



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 justice and protecting and nurturing children. It is a

meaningful time to discover what our different faith traditions hold in common as well as to learn about the unique perspectives, texts, and traditions that each brings. It is a time to unite in shared commitment to take action to solve these problems.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Be sure to read the planning steps for organizing a multi-faith community-wide service, which are outlined in the “Planning Your Children's Sabbath” section of this manual. Follow them to bring together a planning committee that represents the many religious traditions in your community.

Following, you will find materials to help 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 sample multi-faith Children's Sabbath service** that can be used “as is” or adapted;
- **A suggested outline** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service;
- **Resources** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service including 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 (one to three minutes) reflections on the religious traditions' call to do justice and protect 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.

Sample Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor—with Urgency and Persistence Community-Wide Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

Prelude

(Choral selections from adult and children's choirs)

Procession

(Broad range of religious leaders may vest and process, and then be seated in special area at the front of the worship space.)

Welcome

Gathering Words

(May use multiple leaders, different faith traditions)

Leader: We come from north and south and east and west...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor with urgency and persistence.

Leader: We come from church and temple, gurdwara and masjid, community and congregation...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor with urgency and persistence.

Leader: We come from serving children, speaking out for children, loving children, living as children...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor with urgency and persistence.

Leader: We come disappointed and determined, heavy hearted and hopeful, seeking sustenance and sharing strength, naming God's vision and claiming our voice...

People: ...to hear and heed the divine call to pursue justice for children and the poor with urgency and persistence.

Leader: Come, let us worship—coming together in wondrous diversity to celebrate the unity of our conviction that the eternal source of love and justice calls us to pursue justice for children and the poor.

Song

Moments for America's Children

(You may use a PowerPoint which combines statistics from the Children's Defense Fund's Moments for America's Children with images of children and a sung response by the congregation using verses from the hymn God of Justice, God of Mercy sung to the tune Hyfrydol. The PowerPoint may be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/RDzr2n>)

Readings, Music, and Prayers from Various Traditions:

Baha'i reading:

O Son of Spirit! The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behooveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of my lovingkindness. Set it then before thine eyes." (Baha'u'llah, *The Hidden Words of Baha'u'llah*, Arabic No. 2)

Buddhist Reading:

Arouse your will, supreme and great,
Practice love, give joy and protection;
Let your giving be like space,
Without discrimination or limitation.

Do good things, not for your own sake
But for all the beings in the universe.
Save and make free everyone you encounter,
Help them attain the wisdom of the way.
(Prajnaparamita, from *The Buddha Speaks*)

From Hindu Tradition:

āno bhadrāḥ kratavoyantu viśvataḥ |
(Rig Veda 1.89.1a)

May noble thoughts come to us from every side.

īśavāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ
yatkinca jagatyāṁ jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjīthā
māgṛdhaḥ kasya sviddhanam ||
[īśa (eesha) Upanishad -1]

Lord permeates everything in this ever changing world. Enjoy your blessings with detachment.
Don't be greedy after someone else's share.

iṣṭānbhogān hi vo devāḥ
dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ |
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo
yo bhuṅkte stena eva saḥ ||
(Bhagavad-Gītā 3:12)

One who enjoys his blessings accorded by gods without giving back anything in return is indeed a thief.

sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ
sarve santu nirāmayāḥ
sarve bhadrāṇi paśyantū
mā kaścit duḥkhabhāg bhavet
(Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad 1.4.14)

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May all be happy
May all be healthy
May all be prosperous
May none suffer.

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ

(Traditional epilogue)

Om peace peace peace.

(May the peace in the three realms: Mental, physical and in the atmosphere prevail)

From the *Qur'an*: (5:8)

O you who believe! Stand firmly for God, as witnesses in fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and be God conscious, for God is well-acquainted with all that you do.

From the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the Sikh scriptures:

Bilaaval, Mehala 5

(To be Sung in Bilaaval Raga, written by the Fifth Master, Guru Arjan Dev Ji)

Mother, father, children and all material wealth, will not accompany you hereafter.

In the Company of those Saintly Souls, all pains and afflictions will be erased. 1.

The Almighty Being is One – pervading within all of Creation.

So, with your tongue, chant the Name of the Lord.

Thus, pain will not overcome you. 1. Pause and Reflect.

One who is engulfed by the terrible fires of thirst, hunger and desire,

Becomes cool by chanting the Praises of the Ultimate Being. 2.

Even through millions of rituals, Inner Divine Peace cannot be obtained;

But the mind is at true bliss when it sings the Glorious Praises of the Lord. 3.

O' God, O' Knower of Hearts, Please bless me with True Devotion,

Nanak* says: This alone is my prayer, O' Master. 4.5.10.

*Guru Nanak (1469-1539) is the Founder of Sikhism.

From the New Testament: Luke 18:1-8a

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to God's chosen ones who cry to God day and night? Will God delay long in helping them? I tell you, God will quickly grant justice to them (New Revised Standard Version).

From the *Torah*: Deuteronomy 16:18-20

You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Jewish Publication Society Translation)

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Reflection

(A brief reflection—perhaps five minutes— on the call to pursue justice for children and the poor heard in sacred texts and religious tradition.)

Song

Prayers of the People

Leader: Let us now pray to God, Lover of Justice, Protector of the Poor, for the needs of our whole human family. For the faithful, that we rightly worship God by doing justice for the poor, loving kindness and caring tenderly for the children, and walking humbly with God, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.

Leader: For all peoples of the world, in which disease knows no boundary, suffering is a shared language, and poverty is a common pain, that we come together to work so that no one suffers injustice or oppression, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Protector of the Poor, hear our prayer.

Leader: For our nation, especially our elected leaders and those who would serve, that we uphold peace with justice, unite instead of divide, and demonstrate greatness by serving the last, the least, the lost, and the left behind, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.

Leader: For ourselves and our community, that we work passionately for justice with our voices and our votes, that we reach out with tender kindness and care for children in need, and that our hearts faithfully seek to do God's will for the children and the poor, let us pray to the Eternal,

People: Protector of the Poor, hear our prayer.

Leader: For all children, especially those who long for justice or kindness or someone to believe in, that we and our leaders and our nation hear their cries, meet their needs, and help them to know that they are beloved by God, let us pray to the Eternal

People: Lover of Justice, hear our prayer.

Leader: We offer these prayers in confidence that God hears our prayers before they even reach our lips, and that God charges us to make our lives a living prayer for justice.

People: Amen.

Congregational Song: Somebody Prayed for Me

(Verse 1, traditional Spiritual. Verses 2-5, adapted. Perhaps have first verse sung by children's choir. This might be a good place to have liturgical dancers interpret the words of the song.)

Somebody prayed for me, had me on their mind,
they took the time and prayed for me.
I'm so glad they prayed,
I'm so glad they prayed,
I'm so glad they prayed for me.

Somebody cared for me...
Somebody spoke for me...
Somebody served with me...
Somebody stood with me...

Charge to the Congregation

(A brief charge—perhaps five minutes—that urges and inspires participants to go forth to pursue justice with urgency and persistence.)

Song

Affirmation of Commitment

Leader: Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral spoke to the urgency with which we must pursue justice when she wrote:

Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral spoke to the urgency with which we must pursue justice when she wrote:

*Somos culpables de muchos errores y faltas,
pero nuestro mayor delito es abandonar los niños, descuidando las fuentes de vida.
Muchas cosas pueden esperar.
El niño no.
Ahora es el momento en que sus huesos se forman,
su sangre se constituye y sus sentidos se desarrollan.
No les podemos contestar mañana.
Su nombre es hoy.*

*We are guilty of many faults and errors,
but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life.
Many things we need can wait.
The child cannot.
Right now is the time his bones are being formed,
his blood is being made and his senses are being developed.
To [the child] we cannot answer "Tomorrow".
[The child's] name is "Today".*

(Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral)

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Every child's name is today. There are particular children you hold in your heart, who need us to act with urgency and persistence to bring joy and justice to their lives. Aloud or in silence, let us lift up those names. *[Moment for names to be called out.]*

Leader: Friends, the one we call Holy, the Eternal Source of Love and Justice, calls us to pursue justice for children with urgency and persistence, today and every day.

How will you speak out with and for children and families whose voices have too long been ignored, who struggle in poverty, without health coverage, in a chasm of inequity and a widening academic achievement gap, at risk in the Cradle to Prison Pipeline? How will you speak out with them for justice?

People: "With urgency and persistence!"

Leader: How will you reach out to children who need our care—those vulnerable to abuse and neglect, those who are hungry and homeless, those who are suspended and incarcerated? How will you reach out to children who need rich early learning experiences, strong schools, and caring communities?

People: "With urgency and persistence!"

Leader: How will you pursue justice so that every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life?

People: "With urgency and persistence!"

Leader: The pursuit of justice is a marathon, not a sprint. Let us draw on our own deep commitment, on the support and companionship of others in the race, and on the guidance and sustenance of the Holy as we look to reaching the finish line so that every child of God experiences love and justice.

Song: *Guide My Feet*

Guide my feet, while I run this race.
Guide my feet, while I run this race.
Guide my feet, while I run this race,
for I don't want to run this race in vain.

Search my heart...
I'm your child...
Hold my hand...

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Sending Forth: This Moment for America's Children

(A PowerPoint presentation pairing the words with images of children is available for download at <http://bit.ly/Pgvhu3>)

Leader: Hear these words from cellist and composer Pablo Casals as we prepare to pursue justice for children with urgency and persistence:

*Each second we live is a new and unique moment of the universe,
a moment that will never be again.*

*And what do we teach our children?
We teach them that two and two make four,
and that Paris is the capital of France.
When will we also teach them what they are?*

*When will we also teach them what they are?
We should say to each of them: Do you know what you are?
You are a marvel. You are unique.
In all the years that have passed, there has never been another child like you.
Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move.*

*You may become a Shakespeare, a Michaelangelo, a Beethoven.
You have the capacity for anything.
Yes, you are a marvel.
And when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel?
You must work, we must all work, to make the world worthy of its children.*

Leader: We don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste. May each of us go forth to work to make this world worthy of our children.

Recessional

Postlude

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 “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.

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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 “Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence”:** 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.

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- **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.

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.
- **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

Pursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence

In addition to the resources provided below, and those which your planning committee creates or finds, draw from faith resources offered in other sections of the Children's Sabbath resource manual on CDF's website at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

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

Opening Prayer

O Holy One, we know you by many different names and worship you in many different ways. Yet together we believe that you alone are the source and meaning of our existence, and it is your call that we must heed. Help us in this time together to hear your call to help the children...to help them be ready to learn and to succeed.

Disturb our hearts with the harsh reality of poverty, sickness, and violence confronting so many children today and hindering their readiness to learn and succeed. Trouble our consciences that millions of children are left in unsafe and unstimulating situations: in some child care programs, schools, and after school, delaying their readiness to learn and succeed.

Lift up our spirits with examples of people and services that make a difference and are getting children ready to learn and succeed. Strengthen our hands to reach out and our voices to speak up on behalf of children. Finally, we pray that you will inspire us by your divine presence to commit ourselves to serving your children so that each child may learn and succeed and live out the life for which you created them. Amen.

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 left behind by inequitable education, 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 seek justice and protect children so that each is educated and encouraged, prepared for a future bright with promise. Let all people of love and justice say, **Amen**.

Resources for the Time of Lament

The Children¹

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)

Resources for the Call to Service

Following are resources from a variety of faith traditions: the Bahá'í faith, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Native American traditions, Shinto, Sikhism, and Unitarian Universalism. For each tradition, there is a passage from sacred texts or other writings central to the tradition, a prayer, and a reflection.

These resources may be used in a multi-faith Children's Sabbath service, to spark a Children's Sabbath in congregations of these traditions, or to enrich the Children's Sabbath of congregations from other traditions. They also may be used in an interfaith educational program you develop for your Children's Sabbath.

The Bahá'í Faith

A Bahá'í Reading

The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favour of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory. If a child be trained from his infancy, he will, through the loving care of the Holy Gardener, drink in the crystal waters of the spirit and

¹ By Celeste Rossetto Dickey, reprinted with permission of the author cdickey@uoregon.edu

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of knowledge, like a young tree amid the rolling brooks. And certainly he will gather to himself the bright rays of the Sun of Truth, and through its light and heat will grow ever fresh and fair in the garden of life.

(‘Abdu’l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*)²

Bahá’í Prayers

O God! Educate these children. These children are the plants of Thine orchard, the flowers of Thy meadow, the roses of Thy garden. Let Thy rain fall upon them; let the Sun of Reality shine upon them with Thy love. Let Thy breeze refresh them in order that they may be trained, grow and develop, and appear in the utmost beauty. Thou art the Giver. Thou art the Compassionate.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from *Prayers For Young Bahá’ís* —Compiled from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, the Bab, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and the Greatest Holy Leaf)³

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.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from *Prayers For Young Bahá’ís* —Compiled from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, the Bab, ‘Abdu’l-Baha, and the Greatest Holy Leaf)⁴

A Bahá’í Reflection

Philosophy of Bahá’í Education

Among the greatest objectives of humanity is the education and training of children. This education ensures human progress, and prepares each soul for its entry into the next level of existence.

Education must therefore be divine as well as material. Spiritual education embodies those virtues or attributes which, when enkindled in the hearts and minds of children, not only guide their morals, but also enhance their material education. ‘Abdu’l-Baha spoke of this dual necessity, and its benefit: “If...the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.”

(From *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*)⁵

The Bahá’í writings state that, before all else, children must be taught to love and obey God. This love and obedience is represented to a great extent in a child’s relationship with his or her parents and in service to humankind. Because service to the world of humanity is the highest station to which a person can aspire, spiritual education programs must have service to the world of humanity as both a foundation and an outcome.

(From *Summary of the Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education by the National Bahá’í Education Task Force*)⁶

² *Selections from the Writing of ‘Abdu’l-Baha*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

³ *Prayer for Young Bahá’ís*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

⁴ *Prayer for Young Bahá’ís*. Copyright © by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of the United States. Reprinted with permission of the Bahá’í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, IL.

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Buddhism

A Buddhist Reading

If educational institutions are narrowly focused or their spirit is confined by the boundary of self and others, then the world's civilization will be held back. Our aim is to advance the world's civilization by expanding educational institutions, transcending the boundary of self and others, widely educating future generations, and enabling all human beings to lead an ideal life.

- 1) As we have entered an era when the defects of education are removed, we ought to educate the children of others as if they were our own children whether or not we have children of our own. For the realization of this ideal, we must support educational institutions as far as we can and we must educate as many children as we can as if they were our own children.
- 2) A nation and society must establish a wide variety of educational institutions and carry out the educational plan successfully.
- 3) In religious orders, societies, nations, and the world, those who carry out the ideal of educating the children of others should be recognized and rewarded for their meritorious deeds.

(From the Scripture of Won Buddhism)

A 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)⁷

A Buddhist Prayer

May Dharmakaya Buddha nurture in us concentration, wisdom, and compassion.

We pray everyone becomes emboldened in heart to see the path that leads to love and peace.

May we spend more time in meditation and silence to see the truth: the truth about ourselves, the truth about others, and the truth about the universe for the benefit of the earth community.

Let us find the faith and courage to plant seeds of hope for children and thus flourish as one Family in One World.

May we recognize interdependency and interconnectedness: that humanity is one family and the world is the house we share. May we become co-workers on earth among congregations and communities to foster the quality of children's life. May the ... Children's Sabbath deepen and strengthen our love for all children.

(By the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee)⁸

⁷ *The Buddha Speaks*, edited by Anne Bancroft, © 2000 by Anne Bancroft. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publication Inc., Boston, MA. www.shambhala.com

⁸ Reprinted with permission of the author, the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee, Won Buddhism United Nations Office, New York, NY

A Buddhist Reflection

Education, Children, and Responsibility

Buddhists believe in Law of Causality and Rebirth. This understanding invites us to have long-term vision of past, present, and future generations. According to the concept of rebirth, it is our own duties and responsibilities to educate and protect future generations since we want to come back to a happier house and more enlightened society. Therefore, it is everyone's responsibility to create a loving and nurturing environment for children. Since future generations will become our future parents, it is crucial to provide good education and health care for them. It is especially critical to give quality education for all girl children of future generations because they will become our future mothers. The quality of their life and education will have direct impact on our future.

We must understand that the education, health, and welfare of all children is our shared responsibility. The Scripture of Won Buddhism stresses that in order to enhance the world's civilization and endow all human beings with a blessed life, the public is to educate all younger generations, expanding the educational opportunity for spiritual, mental, and physical growth and transcending the boundary between oneself and others. Transforming these words into practice, schools, congregations, community, and government must address the special needs of children, especially those that fall beyond existing safety nets. To eradicate the problems plaguing young people, we must unite at a grassroots level for change. If we can replace our disbelief and disillusion with faith and courage, entering a level of selflessness, we will awaken ourselves to the fact that our youth is our future, and our future is hopeful.

(By the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee)⁹

Christianity

A Christian Reading

Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God grant justice to [God's] chosen ones who cry to [God] day and night? Will [God] delay long in helping them? I tell you, [God] will quickly grant justice to them.

(*Luke 18:1-8a*)

A Christian Prayer

Prayer for Children

Great God,
guard the laughter of children,
Bring them safely through injury and illness,
so they may live the promises you give.
Do not let us be so preoccupied with our purposes
that we fail to hear their voices,

⁹ Reprinted with permission of the author, the Venerable Dr. Chung Ok Lee, Won Buddhism United Nations Office, New York, NY

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

or pay attention to their special vision of the truth;
but keep us with them, ready to listen and to love,
even as in Jesus Christ you have loved us,
your grown-up, wayward children. Amen.

(From The Book of Common Worship)

Christian Reflection

What do children and youth need from religious leaders and people of faith today? They need us to be present and to care—day in and day out—as they struggle to make it through childhood to adulthood, and to lead in reweaving the fabric of community so essential to family stability. They need the integrity of our lived example of what it means to be a person of faith....

Children need our caring presence and support when the adults in their families fail, hurt, or cannot care for them. They need our rituals, moral clarity, and examples in a faithful community of disciplined caring. And parents, and increasingly grandparents, need our ongoing support as they try to raise children in these challenging times.

Children need our affirmation when they do well and loving and constructive admonitions when they stray....

Children need assurances that God will never abandon or leave them alone through our unfailing presence as God's surrogates in the world. They need adults to see and speak to, smile at and compliment them....

Children need our continuous countercultural voices, examples, and guidance in a world awash with false prophets spouting false values, and they need constant reminders that they are sacred children of God—each equal to all others. Children of color especially need to know their great heritage and that they are made in the image of God and not BET and the latest American definitions of external beauty....

Children need Christian faith leaders to work harder to end the reality that 11 a.m. on Sunday morning is still the most segregated time in America. They need to see you and all faiths reaching out to the needy, the stranger, and partnering with congregations and community institutions of different races, ethnicities, and faiths.

Beyond the charity and service all faiths demand, children need faith institutions to speak and stand up to those who treat them unjustly.... The faith community has extraordinary power and resources to save children and end poverty if it would mobilize and use them effectively.

(By Marian Wright Edelman, excerpted from The Sea Is So Wide and My Boat Is So Small: Charting a Course for the Next Generation)

Hinduism

Hindu Readings

I am firmly seated in the hearts of all. From Me comes knowledge and memory and the departing of doubts. I am the Knower and Knowledge of the Vedas. I am the author of Vedanta (the sacred Upanishads and their teachings, the means to spiritual salvation/liberation).

—From the Bhagavad-Gita, XV:15 (God, as Krishna, speaking)

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

—From Svetasvatara Upanishad, IV:1-4

Hindu Prayers

āno bhadrāḥ kratavoyantu viśvataḥ |
(Rig Veda 1.89.1a)

May noble thoughts come to us from every side.

īśavāsyam idaṃ sarvaṃ
yatkinca jagatyāṃ jagat
tena tyaktena bhunjīthā
māgr̥dhaḥ kasya sviddhanam ||
[īśa (eesha) Upanishad -1]

Lord permeates everything in this ever changing world. Enjoy your blessings with detachment. Don't be greedy after someone else's share.

iṣṭānbhogān hi vo devāḥ
dāsyante yajñabhāvitāḥ |
tairdattānapradāyaibhyo
yo bhukte stena eva saḥ ||
(Bhagavad-Gītā 3:12)

One who enjoys his blessings accorded by gods without giving back anything in return is indeed a thief.

sarve bhavantu sukhinaḥ
sarve santu nirāmayāḥ
sarve bhadrāṇi paśyant
mā kaścit duḥkhabhāg bhavet
(Brihadāraṇyaka Upanishad 1.4.14)

May all be happy
May all be healthy
May all be prosperous
May none suffer.

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ
(Traditional epilogue)

Om peace peace peace.

(May the peace in the three realms: Mental, physical and in the atmosphere prevail)

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

A Hindu Reflection

The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most ambitious, comprehensive, and laudable effort to protect, preserve, and enlarge the welfare of children. The quality of human life in the 21st century will depend almost entirely on what the world community will do to its children today. In the classical Hindu tradition, however, it is not simply [a matter] of rights but a question of duty, obligation, and virtue which has characterized human relations in Hindu society. [This] is the overarching principle that should govern relations between persons and collectives.

(Dr. Anand Mohan-Hindu)

Islam

Amir Al-Islam
The Muslim Center for Civilizational Dialogue
New York, NY

An Islamic Reading

“Read! In the name of the Lord and Cherisher, Who created—created human beings from a [mere] clot of congealed blood: Read! And thy Lord is Most Beautiful, He who taught the use of the pen, taught man that which he knew not.”

—From the text of the Holy Qur’an, (Chapter 96 verses 1-5)

These were the first verses of the Qur’an revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, which is an indication of the importance that Islam places on knowledge of education, particularly for children. The training of children is one of the most sacred acts in Islam, and one that is said to be particularly pleasing to Allah. Throughout all its chapters and verses, the Qur’an emphasizes the significance of knowledge and encourages Muslims to learn and to acquire knowledge, not only of God’s laws and religious injunctions, but also of the world of God’s creation. The Qur’an is replete with verses inviting human beings to use their intellect, to ponder, to think and to know, for the goal of human life is to discover the Truth. It places the gaining of knowledge as the highest religious activity and one that is most pleasing to God.

An Islamic 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)

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Islamic Prayers

“O Allah! You are our Creator. You are our provider and sustainer. All things are in Your hands and all authority rests with You and You alone. You have no helpers and need no assistance. Without Your guidance and light, we are in darkness. Help us. Without Your help, we are helpless. We depend solely on You.”

“O Allah! You know that the children are our future, and we have not done what you have commanded us to do. Have mercy on us and overlook our faults. Protect the children, Allah, for surely you are the only protector. Give us the wisdom and the strength to work together for the welfare of all of our beloved children. O Allah! Save the children.”

An Islamic Reflection

Philosophy of Islamic Education

Islam is a way of life based on knowledge of and belief in the oneness of God, an understanding of God, an understanding of God's laws and religious teachings, and a commitment to implement those instructions in one's life. These teachings are embodied in the sacred text of the Holy Qur'an. For Muslims, the Qur'an is the actual Word of God revealed through the archangel Gabriel to Prophet Muhammad(s) and it is the source of all Islamic doctrines and ethics. Muhammad (God's peace and blessings be upon him), the last Prophet of God, was entrusted with explaining, interpreting, and living the teachings of the Qur'an. This body of teachings and practices is embodied in literature that Muslims call Hadith.

The Hadith literature is full of references to the importance of knowledge and education. Prophet Muhammad(s) said, “Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.” And these teachings have echoed throughout the history of Islam and have inspired Muslims to seek knowledge wherever they can.

According to Islam, education is obligatory for every Muslim, male and female. And the primary objective of education is to teach human beings about the nature of their existence and the objective for their creation, which is to worship and obey God in all of their affairs. Muslims understand that the most important knowledge is that which teaches about the oneness of Almighty God, His laws and religious injunctions. However, Muslims are also exhorted to study the world of nature. The Qur'an constantly refers to the importance of seeing, contemplating, and reasoning about the world of creation and its diverse phenomena.

It is critical that we understand that the education, health and welfare of children are our collective responsibility. Children represent the hope of our future, and it is critical that we educate them properly in order to prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. In Islam, proper education entails teaching children first to love and obey God. This is the foundation of their learning and provides them with understanding of their relationship and obligation to humanity.

Many children in America are suffering from neglect, which threatens to undermine our society's future. If we expect to survive as a human family, we must embrace all children, particularly those unfortunate ones who are on the margins of society.

Note: The Islamic reflection provided by Habibe Ali at the CDF Conference workshop Hearing and Heeding God's Call to Pursue Justice will be posted separately on the website.

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Judaism

A Jewish Reading

“You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:18-20 JPS)

A Jewish Prayer

O Source of light and truth,
Creator of the eternal law of goodness,
Well-spring of justice and mercy,
Help us to find knowledge by which to live.
Lead us to take the words we shall speak
Into our hearts and our lives.

Bless all who enter this sanctuary in search and in need,
All who bring to this place the offering of their hearts.
May our worship here lead us to fulfill our words and our hopes
With acts of kindness, peace, and love.

(From *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*)¹⁰

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

(Adapted from *Rabbi's Manual* by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association)¹¹

Jewish Reflections

Rav once came to a certain town and ordered the people to fast and pray in order to bring down rain. But no rain fell.

The Reader of the congregation then went before the Ark and recited the words from the prayer book, “God who causes the wind to blow,” and immediately the wind began to blow. He then recited, “God who causes the rain to fall,” and rain began to fall.

Rav asked him, “What special deed have you done to merit such reward?”

The Reader answered, “I teach young children, those of the poor as well as those of the rich. I take no fees from anyone who cannot afford to pay. Also, I have a fish pond, and if a child does not want to study, I give him some fishes to keep and win him over in that way so that soon he becomes eager to learn. In his day, if one had a learned father, the father would teach, and if not, one did not learn. Then they instituted a publicly funded school in Jerusalem. But those with parents were brought up to Jerusalem, and those

¹⁰ Excerpts from *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur* © 2007; and is under the copyright protection of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and reprinted for use by permission of the CCAR. All rights reserved.

¹¹ From the *Rabbi's Manual*. Reprinted with permission of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.

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without still did not learn. They then set up a school in each district, and the children were to enter at 16 or 17, but when the teachers tried to discipline them, they rebelled and left. They then instituted publicly funded schools for any child six or older. And if there was a long way, or a bridge to cross, they could compel the town to build another school.”

Baba Batra 21a

Loving life and its mysterious source
With all our heart and all our spirit,
All our sense and strength,
We take upon ourselves and into ourselves
these promises:
to care for the earth
and those who live upon it,
to pursue justice and peace,
to love kindness and compassion.
We will teach this to our children
Throughout the passage of the day—
As we dwell in our homes
And as we go on our journeys,
From the time we rise until we fall asleep.
And may our actions be faithful to our words
That our children's children
May live to know:
Truth and kindness have embraced,
Peace and justice have kissed
And are one.

(From *Mishkan T'Filah: A Reform Siddur*)¹²

Native American Traditions

A Native American Hymn

(Traditional Choctaw, sung to the tune of “Amazing Grace.”)

Choctaw:

1. Shee-lom-bish Ho-lee-to-pah-mah!
Ish meen-tee pol-lah chah,
Hah-tahk eel-buh-shah pee-ah hah
Ish pee yok-pah-lah-shkee.

2. Pee chok-osh no-see ah-tok-mah
Ahnt ish ok-chuh-lah-shkee,
Ish pee yo-bee-ee-cheek-bah-no;
Ee cheem ah-uh-neh-shkee.

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3. Shee-lom-bish Ho-lee-to-pah mah!

Peem ah-nok-fee-lah huht

Ok-theel-it kuh-nee-uh ho-kah,

Ish-pee on to mah-shkee.

4. Pee chok-ush nok-hahk-lo yo-kah

Ahnt pee ho-po-luh-chee;

Eel ah-uh-shuh-chee-kah yo-kah,

Ish pee kah-sho-fah-shkee.

English:

(English paraphrase by Harry Folsom)

1. Come, O Holy Spirit! Come to us who are poor in spirit. Bless us!

2. Come and awaken our hearts. Give us your peace, we implore you.

3. O Holy Spirit! Our minds are clothed in darkness. Enlighten us!

4. Our hearts are filled with sorrow. Come and comfort us, sinners that we are. Cleanse us!

A Native American Prayer

O Great Spirit,

Whose breath gives life to the world and

whose voice is heard in the soft breeze,

We need your strength and wisdom.

May we walk in beauty.

May our eyes ever behold the red and purple sunset.

Make us wise so that we may understand what you have taught us.

Help us to learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.

Make us always ready to come to you with clean hands and straight eyes

So when life fades, as the fading sunset, our spirits may come to you without shame.

A Native American Reflection

The whole community sits around a circle called a Medicine Wheel. Around that wheel are representatives of all the different aspects of the community. In the East, there's the fool. In the West, there's the witch. In the South, there's the hunter. In the North, there's the creator. Others positioned around the circle are the shaman, the politician, etc. And in the center of the circle is the children's fire. Next to the children's fire sit the grandfather and grandmother.

If you want to build a condominium in the community of Spirit Lake, you have to enter the Medicine Wheel in the East, at the position of the fool. The Question you ask is, "May I build a condo on Spirit Lake?" The fool takes your question, turns it around backwards and asks, "What would Spirit Lake say about such a condo?" You then have to take the question the fool gives you to everyone around the Medicine Wheel. Each will respond to you according to their position in the community. The last people you must ask the question to are the grandmother and grandfather who guard the children's fire. If these two decide that the request is not good for the children's fire, then the answer is "no." They are the only ones in the circle who have veto power. The concept of the ultimate question is simple. Does it hurt or help the children's fire? If it can pass the test of the children's fire, then it can be done.

(Excerpted from materials by Congregations Concerned for Children. This story was told to Magaly Rodriguez Mossman by Robin Van Doren, who heard it from elders of the Hopi nation.)

Shintoism

A Shinto Reading and Reflection

Shintoism believes it is important to transmit faith to children. Parents are taught that a goal in faith should be to rectify their own minds and nurture good children. Konko Kagamitaro (the fourth patriarch of Konkokyo) has expressed the essence of parent-child relations in the following terms:

Both father and mother
And child as well, must be born and raised as one
Father, mother, and child.

While this simple verse speaks of the father, mother, and child being born together, it doesn't refer to literal simultaneous birth, but rather to the fact that the relationships involved all come about at one and the same time. Accordingly, the child must grow at the same time—and at the same rate—as the parent grows. In Shinto today, children are viewed as beings in relation to parents; the perception is thus that the “problems of children” are at one and the same time the “problems of parents.”

(By the Very Rev. Tatsuo Miyake–Shinto)¹⁴

Sikhism

Amrit Kaur
Guru Gobind Singh Foundation
Washington, D.C.

A Sikh Reading

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 the Wares 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.

—From the *Guru Granth Sahib*

A Sikh Hymn

You are the Father, the Mother, we are Your children
In Your grace lies our whole joy.
No one knows Your limits, O Lord,
You, the maker of our destiny, are
the highest of the high.
All Your creation is strung on Your thread:
And all you have created is in Your command.
You alone know Your end and state:
So, Nanak, Your servant, is forever sacrifice unto You.

¹⁴ The Very Rev. Tatsuo Miyake–Shinto–WCRP President and Chief Senior Minister Designated, Konko Church of Izuo, Japan.

A Sikh Reflection

Sikh religion started in India in the 15th century. The founder was called Guru Nanak, who was succeeded by nine other Gurus who radiated the same divine light that manifested in Guru Nanak. Sikh scripture is a magnificent collection of spiritual poetry, rendered in Classical raags. Liturgy and hymns are inseparable in Sikh scripture. This massive volume of inspirational and devotional hymns is revered by the Sikhs as Guru (Divine Master) and is addressed as Guru Granth Sahib. Hence kirtan (Sikh way of singing hymns) is an integral part of worship. Sikh places of worship are called Gurdwara. There is no Sabbath Day designated in Sikhism. One is supposed to have constant remembrance of God always, though there are special morning and evening prayers.

Sikh children are taught these prayers at an early age. They are also taught kirtan (hymn singing) in classical raags to the accompaniment of musical instruments (mainly harmonium and Tabla). In Gurdwaras, classes are held for children to teach them Punjabi, the language of scripture and Sikh philosophy. They are also taught the Sikh history. At many places summer camps are conducted to enthuse the children, to educate them, and to inspire them to be good Sikhs and equally good citizens. These camps are held in natural environments to bring them in tune to the Creator and also to make them aware of the abundant blessing of Nature, for the Sikhs believe that this whole universe is the manifestation of the same divine light who is the Creator, Nourisher, and Protector. Strong emphasis is laid on character building and in developing leadership qualities. Sikhism believes in the equality of mankind and advocates strongly that all the human race is one. To perpetuate this concept Sikh youths are sent to inter-religious youth retreats and camps.

In some educational centers many modern techniques, such as computers, slide shows, and live discussions are employed for the purpose of education. Since gurdwaras are the center of religious growth, many times youths are encouraged to conduct, participate in, and perform in regular congregations. In Sikhism, there is equality of sexes so male and female children alike can participate in all the events. Children can lead in prayer service, sing hymns, recite anecdotes from the biographies of the Gurus, and perform other tasks required of them. Like all other religious communities, Sikhism believes that children will be the torch-bearers for tomorrow and they have to be trained in the ways of religious traditions while being part of the mainstream American society.

Unitarian Universalism

A Unitarian Universalist Prayer

Giver of all life and love,
You, who are creator of all natural beauty,
You, who are creator of all living things,
We your children thank you for all you have given us.
Help us to dedicate our lives to nurturing children;
To instill in them the sense of value they need;
To design and build for them communities of love.
Help us to be responsible for meeting their needs;
To teach by example so they may grow in their own right;
To provide the resources to improve and sustain their lives.
Help us to be sensitive listeners, and respectful of differing opinions;
To work with patience and gain understanding;

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

To learn from our children how to live with loving hearts.

Giver of all life and love,

May we share all your gifts with the children,

And may they share theirs, now and in the future.

A Unitarian Universalist Reflection

The Great End in Religious Instruction

The great end in religious instruction is not to stamp our minds upon the young, but to stir up their own;

Not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own;

Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire a fervent love of truth;

Not to form an outward regularity but to touch inward springs;

Not to bind them by ineradicable prejudices to our particular sect or peculiar notions,

But to prepare them for impartial, conscientious

judging of whatever subjects may be offered to their decision;

Not to burden the memory, but to quicken and strengthen the power of thought;

Not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, but to awaken the conscience, the moral discernment.

In a word, the great end is to awaken the soul, to excite and cherish spiritual life.

(By William Ellery Channing from *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Resources for the Commitment to Action

Prayer of Commitment

God of justice and mercy, we come before you now with a strong sense of the fierce urgency of now.

Hear our prayers as we offer them to you.

Let us pray for the end of child poverty now... *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for comprehensive health and mental health coverage and access for every child and pregnant woman. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for the protection of every child from abuse and for the connection of all children to caring, permanent families. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for the provision of quality early childhood education and development programs for every child. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for the kind of public education that ensures that every child can read and that all young people graduate from high school. . . *(silence)*

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

Let us pray for an end to the criminalization of children and for the provision of prevention and early intervention.. . . *(silence)*

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Justice, and only justice shall we pursue.

And now, gracious God, we offer to you our commitments to action. By your spirit, help us to pursue justice for children and families in our nation. Give us the strength of will to sustain our own responses, both individually and together. Amen.

(By Martha Bettis Gee)

Prayer of Commitment

Leader: Let us pray, turning our hearts to the one we call holy.

For our nation's more than 16 million children living in poverty and for the parents who work and still are poor,

People: We pray for justice.

Leader: For our nation's children being pushed along the Cradle to Prison Pipeline rather than set on paths of promise,

People: We pray for justice.

Leader: For our nation's millions of children in schools with too few resources and too much discouragement, who flail and fail without the support and opportunity to achieve,

People: We pray for justice.

Leader: For the children who are hungry and homeless,

People: We pray for mercy.

Leader: For the children who are hurt by violence in their homes or schools or neighborhoods,

People: We pray for mercy.

Leader: For all—young and old and in-between—who suffer in mind, body, and spirit,

People: We pray for mercy.

Leader: For the children who don't think they matter and don't know they are beloved by you,

People: We pray for faith.

Leader: For the parents and teachers and social workers and others caring for children who have given up on themselves or their children,

People: We pray for faith.

Leader: For ourselves, when we feel like we can't make a difference,

Leader: We pray for faith.

Leader: These things we pray trusting in the holy one who was and is and ever will be. Amen. *(Before the prayers of the people, pass along the pews baskets containing crayons, pencil stubs, chalk, Band-Aids®, pennies, and pens. Invite each congregation member to take one item. These items will be referenced in the Prayers of the People. Invite them to respond to each petition "hear our prayer." Afterward, encourage members to take the item home and to pray for those it symbolizes.)*

Prayer of Commitment

Eternal Source of Love and Justice, the challenges facing children and those who care for and about them can seem so huge and so abstract that we lose touch with the reality. Help us to remember that the needs and prayers of each child, each parent, each teacher, each caring person are as real and 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. Eternal, with your love, **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. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.**

(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. Eternal, with your love, **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 Band-Aids® when prevention or treatment is needed. Eternal, with your love, **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. Eternal, with your love, **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. Eternal, with your love, **hear our prayer.** Amen.

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)

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 committed 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.)

Reader 4: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." (Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.)
(Reader 4 lights candle from reader 3's candle.)

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Reader 5: "Worship is a way of seeing the world in the light of God." (Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel)
(Reader 5 lights candle from reader 4's candle.)

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.)
(Reader 6 lights candle from reader 5's candle.)

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 simply 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. Hughs

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.

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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.

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 pursue justice and protect children.

(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

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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 movement 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

Charge and Blessing

Go forth from this place to answer God's call:
Go forth from this place to pursue justice;
Go forth from this place to protect children.

Draw strength from each other;
Draw strength from your faith;
Draw strength from the knowledge that children are counting on you.

And may the blessing of the Holy
surround and sustain you and every child,
this day and forever more. Amen.

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 handiwork 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.

Sending Forth

Friends, with God's grace we are ready, ready to go into the world and help all children learn and succeed.
We are ready, ready to spread the word of God's love for children.
We are ready, ready to support and uphold each other as we serve children and speak out for them.
Know that you go into a world ready and waiting, urgently waiting, for your loving service.
And know that God goes with you, even before you, into that world and work. 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.