s Defense Fund. Here is the prayer offered in worship written by her:

O God, help us to recover our hope for our Children’s sake.
Help us recover our courage for our Children’s sake.
Help us recover our discipline for our Children’s sake.
Help us recover our ability to work together for our Children’s sake.
Help us recover our values for our Children’s sake.
Help us recover our faith for our Children’s sake.

The 2016 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths Celebration, “Children of Promise: Closing Opportunity Gaps,” is a focus on closing opportunity gaps due to poverty and lack of access to high-quality early childhood development and a high-quality education so that every child can reach their God-given potential. For that to happen, we as people of faith need to stand tall within our communities and push our nation to keep our promises of love and justice, equality and dignity for all.
Here’s some facts and some ways you can make a prayer with your actions:

- **How about making one day a week a day to phone call or email a legislator or public official encouraging them, and asking them (over and over) to craft law and policy in the best interest of children? It can be as easy as breathing, and as regular. (Remember that God would write a covenant on our hearts, so it would be as integral as living!):** you could ask what they are doing to ensure no child is hungry or without shelter? Or Ask if they will support the UN convention on the rights of the Child (we’re the ONLY COUNTRY not to ratify it. Really?)

- **Check at your work: does your business offer parental leave? Time off for sick family members? Could you explore how some implementation might be possible?**

- **Give some extra love and support to a local teacher:** they are the front line on children’s hardships. They need help so they can be help!

- **Support children who are not your own. This is critical and practical. Children who are not our own will be supporting us with their work, taxes, and community participation. Your generous and loving support is a prayer for the right ordering of all our lives.**

- **Get Educated!** The Children’s Defense Fund is the perfect place to start. Here are some notes from them on Children and Poverty:
  - America’s child poverty rate is one of the highest among industrialized nations.
  - Child poverty creates gaps in cognitive skills.
  - Child hunger jeopardizes children’s health and ability to learn.
  - Child poverty fuels the intergenerational cycle of poverty.
  - For more information, please visit [www.endingchildpovertynow.org](http://www.endingchildpovertynow.org).

Newport Lutheran Church in Newport, MN, celebrated its Children’s Sabbath in November, and designated the Children’s Defense Fund as the recipient of its mission giving that month.

The Communities of Christ based in Independence, MO, developed worship suggestions and sermon helps for their congregations, posted on the denomination’s website.

Broadway Baptist Church in Louisville, KY, celebrated the Children’s Sabbath again. The tradition has become so meaningful to the congregation’s children that when a child’s family moved out of state, he still wanted to be included and so provided the artwork for the front of the worship bulletin. The pastoral prayers in the Children’s Sabbath service was a “bubble prayer,” described by the Associate Pastor for Youth and Families: “Each reader named a blessing and then blew bubbles as a symbol of sending their blessings towards God. We had children and parents doing the prayer together.”

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