



Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

A multi-faith community service offers a powerful and meaningful opportunity to bring together people from all across your community who may not have ever connected before. It is a chance to highlight our shared concern—across religious traditions—for children and families in poverty. 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 these problems.

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Be sure to read the planning steps for organizing a multi-faith community-wide service that are outlined in Planning Your Children's Sabbath at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths. Follow them to bring together a planning committee that represents the many religious traditions in your community.

Following you will find a suggested outline and resources for you to create your own multi-faith 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 multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service is the "recipe";
- **Resources** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service are the "ingredients"—readings, prayers, and other resources from many religious traditions from which you may choose. 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 may also wish to invite one or more to offer brief (1-3 minutes) reflections on the religious traditions' call to do justice and bring hope and health care to children.

Please note: you are not expected, nor is it recommended, to use every one of the options or resources provided below, as that would make the service run too long. (Aim for a service that is about an hour. A service much longer than that may lose the attention of children and youths present—adults, too!)

Be sure to intersperse readings, prayers, and other parts of the service with musical selections sung by the congregation or choirs. This will help to keep the service lively and to engage congregation members.

Suggested Outline for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

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 multi-faith experience.

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 or more choirs could each 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 in whose place of worship the multi-faith service is being held 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. Or the welcome may be omitted and the service may move directly from the Opening Procession to the Gathering Words.
- **Gathering Words:** Beginning with an opening prayer, call to worship, or another 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.
- **Congregational Hymn 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 the *congregation* 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

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“Jesus Christ.” If a *choir* is presenting an anthem to which the congregation will listen, singing music specific to that choir's tradition, remember to balance the choirs represented and to ensure that no anthem 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 or a brief video, liturgical dance)
- **Anthem, hymn 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, Baghavad 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.
- **Hymns, anthems, and songs focused on our call to service;**
- **A reflection on the theme, “Blessed to Be a Blessing: Lifting Up the Next Generation”:** a brief reflection—perhaps five minutes—during which a leader reflects on the shared concerns for children and the strong call to work for change for children to achieve justice heard in our faith traditions.

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 children's behalf. 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 Congregation:** 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.
- **Prayer of Commitment**
- **Act of Commitment:** a responsive reading that invites the congregation 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, or anthem** with words that emphasize the commitment to faithful action (e.g., This Little Light of Mine, with words adapted for the multi-faith congregation and action for children).

V: Blessing

The last portion of the multi-faith 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 multi-faith gathering. Consider ways that those who have not come accompanied by children can feel part of the blessing experience.

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- **Charge:** not as lengthy as the “charge to the congregation” in the commitment to action, this very brief charge 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 the congregation that God goes with us as we depart to do God's work;
- **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 the congregation disperses

Sample Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

In addition to the resources provided below, and those which your planning committee creates or finds, draw from faith resources offered elsewhere in this resource manual.

Remember: you are not expected to use all of the resources offered below in one service!

Unless otherwise noted, all resources were written by Shannon Daley-Harris

Resources for the Gathering of the Community

Gathering Words/Call to Worship

Like the sun that shines on every one of us, warming us through,
Like the wind that blows through each of our communities, refreshing us,
Like the rain that falls on city and suburb alike, renewing us,
We gather here, coming from many places,
Sharing a love of the divine, known by many names,
Who warms, refreshes and renews us
We come to hear the divine call,
to respond to the children's cries,
to live out the love, faith, and justice to which we are called.

Gathering Words/Opening Prayer

Eternal source of love and justice, we gather here from many places, different traditions, and diverse experiences. We give you thanks for the richness of our diversity and the treasured uniqueness of each one here.

We also gather here, brought together by what unites us and makes us one: concern for children in need—those pressed down by poverty, passed over for health care, pushed along a pipeline to prison. We give you thanks for planting in each of us a heart that cares for your most vulnerable children and a passion for justice so that every child may grow and flourish. We give you thanks for our shared concern and commitment.

Use us now, we pray, to create change for your children so that each will know the hope of a better tomorrow. Let all people of love and justice say, **Amen**.

Resources for the Time of Lament

Prayer

Creator of all, you have created us for life together, to manifest your love and justice. We have failed to reflect your goodness, when 14 million children in our rich nation live in poverty. In silence, help us to hear their cries. (*silence.*) In silence, help us to imagine their pain. (*silence.*) In silence, let us remember that you regard each child as precious. (*silence.*) In silence, let us realize their extraordinary promise. (*silence.*) In silence, let us remember our purpose. (*silence.*)

Strengthen us, we pray. Lead us to respond with a powerful sense of purpose to ease our children's pain and to make your love and justice known. Amen.

Litany of Pain and Purpose

Our children today know too many burdens:

The burden of too little food,
Too much poverty
Too little education
Too much violence
Too little hope
Too much despair

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We gather here to ease the burdens and lift up the next generation:

- To ease hunger and improve nutrition
- To increase family incomes and strengthen supports
- To raise reading levels and improve the schools
- To increase the peace
- To raise children's hopes and
- To lift their spirits

We gather here that we may *be* a blessing now and in the days to come as we seek together to lift up the next generation:

- To pray
- To learn
- To listen
- To talk
- To mentor
- To teach
- To comfort
- To advocate

May it be so.

Resources for the Call to Service

Baha'i Readings

Options include:

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

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

Buddhist Reading:

A mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her child, her only child. In the same way should you cultivate love without measure toward all beings. You should cultivate toward the whole world—above, below, around—a heart of love unstinted, unmixed with any sense of differing or opposing interests. You should maintain this mindfulness all the time you are awake. Such a state of heart is the best in the world.

From *The Buddha Speaks*, edited by Anne Bancroft, ©2000 by Anne Bancroft. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications Inc., Boston, MA. www.shambhala.com.

Christian Readings:

Options include:

- Mark 9:33-37 (Welcome the Child)
- Mark 10:13-16 (Blessing the Children)
- Luke 18:1-8a (Widow and the Unjust Judge)
- Luke 21:1-4 (Widow's Offering)
- Matthew 25:31-45 (Judgment of the Nations)

Jewish Readings:

Options include:

- Genesis 12:1-3
- Deuteronomy 15:7-11
- Psalms 112
- Psalms 106:1-3

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*)

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Muslim Reading:

(If the passage is read in Arabic, either print the translation in the program or ask the leader to also read aloud the English translation.)

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do.” (Qur'an 5:8)

Native American Reading: A Prayer of the Chippewa

We pray that someday an arrow will be broken,
Not in something or someone,
But by each of humankind,
To indicate peace, not violence.
Someday, oneness with creation,
rather than domination over creation,
will be the goal to be respected.
Someday fearlessness to love and make a difference
Will be experienced by all people.
Then the eagle will carry our prayer for peace and love,
And the people of the red, white, yellow, brown, and black
communities
Can sit in the same circle together to communicate in love
And experience the presence of the Great Mystery in their
midst.
Someday can be today for you and me. Amen.

Attributed to Wanda Lawrence from The United
Methodist Book of Worship (c)1992

Sikh Hymn:

The Lord is my Mother and Father. He it is who blesses
me with sustenance.
And the Lord takes care of me. For I am the child of God.
He abandons me never and feeds me steadily,
And minds not my demerits and hugs me to His bosom,
And He blesses me with all I seek; yea, He the Bliss-giving
Father,
And He has blessed me with Words of Wisdom, yea, the
riches of the name,
And made me worthy of Himself.
And made me a partner (of His Grace) with the Guru,
and now I possess all joys.
May my Lord forsake me not; yea, He, who is my All
powerful Lord.

*(Hymn composed by Guru Arjan thanking
the Lord for the gift of life.)*

Responsive Reading: “We Cannot Merely Pray to You”

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
So that all of us must find our own path to peace,
Within ourselves and with our neighbors.

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end hunger;
For you have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world,
If we would only use them wisely.*

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

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

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
For You have already given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healing,
If we could only use them constructively.

*Therefore, we pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination, and courage,
To do instead of just to pray,
To become instead of merely to wish.*

Praised are You, O God,
You bless our people ...
And all peoples, with peace.

(By Rabbi Jack Riemer)

Resources for the Commitment to Action

Candle-Lighting and Commitment to Action

Reader 1: “It is better to light a single candle than to sit
and curse the darkness.”

(Reader 1 lights a candle.)

Readers 2 and 3: “Never doubt that a small group of com-
mitted people can change the world; indeed, it is the only
thing that ever has.” (Margaret Mead)

(Readers 2 and 3 light their candle from Reader 1's candle.)

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Reader 4: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

(Reader 4 lights candle from reader 3's candle)

Reader 5: "Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God." (Abraham Joshua Heschel)

Reader 6: "In the attitude of silence the soul finds the path in a clearer light, and what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth." (Mahatma Gandhi.)

In silence, let us each seek the path we will follow from this place to be a blessing to children and raise up the next generation.

(silence)

As we now share the light and illumine our paths forward, let us sing together.

(Readers disperse with lit candles to light candles of those in the front row, who will pass the light to those next to them. If circumstances in your setting do not permit lighting candles among those gathered, omit the group candle lighting other than the readers, and simple move to the song.)

Congregation (sings): This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. (x3) let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Shine to help end poverty...
Shine it for the children...
Shine to be a blessing...

A Prayer for Children by Ina J. Hughes

This prayer could also be read different ways, including in unison, with different leaders (including children) reading sections, or alternating sections between "left" and "right" sides of your worship space (be sure to clarify with the congregation which side is which before beginning).

Leader: Let us join in this prayer with not only the words of our mouths but also by pledging the work of our hands.

We pray for children
Who sneak Popsicles before supper,
Who erase holes in math workbooks,
Who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those
who stare at photographers from behind
barbed wire,
Who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,
Who never "counted potatoes,"
Who were born in places we wouldn't be caught dead,
Who never go to the circus,
Who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children
Who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,
Who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.

And we pray for those
Who never get dessert,
Who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,
Who watch their parents watch them die,
Who can't find any bread to steal,
Who don't have any rooms to clean up,
Whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
And whose monsters are real.

We pray for children
Who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,
Who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick at their food,
Who like ghost stories,
Who shove dirty clothes under the tub,
Who get visits from the tooth fairy,
Who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool,
Who squirm in church or temple and scream in the phone,
Whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles can make us cry.

And we pray for those
Whose nightmares come in the daytime,
Who will eat anything,
Who have never seen a dentist
Who aren't spoiled by anybody,
Who got to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,
Who live and move, but have no being.

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We pray for children

Who want to be carried and for those who must,
For those we never give up on and for those
Who don't get a second chance,
For those we smother and for those who will grab
the hand of anyone kind enough to offer it.

Prayer of Commitment: I Care and I Am Willing to Serve and Stand for Children

One leader or several can read the lines in regular type while the people respond with the words in bold, "but I care...." Perhaps before reading the prayer, the leader could invite each person present to reflect in silence what "I can't" or "I'm not" is in their head or heart that keeps them from most fully living out their calling to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow.

(As an additional activity, in preparing for the Children's Sabbath celebration, you could engage the children and young people in researching the names mentioned below—especially those that may be unfamiliar to some—and writing up a sentence or paragraph description of these courageous change-makers and heroes for justice, and create a display in the building where the Children's Sabbath will be held. Alternatively, you could prepare a booklet or bulletin insert with their findings.)

Lord I cannot preach like Martin Luther King, Jr.
or turn a poetic phrase like Maya Angelou
but I care and am willing to serve and to stand up for children.

I do not have Fred Shuttlesworth's and Harriet Tubman's
courage
or Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's political skills
**but I care and am willing to serve and raise my voice
with others for children.**

I cannot sing like Fannie Lou Hamer
or organize like Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin
but I care and am willing to serve.

I am not holy like Archbishop Tutu,
forgiving like Mandela, or disciplined like Gandhi
**but I care and am willing to serve and sacrifice to build
our children a better future.**

I am not brilliant like Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois or
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or as eloquent as
Sojourner Truth and Booker T. Washington
**but I care and am willing to serve and use the talents I
do have to keep children safe.**

I have not Mother Teresa's saintliness,
Dorothy Day's love or Cesar Chavez's
gentle tough spirit
**but I care and am willing to serve and make a difference
for children.**

God it is not as easy as it used to be
to frame an issue and forge a solution
**but I care and am willing to serve and to keep struggling
until we find the way to build the 21st century move-
ment for children.**

My mind and body are not so swift as in youth
and my energy comes in spurts
but I care and am willing to serve and to vote for children.

I'm so young
nobody will listen
I'm not sure what to say or do
but I care and am willing to serve.

I can't see or hear well
speak good English, stutter sometimes, am afraid of
criticism
and get real scared standing up before others
but I care and am willing to serve.

**God, use us as You will to save Your children today and
tomorrow and to build a nation and world where no
child is left behind and everyone feels welcome. Amen.**
(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Resources for the Blessing

Bahá'í Blessing of the Children

Before the blessing of the children, you might invite the parents and other caregivers present to hold the hand or place a hand on the children with them as they receive this blessing:

O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handi-
work of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs
of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, graciously
assist them to be educated and enable them to render
service to the world of humanity. O God! These children
are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of
Thy loving-kindness. Thou art the Bountiful, the All-
Loving.

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Charge and Blessing

Go forth from this place with gratitude for many blessings,
Go forth from this place determined to *be* a blessing to children,
Go forth from this place to lift up the next generation.
Go forth from this place with vision and commitment, hope and hard work,
Knowing that we don't go alone but are accompanied by each other and
ever held by the Eternal, source of love and justice. Amen.

Blessing

May the blessing of the divine whom we know by many names be with you and all whom you love; and with children who are loved and those who wait still to know our love. Amen.

