

Christian 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 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, may we continue to praise God with our work to nurture and protect all children.

Following you will find:

- **Worship Suggestions:** Worship suggestions drawn from Children's Sabbath worship services celebrated by congregations all across the country. Use or adapt those that would be appropriate for your church.
- **Involving Children and Youths:** Suggestions for creative ways to include the children and youths of your congregation in the Children's

Sabbath service. Remember: The Children's Sabbath should not be turned over to the children with adults only serving as "audience," since this is meant to be an intergenerational event that underscores the role people of all ages have to play in meeting children's needs. At the same time, it is an important time to fully engage children and youths. Be sure to involve them in the planning and leadership of the day.

- **Worship Resources:** Prayers, readings, and music from a variety of traditions: Protestant, Catholic, and Episcopal. Use or adapt them as appropriate for your congregation's tradition.
- **Sermon Resources:** Notes on the texts designated in the Episcopal, Lutheran, Revised Common, and Roman Catholic lectionaries and a sample children's sermon.

Worship Suggestions

- **Invite members to light candles for the 40 days leading up to the Children's Sabbath**, as suggested by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the National Council of Churches, and then light a symbolic 40th candle on the Children's Sabbath. (For more information, visit <http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/lightacandlebrochure.html>.)
- **The week before the Children's Sabbath, distribute copies of the Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer** (available for download from www.childrensdefense.org) to help adult congregation members prepare their hearts and minds for the Children's Sabbath. **First United Methodist Church of Georgetown, Texas**, distributed the daily devotional guide, focused their worship service on children's concerns, and included a presentation to the Methodist Federation for Social Action.
- **Leading up to and on the Children's Sabbath, distribute the bulletin inserts in the Promoting Your Children's Sabbath section available for download from www.childrensdefense.org**. If you don't use the bulletin insert, prepare your own announcement about the Children's Sabbath to include in the bulletin so that worshipers, especially visitors, will understand the special focus and significance of the service.
- **Invite on-site child care, Head Start, and school staff, administrators, parents, and children**, and others to attend your Children's Sabbath.
- **Decorate the sanctuary** with images and materials that bring to life the focus on children and justice.
- **Use bulletin covers that emphasize the Children's Sabbath.**
- **On the Children's Sabbath, distribute the children's activity bulletins** at the end of this section, along with crayons, markers, or pencils.
- **Distribute special tokens to every child** attending the Children's Sabbath, such as ribbons or stickers.
- **Use or adapt some of the prayers and other worship resources provided in this section. Or, use readings from prayer and worship books that include a social action theme, or create your own materials** on the theme of pursuing justice as we seek to answer God's call to protect children and assure that every child has an equitable and excellent education.
- **Explore the resources of other faith traditions** in this manual; some may be appropriate to include in your service.
- **Incorporate resources from your denomination** that focus on children, education, and justice.
- **Focus the sermon or homily on children and our responsibility to pursue justice and answer God's call to protect them.** Sermon notes on the designated lectionary texts for the Revised Common Lectionary, Roman Catholic Lectionary, and the Episcopal Lectionary for the third weekend of October are found in this section. There are also sermon notes on other especially suitable texts for those who don't preach from the lectionary cycle. Other Children's Sabbath resources on CDF's Web site provide information and stories about children that you may want to include in your sermon or homily.

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- **Invite guest speakers to preach or give another address on the needs of children and our call to respond.** Encourage the speaker to highlight opportunities for members to become involved themselves and to speak out for children. A guest speaker who is the director of community outreach for Franklin County Children's Services addressed the Children's Sabbath at **Crossroads United Methodist Church in Columbus, Ohio**. **First United Methodist Church of Dayton, Ohio**, invited the executive director of the United Methodist Children's Home to serve as the morning speaker. In **Livingston, Mont.**, **Holbrook United Methodist Church's** Children's Sabbath featured two guest speakers who were directors of two afterschool programs.
- **Have a special "time with children" or Children's Sermon** during the service, so that the Children's Sabbath focus can be presented to them in an especially engaging and age-appropriate way. See the sample Children's Sermons in this section. Or, in a role reversal, have one of the children give an "Adults' Sermon"—a short message from a child to the adults.
- **Offer prayers for children.** Specifically name problems afflicting children in your community, as well as crises affecting children across our nation and throughout our world. Invite congregation members to pray for the children in your church, too.
- **Incorporate a special blessing of children.** For the altar call at **Trinity Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio**, all of the children and youth were asked to come to the altar. The adults were asked to surround them and a special prayer focused on children was prayed by a deacon.
- **Select hymns and anthems that focus on children and our responsibilities to them.** See the music suggestions in this section.
- **Dedicate ministries/programs serving children or commission staff and board members of child-serving programs** affiliated with the congregation and celebrate their work as part of the congregation's ministry.
- **Honor people who are pursuing justice and answering God's call to protect children through their work or volunteer engagement.** At an appropriate point in the service, invite these professionals and/or volunteers (contacted in advance) to come forward for a brief time of recognition for their work putting their faith into action to seek justice for children, with prayers for God's guidance in their work and prayers for the children they serve. Present them with a flower, ribbon, or other token so that later others might identify them and offer personal appreciation.
- **Collect special offerings for children and families.** In addition to monetary offerings, consider collecting items to help children and families, such as school supplies, books, or warm clothing. One congregation held an "Undie Sunday" to collect new children's underwear and socks to donate to a homeless shelter. Announce the special offering in advance. **Good Shepherd + St. Mark's, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church, in Madras, Ore.**, collected toothbrushes, stuffed animals, and soft blankets for children in local foster care at their Children's Sabbath service. The items were brought forward during the offering and placed at the base of the altar as part of the worship. Or, collect a monetary offering designated to benefit an under-resourced school

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or an organization serving or working on behalf of children. The **First United Methodist Church of Bella Vista, Ark.**, **Christ Church United Methodist Women in New York, N.Y.**, and others made donations to the Children's Defense Fund.

- **Create a Patchwork Quilt of Promise**, as did **Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Fremont, Calif.** Distribute a square of construction paper and a crayon to each person during the service, or in the bulletin, or place them in the pews in advance. At a designated time, invite each person to draw or write a response to "One thing I can do to help a child to learn and succeed." Then invite everyone to come forward (perhaps pew by pew) to tape their square on a paper quilt pattern.
- **Use various media to focus more powerfully on children and their needs.** Some congregations create PowerPoint presentations or slide shows with images of children in need.
- **Include a dramatic presentation** to especially engage children and young people, as well as adults. Some of the scripture passages designated in various lectionaries for the Children's Sabbath Sunday lend themselves to a dramatic reading with several readers taking part.

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.

Reports **St. John's Church in Westwood, Mass.**, about their fifth annual Children's Sabbath: "We celebrated the Children's Sabbath service on October 26th at St. John's Episcopal, Westwood. We had a children's sermon, and young people reading the scripture lessons and the prayers that they had written in class the week prior. We also conducted a project during the month of October: we collected school supplies for Epiphany, a tuition-free Episcopal middle school in Dorchester, Mass.... We worked hard to raise awareness about issues of poverty that affect children, and had our kids show the congregation what they had learned. We have found that the adults really listen when their kids are doing the teaching...especially when it is kids teaching about kids! Now that we have been participating in the Children's Sabbath for many years, we feel that folks of all ages are learning more about poverty in our city and are getting more involved in our various outreach programs."

For example, children and youths can:

- **Prepare for the Children's Sabbath during a "Kids' Night Out," overnight, or other event.**

Reports **Sts. James-George's Episcopal Church in Jermyn, Pa.**, of their fifth annual Children's Sabbath, "We always start our Children's Sabbath with a lock-in on Saturday during which the children practice for Sunday, bake for coffee hour, and make a craft to distribute to the congregation. This year, they decorated the bulletin board with helping hands—each naming a way they would help a child. They have snack, free time, and end with a movie. On Sunday, the children take the place of the choir, they read, collect the offering, and bring up the gifts."

- **Review the Children's Sabbath service and prepare the week before** (perhaps in church school classes). They can practice responses and hymns so they may join more fully in the Children's Sabbath service.
- **Design and paint the paraments** (such as the cloth draping the pulpit) **or make a special banner.** For the third Children's Sabbath celebrated by **Asbury United Methodist Church in Gahanna, Ohio**, during the service a banner was presented to the church in honor of the Sabbath Day for the congregation to help end poverty in America, and a love offering was taken as well.
- **Draw pictures for the bulletin cover.**
- **Decorate the sanctuary** with drawings or banners that the children have made.

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- **Bake the communion bread** (if appropriate for your tradition) or prepare food for the coffee hour following the service.
- **Assist and greet worshipers as they arrive or leave, light candles, or collect the offering.**
- **Lead a procession** to begin the Children's Sabbath.
- **Participate through music.** The children might sing a special anthem, play an instrumental piece, or perform a song in sign language.

First Presbyterian Church of Glen Cove, N.Y., a congregation of about 80, celebrated its seventh Children's Sabbath with worship that was led almost entirely by youths. The sermon focused on justice issues for children and the congregation hosted the Choir of St. Dunstan's College, England, comprised of 36 youths, for a free concert open to the community.

- **Read prayers and scriptural passages** and lead responsive readings.
- **Write a prayer** to be used in the service.
- **Deliver the sermon** or other presentation.
- **Prepare a dramatic skit for the service.** The middle school children of **Cross Lanes United Methodist Church in Cross Lanes, W.Va.**, presented the "Witness to the Word" in the form of skits, while children in Kindergarten through fifth grade served as liturgists, ushers, greeters, and instrumentalists for the prelude, offertory, and postlude.
- **During the offertory procession, place items on the altar** that serve to remind the congregation of the love and care our children require.
- **Invite friends to attend.**

Congregations whose children usually depart for church school classes during the worship service (often after the Children's Sermon or time with children) will need to reflect thoughtfully about the plan for the Children's Sabbath.

- Some will choose to follow their customary schedule and have the children engage in the Children's Sabbath lesson plans while the adults remain in worship. This may free the preacher to speak more seriously to the adults about the plight of children and their responsibility to respond without concerns about trying to engage or upsetting the children. The children can learn about the concerns in an age-appropriate setting in their classes.
- Other congregations will see the Children's Sabbath as a good opportunity for the children to remain in worship throughout the service. If the children are not accustomed to this, however, it will require forethought. The whole service, including the sermon, can be carefully planned to be engaging and accessible to all ages. The more children are involved in the planning and implementation, the more interested they will be. Or, activity bulletins designed for children and other quiet activities can be distributed to engage the children during the sermon and other "listening" times.

Worship Resources

Following are Christian worship resources from a variety of sources. Use or adapt any of the following resources that would be appropriate for your tradition. In addition, you may want to consider the prayers and other worship resources from other faith traditions available for download from CDF's website to see if any would be appropriate for your service. **Unless otherwise noted, all prayers are written by Shannon Daley-Harris.**

Call to Worship (from Psalm 99:2-5)

Before starting, have the worship leader tell the children that the congregation's response will be "Holy is God!" so that they can join in the call to worship.

Leader: God is great in our land;
God is supreme over all the peoples.
Let everyone praise your great and awesome name.

People: Holy is God!

Leader: Mighty Ruler, lover of justice,
you have established fairness;
you have done justice
and goodness in those who have gone before.

People: Holy is God!

Leader: Praise our God;
worship before God's throne.

People: Holy is God!

Call to Worship

Leader: Jesus said, Let the little children come to me...

People: We come, each of us a child of God.

Leader: Jesus said, Do not stop them.

People: We come to remove obstacles before children.

Leader: Jesus said, It is to such as these that the reign of God belongs.

People: We come to recognize that each child is already part of God's realm.

Leader: Jesus said, Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the reign of God as a little child will never enter it.

People: We come to worship with the trust and vulnerability and dependence of a child.

Come, let us worship God.

Call to Worship

Leader: Come praise God the Creator who made each child in God's image!

People: We will praise our Creator by recognizing each child's sacred worth.

Leader: Come praise the Christ who blessed the children!

People: We will praise Christ by being a blessing to children in need.

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Leader: Come praise God the Holy Spirit who moves among us!

People: **We will praise the Holy Spirit by working for justice.**

Leader: Come praise the triune God who created us, redeemed us, and sustains us!

People: **We will praise God by putting our faith into action to seek justice for children.**

Call to Confession

Like the prodigal son, we stray from the lives God wants us to lead and follow our own selfish pursuits. When we recognize that we have lost our way, God welcomes us with open arms and joyous celebration. So with confidence, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

Prayer of Confession

Creator God, you have made each of us in your image, and yet we fail to reflect your love and justice. You have created every child in your image, and yet we don't treat every child as a precious reflection of you. We see some children as valued treasures, and others as lost causes. We invest our time, money, and hopes in some children, while we squander the great potential of others. Open our eyes, we pray, to see that every child is made in your image and belongs to you. Help us to love, protect, and nurture all children. We pray these things in the name of the One who came to us as a child. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Listen! I have something to say! Our past is behind us. We are free to live new lives, be new people, try again to be who God intends us to be. Rejoice! I say again, rejoice!

Call to Confession

Jesus told this story: if a shepherd had a hundred sheep, and one of them was lost, the shepherd would go out and look for the one that was lost. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, the shepherd would carry it home rejoicing. Jesus told this story so we would know that God rejoices when we, who have lost our way, turn in a new direction and feel ourselves caught up in God's loving embrace. Let us now confess our sins with confidence that God rejoices when we turn in a new direction.

Confession

God of new beginnings, we confess that we are stuck in our old ways. You taught us about an upside down reign, and yet we still live our lives seeking power, wealth, and status. We have failed to protect those who are most vulnerable, to stand with and for those who live in poverty, to put children first. Forgive us, we pray. Shake us up, open our hearts and our hands, our eyes and our ears that we hear again your calling and live our lives in grateful obedience. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Like a parent racing out to welcome home the prodigal child who had lost his way, God greets our return with joy and love. Friends, believe the good news of the Gospel: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Prayer of Confession

Eternal God, you call us to the hard work of justice, and we look for an easier task. You expect us to persist and we want to give up. You call for courage and we worry about criticism. You ask us to protect the most vulnerable, and we mostly look out for ourselves and our "own." Forgive us we pray. Instill in us determination, persistence, courage, and selflessness, that our lives may be a more true reflection of the one we claim to follow and in whose name we pray, your own beloved child Jesus.

Call to Confession

"Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," Jesus told his followers. He wasn't telling us to act playful or childish; he was telling us that until we recognize our utter reliance on God, our weakness and vulnerability and inability to "earn" our way into God's grace, we'll never enter God's kingdom. But, once we recognize our dependence on God, once we drop the illusion that we can be perfect enough or worthy enough to merit God's grace, that's when we will experience God's grace, freely given as we are fully forgiven in Christ's name. Children of God, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, you call us to create change for children, but we're comfortable with the status quo. You call us to work for justice today, but we put it off until another day. You call us to bring hope, but inside we've really given up on making a difference. You call us to believe in a better tomorrow, but we don't always believe that it is possible.

Forgive us, we pray, for our apathy, for our procrastination, for our resignation and our limited vision. Change our hearts, O God, so that we may live boldly into your vision of justice and compassion for every child, for a bright and hopeful tomorrow that we can work for today. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

God who makes all things new, we confess that we cling to the comfortable, fall back on the familiar, and allow apathy to dull our hearts and our commitment. We shrug our shoulders and say that poverty is inevitable even as it deprives children of the fullness of life that you intend and they deserve. We throw up our hands at the number of children without health coverage and accept what is unacceptable. We shake our heads over the bursting prisons but turn away from the things that push children toward prison rather than keeping them on the path to success.

Forgive us, we pray, for callousness instead of compassion, for discouragement instead of determination, for selfishness instead of service. Change our hearts, we pray, so that we can create change for your beloved children and help bring the hope and better tomorrow that you intend. These things we pray in the name of your beloved child, the hope of the world. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Beloved, we are God's children now. Hear and believe the good news:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

O God, you speak to us in so many ways: through the voices of children, in the stirrings of our hearts, in the silence after the last bedtime story has been read. By your Holy Spirit, speak to us now through the Word read and proclaimed that we may hear and heed your call on behalf of the children. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Eternal God, we hear your Word of love in a parent's conversation with a child. We glimpse your Word of hope as a young person gets a fresh start. We encounter your Word of justice as people stand with and for those in poverty. By the power of your Spirit, attune us this day, in scripture read, proclaimed, and lived, to hear your Word of love, hope, and justice. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Living God, by the power of your Spirit let your Word ring in our ears, open our minds, and set our hearts afire so that we are transformed from hearers into doers of your Word. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

As we hear your word read, O God,
By your Spirit
Tug on our hearts, like a child tugging a parent's sleeve,
Whisper in our ear, like a child sharing an important secret,
Clamor for our attention, like a young one who can't wait any longer,
Redirect our sights, like a child pointing out a wonder we almost missed.
Don't let us miss your Word to us this day, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, by your Spirit help us to listen for your word to us today
With the openness and trust of a child
With the questioning mind of a youth
With the discerning heart of one grown to maturity
With the wisdom of one seasoned by years. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

O God who came as a baby when we were expecting a king,
who called us to be last when we were expecting to be first,
who welcomed a child when we thought grown-ups were more important,
who rose to new life when we thought death had the last word,
surprise us again this day with what you have to say to us.
By your holy spirit, open our ears and our eyes and our hearts
to find you where we least expect you, to be led where we least expect to go,
through the reading and proclamation and the living of your word. Amen.

Prayers of the People

(Before the prayers of the people, pass baskets containing crayons, pencil stubs, chalk, Band-Aids®, pennies, and pens along the pews. Invite each congregation member to take one item. These items will be referenced in the Prayers of the People. Afterward, encourage members to take the item home and to pray for those it symbolizes.)

Almighty God, the challenges facing children and those who care for them can seem so huge and so abstract that we lose touch with reality. Help us to remember that the needs and prayers of each child, each parent, each teacher, each caring person are as real and as individual to you as the items in our hands.

(Holding up a crayon)

And so we pray this day for the child care providers and parents who provide safe, warm, stimulating environments to spark a love of learning and fuel the curiosity of our youngest children as they scribble with crayons, pet the hamster, and try to taste the Play-Doh®. We pray especially for those providers who are underpaid and undervalued, for those parents who can't find quality, affordable care for their children while they work, and for the children whose potential is squelched in poor care. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a piece of chalk)

We pray for the teachers, covered in chalk dust, who devote themselves to educating our children and helping them flourish to their potential. For their dedication, imagination, and concern we give you thanks. We pray especially for those teachers who have given up on themselves or on the children, those who feel unsafe, those who feel unappreciated. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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(Holding up a pencil stub)

We pray for students gripping pencils as they strive to learn, especially those faced with the challenges of disability, unsafe schools, low expectations from their parents, teachers, and selves, and inadequate resources. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a Band-Aid®)

We pray for children who are sick and injured, whose ability to learn is hampered by vision and hearing problems or illness. We pray especially for those children who don't have health insurance to get the care they need, and for their parents who worry about what to do, who rely on temporary solutions when prevention or treatment is needed. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a penny)

We pray for the youths who are preparing for the world of work, that you will guide them in discovering their gifts and talents, skills and aptitudes, and surround them with teachers and adults who will get them ready to succeed. We pray especially for those young people who fear they will not be able to find work and earn a living, who don't have adults to help them prepare, and who despair of ever succeeding. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

(Holding up a pen)

We pray for our leaders in government, business, and the media, that the laws they write, the bottom lines that are inked, and the stories they pen will demonstrate an investment and priority in our children today for our future tomorrow. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Prayers of the People

(If the spiritual "Thank You, Lord" is not familiar to your congregation, have the choir sing the refrain with the leader at the beginning. In each instance, the people's response will be sung.)

Leader: Let us join our hearts in prayer, responding in song: Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you Lord, I just want to thank you, Lord.

For the blessing of children—from newborn to almost grown, and for the sacred charge to nurture and protect them, let us lift our hearts to God:

People: Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, I just want to thank you, Lord.

Leader: For the love of parents, a love shown in its perfect form in God, let us pray:

People: Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord, I just want to thank you, Lord.

Leader: For the families who work hard yet struggle every day to make ends meet and provide for their families:

People: Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Help us be a blessing too.

Leader: For the children who are beaten down by poverty and homelessness and hunger and who suffer in innumerable ways, let us pray:

People: Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Bless them, Lord. Help us be a blessing too.

Leader: For the children who are abused and neglected, for those who are shuffled through the foster care system and those who wait longingly for permanent families, let us pray:

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People: Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Help us to love all of them, too.

Leader: For the children who are victims of violence and for the children who turn to the violence they see glorified in our culture, let us pray:

People: Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Love them, Lord. Help us to love all of them, too.

Leader: For the leaders of our nation who have the choice to stand for the powerful or the powerless, the rich or the poor, the corporations or the children, let us pray:

People: Guide them, Lord. Guide them, Lord. Guide them, Lord. Help us work to guide them too.

Leader: For ourselves, that we find the vision, commitment, skills, and persistence to work for justice in our nation so that we truly leave no child behind.

People: Guide us, Lord. Guide us, Lord. Guide us, Lord. Help sustain and guide us now.

Leader: Amen.

Act of Commitment

(If desired, children could develop a dramatic scene to accompany the reading of Greenless Child below. Perhaps one child would be dressed in drab gray, while the other children are dressed in bright oranges, yellows, and other vibrant colors and carry streamers. These children could dance and swirl bright streamers while the child in gray sits quietly and forlornly. On the last line, she could look straight out at the congregation. Any number of people, of a variety of ages, could take turns reading the leader lines.)

Leader:

I watched her go uncelebrated into the second grade,
A greenless child,
Gray among the orange and yellow,
Attached too much to corners and to other people's sunshine.
She colors the rainbow brown
And leaves balloons unopened in their packages.
Oh, who will touch this greenless child?
Who will plant alleluias in her heart
And send her dancing into all the colors of God?
Or will she be left like an unwrapped package on
the kitchen table—
Too dull for anyone to take the trouble?
Does God think we're her keeper?

(By Ann Weems in *Reaching for Rainbows*)¹

Leader: Who will touch the greenless children, and work to see that every child enters school ready to learn, with strong early childhood experiences that are safe and nurturing?

People: We will, with the grace of God.

Leader: Who will believe, and act on the belief, that all children can succeed and perform at high levels?

People: We will, with the grace of God.

¹ From *Reaching for Rainbows*. © 1980 Ann Barr Weems. Used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press. www.wjkbooks.com

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Leader: Who will work to support children, parents, teachers, and principals to make the best educational decisions possible?

People: **We will, with the grace of God.**

Leader: Who will support quality teaching and let our teachers know their work is valued?

People: **We will, with the grace of God.**

Leader: Who will see that children and schools have the resources they need to prepare every child to learn and succeed?

People: **We will, with the grace of God.**

Leader: Who will support families in times of crisis so the needs of the children will not be neglected?

People: **We will, with the grace of God.**

Leader: Who will work to involve our whole community—health care providers, police, social service agencies, neighborhood groups, voluntary organizations, and other congregations—to see that our children get what they need to learn and succeed in school and beyond?

People: **We will, with the grace of God.**

Leader: We are called to covenant with God and with one another. God will be with us as we help all children, especially the greenless children, to learn, succeed and fulfill their God-given potential.

Prayer

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 our faith in Thee for our children's sake. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Litany of Commitment

God did not call us to succeed,

God called us to serve.

God did not call us to win,

God called us to work.

God did not call us to live long,

God called us to live for God.

God did not call us to be happy,

God called us to be hopeful.

God did not call us to fame,

God called us to faith.

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God did not call us to seek power,
God called us to seek peace.

God did not call us to loot the earth and each other,
God called us to love our earth and each other. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Prayer for Children²

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.

(The Book of Common Worship)

A Prayer for Parents³

Almighty God, from whom we receive our life,
you have blessed us with the joy and care of children.
As we bring them up, give us calm strength and patient wisdom,
that we may teach them to love
whatever is just and true and good
following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

(The Book of Common Worship)

Prayer for Teachers and Students

Holy and life-giving God,
the source of all wisdom and understanding:
enlighten by your Holy Spirit those who teach
and those who learn, that, rejoicing in the knowledge of your truth,
they may worship You with joy,
proclaim the Good News with faithful obedience,
and serve you from generation to generation;
through the one who came among us as your Wisdom incarnate, Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

(From the 1998 installation of the academic dean at Wesley Theological Seminary)

² From *The Book of Common Worship*

³ From *The Book of Common Worship*. © 1993 Westminster John Knox Press. Used by permission. www.wjkbooks.com

The Children⁴

Rushing to school, their faces red and expectant,
Dancing and smiling through the classroom doors,
Hopeful for another day, another chance
To live, to grow, to learn.

Many come from loving families,
Eager for new adventures.
For others, school is a welcome change,
A haven from chaos and fear.

A few come in anger and rage,
Daring another one to disappoint,
Afraid to try, to trust, to care
Their hatred masking years of hurt.

How to reach you, little child,
How to touch your heart with peace,
How to remove the hurts ingrained,
How to give your spirit release.

Our God, the answers lie with you.
Let your love and wisdom flow through me.
I place each precious one in your hands.
Give me courage and strength to do your work.
(By Celeste Rossetto Dickey)

Charge and Blessing

Go forth to answer God's call;
Go forth to protect children;
Go forth to pursue justice.
Now may the blessing of God who calls us,
Of Christ who welcomed the children into his protective embrace,
And of the Spirit who moves in and through us as we work for justice
Be with you and every child of God now and forever more. Amen.

Charge and Benediction

Go forth recognizing each child as a blessing from God.
Go forth knowing yourself to be blessed by God.
Go forth to be a blessing in God's name.

Now may the blessing of God
Who created each child in God's image
Who redeemed us through God's own Child,
Who works through us to seek justice for every child
Be with you and every child of God this day and ever more. Amen.

⁴ Celeste Rossetto Dickey, reprinted with permission of the author cdickey@uoregon.edu

Charge and Blessing

Go forth to create change for children made in the image of our Creator;
Go forth to bring hope, in the name of the one who is the hope of the world;
Go forth to work for a better tomorrow, empowered by the spirit, the advocate, who unites us in community.
Now may the blessing of our Creator, our Redeemer, and our Advocate be with you and every child of God this day and ever more. Amen.

Sample Greeting (Catholic liturgy)

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.

We greet you on this day that is celebrated as the Children's Sabbath by congregations of many faiths across our nation. On this Children's Sabbath, we hear anew God's charge to pursue justice and our solemn responsibility answer God's call and to protect children, especially those who are not receiving the education they need to fulfill their potential. As our Lord Jesus Christ said to those who would be his followers, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Sample Greeting (Catholic liturgy)

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.

We have gathered on this special day to mark the twentieth National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. Today, we join our hearts, hands, and voices with people of faith in thousands of congregations nationwide to lift up the needs of children and commit faithfully to respond to God's call to pursue justice and protect children. Every child is wonderfully made in God's image. Yet for millions of children in our nation, the bright promise of childhood is dimmed by struggling schools, lack of access to Head Start, poor quality child care, poverty, violence, and lack of health care. Let us be the people of God who recognize that all children are wonderfully made in God's image. Let us offer our prayers and our promises to remove these obstacles and help all children learn and succeed.

Penitential Rite (Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness, for he is full of gentleness and compassion.

Lord Jesus, you gathered the little children to yourself and blessed them.

Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Priest: Lord Jesus, you warned us not to put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in you. Christ, have mercy.

People: Christ, have mercy.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Priest: Lord Jesus, you called us to welcome children in your name.
Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

Penitential Rite (Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness, for he is full of gentleness and compassion.

Lord Jesus, you came as a child in the fullness of humanity that we may know the Father'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.

Gospel Acclamation (Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest. (Luke 9:48)

People: Alleluia.

Gospel Acclamation (Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

Priest: Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. (Lk. 18:17)

People: Alleluia.

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) (Catholic rubric)

My brothers and sisters, through this common prayer, let us pray to our Lord Jesus Christ, not only for ourselves and our own needs, but for all people, young and old, near and far.

For the holy Church of God, that we manifest your love for all children, not just this Children's Sabbath day but every day, and so become living witnesses to the Christ who welcomed the children to him, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all the peoples of the world, especially the children in countries where labor replaces learning, in lands where the education of girls is valued less than that of boys, in places where malnutrition and preventable disease stunt minds and bodies and cut short learning and lives, that all children may one day learn and thrive, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

For our nation, that we fulfill the promise of opportunity by helping all children learn and succeed, and for our leaders, that they lead by serving and demonstrate greatness by protecting the least of these, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For our brothers and sisters in need, especially the more than 15 million children living in poverty in our rich land, that they find justice and comfort in you, in their families, and in the care of congregations and communities, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For ourselves and our community, especially the teachers and school administrators, child care providers, Head Start staff, parents, mentors, and all who help our children learn, that they find satisfaction in their work and appreciation from the community as they guide the discoveries of children, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all children—the smallest baby learning to recognize his or her father's voice, the preschooler stooping to examine a bug, the kindergartner learning to manage milk money, the middle school student wrestling with the challenges of school and peer groups, and the high school students whose gazes are drawn toward the future that for some looks bright and others looks dim—that every child know the love of you, of family and friends, of congregation and community as we help them to learn and succeed, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all who have died, especially those who died too soon and too small, and the children who have died from illnesses we could have prevented, guns we could have controlled, poverty we could have abated, and despair we could have lifted, we pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

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 Lord. Amen.

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) (Catholic rubric)

My brothers and sisters, in the name of Christ who told his followers to welcome the children and who blessed the children, let us pray to the Lord saying, Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For the holy Church of God, that we open wide our arms of blessing to embrace all of your children in word and deed, with justice and mercy,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For our world, where millions of children suffer, sicken, and starve, where millions yearn for safety, schooling, and sustenance, that we find ways to share your bounty with all, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For all our brothers and sisters in need, especially children living in poverty who bear its heavy burden and worry about what tomorrow will hold, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

For our community and nation, that we feel a holy dissatisfaction with the way things are, with imbalance between rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, the corporations and the children, and that we work to better reflect your intentions for justice and love, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

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.

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) (Catholic rubric)

My brothers and sisters, in the name of Christ who came to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free, let us pray to the Lord saying, O Lord, you are our hope.

For the holy Church of God, that the Spirit of the Lord rests upon us as we bring good news to the poor not in word alone but also in deed, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

For our world, in which billions of people are held captive by grinding poverty, preventable malnutrition and disease, warfare and displacement, that we work to bring release from their suffering, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

For all our brothers and sisters in need, especially children in our rich nation who are oppressed by poverty, that we work so that all have enough, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

For our community and nation, which are so often blinded by greed, prejudice, suspicion, and self-concern, that we open our eyes to the needs of others, the inherent dignity and worth of every child, and recover our vision of the just and compassionate society you intend, we pray to the Lord,

O Lord, you are our hope.

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.

Prayer over the People (Catholic)

(The following prayer may be used at the end of Mass, or after the liturgy of the word, the office, and celebration of the sacraments.)

Lord,
Send your light upon your family.
May they continue to enjoy your favor
and devote themselves to doing good.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

May almighty God bless you,
The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

(Daily Roman Missal)

Collect of the Day: On the Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Gracious and almighty God, source of all wisdom, love, and justice: Help us on this Children's Sabbath to hear your call to care for the children. Strengthen our hands and embolden our hearts that we may act with your love and speak with your justice, to the end that all children may learn, succeed, and live out the lives for which they were created; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

Collect of the Day: On the Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Almighty and everlasting God, you have blessed us with children and called us to be a blessing. In Christ who came to bring good news to the poor and welcomed the children, you have revealed your intention for justice and compassion. Prosper now the work of our hands that we may faithfully serve you by lifting up the next generation; through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

The Prayers of the People (Episcopal rubric)

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord, saying "Lord, bless the children."

For the Universal Church, that we manifest your love for all children not just this Children's Sabbath day but every day, and so become living witnesses to the Christ who welcomed the children to him, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For our nation, that we fulfill the promise of opportunity by helping all children learn and succeed, and for those in authority, that they lead by serving and demonstrate greatness by protecting the least of these, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For children everywhere, in countries where labor replaces learning, in lands where the education of girls is valued less than that of boys, in places where malnutrition and preventable disease stunt minds and bodies and cut short learning and lives, that all children may one day learn and thrive, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

For our local community, especially the teachers and school administrators, child care providers, Head Start staff, parents, mentors, and all who help our children learn, that they find satisfaction in their work and appreciation from the community as they guide the discoveries of children, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all children—the smallest baby learning to recognize his or her father's voice, the preschooler stooping to examine a bug, the kindergartner learning to manage milk money, the junior high students wrestling with the challenges of school and peer groups, and the senior high students whose gazes are drawn toward the future that for some looks bright and others looks dim—that every child know the love of you, of family and friends, of congregation and community as we help them to learn and succeed, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For those who suffer, especially the more than 15 million children living in poverty in our rich land, that they find justice and comfort in you, in their families, and in the care of congregations and communities, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

For all who have died in the hope of the resurrection, and for all the departed, especially the children who have died from illnesses we could have prevented, guns we could have controlled, poverty we could have abated, and despair we could have lifted, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, bless the children.

We pray to you also for the forgiveness of our sins.

Leader and People:

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Prayers of the People (Episcopal rubric):

With all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing."

For the body of Christ, that we treat every child as made in your image; that we welcome every child as you welcomed the children, and that we bring good news to the poor that you announced, let us pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

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For our nation and our leaders, grant wisdom and courage to change what is unjust and recognize that until all the children are well, none of us is well, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

In a world where children hunger and starve, where they sicken and die, where they face bullets and bombs, where they know the exile of prison and refugee camp, help us protect and defend them, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For ourselves and our community, that we let our eyes weep over injustice, our hearts burn with determination, our voices speak out to demand change, and our hands move to make a difference, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

On this Children's Sabbath day, for our nation's more than 15 million children in poverty, that we use all that we have and all that we are to raise up the next generation, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

For all who have died, especially those who died too soon and too young, those whose lives were cut short by poverty, we pray to the Lord,

Lord, bless us that we may be a blessing.

Leader and People:

God of all mercy,

We confess that we have failed to live our lives as ones made in your image,

We have not loved each other as sisters and brothers,

We have not welcomed all children and so welcomed you,

We have left stumbling blocks in the way of too many children.

Forgive us our sins,

As a woman searching for a cherished coin,

As a father welcoming a beloved child home,

And uphold us by your Spirit

That we may do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you,

Through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Because you sent your Son, who came as a baby, who studied in Temple and grew, who called the children to him and blessed them, who gave himself that we may know the fullness of your love for us, your children.

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

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

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Because your will is for justice, peace, and love that embrace all and exclude none, and you show special concern for those oppressed by poverty.

Eucharistic Prayer for the Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

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, living and loving God,
for calling our world into being—
for making earth and water, plants and animals, and then
for making each and every one of us in your image—
every woman and man, every girl and boy,
of every race and place, rich and poor.

We give you thanks
for loving each of us
as a mother loves her children,
for promising to be our God no matter what—
welcoming us as a father
even when we have done wrong.

On this Children's Sabbath day,
we thank you especially for children,
for the ways they are eager to learn and for the things that they teach us,
for the challenges that don't stop them and for the successes they celebrate,
for the way in which each one is
wonderfully made, a gift from 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,
You sent your beloved child Jesus
to enter our world as a baby,
to grow as a child in mind and body,
to teach others that God loves us as a parent,
to hug the children close and bless them,
to tell all people that it is only by being like a child that we may enter God's reign,

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to heal children and adults who were sick in their bodies, minds, and hearts,
to be a friend to people who were poor, looked down upon, left out by others.

Jesus went even to the cross
that we may know your love,
triumphant even over death,
that frees 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 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

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to welcome the children,
to show your love,
to work for your justice.
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.

Eucharistic Prayer for the Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

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 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. 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.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

The Blessing⁵

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,
in the name of the Holy Trinity. Amen.

(from *Enriching Our Worship*)

The Dismissal

Option 1:

Celebrant Remembering especially all our children, let us go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

Option 2:

(adapted from 15th century Gaelic blessing)

God be in your heads and in your understanding of children's needs.

God be in your eyes and in your beholding the wonder of children.

God be in your mouths and in your speaking to and on behalf of children.

God be in your hearts and in your love for all children.

God be in your hands and in your serving children.

God be at your end and at your departing.

People Thanks be to God.

Affirmation of Faith

God has not taken God's people out of the world, but has sent them into the world to worship God there and serve all humankind. We worship God in the world by standing before our Lord on behalf of all people. Our cries for help and our songs of praise are never for ourselves alone. Worship is no retreat from the world; it is part of our mission. We serve humankind by discerning what God is doing in the world and joining in that work. We risk disagreement and error when we try to say what God is doing here and now. But we find guidance in God's deeds in the past and promises for the future, as they are witnessed to in Scripture. We affirm that the Lord is at work, especially in events and movements that free people by the gospel and advance justice, compassion, and peace.

(From *A Declaration of Faith*)

Benediction

Let us go forth
To love, serve, and seek justice
For all of God's children.

Now may the God who
Watches over us
Came for us and
Works through us
Be with you, beloved children of God. Amen.

⁵ From *Enriching Our Worship* © 1997 by Church Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Music Suggestions

The following hymn suggestions that lift up children, families, and God's call to justice and love can be found in many hymnals including the *New Century Hymnal*, the *United Methodist Hymnal*, the *Presbyterian Hymnal*, *Chalice*, the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the *African American Heritage Hymnal*, and *Worship: Hymnal and Service Book for Roman Catholics*.

Hymns of Praise

All Things Bright and Beautiful
Bring Many Names
Earth and All Stars
For the Beauty of the Earth
Gather Us In
God of the Sparrow
God Whose Love Is Reigning o'er Us
God Is Here
Here, O Lord, Your Servants Gather
How Can We Name a Love
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
Let the Whole Creation Cry
Lord of Our Growing Years
My Heart Is Overflowing
O God in Heaven
Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

Hymns After Passing the Peace

A hymn such as "I've Got Peace Like a River" or "Jesus Loves Me" would be a good choice here, since the children may already know it or could learn it in preparation for the Children's Sabbath.

Hymns of Thanksgiving and Communion

For the Fruits of This Creation
Living Word of God Eternal
Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether

Hymns of Petition

God, Omnipotent, Eternal
Kum Ba Yah
Lord of All Hopefulness
O God, We Bear the Imprint of Your Face
Our Father by Whose Name
This World, My God, Is Held Within Your Hand

Hymns of Commitment and Closing Hymns

All Who Love and Serve Your City

Called as Partners in Christ's Service

Child of Blessing, Child of Promise (*traditionally a baptismal hymn, it may be sung on the Children's Sabbath by the congregation to affirm the promises of God and of the congregation that we make in baptism.*)

Christian Women, Christian Men

Guide My Feet

Help Us Accept Each Other

Here I Am, Lord

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love

Let Justice Flow Like Streams

Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ

Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us

Live into Hope

Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace

Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service

Lord, You Give the Great Commission

Now Praise the Hidden God of Love

O For a World

Our Cities Cry to You, O God

Song of Hope (Canto de Esperanza)

The Church of Christ in Every Age

There's a Spirit in the Air

Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples

We Are Your People

What Does the Lord Require

When a Poor One

When We Are Living

Sermon Resources

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 pursue justice and protect children. To help you prepare the sermon or homily for the Children's Sabbath, we have provided several resources: sermon notes based on the Revised Common Lectionary and Catholic reflections based on the Roman Catholic Lectionary. Seeing how others have linked the texts designated by their traditions for October 17, 2011, to the themes and concerns of the Children's Sabbath may spark your reflection, provide new insights, inspire your writing, and open your eyes to new connections.

The following texts are the designated readings for October 17, 2011, for the churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary, the Episcopal Lectionary, the Lutheran Lectionary, and the Roman Catholic Lectionary.

Revised Common Lectionary: 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A: Exodus 33:12-23; Psalm 99; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

Roman Catholic Lectionary: 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A: Isaiah 45:1-6; Ps. 95; I Thessalonians 1:1-5; Matthew 22:15-21

Episcopal Lectionary, Proper 24, Year A: Isaiah 45:1-7; Ps. 96; I Thessalonians 1:1-10; Matthew 22:15-22

Even pastors who do not follow a lectionary will find food for thought and study in these sermon resources. Of course, countless other biblical passages also illuminate our call to nurture and protect every child. Reflections in the Daily Devotional Guide which will be available for download from www.childrensdefense.org may also spark sermons on other texts.

A sample Children's Sermon is offered for a time of conversation with the children of the conversation. Use or adapt it or create your own.

Sermon Notes for the Revised Common Lectionary Texts

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National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.
New York, NY

The notes below are intended to be used by priests, pastors, and others in the preparation of sermons for the 2011 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. While the lessons are taken from both Hebrew scripture and the New Testament, the exegetical notes are drawn from Christian experience and tradition.

Exodus 33:12-23

"Exodus" as we know it is a part of the section of Hebrew scriptures known as the five books of Moses. In a general sense, these works recount the history of Israel. More important, Exodus provides a dramatic encounter between God and the people which illuminates the meaning of the history of Israel.

In these verses as Moses is about to lead the people out of Sinai, he engages God seeking reassurance. In this exchange, God promises Moses that as he leads the people, God will go before them and that God knows Moses' name. Yet, even as God renews the covenant with Moses and the people, God reminds Moses, "You will not see my face." So, God's glory, work, and grace will be seen, but even to the faithful servants God is not wholly knowable.

Child advocates always work within the assumption that God has an infinite plan for the cosmos. God has created and actively loves each child—created in God's own image. Those who work on behalf of children, like all other believers, live in faith that while we do not see God's face, we are companioned along life's way by God. God is constant in human history.

Psalms 99

The Psalms are 150 poems of religious sentiment that allow contemporary readers to learn much about the devotion and faith of another era. Authored by many hands and for different purposes, the Psalms form a body of inspiring spiritual texts offering prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, petition, and intercession.

Psalms 99 celebrates God's universal sovereignty. The formality of the psalm suggests it was utilized in temple worship, perhaps offered antiphonally. The brief psalm focuses upon the holiness of God. This poem repeatedly enjoins the faithful to praise and worship God. The psalm recollects God's constancy, justice, and forgiveness. The God celebrated in this psalm speaks directly to the beloved people through the pillar of a cloud and is steadfast to the faithful.

God's holiness, that is God's majesty, might and unfailing love, is the foundational sustaining resource to all believers. In God's holiness, the child advocate finds the authority to work for the well-being of God's beloved children. God, whom the psalmist praises for speaking to the beloved community through a pillar of cloud, still speaks to us today. Men and women, parents and teachers and friends are all called to ministry with children sometimes through circumstances and occasions as mysterious to us as a pillar of cloud. By faith, we recognize in it God's own calling.

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

Among the rich Pauline literature of the New Testament, we find the letters to the Thessalonians, which are attributed to Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy. Having founded the church in Thessalonica, these three continue to bear a pastoral concern toward the church there. The church at Thessalonica was composed largely of Gentiles who had previously been adherents of the mystery religions of the region. The formation of the church had faced both economic hardship and severe persecution. At the time of the writing of the first letter, it has been some time since Paul and his companions were in Thessalonica, yet reports of that church's faithfulness in hardship have reached them.

The opening passage of the first letter to the Thessalonians deserves close scrutiny and ought not to be dismissed as a formula greeting. The authors identify three characteristics of the congregation in Thessalonica: work of faith, labor of love, steadfastness of hope. Each of these is a precious manifestation of faith and a fruit of the spirit. Paul and his companions note the way in which this model of faithfulness has set an example for others.

This letter to the church at Thessalonica tells us in a fresh way that the Holy Spirit is present within the church and brings us gifts for ministry. These gifts show themselves in our works of faith, in our labors of love, and in the constancy of our faith. Children need to be recipients of these fruits of the Spirit if they are to have faith and the fullness of life.

Matthew 22:15-22

The Gospel of Matthew has long been a primary reference for the Church. By the second century, it was perhaps the most widely used of the gospel traditions. Its very organization, combining as it does elements of chronological as well as topical points of reference, lends it a highly useable format for church life. It was well suited to ancient near-eastern culture and to a Jewish religious context.

In this well-known passage Jesus is being tested by those who wish to trick him into a political error. Probably in regard to the payment of the poll tax, he is asked about the appropriateness of paying tax under Roman rule. His response often has been misunderstood as drawing too sharp a distinction between the secular and the sacred realms. Jesus was distinguishing between worldly loyalties and more ultimate sacred obligations, and the necessity of humans to be able to know the difference.

In our world today, many, many claims compete for our time, loyalty, and resources. Our busy lives require us to tend to many mundane duties and responsibilities. Modern life is a complex business. Child advocates know well Jesus' lesson in this passage. There are many demands upon us, but none is more urgent, important, or more sacred than preserving God's own beloved children cast into the very image of God.

Catholic Reflections

*For the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
Based on Isaiah 45:1-6, I Thessalonians 1:1-6, Matthew 22:15-21*

*Walter J. Burghardt, S.J.
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Hands Cut Off?

Late last January, in the early stages of this homily, I glanced at the front page of *The New York Times*. A picture in living color caught my eye, cut my heart. The place: Freetown in Sierra Leone, West Africa. The background: civil war, brutish, savage, barbarous, inhuman. The picture: a young man, quite normal-looking, except for one thing: His hands had been cut off. Cut off at the wrists. Cut off by a machete. Cut off by another human being. He had begged his captors, the rebels, to kill him. No, they replied; we want to send a message—to your people, to your president.¹

I was afraid I would be sick. How blest we are, I mused, in our United States! Even the most cruel of our criminals would not do something so uncivilized. Perhaps. Still, I could not help but see in that picture a metaphor. A metaphor for what we are doing to millions of our children. In a sense, cutting their hands off. How? Making it difficult or impossible for them to touch the better things in their world: to experience the life of the mind, to turn the pages of a book, to build sand castles real or imagined, to write a discovered word on the blackboard, to strum a guitar, to dunk a basketball outside the concrete jungle, to finger a Macintosh, to take the Lord's body in spotless hands.²

I

Is this exaggerated? Not if you cast a clear eye on the facts. Not if you move the metaphor to the grim reality. We recall somewhat casually that one out of five children in the U.S. grows up below the poverty line. This is more than another unfortunate tragedy, an isolated statistic. Do you know what poverty does to the mind of a child?

Take my little friend Peter. His iron is low, and that slows his ability to solve problems, distracts his attention, keeps him from concentrating. His growth has been stunted, and so he scores lower than others on several tests of academic ability. His family has had to move again and again, and this has disrupted his schooling, even made him drop out for a while. Cold, dampness, mold, allergies cause all sorts of respiratory diseases like asthma, take him from school. Crowding at home, and accompanying stress, interfere with his homework. In this home water is leaking, paint is peeling, plaster is falling, lead is poisoning. He attends one of the poorest inner-city schools, and so his level of achievement is lower than that of a friend in a suburban school with the latest in machines and the best in teachers. His family cannot afford to buy him exciting magazines and books, maps and encyclopedias. He has several responsibilities at home: younger siblings to care for, has to work more than 20 hours a week to help the family eat. His parents can not afford a computer. When college beckons, he simply will not be able to pay for it, even with financial assistance from the institution.³

* This reflection was originally written for the 1999 Children's Sabbath. The data has been updated. Its message is still urgent, compelling, and timely.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Very simply, Peter is not “ready to learn, ready to succeed.” And Peter is not alone; he has 15 and a half million brothers and sisters in deadening situations similar to his. 15,451,000

II

So what can we Catholics do about it? Let's start with the school. Not only the parochial school that accepts Catholics and non-Catholics, but the public school as well. Here tough questions raise their heads: Why should parochial schools educate non-Catholic children? And why should Catholic parents improve public education, especially if they have no children suffering therein? As with the homeless poor, so with the poorly educated: We care for them not because they are Catholic but because we are Catholic. What our loving God said to Jacob and Israel, the same God says to each child:

Thus says the Lord,
He who created you, he who formed you:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you....
You are precious in my sight,
and honored, and I love you.
(Isa 43:1-4a)

Each child born into this world is precious to God. And each Catholic should repeat what a loving Jesus said when his disciples wanted to keep little children from bothering him: “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’ And he laid his hands on them” (Mt. 19:14-15).

We care for each child, particularly the disadvantaged, because each, baptized or not, is an image of Jesus. If the mind of a child is imperiled, it should call forth from us the same compassion we lavish on a child with muscular dystrophy. And if we take such children into our schools, it is not primarily to make them Catholic; it is to bring out the human that is hidden within, to ready them for a life of dignity, to help them shape ever so fully their likeness to the Lord who fashioned them.

III

Concrete suggestions for a Catholic homilist? In my project *Preaching the Just Word*, we do not expect that a ten- or fifteen-minute homily will solve complex social problems, will give politicians and educators a ground plan for improving their schools. What we do expect is that a powerful homily will raise awareness, raise consciousness, in the pews. Specifically, we recommend that, once a well-informed preacher has laid out certain issues of justice, a parish will gather substantial numbers of parishioners together to put flesh on those bones, to begin the process by asking three questions: (1) What are the justice issues that clamor for immediate attention, for drastic reform, in our area? (2) What resources can we command to attack these issues? (3) Since we cannot do everything, what in the concrete shall we do?

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

The justice issues are discouragingly many; but here, today, the emphasis is on education and school readiness. Who, within these parish lines, are the children not “ready to learn, ready to succeed?” Where does the problem lie? Overcrowded buildings, substandard science facilities, faulty air conditioning, external noise? Here, researchers tell us, are causes behind low achievement and bad behavior.⁴

Resources? Many Catholic dioceses, even some parishes, are blessed with CEOs in business and hospitals, with doctors and dentists, with builders and architects, with lawyers and judges, with politicians and social activists, with educators and scientists. Is it an impossible dream to harness these competencies, to link them with their non-Catholic colleagues, so as to forge a unified force to save the minds of our children? What Jimmy Carter's Habitat for Humanity is doing for decent housing—itsself a crucial first step for readiness to learn—can we not expand to touch all that goes on within that habitat, within that environment?

Idealist, visionary, dreamer that I am, I look forward to a time where a Catholic family of even modest means will assume responsibility for a poor family, irrespective of race or religion. Not to take over; simply to help preserve, help improve, the minds of its children. One example. Reliable research has revealed how utterly important it is for children's mental development to have their mothers hold them, caress them, read a book to them. But what to do when a mother cannot afford books? So many of our more fortunate families have them in abundance.

Have I wandered from today's liturgical readings? Not entirely. St. Paul is writing to the Christians of Thessalonica, a port city in Macedonia, a thriving commercial center. He is convinced that their Christian life takes place under the providence of God. In that context he tells them how he constantly remembers in prayer to God three aspects of their Christian living: their active faith, a dynamic faith because what they believe they express in life; their manifested love, expressed in actions that at times are quite difficult; and their steady hope and patient expectation, despite the tribulations of the age, that Christ will indeed return (see 1 Thess. 1:3)⁵.

It is precisely these free gifts of God—dynamic faith, manifested love, and steady hope—that urge our Catholic families today to look beyond their individual households, despite the tribulations that trouble them, and to extend their hands to hands that are cut off from so much that makes life human, livable, enjoyable. Yes, good friends in Christ, join today's children's crusade. Help make one child “ready to learn, ready to succeed.”

¹ The New York Times, Jan 26, 1999, A1.

² This homily was written for the Catholic resources for the 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A in the 1999 Children's Sabbath manual of the Children's Defense Fund, to galvanize thousands of Catholic congregations into greater service and advocacy on behalf of children. Unfortunately, the gospel for that Sunday (Mt 22:15-21: “Give to the emperor what belongs to the emperor”) could not be fitted without violence into the CDF theme, “Ready to Learn, Ready to Succeed.” The small segment from St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians does have genuine relevance, as suggested in my final two paragraphs.

³ See, for details, Arloc Sherman, *Wasting America's Future* (Children's Defense Fund; Boston: Beacon, 1994) pp. 12, 15, 19, 20, 22, 25, 27. I have translated Sherman's factual data to a more personal rhetoric.

⁴ See *The State of America's Children: Yearbook 1998* (Children's Defense Fund; Washington, DC, 1998); see 48-51, “Spotlight on Education.”

⁵ See Raymond E. Collins, “The First Letter to the Thessalonians,” *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, S.J., and Roland E. Murphy, O. Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990) 46:14, p 774.

Children's Sermon

Text: Luke 2:40–52

The child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. (Luke 2:40).

Who can tell me something about Jesus as a baby? *(Let a child volunteer some brief piece of the nativity story.)*

Who can tell me something about Jesus as a grown-up? *(Let another child volunteer any piece of information. If the children draw a blank, ask if anyone remembers a story about Jesus as a grown-up welcoming and blessing children when the disciples tried to keep them away, or another equally familiar story.)*

Now, who can tell me something about Jesus when he was a boy, in between the time he was a baby and a grown-up? *(Assume that the children will draw blanks...as would most adults!) It's hard to think of stories about Jesus as a boy, isn't it? We don't have too much that was written in the Bible about Jesus as a child. But what was written is important. It tells us about Jesus as someone who loved to learn. There is a story about Jesus when he was 12 years old. (Paraphrase story from Luke 2:41-52.)*

It's exciting to listen and learn things from teachers, isn't it? Asking questions like Jesus did is a good way to learn even more.

Today is Children's Sabbath. It is a special day to think about children like all of you and about ways that grown-ups and children can help make sure that all children have what they need to grow strong and healthy and be excited about learning, just like Jesus. At the beginning of the Bible story we told today it says that "the child [Jesus] grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him." Just like Jesus, we want every child to grow and become strong and to have the food and health care and other things to help them do that. Just like Jesus, we want every child to be filled with wisdom, which means to learn lots of important things, and we want all children to have good teachers and parents and others who help them learn. And we want every child to grow in their relationship with God—to learn more about God, and trust God, and know that God loves them.

Let's pray.

Dear God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus. Thank you for helping us know that he was a child and grew bigger and learned things just like us. Help us to love you as Jesus did. And help us to help all children grow strong, learn things, and love you. Amen.



Children's Activity Inserts

There are two activity inserts, one for younger children and one for older children.

Each insert makes one folded insert with four half-size pages. Here's how to make it:

For the Children's Activity Insert (Ages 6–10) (pages 38–39):

Print out the pages with "Proverbs talks about wisdom being like a hidden treasure" and "One way grown-ups can work for justice and equity" at the top. Place them on the photocopier and make copies using the one-sided to two-sided function, so that you have two-sided copies. Fold each page in the middle for a four-page insert, with "Children's Activity Insert (Ages 6-10)" at the top of the front page, "One way grown-ups can work for justice and equity" at the top of the inside left page, "J" at the top of the inside right, and "Proverbs talks about wisdom being like a hidden treasure" at the top of the back page.

For the Children's Activity Insert (Ages 3–5) (pages 40–41):

Print out the pages with "When you love God and try to do the right thing" and "Being wise is like staying on a good path" at the top. Place them on the photocopier and make copies using the one-sided to two-sided function, so that you have two-sided copies. Fold each page in the middle for a four-page insert, with "Children's Activity Insert (Ages 3-5)" at the top of the front page, "Being wise is like staying on a good path" at the top of the inside left page, "Learning to love God and do the right thing can be fun" at the top of the inside right, and "When you love God and try to do the right thing" at the top of the back page.

Proverbs talks about wisdom being like a hidden treasure. Search for these hidden words. (They can go down, sideways, or diagonally.)

Justice Equity God Child Wisdom Knowledge
 Understanding Good Path Equal Fair

G	R	E	N	K	A	C	E	G	I	C	H	I	L	L
M	O	P	R	N	T	V	C	H	I	L	D	W	Y	Z
A	B	D	D	O	F	H	J	L	N	P	R	U	T	V
X	A	B	D	W	E	G	H	J	K	M	N	N	P	Q
F	G	S	T	L	E	Q	U	I	T	Y	V	D	W	J
A	O	C	F	I	L	O	R	U	X	A	D	D	E	U
I	O	J	M	P	S	V	Y	G	B	E	H	R	K	S
R	J	N	U	Q	T	W	Z	O	B	C	E	S	F	T
H	I	K	L	S	N	O	Q	O	R	P	A	T	H	T
W	Z	A	B	C	T	D	E	D	F	G	H	A	I	W
P	A	T	J	K	L	I	M	N	O	P	Q	N	R	I
S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	C	Z	Z	Y	U	D	W	S
V	U	T	S	R	Q	U	O	E	N	M	L	I	K	D
K	N	O	W	L	E	D	G	E	J	I	H	N	G	O
F	E	D	C	B	E	Q	U	A	L	A	S	G	T	M

Children's Activity Insert

(Ages 6-10)

Proverbs 2

Words from a parent to a child:

*If you seek wisdom
 you will come to know God and
 you will understand righteousness and justice and
 equity, every good path.*

*When wisdom is in your heart,
 you stay on the right path and keep out of trouble.*

Righteousness is the way God wants us to act.
Justice is when unfair things have been fixed.
Equity is things being equal or fair.

Can you think of an example of each word?
 Tell a grown-up after the service.

**The message of Proverbs 2 is that
 when we know what is right,
 we have to do it!**

One way grown-ups can work for justice and equity is to make sure that all children go to schools where they can learn and succeed. Children can help each other learn and succeed, too.

Proverbs 2 was first written in Hebrew as an acrostic. That means it was written so that the first line began with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each line began with the next letter in the alphabet, all the way to the last letter.

Use each letter below to start a sentence. For each sentence, write how you can help other children learn and succeed, or how someone has helped you learn and succeed. A few are already filled in to help you get started.

A

B

C

D

Encourage a classmate who is having a hard time.

F

G

H

I

J

K

L

M

N

O

P

Q

Read to a younger child.

S

T

U

V

W

eXpect that every child can learn.

Y

Z

**When you love God and try to do the right thing
you are a wise child!**

Draw a picture of yourself in the frame.



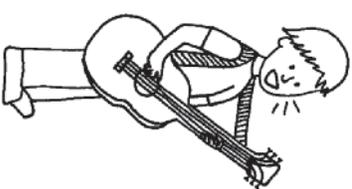
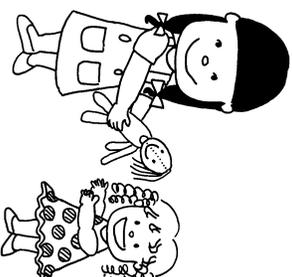
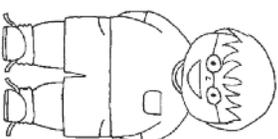
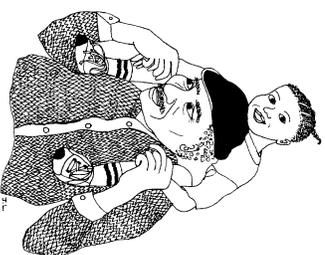
I AM WISE

Children's Activity Insert (Ages 3-5)

**Did you know grown-ups are not the only ones
who can be wise?**

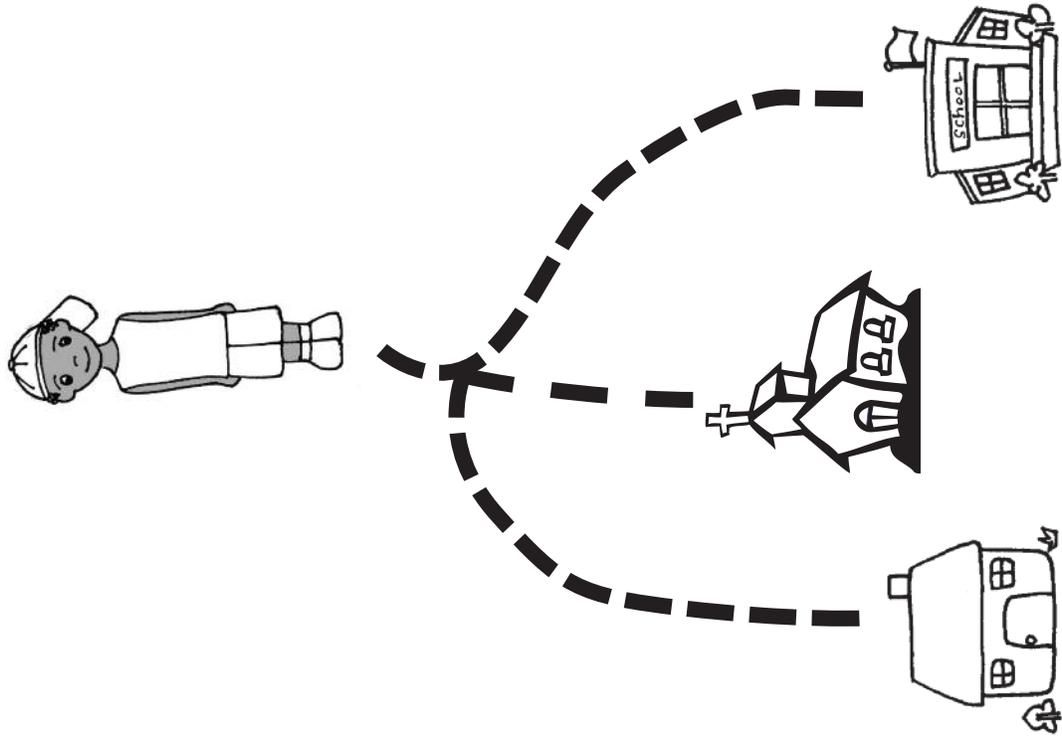
**Children are wise when they love God and do the
right thing!**

Draw a circle around each picture that shows a child who is wise.



Being wise is like staying on a good path.

Use a pencil or crayon to draw a line on the path between the child and the places the child can go.



Learning to love God and do the right thing can be fun like a treasure hunt.

Can you find these things in the picture?
heart, coin, treasure chest, pencil, crayon, sheet of paper

