MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE:
LOVE AND JUSTICE FOR EVERY CHILD

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

Dear Lord,

Be good to me. The nerves so wide and my boat is so small.

Children’s Defense Fund
MOVING FORWARD
WITH HOPE:
LOVE AND JUSTICE FOR EVERY CHILD

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

Volume 26
By Shannon Daley-Harris

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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:

- 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
Welcome to the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration

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 to 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.”

— Parker J. Palmer, author of *The Courage to Teach*, *Let Your Life Speak*, and *Healing the Heart of Democracy*.

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

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

The Children’s Sabbath is a mix of joy and sorrow, celebration and sober commitment. To be sure, a Children’s Sabbath exudes the happiness of a wonderful celebration. Children delight in their roles of the day 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.

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

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

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

The Children’s Sabbath is flexible. While there is a suggested theme each year, places of worship are encouraged to focus on the most urgent problems confronting children and families in their communities. The Children’s Sabbath downloadable resources are chock full of materials from which you can pick and choose those best suited to your places of worship. Most can be used as is, 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.
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). 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.
Welcome to the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration

Examples of Children’s Sabbaths Celebrated in 2016

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. Coffing 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.
There are two kinds of Children’s Sabbath celebrations. First, there are Children’s Sabbath celebrations in your own place of worship, which typically take place during the customary time for services, prayers, or other worship and often follow the customary order of worship but are enriched with a special Children’s Sabbath focus. The other kind of Children’s Sabbath is a community-wide, multifaith celebration that brings together many different places of worship, and is planned for a day and time that do not conflict with the customary times of worship, prayers, or services of other places of worship. As a multifaith service bringing together many different religious traditions, this form of the Children’s Sabbath service is flexible, creative and unique to your community and the leadership involved. At this time in our nation, it can be especially powerful to come together as a multifaith community that celebrates shared values of justice and compassion especially for children and those in poverty and that respects differences and welcomes the chance to learn from each other.

Both kinds of Children’s Sabbath celebrations — one held within your own place of worship for your members and one held in the community for members of many places of worship — are terrific ways to participate in the Children’s Sabbath movement. Decide what is best for you this year.

In this section you’ll find:

- Steps for Planning a Children’s Sabbath Celebration in Your Place of Worship
- Steps for Planning a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Celebration in Your Community
Steps for Planning a Children’s Sabbath Celebration in Your Place of Worship

- **Begin with prayer.** The success of the Children’s Sabbath — its ability to stir the hearts, minds and hands of people to nurture and protect children — ultimately relies on God’s grace. Seek God’s guidance for your Children’s Sabbath, turn to God for the strength and commitment to plan it, pray for partners to help you in this venture, and thank God for the precious children God has entrusted to our care. Whatever your faith tradition, and whatever words you choose to pray, know that God is with you as you embark on planning a Children’s Sabbath.

- **Secure support from appropriate religious leaders, staff, or committees.** In addition to obtaining approval for planning a Children’s Sabbath, do some preliminary investigation into potential sources of financial support for your celebration. Of course, you will have a better idea of your budget when you are further into the planning process. You may find that you can plan a Children’s Sabbath with little additional expense.

- **Mark the date on the calendar for your place of worship.** The 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbath® weekend is October 20-22, although many congregations will plan celebrations for other weekends in October, while some will plan events throughout the month. Most Children’s Sabbath celebrations are held during a place of worship’s traditional time of gathering for service, prayers, and education. Keeping your celebration during the usual worship time promises greater participation and communicates that the Children’s Sabbath is an integral part of your worship and faithful action. If you select a time other than the traditional time for your place of worship, be prepared to do lots of extra promotion to ensure a strong turnout.

- **Recruit a committee to plan the Children’s Sabbath and activities leading up to or following it.** Involving a broad range of people brings a wealth of gifts and experiences, builds greater excitement and “ownership” of the Children’s Sabbath throughout your faith community, and helps ensure that no single person gets overloaded. In addition to religious leaders and staff, consider involving religious education teachers, social action committee members, children and youths, and any interested members. Develop a meeting schedule that will allow sufficient planning time. Many committees find they need more frequent meetings in September and October as the Children’s Sabbath draws near.

- **Identify leadership within the committee.** Designate a chairperson or co-chairs to guide the planning and ensure that goals are set, responsibilities assigned and fulfilled, and that the process moves forward effectively. You also may want to name a secretary who will keep notes of committee meetings and communicate decisions and other information to those involved. Be sure to involve or keep informed all who will be affected by Children’s Sabbath activities, such as musicians, educational program teachers and volunteers, and secretaries. A treasurer could keep tabs on the budget allotted for the Children’s Sabbath and also oversee in-kind contributions donated by the community. As the Children’s Sabbath planning proceeds, the chairperson(s) should assign new tasks and responsibilities as they arise.

- **Focus your vision for the Children’s Sabbath.** What do you hope will happen during and as a result of your Children’s Sabbath? Do you want the Children’s Sabbath to highlight and affirm the gift and gifts of children? To underscore the responsibility of adults to nurture and protect children? Do you hope to increase awareness about the serious needs of many children today? To broaden the congregation’s concern for children to encompass those in the community? Do you want to energize and increase participation in existing congregational programs serving children as a result of the Children’s Sabbath? Do you hope to build excitement and commitment for starting a new effort by your place of worship to help children? To stimulate new, individual commitments to giving time or resources to help children? Clarifying your vision for the Children’s Sabbath and its impact will help guide your planning for a successful experience.
Determine the format of your Children’s Sabbath. You may decide to start small and build your celebration in future years, or you may want to plan an ambitious celebration now. Choose the approach that is right for your congregation and will provide a successful, affirming experience upon which you can build year after year.

These are the major components to consider for your Children’s Sabbath:

- **Service of worship/prayers:** This is the heart of most Children’s Sabbath celebrations: lifting up — in prayer, sermon, and song — God’s call to people of faith to nurture and protect children. The worship and education resources for various faiths which provide ideas and resources are available for download at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

- **Educational programs:** Educational programs for children, youths, and adults help everyone learn more about the problems facing children, the faith-based call to respond, and ways to make a positive difference. Discussion guides for adults and children’s lesson plans for a variety of faith traditions may be downloaded at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

- **Advocacy and hands-on outreach activities:** When people have been inspired and called in the service of worship and have learned more through the educational programs, they are eager to start making a difference for children immediately. Providing concrete outreach and advocacy activities on the Children’s Sabbath, perhaps following the service of worship, helps people respond and put their faith into action (please download the “Action Ideas” section. Also, check CDF’s website, www.childrensdefense.org/take-action for any advocacy actions needed to improve policies for our most vulnerable children).

- **Commitment to long-term responses to children’s needs:** This is the goal of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths movement. The Children’s Sabbath is about more than one weekend a year; it is about inspiring new, long-term responses to the needs of children. Provide opportunities for individuals to find out about, and make commitments to, ongoing action through information tables, presentations, and sign-up sheets. The ongoing action could include participating in existing programs in your place of worship, volunteering with a community child-serving program or organization, or even joining a planning committee to develop a new program in your place of worship. (The “Action Ideas” section is a great tool for ideas and resources).

Involve children and youths. The Children’s Sabbath is an important time to highlight the gifts, contributions, and leadership of children and youths. However, the Children’s Sabbath should not be completely turned over to children, with adults serving only as the advisors and “audience.” The Children’s Sabbath is meant to be an intergenerational event that demonstrates and celebrates how everyone — children, youths, parents, singles, and seniors — must respond faithfully to God’s call to nurture and protect children. (Other occasions celebrated by many congregations, such as Youth Sundays or Children’s Day, are more appropriate times to put the service entirely in the hands of children and youths.) Be sure to involve children and youths in the planning process as well as in carrying out parts of the Children’s Sabbath. The various sections of this manual offer specific suggestions on how children and youths can participate in promoting the Children’s Sabbath, leading the service of worship, and engaging in outreach and advocacy activities. Be sure to solicit young people’s ideas and suggestions to supplement those found here.

Involve resource people. After you have determined the basic format and activities for your Children’s Sabbath, involve resource people from your place of worship and the community. These may include health care professionals, public education teachers and administrators, staff of after-school programs, child care providers, Head Start teachers, staff of organizations serving families in poverty, staff of community...
organizations serving children, elected officials, and representatives of advocacy organizations working on behalf of children. Secular organizations working for children are often eager to find ways to link with religious congregations and draw on the rich resources congregations can offer. Forging these connections will not only assist you in planning your Children’s Sabbath weekend, but also should create partnerships for long-term projects that build on the Children’s Sabbath.

- **Recruit volunteers to help prepare for and conduct Children’s Sabbath activities.** Some who may not have been able to join the ongoing planning committee would welcome responsibility for a specific task in preparation for the Children’s Sabbath or during the weekend itself. In addition to recruiting volunteers through personal contact, publicize opportunities through the announcement time during the service, in your place of worship’s newsletter or bulletin, at meetings, and at gatherings. Tap seniors, children, youths, singles, parents — everyone! The Children’s Sabbath is about the role each person can play to nurture and protect children.

- **Plan to build on the Children’s Sabbath.** While you are planning the Children’s Sabbath, keep your focus on the ultimate goal of stimulating new, long-term, congregational and individual commitments to help children year-round. Don’t wait until after the Children’s Sabbath weekend to think about where you hope it will lead. Instead, make the long-term result of the Children’s Sabbath a focus on the planning process. Some Children’s Sabbath committees have found it useful to designate a subcommittee for follow-up to begin working on this from the start. (See the “Action Ideas” section for ideas and resources.) As you plan long-term follow-up, make sure that you involve the necessary religious leaders, staff and committees, as well as other interested individuals. Your resource people can also provide input about community needs and opportunities for partnerships. Be sure you have a meeting date on the calendar after the Children’s Sabbath to convene members of the Children’s Sabbath Planning Committee and any others, as appropriate, to move ahead on the follow-up plans.

- **Take care of “wrap-up” details.** After the Children’s Sabbath, be sure to attend to details to wrap things up related to the weekend itself and to ensure that follow-up plans are being put into action. These may include evaluating the Children’s Sabbath (what worked and what you would do differently next time); writing “thank you” notes to those involved in the leadership and planning and any others who made contributions; marking next year’s Children’s Sabbath on your place of worship’s calendar; setting a date for the first planning committee meeting (even though the planning committee membership may change); and closing the books on the Children’s Sabbath budget. Some places of worship gather the planning committee members for a special appreciation luncheon and awards or other tokens of appreciation. If videos or photographs were taken during the Children’s Sabbath, you may want to arrange a time to display them to extend the Children’s Sabbath experience. With appropriate permissions, post pictures, videos and descriptions of your Children’s Sabbath events on your place of worship’s website, Facebook page or other social media platforms. Begin a scrapbook chronicling your place of worship’s Children’s Sabbath, and plan to add to it next year.

**Most importantly, send a brief description of your Children’s Sabbath weekend and follow-up plans to the Children’s Defense Fund at sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org. Also, feel free to send any suggestions for how CDF might improve our materials and other support for the Children’s Sabbath. Copies of bulletins, sermons, and other materials are welcome. Mail them to CDF, Attn: Communications, 25 E Street N.W., Washington, D.C., 20001.**

- **Put next year’s Children’s Sabbath weekend on the calendar.** The 2018 Children’s Sabbath weekend will be October 19-21.
The Children’s Sabbath’s power and inspiration comes, in large part, from the connections it makes across faith traditions, across our nation, and across generations. It is an extraordinary opportunity to recognize and celebrate our shared commitment to assuring justice and care for children and to affirm the unifying message of our religious traditions that call us to love, protect, and seek justice for those who are young, impoverished, and vulnerable.

Since 1992, many communities have come together to proclaim and respond to that mandate through multifaith Children’s Sabbath celebrations. These community-wide Children’s Sabbaths stand as an important example of the promise and power of multifaith partnership for a common cause. If planned with care, sensitivity and a commitment to inclusion, a multifaith Children’s Sabbath can be a time of new understanding, of celebration, and most importantly, of unifying and strengthening your community to nurture and protect children with even greater justice and compassion.

Below you will find suggestions for planning the practical aspects of a multifaith Children’s Sabbath. See Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Worship Resources, available for download from CDF’s website, for tips on planning the content and leadership of the service, a suggested outline for a multifaith service, and resources for a community-wide multifaith service from which you may select and may supplement with additional resources.

Organizing a community-wide multifaith service may sound like a daunting task, but it can and has been done successfully, with tremendous contributions to the community. These are suggested ways to coordinate the event. Feel free to adapt this process to suit your needs.

- **Recruit a team.** Connect with two or more people to help you get started. Then convene an advisory committee of eight to 15 members. Strive to build an advisory committee that represents the full range of religious bodies, races, and ethnicities of your community. Be sure to involve all of the faith groups you hope to include from the outset, so no one feels like an afterthought.

- **Prepare a game plan.** Develop an efficient agenda for the initial meeting of the advisory committee. A productive meeting will generate energy, enthusiasm and continued commitment. Key items to determine include the date, site, range of events and point people to assume responsibility for aspects of the event.

- **Build broad support and participation.** Begin to contact as many places of worship and community organizations as you can, to get them on board. Be sure to invite congregations of all ethnic and racial groups. Network with ministerial, rabbinical, and interfaith associations, Islamic centers and associations of mosques, schools, social clubs, and organizations dealing with children, early childhood development, health care, juvenile justice, poverty, violence, hunger, homelessness, education, and parenting. Contact them by letter or email and include a response form for those who wish to participate. Follow up with a phone call. Make a quick reference list of those who respond affirmatively that you can add to later.
Even if places of worship have signed on as co-sponsors of a multifaith service, that doesn’t necessarily mean that their members will attend. Work together with these co-sponsors to identify strategies that will be most successful with each place of worship, and with potential attendees overall.

**Strategies for a particular place of worship include:**

- Inviting a choir to perform by itself or as part of a combined choir with other places of worship, or a dance troupe, or a step group.
- Making the multifaith service a planned event of a group such as the youth group, women’s group, or religious education program.
- Planning decorations that will feature the artwork of many children from each of the sponsoring places of worship, with the young artists standing on hand before the Children’s Sabbath service to talk about their pictures to adults who come to view them.
- Posting a sign-up sheet for a ride in the congregation’s van or in carpools.
- Posting a sign-up sheet or having a bulletin insert to fill out indicating whether a member plans to attend.
- Meeting at the place of worship before the service for an ice cream social or a simple meal like pizza or spaghetti and then traveling to the service together.
- Discussing in planning meetings how many attendees are needed from each place of worship for a desirable turnout, so each leader has a goal or sense of expectation.
- Having a light-hearted “competition” for each sponsoring place to be the “Children’s Champion” by generating the greatest turnout from their members (you can weight the competition to account for the different sizes of congregations), with a “Children’s Champion” plaque/statue/trophy to reside with that congregation until the next year.
- Sending out a congregation-wide email reminder the day before or the day of the community service.
- Sending notices home with the children who attend the education program, so they can encourage their families to attend.
- Talking it up during the announcement time in each place of worship for several weeks prior, and passionately conveying the urgency of the problems confronting our children, the moral imperative for people of faith to act, and the inspiration, joy, and excitement that the community service will provide in bringing together an array of others with shared concerns and common commitment.

**Turnout strategies for the community at large, if your budget allows:**

- Offering fun, family-friendly activities before or after the service, like face painting, simple crafts, or balloon animals. If it is outside, you could even consider something like a hay ride.
- Providing goods or services that many children and families really need, like a health check; school supplies; “dental health” goody bags donated by an area dentist with toothbrushes and toothpaste; help for eligible families to enroll in Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP); and a chance either to serve (as a volunteer, or by making a donation) or be served by community organizations and programs.
- Arranging for simple food for purchase that can stand in as the closest meal (lunch or dinner) for time-pressed families, or providing free coffee and tea (perhaps donated by a coffee shop in the community), juice, and water, or inexpensive, kid-popular treats like popsicles.
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- Offering an inexpensive but appealing item for the first 100 people. Consider providing CDF buttons and bumper stickers, for sale on our website: [https://secure.childrensdefense.org/site/Ecommerce?store_id=1101](https://secure.childrensdefense.org/site/Ecommerce?store_id=1101) (there are also several websites through which one can purchase items in quantity inexpensively, from pencils to stickers to Frisbees to small stuffed toys to hats to tee-shirts). Talk to managers of stores in the community to see what they would be willing to donate.
- Publicizing a chance to meet and greet a well-known person after the event. This could be an elected leader like the mayor, a popular musician or athlete from the area, or a radio or television personality. You might be surprised by who on your planning committee knows someone (or knows someone who knows someone) who could be a “draw.” While you won’t want to let the fun, festival-like offerings overshadow the goal of the Children’s Sabbath, which is to focus attention on the serious problems facing children, and to urge people of faith to respond, if planned carefully you can offer a combination of appealing fun that draws families in and an important message that sends them out to act faithfully and urgently to improve the lives of children.

- Assign areas for coordination. Areas to coordinate include site selection, administration and funding, worship planning, music, outreach/promotion/media, and activities to raise awareness and generate service and advocacy.
- Choose a good day and time. Schedule the multifaith service for a time that does not exclude any group’s participation. For example, scheduling a multifaith service on Saturday afternoon, during the Jewish Shabbat, would prevent some Jews from attending. Similarly, Sunday morning scheduling is likely to conflict with most church services. Sunday afternoon or evening is usually the best time for a multifaith event. Be aware, however, that you will need to do lots of outreach and promotion to generate strong attendance for a multifaith service, whenever it is scheduled. See the “Promotion Ideas” section which can be downloaded from CDF’s website and the ideas listed above.
- Find a suitable location. Seek advice from people who have done similar events, and choose a site as early as possible. Feasible sites for multifaith activities include auditoriums, hospitals, convention centers, or public buildings, parks, and schools. Of course, religious places of worship are also good sites. If you use a place of worship, be sure the religious leader is involved in the planning, since he or she will know the logistics of the site.

Consider the following in selecting a site:

- **Size**: Make sure it is large enough to accommodate the crowd you expect, but not so large that when the congregation has arrived it looks half-empty and makes your turnout appear small.
- **Staging**: Will it accommodate choirs and a procession? Is there a good sound and lighting system? Sound and, depending on the time of the service, lighting are especially important to consider if the event will be outside — which also calls for contingency plans in the event of rain.
- **Location**: Is it centrally located and convenient for all segments of the community? If not, can you arrange for shuttle buses to transport groups from other areas of the community to encourage and enable them to attend?
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• **Cost:** Try to find a site that will host the service without any charge.

• **Worship space:** Is it conducive to multifaith worship? Will it foster unity among persons who don’t know each other? Consider temporary removal of symbols or objects that might cause others distress that can be easily removed. Also, consider the addition of banners and symbols or expressions of welcome that may make guests feel more at home.

• **Parking:** Is parking available or is public transportation nearby?

• **Accessibility:** Is it accessible to people with disabilities? Have a sign language interpreter for those who are deaf or hearing impaired.

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### Strategies for Successfully Planning Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Engagement

The Children’s Agenda in Rochester, NY, has successfully coordinated the participation of the many faith traditions in the Children’s Sabbath weekend over the past several years. Last year, more than 90 different faith communities participated in the weekend — in multifaith events and in worship services, education programs, and activities in individual places of worship. They held a press conference with Baptist, Catholic, Hindu, Muslim and Presbyterian leaders to focus attention on early childhood investments. Together with other segments of the community, the leaders and members of participating places of worship generated thousands of letters to elected officials urging investments in early childhood programs, met with legislators, testified at county legislative meetings, generated media coverage, and raised awareness in the community. Most importantly, this multifaith participation in the Children’s Sabbath continues long past the designated weekend and realizes the full promise and intention of the Children’s Sabbath which is to galvanize and sustain new, long-term engagement in faithful advocacy and other efforts for children. Here are eight strategies for success offered by Brigit Hurley, Policy Analyst for The Children’s Agenda:

1. Determine that the goal of the weekend will be to celebrate children, to raise awareness about pressing issues facing your community’s young people, and to take action to improve their lives. Don’t get distracted, and don’t let the media and the faith leaders themselves get distracted, by the interfaith nature of the effort. That is a means to the end.

2. Use CDF resources and add local data, issues, stories, etc. to illustrate why faith communities are concerned about how kids are doing in your town, city, county, etc.

3. Encourage faith leaders to tell stories about families and children from their own congregations to put a face on statistics.

4. Develop relationships with reporters from your local newspaper and TV stations so they understand what a Children’s Sabbath is, and the annual, recurring nature of it. Notify them several weeks before the weekend and then remind them a few days before. Identify several faith leaders from different traditions who can speak knowledgeably with the media about the Sabbath and about children in your community.
5. Convene faith leaders throughout the year to learn about and take action on children’s issues. Choose one issue or policy area to focus on for the whole year.

6. In this year-round work, combine CDF’s data and advocacy resources with the faith leaders’ roles as truth-tellers to become a persistent voice for change. Look for opportunities to identify “the moral edge of what’s possible.” Where can the religious community use its influence during a public conversation about issues impacting children to insist that right action is taken (e.g., testifying at hearings on a city or school district budget, meeting with state officials when a change in policy or practice will harm children)?

7. Bring local experts in to present to the group so leaders become knowledgeable about how children in your community are faring, and what is needed to improve their well-being.

8. Look for partners outside the religious community who share your concerns, and combine efforts. Is there a local advocacy organization, or a coalition of parents, who will participate in Children’s Sabbath worship services or hold their own event during the same week to generate more attention toward the issues you are highlighting?
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Your Children’s Sabbath will have the greatest impact if it is effectively promoted and publicized both within your place of worship and to the broader public.

This chapter has suggestions and resources for:

- Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship;
- Reaching Out to the Community and Media; and
- Reproducible Resources: Bulletin and Newsletter Inserts.
Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship

- **Bulletin Inserts**: Place the first bulletin insert in this section announcing the Children’s Sabbath in your congregation’s bulletin or newsletter approximately one month before the date. The second bulletin insert is intended to be distributed on the Children’s Sabbath. The third bulletin insert may be used at any time.

- **Newsletter**: Include other information in your place of worship’s newsletter. Adapt the sample newsletter article in this section or write your own.

- **Posters**: Make posters announcing the Children’s Sabbath and display them in appropriate locations in your building(s). Involve youths and children in making these posters.

- **Announcements**: Request time to make an announcement during the worship service one or two weeks before the observance.

- **Emails**: If your place of worship has an email list of members, get permission to send an email to the members reminding them of the upcoming Children’s Sabbath.

- **Yard Sign**: Make a yard sign to place on the grounds in front of your place of worship, announcing the Children’s Sabbath.

- **Letters**: Send the bulletin insert or a letter about the Children’s Sabbath home with the children who participate in your place of worship’s educational programs. After securing any needed permission to send a letter to the mailing list for your place of worship, write a letter describing the Children’s Sabbath that encourages members to join the celebration on the designated weekend.

- **Website**: If your place of worship has a website, post an announcement.

- **Social Media**: Use various forms of social media such as Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat and LinkedIn to spread the word about your Children’s Sabbath activities.

- **Keep it up!**: Don’t forget to continue to focus attention on the Children’s Sabbath and the needs and opportunities for response after the weekend itself. Use these same media channels to report on your place of worship’s response, announce the total items and money collected, share stories of children and families who were helped, and encourage continued action.
Sample Article for Your Place of Worship’s Newsletter:
Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child
Focus of 2017 Children’s Sabbath

The 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration, “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child,” takes place this October (enter date). We will be joining with thousands of places of worship all across the nation as together people of faith affirm their determination to move forward with hope to assure every child love and justice. One way we can do that is by ending child poverty in our rich nation so all children have their basic needs for food, housing, and health care met. We will be raising a voice of concern about child poverty, learning how we can help end it and exploring other ways to move forward with hope to assure every child love and justice. We will be taking action on the Children’s Sabbath weekend and looking at ways we can continue to work faithfully throughout the year through direct service, raising awareness, and working for justice so every child has a hopeful future in which they have not only what they need to survive but also what will help them to thrive.

Here at [name of your congregation], we will [name elements of your Children’s Sabbath observance.] For more information and to find out how you can be involved, contact [name of contact or coordinator in your place of worship.]
Promoting Your Children’s Sabbath

Reaching Out to the Community and Media

- **Introduce the Children’s Sabbath to clergy and interfaith associations**, civic groups and other organizations that may be interested in supporting, attending or publicizing your Children’s Sabbath.

- **Mail a letter to civic, social and religious organizations in your community**, and offer to speak about the Children’s Sabbath at their meetings or gatherings. For example, you might contact the PTA, Lions Club, Rotary, interfaith associations, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America and other community organizations. Invite them to participate in your place of worship’s Children’s Sabbath or to plan their own Children’s Sabbath.

- **Attend community events** such as school open houses, local health fairs and parades to distribute information about the Children’s Sabbath. Make sure to obtain permission from event organizers.

- **Put up posters or flyers** on community bulletin boards and in other permissible locations throughout your community.

- **Remember the impact of an invitation and the influence of “word of mouth.”** Encourage members to invite friends, neighbors and colleagues to the Children’s Sabbath. People who have written off organized religion as irrelevant to them and their lives may be pleasantly surprised to find your place of worship working joyfully for justice to improve the lives of children across our nation.

- **Include information about the Children’s Sabbath on your blog, Facebook page and other social media channels.**

- **Adapt the sample news release in this section and submit it to the religion page of your local newspaper, local online news feeds, and to religious newspapers or newsletters in your area**, including denominational publications as appropriate. Follow up with a telephone call to each.

- **Reach out to a newspaper columnist.** If you have any contacts who know a columnist for the local paper, solicit their help in pitching the Children’s Sabbath to the columnist.

- **Contact your local radio station** to learn the requirements and formats for having your Children’s Sabbath events publicized as a Public Service Announcement (PSA) or on its community calendar or community bulletin board. You may be asked to prepare a “live read” script — a brief (10 second) script giving the basic information. For example:

```
PSA Live-Read Script

This weekend, all across our nation thousands of religious congregations of many faiths will be uniting to focus on children in need — especially the more than 14.5 million children who live in poverty. Together, people of faith will be committing to improve the lives of our nation’s children through direct service and work for justice to give every child a fair start. The National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths, now in its 26th year, will be marked here in [name of town] by [name of congregation] on [date] at [time] with [name type of event, e.g., worship or education program]. All are invited to participate as part of the National Observance titled, “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child.”
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Type it, double-spaced, with accurate names, times and addresses. Be sure to include your name as a contact for the station, with daytime and evening phone numbers. Send it to the station at least two weeks in advance.
Promoting Your Children’s Sabbath

- **Invite the local media** — television, radio and print — to attend and publicize the Children’s Sabbath. Tell them about aspects of the event that promise to be visually interesting and emotionally compelling. Point out that the Children’s Sabbath is a way to focus attention on serious problems facing children and on positive ways to make a difference. Let them know about any well-known speakers who will be participating in your Children’s Sabbath.

- **Arrange for a local spokesperson or an interfaith panel of speakers to participate on a radio or television talk show program** about an issue of concern for the children in your community.

- **If your community has a cable or public access television station, contact the station’s producers to arrange an interview.** Check if they will list the Children’s Sabbath on their billboard of local events.

- **Write a letter to the editor** about the concerns which your Children’s Sabbath is focusing on, whether ensuring every child a strong start through early childhood development or about the violence of child poverty that harms more than 14.5 million children in our rich nation. Offer the Children’s Sabbath as a way to learn more and become involved. Watch the newspaper for articles about early childhood development, gun violence, poverty, and children in general so that you can relate your letter to those articles and time it appropriately.

**News Release for Local Media**

One of the goals of the *National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths* is to reach a wider, secular audience with a message about children’s needs and the religious community’s concern and commitment to meeting those needs. We encourage you to use the sample news release below as a model for explaining the Children’s Sabbath to your local newspaper’s religion or community news editor and as a means of generating a news story. If you know of other congregations in your community that will also be celebrating the Children’s Sabbath, contact them about preparing a joint news release.

Here are steps to follow:

1) **Call your newspaper** to obtain the name of the religion writer or city editor. If you know someone who works for the newspaper or has contacts there, ask for their help in getting the news release into the right hands.

2) **Email the news release** to the right person at the paper in early October, two to three weeks before your Children’s Sabbath.

3) **Follow up with a telephone call a few days later.** Remember, the news media are looking to cover a newsworthy story, not to promote a particular event. In your communication with them, emphasize that the Children’s Sabbath is about children’s issues of concern to many people and is a practical and inspiring example of how people are taking action. Emphasize that your celebration is part of a growing national movement among religious congregations to improve the well-being of America’s children. Suggest that reporters contact the Children’s Defense Fund’s Communications Department at (202) 628-8787 for background information and a national perspective to supplement your own.

4) **Send a letter of thanks to the reporter** if the paper does cover your story, with copies to superiors. Building and maintaining a good relationship with the religion writer or other reporter may help gain coverage of follow-up efforts developing from your Children’s Sabbath and of the event in subsequent years.

5) **Send a copy of any coverage you receive to the Religious Action Division of the Children’s Defense Fund** to assist in further promotion of the Children’s Sabbath. Send information about your Children’s Sabbath to CDF Attn: Communications, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001 or email a description to religiousaction@childrensdefense.org
Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October [date], 2017

For More Information Contact:
(Contact Name)
(Contact Phone/Email)

[Insert Congregation’s Name] Joins the Children’s Defense Fund in Multifaith National Observance of Children’s Sabbath® Celebration

Children’s Sabbath to Focus on Ending Child Poverty

[Insert City, State] — [Insert congregation’s name] will [describe events planned, such as holding a special worship service or conducting service and advocacy activities] on [Insert date, time, and location] with the theme: “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child.” This year the Children’s Sabbath is focusing on ending child poverty.

“Seeding and building a transformative social justice movement requires a deep and strong spiritual base and reaching out and listening to and engaging a wide variety of constituencies who share their deepest hopes, fears, and concerns over time. Movements do not happen overnight,” said Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children’s Defense Fund. “Working in partnership with people of faith and people of moral courage in communities across our nation, we will keep planting and nurturing seeds to organize a movement to end immoral, indefensible, and costly child poverty in America as the 50th anniversary of Dr. King’s Poor People’s Campaign approaches in 2018. The Poor People’s Campaign gave birth to CDF’s parent organization, the Washington Research Project, in 1968. I know Dr. King would be calling for a campaign to end child poverty in rich America today when wealth and income gaps between rich and poor are at historic levels. That children are the poorest age group in America is morally indefensible and economically costly and a great threat to our future economic and national security. The 2017 multifaith National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebration is a vital part of building the transformative movement we need. Together, we can and must move forward with hope to ensure love and justice for every child.”

[Insert statement from a local religious leader]

[Insert congregation’s name] is one of thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques, Bahá’í communities, temples, and other places of worship around the nation celebrating the Children’s Sabbath this weekend as part of the Children’s Defense Fund’s annual observance. The multifaith weekend seeks to inspire congregations and religious organizations to work on behalf of children through prayer, service, and advocacy throughout the year.

For more information about [Insert congregation’s name]’s celebration of the Children’s Sabbath, contact [Insert contact person’s name, title, group affiliation, telephone number and email address, if available].

###
Reproducible Resources

The following pages provide several resources that may be photocopied. No additional permission is needed.

**Announcement Inserts** (Pages 8 - 9)
The first insert for your bulletin or newsletter is to announce your plans to participate in the *National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths* weekend. Fill in the blanks to provide the date(s) and time(s) of the Children’s Sabbath event(s) planned in your place of worship and provide the name and contact information of someone in your place of worship whom others can contact to volunteer or get involved in other ways to help with the Children’s Sabbath. Distribute this bulletin insert about one month before your Children’s Sabbath events to alert your members, build excitement and bolster participation.

This insert makes two half-page size inserts per photocopy.

For pages 8 and 9, make a two-sided photocopy and cut down the middle to make two sets of 5½” x 8 ½” bulletin inserts.

**Children’s Sabbath Service Inserts** (Pages 10 - 11)
The following inserts may be used on the day you celebrate the Children’s Sabbath or any time to raise awareness and encourage a prayerful response and commitment to act. Insert it into your bulletin, if your place of worship uses one, or simply hand it out at an appropriate time, perhaps as people arrive or depart.

Each of these insert pages are formatted horizontally to include two panels per 8 ½” x 11” page.
Make two-sided photocopies of the bulletin inserts, and fold down the middle to create one set of 5 ½” x 8 ½” two-page bulletin inserts.

For pages 12 - 13, make a two-sided photocopy and cut down the middle to make two sets of 5 ½” x 8 ½” two-sided-page bulletin inserts.
The 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths®
celebration, “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice
for Every Child,” is focused on ending child poverty.

Today in our rich nation, one out of every five children
lives in poverty. Most are in working families. Most are
White and most are poor children living outside central
cities. The younger you are, the more likely you are to live
in poverty.

We can work together to end child poverty and give every
child a future of hope, love and justice.

We will be joining in the multifaith National Observance
of Children’s Sabbaths celebration, uniting with places of
worship across the country!

Date: ________________________________
Time: ________________________________

For more information about what we are planning and how
you can be involved, contact:

______________________________

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celebration, “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice
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The 26th Annual National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration, Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child, is coming!

“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, in shared conviction that each of our great religious traditions calls us to acts of love and justice — especially in shared committment to reach out with love 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 that 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.”

— Marian Wright Edelman, Founder and President of the Children’s Defense Fund
More than 14.5 million children in America were poor in 2015, with more than two-thirds in working families.

The Children’s Defense Fund’s vision is to end child poverty.

To end child poverty we must ensure all parents and caregivers have the resources to support and nurture their children:

- jobs with livable wages;
- affordable high-quality child care so that caregivers can work;
- supports for working families like the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit; and
- safety net supports like TANF, nutrition, and housing assistance to make sure children’s basic needs are met.

We must also ensure every child in our rich nation has access to high-quality early childhood development and learning, comprehensive health coverage and care, and quality K-12 education so all children can reach their full potential.

Finally, we must replace the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® with a pathway to college and career.

The nation could cut child poverty by 60 percent just by investing more in programs and policies that work.

What are the first steps to move forward with hope to seek love and justice for every child?

1) Pray, meditate or spend time in other faithful reflection to seek discernment, strength, and courage to value all children and act to put that value into practice.

2) Learn more about the challenges children and families face and how we can overcome them, at www.childrensdefense.org.

3) Connect with timely information, at www.childrensdefense.org and through the Washington offices or social justice arms of your faith community, to raise a faithful voice calling for justice and actions that will help end child poverty in our rich nation.

4) Reach out in your own place of worship or community to do what you can to help end child poverty.

5) Communicate regularly with your elected officials and urge them to champion the needs of children in poverty.
The Children's Defense Fund's report ending Child Poverty Now shows that, contrary to what some believe, we do not have to accept having the second highest child poverty rate among advanced economies. For the first time this report shows how we can shrink overall child poverty by 60 percent, Black child poverty by 72 percent, rural child poverty by 68 percent, and improve the economic circumstances of 97 percent of poor children, simply by investing more in programs that work like the Earned Income Tax Credit, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, housing subsidies, subsidized jobs, the Child Tax Credit, child care, health care, and other necessities to thrive.

In our rich nation one out of every five children lives in poverty. One out of every five children too often lacking the nutrition, health care, and other necessities to thrive.

On the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, we can change that. We can change that.

On the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, we can change that.

Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child

Support CDF’s work to end child poverty. You can also sign up to receive updates on how you can read the report at www.endingchildpoverty.org.

Children's Defense Fund

50 Small St.
Washington, D.C. 20010

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### Moments in America for All Children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event Duration</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every 2 seconds</td>
<td>Public school student suspended*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 9 seconds</td>
<td>High school student drops out*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 20 seconds</td>
<td>Baby born to an unmarried mother</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 24 seconds</td>
<td>Child is arrested</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 27 seconds</td>
<td>Public school student corporally punished*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 34 seconds</td>
<td>Baby born into poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 45 seconds</td>
<td>Child confirmed abused or neglected</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 57 seconds</td>
<td>Baby born without health insurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 67 seconds</td>
<td>Baby born into extreme poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 2 minutes</td>
<td>Baby born to teen mother</td>
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<td>Every 2 minutes</td>
<td>Baby born at low birthweight</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 4 minutes</td>
<td>Child arrested for drug offense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 9 minutes</td>
<td>Child arrested for violent offense</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 23 minutes</td>
<td>Baby dies before first birthday</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 69 minutes</td>
<td>Child or teen dies from accident</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 3 hours and 28 minutes</td>
<td>Child or teen killed by firearm</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 4 hours</td>
<td>Child or teen commits suicide</td>
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<tr>
<td>Every 6 hours</td>
<td>Child killed by abuse or neglect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every 11 hours</td>
<td>Mother dies from complications of childbirth or pregnancy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on 180 school days a year
Each Day in America for All Children

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<tr>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mothers die from complications of childbirth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Babies are born to unmarried mothers.</td>
<td>4,396</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children are arrested</td>
<td>167</td>
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Christian Worship Resources for the Children’s Sabbath

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](http://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
Christian Worship Resources for the Children’s Sabbath

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](http://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 saw 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

**Hymn:** “O Threefold God of Tender Unity” (#743, WLP), “Joyful We Adore Thee” (#304), “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” (#423), “God the Sculptor of the Mountains” (#746, WLP)

**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.

**Song of Praise:** “God Is Love” (#379), “We Will Extol You” (#404), “Creating God, Your Fingers Trace” (#394)

**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.
7 He spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept his testimonies and the decree that he gave them.
8 O Lord our God, you answered them indeed; *
you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.
9 Proclaim the greatness of the Lord our God
and worship him upon his holy hill; *
for the Lord our God is the Holy One.

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. 4 For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he
has chosen you, 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. 6 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, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in
Macedonia and in Achaia. 8 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. 9 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, 10 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.

*silence*

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.

*silence*

Mighty God, Lover of Justice,

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for our communities,

*silence*

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.

*silence*

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.

*silence*

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 Schumaaat)

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.
Children’s Defense Fund

Christian Worship Resources for the Children’s Sabbath

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 Pharisees. The Herodians, supporters of Herod the Great’s successor to rule Palestine, were pro-Roman, and favored the tax. The Pharisees 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)

End notes — Cites: Kidder, Tracy, Mountains Beyond Mountains, The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a man who would cure the world; Random House, New York, NY, 2004, Page 79.
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](http://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.)

Before the reading, tell participants that the excerpt is from a book, Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children, written by Shannon Daley-Harris, religious advisor for the Children’s Defense Fund who launched the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebration in 1992.

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/ 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.
Moving Forward with Hope to Provide Love and Justice for Children (30 minutes)

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:

“To 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

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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.\(^6\)

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.

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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 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

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8 The State of America’s Children 2014, 5.
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.²⁰

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._

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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)
MOVING FORWARD WITH HOPE:
Love and Justice for Every Child

The 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® theme is “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child.” In a time of fear and division, the words of the following reflection on Emet Ve-Emunah encourage us to work for the day that our world will reflect the Eternal’s justice, love and peace. We look back not to retreat or regress but for the reminder of how the prophets and sages inspired our people to overcome oppressive forces and bear witness to the true and trustworthy promises of the Eternal; that memory emboldens us to move forward with hope to pursue justice and love for every child.
Emet Ve-Emunah
In a world torn by violence and pain,  
a world far from wholeness and peace,  
give us the courage to say, Adonai:  
there is one God in heaven and earth.

*The high heavens declare Your glory;  
May earth reveal Your justice and love.*

From bondage in Egypt, we were delivered;  
At Sinai, we bound ourselves to Your way.

*Inspired by prophets and instructed by sages,  
Time and again, we overcame oppressive forces.*

Though our failings are many and our faults are great,  
It has been our glory to bear witness to our God,  
Keeping alive in dark ages  
Your vision of a world redeemed.

*Let us continue to work for the day  
When the nations will be one and at peace.  
Then shall we rejoice as Israel did,  
Singing on the shores of the Sea.*

The 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths is focused on moving forward with hope  
to create a future of love and justice for every child which includes ending child poverty in  
our rich nation.

Following you will find a range of Jewish resources for your Children’s Shabbat:

- Suggestions for the services
- Passages from modern and traditional Jewish sources related to poverty, children, and justice.
- Suggested readings and prayers for an Erev Shabbat Service for Children’s Shabbat
- Suggested readings and prayers for the Shacharit for Children’s Shabbat
- Sermon notes for the Torah portion Noach (October 21, 2017) will be posted at [http://www.childrensdefense/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense/childrenssabbaths) in September.

Be sure to draw on other sections of the Children’s Sabbath resource manual (at [www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths)) for suggestions and materials to broaden your Children’s Shabbat beyond the services to include education, outreach and actions for justice on the weekend of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths and throughout the year to come. Children’s Shabbat is about far more than one weekend. After the services and education programs and activities of the weekend, our hope is that the *gemilut hasidim* — compassionate action — and the justice-seeking advocacy of your congregation in the year ahead will help improve the lives of children in our communities and throughout our nation in deep and lasting ways.
Suggestions for the Services

Services on the Children’s Shabbat are an excellent opportunity to help focus the congregation on the links between Torah readings, Jewish tradition, and the charge to pursue justice and protect children. The focus of the 2017 Children’s Shabbat is assuring love and justice for every child which includes ending child poverty. Children’s Shabbat services also are a time to affirm the work of your congregation on behalf of children and to challenge members to continue and expand their responses to the needs of children locally and nationally.

The following suggestions may assist you in planning your own unique Children’s Shabbat service or supplementing your congregation’s weekly prayer and discussion.

• There are several options for the services:
  1) Use or adapt the service readings provided in this section for an Erev Shabbat service or a Shabbat morning service;
  2) Develop your own Children’s Shabbat that reflects the theme of children, justice and the need for action; or
  3) Use readings from the prayer books that include a social action theme.

• Determine ways in which the children of your congregation can participate in the various services on this Shabbat. Involve children attending religious school, members of youth groups, and children who attend day schools. For example, religious school classes and youth groups could read prayers or Torah and Haftarah readings, lead songs or responsive readings, greet people as they arrive, or design and print the bulletin. Keep in mind, however, that this is an intergenerational family event and should not be “given over” to children as “performers” or only be intended for families with young children as in a Tot Shabbat.

• Introduce the special Children’s Shabbat focus at the beginning of the service. The Union for Reform Judaism’s online resources for Social Action Worship note, “The beginning of the service is the time to set the tone. By opening with a special reading, the congregation knows that the service has a special theme and we can consider how we might focus our prayers differently during this service. What is the connection between our prayers and our pursuit of tikkan olam? An introductory reading might help us begin to answer that question. In addition, candle lighting during Friday night services would also be an appropriate time to include a special reading. With the lighting of the candles, we reflect on what it means for us to be an Or Lagoyim, a ‘light unto the nations,’ and how that shapes our actions.”

• Focus the sermon, D’var Torah, or Torah discussion on children, justice, and ending child poverty. In addition to the sermon notes at the end of this section, draw on resources provided in other sections of the Children’s Sabbath materials (available for download at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths), from the Children’s Defense Fund’s website (www.childrensdefense.org), and social action websites and resources of your movement such as the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism (www.rac.org).

• Invite a professional from the congregation or the community who works with or on behalf of children to give the sermon. For example, this might be a community organizer or child advocacy staff working for systemic change to end child poverty or a staff person from an agency or organization serving low-income families.
• **Bless the children.** On Friday night, incorporate the parental blessing for children into the service. Alternatively, incorporate the need to bless all children into the Shabbat morning blessing of Bar/Bat Mitzvah children.

• **Honor congregation members who are working to nurture and protect children.** This year, invite those who are engaged in efforts to end child poverty and work for justice. Ask them to lead certain prayers or give them Aliyot during the Torah reading.

• **Collect Tzedakah in religious school to benefit a program serving children,** such as a struggling public school, a Head Start program, mentoring or tutoring program, an organization working to end or alleviate the effects of poverty, or after-school program.

• **Distribute or insert the bulletin inserts** which can be found in Promoting Your Children’s Sabbath at [www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbaths-Promotion](http://www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbaths-Promotion).

• **With the help of your Cantor, prepare some new music to be sung by the children at the service.**

• **Encourage families to invite grandparents and other relatives to join them for the service.** If you wish, plan a special recognition of grandparents during the service.

• **Arrange for a special kiddush/oneg Shabbat/luncheon/ se’udah shlishit in honor of the occasion.** As a resource, see “Planning a Shabbat or Holiday Family Meal” and “A Family Shabbaton,” both from the Youth/School Liaison Department of the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism.

• **Continue the celebration of Children’s Shabbat** with Havdalah and/or a M’laveh Malkah during the Saturday evening or the Sunday morning minyan/religious school sessions.

• **Plan a “Moving Forward with Hope” educational session for adults or youth group members,** drawing on the session outline provided in the Actions Section of the Children’s Sabbath resources.

• **Be sure to read the “Actions” section of the Children’s Sabbath manual,** available for download from [www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbaths-ActionIdeas](http://www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbaths-ActionIdeas), to select actions for the congregation collectively or individual members to take on the Children’s Sabbath weekend and in the year to follow to seek justice for our nation’s children. Children’s Shabbat is about much more than one Shabbat a year, but is intended to support long-term efforts to improve the lives of our nation’s children throughout the years to come. Additional resources for action planning include *Lirdaf Tzekdek: A Guide to Synagogue Social Action* (by Evely Laser Shlensky and Rabbi Marc D. Israel, ed.) and *Mitzvah Magic: What Kids Can Do to Change the World* (by Danny Siegel with Naomi Eisenberger).
On Poverty

A small bit of bread may be life to the poor; one who deprives them of it sheds blood.

(Ben Sira 34:21)

Do not neglect the children of the poor, for from them will go forth the law.

(Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 81a)

Defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted and needy.

(Midrash Tehillim 82:3)

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)

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Lakish: “He who lends money [to a poor person] is greater than he who gives charity; and he who throws money into a common purpose [to form a partnership with the poor person] is greater than either.”

(Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 63b)

Although the giving of charity is a sacred obligation, the ultimate aim of tzedakah is to abolish poverty and to enable the poor to help themselves.

(Talmud, Shabbat 63)

God says to Israel, “My children, whenever you give sustenance to the poor, I impute it to you as though you gave sustenance to Me.” Does God then eat and drink? No, but whenever you give food to the poor, God accounts it to you as if you gave food to God.

(Midrash Tannaim on Deuteronomy 15:10, citing Numbers 28:2)

Anyone who withholds what is due to the poor blasphemes against the Maker of all, but one who is gracious unto the needy honors God.

(Proverbs 14:31)

Take care of the children of the poor, for they will be the ones who advance knowledge.

(Nedarim, 81a)

In Rab’s day, there was a teacher whose prayer for the rain was answered promptly. When asked to tell of his special merit, he said, “I teach children of the poor as well as of the rich, I accept no fee from any who cannot afford it, and I have a fishpond to delight the children and to encourage them to do their lessons.”

(Bab Batra 21a)
On the Importance of Children and Justice

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)

And Israel beheld Joseph’s sons and said, “Whose are these?” And Joseph said to his father, “These are my children, whom the Lord has given me in this place.” And he said, “Bring them to me, and I will bless them.”

(Genesis 48:8-9)

Speak up for [those unable to speak], for the rights of all the unfortunate. Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and needy.

(Proverbs 31: 8-9)

One violates Shabbat for the sake of a one-day-old baby, but not for the corpse of David, King of Israel.

(Shabbat 151b)

As long as one dissident is in prison, our freedom will not be true. As long as one child is hungry, our life will be filled with anguish and shame. What all these victims need above all is to know that they are not alone; that we are not forgetting them, that when their voices are stifled we shall lend them ours, that while their freedom depends on ours, the quality of our freedom depends on theirs. We know that every moment is a moment of grace, every hour an offering; not to share them would mean to betray them. Our lives no longer belong to us alone; they belong to all those who need us desperately.

(Elie Wiesel, Night)

When the children are blessed, the parents by this very token are blessed.

(Zohar, i, 227b)

Rabbi Meir said: When the Israelites came to receive the Torah, God said to them, “Bring me good sureties that you will observe it.” They answered, “Our ancestors shall be our sureties.” God replied, “Your sureties need sureties themselves. I have found fault with them.” They answered, “Our prophets shall be our sureties.” God replied, “I have found fault with them also.” Then the Israelites said, “Our children will be our sureties.” They proved acceptable, and God gave Israel the Torah.

(Shir HaShirim Rabbah)

“Righteousness and only righteousness you shall pursue” (Deut. 16:20). The term “pursue” carries strong connotations of effort, eagerness, persistence, inflexibility of purpose. This implies more than merely respecting or following justice, walking in the way of righteousness; righteousness may be hard to attain; it may escape us if we do not pursue it.

(Abraham J. Heschel, in The Prophets, p. 264)

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.

(Elie Wiesel)

Help me perfect my ways of loving and care. Inspire me to make myself whole so that I may honor your name and create a world of justice and peace.

(Martin Buber, as quoted in Mishkan T'filah, p 121)
The following readings, reflections and prayers may be incorporated into your services to focus attention on the Eternal’s call to justice and care for children. Choose as many or as few as is appropriate for your congregation. Each reading suggests a particular point in the service for which it may be especially appropriate (in some instances, several options are offered), but there are many ways to incorporate these resources and you should do what works best for your service.

Suggested Readings and Prayers for An Erev Shabbat Service

“Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child”
Friday, October 20, 2017

Kabbalat Panim

Reflection before the Candle Lighting

_Hadlakat Neirot Shabbat_

As the great doors of night are opening we come into the clean, quiet room of Shabbat.
Let us be thankful as we light these candles like eyes of holiness on this moment of peace.
Let us savor the fruit of the vine, the blood of the earth that quickens us.
Let us be thankful for grain, fruit of grasses that feed the cow, the gazelle, and us.
Let us be grateful for the children and the work of the week that are our own fruitfulness.
Let us as we eat never forget that food comes from the earth.
We must cherish and heal through labor, we must respect and reward.

(By Marge Piercy from *Kol Hameshah, Shabbat Vehagim.*
Reprinted with permission of the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation.)

O Source of light and truth,
Creator of the eternal law of goodness,
Well-spring of justice and mercy,
Help us to find knowledge by which to live.
Lead us to take the words we shall speak
Into our hearts and our lives.
Bless all who enter this sanctuary in search and in need, All who
bring to this place the offering of their hearts. May our worship
here lead us to fulfill our words and our hopes
With acts of kindness, peace, and love.

(From *Mishkan T’filah: The Siddur for Reform Jewish Prayer*)
May the door of this synagogue be wide enough
to receive all who hunger for love, all who are lonely for fellowship.

May it welcome all who have cares to unburden,
thanks to express, hopes to nurture.

May the door of this synagogue be narrow enough
to shut out pettiness and pride, envy and enmity.

May its threshold be no stumbling block
to young or straying feet.

May it be too high to admit complacency,
selfishness and harshness.

May this synagogue be, for all who enter,
the doorway to a richer and more meaningful life.

(From Mishkan T’filah: The Siddur for Reform Jewish Prayer)

Welcome

I begin with a prayer of gratitude
for all that is holy in my life.
God needs no words, no English or Hebrew,
no semantics or services.
But I need them.
Through prayer, I can sense my inner strength,
my inner purpose,
my inner joy, my capacity to love.
As I reach upward in prayer,
I sense these qualities in my Creator.
To love God is to love each other,
to work to make our lives better.
To love God is to love the world God created
and to work to perfect it.

This weekend marks the 26th anniversary of the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebrated
by congregations of many faiths all across our nation. This year’s observance is titled “Moving Forward
with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child” and is focused on ending child poverty. In our rich nation,
one in every five children lives in poverty, struggling against the undertow of hunger, lack of health care,
inadequate housing, and other necessities to survive and thrive. The haftorah for Noach includes this
promise: “And all your children shall be disciples of the Lord, and great shall be the happiness of your
children; You shall be safe from oppression, and shall have no fear; from ruin, and it shall not come near you.” We are called to move forward not with fear but with hope, freeing children from the oppression of poverty and assuring love and justice for every child. The familiar midrash observes of this passage that the word for children, banayikh, should be read as “bonayikh” or “builders.” As we celebrate Children’s Shabbat this year, let us work with and for our children to build a future of love and justice. Shabbat shalom.

**Kabbalat Shabbat — Welcoming Shabbat**

**Introduction to Lecha Dodi**

As we prepare to sing Lecha Dodi, pause to reflect on the words of comfort and promise in the third verse of the translation in Siddur Sim Shalom: “Holy city, majestic, banish your fears. Arise, emerge from your desolate years. Too long have you dwelled in the valley of tears. God will restore you with mercy and grace.” This evening, as we sing, may the words be our prayer for the children and families throughout our nation who live in fear, with the desolation of poverty, and in a valley of tears.

**Ar’vit l’Shabbat**

**Chatzi Kaddish**

**Sh’mah Uvirchoteha — Sh’mah and Its Blessings**

**Reflection after the Bar’chu**

One must repeat from time to time: The world was created for my sake. Never say: What do I care about this or that? Do your part to add something new, to bring forth something that is needed, and to leave the world a little better because you were here briefly.

(Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav)

**Maariv Aravim**

This is an hour of change.

Within it we stand uncertain on the border of light.

Shall we draw back or cross over?

Where shall our hearts turn?

Shall we draw back, my brother, my sister, or cross over?

This is the hour of change, and within it, we stand quietly on the border of light.

What lies before us?

Shall we draw back, my brother, my sister, or cross over?

Baruch atah, Adonai, Hamaariv aravim.

(Mishkan T’filah, p. 149)
Reading after Ahavat Olam

In each age we receive and transmit Torah.  
At each moment we are addressed by the World.  
In each age we are challenged by our ancient teaching.  
At each moment we stand face to face with Truth.

In each age we add our wisdom to that which has gone before.  
At each moment the knowing heart is filled with wonder.  
In each age the children of Torah become its builders  
and seek to set the world firm on a foundation of Truth.

(Mishkan T'filah, p. 266)

God of the generations, God of new beginnings, children are Your promise of tomorrow made in Your image, a reflection of Your divine love. Teach us to raise our children worthy of this sacred trust of life. Sustain us and our children in health and love. We are thankful for the beauty of our lives and the ability to bring new life. We are thankful to all those who help us to raise our children in love.

(Adapted from the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association Rabbi's Manual. Used with permission.)

“One who teaches a child Torah is considered to have taught that child and that child’s children and grandchildren, to the end of the generations.”

(Kiddushin 30a)

Reflection after the Sh’mah and V’ahavta

Love God with all the power of your heart,  
with its yearnings and passions.  
Love God with all you hold dear in life,  
and with the fullness of whatever the world offers you,  
Both joy and sorrow.  
Teach children to cope,  
to dream and to stretch,  
to become their purpose,  
to live holy lives.  
Wrap these words around every deed,  
a garment of holy expression.  
Let these words shape your home,  
a dwelling of peace.  
Wherever you go,  
scatter the words as seed,  
or as drops of water into the thirsty earth.  
Nurture trees of life in your garden.  
Seal these words upon your heart;  
let them course through  
and cleave soul to body  
that the sacred permeates all your being.

(Mishkan T’filah, p. 67)
Emet Ve-Emunah

In a world torn by violence and pain,
a world far from wholeness and peace,
give us the courage to say, Adonai:
there is one God in heaven and earth.

*The high heavens declare Your glory;*
*MAY EARTH REVEAL YOUR JUSTICE AND LOVE.*

From bondage in Egypt, we were delivered;
At Sinai, we bound ourselves to Your way.

*INSPIRED BY PROPHETS AND INSTRUCTED BY SAGES,*
*TIME AND AGAIN, WE OVERCAME OPPRESSIVE FORCES.*

Though our failings are many and our faults are great,
It has been our glory to bear witness to our God,
Keeping alive in dark ages
Your vision of a world redeemed.

*LET US CONTINUE TO WORK FOR THE DAY*
*WHEN THE NATIONS WILL BE ONE AND AT PEACE.*
*THEN SHALL WE REJOICE AS ISRAEL DID,*
*SINGING ON THE SHORES OF THE SEA.*

(Adapted from Chaim Stern in *Mishkan T'filah*, p. 157)

Readings after Mi Chamocha

“You cannot find redemption until you see the flaws in your own soul, and try to efface them. Nor can a people be redeemed until it sees the flaws in its soul and tries to efface them. But whether it be an individual or a people, whoever shuts out the realization of their flaws is shutting out redemption. We can be redeemed only to the extent to which we see ourselves.

The world is in need of redemption, but the redemption must not be expected to happen as an act of sheer grace. Our task is to make the world worthy of redemption. Our faith and our works are preparations for ultimate redemption.”

(Adapted from Martin Buber, in *Siddur Sim Shalom*, p. 32)

Sing the song of men and women
joined in understanding and respect.
The song of God's miracles,
an earth protected and cherished;
a gift for our children
and the generations to come.
The song of a land once ravaged by war,
now quiet and content;
her soldiers home, to leave no more.
The song of a world redeemed:
the song of peace.

(*Mishkan T'filah*, p. 159)
Responsive Reading after Hashkiveinu

As a mother comforts her children,
so I Myself will comfort you, says Adonai.
And you will find peace in Jerusalem.

Past troubles will be forgotten, hidden from sight.
Jerusalem will be a delight, her people a joy.
And you will find peace in Jerusalem.

None shall hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,
says the Creator whose throne is heaven,
says Adonai who also seeks peace in Jerusalem.

Each month at the new moon, each week on Shabbat
all people, all My children, shall worship Me,
says Adonai who will also find peace
and consolation in Jerusalem.

(Jules Harlow, in Siddur Sim Shalom, p. 33).

Prayer after the V’shamru

O God of Israel,
May our worship on this day help us to grow
in loyalty to our covenant with you
and to the way of life it demands:
the way of gentleness and justice,
the path of truth and of peace.

(Mishkan T'filah)

Amidah

Readings for the Amidah

Prayer invites
God’s Presence to suffuse our spirits,
God’s will to prevail in our lives.
Prayer might not bring water to parched fields,
nor mend a broken bridge,
nor rebuild a ruined city.
But prayer can water an arid soul,
mend a broken heart,
rebuild a weakened will.

(Abraham Joshua Heschel, adapted, in Mishkan T'filah, p. 165)
Pray as if everything depended on God.  
Act as if everything depended on you.

Help me perfect my ways of loving and caring.  
Inspire me to make myself whole  
so that I may honor Your name and  
create a world of justice and peace.

(Martin Buber)

“'Never again’ becomes more than a slogan: It’s a prayer, a promise, a vow. There will never again be hatred, people say. Never again jail and torture. Never again the suffering of innocent people, or the shooting of starving, frightened, terrified children. And never again the glorification of base, ugly, dark violence. It’s a prayer.”

(Elie Wiesel, *Hostage*)

O God, by faith, like Abraham, let us obey Your call to leave our comfortable homes and set out for strange places although we do not know for certain where we are going.

By faith, like Noah, let us heed Your signs and warnings and build sturdy arks to rescue our children from the coming floods.

By faith, like Isaac and Jacob, let us seek Your blessings on our children’s futures.

By faith, like Moses, let us leave Pharaoh’s house and head across the wilderness to lead our oppressed children to freedom.

By faith, like Joseph, let us turn evil into good and welcome our erring brothers and kin with a spirit of reconciliation and love.

By faith, like the child David, let us go out without fear to face the Goliaths of our day with slingshots of righteousness and justice confident of Your divine guidance and protection.

(Marian Wright Edelman in *Guide My Feet: Prayers and Meditations on Loving and Working for Children*, p. 56)

**Prayer after the Avot v’Imahot**

Source of All Being, we turn to You as did our people in ancient days.  
They beheld you in the heavens, they felt You in their hearts,  
They sought You in their lives. Their quest is ours.  
Help us to see the wonder of being.  
Give us the courage to search for truth;  
teach us the path to a better life.  
So shall we, by our lives and our labors,  
bring nearer the world we envision,  
one of justice, freedom and peace.

(Chaim Stern, in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 274)
Responsive Reading after the G’vurot

Your might, O God, is everlasting;  
*Help us to use our strength for good and not evil.*

You are the Source of life and blessing;  
*Help us to choose life for ourselves and our children.*

You are the support of the falling;  
*Help us to lift up the fallen.*

You are the author of freedom;  
*Help us to free the captive.*

You are our hope in death as in life;  
*Help us to keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.*

Your might, O God, is everlasting;  
*Help us to use our strength for good.*

For blessing and not for curse,  
*For life and not death,*

For abundance, not want.

(Chaim Stern, in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 349)

Reflection after the K’dushah HaShem and K’dushat HaYom

Disturb us, Adonai, ruffle us from our complacency;  
Make us dissatisfied. Dissatisfied with the peace of ignorance,  
the quietude which arises from a shunning of the horror, the defeat,  
the bitterness and the poverty, physical and spiritual, of humans.

Shock us, Adonai, deny to us the false Shabbat which gives us  
the delusions of satisfaction amid a world of war and hatred;

Wake us, O God, and shake us  
from the sweet and sad poignancies rendered by  
half forgotten melodies and rubric prayers of yesteryears;

Make us know that the border of the sanctuary  
is not the border of living  
and the walls of your temples are not shelters  
from the winds of truth, justice and reality.

Disturb us, O God, and vex us;  
let not Your Shabbat be a day of torpor and slumber;  
let it be a time to be stirred and spurred to action.  
*Baruch atah, Adonai, m’kadeish HaShabbat.*

(Mitchell Salem Fisher, adapted, in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 173)
Reading after the Avodah and Hodaah

For the good in us, which calls us to a better life, we give thanks.
For the strength to improve the world with our hearts and our hands,
we offer praise.
For the desire in us which leads us to work for peace, we are grateful.
For life and nature, harmony and beauty, for the hope of tomorrow,
All praise to the Source of Being.

(Chaim Stern and Abraham Rothberg, in Mishkan T'filah, p. 281)

Readings after Shalom

We oughtn’t pray for what we’ve never known,
and humanity has never known:
unbroken peace,
unmixed blessing.
No.
Better to pray for pity,
for indignation, discontent,
the will to see and touch,
the power to do good and make new.

(Mishkan T’filah, p. 259)

Reflection after T’filat HaLev

Holy One,
give me a quiet heart,
and help me to hear the still,
small voice that speaks within me.
It calls me to come close to You
and to grow in Your likeness.
It teaches me to do my work faithfully,
even when no one’s eye is upon me.
It counsels me to judge others kindly
and to love them freely,
for it persuades me to see divinity
in everyone I meet.
Help me, O God,
to come to the end of each day
feeling that I used its gifts wisely
and faced its trials bravely.

(Chaim Stern in Mishkan T’filah, p. 261)
Introduction to the Misheberach
One is five children in our nation is poor. Poverty exacts a terrible toll from children — including hunger, health problems, and even early death. Tonight, as we say/sing the Misheberach, may we pray for their blessing and healing.

Mi Shebeirach avoteinu
M’kor hab’rachah l’imoteinu.
May the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing and let us say, Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M’kor hab’rachah laavoteinu.
Bless those in need of healing with r’fuah sh’leimah,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit, and let us say, Amen.

(Debbie Friedman)

Prayer for Our Country
We pray for all who hold positions of leadership and responsibility in our national life.
Let Your blessings rest upon them, and make them responsive to Your will, so that our nation may be to the world a beacon of justice and compassion.

Deepen our love for your country and our desire to serve it. Strengthen our power of self-sacrifice for our nation’s welfare. Teach us to uphold its good name by our own right conduct.

Cause us to see clearly that the well-being of our nation is in the hands of all its citizens; imbue us with zeal for the cause of liberty in our land and all lands; and help us always to keep our homes safe from affliction, strife, and war. Amen.

Aleinu v’Kaddish Yatom

Reflections after the Aleinu
Rejoice in the everlasting creation,
Give praise to the greatness of the world!
Divine glory is revealed in the heavens above, and in the earth below.
Yet creation is never ended, and the universe never full.
Potential is unrealized, promises unfulfilled.
Our place is to affirm the present, even as We commit to the future, through the ideals of sacred living, as revealed in our sacred Teaching.

(Chaim Stern, adapted, in Mishkan T’filah, p. 589)

Meditation Before Kaddish
When I die give what’s left of me away to children and old men that wait to die.
And if you need to cry, cry for your brother walking the street beside you.
And when you need me, put your arms around anyone and give them what you need to give me. I want to leave you something, something better than words or sounds. Look for me in the people I’ve known or loved, and if you cannot give me away, at least let me live in your eyes and not in your mind. You can love me best by letting hands touch hands, by letting bodies touch bodies, and by letting go of children that need to be free. Love doesn’t die, people do. So, when all that’s left of me is love, give me away.

(Merrit Malloy in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 592)

**Blessing of the Children**

We call upon the child advocates and educators in the congregation who are working to end poverty and assure love and justice for every child, to come to the bima with their children, and lead us as together we bless our children.

Blessed is the parent, and blessed the child, when their hearts are turned to one another. Blessed is the home filled with gladness and light, the spirit of Shabbat. May God bless you and guide you. Seek truth always, be charitable in your words, just and loving in your deeds. A noble heritage has been entrusted to you; guard it well.

**For a Boy**

_Y sim’cha Elohim k’ephrayim u’menasheb_

May God inspire you to live in the tradition of Ephraim and Menasheh, who carried forward the life of our people.

**For a Girl**

_Yismech Elohim k’Sarah, Rivkah, Leah, v’Rachel_

May God inspire you to live in the tradition of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel, who carried forward the life of our people.

**For Both Boys and Girls**

_Y’varech’cha Adonai veysm’rebacha_
_Yair Adonai panav eleycha vichuneka_
_Yisa Adonai panav eleycha veyasem lecha shalom_

May God bless you and keep you. May God look kindly upon you and be gracious to you. May God reach out to you in tenderness and give you peace.

(Excerpted from *On the Doorposts of Your House*, © 1994, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Used with permission of the publisher.)
Welcome

Today marks the 26th annual National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths weekend celebrated by congregations of many faiths all across our nation. This year’s National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths is titled “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child” and is focused on ending child poverty.

Our haftorah for Noach includes this promise: “And all your children shall be disciples of the Lord, and great shall be the happiness of your children; You shall be safe from oppression, and shall have no fear; from ruin, and it shall not come near you.”

We are called to move forward not with fear but with hope, freeing children from the oppression of poverty and assuring love and justice for every child.

The familiar midrash observes of this passage that the word for children, banayikh, should be read as “bonayikh” or “builders.” As we celebrate Children’s Shabbat this year, let us work with and for our children to build a future of love and justice. Together, let us be the children of Hope.

Modeh/Modah Ai

There is grace that every dawn renews, a loveliness making every morning fresh. We will endure, we will prevail— We, the children of Hope, Children of the One Who crowds the heavens with stars, Endows the earth with glory, And fills the mind with wonder!

(Chaim Stern, Gates of Prayer, in Mishkan T’filah, p. 187)

Mah Tovu

May the One whose spirit is with us in every righteous deed, be with all who work for the good of humanity and bear the burdens of others, and who give bread to the hungry, who clothe the naked and take the friendless into their homes. May the work of their hands endure, and may the seed they sow bring abundant harvest.

(Chaim Stern, adapted in Mishkan T’filah, p 193)
Elohai N’shamah

My soul came to me pure,
drawn from the reservoir of the Holy.
All the time it remains within me,
I am thankful for its thirst
for compassion and justice.
Let my eyes behold the beauty of all creatures;
let my hands know the privilege of righteous deeds.
Baruch atah, Adonai, asher b’yado nefesh kol chai v’ruach kol f’sar ish.

(Elyse Frishman in Mishkan T’filah, p. 197)

Nisim B’chol Yom

I can stay the tears of others, if I can see myself
as diminished of their sorrows.

I can hasten time when everyone will be able
to rejoice in freedom,

And if I can see myself as the companion
of those fighting against oppression,

I can honor the struggle of people everywhere
to gain dignity and deliverance from bondage.

When I look at myself in the mirror
who will I see?

(Jewish Fund for Justice in Mishkan T’filah, p. 199)

Religion embraces both faith and action.
The primary quality is action,
for it lays the foundation for faith;
the more we do good,
the more readily do we grasp the meaning of duty and life
and the more readily do we believe in the Divine
from which stems the good.

(Leo Baeck in Mishkan T’filah p. 199)

Study Text after Eilu D’varim

The Call to Justice

Justice, justice shall you pursue,
That you may live in the land which God gives you.

You shall not pervert judgment, nor favor persons,
Neither shall you take a bribe,
For a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise,
And perverts the words of the righteous.
   Hear the causes between your brothers [and sisters],
   Judge righteously your [kin] and the stranger.
You shall hear the small and great alike,
You shall not be afraid of the face of any [person];
For the judgment is God’s.
   Woe unto them that call evil “good” and good “evil”,
   That turn darkness into light, and light into darkness.
Woe unto them that defend the wicked for a bribe
And deprive the innocent of [their] rights.
   Rob not the weak because [they are] weak,
   Neither crush the poor in thy midst.
See justice, relieve the oppressed,
Protect the [orphan], defend the cause of the widow.
   Seek good and not evil, that you may live;
   Then I the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you.
Hate evil and love what is good,
Yea, establish justice in the land.
   Let justice well up as the water
   And righteousness as a mighty stream.
For righteousness and justice
Are the foundations of God’s throne.
   For the Lord of Hosts is exalted through righteousness,
   And God, the Holy One, is sanctified through justice.

(Rabbinical Assembly of America and the United Synagogue of America
Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book, 1957, adapted for inclusive language.)

Sh’mah Uvirchoteha — Sh’mah and Its Blessings

Reflection after the Bar’chu and Yotzeir Or

In the beginning, even then,
a new light was sown for the righteous;
a promise that Your light would become
the catalyst, first for Order
and then for Hope.
Author of language and light,
help us to use words as You have,
to cast light into dark waters
and draw out justice and truth.
   Baruch atah, Adonai, yotzeir ham’ orot.

(Elyse Frishman, in Mishkan T’filah, p. 229)
Responsive Reading after Ahavah Rabbah

In a world where the weak were tormented by oppressors,
our Torah taught us to love the poor
and the stranger.
A heritage of justice has come down to us.
Where the sword was sovereign, we were commanded to seek peace and pursue it.
A heritage of peace has come down to us.
All this now is ours. Ours the teaching, ours the task, to make the heritage live.
For it is our life, and the length of our days!

(Gates of Prayer)

Responsive Reading after the Sh’ma and V’ahavta

True, we are often too weak to stop injustices;
but the least we can do is protest against them.
True, we are too poor to eliminate hunger;
but in feeding one child, we protest against hunger.
True, we are too timid and powerless to take on all the guards of all the political prisons in the world;
but in offering our solidarity to one prisoner, we denounce all the tormentors.
True, we are powerless against death;
but as long as we help one man, one woman, one child live one hour longer in safety and dignity,
we affirm a human’s right to live.

(Elie Wiesel, Sages and Dreamers)

When justice burns within us
like a flaming fire,
when love evokes willing sacrifice from us,
when, to the last full measure of selfless devotion,
we demonstrate our belief in the ultimate triumph
of truth and righteousness—
then Your goodness enters our lives
and we can begin to change the world.
And then You live in our hearts,
and we, through righteousness, behold Your Presence.

(Mishkan T’filah, p. 235)

Responsive Reading after Emet v’Yatziv

The eternal truth
is that You alone are God and there is none else.
May the righteous of all nations
rejoice in Your love and exult in Your justice.
Let them beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.
Let nation not lift up sword against nation
nor learn war any more.
You shall not hate your brother or your sister in your heart.

The stranger that sojourns with you
shall be accepted as your equal,
for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

“Why do you crush My people and oppress the poor?” asks God.

We know that the Eternal One defends the poor
and upholds the rights of the needy.
Praise to God Most High;
Blessed is God and deserving of blessing!

(Solomon ben Isaac in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 239)

**Reading after Mi Chamocha**

The good in us will win,
over all the wickedness, over all the wrongs we have done.
We will look back at the pages of written history, and be amazed,
and then we will laugh and sing,
and the good that is in us, children in their cradles, will have won.
Our hearts beat with certainty
that there is a day and an hour, and a mountain called Zion,
And that all of the sufferings will gather there and become song,
ringing out into every corner of the earth, from end to end,
and the nations will hear it,
and like the caravans in the desert will all to that morning throng.

(Hugh Nissenson, adapted, in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 241)

**Amidah**

**Reflection for the Amidah**

“Never again” becomes more than a slogan: It’s a prayer, a promise, a vow. There will never again be hatred, people say. Never again jail and torture. Never again the suffering of innocent people, or the shooting of starving, frightened, terrified children. And never again the glorification of base, ugly, dark violence. It’s a prayer.

(Elie Wiesel, *Hostage*)

In [Deuteronomy 16], we are not only warned of the dangers of distorting or subverting justice. We are told to pursue justice. There can be nothing accidental or incidental, apathetic or apolitical, about pursuing justice. Rabbi Abraham Heschel knew something about pursuing justice. He said once, after marching with Dr. King in Selma, ‘It felt as if my feet were praying.’ Of this passage in Deuteronomy, Rabbi Heschel wrote “The term “pursue” carries strong connotations of effort, eagerness. This implies more than merely respecting of following justice; we must actively pursue it.”

(from *Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Children*)
Prayer invites
God’s presence to suffuse our spirits,
God’s will to prevail in our lives.
Prayer might not bring water to parched fields,
nor mend a broken bridge,
nor rebuild a ruined city.
But prayer can water an arid soul,
mend a broken heart,
rebuild a weakened will.

(Abraham Joshua Heschel, adapted, in Mishkan T’filah, p. 165)

God, please stop injustice,
the killing of innocent children
by violence at home and in faraway lands.
God, please stop injustice,
The killing of innocent children
By poverty at home and abroad.
God, please stop injustice,
The killing of innocent child spirits
By vanity and greed in our land and others.
God, please stop injustice,
The assault on precious child dreams
By neglect and apathy near and far.
God, please stop injustice,
So our children may live
And love and laugh and play again.

(Marian Wright Edelman, in Guide My Feet)

Reading after Avot v’Imahot

Our fathers and mothers prayed,
each through their own experience of God,
each through their own visions which we have come to share.
Abraham with the fervor of justice, pleaded the cause of cities.
Sarah, in the pain of waiting, dared to hope for new life.
Isaac, meditating alone in the field, lifted his eyes to find love.
Rebecca asked for the ability to discern God’s call.
Jacob climbed the rungs of his night into heaven, seeking destiny.
Leah dreamed of love; and Rachel sought harmony.
We as they seek God’s Presence.

(Richard Levy, adapted, in Mishkan T’filah, p. 245)
Responsive Reading after G’vurot

Your might, O God, is everlasting;  
*Help us to use our strength for good and not evil.*
You are the Source of life and blessing;  
*Help us to choose life for ourselves and our children.*
You are the support of the falling;  
*Help us to lift up the fallen.*
You are the author of freedom;  
*Help us to free the captive.*
You are our hope in death as in life;  
*Help us to keep faith with those who sleep in the dust.*
Your might, O God, is everlasting;  
*Help us to use our strength for good.*
For blessing and not for curse,  
*For life and not death,*
For abundance, not want.

(Chaim Stern in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 349)

Reading after K’dushah

How shall we sanctify God’s name?  
By being holy ourselves.
How do we accomplish this?  
Let our prayers bring us to sacred deed,  
to actions that promote justice, harmony and peace.

(Mishkan T’filah, p. 351)

Reading after K’dushat HaYom

For the good in us  
which calls us to a better life,  
we give thanks.
For the strength to improve the world  
with our hearts and hands,  
we give praise.
For the peace in us  
which leads us to work for peace,  
we are grateful.
For the gift of Shabbat  
which renews us for life,  
we offer blessing.

(Chaim Stern and Abraham Rothberg in *Mishkan T’filah*, p. 353)
Responsive Reading after Avodah

We Cannot Merely Pray

We cannot merely pray to God to end war;
For the world was made in such a way
That we must find our own path of peace
Within ourselves and with our neighbor.

We cannot merely pray to God to root out prejudice;
For we already have eyes
With which to see the good in all people
If we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end starvation;
For we already have the resources
With which to feed the entire world
If we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to God to end despair;
For we already have the power
To clear away slums and give hope
If we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to God to end disease;
For we already have great minds
With which to search out cures and healings
If we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray instead
For strength, determination, and will power.
To do instead of merely pray
To become instead of merely to wish;
That our world may be safe,
And that our lives may be blessed.

(Jack Riemer, adapted)

Responsive Reading after Hodaah

For the expanding grandeur of Creation,
Worlds known and unknown, galaxies beyond galaxies,
Filling us with awe and challenging our imaginations,
Modim anachnu lach.

For this fragile planet earth, its time and tides,
Its sunsets and seasons,
Modim anachnu lach.

For the joy of human life, its wonders and surprises,
Its hopes and achievements,
Modim anachnu lach.

For human community, our common past and future hope,
Our oneness transcending all separation,
Our capacity to work for peace and justice in the midst of hostility and oppression

*Modim anachnu lach.*

For high hopes and noble causes, for faith without fanaticism,

*Modim anachnu lach.*

For understanding of views not shared.

*Modim anachnu lach.*

For all who have labored and suffered for a fairer world,

Who have lived so that others might live in dignity and freedom,

*Modim anachnu lach.*

For human liberties and sacred rites:

for opportunities to change and grow, to affirm and choose,

*Modim anachnu lach.*

We pray that we may live not by our fears but by our hopes,

Not by our words but by our deeds.

*Modim anachnu lach.*

Blessed are you, Adonai, Your Name is Goodness and You are worthy of thanksgiving.

(Eugene Picket, adapted, in *Mishkan T'filah*, p. 257)

Readings after Sim Shalom

O God, may we never become complacent,

faltering in our effort to build a world of peace.

Let the nations know and understand that

justice and right are better than dominion and conquest;

may all come to see that it is not by might nor by power

but by Your spirit that life prevails.

*(Mishkan T'filah*, p. 334)

We oughtn’t pray for what we’ve never known,

and humanity has never known:

unbroken peace,

unmixed blessing.

No.

Better to pray for pity,

for indignation, discontent,

the will to see and touch,

the power to do good and make new.

*(Mishkan T'filah*, p. 259)

Readings for the T'filat HaLev

A Talmudic sage once taught, “If a man prays only according to the precise text of the prayer book and adds nothing from his own heart, his prayer is not complete.”

Pray as if everything depended on God;

Act as if everything depended on you.

Who rise from prayer better persons,

their prayer is answered.

(From the Religious Action Center’s Shabbat Tzedek Morning Service)
Jewish Resources for the Children’s Shabbat

My God, help me to persist although I want to give up.
Help me to keep trying although I can’t see what good it does.
Help me to keep praying although I’m not sure You hear me.
Help me to keep living in ways that seek to please You.
My God, help me to know when to lead and when to follow.
Help me to know when to speak and when to remain silent.
Help me to know when to act and when to wait.

(Marian Wright Edelman, adapted from Guide My Feet)

Help me perfect my ways of loving and care.
Inspire me to make myself whole
so that I may honor your name and
create a world of justice and peace.

(Martin Buber, in Mishkan T’filah, p 121)

**Seder K’riat Hatorah L’Shabbat — Reading the Torah on Shabbat**

**Before the Ki Mitziyon**

Assemble the people, men, women and children,
and the strangers in your cities, to hear, to learn, to revere Adonai your God.,
to observe faithfully the words of this Torah.
And let their children, who do not yet know it, hear,
that they, too, may learn to revere Adonai your God.

**Mi Shebeirach**

One in five children in our nation is poor. Poverty exacts a terrible toll from children — including hunger,
health problems, and even early death. As we say/sing the Misheberach, may we pray for their blessing and healing.

Mi Shebeirach avoteinu
M’kor hab’rachah l’imoteinu.

May the Source of strength who blessed the ones before us
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing and let us say, Amen.

Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M’kor hab’rachah laavoteinu.

Bless those in need of healing with r’fuah sh’leimah,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit, and let us say, Amen.

(Debbie Friedman)
Responsive Readings after the Haftarah

I, the Eternal, have called you to righteousness
and taken you by the hand, and kept you;
I have made you a covenant people, a light of nations.

We are Israel: witness to the covenant
between God and God’s children.

This is the covenant I make with Israel:
I will place my Torah in your midst, and write it upon your hearts.
I will be your God, and you shall be My people.

We are Israel: our Torah forbids the worship
of race or nation, possessions or power.

You who worship gods that cannot save you,
hear the words of the Eternal One:
I am God, there is none else!

We are Israel: our prophets proclaimed
an exalted vision for the world.

Hate evil, and love what is good;
let justice well up as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream.

We are Israel, schooled in the suffering of the oppressed.

You shall not oppress your neighbors nor rob them.
You shall not stand idle while your neighbor bleeds.

We are Israel, taught to beat swords into plowshares,
commanded to pursue peace.

Violence shall no longer be heard in your land,
desolation and destruction within your borders.

All your children will be taught of your God,
and great shall be the peace of your children.

We are Israel, O God,
when we are witnesses to Your love
and messengers of Your truth.

(Harvey J. Fields and Chaim Stern in Mishkan T’filah, p. 373)

A Prayer for Peace

May we see the day when war and bloodshed cease,
when a great peace will embrace the whole world.

Then nation will not threaten nation,
And mankind will not again know war.

For all who live on earth shall realize
we have not come into being to hate or to destroy.
we have come into being to praise, to labor, and to love.

Compassionate God, bless the leaders of all nations
With the power of compassion.

Fulfill the promise conveyed in Scripture:
I will bring peace to the land,
and you shall lie down and no one shall terrify you.

_I will rid the land of vicious beasts_
_And it shall not be ravaged by war._

Let love and justice flow like a mighty stream.
Let peace fill the earth as the waters fill the sea.
And let us say: Amen.

_Siddur Sim Shalom_, p. 149

When Torah entered the world, freedom entered it.
The whole Torah exists only to establish peace.
Its highest teaching is love and kindness.
What is hateful to you, do not do to any person.

That is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. Go and learn it.
Those who study Torah are the true guardians of civilization.
Honoring one another, doing acts of kindness,
and making peace: these are our highest duties.
But the study of Torah is equal to them all,
because it leads to them all.

Let us learn in order to teach.
Let us learn in order to do!

_John Raynor and Chaim Stern in Mishkan T’filah_, p. 375

**Readings after the Aleinu L’shabeach**

May we gain wisdom in our lives,
Overflowing like a river with understanding.
Loved, each of us, for the peace we bring to others.
May our deeds exceed our speech,
And may we never lift up our hand
But to conquer fear and doubt and despair.
Rise up like the sun, O God, over all humanity.
Cause light to go forth over all the lands between the seas.
And light up the universe with the joy
of wholeness, of freedom, and of peace.

_Mishkan T’filah_, p. 591

While the sage Choni was walking along a road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. Choni asked him:
“How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?” “Seventy years,” replied the man. Choni then asked:
“Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?” The man answered:
“I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise, I am planted for my children.”
It is not your duty to complete the work. Neither are you free to desist from it.

_Pirkei Avot 2:16_
Reflection Before the Mourner’s Kaddish

Yiskor…We remember

Remember our people who suffered and died so that we could be free and secure; May their memory be more than a distant shadow.

For their dreams left unfulfilled and lives taken too soon: we remember.

Remember our brothers and sisters whose sacrifice kept the dream of democracy and justice alive; may their courage be our inspiration and strength.

For life cut short and vision unrealized: we remember.

Remember the fallen of our armed services, the victims of terror and tragedy; may the darkness of their loss not obscure the light of peace. They were in love with our land and in love with life.

For the agony, the tears, the mothers and the fathers, for the children who were and for the children yet to be: we remember.

(Peter Knobel in Mishkan T’filah, p. 597)
A multifaith Children’s Sabbath offers a powerful and meaningful opportunity to bring together people from all across your community who may never have connected before. It is a chance to highlight our shared concern — across religious traditions — for justice and protecting and nurturing children. It is a meaningful time to discover what our different faith traditions hold in common as well as to learn about the unique perspectives, texts and traditions that each brings. It is a time to unite in shared commitment to take action to solve the problems facing children in our communities and nation.
Planning a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Celebration: Be sure to read the planning steps for organizing a multifaith community-wide service which are outlined in the “Planning Your Children’s Sabbath” section of the Children’s Sabbath manual. Follow the planning steps to bring together a planning committee that represents the many religious traditions in your community.

Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Service: Following, you will find materials to help to create your own multifaith Children’s Sabbath service that is inclusive, respectful of different traditions, focused on the Children’s Sabbath core themes, and adaptable to your particular community and leadership:

- A suggested outline for your multifaith community-wide Children’s Sabbath service;
- A sample multifaith Children’s Sabbath service that can be used “as is” or adapted. Select those resources that appeal to your planning team, supplement them with your own, or adapt them as desired. Add readings or prayers from other traditions as appropriate to reflect the leadership and participation in your community.
- You are encouraged to also download and draw from the separate sections providing resources from many faith traditions:
  - Baha’i Faith
  - Buddhism
  - Christianity
  - Hinduism
  - Judaism
  - Islam
  - Native American Traditions
  - Sikhism
  - Unitarian Universalism

Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Action: Be sure to plan activities before or after the multifaith service to engage participants in hands-on service and justice-seeking advocacy activities. Present opportunities for those present to connect with child-serving and child advocacy organizations, programs and agencies so they can make a difference throughout the year. See the Action Section for ideas.

Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Discussion: If possible, plan to hold a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Discussion to engage adults and older youth participants in learning more about child poverty, solutions and the rich and varied perspectives of different religious and ethical traditions, as well as options for action in the community. The 2017 Children’s Sabbath resources include a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Discussion Guide with handouts that you can use.
I: Gathering of the Community

The service begins with a “Gathering of the Community” that creates a sense of welcome and inclusion and affirms a sense of shared purpose. These earliest moments in the service should be planned with care to reassure people that this service is a “safe” space in which their own faith will not be denigrated and ease any anxieties that people may bring to a multifaith experience. Your planning team might arrange for “greeters” from each tradition to be at the doors as people arrive, to create an immediate experience of welcome and belonging.

The Gathering of the Community segment of the service may include some or all of the following:

- **Prelude**: Choral or instrumental music that either creates an atmosphere for contemplation and reflection or that builds excitement and generates enthusiasm. One choir or more could offer a selection, for instance, or an organist or pianist could play.

- **Opening Procession of Religious Leaders and Children**: This can provide a visual appreciation for the range of religious traditions represented and add a sense of importance and broad support for the event. You may want to include symbolic elements to the procession or other visual enhancements like banners, liturgical dancers, drummers, candle lighting or another creative element.

- **Welcome**: The religious leader whose place of worship is hosting the multifaith service may offer a very brief welcome. If the service is not being held in a place of worship, one of the key leaders involved in planning the Children’s Sabbath may give a brief welcome. In the welcome, the leader should convey that people of any tradition — and those of no tradition — are welcome. The service has been designed to be inclusive of and comfortable for all. However, participants should feel free to join in or refrain from any parts of the service according to what is comfortable for them. What we all share is a desire to move forward with hope to assure love and justice for every child.

- **Gathering Words**: Beginning with an opening prayer, call to worship or other form of “Gathering Words” can make people from many different communities feel united in why they are there and reassured that all are welcome. See the sample resources below for Gathering Words that can be used, adapted or simply serve as an inspiration for your own creation.

- **Song, Hymn, Kirtan, Chant or Choral Anthem**: A musical selection at this point may keep the service lively. Remember, if everyone is asked to sing or say it, the words should include everyone. For instance, if all of those gathered will be singing, remember to select a song with inclusive words that people from many different faiths will feel comfortable singing — ensure that it does not use language specific to just one tradition, such as “Jesus Christ.” If a choir or other group is presenting an anthem, chant or song to which those gathered will listen, and singing music specific to that group’s tradition, remember to balance the groups represented and to ensure that no musical offering, while specific to a tradition, puts down another faith tradition.
II: Time of Lament

This is a time to focus attention on the serious problems affecting children, to declare our concern for children’s suffering, and recognize our responsibility as people of faith, adults, parents, citizens and community members for how we have contributed to or failed to prevent or end child suffering and ensure justice and care for all children.

The time of lament portion of the service might include one or more (but not all) of the following:

- Prayer
- Litany
- Responsive reading
- Creative or symbolic action
- Visual experience that underscores the problems to which we have come to respond (e.g., PowerPoint or slide presentation, a brief video or liturgical dance)
- Anthem, hymn, kirtan, chant or song

III: Call to Service

This part of the worship service proclaims the call to justice, compassion and faithful action for children that is central to our religious traditions.

This part of the service could include some of the following:

- Readings from sacred texts such as Torah and other Hebrew texts, the New Testament, Qur’an, Bhagavad Gita and others. If the readings are recited in another language, either have the readers also read the English translation or, to keep the service from becoming too lengthy, provide written translations into English in the service program.
- Songs, hymns, anthems, kirtans or chants focused on our call to service.
- A reflection on the theme “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child.” A brief reflection — perhaps five minutes — during which a leader reflects on the shared concerns for children and the strong call across religious traditions to work with hope to end child poverty and assure love and justice for children. (This reflection on the theme could include the “charge to the gathered community” in the next section instead of having two different leaders offer a separate “reflection” and “charge”).

IV: Commitment to Action

After the gathering, lament and call to service, people should be ready to respond to what they’ve heard and experienced with a commitment to action on behalf of children. This enables them to channel the experience into a positive, forward-looking, hopeful response that puts their faith into action.
The commitment to action section of the service might include one or more of the following:

- **A charge to the gathered community**: a brief, inspirational charge from a powerful speaker that encourages those present to respond to the call to service just heard with a commitment to action manifesting the justice and peace God intends. Five minutes may be an appropriate length to give the speaker for her/his charge. (This inspirational charge could be included in the “reflection on the theme” in the previous section, instead of being offered by a different speaker).

- **Prayer of commitment**

- **Act of commitment**: a responsive reading that invites those gathered to respond aloud and declare their intention to act on behalf of children.

- **Symbolic action**: a creative action or response through which the people or one or more leaders make visible the commitment to act. Options include: each person writing a commitment on a slip of paper that is collected with the others; distributing a small item to each person present that will serve as a reminder of their commitment; or lighting candles.

- **Song, hymn, kirtan, chant or anthem** with words that emphasize the commitment to faithful action.

**V: Blessing**

The last portion of the multifaith service prepares the people to leave the time together inspired and committed to action, reassured that the gathered community will be dispersed but still joined in commitment and that they will continue to be guided and sustained by the divine.

The blessing portion of the service might include one or more of the following:

- **Blessing of the children**: many traditions have rituals for blessing the children that could be adapted for a multifaith gathering. Consider ways that those who have not come accompanied by children can feel part of the blessing experience.

- **Charge**: not as lengthy as the “charge to the gathered community” in the commitment to action, this very brief charge (just a line or two) can precede the final blessing as a reminder of what we go forth to do.

- **Final blessing**: the last words offered by a religious leader, reminding those gathered that we go forth to seek justice in the power of the eternal/divine source of love.

- **Closing hymn or song**: a final song that has a “sending forth” theme, such as the traditional spiritual, Guide My Feet. The religious leaders who processed in may process out during the closing hymn or remain in place.

- **Postlude**: instrumental (or choral) music as those gathered disperse.

In addition to the resources provided below, and those which your planning committee creates or finds, draw from faith resources offered in other sections of the Children’s Sabbath resource manual which are available for download at [www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths](http://www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths).
2017 Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Service
“Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child”

I: Gathering

Music

Opening Procession of Religious Leaders and Children

Welcome

(Offer words that welcome participants, remind them of the purpose of gathering, and assure that all are welcome and respected.)

Opening Prayer in Zoroastrian tradition

We pray to God to eradicate all the misery in the world:
that understanding triumph over ignorance,
that generosity triumph over indifference,
that trust triumph over contempt, and
that truth triumph over falsehood.

Today, as we gather together,
may we strive for understanding and openness.
May we open our hearts and minds to others’ beliefs [and] differences,
and may unity be our destination
and our goal, peace.

Prarthana — Prayer/Chant From Hindu Tradition: Tvameva Mata Ca Pita

(Use the following or replace with one fitting the Children’s Sabbath service theme as suggested by a local Hindu leader.)

Tvameva. Tvam-Eva Maataa Ca Pitaa Tvam-Eva |
Tvam-Eva Bandhush-Ca Sakhaa Tvam-Eva |
Tvam-Eva Viidyaa Dravinnam Tvam-Eva |
Tvam-Eva Sarvam Mama Deva Deva ||

You are my mother and my father
You are my family and my friend
You are my knowledge and my wealth
You are my All, God of Gods!
II: Time of Lament

Litany of Lament (with a reading from Jewish tradition)

(The litany could be led by a rabbi, reading the Jeremiah passages first in Hebrew and then in English, or by a rabbi and additional leaders—children, youths, or adults.)

Thus said the Lord:
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. *(Jeremiah 31:15)*

**Our hearts weep for our children;**
**we refuse to be comforted in the face of injustice.**

In our rich nation today, one in 5 children lives in poverty.
Our hearts weep for our children;
we refuse to be comforted in the face of injustice.

One in 11 children lives in extreme poverty.
Our hearts weep for our children;
we refuse to be comforted in the face of injustice.

One in 5 children doesn’t know when they will next eat or if there will be enough.
Our hearts weep for our children;
we refuse to be comforted in the face of injustice.

In our rich nation today, countless children are
left out and left behind…
exiled and excluded from the abundant, life-giving opportunities every child deserves.
Our hearts weep for our children;
we refuse to be comforted in the face of injustice.

Thus said the Lord:
Restrain your voice from weeping,
Your eyes from shedding tears;
For there is a reward for your labor
—declares the Lord:
They shall return from the enemy’s land.
And there is hope for your future
—declares the Lord:
Your children shall return to their country. *(Jeremiah 31:16-17)*
There is a reward for our labor of love and work for justice—
when our children, all children, are cherished,
when our children, all children, experience justice,
when our children, all children, live in neighborhoods of safety and a nation at peace,
when our children, all children, are equally valued and respected in our nation,
when our country lives up to its highest ideals for all children.

There is a reward for our work.
There is hope for our future —
that our children, all children, will experience our nation as a place of love and justice.

III: Calls to Compassionate Service and Justice-Seeking Action from Sacred Traditions

(Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Native American and Sikh sacred texts have been incorporated into other parts of the service and so do not appear in this section.)

Reading from Bahá’í Tradition

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. Be an ornament to the countenance of truth, a crown to the brow of fidelity, a pillar of the temple of righteousness, a breath of life to the body of mankind, an ensign of the hosts of justice, a luminary above the horizon of virtue, a dew to the soil of the human heart, an ark on the ocean of knowledge, a sun in the heaven of bounty, a gem on the diadem of wisdom, a shining light in the firmament of thy generation, a fruit upon the tree of humility.

(Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh p. 346)

Reading from Christian Tradition


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)*

OR

When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, “My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created. When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me.” Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, “When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?” The king will answer, “Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.” *(Matthew 25:31-40 Common English Version)*

Reading from Islamic Tradition

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God. *(2:177, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem translation)*

Reading from Mormon Tradition

“In the twenty and ninth year there began to be some disputings among the people; and some were lifted up unto pride and boastings because of their exceedingly great riches, yet even unto great persecutions; for there were many merchants in the land, and also many lawyers, and many officers. And the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their riches and their chances for learning; yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and other did receive great learning because of their riches. Some were lifted up in pride, and others were exceedingly humble. . . . And thus there became a great inequality in all the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up. *(3 Ne. 6:10-14)*

[And so Jesus, quoting Malachi, said] “I will be swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger, and fear not me, saith the Lord of Hosts” *(3 Ne. 24:5)*

In response, “Every man did deal justly one with another. And they had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free.” *(4 Ne. 1:2-3)*
IV: Commitment to Action

Charge to the Gathered Community

(A leader might give a brief — perhaps five minutes — reflection on the call to justice and warnings against injustice in every tradition, and offer a charge or call to action to those gathered.

Participants might be given the opportunity to reflect and then write on cards distributed with the programs/bulletins what steps they will take to move forward to hope to assure love and justice for children. Those commitments could be kept by individuals as a reminder of their promises. Or, invite participants to turn to the person next to them to share their commitment — allowing a minute or two for each to speak.)

Music: Live Into Hope

(Words: Jane Parker Huber, 1976. Tune: Truro. Based on Isaiah 61)

Live into hope of captives freed,
Of sight regained, the end of greed.
The oppressed shall be the first to see
The year of God’s own jubilee!

Live into hope the blind shall see
With insight and with clarity,
Removing shades of pride and fear—
A vision of our God brought near.

Live into hope of liberty,
The right to speak, the right to be,
The right to have one’s daily bread,
To hear God’s word and thus be fed.

Live into hope of captives freed
From chains of fear or want or greed.
God now proclaims our full release
To faith and hope and joy and peace.

Litany of Commitment —

Based on Buddhist Prayer of Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, ending with words from the Buddha in Sutta Nipata

(All together read words in bold. Buddhist leader or different leaders including children and youths may read following lines in regular type.)

All: May [we] become at all times, both now and forever:
A protector for those without protection
especially children facing opportunity gaps our nation allows to exist and to widen

A guide for those who have lost their way
especially elected leaders who have strayed from ideals of justice and service
A ship for those with oceans to cross
especially families overwhelmed by rising tides of poverty and choppy seas of unemployment

A bridge for those with rivers to cross
especially parents with difficulty wading through the systems to secure health coverage for their children

A sanctuary for those in danger
especially children and youths facing gun violence, bullying, abuse and neglect

A lamp for those without light
especially children struggling to learn in schools with inadequate resources and low expectations

A place of refuge for those who lack shelter
especially families who are homeless, refugees and immigrants

And a servant to all in need
especially those we hold in our hearts and lift up now in the silence:

[silence]

Let your love flow outward through the universe,
to its height, its depth, its broad extent,
a limitless love, without hatred or enmity.
Then as you stand or walk,
sit or lie down,
as long as you are awake,
strive for this with a one-pointed mind;
your life will bring heaven to earth. (The Buddha – Sutta Nipata)

V: Blessing

Sikh Kirtan: Poota Mata Ki Asis
(Print translation into English in program.)

Oh child! This is your mother’s blessing. May you never forget God even for a moment and always remember the Lord of the universe. By meditating on God all the sins are obliterated and generations are enlightened. Ponder over always on that Lord who is boundless. May the true Guru be kind to you and may you nurture love for the company of saints. May the preservation of your honor by the Lord be your attire: Singing of His praise your daily bread. Drink ever the nectar of God’s name and live long. By remembering God may you attain bliss. May joys and playful pleasures be yours. May your hopes be realized and may you never get distressed. Let your mind hover like a humming black bee at the lotus feet of God. Says the humble Nanak [the founder of Sikhism], be attached to God like a pied-cuckoo that rejoices in ecstasy on finding rain drop.
Blessing/Sending Forth
Great Spirit, Great Spirit, my Grandfather,
all over the earth the faces of living things are all alike. . .
Look upon these faces of children without number
and with children in their arms,
that they may face the winds and
walk the good road to the day of quiet.

*(Black Elk, Oglala Sioux holy man)*

Closing Music:  *Canto D’Esperanza (Song of Hope) by Alvin Schutmaat*
(*It could be sung first in English, then in Spanish and again in English.*)

May the God of hope go with us every day,
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
bringing light and hope to every land and race.

Refrain:
Praying, let us work for peace;
singing, share our joy with all;
working for a world that’s new,
faithful when we hear [Your] call.

*(Spanish)*
Dios de la esperanza, danos gozo y paz.
Al mundo en crisis, habla tu verdad.
Dios de la justicia, mandanos to luz,
luz y esperanza en la oscuridad.

Refrain:
Oremos por la paz,
cantemos de tu amor.
Luchemos por la paz,
fieles a ti, Señor.
Resources for a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Celebration

Resources from Many Faiths

The following pages provide resources from a variety of faith traditions: the Bahá’í faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Native American traditions, Sikhism and Unitarian Universalism. The resources include passages from sacred texts or other writings central to these traditions, prayers and reflections.

For Christian and Jewish resources, please draw from the extensive materials provided elsewhere in the Children’s Sabbath resource manual.

These resources may be used in a multifaith Children’s Sabbath service, to spark a Children’s Sabbath in places of worship of these traditions, or to enrich the Children’s Sabbath of congregations from other traditions. They also may be used in an interfaith Children’s Sabbath educational program.

Bahá’í Faith Resources

This section provides suggestions for learning activities for children, youth and adults, devotional and fellowship activities for the Nineteen Day Feast for the Month of ‘Ilm (Knowledge), selections from the Bahá’í Writings on putting our faith into action, and resources for continuing the community’s involvement in the themes of the Children’s Sabbath beyond the event itself. Please utilize these as appropriate for your community. A brief Glossary is provided at the end of this section, to acquaint the reader with terms that may be unfamiliar.

Suggestions for Observances and Related Activities:

- **Feast of ‘Ilm (Knowledge):** This Nineteen Day Feast falls in the week before the October 20-22, 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® celebration. The 2017 Children’s Sabbath dates coincide with the Birth of the Báb. Hence, you may wish to join the Children’s Sabbath early (as do many places of worship) and consider including the readings and prayers about faith in action reprinted in this section, for the devotional, consultative and fellowship portions of Feast of ‘Ilm. Include a diversity of readers, including children and youth. Consider inviting others to serve refreshments to the children and youth, and/or to those who work to fill the needs of children and youth, such as teachers, parents, grandparents, social workers and health care providers. During the administrative portion of the Feast, encourage consultation about specific needs and hopes of children and youths in your community.

- **Devotional meetings:** Encourage community and individual devotional meetings during the Children’s Sabbath weekend to focus on the theme of “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for All Children,” perhaps including some of the readings and prayers reprinted in this section. Consider inviting children and youths to be involved in planning and presenting a devotional meeting on the subject of creating a better world.

- **Children and youth classes:** Encourage children and youth classes in the community to utilize the materials in this manual for their participation in observing the Children’s Sabbath.
Resources for a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Celebration

- **Ongoing community learning through local study groups or weekend workshops:** Consider beginning study circles in your community that help develop strong, vibrant communities and families, in which children and youth can thrive. Many Bahá’í curricula support the themes of providing for the needs of children, creating a more just and prosperous world and developing nurturing communities. For a variety of educational resources, see www.ruhiresources.org and www.corecurriculum.org.

- **Encourage every family in your community to subscribe to (and read with their child), Brilliant Star, the Bahá’í children’s magazine.** Included in this section are many activities and articles from past issues. For subscription information contact BDS at www.Baháíbookstore.com, call 1-800-999-9019 or visit www.brilliantstarmagazine.org.


**Passages and Prayers from the Bahá’í Writings Related to “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for All Children”**

O CHILDREN OF DUST! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.

*(Bahá’u’lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh, Persian No. 49)*

O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own case.

*(Bahá’u’lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh, Persian No. 54)*

They who are possessed of riches, however, must have the utmost regard for the poor, for great is the honor destined by God for those poor who are steadfast in patience. By My life! There is no honor, except what God may please to bestow, that can compare to this honor. Great is the blessedness awaiting the poor that endure patiently and conceal their sufferings, and well is it with the rich who bestow their riches on the needy and prefer them before themselves.

*(Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 202)*

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring.

*(Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 285)*
God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger.

*(Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 290)*

The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá’u’lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind.

*(Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 107)*

What could be better before God than thinking of the poor? For the poor are beloved by our heavenly Father. When Christ came upon the earth, those who believed in Him and followed Him were the poor and lowly, showing that the poor were near to God. When a rich man believes and follows the Manifestation of God, it is a proof that his wealth is not an obstacle and does not prevent him from attaining the pathway of salvation. After he has been tested and tried, it will be seen whether his possessions are a hindrance in his religious life. But the poor are especially beloved of God. Their lives are full of difficulties, their trials continual, their hopes are in God alone. Therefore, you must assist the poor as much as possible, even by sacrifice of yourself. No deed of man is greater before God than helping the poor. Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of them. When one is physically destitute, spiritual thoughts are more likely. Poverty is a stimulus toward God. Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty. The greatest means for prevention is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. One of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and laborer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent — each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all.

*(Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 216)*

Soon will your swiftly-passing days be over, and the fame and riches, the comforts, the joys provided by this rubbish-heap, the world, will be gone without a trace. Summon ye, then, the people to God, and invite humanity to follow the example of the Company on high. Be ye loving fathers to the orphan, and a refuge to the helpless, and a treasury for the poor, and a cure for the ailing. Be ye the helpers of every victim of oppression, the patrons of the disadvantaged. Think ye at all times of rendering some service to every member of the human race... Let him do some good to every person whose path he crosseth, and be of some benefit to him.

*(Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Bahá, pp. 1-3)*
Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of them… Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent the increase of poverty.

*(Abdu’l-Baha, *Foundations of World Unity*)

O God! Rear this little babe in the bosom of Thy love, and give it milk from the breast of Thy Providence. Cultivate this fresh plant in the rose garden of Thy love and aid it to grow through the showers of Thy bounty. Make it a child of the kingdom, and lead it to Thy heavenly realm. Thou art powerful and kind, and Thou art the Bestower, the Generous, the Lord of surpassing bounty.

*(Abdu’l-Baha, from Prayers for Young Babá’is)*

Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way ye train them. Take the utmost care to give them high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world. . . [and] will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honour and acquiring all the excellences of human kind.

*(Abdu’l-Baha, from Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha)*

O Lord! Make this youth radiant, and confer Thy bounty upon this poor creature. Bestow upon him knowledge, grant him added strength at the break of every morn and guard him within the shelter of Thy protection so that he may be freed from error, may devote himself to the service of Thy Cause, may guide the wayward, lead the hapless, free the captives, and awaken the heedless, and that all may be blessed with Thy remembrance and praise. Thou art the Mighty and the powerful.

*(Abdu’l-Baha, from O Thou Kind Lord! Prayers and Readings for Children from the Babá’i Writings)*

As to the difference between that material civilization now prevailing, and the divine civilization which will be one of the benefits to derive from the House of Justice, it is this: material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him. In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamoured of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to whatever will bring light to the world and will further those qualities which are acceptable at the Holy Threshold of God.

*(Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 132)*

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them – these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose.

*(Ridvan Messages of the Universal House of Justice, Ridvan 157, 2000, p. 8)*
Resources for a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Celebration

Buddhist Resources

The following resources — reading, Jataka tale, and a reflection — can be used as you consider how you might involve children and adults in your community in the National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths. This year’s National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths celebration is focused on ending child poverty.

Meditation on Compassion

Love is a mind that brings peace, joy and happiness to another person. Compassion is a mind that removes the suffering that is present in the other. We all have the seeds of love and compassion in our minds, and we can develop these fine and wonderful sources of energy. We can nurture the unconditional love that does not expect anything in return and therefore does not lead to anxiety and sorrow.

The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognize the physical, material and psychological suffering of others, to put ourselves ‘inside the skin’ of the other. We ‘go inside’ their body, feelings and mental formations, and witness for ourselves their suffering. Shallow observation as an outsider is not enough to see their suffering. We must become one with the object of our observation. When we are in contact with another’s suffering, a feeling of compassion is born in us. Compassion means, literally, ‘to suffer with.’

We begin by choosing as the object of our meditation someone who is undergoing physical or material suffering, someone who is weak and easily ill, poor or oppressed, or has no protection. This kind of suffering is easy for us to see. After that, we can practice being in contact with more subtle forms of suffering. Sometimes the other person does not seem to be suffering at all, but we may notice that he has sorrows which have left their marks in hidden ways. People with more than enough material comforts also suffer. We look deeply at the person who is the object of our meditation on compassion, both during sitting meditation and when we are actually in contact with him. We must allow enough time to be really in deep contact with his suffering. We continue to observe him until compassion arises and penetrates our being.

When we observe deeply in this way, the fruit of our meditation will naturally transform into some kind of action. We will not just say, ‘I love him very much,’ but instead, ‘I will do something so that he will suffer less.’ The mind of compassion is truly present when it is effective in removing another person’s suffering. We have to find ways to nourish and express our compassion. When we come into contact with the other person, our thoughts and actions should express our mind of compassion, even if that person says and does things that are not easy to accept. We practice in this way until we see clearly that our love is not contingent upon the other person being lovable. Then we can know that our mind of compassion is firm and authentic. We ourselves will be more at ease, and the person who has been the object of our meditation will also benefit eventually. His suffering will slowly diminish, and his life will gradually be brighter and more joyful as a result of our compassion.

(From Peace Is Every Step by Thich Nhat Hanh)
If beings knew, as I know, the fruit of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart and stay there. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it.

*(Itivuttaka 18)*

Better than a hundred years lived in idleness and in weakness is a single day lived with courage and powerful striving.

*(The Dhammapada, 112)*

Whatever living beings there may be—feeble or strong, small or large, seen or unseen, those who live far or those near, those who are born and those who are yet to be born—may all beings, without exception, experience a happy mind. Let one not deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place. In anger or ill will let one not wish any harm to another. Let one’s thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity.

*(Samyutta Nikaya, The Buddha Speaks)*

It is in this way that we must train ourselves: by liberation of the self through love. We will develop love, we will practice it, we will make it both a way and a basis, take our stand upon it, store it up, and thoroughly set it going.

*(Samyutta Nikaya, The Buddha Speaks)*

Arouse your will, supreme and great,
Practice love, give joy and protection;
Let your giving be like space,
Without discrimination or limitation.
Do good things, not for your own sake
But for all the beings in the universe.
Save and make free everyone you encounter,
Help them attain the wisdom of the way.

*(Prajnaparamita, from The Buddha Speaks)*

Life is filled with suffering, but it is also filled with many wonders, like the blue sky, the sunshine, the eyes of a baby. To suffer is not enough. We must also be in touch with the wonders of life. They are within us and all around us, everywhere, any time.

*(Thich Nhat Hanh, Being Peace)*
Jataka Tale:

Note: The jataka tales are a collection of stories about the Buddha’s previous births in the animal realm. A traditional part of the Buddhist canon found in both Pali and Mahayana texts, the jatakas are not merely folktales for children, but parables that can awaken adults to their own potential for compassion and selflessness.

Great King Goodness

by Rafè Martin

Once, long ago, when Brahmadatta reigned in Benares, the Buddha came to life as the child of the queen. They named him Silava, or “Goodness.” Prince Goodness he was called. When he was sixteen, his father, the king, died, and he became king in his place—King Goodness.

His first act as king was to have six platforms built from which to distribute gifts, one at each of city’s four gates—north, south, east, and west; one at the city’s center; and one at the palace gates. From each of these he regularly distributed money, medicines, food, silks, and jewels to all those who came.

He regarded all the people with such loving kindness that he felt towards each one of them as a parent feels towards a beloved only child.

Now, at one time, it was discovered that a certain minister of King Goodness had taken for himself money set aside by the king for the poor. This man, the king also learned, mistreated all who tried to question him about it, using not only harsh words but dealing out blows as well. King Goodness spoke to the minister and reasoned with him, but the minister simply denied it all. “I have done no wrong!” he exclaimed, “and will not remain here to be mistreated!” Gathering his wealth, he left the kingdom and crossed the borders into the neighboring land of Kosala. And there he rose in influence and power until he was that king’s advisor.

One day the minister said to the King of Kosala, “Sire, the city of Benares is like a ripe honeycomb, easy in the taking. Its wealth is great. Its king is feeble. Send your soldiers into the city. Take the palace, the treasure, all. The king has no force to withstand you. His goodness has made him weak.”

But the King of Kosala was suspicious. “You have left Benares only recently yourself,” he said. “You are a spy for King Goodness! Yes, I see it all now! This is a ruse to destroy me. Upon entering the city, my forces will be ambushed. You are conspiring with King Goodness!”

“No, Sire, no!” exclaimed the minister. “Never.”

“Really,” said the king. “Do you take me for such a naïve simpleton? I can see it all, I tell you! And I think that perhaps a little torture will bring out the truth for all to see. Guards!”

“But Sire!” exclaimed the minister. “Please, wait! If you doubt me, just send a raiding party across the border. Let them attack an outlying village of King Goodness’s realm. Then see what he will do!”
So a raiding party was sent. After robbing, beating, burning and looting, they were at last captured by King Goodness’s soldiers, brought to Benares, and set before the king.

“My children,” asked King Goodness, “why have you done such terrible things? Why have you robbed and beaten others? Why have you burned their home?”

“We were hungry!” they said. “We needed money, and we were paid to do it.”

“My children,” said King Goodness, “if you need food, money, clothing, whatever, come to me in the future and I will give it to you. You need not harm others. Such actions only harm yourselves.” And giving gifts to the astonished men, he set them free.

“As you see, Sire,” said the evil-hearted minister when those men had returned, “Benares is a honeycomb, a ripe plum. The king is intoxicated with his own goodness. He has no power to resist. Attack, my Lord, and take the kingdom from the hands of this weakling.”

“Wait,” said the King of Kosala, “not so fast. We shall try this again.” So another raiding party was sent closer yet to the capital. Again violence was done. And again, these men were captured and brought before King Goodness.

“My children,” he asked, “why have you done these things?”

And again the men said, “Why, we needed money, and were paid to do it!”

Then King Goodness again said, “Come to me in the future and I will help you. But do not harm others. By such actions you grievously harm yourselves.” And giving them gifts, he allowed these men, too, to return to their homes unharmed.

“You see, Sire,” said the minister. “Didn’t I tell you! He is a weakling — and a fool. Attack!”

“Wait,” said the king, suspicious still. “Third time tells all.”

So yet a third group of men was sent, and this time they struck in the heart of the kingdom, on the very streets of Benares. Yet once again, even they returned telling the same tale. They too had been given gifts by King Goodness and released.

Satisfied at last that King Goodness was, indeed, a thoroughly good king, the King of Kosala raised his army, mounted his war elephant, and set off to capture the ripe, golden honeycomb that was Benares.

That afternoon, as King Goodness sat upon his throne with its legs carved like those of an antelope, he turned to his bodyguard of one thousand champions standing there. Each of those men was an unbeaten warrior, loyal, strong, and disciplined. And King Goodness said, “My children. It is war. I can feel it. You must be prepared.” And those one thousand champions shouted, “Give us the order, Lord, and we will destroy any army. We will drive them back, take their king captive, and secure our borders.”

But King Goodness said, “No violence, my children. None. Let them enter the kingdom. Let them enter the city. Let them enter the palace and yes, even come into the throne room itself. But you must be
prepared. No one shall lift a hand in violence. Is that understood?”

And those mighty warriors, so strong in their discipline and their dedication to that great, good king, all, to a man, answered, “Yes.”

Then the army of the King of Kosala entered the land and none opposed them. They marched into the city of Benares. No army of warriors stopped them. They mounted the steps of the palace and shattered the great bronze doors. Still no weapon was raised against them. They marched into the marble throne room of the great King Goodness. There sat King Goodness on his golden throne, surrounded by his one thousand champions. “Remember, no violence, my children,” cautioned the king. “No thoughts of anger or hatred. Let thoughts of charity and love alone fill your hearts.” And even as the men of Kosala laid rough hands upon him, he cautioned his champions, over and over, “No violence, my children. None.” And so great was the discipline of those one thousand champions that not even one broke form in anger to destroy the enemy host.

Then the great King Goodness and his one thousand champions were all brought to the graveyard. Their weapons were taken from them and all were buried up to the neck in the earth. The ground was stamped down around them. And, as the sun set, they were abandoned there.

Darkness fell. The night grew chill. Towards midnight furtive shapes gathered, pacing nervously in the shadows. The jackals had come to devour fresh corpses. As they slunk forward, King Goodness said to his men, “Let your hearts be filled only with love and charity, my children. More powerful than any weapon is the desire for goodness.”

When the jackals came close, the king and his men gave a great shout. At once the jackals turned and fled in terror. But, after a time, when nothing more happened, they returned and drew closer again. Then once more King Goodness and his men gave a great shout. And once more the jackals fled in fear. But, again, finding no one giving chase, they once more crept near. Then, for the third time, the king and his men raised their cry. But this time the jackal leader barked, “These are only prisoners, condemned men, trapped and helpless. Let us go forward and devour them.”

And this time they came on and did not turn away.

King Goodness could see the jackal leader padding forward. Ears erect, it stopped, sniffed the air cautiously, then came on again. In the brightness of the moon’s light its eyes glinted and its teeth gleamed. Then King Goodness raised his head, exposing his throat, as if seeking a quick and easy death. The jackal king, sniffing cautiously, came closer still. Then, seeing no danger, it lunged forward. But before its teeth could grip, King Goodness grabbed the fur of the jackal’s throat with its own teeth and help tight. Terrified, the jackal king lunged this way and that, struggling to break free. It pulled and tugged desperately back and forth and from side to side, moving the king as it did so and loosening the earth around him. The wild scrabbling of its claws dug up and loosened the soil even more.

At last the jackal king broke free and ran off, howling, into the night, followed by his pack.
Then King Goodness, rocking back and forth in the loosened soil, broke the hold of the earth which had been stamped down around him. He worked his arms free, and at last climbed up out of the burial ground, free. Then he worked to free his companions. As each man was released, he too, worked to free others, so in a short time all one thousand men were again free.

Now, as it should happen, a corpse had been left lying in that graveyard extending across the territory of two goblins. Each goblin claimed the greater portion of that corpse as its own. Their argument grew more heated, worse and worse. Then, at the point of coming to blows, one of these two goblins said, “In this graveyard stands King Goodness, a truly righteous man. Let us bring the corpse to him. He will divide it fairly for us.” And to this the other goblin agreed.

Dragging the corpse by a foot, they approached King Goodness and asked for his help. “Certainly,” said the king. “But I am, as you see, covered with dirt. I must bathe first.”

Then, just like that, with their magical powers the goblins made the king’s own golden bath, filled with scented water, appear. Straight from the palace where that usurper king slept, they brought it magically through the air. When King Goodness was clean and refreshed, the goblins brought his own robes to him, the very robes which had been laid out for that usurping King of Kosala. They brought him perfumes in a golden casket and garlands of fresh flowers laid out on ivory fans. Then the goblins asked if there was anything else he might require. “Well,” said King Goodness, “I am hungry.” And just like that, at once, fresh-cooked rice flavored with the choicest curries and the finest spices and herbs lay on a golden plate before him. The goblins also brought his own golden cup, filled with rose-scented water, for him to drink, straight from the usurper’s table. Then King Goodness, well satisfied, had but one more request. “My sword,” he said, “rests by the pillow of my bed. Bring it and I will now fulfill your request.”

At once the great sword appeared. Then, King Goodness set the corpse upright and with a single stroke split it perfectly. The goblins were overjoyed! The king washed the blade and girded on his sword.

The goblins ate their fill, and when they were done, glad of heart and filled with gratitude, they asked King Goodness if there was not something else they might yet do for him.

“If you would set me in my bedchamber where the usurper lies and also bring my men into the palace, I would be well satisfied,” said King Goodness.

In an instant it was done.

King Goodness stood once again in his own bedchamber and looked down upon the sleeping form of that usurper, the King of Kosala. Then, raising his sword, he struck the sleeping king upon his side with the flat of the blade. The King of Kosala awoke and saw, by the light of the lamp burning there, his enemy, King Goodness—or his ghost—standing beside him sword in hand. And the King of Kosala was terrified! Summoning his courage he asked, “Are you man or ghost?”

“Man,” answered King Goodness, “even as you are.”

“How did you enter? It is impossible,” said the King of Kosala. “The gates are guarded. The doors are
bared. The halls patrolled. What’s more, you were left as food for the jackals. Yet you stand here sword in hand, robed in splendor.”

Then King Goodness told the whole story in all its detail.

Then the heart of the King of Kosala was moved and he cried aloud, “Sir, this is wondrous! I called myself a man, was blessed with a man’s shape, with a man’s heart and mind. Yet, for all that, I did not know the worth of your goodness, while even these blood-drinkers, these eaters of carrion flesh knew it! I will never plot against you again! I swear it!” Then he swore an oath of friendship with King Goodness, swore it on his own sword, and he begged, too, for the king’s forgiveness. Then he had King Goodness lie down in safety upon his own bed of state, while he stood by the doorway, guarding the great king from danger.

When the morning came, the King of Kosala had the drum sounded and gathered all his men. Then, in full sight of his army and of all the people, he announced, “I thought I was a great king and that this man here, the King of Benares, was a weakling and a fool. But in one night, all is changed. My only concern was for power; my only recourse violence and war. But King Goodness is far greater. The forces of heaven and of earth are on his side! That is greatness indeed!” Then, turning to King Goodness he said, “Great King, rule in peace. My men and I shall keep watch over your borders. I will use my might to protect your realm as well as my own.” And passing sentence on the treacherous minister, he departed with his army of men and his war elephants, back to his own land.

Seated in splendor upon his golden throne with legs carved like those of an antelope, beneath a great white parasol, King Goodness looked with joy upon his people and upon his one thousand mighty men. “If I had not remained true,” he said to himself, “if I had not persevered fearlessly in goodness, both the people of my own kingdom as well as those of the kingdom of Kosala would have suffered greatly. At this moment what joy arises in me! How could any victory gained through violence or war compare with it!”

And speaking from is heart, he said to the assembled people, “Never doubt it. Effort in goodness will be rewarded. Even if you don’t see how it may work out, persist in goodness. The fruit of such perseverance is sweet indeed!”

**Rafe Martin, a practitioner of Zen Buddhism for more than twenty-five years, is the author of numerous award-winning books and recordings for children and adults. He books and recordings have won him several prizes, and he has been featured at the National Storytelling Festival, as well as at schools and libraries, conferences and festivals throughout the U.S. and around the world.**

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A Buddhist Perspective:

**Invoking Reality**
from *Heart of Being*

by John Daido Loori Roshi

When Zen arrived and began to take root in this country, there arose a misconception about the role of morality and ethics in the practice of the Buddhadharma. Statements that Zen was beyond morality or that Zen was amoral were made by distinguished writers on Buddhism, and people assumed that this was correct. Yet nothing can be further from the truth. Enlightenment and morality are one. Enlightenment without morality is not true enlightenment. Morality without enlightenment is not complete morality. Zen is not beyond morality, but a practice that takes place within the world, based on moral and ethical teachings. Those moral and ethical teachings have been handed down with the mind-to-mind transmission from generation to generation.

The Buddhist precepts form one of the most vital areas of spiritual practice. In essence, the precepts are a definition of the life of a Buddha, of how a Buddha functions in the world. They are how enlightened beings live their lives, relate to other human beings, make moral and ethical decisions, manifest wisdom and compassion in everyday life. The precepts provide a way to see how the moral and ethical teachings in Buddhism can come to life in the workplace, in relationships, in government, business, and ecology.

The first three precepts are vows to take refuge in the Three Treasures—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. Buddha is the historical Buddha, but at the same time Buddha is each being, each creation. Dharma is the teaching of the Buddha, but at the same time Dharma is the whole phenomenal universe. And Sangha is the community of practitioners of the Buddha’s Dharma, but at the same time Sangha is all sentient beings, animate and inanimate.

The Three Pure Precepts are: “not creating evil,” “practicing good,” and “actualizing good for others.” The Pure Precepts define the harmony, the natural order, of things. If we eschew evil, practice good, and actualize good for others, we are in harmony with the natural order of all things.

Of course, it is one thing to acknowledge the Three Pure Precepts, but how can we practice them? How can we not create evil? How can we practice good? How can we actualize good for others? The way to do that is shown in the Ten Grave Precepts, which reveal the functioning of the Three Pure Precepts. The Ten Grave Precepts are: 1) Affirm life; do not kill, 2) Be giving; do not steal, 3) Honor the body; do not misuse sexuality, 4) Manifest truth; do not lie, 5) Proceed clearly; do not cloud the mind, 6) See the perfection; do not speak of others’ errors and faults, 7) Realize self and other as one; do not elevate the self and blame others, 8) Give generously; do not be withholding, 9) Actualize harmony; do not be angry, 10) Experience the intimacy of things; do not defile the Three Treasures.
The Sixteen Precepts—taking refuge in the Three Treasures, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Grave Precepts—are not fixed rules of action or a code for moral behavior. They allow for changes in circumstances: for adjusting to the time, the particular place, your position, and the degree of action necessary in any given situation. When we don’t hold on to an idea of ourselves and a particular way we have to react, then we are free to respond openly, with reverence for all the life involved.

When we first begin Zen practice, we use the precepts as a guide for living our life as a Buddha. We want to know how to live in harmony with all beings, and we do not want to put it off until after we get enlightened. So, we practice the precepts. We practice them the same way we practice the breath, or the way we practice a koan. To practice means to do. We do the precepts. Once we are aware of the precepts, we become sensitive to the moments when we break them. When you break a precept, you acknowledge that, take responsibility for it, and come back to the precept again. It’s just like when you work with the breath in zazen. You sit down on your cushion and you vow to work with the breath, to be the breath. Within three breaths you find yourself thinking about something else, not being the breath at all. When that happens, you acknowledge it, take responsibility for it, let the thought go, and return to the breath. That is how you practice the breath, and that is how you practice the precepts. That is how you practice your life. Practice is not a process for getting someplace; it is not a process that gets us to enlightenment. Practice is, in itself, enlightenment.

It is one thing to study the precepts, but the real point of practice is to be the precepts through and through, to manifest them with our lives. The precepts are a sword that kills and a sword that gives life. The sword that kills is the absolute basis of reality, no-self. The sword that gives life is the compassion that comes out of that realization of no-self. The precepts are the sword of the realized mind.

The precepts need to be understood clearly from the literal point of view, from the perspective of compassion and reverence for life, and from the absolute, or “one-mind,” point of view. Their richness is wasted if we see them simplistically as a set of rules, a list of “dos and don’ts.” They are not meant to bind but to liberate. In fact, they define a life that is unhindered, complete, free. What the precepts do is to bring into consciousness that which is already there.

When one only reads about Buddhism, one can come to the conclusion that Zen is amoral, that it considers itself above morality and does not address itself to ethical teachings. That is the view of a person standing on the sidelines, only involved intellectually. Those who truly embrace this practice cannot help but see the intimacy between the Buddhadharma and a moral and ethical life. It is intrinsic to the teaching itself. The life of the Buddha is the manifestation of compassion, but if we do not engage it, it does nothing. It all depends on us. To stand on the sidelines merely thinking about practice is self-styled Zen. For the teachings to come alive, they have to be lived with the whole body and mind.

I feel that because we put such an emphasis on the precepts, we have a moral obligation to do something about that misconception concerning Zen and morality. There are thousands of Zen
practitioners in our country, many thousands who have received the precepts and taken refuge in the Three Treasures but who don’t really know what they’ve done. They have no idea what the precepts mean.

Ask yourself what it means to take refuge in the Three Treasures. What is refuge? What, really, are the Three Treasures? We say “Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,” but what does that mean? Those are the words. What is the reality of Buddha, of being one with the Buddha, being one with the Dharma, being one with the Sangha? It is not some idea. It is a reality, a state of consciousness, a state of being. It is the state of being in harmony with the moral and ethical teachings.

We live in a time period of considerable moral crisis, with an erosion of values and a fragmentation of meaning prevalent throughout the fabric of the society. The crisis impacts on us personally, as a nation, and as a planet. The injuries that we inflict on each other and on our environment can only be healed by sound moral and ethical commitment. That doesn’t mean being puritanical. It doesn’t mean being “moralistic.” These precepts have a vitality that is unique in the great religions. They are alive, not fixed. They function broadly and deeply, taking into account the intricacies and subtleties of conditions encountered.

There is so much to learn. The precepts are incredibly profound. Don’t take them lightly. They are direct. They are subtle. They are bottomless. Please use them. Press up against them. Push them. See where they take you. Make them your own. They are no small thing, by any measure. They nourish, they heal, and they give life to the Buddha.

**Atonement:**

*Realizing Responsibility*

*All evil karma ever committed by me since of old,*  
*Because of my beginningless greed, anger, and ignorance,*  
*Born of my body, mouth, and thought,*  
*Now I atone for it all.*

Many rites of passage that take place in the context of Zen practice include the Verse of Atonement near the beginning of the ceremony. The Verse of Atonement, or At-one-ment, creates a pure and unconditioned state of consciousness. It introduces an attitude of mind conducive to entering and engaging a new way of being, a mind receptive and open to transformation.

Engaging the precepts as one’s life is a serious matter. When we vow to maintain them, making a commitment to manifest our life with the wisdom and compassion of the Tathagata, we enter a new and different realm. In that passage, the Verse of Atonement establishes a clean slate.

The spiritual search begins when we open our mind and heart, raising to consciousness the inherent possibility of completely realizing this human life. We call it raising the bodhi mind. This raising of the bodhi mind simply means seeing, hearing, feeling, experiencing and realizing in ways that were not even
imagined before. It means opening the doors of perception and awareness.

Usually, out of that transformation and opening emerges practice. And practice is doing. Practice means commitment and action. We are no longer observers standing on the sidelines. We become participants.

With practice — the doing, the commitment, the action — there comes discovery and realization. As a result, the precepts begin to be actualized as our own life. We make conscious, in a very personal way, the identity of the life-stream of the Buddhas and ancestors with the life-stream of all sentient beings. Not the life-stream of the Buddhas and ancestors in identity with our life-stream alone, but the life-stream of the Buddhas and ancestors in identity with all sentient beings, which, of course, includes oneself.

Real atonement takes place only when the bodhi mind has been raised and practice is engaged. When that has happened, we’re dealing with a very powerful spiritual magnet that attracts everything into the sphere of practice. Raising the bodhi mind, practice and enlightenment thus become one reality.

All evil karma ever committed by me since of old. Every cause has an effect, and every effect is the next cause. But we should always appreciate the fact that cause and effect are one; they are not two distinct events. Cause does not precede effect, and effect does not follow cause. This is why karma does not move in only one direction. Remarkably it moves backward in time and space as well as forward in time and space. It permeates the ten directions.

Because of my beginningless greed, anger and ignorance. Greed, anger and ignorance are the three poisons. They are the basis of evil karma. Transformed, they become the three virtues — compassion, wisdom and enlightenment, and these qualities are the basis of good karma. They describe a way of being in harmony with the nature of all things.

Born of my body, mouth and thought. Body, mouth and thought are the spheres of action where karma is created, both good and evil. What we do with our bodies, what we do with our words, and what we do with our thoughts, all lead to consequences, all establish specific karma. We should appreciate this fact thoroughly.

Body language speaks outwardly and inwardly. When you clench your fists and grit your teeth, you create anger mentally and physically. When you place your hands in the cosmic mudra, you create a state of consciousness that reflects introspection and peace. What we do with our bodies is who we are. It is for that reason that the posture of zazen is so important.

When we bow, we manifest the body karma of the three virtues. When we gassho we manifest the body karma of the three virtues. It is nearly impossible to communicate the meaning of this in words. Most of it is a process of personal discovery. If you just sit cross-legged and make the cosmic mudra with your hands, you may appreciate how that mudra affects your whole being, how it can turn your attention inward to the deepest aspects of yourself. There are other mudras, some that turn you outward, toward the
world, but all of them are about the karma of body.

Words are also karma. What we say has a tremendous impact on our lives and on the world around us. When we vow to attain the Way, we connect with the karma of that vow. In chanting the name of the Buddha, we are one with the Buddha. There is no separation. On the other hand, “God, give me a Mercedes” creates an immediate separation. When our words are motivated by compassion and wisdom, they manifest as wisdom and compassion. When our words are motivated by greed, anger, and ignorance, that’s what they manifest. When we express goodwill, we create the karma of goodwill. When we express anger, we create the karma of anger.

There is also the illusive karma of thought, which is all too often unrecognized. Thought, in and of itself, has the ability to transform. Actually, transformation can occur in all three spheres, but generally we pay little attention to the cause-and-effect power of thought. We think it is a very personal, invisible process, and that nobody knows about it. But thoughts radiate like signals from a telecommunication satellite. We project what we are thinking in hundreds of ways. What we think touches the world and it touches us.

When thoughts move inward, and these thoughts are thoughts of greed, anger, and ignorance, we end up chewing up our own bodies. We end up destroying ourselves. This happens on both an individual and a collective level. Sometimes it is easy to see this in people’s faces; somebody who is fifty years old looks a hundred; somebody who is a hundred years old looks fifty. Why? It is about body, mouth, and thought. It is karma that creates who we are, how we live our lives, how we relate to each other, and how we relate to ourselves. It is that simple and that important.

Now I atone for it all. When at-one-ment takes place with the whole body and mind, you have created a state that is pure and unconditioned. Spiritual realization and moral action are one reality. They are interdependent — just like cause and effect. Enlightenment is not beyond good and evil, as popularized Zen would have us believe. It is rather a way of using one’s body and mind and living one’s life with a clear and unequivocal moral commitment. Enlightenment is realized and actualized not only in the realm of good and evil but also within all dualities, and is at the same time not stained by those dualities. To realize the Verse of Atonement is to enter the practice of the precepts with the whole body and mind, prepared to make the enlightenment of all Buddhas, past and present, one’s true self.

John Daido Loori is the founder and spiritual leader of the Mountains and Rivers Order of Zen Buddhism and abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery, as well as a lineage holder in both the Rinzai and Soto Schools of Zen. Devoted to maintaining the authenticity of these traditions, Daido Roshi is known for his unique adaptation of traditional Buddhism into an American context, particularly with regard to the arts, the environment, social action, and the use of modern media as a vehicle of spiritual training and social change.
Hindu Resources

The following resources — reflections, songs, prayers and stories — can be used to engage children and adults in your temple during your National Observance of Children’s Sabbath celebration. This year’s activities should focus on ending child poverty.

Reflection

The goal of the Multifaith Children’s Sabbath weekend this year is to make our congregations aware of the plight of children living in poverty in the United States. A nation’s children, rich or poor, are its most precious possession and its hopes and aspirations. The most important oblation in a Hindu religious service is offered to God prajapati, protector of progeny, to pray for healthy children who are givers of joy. [Rig-Veda X, 41-42] Making this wish for everyone in the society, the mantra uses first person plural ‘us’ instead of first person singular ‘me.’ Let us offer this oblation to almighty God prajapati on this weekend for all our children, those who are born in riches and those who are born in poverty, that every one of them may have all the opportunities to achieve the potential that God has endowed them with. Let us affirm our commitment to those who are born in poverty by vowing that we will contribute to their welfare in whatever way we can (yatha-sambhav), either in cash by donating money for the schools, orphanages, and other programs that serve them or in kind through advocacy to create opportunities for them to get better education, health care and to help their families move out of poverty.

Salvation or God realization in Hinduism depends upon performance of good deeds (karma), altruistic, for the benefit of the world at large (shrauta karma) and egoistic, for the well-being of oneself and one’s family (smaarta karma). Deeds done for the poor and not-so-fortunate can be considered both shrauta and smaarta, depending upon the philosophical perspective (darshan) from which we conceptualize God and His children — as a universal spirit pervading everything in this world (Isha vasya idam sarvam, yat kinchit jagatyam jagat) (Ishwar sarva butanaam bribeshu tishatathi Arjuna), a universal ocean in which we exist temporarily as waves, part and yet separate for a finite time (monism) or as a divine father or mother of everyone of us (sarveshaam amritsya putrah). Each of these concepts unites us in a way that helping one another in times of difficulty is not an act of sympathy, empathy or altruism, but an act of self help and preservation because in essence we are the same. Therefore to a Hindu the act of helping the poor is not an act of pity but a sacred duty.

At the ethical level, Rig-Veda reminds us that, “It is expected of every rich man to satisfy the poor implorer. Let the rich have foresight that the rich of today may not remain rich tomorrow because remember that riches revolve from person to person like the spokes of a wheel.” The same hymn warns us that the riches of one who gives liberally do not waste away while the one who does not give does not find anyone to console him. A person who has ample food in his store and hardens his heart against the needy person who comes in a miserable shape begging for bread to eat, will find no one to console him. It declares that bounteous is he who gives food to the needy and helps a person in need, to him there is ample recompense, and success awaits him in battle because he makes a friend of him in future troubles. [Rig-Veda X 117]. In Hindu codes of ethics (dharma) service (seva) and compassion (daya) are considered cardinal virtues. Satya Sai Baba, a Hindu monk, calls the service of the poor or dridra narayana as the highest form of spiritual practice. Swamii Dayananda, a social reformer, made the welfare of everyone in the society an article of faith of his organization.
So, I urge all Hindus to reflect upon their duty to the poor and unfortunate in the society and do whatever they can to help them. In the future of our children lies the future of humankind. Service and love make us dear to the lord as Krishna says in Gita, “the One who is not envious (advesta sarva-bhutanam) but who is a kind friend to all living beings (maitrah karna eva ca), who does not think himself a proprietor (nirmamo), who is free from false ego (nirabankarabh) and … and whose mind and intelligence are in agreement with Me (masya arpita-mano-buddhir) — he is very dear to Me (yo mad-bhaktah sa me priyah).”

**Compassion (Daya)**

Daya dharma kaa mool hai, paap mool abhimaan
Compassion is the root of religion while arrogance is a sin.
_Bada hua to kyaa hua jese ped khajoor, punchhi ko chaayaa nahin phal laage ati dur._
What is the idea of being tall like a date palm tree which does not give shelter to the birds and carries fruit too high to be accessible?
_Bhunjate te tuaghamb paapab ye pachanty aatmakarnaat_ Those sinful ones who cook food only for their own verily eat sin.  
*(Gita 3-13)*

*Piniyaadinna adha maanaay tavyaan draaghiyaasam anu pasyeta panthaam*  
O hi vartante rathyeva chakranyam-anyam upa tish thant raayah

It is expected of every rich man to satisfy the poor implorers, let the rich have foresight (for the rich of today may not remain rich tomorrow). Remember that riches revolve from person to person like the spokes of a wheel.  
*(Rigveda X.117.5)*

**Charity (daana)**

Charity is considered to be a cardinal duty of a Hindu. A Hindu is supposed to perform a _athithi_ and _balivaisvadeva_ sacrifice every day. The former consists of feeding a guest or a poor person and the latter feeding and taking care of livestock. Special occasions have been earmarked for charity, such as birth and marriage of a child, death of the parents, eclipses, and two seasons of _sraavana_ (July-August) and _maarghshira_ (November-December) — both these times nature is vibrant and crops are ready. _Daana_ can be given as food (_anna_), knowledge (_vidya_), land (_bhu_) for temples, clothes (_vastra_), ornaments (_svarna_), grains (_dhaanya_) and water (_jala_). Charitable acts should be done without any ulterior motive such as fame or for return of a favor.  
*(By Dr. Vidya Bhushan Gupta)*

**Reflection**

“Arjuna, whenever righteousness is on the decline, unrighteousness is in the ascendant, then I am reincarnated. For the protection of the virtuous, for the extirpation of the evil-doers, and for establishing Dharma [righteousness] on a firm footing, I am born from age to age.”  
*(Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4: 7-8)*

“What Krishna tells him is that when the world is not on the right side of God, when it is unjust and immoral, the ensuing battle for what is right and just is what brings God into the world, to be born from age to age in the fight against evil. This God remains in the world until the world is set right. He then reveals to Arjuna the full glory and power of God — the God that is on Arjuna’s side — and tells him to pick up his bow and fight with him!
What does this reading tell us today? First, that God intervenes in our lives. Second, that God is not neutral. God takes sides and God takes sides with those who are oppressed and suffer injustice, because God loves life. And third, God calls us to action, to fight for what is right and just.

When I think of this story of Arjuna and Krishna, which has been passed down to us from long ago from our ancestors in another time of injustice when people were suffering and calling on God, from my own experience living in today’s unjust world, I can better see where God is in these times:

God is fighting alongside the mothers and families in Flint against the injustice and immorality of poisoned water in their homes and schools.

God is fighting alongside NC NAACP and in states across the country against the injustice and immorality of voter suppression and the disenfranchisement of the poor and dispossessed.

And God is fighting alongside all those who are battling against the injustice and immorality of homelessness, hunger, hospital closures, foreclosures, and rampant inequality in a system that abandons human beings if they cannot pay for their basic needs, while 62 people have the same amount of wealth as 3.6 billion people.

And because God will not leave until righteousness and justice are established on earth, we must continue these battles knowing that God is here with us. And that we will win, moving forward together, not one step back!"

(Excerpt from remarks by Shailly Gupta Barnes on February 12, 2016 at First Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC, at a Mass Meeting held the night before the 2016 Moral March on Raleigh, NC.)

The Hindu mind is singularly dominated by one paramount conception: the divinity of life. Regarding the creation of the universe, Hindu tradition, based on the experience of illumined mystics, asserts with deep conviction that God is the supreme creator of everything and every being. . . Hindus give God a favored place in our homes as mother, friend, child, even husband or sweetheart. God, being the most beloved object of life, must find a place in our family life. He must be dear and near to us. This ideal of the sweet God, lovable God, playmate God, child God has been admirably illustrated in Hinduism in the personality of Sri Krishna. So, every child can be looked upon by anyone as a baby God, and spiritual life can be quickened in this manner.

(Swami Tathagatananda, Vedanta Society, New York, from “Our Children, Their Earth,” United Nations Environmental Programs)

All beings, from the smallest organism to man, are considered manifestations of the Divine or reflections of the Divine’s qualities, depending upon the school of thought. Because of this shared divinity, Hinduism views the universe as a family or, in Sanskrit, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. Hinduism also advances the concept of the equality of all mankind, as expressed in the ancient hymn:

\[
Ajyesthaso akanishthaso ete sambhrataro vahaduhu saubhagaya
No one is superior, none inferior. All are brothers marching forward to prosperity.
\]

Mankind, in turn, carries a special responsibility to honor the underlying equality of people and unity of existence because it is believed to be the most spiritually evolved. The popularly recited Hindu invocation demonstrates this concern for universal kinship and well-being:
Om sarve bhavantu sukhinah. Sarve santu niraamayaah.
Sarve bhadraani pashyantu. Maa kaschid dukhbhaag bhavet.
May all beings be happy. May all beings be healthy.
May all beings experience prosperity. May none in the world suffer.

Against the backdrop of this understanding of equality and unity, the Hindu world has been able to embrace the reality of diversity through its philosophy of pluralism. Every being, with their varying likes and dislikes, their unique personalities, and their different cultures, not only connect with one another in their own unique ways, but connect with the Divine in their own individual ways.

(Hindu American Foundation)

The husband and wife of the house should not turn away any who comes at eating time and asks for food. If food is not available, a place to rest, water for refreshing one’s self, a reed mat to lay one’s self on, and pleasing words entertaining the guest — these at least never fail in the houses of the good.

(Apastamba Dharmasutra 8.2)

A householder must give (as much food) as he is able (to spare) to those who do not cook for themselves, and to all beings one must distribute (food) without detriment (to one’s own interest).

(Manu Smriti 4.32)

In the kingdom of God there is no premature death or suffering, everyone is healthy and beautiful. No one lives in poverty and want; no one is without learning or virtue.

(The Ramayana)

Prarthana — Tvameva Mata Ca Pita
Tvameva. Tvam-Eva Maataa Ca Pitaa Tvam-Eva |
Tvam-Eva Bandhush-Ca Sakhaa Tvam-Eva |
Tvam-Eva Viidyaa Dravinnam Tvam-Eva |
Tvam-Eva Sarvam Mama Deva Deva ||

You are my mother and my father
You are my family and my friend
You are my knowledge and my wealth
You are my All, God of Gods!

Oh Brahman Supreme! Formless and colorless are you. But in mystery, through your power you transform your light and radiance into many forms and colors in creation. You bring forth the creation and then withdraw them to yourself. Fill us with the grace of your auspicious thoughts and vision. . . You are in the woman, in the man. You are in the young boy, in the youthful maiden. You are in the old man who walks with his staff. . . You are in the dark butterfly, in the green parrot with red eyes. . . You are without beginning, infinite, beyond time and space. All the worlds had their origins in you.

(From Svetasvatara Upanishad, IV:1-4)
May there be welfare to all beings;
May there be fullness and wholeness to all people;
May there be constant good and auspicious life to everyone;
May there be peace everywhere . .
May all be full of happiness and abundance;
May everyone in the world enjoy complete health, free from diseases;
May all see and experience good things in their lives,
May not even a single person experience sorrow and misery.
Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

**Benediction in Vedic Sanskrit Pasyati Puthram,**

_Pasyati Poutram Aputraahas santu putrinaha,_
_Putrinas santhu poutrinaha Daanyam, dhanam,_
_Bahuputralaabham._

May one live to see children,
May one live to see grandchildren,
May those that are childless have children,
May those that have children have grandchildren!
May you have lots of grain, wealth, and many children.

**In Honour of Children (Bachche Man Ke Sachche)**

_Bachche man Ke sachche, saare jag kee aakh ke taare_  
_Ye wo nanhe phool hai jo bhagwaan ko lagte pyaare_  
*Children are by nature truthful and honest. They are dear to everyone. They are the flowers that God likes.*  

Khud roothe khud man jaaye, phir hamjolee ban jaaye  
Jhagraa jiske saath kare, agle hi pal phir baat kare  
Inko kisee se bair nahee, inke liye ko-ee gair nahee  
Inka bholaan paal karta hai, sabko baah pasara

*Children bear no malice and enmity for anyone; in an instant they become your friends again. No one is a stranger for them. They are so innocent that they are ready to hug anyone.*

Insaan jab tak bachchaa hai, tab tak man kaa sachchaa hai  
Kyo kyo uskee umra barhe, man par jhooth kaa mail charhe  
Krodh barhe nafrat ghere, laalach kee aadat ghere  
Bachpan in paapo se hatkar apnee umra guzaare

*People remain innocent as long as they are children. Their minds become corrupt as their age increases to adult life; Anger, hate and greed saturate their minds. A child enjoys his childhood far removed from these vices.*

Tan komal man sundar hai, bachche baro se behtar hai  
Inme chhoot aur chhaat nahee, jhoothee jaat aur paat nahee  
Bhaashaa kee takraar nahee, mazhab kee deewaar nahee  
Inkee nazro me ek hai mandir, masjid gurdwara

*Children supercede adults in their behaviour - they are free from the prejudice of race, gender, caste and class. They are not imprisoned by barriers of language, religion and temple.*
The Story of King Shibi  
(found in Mahabharat, Ramayan, and Bhagavata Mahapuran)

In the Ikshvaaku Dynasty (same family as Lord Ram), there was a King Shibi. He was very famous for being a just and dutiful king providing for all living beings in his kingdom. He would make sure there was justice in each action, available to all equally, irrespective of who they were. Devraaj Indra (the ruler of heaven or the chief of angels and spirits) and Dharmraaj (angel who governs righteousness) decided to test this great king. Devraaj Indra took the form of a dove (kapota) and Dharmraaj took the form of a falcon (syena) (a variety of eagle that preys on smaller birds and animals). Now the falcon followed the dove and arrived at the king’s court.

While the king was sitting in his court, the dove came and fell into the king’s lap and hid himself there. He was a bit wounded and a little blood was flowing from his wounds. In the meantime, the falcon that had been following, upon seeing the dove hiding in the king’s lap, said to the king — “Oh! King, this is my prey, so give it to me.”

Seeing the falcon, the dove got scared and hid more in the king’s lap. King Shibi caressed the dove kindly and said to the falcon, “Maybe, it was your prey, but now he is in my shelter, and whosoever comes in to my shelter, it is my duty to protect him, so I cannot give him to you.”

The falcon said: “It will be injustice to me if you will not give me my prey. He is my food. If you don’t give him to me, then I will be hungry.” King Shibi said: “That is not a problem at all. I am a king. I have lots of food in my kingdom; you can take as much as you wish to satisfy yourself.” The falcon said: “You cannot kill others to protect one. This is not just conduct. I cannot accept such food.”

The king thought for a few moments, then spoke. “Well, I cannot give you this dove because it is my duty to protect him. But at least I have the right to offer you my flesh in exchange of this dove, don’t I?”

Falcon accepted his offer. All courtiers were astonished by the king’s decision. A large scale was set in the court. The king kept the dove on one side of the scale, and he started cutting his flesh and keeping it on the other side of the scale to make it equal to the flesh of the dove. He continued to cut his flesh and keep it on the scale, but it never became equal to the little bird’s flesh. The dove always remained heavier than his flesh. In the end, he himself sat on the scale to make his flesh equal to the dove’s flesh.

When the king sat on the scale, all the courtiers shouted: “God bless the king, God bless the king!” Then the dove and falcon also appeared in their real form as Devraaj Indra and Dharmraaj and blessed King Shibi. They were very happy to see the king, who had proven his justice in his duty to protect and provide for living beings in his kingdom. They made him whole by instantly healing his wounds, and he ruled for many years to come.
Islamic Resources

In this section you will find:

- Suggested activities to engage your mosque, Islamic center, school or group in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths;

- Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Reflection by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Ph.D.;

- Materials for khutbahs and discussions, including:
  - Passages from the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.); and
  - A sample Friday sermon/khutbah by Syed Shakeel, Islamic Shura Council of Southern California; and

- Two duas.

Suggested Activities

1. A Friday sermon on the vulnerability of children and the urgent need to care for them. Material provided here in addition to other materials from the Qur’an, Sunnah, Islamic law and biography of early Muslim generations can be used to illustrate the care given to children. One great story is that of the second great rightly guided caliph Omar when he declared that infants and children must be given allowances like adults in order to allow their parents to provide adequate care for them.

2. An evening or weekend congregational event where parents and children who lack proper care, adequate education, or health insurance can speak to the community in order to raise awareness among members of the Muslim community.

3. A public and community-wide forum organized by the Islamic center or the Muslim community in which experts on child poverty, childhood hunger, housing and homelessness, health care, health insurance and school districts. Public officials can attend to provide information on existing resources and, at the same time, direct the public on productive ways of activism to change existing public policies and commit themselves to helping in these noble tasks.

4. A gathering of various ethnic and religious groups to raise awareness and commit themselves to producing the necessary and desirable change. The Muslim representative can read one of the Islamicly based public prayers included in this section.
Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Reflection
By Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Islamic Society of New York

Generally speaking, children are the most precious, yet vulnerable, most innocent, yet fragile, of all age groups. The future of any nation depends greatly on how that nation educates, treats, and nurtures its children. Due to the unique position and role of the United States in the world as the sole superpower, not only the future of the United States but also that of the world will be greatly affected by the way children in America are educated, nurtured, and treated today. Although the United States is the most advanced in the world industrially, scientifically, and militarily, among other things, statistics on children are not encouraging. A great percentage of American children are left in poverty, in harmful environments, and without adequate nourishment, health care, or education.

To illustrate:

In poverty:
- Every 37 seconds a child is born into poverty.
- Children under the age of five remain more likely to be poor than older children.
  - Nearly 70 percent of poor children in America are children of color.
- Every year that 14.5 million children live in poverty costs the nation $500 billion in lost productivity, increased crime and poorer health.

In health care:
- There are nearly four million uninsured children in America.
- Every day more than 1,300 children are born uninsured.
- Every 64 seconds a baby is born at low birthweight.

In education:
- Every 9 seconds during the school year a student drops out.
- Only 18 percent of Black, 21 percent of Latino, and 46 percent of White fourth graders are reading at grade level.
- States spend on average almost three times as much per prisoner ($24,836 a year) as per public school student.

In harmful environment:
- Every 47 seconds a child is confirmed abused or neglected.
- Every three hours and eight minutes a child or teen is killed by a firearm.
- On any given night, 121,000 children are homeless.

The Qur’an describes children’s condition as that of vulnerability, weakness, and need.

*The Qur’an states:*

It is He who has created you from dust then from a sperm drop, then from a leech-like clot; then does he get you out (into the light) as a child: then lets you (grow and) reach your age of full strength; then lets you become old — though of you there are some who die before — and lets you reach a Term appointed; in order that ye may learn wisdom.

*(Qur’an 40:67)*
Islam commands mercy when dealing with children and considers the way children are treated as the measure of mercy. In an authentic narration, while a man was sitting with the Prophet (peace be upon him), a child came to the Prophet, so the Prophet held and kissed him. The man asked:

“Do you kiss your children? I have ten children but I’ve never kissed any of them.” The Prophet replied: “What help I can offer to you if Allah has deprived your heart of mercy?”

This narration explains the great attention that the Qur’an gives to the care for orphans and the reward promised for treating them like one’s own children.

*The Qur'an states:*

And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive.

*(Qur’an 76:8)*

The Prophet (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: “I and the one who cares for the orphan in Paradise are as near as these two fingers” (while holding the index and the middle fingers).

*The Qur'an forbids mistreatment of orphan children:*

Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness.

*(Qur’an 93:9)*

In Islam, children who are not orphans but are still weak, vulnerable, and deprived should be no different. The Orphan in Islam refers to the child who lost his/her father (i.e., the breadwinner for the family). There are many children whose parents are both alive but who still can be described as “orphans” due to the lack of adequate care in various aspects of life from negligence, ignorance, or inability in the face of difficult circumstances. They are weak and vulnerable without an adequate family income, or food, or health care, or housing, or safe and nurturing care.

A Muslim poet states what could be translated to the following:

“The true orphan is not the one whose father or mother has passed away and left him behind. The true orphan is the one whose mother has become negligent or whose father has become inattentive.”

Of course, many parents are trying to do the best they can for their children, yet face insurmountable challenges of unaffordable housing or health care, unavailable child care and jobs that pay a living wage, lack of job training and transportation, and all kinds of other obstacles. Despite their best efforts, these circumstances leave their children as vulnerable as the orphans we are instructed to protect, and to them, too, we must offer our care and concern.

It is the duty of every Muslim, male and female, young and old, to change the unfair and unhealthy circumstances of children of our societies and consequently of our nation. Muslims are urged to display the mercy of Islam for the vulnerable and the care for the future of our nation and for that of the world by working hard to bring this issue to the attention of the public and to the public policy makers, by raising the awareness among Muslims of the plight of children in the United States and of the need to change such conditions, and by collaborating with their fellow citizens of various religious and non-religious groups to change such oppressive and unhealthy conditions of children.
Materials for Sermons and Discussions:

**Passages from the holy Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.):**

Use verses that assert the honor and dignity which Allah assigned to the human race, equality among all people, the essentiality of justice and standing for justice, the obligation to cooperate with everyone — Muslim or non-Muslim — on issues of justice and mutual good, the mercy of Islam and the kind treatment Muslims are required to give to the vulnerable and weak. Some illustrations are included below. Muslim leaders are encouraged to utilize the abundant sources in the Qur’an and Prophetic tradition to support the activities related to this program.

You who believe, uphold justice and bear witness to God, even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly — if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.

**(S. 4: 135, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem translation)**

God forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for God loves those who are just.

**(Qur’an 60:8)**

God truly enjoins justice and Ihsan (kind and excellent treatment). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: “The creatures of God (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of God, and the most beloved to God are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children.”

“We sent aforetime our apostles with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance (of Right and Wrong), that they may stand forth in justice.”

**(Qur’an 57:25)**

“None of you shall attain to full faith until he/she loves for his/her brother or sister what he/she loves for him/herself.” He also states: “He/She who loves to be moved away from hell and admitted to Paradise, must not die until he/she is in a state of faith in Allah and the Last Day and must do unto other people what he/she loves others do unto him/her.”

Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states that which means:

“The creatures of Allah (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of Allah and the most beloved to Allah are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children.”

In the Name of God the Compassionate the Caring Do you see him who calls the reckoning a lie? He is the one who casts the orphan away who fails to urge the feeding of one in need. Cursed are those who perform the prayer unmindful of how they pray who make of themselves a display but hold back the small kindness.

**(S. 107, Michael Sells translation)**

In the Name of God the Compassionate the Caring
By the morning hours
By the night when it is still
Your Lord has not abandoned you and does not hate you.
What is after will be better than what came before
To you the Lord will be giving
You will be content
Did he not find you orphaned
and give you shelter
Find you lost
and guide you
Find you in hunger
and provide for you
As for the orphan—
do not oppress him
And one who asks—
do not turn him away
And the grace of your Lord—
proclaim

(S. 93, 1-11, Michael Sells Translation)

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God.

(S. 2:177, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem translation)

Those who have been graced with bounty and plenty should not swear that they will [no longer] give to kin, the poor, those who emigrated in God’s way: let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is most forgiving and merciful.

(S. 24:22)

They ask thee
What they should spend
(In charity.) Say: Whatever wealth
Ye spend that is good,
Is for parents and kindred
And orphans And those in want
And for wayfarers
And whatever ye do
That is good, -Allah
Knoweth it well.

(S. 2, 215, IFTA translation)

Commentary on Surah 2, 215

“Three questions arise in charity: 1) What shall we give? 2) to whom shall we give? And 3) how shall we give? The answer is here. Give anything that is good, useful, helpful, valuable. It may be property or money; it may be a helping hand: it may be advice; it may be a kind word; “whatever ye do that is
good” is charity. On the other hand, if you throw away what is useless, there is no charity in it. Or if you give something with a harmful intent, e.g., a sword to a madman, or a drug or sweets or even money to someone whom you want to entrap or corrupt, it is no charity but a gift of damnation.

To whom should you give? It may be tempting to earn the world’s praise by a gift that will be talked about, but are you meeting the needs of those who have the first claim on you? If you are not, you are like a person who defrauds creditors: it is no charity. Every gift is judged by its unselfish character: the degree of need or claim is a factor which you should consider: if you disregard it, there is something selfish behind it. How should it be given? As in the sight of Allah; this shuts out all pretense, show, and insincerity.

(From The Holy Qura-An, English translation of the meanings and Commentary, Revised and Edited by the Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance)

Sample Friday Sermon (Khutba)
By Shakeel Syed, Islamic Shura Council of Southern California

O our Lord! Grant our spouses and offspring that are joy to our eyes, and help us to be a model among those who are conscious of You.” (25:74)

It is God alone who has made for you from among yourselves pairs, male & female. And He has made for you from your mates, children and grandchildren. He has provided you, moreover, with all that is wholesome in life. Then is it in falsehood they shall believe, while in the blessings of God they disbelieve? (16:72)

These two verses reflect on the priceless gifts that the Most Compassionate God Almighty has bestowed upon us — the gift of children and grandchildren.

Our most grateful response toward this awesome gift of children and grandchildren ought to be;

• In our gratefulness to God Almighty for His awesome gifts
• In our absolute commitment to take care of these gifts by protecting and sheltering them
• By being a source of comfort and means to their needs
• By helping them reach their full potential
• And, most importantly, making our lives revolve around their well being

Brothers and Sisters — as people of faith and people of conscience, we most regrettably are living in a society that seems to have misplaced our priorities, almost completely.

Children seem to have become the last and not the first priority of our society.

This is best demonstrated by virtue of our dismal record in protecting them …

• records indicate that a child is killed in gunfire about every three hours
• data reveals than 14.5 million of our children are poor; 3.9 million of them are without health insurance; more than 670,000 of them are victims of abuse and neglect; more than 14 million of them live in households that are food insecure, and we spend less than $11,000 to educate each child but have the audacity to spend more than $24,000 on each prisoner … and the list goes on.

As people of faith and people of conscience, brothers and sisters, we have a responsibility and an urgent one — toward this most awesome gift from the Most Compassionate God Almighty.

We are reminded by Prophet Muhammad (blessings & peace be upon him) that the “best of you are those who are best to your family.”
The question we ought to ask ourselves is: am I the parent who is best to my family — am I the citizen who cares for my own and other children — is the community and society that I live in the one who takes care of “all” the families and not just “some” … have we abdicated our responsibilities or embraced our obligations?

These important and urgent questions are the need of the day, my dear brothers and sisters.

As a nation we have spent hundreds of billions of dollars for death and destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan but did not have enough to provide shelter, health care and education to our own children affected by Katrina.

As a nation we chose to remain blind to the hundreds of millions of tax dollars as bonuses to Wall Street while voiceless children and their helpless parents are being asked to remain silent.

As a nation that claims to be the “richest” and “most powerful” of the planet — how can we possibly reconcile the disparity in our priorities?

A nation that cannot take care of the most vulnerable ought to be ashamed of itself rather than boasting as a leader of the world — we have become the immoral cheerleaders of a corrupt system and a society that we lead.

Brothers and Sisters — as people of faith and conscience, we ought to uphold “the God granted dignity and right of every child born to Adam” (“laqad karramna bani Adam”) – and not only some …

Brothers and Sisters — as tax-paying citizens of this country — we ought to hold the perpetrators of the crimes of highest magnitude by their neglect of our children — responsible …

Brothers and Sisters — as members of a human society — we ought not to ask whose child it is but rather embrace each one of them- with a name or no name — with a parent or none as ours …

Let us remember what Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) reminded us, that those “who take care of the orphans will accompany him just as twin fingers in the best of heavens in the eternal life hereafter.”

Let us remember that it is most noble to give before we are asked for it …

Let us remember that our gratefulness to God’s awesome gifts is to protect them …

Let us remember that children are a mighty and priceless blessing to us and not a curse …

Let us remember as parents and guardians our imperative to be a source of comfort to them …

Let us remember that we’ll be remembered by our care and concern for the voiceless…

Let us remember that our joy is in giving rather than in receiving…

Let us remember that in God, we seek refuge and find strength in reclaiming and restoring the lost rights of His most awesome creation and gift to us — our children.

In closing, my dear brothers and sisters, I would like you all to dedicate a day a month, if not more, to nothing else but to find ways to be a source of comfort and joy to children. I invite you to join me and Islamic Shura Council and the Children’s Defense Fund to engage in this noble struggle to defend those who are defenseless, to give voice to those who are voiceless, and to be a reason for smiles and joy to those who are full of tears and without hope. Their voiceless cries must be heard because in it is our salvation and in them is our present and future!

Amen.
Two Duas

A Dua by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Ph.D., Islamic Society of Central New York

Our Creator, The Lord of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, Our beloved God and Our Loving God,

We know Our Lord, Most Wise, that You created humans purposely to proliferate on Earth, to reproduce and have children and for their children, when they mature and become responsible, to have children, and it is Your Grace which has allowed us to draw from this... an immense joy.

But, we also know that along with the pleasure you have graciously planted in our hearts, Our Lord, Most Just, You have placed on our shoulders a hefty responsibility. Deeply embedded in Your Divine Purpose, is our obligation to defend all that is weak, to nurture all that is vulnerable, to protect all that is innocent, to safeguard all that is fragile and to cherish all that is precious.

And who should know better than You, O’ Lord, Who is Most Cognizant, that our children are all of these things?

So graciously, O’ Lord, assist us in fulfilling our duties towards them so that they can grow up to be whoever they wish to become and we hope them to be. Please shape us into the perfect examples for them to follow as they inevitably become the adults of tomorrow.

Our Lord, Most Forgiving, we are horribly ashamed of the way in which we failed You by failing our children. Alarming statistics of hunger, deprivation, lack of adequate health care, and closed doors of opportunities deprive us of our humanity and civilization. Daily images of children being abducted from their homes, raped, killed, and brutally mutilated rob us all of any sense of accomplishment. Other children indicted and convicted as adults pass the conviction to all of our societal institutions. We have foolishly let our greed, arrogance, and apathy get the best of us by letting these vices cloud our judgment and darken our hearts and souls.

So we ask You, Mighty Lord, to turn the eagerness of our greed into a spirit of selflessness so that we may give back to our children the innocence we so voraciously took. Please turn our arrogance and false pride into humility and servitude so that we may rightfully nurture them the way they so deserve. And Lord, Most Gracious, please turn our apathy and inertia into empathy and compassion so that we may change the tears we so wrongfully caused into the smiles our children so direly need, and the cries we so unjustly provoked into giggles and laughter carried by the gentle breeze. After all, until our children succeed and prosper, our hearts will know no peace... and torment will continue to replace the joy that once was.

Our Lord, help us learn the lessons from all that goes on around us.

Grant our members, religious leaders, city officials, public policy makers, and national caretakers the will, strength, resolve and wisdom to nurture, educate and support our children towards excellence in life, health, the opportunity to learn and virtue in values.

Guide our society members, officials, educators and parents to join hands in preparing the children of today to become the peacemakers of tomorrow.

Help us make the world a safer place for them.
A Dua by Afeefa Syeed

The following dua was written and spoken by Afeefa Syeed at the Interfaith Service for Justice for Children and the Poor sponsored by the Children’s Defense Fund at the Washington National Cathedral on October 28, 2004.

Our Prayer for Children: A Muslim Call to Justice

I begin with the name of God. The God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The God whose everlasting compassion and never ending mercy are the saving grace of all humanity. God who is the source of Peace and Perfection. God who is the Protector.

Our nation has been blessed with abundance. At this moment, Dear God, help us to remember and reflect on Your words:

There will be a time We will test you with affluence — avoid arrogance and practice justice and equality.

Oh Lord, Oh God! To every life afflicted with senseless, mean acts, grant your everlasting Mercy. We are comforted in the thought that innocent children whose lives were ended are safe now in Your embrace.

Your Prophet, Muhammad, said,

The best community will be known because of its kindness to children.

In this time of such suffering of the children, help us to remember that our children are a trust from You. We are their guardians and You will be the judge of how we guide and protect them. Guide us to teach them how to be better than we.

Help us to teach our children that a true believer’s success is how close he is to God, how relevant and beneficial he is to mankind. The more pain we inflict on fellow human beings the more distance we put between us and God.

As parents in this nation, Lord, help us to sense and know that our children are born in a state of purity and innocence. They are gifts from You.

Remind us, oh Lord, of the story when a man came to Your prophet, Muhammad, and asked, “Do you kiss your children? I have ten and have never kissed them.” The Prophet replied with a sorrowful tone and a clenched jaw, “That shows you have no mercy or tenderness at all. Those who do not show mercy to others will not have God’s mercy on them.”

Our Prophet drew great joy and happiness even in times of despair and loss at the sight of children. His supplication should be our supplication:

I commend you, oh children of this world, to the protection of God’s perfect words from every evil.

Help us to raise children who are gentle and polite, not timid, afraid, or cowed down. Help us to raise children who are helpful and considerate, not arrogant and loutish.

Help us teach our children to know Your prophet’s words:

The strong person is not the one who is best at wrestling; but the one who controls himself in anger.

Help us as parents to be tolerant, kind, understanding, truthful, reverent so our children will be tolerant, kind, understanding, truthful, reverent. Help us, Oh Lord, to utter often the verse from the Qur’an:

God truly enjoins justice and kind and excellent treatment.
Oh Lord, those of us who carry Your trust now in our wombs pray to you. Help us to dedicate our offspring to the founding of justice. Let us take the example of Hanna, mother of Mary, who beseeched her Lord to protect and guide her child who was not yet born. Make us conscientious and steadfast parents, not accidental or incidental ones.

Lord, help us to know that Justice is Your Attribute. Justice is a balance. Most importantly, we know from Your words, Justice is a call to action.

Oh Lord, as children of this country, help us to grow as citizens who work for the betterment of our brothers and sisters — no matter how small the action.

As children of this country, guide us to be leaders who will not be blinded to the injustices of this world.

As children of this country, grant us the wisdom to know what our country must do to seek Your Pleasure.

Our nation is great. Our nation is vast. America is beautiful.

Guide us, Oh Lord, to know that justice for all is not a luxury or a choice. Help us to remember You give all children the right to a good name, shelter, good health, and an education.

We will work for these rights for those who are without — help us be passionate and proactive in the preservation and practice of justice.

Our children are the future, Lord. Do not let us forsake our future by harming the trust You have bestowed on us. We are ready as children and as parents of this country, as Americans all, to pass this test together.

Oh Lord! Guard our children with Your never slumbering eyes. Hold them fast with your embrace of mercy. Shower them wherever they go with love from Your bottomless well of compassion.

Let us remember the mission of all Your prophets from Adam, to Jesus, Moses, and through to Muhammad who said:

*If any of you witness an injustice, he should change it with his hand, and if he is not able, then with his tongue, and if he is not able, then detest it with his heart. But that shows the weakest of faith.*

Finally, we remember Your words to us:

*Oh ye who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer. For God is with those who patiently persevere.*

Amen.
Grandfather,
Look at our brokenness.

We know that in all Creation
Only the human family
Has strayed from the Sacred Way.

We know that we are the ones
Who are divided
And we are the ones
Who must come back together
To walk in the Sacred Way.

Grandfather,
Sacred One,
Teach us love, compassion, honor
That we may heal the earth
And heal each other.

(Ojibway Prayer)

It is strictly believed and understood by the Sioux that a child is the greatest gift from Wakan Tanka,
in response to many devout prayers, sacrifices, and promises. Therefore the child is considered “sent by
Wakan Tanka,” through some element—namely the element of human nature.

(Robert Higheagle, Teton Sioux)

Great Spirit, Great Spirit, my Grandfather, all over the earth the faces of living things are all alike. . .
Look upon these faces of children without number and with children in their arms, that they may face
the winds and walk the good road to the day of quiet.

(Black Elk, Oglala Sioux holy man)

In many Indian cultures, young children are considered sacred gifts to the family and to the tribe. . . Each
child is to be treated with personal respect as an individual bearing special traits. . . Each adult generation
is to acknowledge the sacredness of young children and to care for the coming generation.

(Wabacanka Ska Win Gough)
The gods and the spirits of the sacred mountains created a [child]. The [child] was made of all rains, springs, rivers, ponds, black clouds, and sky . . . with feet made of earth and legs of lightning. White shell forms the knees and the body is white and yellow corn; the flesh is of daybreak, hair of darkness; eyes are of the sun . . . white corn forms the teeth, black corn the eyebrows and red coral beads the nose . . . tears are of rain, the tongue of straight lightning, and the voice of thunder . . . human’s heart is obsidian, the little whirlwind keeps nerves in motion, and motion and movement is the air . . . the name of this new kind of being was “created from everything.”

(A poetic legend of Indians, Christians and Native American Concerns in the Late 20th Century. Church Council of Greater Seattle, 1981)

Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw. For I was seeing in the sacred manner the shape of all things of the spirit and the shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that make one circle, wide as daylight and starlight. And in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy.

(Black Elk)

O Great Spirit, Creator of all things;
Human Beings, trees, grass, berries.
Help us, be kind to us.
Let us be happy on earth.
Let us lead our children
To a good life and old age.
These, our people; give them good minds
To love one another.
O Great Spirit,
Be kind to us.
Give these people the favor
To see green trees,
Green grass, flowers, and berries
This next spring.
So we all meet again.
O Great Spirit,
We ask of you.

(Mohawk prayer)
Resources for a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath Celebration

The following resources — reflections, shabad from the Guru Granth Sahib and a sakhi — can be used to engage children and adults in your gurdwara in your National Observance of Children’s Sabbath® celebration or to enrich multifaith Children’s Sabbath celebrations and educational events. This year’s activities should focus on ending child poverty.

A Sikh Reflection and Prayer for America
By Valerie Kaur offered Nov. 9, 2016

Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!

In our tears and agony, we hold our children close and confront the truth: The future is dark.
But my faith dares me to ask: What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb, but the darkness of the womb?
What if our America is not dead but a country still waiting to be born?
What if the story of America is one long labor?
What if all the mothers who came before us, who survived genocide and occupation, slavery and Jim Crow, racism and xenophobia, political oppression and sexual assault, are standing behind us now, whispering in our ear: You are brave!
What if this is our Great Contraction before we birth a new future?
Remember the wisdom of the midwife: “Breathe,” she says. Then: “Push.”
Now it is time to breathe. But soon it will be time to push; soon it will be time to fight - for those we love -- Muslim father, Sikh son, trans daughter, indigenous brother, immigrant sister, white worker, the poor and forgotten, and the ones who cast their vote out of resentment and fear.
Let us make an oath to fight for the soul of America — “The land that never has been yet- And yet must be” (Langston Hughes) — with Revolutionary Love and relentless optimism. And so I pray this Sikh prayer:

Nanak Naam Chardi Kala, Tere Bane Sarbat Da Bhalla

“In the name of the Divine within us and around us, we find everlasting optimism. Within your will, may there be grace for all of humanity.”
Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh!
Shabad from the Guru Granth Sahib

Goojaree Mehalaa 5 ||

Goojaree, Fifth Mehl: 22319

Jis Simarath Sabh Kilavikh Naasehi Pitharee Hoe Oudhhaaro ǁ
Remembering Him, all sins are erased, and ones generations are saved.

So Har Har Thumh Sadh Hee Jaapahu Jaa Kaa Anth N Paaro ǁ1ǁ
So meditate continually on the Lord, Har, Har; He has no end or limitation. ǁ1ǁ

Poothaa Maathaa Kee Aasees ǁ
O son, this is your mother’s hope and prayer

Nimakh N Bisaro Thumh Ko Har Har Sadhaa Bhajahu Jagadhees ǁ1ǁ Rehaao ǁ
That you may never forget the Lord, Har, Har, even for an instant. May you ever vibrate upon the Lord of the Universe. ǁ1ǁPauseǁ

Sathigur Thumh Ko Hoe Dhaiaaalaa Santhasang Thaeree Preeth ǁ1ǁ
May the True Guru be kind to you, and may you love the Society of the Saints.

Kaaparr Path Paramaesar Raakhee Bhojan Keerathan Neeth ǁ2ǁ
May the preservation of your honor by the Transcendent Lord be your clothes, and may the singing of His Praises be your food. ǁ2ǁ

Anmrith Peevahu Sadhaa Chir Jeevahu Har Simarath Anadh Ananthaa ǁ2ǁ
So drink in forever the Ambrosial Nectar; may you live long, and may the meditative remembrance of the Lord give you infinite delight.

Rang Thamaasaa Pooran Aasaa Kabehi N Biapai Chinthaa ǁ3ǁ
May joy and pleasure be yours; may your hopes be fulfilled, and may you never be troubled by worries. ǁ3ǁ

Bhavar Thumhaaraa Eihu Man Hovo Har Charanaa Hohu Koulaa ǁ2ǁ
Let this mind of yours be the bumble bee, and let the Lord’s feet be the lotus flower.
Naanak Dhaas Oun Sang Lapattaeiou Jio Boondhehi Chaathrik Moulaa ||4||3||4||
Says servant Nanak, attach your mind to them, and blossom forth like the song-bird, upon finding the rain-drop. ||4||3||4||

(SGGS, Ang 496 Raag Goojree Guru Arjan Dev)

Bhairo Mehalaa 4 ||

Bhairao, Fourth Mehl: 48517

Sukirath Karanee Saar Japamaalee ||
To do good deeds is the best rosary.

Hiradhai Faer Chalai Thudhh Naalee ||1||
Chant on the beads within your heart, and it shall go along with you. ||1||

Har Har Naam Japahu Banavaalee ||
Chant the Name of the Lord, Har, Har, the Lord of the forest.

Kar Kirapaa Maelahu Sathasangath Thoott Gee Maeciaa Jam Jaalee ||1|| Rehaao ||
Have mercy on me, Lord, and unite me with the Sat Sangat, the True Congregation, so that I may be released from Maya’s noose of death. ||1||Pause||

Guramukh Saevaa Ghaal Jin Ghaalee ||
Whoever, as Gurmukh, serves and works hard,

This Gharreeai Sabadh Sachee Ttakasaalee ||2||
Is molded and shaped in the true mint of the Shabad, the Word of God. ||2||

Har Agam Agochar Gur Agam Dhikhaalee ||
The Guru has revealed to me the Inaccessible and Unfathomable Lord.

Vich Kaaeiaa Nagar Ladhhaa Har Bhaalee ||3||
Searching within the body-village, I have found the Lord. ||3||

Ham Baarik Har Pithaa Prathipaalee ||
I am just a child; the Lord is my Father, who nurtures and cherishes me.

Jan Naanak Thaarahu Nadhar Nihaalee ||4||3||
Please save servant Nanak, Lord; bless him with Your Glance of Grace. ||4||3||

(SGGS, Ang 1134  Raag Bhaira-o Guru Ram Das)
Raag Bhairao, Third Mehl, Chaupadas, First House: 48235

Ik Oankaar Sathigur Prasaadh ||
One Universal Creator God. By The Grace Of The True Guru:

48236

Jaath Kaa Garab N Kareahu Koe ||
No one should be proud of his social class and status.

48237

Breham Bindhae So Braahaman Hoe ||1||
He alone is a Brahmin, who knows God. ||1||

48238

Jaath Kaa Garab N Kar Moorakh Gavaaraa ||
Do not be proud of your social class and status, you ignorant fool!

48239

Eis Garab Thae Chalehi Bahuth Vikaaraa ||1|| Rehaao ||
So much sin and corruption comes from this pride. ||1||Pause||

48240

Chaarae Varan Aakhai Sabh Koe ||
Everyone says that there are four castes, four social classes.

48241

Breham Bindh Thae Sabh Oupath Hoe ||2||
They all emanate from the drop of God’s Seed. ||2||

48242

Maattee Eaek Sagal Sansaaraa ||
The entire universe is made of the same clay.

48243

Bahu Bidhh Bhaanddae Gharrai Kumhaaraa ||3||
The Potter has shaped it into all sorts of vessels. ||3||

48244

Panch Thath Mil Dhachee Kaa Aakaaraa ||
The five elements join together, to make up the form of the human body.

48245

Ghatt Vadhh Ko Karai Beechaaraa ||4||
Who can say which is less, and which is more? ||4||

48246

Kehath Naanak Eihu Jeeo Karam Bandhh Hoe ||
Says Nanak, this soul is bound by its actions.

48247
Bin Sathigur Bhaettae Mukath N Hoee ||5||1||
Without meeting the True Guru, it is not liberated. ||5||1||

48248

(SGGS, Ang 1127-1128 Raag Bhaira-o Guru Amar Das)

Sorath Mehalaa 5 ||

Sorat’h, Fifth Mehl: 26680

Raajan Mehi Raajaa Ourajhacaeiou Maanan Mehi Abhimaanee ||
As the king is entangled in kingly affairs, and the egotist in his own egotism,

26681

Lobhan Mehi Lobhee Lobhaaeiou Thio Har Rang Rachae Giaaneec ||1||
And the greedy man is enticed by greed, so is the spiritually enlightened being absorbed in the Love of the Lord. ||1||

26682

Har Jan Ko Eihee Suhaavai ||
This is what befits the Lord’s servant.

26683

Paekh Nikatt Kar Saevaa Sathigur Har Keerathan Hee Thripathaavai || Rehaao ||
Beholding the Lord near at hand, he serves the True Guru, and he is satisfied through the Kirtan of the Lord’s Praises. ||Pause||

26684

Amalan Sio Amalee Lapattaaeion Bhooman Bhoom Piaaree ||
The addict is addicted to his drug, and the landlord is in love with his land.

26685

Kheer Sang Baarik Hai Leenaa Prabh Santh Aisae Hithakaaree ||2||
As the baby is attached to his milk, so the Saint is in love with God. ||2||

26686

Bidhiaa Mehi Bidhuansee Rachiaa Nain Dhaekh Sukh Paavehi ||
The scholar is absorbed in scholarship, and the eyes are happy to see.

26687

Jaisae Rasanaa Saadh Lubhaaneec Thio Har Jan Har Gun Gaavehi ||3||
As the tongue savors the tastes, so does the humble servant of the Lord sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord. ||3||

26688

Jaisee Bhookh Thaisee Kaa Poorak Sagal Ghataaa Kaa Suaamee ||
As is the hunger, so is the fuller; He is the Lord and Master of all hearts.

26689
Naanak Piaas Lagee Dharasan Kee Prabh Miliaa Antharajaamee ||4||5||16||
Nanak thirsts for the Blessed Vision of the Lord’s Darshan; he has met God, the Inner-knover, the
Searcher of hearts. ||4||5||16||

26690
(Ang 613, Raag Sorath, Guru Arjan Dev)

Bhairo Mehalaa 5 ||

Bhairao, Fifth Mehl: 48675
Khoob Khoob Khoob Khoob Koob Khoob Thaero Naam ||
Excellent, excellent, excellent, excellent, excellent is Your Name.

Jhooth Jhooth Jhooth Jhooth Dhunee Gumaan ||1|| Rehaao ||
False, false, false, false is pride in the world. ||1||Pause||

Nagaj Thaerae Bandhae Dheedhaar Apaar ||
The glorious vision of Your slaves, O Infinite Lord, is wonderful and beauteous.

Naam Binaa Sabh Dhuneeaa Shhaar ||1||
Without the Naam, the Name of the Lord, the whole world is just ashes. ||1||

Acharaj Thaeree Kudharath Thaerae Kadham Salaah ||
Your Creative Power is marvellous, and Your Lotus Feet are admirable.

Ganeev Thaeree Sifath Sachae Paathisaah ||2||
Your Praise is priceless, O True King. ||2||

Needhariaa Dhhar Paneh Khudhaae ||
God is the Support of the unsupported.

Gareeb Nivaaj Dhin Rain Dhhiaae ||3||
Meditate day and night on the Cherisher of the meek and humble. ||3||

Naanak Ko Khudh Khasam Miharavaan ||
God has been merciful to Nanak.

Alahu N Visarai Dhil Jeea Paraan ||4||10||
May I never forget God; He is my heart, my soul, my breath of life. ||4||10||

(SGGS Ang 1137-1138 Raag Bhaira-o Guru Arjan Dev)
Salok ||

Shalok: 11577

Guradhaev Maathaa Guradhaev Pithaa Guradhaev Suaamee Paraamaesuraa ||
The Divine Guru is our mother, the Divine Guru is our father; the Divine Guru is our Lord and Master, the Transcendent Lord.

11578

Guradhaev Sakhaa Agiaan Bhanjan Guradhaev Bandhhip Sehodharaa ||
The Divine Guru is my companion, the Destroyer of ignorance; the Divine Guru is my relative and brother.

11579

Guradhaev Dhaathaa Har Naam Oupadhaesai Guradhaev Manth Nirodhharaa ||
The Divine Guru is the Giver, the Teacher of the Lord’s Name. The Divine Guru is the Mantra which never fails.

11580

Guradhaev Saanth Sath Budhh Moorath Guradhaev Paaras Paraa ||
The Divine Guru is the image of peace, truth and wisdom. The Divine Guru is the Philosopher’s Stone - touching it, one is transformed.

11581

Guradhaev Theerathh Anmrith Sarovar Gur Giaan Majan Aparanpara ||
The Divine Guru is the sacred shrine of pilgrimage, and the pool of divine nectar; bathing in the Guru’s wisdom, one experiences the Infinite.

11582

Guradhaev Karathaa Sabh Paap Harathaa Guradhaev Pathith Pavith Karaa ||
The Divine Guru is the Creator, and the Destroyer of all sins; the Divine Guru is the Purifier of sinners.

11583

Guradhaev Aadh Jugaadh Jug Jug Guradhaev Manth Har Jap Oudhharaa ||
The Divine Guru existed in the very beginning, throughout the ages, in each and every age. The Divine Guru is the Mantra of the Lord’s Name; chanting it, one is saved.

11584

Guradhaev Sangath Prabh Mael Kar Kirapaa Ham Moorrr Paapee Jith Lag Tharaa ||
O God, please be merciful to me, that I may be with the Divine Guru; I am a foolish sinner, but holding onto Him, I will be carried across.

11585

Guradhaev Sathigur Paarabreham Paraamaesar Guradhaev Naanak Har Namasakaraa ||
The Divine Guru is the True Guru, the Supreme Lord God, the Transcendent Lord; Nanak bows in humble reverence to the Lord, the Divine Guru. ||

11586

Eaehu Salok Aadh Anth Parranaa ||
Read this Shalok at the beginning, and at the end. ||

11587

(SGGS, Ang 262 Raag Gauri Guru Arjan Dev)
Sakhi from the Life of Guru Nanak:

Guru Nanak was thirty years old at this time in 1499. The next stage of his life began with extensive travels to spread the message of God. Accompanied by his Muslim rabab player Mardana for company, Guru Nanak undertook long journeys to convey his message to the people in the form of musical hymns. Guru Nanak choose this medium to propagate his message because it was easily understood by the population of the time. Wherever he traveled he used the local language to convey his message to the people. He traveled throughout the Indian Subcontinent and further east, west and north to spread his mission. Wherever he went he set up local cells called manjis, where his followers could gather to recite hymns and meditate.

Once when Guru Nanak came to the small town of Saidpur in West Punjab he chose to stay there with Lalo, a low caste carpenter. At the same time the local chief of the town Malik Bhago, who was quite wealthy and a very proud man, was holding a feast to which all holy men were invited. When Malik Bhago found out that Guru Nanak would not attend his feast but instead partook of the simple fare of his host Lalo, he was quite angry and had the Guru brought to him for questioning. When asked why he didn’t join in the feast, the Guru sent for the meal served by Malik Bhago and also some of the simple meal served by Lalo. Holding these in separate hands he squeezed them, blood appeared out of the rich food of Malik Bhago, while milk oozed out of Lalo’s simple fare. Malik Bhago was put to shame and realized that his riches had been amassed by exploiting the poor, while what Lalo offered was the milk of hard-earned honest work.

(Source: https://www.sikhs.org/guru1.htm)

Reflection: “Kaljug mein Kirtan Pardhana” :

How Gurbani Kirtan Helps in Applying the Message of Sri Guru Granth Sahib
by Dr. Inderjit N. Kaur

We often think of kaljug (an era of vices) as a distant notion that is not of our making. However gurbani tells us in numerous sabad that we are immersed in lifestyles that sustain kaljug, lifestyles caught in a web of greed (lobh) and arrogance (ahankar) to such an extent that we are in denial about them; we live in delusion (bharam)….Gurbani kirtan (the musical rendering of gurbani) can help us overcome the social ills we perpetuate, often without awareness.

I will make my point with the help of a well-known sakhi (life story) about Guru Nanak, and a sabad by Guru Ramdas, as well as its musical rendition by the most renowned ragi of the last several decades, Bhai Harjinder Singh Srinagar Wale and his brother Bhai Maninder Singh. A thread running through these three that I will focus on will be the gurbani concepts of har-ras (divine sensations) and an-ras (other sensations).

Our guru sahiban not only sang and wrote down gurbani, but also put its message into action in their daily lives to counter kaljug. The painting below is a picturization of a sakhi which describes one of the many ways Guru Nanak confronted actions and lifestyles that sustain kaljug.

In the sakhi, Guru Nanak rejects the invitation of Malik Bhago, a person who is rich in material wealth but poor in ethical values, and accepts the hospitality of Bhai Lalo, a person who is poor in wealth but rich in moral virtues. Through this action, Guru Nanak is leading us on how to conduct our everyday social lives. He is setting an example that we should choose those we associate with on the basis of their ethical values rather than the value of their wealth and power. Indeed, that is the very concept of sadh sangat – the company of the ethical. In this sakhi Guru Nanak is also setting an example of courage, of exposing wrong-
doing and standing up against it. He squeezes the food prepared at the homes of both men to expose Malik Bhago’s vices through the blood that oozes from his food, and Bhai Lalo’s virtues through the milk that flows from his. The sakhi uses the metaphor of ras, literally juice and essence.

By comparing the pure ras in the food of the humble and honest Bhai Lalo with the impure ras in the arrogant and dishonest Malik Bhago’s food, Guru Nanak is also teaching us that what we ingest matters. In many sabads in Guru Granth Sahib, we are asked to drink, eat, taste and savor har-ras and amrit-ras — the experience of the divine. These have ethical connotations too. Har is a word for the divine that refers to the divine moral virtue of removing suffering. Amrit is that which does not die, which is everlasting, that is truth and truthfulness. Ras here is then an experiential sensation of divine virtues. By incorporating these divine sensations into one’s body, one renders it capable of divine actions, such as empathy and compassion for the less fortunate, and courage to speak truth to power, that Guru Nanak is showing in the above sakhi.

An-ras on the other hand is described in gurbani as the experience of other ras, of excessive consumption and worldly pleasures, as for example in the following shabad.

\[ \text{Gau bairgambl 4.} \]
\[ \text{Gaurree Bairaagan, Fourth Mehl.} \]
\[ \text{Mere rm eh nc karam har mere.} \]
\[ \text{My waheguru, these are my unethical actions.} \]
\[ \text{Guvanhar har aiy kar kirpbakas avga sab mere. raho.} \]
\[ \text{Virtuous, Remover of suffering, Compassionate, bless me with your grace, forgive my vices. Pause.} \]
\[ \text{Kancan nrmh jo luba hai moh m miy.} \]
\[ \text{With my being/inclination immersed in the greed for wealth, sexual pursuits, worldly pleasures,} \]
\[ \text{Gar manar goe kus man an-ras li.} \]
\[ \text{And my happiness linked to conspicuous consumption, I am absorbed in an-ras.} \]
\[ \text{Har parab ci na v kio ct mere har ri. 1} \]
\[ \text{I do not remember divine virtues and, not surprisingly, have lost my divine.} \]

As this sabad emphasizes, an-ras leads one away from divine virtues and ethical action. Conspicuous consumption is particularly seen in gurbani as unethical action, because it leads to arrogance, and to further greed. Arrogance deprives one of the ability to see and treat all human beings as equal and deserving of the same human dignity. Greed compromises one’s ethical principles. And both these escape the awareness of the person subject to them, making her/him a contributor to the preservation of kaljug.

To draw people away from the charms that the wealthy and powerful can offer, Guru Nanak travelled far and wide singing his songs that spoke of the divine and divine virtues, of ethics and social justice. Indeed the theme of this sakhi, and of daily ethical action, can be found in many sabad of our guru sahiban, such as:

\[ \text{a baia har har i ai an in sukari kar ai.} \]
\[ \text{As you go about, contemplate the divine; day in and out, enact good actions.} \]
\[ \text{Guru Granth Sahib: 621} \]

Our guru sahibs not only used the medium of music to communicate their message, they explicitly proclaimed musical rendition as the most effective means of accessing the divine and divine virtues – “Kaljug mein kirtan pardhana.” Why? Why is the musical rendering of gurbani the most efficacious means in an era of vices?
The answer lies in music’s ability to affect us. Music moves us; it creates action tendencies. Some aspects of music that are particularly effective in affecting us are intonation, phrasing, repetition and variation, and voice quality.

Music creates ras in us. This can be har-ras or an-ras depending on the text (lyrics), context, associations, memories and histories. Music, including gurbani music, can generate an-ras and lead us away from the divine. For example, music in product advertisements leads to unnecessary and conspicuous consumption, which further leads to arrogance and greed, trapping one in a loop of vices outside one’s awareness.

When music is paired with gurbani, it can generate har-ras. It can move us to enact divine virtues, to ethical actions. Listening to gurbani kirtan, especially with sadh sangat amplifies the message of gurb ni, the ras from gurbani.

(Please refer to Dr. Kaur’s original article for her analysis of how the phrasing, and repetition and variation are beautifully executed by Bhai Harjinder Singh and Bhai Maninder Singh in their rendition of the sabad discussed above, Mere rm eh nc karam har mere.). This rendition can be heard on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-O6Lkr55_Y.

Har-ras brings peace and relief from the injustices rampant in kaljug. It can also move one to action to counter kaljug, to have the courage to be truthful, humble, and selfless, instead of becoming collusive with and participant in dishonesty, arrogance and greed.

However, the effectiveness of har-ras in moving us to ethical action is counteracted by all the an-ras flowing in our bodies from our immersion in a consumption oriented lifestyle. Typically, we spend most of the time in activities that produce an-ras, and very little time in activities that produce har-ras. The music too which we choose or which plays in the background in our everyday environments intensifies an-ras. For example, the background music in shopping malls is designed to increase consumer spending. With the immersion in such environments and activities, the effect of the little bit of kirtan listening is overtaken very quickly by the shift to worldly pleasures, taking us away from har-ras and ethical action. The derivation of pleasure from consumption and egotism dulls our ability to be aware of the compromises we make to Sikh values in our daily choices.

Thus, Guru Nanak’s example from the above sakhi is very difficult for us to follow. Not only are we unable to speak truth to power, we yearn the company of the wealthy and powerful, often irrespective of their everyday ethical values (such as arrogance, greed, and duplicity), and therein lies a significant way that we on a daily basis play a role in sustaining kaljug, because we end up further empowering those with poor ethics.

However, Guru Nanak’s example is not impossible to follow, if we make it a conscious project. If we bring focus and mindfulness into our daily choices and actions, and inculcate the awareness of their consequences on ourselves, on others, and on the sustenance of kaljug, we can be strong agents of our guru sahiban’s vision of an egalitarian and just world where divine virtues prevail.

In fact, the more we practice the guru’s ways, the easier it becomes. And that is the gurbani concept of sahaj. Further, the more we practice ethical action, the more pleasurable it becomes. Our body wants more har-ras, and less an-ras.

Fortunately, guru sahiban gave us the gift of gurbani kirtan. It is a great resource for getting har-ras moving in our bodies, and for moving towards everyday choices and actions that, instead of being self-oriented and supportive of kaljug, are selfless and disruptive of kaljug…This har-ras is essential to our ability to stay away from vices such as greed and arrogance that are some of our daily ills sustaining kaljug. But we have to give har-ras a chance!

(Dr. Inderjit Kaur is a scholar of Gurbani Kirtan, currently teaching at the music department at the University of California, Berkeley. She holds two PhDs, in musicology and in economics, both from UC Berkeley. She holds diplomas in North Indian Classical Music and in South Indian Classical Dance.)
Give Us the Spirit of the Child

Give us the spirit of the child.
Give us the child who lives within:

*The child who trusts, the child who imagines, the child who sings.*

The child who receives without reservation, the child who gives without judgment.

*Give us a child’s eyes, that we may receive the beauty and freshness of this day like a sunrise;*

Give us a child’s ears, that we may hear the music of mythical times;

*Give us a child’s heart, that we may be filled with wonder and delight;*

Give us a child’s faith, that we may be cured of our cynicism;

*Give us the spirit of the child, who is not afraid to need; who is not afraid to love.*

*(Sara Moores Campbell)*

New Life Comes to Us

*(Congregations may wish to adapt the following reading, traditionally used for a naming or child dedication, to honor all children.)*

New life comes to us as a gift.

*Each new life makes its demand, exacts our attentiveness,*

*enlists and organizes our energies, and blesses us.*

*May we be worthy of the gift, and glad receivers of the blessing.*

New life appeals to us.

*Each new life is helpless and so calls forth our help,*

*is weak and so calls forth our strength,*

*is innocent and so calls forth our wisdom.*

*May we be wise in our strength and ever-strong in our help.*

New life grows.

*Each new life ventures first words, first steps, first essays in the art of living,*

*Each grows, ever surpassing the life that was for the life that shall be.*

*May we patiently wait, and watch in wonder.*

New life bears untold promise.

*Each new life has a story to tell, and we shall listen.*

*Each new life goes forth from us, laying the child’s sovereign claim on whole realms of being we had called our own.*

All: God of grace, may they be blessed, whatever the pathways they follow, whatever the life they claim as their own.

*(George Kimmich Beach)*
Commitment
I am only one
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
But still I can do something.
And because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.

(Edward Everett Hale)

Benediction
And now, may we have faith in life to do wise planting that the generations to come may reap even more abundantly than we. May we be bold in bringing to fruition the golden dreams of human kinship and justice. This we ask that the fields of promise become fields of reality.

(V. Emil Gudmundson)
Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child

This discussion guide can be used to plan a session with adult and older youth participants from a single place of worship, from a single tradition, or with participants from many different religious and ethical traditions. It is designed as a 90-minute session. Adapt as appropriate for your group to reflect the traditions present, the number and age of participants, and the time available.
One person can serve as the facilitator for this session. However, if you are planning a multifaith discussion, it would be best if you could involve one leader from each tradition expected to be present to discuss the session in advance, make any desired adjustment to the program and materials, and share in the facilitation/leadership of the session. This will ensure not only that the session is appropriate for all present but also will support outreach in advance to build participation.

**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 and 3 so each is just one sheet.
  - Handout 2 is “Moments in America.” Make the appropriate number of copies.
  - Handout 4 is six sides (three sheets if printed two-sided). If you want to reduce the amount of photocopying, you could handwrite the readings from Handout 4 on sheets of newsprint or poster board and display them on the walls of the room where you will be meeting.
  - 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 community. If appropriate, invite local organizations, programs and agencies serving and seeking justice for children to provide materials, speakers or be present at tables following the discussion so participants can learn more and get involved. Consider having index cards available for participants to write their vision of a future of hope for children and their concrete commitment to the step they will take to move forward toward that vision.

- **Publicize the Program:** If it will be a multifaith discussion, be sure to publicize that and emphasize that all are welcome. Choose a location and time for a multifaith discussion that will be welcoming and appropriate for all. (Please download the “Planning a Multifaith Children’s Sabbath” at [www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbaths-Planning](http://www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbaths-Planning) for additional suggestions for planning multifaith events.)
Multifaith Discussion Outline

Introduction (15 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 children 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. It is also 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 for children.

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 will have time to share from our own religious traditions and learn about others. Finally, we will 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. Setting Guidelines to Ensure a “Safe Space” for Multifaith Conversation

Establish agreements for the discussion to ensure it feels like a “safe space” for all participants.* Be clear that there is to be no proselytizing; this is not a time to persuade someone to adopt your faith tradition or to compare traditions with an intention of establishing superiority or “the truth.” This is a time to share about your tradition and learn about the traditions of others in an atmosphere of respect with a desire to understand different perspectives and experiences.

*Interfaith Youth Core offers these guidelines for setting a safe space for conversation:

Introduce the kind of discussion we will be having today:
Tell participants: “You will be asked to talk about your faith or values today with others who don’t necessarily share your beliefs and ways of life.”

Brainstorm the guidelines for this unique discussion:
■ What do you need from yourself and others in order to feel safe having this conversation?
■ Take notes on your group’s responses and then read the responses aloud to conclude the discussion.

Here’s a list of key safe space guidelines. When your group is done brainstorming, add to the list anything you might have missed:
■ Everyone has a right to pass (decline to share or to read aloud).
■ Everything said is confidential.
■ Seek clarification if you don’t understand something someone else is saying.
■ Make sure to listen to others without interrupting.
■ Suspend your judgment.
■ Use “I” statements.
■ Remember the importance of the other person’s faith or ethical tradition in his or her own life.
■ Don’t expect others to know everything about your own tradition.
3. 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)

4. “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.)


Add that the chapter, of which this is an excerpt, refers to a passage from the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah — a text common to the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam — and that later in the session there will be an opportunity to read that text and for each person present to share a text or teaching or practice from their own religious or ethical tradition.

5. “Moments in America” (5 minutes)

Distribute copies of Handout 2 “Moments in America” (below). 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.

6. Our Particular Concerns (15 minutes)

Invite participants to share about a child or children for whom they have a special concern. Questions to prompt responses might include:

   a. “Who are the children for whom you weep?”
   b. “When have you felt so much 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?”
   c. “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 15 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.

Moving Forward with Hope to Provide Love and Justice for Children (55 minutes)

7. 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.”
8. Sharing from the Richness of Our Sacred Traditions (20 minutes)

Distribute copies of the handout with passages from a variety of religious traditions which may stimulate or supplement responses. (You can point out the first text under “Judaism” and note that it is the text that inspired the book chapter from which we’ve been reading excerpts.)

Tell participants that in a moment you will be inviting them to share what from their tradition 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; 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 — ideally with others of different traditions. Remind them of the agreements at the start of the session that will make this a safe and comfortable space in which to share.

(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.)

9. Responses to Seek Justice and Care for Children (20 minutes)

Open up discussion about what participants intend to do to move forward with hope and seek justice and love for every child.

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 (one or two minute) 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, adding additional texts from the spectrum of religious traditions present in a particular study and action group, 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.”

10. Envisioning the Restoration of Children to Community (5 minutes)

If time permits and it fits with the flow of the preceding discussion say, “The restoration of children to community is the ‘hope for the future’ in the passage read earlier. If you are comfortable, I invite you to close your eyes and envision what the promise of children restored to their community would look like for us in our day. What does ‘hope for the future’ look like to you, when you think about children?”

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 for participants to 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.
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 six 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

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?

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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

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.6

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?


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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 for additional information and data, which are updated annually or as new numbers become available.


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 21 seconds a child is arrested.
Every 30 seconds during the school year a public school student is corporally punished.*
Every 34 seconds a baby is born into poverty.
Every 47 seconds a child is abused or neglected.
Every 56 seconds a baby is born without health insurance.
Every 67 seconds a baby is born into extreme poverty.
Every 1-and-a-half minutes a baby is born to a teen mother.
Every 1-and-a-half minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.
Every 3-and-a-half minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense.
Every 8 minutes a child is arrested for a violent offense.
Every 22 minutes a baby dies before his or her first birthday.
Every hour a child or teen dies from an accident.
Every 3 hours and 15 minutes a child or teen is killed by guns.
Every 4-and-a-half hours a child commits suicide.
Every 5-and-a-half hours a child is killed by abuse or neglect.
Every 11 hours 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: Excerpt There Is Hope for Your Future: Your Children Shall Come Back” from Hope for the Future: Answering God’s Call to Justice for Our Children

by Shannon Daley-Harris (Westminster John Knox Press, 2016)

There is Hope for Your Future; Your Children Shall Come Back

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….

There is hope for your future… 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… 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… 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® program sites have welcomed children who might have traveled through the pipeline to prison, touching the lives of more than 149,000 pre-K-12 children since 1995, and more than seven 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

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7 The State of America’s Children 2014, 5.
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…. 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.9

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 an …orphanage.10

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.’”11

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….

There is hope for your future…. [H]ow 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?


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

Following are four excerpts from sacred texts of each religious tradition. There are, of course, many more passages from sacred texts as well as teachings and practices from each tradition related to poverty, love, justice, children, faith and action. What inspires, guides or sustains you from your tradition? What resonates with you from another tradition?

The Bahá’í Faith

O children of dust! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues. (Bahá’u’lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh, Persian No. 49)

O ye rich ones on earth! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease. (Bahá’u’lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh, Persian No. 54)

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. (Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, p. 285)

God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger. (Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 290)

Buddhism

If beings knew, as I know, the fruit of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart and stay there. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it. (Itivuttaka 18)

Better than a hundred years lived in idleness and in weakness is a single day lived with courage and powerful striving. (The Dhammapada, 112)

Whatever living beings there may be—feeble or strong, small or large, seen or unseen, those who live far or those near, those who are born and those who are yet to be born—may all beings, without exception, experience a happy mind. Let one not deceive another nor despise any person whatever in any place. In anger or ill will let one not wish any harm to another. Let one’s thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity. (Samyutta Nikaya, The Buddha Speaks)

It is in this way that we must train ourselves: by liberation of the self through love. We will develop love, we will practice it, we will make it both a way and a basis, take our stand upon it, store it up, and thoroughly set it going. (Samyutta Nikaya, The Buddha Speaks)
**Christianity**

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)

Hinduism

Ajyesthaso akanishthaso ete sambhrataro vahaduhu saubhagaya
No one is superior, none inferior. All are brothers marching forward to prosperity. (Ancient Hindu hymn)

The husband and wife of the house should not turn away any who comes at eating time and asks for food. If food is not available, a place to rest, water for refreshing one’s self, a reed mat to lay one’s self on, and pleasing words entertaining the guest — these at least never fail in the houses of the good. (Apastamba Dharmasutra 8.2)

A householder must give (as much food) as he is able (to spare) to those who do not cook for themselves, and to all beings one must distribute (food) without detriment (to one’s own interest). (Manu Smriti 4.32)

In the kingdom of God there is no premature death or suffering, everyone is healthy and beautiful. No one lives in poverty and want; no one is without learning or virtue. (The Ramayana)

Islam

And they feed, for the love of God, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive. (Qur’an 76:8)

“The creatures of God (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of God, and the most beloved to God are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children.” (Qur’an 60:8)

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God. (Qur’an S. 2:177, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem translation)

They ask thee what they should spend (In charity.) Say: Whatever wealth Ye spend that is good, Is for parents and kindred and orphans and those in want and for wayfarers and whatever ye do that is good, Allah knoweth it well. (Qur’an S. 2, 215, IFTA translation)
**Judaism**

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)*

Defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted and needy. *(Midrash Tebhillim 82:3)*

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)*

Although the giving of charity is a sacred obligation, the ultimate aim of tzedakah is to abolish poverty and to enable the poor to help themselves. *(Talmud, Shabbat 63)*

**Sikhism**

To do good deeds is the best rosary.
Chant on the beads within your heart, and it shall go along with you.
Chant the Name of the Lord, Har, Har, the Lord of the forest.
Have mercy on me, Lord, and unite me with the Sat Sangat, the True Congregation, so that I may be released from Maya’s noose of death.
Whoever, as Gurmukh, serves and works hard,
Is molded and shaped in the true mint of the Shabad, the Word of God.
The Guru has revealed to me the Inaccessible and Unfathomable Lord.
Searching within the body-village, I have found the Lord.
I am just a child; the Lord is my Father, who nurtures and cherishes me.
Please save servant Nanak, Lord; bless him with Your Glance of Grace.
*(SGGS, Ang 1134 Raag Bhaira-o Guru Ram Das)*

One Universal Creator God. By The Grace Of The True Guru:
No one should be proud of his social class and status.
He alone is a Brahmin, who knows God.
Do not be proud of your social class and status, you ignorant fool!
So much sin and corruption comes from this pride.
Everyone says that there are four castes, four social classes.
They all emanate from the drop of God’s Seed
The entire universe is made of the same clay.
The Potter has shaped it into all sorts of vessels.
The five elements join together, to make up the form of the human body.
Who can say which is less, and which is more?
Says Nanak, this soul is bound by its actions.
Without meeting the True Guru, it is not liberated. *(SGGS, Ang 1127-1128 Raag Bhaira-o Guru Amar Das)*
As the king is entangled in kingly affairs, and the egotist in his own egotism, 
And the greedy man is enticed by greed, so is the spiritually enlightened being absorbed in the Love of the 
Lord.
This is what befits the Lord’s servant.
Beholding the Lord near at hand, he serves the True Guru, and he is satisfied through the Kirtan of the 
Lord’s Praises.
The addict is addicted to his drug, and the landlord is in love with his land.
As the baby is attached to his milk, so the Saint is in love with God.
The scholar is absorbed in scholarship, and the eyes are happy to see.
As the tongue savors the tastes, so does the humble servant of the Lord sing the Glorious Praises of the Lord.
As is the hunger, so is the fulfiller; He is the Lord and Master of all hearts.
Nanak thirsts for the Blessed Vision of the Lord’s Darshan; he has met God, the Inner-knower, the 
Searcher of hearts. (SSGS, Ang 613)

Those who remember God generously help others. (SGGS)
The actions that you plan for the Children’s Sabbath weekend and for the year that follows are an essential part of the Children’s Sabbath. As important as the worship experiences and educational sessions are, it is vital to plan actions that will help translate that prayer, inspiration, awareness and information into new, hands-on service and justice-seeking advocacy to ensure every child a fair start in life by ending poverty and giving families the tools and support for economic security and well-being.

Be sure to include planning for action from the start of your Children’s Sabbath planning process.

- Develop a vision for the kinds of outreach and justice actions you hope to include in the Children’s Sabbath and what long-term responses you hope to generate. What kind of difference do you want to make?
- Include necessary decision-makers in the process, whether it is a social action committee or other committee, religious leaders, or others depending on your place of worship.
- As you plan, tap into people in your place of worship and community who are already involved in organizations, programs, and agencies that help children and families in poverty. They can help you develop your action planning.
- If your past Children’s Sabbath celebrations have mostly focused on the service of worship or prayers, be prepared to explain to leaders or members why now is an important time to broaden the Children’s Sabbath to include action.

The following ideas provide suggestions for action that can be taken on the Children’s Sabbath weekend itself and actions that can be carried out throughout the year to come to make a lasting difference for children.

This Action Ideas Section provides:

- Tips for Planning Activities
- 2017 Children’s Sabbath Actions
Tips for Planning Activities

As you plan activities for the Children’s Sabbath weekend and for the year to come, keep the following tips in mind:

First, offer a range of activities focusing on raising awareness, hands-on service and advocacy. Making a difference for children requires all three kinds of effort! It also enables people to choose activities based on their particular skills and interests.

Second, plan some activities that can be completed on the Children’s Sabbath weekend (such as assembling care packages for children going into foster care) and some that will lead people into long-term commitments (such as signing up volunteers to do outreach and enrollment for children’s public health coverage programs or work with a mentoring or after-school program once a week).

Third, plan activities that will engage people of all ages. For example, if there is a table to write letters to elected officials, provide crayons and markers so young children can draw pictures to enclose, or have them dictate their letters to an older child or adult.

Fourth, use the Children’s Sabbath to reinforce existing congregational programs that serve children, particularly programs that promote justice and help to end poverty and highlight new opportunities to serve children and families, seek justice, protect children and lift up the next generation. For example, you could highlight accomplishments, recruit new people to help, or solicit donations for existing programs. For new opportunities, you could introduce the program or effort, invite participation, and build awareness of how the new effort fits within your place of worship’s priorities and values.

Finally, be sure you are prepared to guide people in the activities so they understand the connection between the worship and the action. You may want to provide a preview of the activities on a bulletin insert or during the announcement time in worship. During the activity period, it works best to have several people at each activity who are prepared to explain and guide participation.

Please Note: The kinds of activities that are appropriate and permissible at various points during the Children's Sabbaths weekend vary depending on the religious tradition of a place of worship. As you read through the suggested activities, you should select those that are appropriate for your tradition or modify the actions to make them so. Remember that the whole weekend, from Friday morning through Sunday night, is part of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration, so some activities that would not be appropriate immediately following your time of worship could be planned for another day or time during the weekend. Additionally, activities can and should be planned for the year to follow. You know what is best for your place of worship.
2017 Children’s Sabbath Actions

The National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths weekend is about more than worship — even though worship is central to the occasion. The weekend, with the insight and inspiration from the experience of worship, aims to generate powerful, faithful sustained action to improve the lives of children. Places of worship will use the Children’s Sabbath weekend to introduce, reinvigorate or expand a wide variety of efforts to improve the lives of children through raising awareness, reaching out directly and speaking up for justice. Those important efforts reflect the unique needs, resources, traditions and commitments of places of worship and the communities in which they are situated. In addition to those valuable actions, this year we are encouraging each place of worship to take the following three key actions on and following the 2017 National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths weekend:

1. Develop Relationships and Communicate Regularly with Your Elected Officials.

2. Educate Your Faith Community about Child Poverty and How We Can Help End It. Ways to do this include:

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

   b) Organizing a Child Watch Guided Site Visitation to take community leaders and others to sites where they can see first-hand the problems and the potential solutions and learn from those being served and those who are working with and for them;

   c) Hosting a “Moving Forward with Hope to End Child Poverty: Love and Justice for Every Child” Discussion at Your Place of Worship or as a Multi-Faith Discussion with Others from Across Your Community (See Downloadable Discussion Guide); or

   d) Holding a “Moving Forward with Hope to End Child Poverty: Love and Justice for Every Child” Forum with speakers who can help participants understand the opportunity gaps children face and how those gathered can help close those gaps through direct service and working for justice and policy changes so that every child can develop their full promise and potential.

3. Help Ease the Worst Effects of Child Poverty While We Work to End Child Poverty There are many ways that individuals and places of worship can lend a hand or contribute in other ways so that young children get off to a fair start by working to end child poverty and ease its worst effects while we do.
**Action 1: Develop Relationships and Communicate Regularly with Your Elected Officials**

Election years are rife with promises from candidates — but too often, these promises are not about meaningful change for children and even when they are the promises are too rarely kept after the election is over. Citizens are often very focused on their roles and responsibilities during an election year, but after the votes are cast and winners declared, too many of us relinquish our continuing roles and opportunities in the democratic process — or resort to on-line petitions and occasional protests. To develop champions for children in Congress — across the aisle — requires building on-going relationships with elected leaders of every party. By communicating with them regularly, people of faith can educate elected leaders about children’s concerns and the policies that will protect children from harm and help to end child poverty, convey expectations for their leadership, and hold them accountable — praising them when they take steps to protect children and letting them know we notice and care when they don’t.

**First:** Ask elected officials at local, state and federal levels what specific steps they will take to end child poverty and close opportunity gaps for children in family income, early childhood development and education. Be clear with the members of your place of worship that these actions are **not** about a religious congregation working in a partisan way but working with leaders of **every** party to put children first.

  a. Publicize opportunities when elected officials will be accessible, such as town hall meetings or call-in programs.
  
  b. Provide contact information for elected officials’ offices so your members can call to ask for information about the legislators’ positions and promises on these concerns.
 
  c. Encourage your members to visit elected officials and to take their older children with them when they do. Children can be powerful advocates in their own right. Prepare them for the occasion so they can communicate their own ideas about what will help to protect children and end poverty.
 
  d. Set up a letter-writing table or computer station for sending emails to elected officials. Provide sample letters and email messages, but encourage people to write their own, putting their concerns and requests in their own words. This will have the greatest impact. You can also provide background fact sheets and other materials provided by the Children’s Defense Fund and by many religious groups’ Washington offices and social justice offices.

When members of Congress return from Washington, D.C. to their districts, this may also be an opportunity to attend town hall meetings and speak up about the need to end child poverty in your community. You may consider attending town hall meetings as a group, with t-shirts or other clothing that identifies you as members of a congregation to show that a group of you are committed to pressing for change to end child poverty.

Be ready to talk about how poverty, lack of high-quality child care and early childhood development opportunities, lack of affordable health care and housing, and unequal educational opportunity harm children.
Having members of Congress at home may also provide an opportunity to have your Representative or Senators attend your Children’s Sabbath celebration or speak at an educational event or forum before or after the Children’s Sabbath service. If the invitation is to speak at a forum or educational event, you might want to team up with other places of worship to increase the audience size and appeal of the invitation. Be clear in the invitation that you are inviting the member of Congress to address ending child poverty and closing other opportunity gaps and the leadership they have provided and will provide to help end it.

**Second:** *Work with others to follow up with elected officials to ask them what they are planning to do to keep those promises.*

1. Encourage your members to communicate with elected leaders by email or phone to express their expectations for strong leadership on behalf of children to end child poverty.

2. If your members have experiences that point to the impact of child poverty on children, families and the community, encourage them to share these experiences in correspondence with elected leaders.

3. If your place of worship houses or supports a program that is helping to end child poverty or ease poverty’s worst effects while we’re working to end it, invite elected officials to come visit to see first-hand what works.

**Third:** *Stay connected with the Children’s Defense Fund and its forthcoming reports and its 2017-2018 action agenda:*

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

2. Ensuring children’s basic needs are met
   - Increasing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits by 30 percent for families with children.
   - Making the Child Tax Credit fully refundable.
   - Making housing vouchers available to all households with children below 150 percent of poverty for whom fair market rent exceeds 50 percent of their income.
   - Requiring child support to be fully passed through to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), fully disregarded for TANF benefits, and partially disregarded for SNAP benefits.
Meeting with Your Legislators

Before Your Visit

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

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

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

Talk about personal experiences you have had, if possible, to illustrate your point.

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

During Your Visit

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

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

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

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

Following Your Visit

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

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

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

Call periodically with updates.

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

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

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

Watch how your legislator votes and respond. If the legislator votes with your position on the issue, recognize that vote with a written “thank you.” Such recognition may influence his or her next vote on children’s issues. It also lets your legislator know that you are watching closely. If the legislator votes against your position, write or call to express your disappointment, and urge reconsideration of the issue the next time it comes up for a vote.
Action 2: Educate Your Faith Community about Child Poverty and How We Can Help End It

Ways to do this include:

a) Hosting a “Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child” Discussion at Your Place of Worship or as a Multi-Faith Discussion with Others from Across Your Community.
   Download the free Multi-Faith Children’s Sabbath Discussion Guide at www.childrensdefense.org/ChildrensSabbaths-MultiFaithDiscussionGuide. The Christian Resources section has a version of the discussion guide for use in churches.

b) Conducting a Listen and Learn Family Supper or Lunch in your community. To help our action be most appropriate, effective, and ensure that it addresses the deepest need with our most useful resources, we can start by listening and learning from those who are most directly affected by poverty.

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

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

The Listen and Learn team, in partnership with the service organizations and people they heard from, can consider planning a town hall meeting of sorts, some kind of public event where people with formal power are invited to come hear from people who are facing poverty and economic injustice. The goal of the forum would be to help bring these issues and concern to the attention of those with formal power in the community and to provide an opportunity to discuss potential solutions.

If your place of worship is interested in learning more about and then planning a Listen and Learn Session, please send an email to Dr. Janet Wolf, Director of CDF Haley Farm and National Director of Nonviolent Direct Action Organizing for the Children’s Defense Fund, at JWolf@childrensdefense.org. This will help us identify the communities in which Listen and Learn sessions are happening and also to offer additional resources and support for your planning. Please also refer to the Family Suppers manual, prepared by Dr. Wolf and CDF’s Nonviolent Direct Action Organizing Team, as an additional resource and sustained action you and your community can take. http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/2015-sabbath-manual/family-suppers.pdf
c) **Holding a “Moving Forward with Hope to End Child Poverty” Forum at Your Place of Worship** with speakers who can help participants understand the impact of child poverty and how those gathered can help ease the worst effects of child poverty through direct service while working, most importantly, to end child poverty through justice and policy changes. Such a forum could take place during the customary time for adult education or other programming for your place of worship, or you could plan an alternative date and time, especially if you want to host such a forum in partnership with other places of worship.

d) **Organizing a Child Watch Guided Site Visitation** to take community leaders and others to sites where they can see first-hand the problems facing children and families as well as to sites that point to solutions. Along the way, participants will learn from those being served and those who are working with and for children and their families.

For many of us, including our nation’s and community’s leaders, reports and statistics alone are not enough to move us to act on behalf of our children. If seeing is truly believing, then the way to convince ourselves and our leaders that our nation is in the midst of a crisis is to see first-hand what is happening to our children. The Child Watch Visitation Program provides those first-hand experiences and adds life to the seemingly endless stream of statistics and reports.

The three major components of Child Watch are: on-site visits to programs serving children and families; briefings by policy experts; and written background materials. They combine to serve as a comprehensive tool to educate our leaders about children’s concerns and motivate them toward action.

The Child Watch model is based on the belief that seeing is believing, and that facts, figures and statistics tell only a part of the story. Keeping this in mind, there are three major components to a successful Child Watch program:

1) **Written Materials** — these are important for several reasons. The hope, of course, is that participants read these materials prior to beginning the program, but even if they do not, the written materials are a tangible, lasting record of the Child Watch program. Statistical information, issue papers and background newspaper and magazine articles are valuable reference materials for course participants as they begin their work on behalf of children.

2) **The Policy Briefings** — Behind every child’s story and every program visited, there exists a maze of public policy issues. Policy briefings set the stage for site visits and allow course participants to ask pertinent questions of service providers and make the critical connection between the services they see and the budget and policy issues that affect them. Policy briefings also allow course coordinators to point out the many places in which issue areas intersect. Government employees, child advocates and service providers can all make excellent policy briefers, and a mix of these individuals provides for a well-rounded program.
3) **The Site Visit** — This is the most crucial of course components, and is what sets Child Watch apart from other programs. You can offer course participants a guided tour through facilities in your city that are serving children and families. You can take participants out of a conference room and into the community to see what our children and parents must face every day of their lives. They will meet the service providers who are engaged in a constant struggle to provide quality services to children in spite of overworked staffs and inadequate budgets. Participants will learn, by seeing success first-hand, that they can make a difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children.

Planned well by a coalition in your community, a Child Watch program can achieve nine goals:

1. **To personalize child suffering.** While many people read about the serious difficulties faced by poor children and families, it is often not until individuals can see and feel these struggles for themselves that they become ready to work for change.

2. **To create a new cadre of leaders and influential citizens who are concerned about and personally aware of children's needs.** The pool of Child Watch participants could include members of Congress, state legislators, their spouses and staffs, business and foundation executives, local public officials and senior agency staff, reporters and editors, religious leaders, leaders of racial/ethnic organizations, elderly and civic leaders, and child and youth services staff members.

3. **To create a sense of urgency about children's needs and a climate for change.** Children cannot wait forever for policymakers and community leaders to recognize the extent and urgency of their needs, and America cannot afford to lose a single child.

4. **To help a critical mass of community leaders make the connections between the child suffering they see and local, state, and federal budget priorities and policies.** It is essential to help decision makers and those who can influence decision makers understand that they have not only the ability but also the responsibility to make the choices that will benefit our most vulnerable children and families.

5. **To show participants that there are positive alternatives and steps they and others can take to correct or alleviate the problems identified.** The complex nature of the multiple crises faced by today's youths can seem overwhelming. A Child Watch program includes visits not only to sites that illustrate the range of problems faced by children and families but also to sites that send a message of hope about the solutions to those problems.

6. **To keep participants involved in an action network.** Child Watch “graduates” can stay connected to the Children's Defense Fund and state and local advocacy organizations to mobilize for a variety of actions depending on the level of commitment, desire, interest, and ability of participants. Action activities can include volunteering, advocacy, philanthropy, and program development.

7. **To affirm good local program providers whose fine work is often frustrated by funding struggles, isolation, and lack of a support network.** A Child Watch visit can not only give service providers much needed recognition but can also provide them access to networks that could produce funds, board members, volunteers, and other types of support.
8. **To build relationships with and among a wide variety of providers and child advocates through a shared understanding of mutual benefit.** Too often the good work of community groups on behalf of children and families is as fractured as the service delivery system. Planning a Child Watch is most often done by a coalition, and by working together on a joint project, groups are encouraged to share both information and resources.

9. **To create a constituency for preventive and early intervention investments.** Child Watch can help overcome the pervasive myth that “nothing works” by introducing opinion leaders to effective programs and agencies. An additional benefit may be the introduction of business, media and religious leaders to effective nonprofit leaders.

Planning and conducting a good Child Watch program takes time, thought and a good coalition to work with community partners. While a Child Watch program could be conducted as part of your Children’s Sabbath weekend, the Children's Sabbath weekend could also serve as the kick-off to forming a Child Watch planning committee that can then take adequate time over the coming months to ensure a strong and effective program that will make a significant contribution to achieving the nine goals above.


**Action 3: Help Ease the Worst Effects of Child Poverty While We Work to End Child Poverty**

Almost every place of worship is engaged in directly meeting the needs of children and families in poverty, serving with compassion and care. The 2017 Children’s Sabbath is an important time to celebrate and generate fresh support for the ways that your congregation is already meeting the immediate needs of children and families with direct, caring services. It is also a vital opportunity to make connections between the direct service you provide and advocacy or justice work that is needed to prevent or lessen children’s needs from arising in the first place and to end child poverty in our rich nation.

Faith communities can help meet family income, housing, nutrition and early childhood development needs, easing the worst effects of poverty while - most importantly - we work to *end* child poverty.

**Income, Jobs and Benefits:**

- Provide internships and job-shadowing experiences for youths and young adults in need. The guidance, experience and connections can be invaluable.
- Provide year-round and summer job opportunities for families and youths in need. Partner with other places of worship, community organizations and area high schools to pool opportunities and identify those who might benefit from them.
- Provide space for, or host, a “job seekers” support group where those who are unemployed can gather for support, encouragement and to discuss job search and interview strategies.
- Provide a resume workshop where community members seeking employment can go to get help polishing their resumes. Alternatively, provide job search mentors to help job seekers develop internet job search skills, complete internet and paper job applications and improve interview and communications skills.
- Collect donations of work-appropriate clothing for men and women who are job seekers and newly employed.
Action Ideas for the Children’s Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year

- Create a transportation fund to give subway, bus fare cards or gasoline cards to the newly employed to help with expenses while they transition into the workforce.
- Provide free tax filing assistance to low-income working families. Serve as a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site, so that low-income families can get help filling out their tax forms and receive any Earned Income Tax Credit refunds they may be eligible for.
- Provide volunteers for an existing VITA site. To find out more, visit http://irs.treasury.gov/freetaxprep/.
- Publicize the availability of the Earned Income Tax Credit so low-income families don’t miss out on this valuable help. Include notices in bulletins, newsletters, and around your buildings.
- Model just employment practices, and ensure those employed by your place of worship are paid a fair wage, with a minimum of $10.10/hour and more in some cities.

Housing:

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

- Sponsor a food pantry to help meet emergency food needs of low-income families, or donate food and volunteer time to community food pantries.
- Provide volunteers or food for community kitchens (soup kitchens). Encourage volunteers to engage in meaningful conversation with clients.
- Find out if there are summer feeding sites in your community where school children can receive federally funded breakfast and lunch during the long summer months when many children go hungry. If there are, provide volunteers. If not, find out how your place of worship can host or support one this summer.
- Find out if the local schools are taking advantage of the federally funded school breakfast program. If not, work with local school leaders to offer that important resource so all children can start the school day well fed and ready to learn.
- Make information about SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program commonly known as food stamps, and WIC, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, available for families at your place of worship.
- Participate in a “blessings in a backpack” program to provide backpacks filled with food for the weekend so that children who qualify for free or reduced price lunches during the school week don’t go hungry over the weekend.
- Get a taste of eating on a SNAP budget. Challenge members of your place of worship to spend a week preparing food using $1.40 per person per meal — the average SNAP benefit. At the end of the week, find time for discussion about the experience, what was learned, and steps your place of worship might take to help those for whom hunger is an ongoing challenge and reality, not an exercise.
- Partner with schools or community groups to plant vegetable gardens to provide fresh produce to children and families on low-incomes.
- Cook and Play: Offer a monthly session at your place of worship where parents can come to cook and children can come to play. Provide volunteers to engage the children in play and activities while the parents work together in the kitchen to prepare meals to take home to be eaten later in the week. Provide ingredients and a healthy, family-friendly recipe, as well as disposable containers for the finished meals to be taken home in. If your place of worship is not well positioned to provide this service, partner with a place of worship that is.
- Explore ways your place of worship can assist low-income families in urban or rural “food deserts” without easy access to well-stocked grocery stores. Consider providing a monthly transportation service or other assistance so they can purchase healthy foods.
Early Childhood Development:

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

Keep members informed about upcoming legislation that could help or hurt the provision of good quality child care for low-income families and others and provide opportunities for individuals to communicate with their members of Congress. Consider appointing a committee or individual in your faith community who will connect with local, state and national child advocacy organizations to keep up-to-date on when and how members can speak out on behalf of early childhood investments.