

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

"..[T]hey have become great and rich...they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan,...and they do not defend the rights of the needy...shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?"
(Jeremiah 5:27-29)

"The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little." (Franklin Delano Roosevelt)

"Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive..." (Deut. 16:20 JPS translation)

Dear Faithful Friend of Children:

Thank you for your interest in participating in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths and for your commitment to *Pursuing* Justice for Children and the Poor with *Urgency* and *Persistence*. Never have your voice and leadership been more needed by children—our poorest group of Americans.

A nation-threatening toxic cocktail of poverty, racial disparities in child serving systems, poor education and racially unjust zero tolerance school discipline policies, arrests and unjust sentences is fueling a Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis, which is funneling millions of poor children and adults of color into dead-end, powerless, and hopeless lives. We must confront these realities with resolve and end the morally indefensible and economically costly poverty afflicting 16.4 million children, many hungry and homeless, in the richest nation on earth. We must communicate and organize more effectively, go beyond our current comfort and courage zones and do whatever is necessary to protect children.

Your plan to participate in the Children's Sabbath says that you are ready for faithful and sustained struggle—unafraid of the hard work of protecting decades of hard-earned progress and of sowing new seeds to move our children and our nation forward. We must all be undeterred by the fierce political thunder and lightning of powerful special interests that are trampling on the survival needs of our struggling children and poor and middle-income neighbors in America in a time of deep economic downturn they did not cause. We must stand together and fearlessly demand justice for the most vulnerable among us.

I hope that you will use the Children's Sabbath weekend to focus your place of worship on the sacred charge to nurture and protect children and the poor, to equip members with new understanding about the huge threats facing children and democracy, and to join together as a place of worship and with other places of worship in your community and across our nation to ensure a level playing field for every child. I hope you will form a Children's Action Team (CAT) to make your community a safe and positive space for all children. And I hope you will use the Children's Sabbath to reach out to new partners to pinpoint your community's existing strengths and needs and develop action strategies to fill in the gaps. The Children's Sabbath, of course, is about much more than one weekend—it is about the long-term action for which the Children's Sabbath weekend equips and inspires us.

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Whether this is your first time celebrating a Children's Sabbath or your 21st, it is an extraordinary occasion that stretches across our nation and reaches across every religious tradition, race, ethnicity, income group, political party, and region to unite in a weekend of prayer, worship, study, action, and most especially new, long-term, faithful commitment to making a difference in children's lives and pursuing justice with and for them. We are eager to know what you plan. Share your plans with the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris, CDF's Religious Action Advisor, at SDaleyHarris@ChildrensDefense.org. Our children are counting on you. We don't have a moment to wait or a child to waste.

In hope and faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marian Wright Edelman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marian Wright Edelman
President
The Children's Defense Fund

P.S. Following this letter I share with you a sermon preached by the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris. The title of the 2012 Children's Sabbath is drawn from her sermon. After her sermon, you will find three pieces that will fill you with the urgency of now. The first outlines dire budget threats to child investments when child needs have never been greater and our new campaign to protect children from budget cuts called, "Be Careful What You Cut". The second provides an overview of inequality in education, and the third an overview of the importance of dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™ and replacing it with a highway to college and productive work. Draw on these resources along with others on CDF's website as you plan your Children's Sabbath worship, education, and action events.

Is This As Fast as It Goes?

By the Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris

You shall appoint judges and officials throughout your tribes, in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall render just decisions for the people. You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

(Deuteronomy 16:18-20)

It was a foggy day at Washington's Dulles airport. I boarded the plane bound for Florida to give a speech. On my sixth flight of the month, I settled myself into my seat and immediately buried myself in some work.

As I did so, a father and his young son, maybe three years old, entered the row in front of me. On what was clearly his first ever airplane ride, the little boy eagerly clambered into his window seat, pushed up the plastic shade and peered out the window with great excitement and anticipation.

Well, the deep fog that day had delayed many flights. Our plane was way at the back of a long line of planes waiting for their turn on the runway. So you know what that means: the plane at the front of the line would take off and the rest of us in this long line of planes would roll slowly forward a few feet and then stop and wait some more. Then the next plane would take off and we would inch forward, stop, wait, and so on. Buried in work, I scarcely paid attention as for half an hour or more we continued inching forward like this.

Suddenly I heard the voice of the little boy turn to his dad and ask with dismay and deep disappointment: *is this as fast as it goes?*

I wonder if our nation's 16.4 million children who live in poverty, who are waiting for us to end child poverty in our rich nation, would turn to each of us and ask "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to end poverty while their childhoods slip by?

I wonder if the hungry children whose parents are waiting to hear if the SNAP program—food stamps—will be cut or preserved, whose meals depend on the decision of a budget so-called Super Committee, would they turn to our legislators and ask, "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to protect children from cuts?

I wonder if the three-year-old waiting for a place in Head Start to be funded, or the toddler waiting for a quality child care spot, or a child at the bottom of the list for affordable housing...would they ask us all "Is this as fast as it goes?"

I wonder if the nation's uninsured children, who rely on Medicaid which is now in jeopardy, on health reform threatened with repeal, would they turn to pundits and pastors, congregations and candidates and Congress, and ask "Is this as fast as it goes?" Is this as fast as we can go to protect every child with health coverage?

Is this as fast as we can go?

Pursuing Justice

Our passage from Deuteronomy this morning warns against distorting justice and the things that can fog our leaders' clarity about the right thing to do, slowing our progress toward justice. Babies, now as then, aren't very good at making bribes; children don't make campaign contributions, or vote, or lobby, or do much of anything to tip the scales in their favor or just keep the scales even. Children and their cause are outweighed by contributors, campaigners, corporations, and constituents. It's an old, old story. Isaiah, using the same Hebrew word for "pursue" as the Deuteronomist, says of the nation's leaders, "Everyone loves a bribe and runs after—*pursues*—gifts. They do not defend the orphan and the widow's cause does not come before them." (Isaiah 1:23b) Both writers warn of a nation headed fast in the wrong direction and of children and poor parents being left behind.

In our passage today, we are not only warned of the dangers of distorting or subverting justice. We are told to *pursue* justice. To *pursue* it—there can be nothing accidental or incidental, apathetic or apolitical, about *pursuing* justice. Rabbi Abraham Heschel knew something about pursuing justice. He said once, after marching with Dr. King in Selma, "It felt as if my feet were praying." Of this passage in Deuteronomy, Rabbi Heschel wrote "The term 'pursue' carries strong connotations of effort, eagerness. This implies more than merely respecting or following justice"; we must actively pursue it.¹

The Deuteronomist couldn't have envisioned, precisely, our burgeoning email inboxes, phones that ring off the hook, computers waiting for us to finish memos or sermons or grant reports...but maybe he knew, nonetheless, that there would always be competition between our to-do lists and the call to do justice, and that if we are not to be forever distracted and derailed from doing justice by the rest of our over-full lives and competing demands, then we would have to pursue, actively pursue, justice with focus, urgency, energy, imagination, and determination.

So how fast are we going to get to work? How fast are we going to tell our nation's leadership to get moving? How are we going to remind them that their first responsibility is to defend the orphan—that is, our nation's poorest and most vulnerable children, and to respond to the widow's cause—that is, the parents who are most impoverished, most lacking in community and economic supports? How much urgency and focus will we help our congregations bring to the pursuit of justice at this crucial time?

Victor

Maybe you remember the story in the news last October of Victor Perez, an immigrant here legally, a construction worker by trade but unemployed for three years who picked grapes to try to make ends meet for his family. On this fall day he was standing outside his house in Fresno, California, talking with his cousin about a recent Amber Alert for an 8-year-old girl who had been abducted. As they were standing there talking, he spotted a vehicle that looked like the one in the Amber Alert.

So Victor leapt into his own car and took off in pursuit, even though he was nervous that the abductor might have a weapon. Each time Victor pulled up to try to cut off the abductor's vehicle, the man driving protested "I don't have no time," and sped up to try to get away.

Victor later said, "The second time I reached him, the way he acted—yes, I was, for a split second I was nervous until I saw the little girl and all fear was out the window after that, I didn't have no fear. I wasn't thinking of me no more. I was just thinking we need to get that little girl to safety." He added, "I wasn't going to give up.... I couldn't give up." So Victor kept pursuing him.

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The driver was pushing the little girl down, trying to hide her. Victor said, "He kept getting away. He kept going round my truck. The last time I completely said, 'Either he crashes into me or he stops.'" Finally, on his fourth attempt, Victor forced the vehicle to stop and the abductor shoved the child out. She was saved.

Afterward, the aptly named Victor humbly said, "I just felt like I was doing my part.... I just felt like everybody should step up in their own communities and when something like this happens, come together and try to do your part to help out. And, you know," Victor concluded, "I just thank that God I was put in the right situation to do what I did. Thank the man above for that." ²

Amber Alert Time for Our Nation's Children

When a child is in absolute jeopardy, mortal danger, we put out an Amber Alert—we tell the whole community that we are in pursuit of the child and the one who is endangering her, it is a time of utmost urgency and everyone has to get involved, everyone is expected to be aware, to look out for the child, to do what they can to help rescue the child in danger.

This, my friends, is Amber Alert time for our nation's children. Everyone in our communities of faith needs to be on the lookout for the child, needs to help in the pursuit, to bring the child to safety, to see that justice is done. We need to protect children from cuts, invest in their development, and see that the rich and powerful contribute their fair share.

In an Amber Alert, the child's face, name, story, is plastered on telephone poles, on TV, and in the newspaper. In this Amber Alert time for our nation's children, we won't get to see the faces of all 16.4 million children in poverty, or the millions without needed health care, or those without a spot in Head Start or child care, or the countless faces of children who went to bed last night hungry. We won't come to know their names or faces as intimately as we do when an Amber Alert goes out for a single child. Maybe we can meet just a few:

Shoes tell the story of the McKee family's descent into poverty. Those of Skyler, who is 10, and Zachery, who is 12, are falling apart—tops flapping loose above the worn remnants of soles from which they have largely detached. When their big sister, Jordan, 14, plays on her school's volleyball team, she wears the varsity coach's shoes.

Less visible is hunger. The children and their parents, Tonya and Ed McKee, who live in Michigan, sometimes went without food this summer when Ed's unemployment insurance ran out and the family was not yet receiving food stamps. Skyler said he gave the birthday money he got at church to his mom for groceries "and I told her she didn't have to pay me back." Skyler confided that sometimes his stomach has growled. "It's hard not easy like it was before where we had money and could do stuff. Now we don't go anywhere... Sometimes we don't have food and we just don't eat."

Their mother Tonya shared, "Ed and I went hungry some nights so we could feed the kids. A lady here in town has brought us food several times and went shopping for us several times. And our parents helped when they could. Otherwise, we didn't know where the next meal would come from. One of my friends brought over some cereal and milk one day and the boys said, 'Wow! We get cereal!'"

¹ Etz Hayim;; Torah and Commentary, The Rabbinical Assembly, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 2004, p. 1088-1089

² From reports "Samaritan Hero: God 'Put Me Here' to Rescue Girl" Oct 6, 2010 , AOL News, and "Victor Perez Hailed as Hero for Rescue of Abducted 8-Year-Old Calif. Girl" by Naimah Jabali-Nash, CBS News, October 8, 2010.

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I can imagine that you, too, have children in difficult or desperate circumstances—that you hold in your heart. The way that you know them—their names, stories, faces, or even this glimpse of the McKee children—that's more than we'll get of most of our nation's millions of children imperiled in this Amber Alert time for our nation. We'll never come to know all 16.4 million children personally, but, friends, *God* knows each of their names, their faces, their stories. And God calls us to go in pursuit of justice on their behalf.

Godspeed

Back in the Middle Ages, people used the expression “Godspeed;” it was shorthand for “God speed you.” “Godspeed,” they would say, meaning God send you swiftly on your way; it was a wish for success and a prosperous journey, a hope that you would quickly reach your desired destination, get to your goal. “Godspeed.”

We don't have time to move at the world's sluggish pace to rescue our children. We don't have time for filibustering in Congress and for frittering away our own time; we don't have time for business-as-usual foot dragging in at the Capitol or slogging our way through our own routines. We can't keep moving at the world's pace if we are going to protect children as God expects of us. This *isn't* a fast as it goes. As we pursue justice as God intends, we need, my friends, to say to each other as blessing, as reminder, as prodding: “Godspeed.” Would you turn to your neighbor and bid them Godspeed? Turn to your other neighbor and as we prepare to pursue justice for children, bid them Godspeed.

Justice, only justice, shall you pursue. May it be so. Godspeed.

Be Careful What You Cut

by Marian Wright Edelman

Right before the U.S. House of Representatives left for the summer to go home to campaign for your vote, they voted to extend the Bush era tax cuts for the richest Americans millionaires and billionaires. For more than ten years the richest one percent have received almost \$750 billion from these tax cuts. Income and wealth inequality have grown astronomically threatening the very fabric of our democracy. The top one percent in our nation now possesses more net worth than the bottom 90 percent combined. In 2008, the 400 highest-income taxpayers earned as much as the combined tax revenue of 22 state governments with almost 42 million citizens. It's way past time to reset our moral and economic compass, demand a more just tax system where those with the most pay their fair share, and stop the reverse Robin Hood policies that take from the poor and young to give to the rich and powerful.

There should not be one new dime in tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires as long as millions of children in America are poor, hungry, uneducated and without health coverage. A nation that does not stand for its children does not stand for anything and will not stand tall in the future. Like Thomas Jefferson, I tremble for my country when I think that God is just; that his justice cannot sleep forever.

Yet the extension of the tax cuts for the wealthiest American, especially on top of the cuts approved in the Ryan budget, passed by the full House defies the prophets, apostles and tenets of all great faiths as well as common decency and economic common sense. The most recent vote continues to give huge tax breaks to those who need them least while shaving away lifelines of survival from those who need them most. It would cut eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), two of the most effective investments we have that lift children out of poverty, and from the American Opportunity Tax Credit which helps struggling families pay for their children's college. These cuts would push 900,000 children into poverty and at least 6.4 million children into deeper poverty an unconscionable act when 16.4 million children are living in poverty 7.5 million in extreme poverty.

This is a year of stark political, economic and moral choices. Those who caused the deficit should be asked to pay to close it and not be rewarded with more tax breaks which will increase the deficit and shave already inadequate safety investments. Children under five are the poorest age group in America, and one in four infants, toddlers and preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development. If you believe as I do that we have more just and sensible choices like helping babies during their early childhood development years rather than helping billionaires who need not one additional material thing, then speak up and fight back.

Cascading federal, state, county and city budget cuts adding up to hundreds of billions of dollars are being pushed by lawmakers pursuing a toxic ideological agenda of no new revenues, expanded tax cuts for the top one percent of Americans and billions of cuts for poor children and families. Our nation's greatest deficit is not one of money but of values and priorities that leave millions of children without hope or a vision of the future worth striving for in our militarily and materially powerful but spiritually anemic nation.

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That's why the Children's Defense Fund has launched a new campaign to protect children from budget cuts at the national, state and local levels. The "Be Careful What You Cut" campaign lays out the irrefutable economic case that cutting children from the budget now costs all of us more later. It's a simple calculation really. Protect children now or pay later. The campaign is grounded in three provocative ads created by our award winning pro-bono advertising agency partner Fallon Worldwide. The head of a child is on the body of an adult. The images show what happens later if you cut child investments now as the House of Representatives and their allies are bent on doing.

For all of you who care about children, here's what you can do. Arm yourself with the facts about children in your community from the CDF's *State of America's Children® 2012 Handbook* at www.childrensdefense.org/soac, download questions for candidates from the becarefulwhatyoucut.com website, then go to town hall meetings or visit your member of Congress while they are back home campaigning and hold them accountable to ensure they treat babies as fairly as billionaires. If candidates want your vote on Election Day make sure they answer your questions and put children first rather than last on the agenda.

Join the "Be Careful What You Cut" campaign. Help us spread the word by getting pro-bono space in your local newspapers to run the advertisements. Spread the word through your social media networks. Show your support by visiting www.becarefulwhatyoucut.com and changing your profile picture on Facebook and your avatar on Twitter. Donate to the Be Careful What You Cut Fund, so that we can run a second wave of ads in the late fall before the lame duck Congress makes final budget decisions for next year. Together we can and must fight for justice for our children and protect them from draconian tax cuts and budget choices that threaten their survival, education and preparation for the future. If they are not ready for tomorrow, neither is America.

America's Public Schools: Still Unequal and Unjust

by Marian Wright Edelman

Millions of children in America are denied the opportunity to receive a fair and high quality education. In March, the U.S. Department of Education released new information showing that children of color face harsher discipline, have less access to rigorous course offerings, and are more often taught by lower paid and less experienced teachers.

Inequities in funding and educational resources place poor children in low-performing schools with inadequate facilities and often ineffective teachers. Practices such as tracking, grade retention, out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and one-size-fits-all zero tolerance policies continue to contribute to the discouragement, disengagement, and eventual dropout of countless children in America to their detriment and to all of us who need a competitive future workforce. Instead of serving as "the great equalizer," American public education is serving as a portal to the cradle-to-prison pipeline for millions of poor children of color, stunting their lives by school dropouts, arrests, and incarceration. The struggle to make sure a quality education is available to every child—and not just a privilege for a few—is the unfinished and critical business before the nation for it will determine America's future place on the global stage in a rapidly changing competitive world.

The 2009-2010 Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection survey, the most expansive of its kind, covered 85 percent of the nation's students and was the first release of this crucial federal data since 2006 when it was suspended by the Bush Administration. The results from the schools surveyed show public school systems where Black students represented 18 percent of students but 46 percent of those suspended more than once and 39 percent of those expelled. One in five Black boys and one in nine Black girls received an out-of-school suspension compared to nine percent of Hispanic boys and four percent of Hispanic girls and seven percent of White boys and three percent of White girls. Disabled students were more than twice as likely to receive one or more out-of-school suspensions. One in eight students in the study reported having a disability and nearly 18 percent of those students were Black boys. Black and Hispanic students represented more than 70 percent of those involved in school-related arrests or referrals to law enforcement—an astonishing number that requires rigorous examination of the reasons why and action to change unfair racial practices in the application of discipline.

Children of color were also at a disadvantage in access to academic opportunities. Fifty-five percent of the low-minority high schools surveyed offer calculus but only 29 percent of high-minority high schools do. Similarly, 82 percent of low-minority schools offer Algebra II compared to 65 percent of the high-minority schools. Black and Hispanic students represented 44 percent of the students in districts offering gifted and talented programs but only 26 percent of the students in those programs and were overrepresented when it came to repeating a grade. Across all grades, Black students were nearly three times as likely and Hispanic students were twice as likely as White students to be retained. More than half of all fourth graders retained in the reporting districts were Black and although Black students were only 16 percent of middle school students surveyed, they were 42 percent of those who repeated a grade.

Teacher experience and salaries varied widely. In schools with the highest Black and Hispanic enrollment, 15 percent of teachers were in their first or second year in the profession compared with eight percent of teachers in schools with the lowest minority enrollments. And teachers in high-minority elementary schools were paid on average \$2,251 less a year than their colleagues in low-minority schools in the same district.

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The Department of Education, and its Office for Civil Rights, is to be applauded for reinstating this crucial data collection survey and creating an extensive data tracking system. But that is just one crucial step. It's time for all of us to use these numbers as a spring board for robust examination of and discussion about school discipline policies and practices and how they are contributing to school dropouts and the school to prison pipeline, and systematic and sustained action where required.

We all must support strong, consistent and fair discipline policies in our schools and classrooms where learning can occur for all children. At the same time we must raise important questions about how to make those policies work for children of color and all children, rather than against them. Why are so many children being suspended for offenses that used to result in a trip to the principal's office? Do principals and teachers have too much discretion in deciding who should be suspended or expelled? Is there a need for rethinking and greater clarity about the range of nonviolent offenses that can result in suspensions or expulsions? Should children be suspended for nonviolent offenses like truancy and tardiness? I have never understood what good it does to put a child out of school for not coming to school. Are our young inexperienced teachers getting enough training in classroom management? Are teachers getting the cultural competence training needed to understand and address the behavior of all their children? Do policies require that a child's parent or caregiver be notified before a child is excluded from school? Or is the child sent to the streets without the parents' knowledge?

As Education Secretary Arne Duncan correctly said about his department's findings, "The power of the data is not only in the numbers themselves, but in the impact it can have when married with the courage and the will to change. The undeniable truth is that the everyday educational experience for many students of color violates the principle of equity at the heart of the American promise. It is our collective duty to change that." (*Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children's Defense Fund.*)

Ending the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and Mass Incarceration—the New American Jim Crow

By Marian Wright Edelman

A Black boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime and a Latino boy a one in six chance of the same fate. The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world: 7.1 million adult residents—one in 33—are under some form of correctional supervision including prison, jail, probation, or parole. Michelle Alexander writes in her bestselling book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* that there are more adult African Americans under correctional control today than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began. In 2011, our state and federal prison population exceeded that of all European nations combined. Something's very wrong with this picture.

The numbers are frightening—and there's more. This epidemic of mass incarceration has created one of the most dangerous crises for the Black community since slavery and affects everyone in our nation. Black males have an imprisonment rate nearly seven times higher than White males, and Hispanic males have an imprisonment rate over twice that of White males.

Mass incarceration is tearing fathers and mothers from children, and economically and politically disempowering millions by taking away the right to vote and ability to get a job and public benefits in some states after prison terms are served. One in nine Black, one in 28 Hispanic and one in 57 White children have an incarcerated parent.

Mass incarceration has also become a powerful economic force and drain on taxpayers. Annual state spending on corrections tops \$51 billion and states spend on average two and a half times more per prisoner than per public school pupil. I think this is a very dumb investment policy. Federal spending on prisons totaled \$6.6 billion in fiscal year 2012. An added danger driving mass incarceration is the privatization of prisons for profit. The Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison corporation, has proposed to 48 state governors that it will operate their prison systems for 20 years with a guaranteed 90% occupancy rate. A majority of all those incarcerated have committed nonviolent offenses. Some young prisoners I recently visited are in prison for use or possession of marijuana.

The toxic cocktail of poverty, racial disparities in child serving systems, poor education, zero tolerance school discipline policies, racial profiling, unbridled prosecutorial discretion, and racial disparities in arrests and sentencing are funneling millions of young and older poor people of color, especially males, into dead end, powerless and hopeless lives

It's time to reroute our children, youths, and parents from prison to college and productive work. And it's way past time to stop the uniquely American blight of mass incarceration permanently.

NOTE: CDF brought together an extraordinary group of experts and advocates at our national conference this July 2012 in Cincinnati for the “Ending the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and Mass Incarceration—the New American Jim Crow” plenary session. The panel discussed how to halt the mass incarceration epidemic and get our nation back on course and our children into a pipeline to college and productive work. They shared their thoughtful research and experience about how to better ensure public safety through prevention and early intervention and fairer law enforcement policies. They also examined mass incarceration as a continuing method of racial control and discrimination and recommend measures to replace the Cradle to School to Prison Pipeline one to college and productive work.

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The panel led into an interactive town hall discussion with added speakers, including formerly incarcerated participants, to focus on how we can close off the major feeder systems fueling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline™ and mass incarceration and create new hope and opportunity for children in their place.

DVDs of the session are available for purchase through the Online Store on our website. It is an extraordinary chance to hear from leading experts, identify how we've reached this point, and determine how together we must build a focused, effective movement to say *no more*.

The moderator and speakers on the panel are listed below:

Moderator:

- **Charles Ogletree**, Jesse Climenko Professor at Harvard Law School; Founder and Executive Director, Harvard's Charles Hamilton Houston Institute for Race and Justice

Speakers:

- **Michelle Alexander**, Legal scholar and author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*
- **The Hon. Patricia Martin**, Presiding Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois Child Protection Division; President, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- **The Hon. Michael A. Nutter**, Mayor of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors
- **Bryan Stevenson**, Executive Director, Equal Justice Initiative, Montgomery, AL
- **The Rev. Janet Wolf**, National Program Coordinator and Director of Nonviolent Organizing to End the Cradle to Prison Pipeline, CDF Haley Farm
- **Ndume Olatushani**, formerly incarcerated prisoner for almost 28 years; 19 years on death row
- **Preston Shipp**, former prosecutor in Nashville, Tenn. and currently Disciplinary Counsel at the Board of Professional Responsibility of the Supreme Court of Tenn.

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P*ursuing Justice for Children and the Poor with Urgency and Persistence* is the theme of the 2012 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend. The theme and focus will build on last year's Children's Sabbath, "*Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue: Answering God's Call to Protect Children.*" The pursuit of justice is not a dash but a long-distance run, and the theme is still timely and needs us to pursue it with urgency and persistence. The 2011 Children's Sabbath focused on the closing the achievement gap in education that currently has children in poverty and children of color falling further and further behind, and ensuring that education becomes the engine of equality, not inequality. Level of educational achievement is the best predictor of future income; ensuring that every child gets a high quality education is the best poverty-prevention program we have. The 2012 Children's Sabbath will continue that focus on education and closing the achievement gap, with a particular focus this year on ending the criminalization of children. As these words were written, a morning news story reported on a six-year-old child who was suspended from school for "sexual harrasment." Surely we as adults have more appropriate and effective ways of teaching children and managing behavior that put all children on the path to success and keep them out of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline.

You make a difference in the lives of children and in the life of your place of worship—by connecting the two, you can help make incredible, important things happen that will improve the lives of children in your place of worship, community, and across our nation and at the same time bring new inspiration and excitement to your worshipping community.

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

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

What is the Children's Sabbath?

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

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

A Children's Sabbath weekend typically has four elements:

- 1) **the service of worship or prayers**, during which the divine mandate to nurture and protect children calls us to respond to the needs of children today;
- 2) **educational programs**, during which all ages learn more about the needs of children today and the socialpolitical structures that keep children in need, explore the sacred texts, teaching, and traditions that lead us to serve and seek justice for children, and develop specific, active responses to help children;
- 3) **activities** that immediately engage participants in compassionate service to help children and in action to seek justice (such as writing letters to elected officials); and
- 4) **follow-up actions** that use the inspiration, information, and motivation of the Children's Sabbath weekend to lead individual members and the congregation as a whole into new, effective efforts to improve the lives of children in the congregation, community, and nation throughout the year.

The Children's Sabbath is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, guided by a multi-faith advisory committee, and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations. The Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities.

CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investment before they get sick or into trouble, drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown. CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundations and corporate grants and individual donations.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And while the suggested date is the third weekend of October, if that date doesn't work for your congregation's calendar, pick a different date that does. What is most important is finding a time to focus on the needs of children and our responsibility to nurture and protect them.

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

Celebrate and strengthen existing efforts for children!

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

Discover new opportunities to help children!

The Children's Sabbath provides an opportunity for each place of worship to consider in what new ways they might work—as a body or as individuals—to help children not only in the congregation, but in the community and across the nation. Religious leaders, committees, and members may discover additional problems confronting children—like poverty, lack of health care, or violence—and come up with new ways to respond to them. This might include starting a new program sponsored by the congregation. Or it

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might mean exploring and promoting opportunities for individual members to commit their time, services, or resources. Or it might mean forging a new partnership with another congregation or community organization to help children. It could mean establishing a new child advocacy committee to guide the congregation's work for justice for children.

Pray, study, and reflect

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

Take action

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

Commit to new, long-term efforts

The Children's Sabbath is intended to inspire new long-term efforts to help children and families. However wonderful the weekend celebrations may be, what matters most is what individuals and congregations do in the following weeks and months and years to help children. Some congregations will start new service or advocacy efforts (on their own or in partnership with other congregations or community organizations), such as an after-school tutoring program or housing a Head Start program or an outreach and enrollment campaign to help uninsured children get health care. Other congregations will not start a new service program or advocacy effort, but will work to encourage individual members to find new ways to volunteer time or resources to help children and change the systems that keep children in need.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Children's Sabbath

Is the Children's Sabbath the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, or Children's Service?

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

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

Many congregations have Youth Days when they turn the service over to the young people to plan and lead. Like a Youth Day, on the Children's Sabbath children and youths often participate in the planning and leadership of the day. But on the Children's Sabbath, the adults aren't only the "audience," because the

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Children's Sabbath is an intergenerational event drawing on the leadership and involvement of *all* ages to convey its message that each of us, no matter our age, has a role to play in nurturing and protecting children and working for justice.

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

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

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

The next planning steps can be found in the "Planning Your Children's Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths" section of this manual. One of the first decisions you and those who join you in the planning will need to make is whether to plan a Children's Sabbath just for your congregation or to join with congregations of other faiths or denominations to plan an interfaith or ecumenical Children's Sabbath in your community. Either option is a valuable way to participate. You should determine what is right for your congregation this year.

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

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

Choose an alternate date! While it's great to celebrate on the same weekend as thousands of other places of worship, what's most important is to participate in the movement at a time that works for your place of worship.

Which is better to do, a Children's Sabbath in my own place of worship or a multi-faith, community-wide service?

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

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

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

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Should we bother participating in the Children's Sabbath celebration if my congregation already cares about children?

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

There is an extraordinary power in participating in the Children's Sabbath, knowing that all across the country, in congregations of many different faiths, we are united in our concern for children and in our commitment to respond.

How Places of Worship Celebrated the Children's Sabbath Last Year

Like our children, Children's Sabbath celebrations are unique, and no two are alike. They can be big or small, young or more experienced. Children's Sabbath celebrations reflect the diversity and unique gifts, resources, and concerns of the congregations that plan them. Some are celebrating their first-ever Children's Sabbath, some are building on a tradition of many years, and some are reviving their congregation's Children's Sabbath participation after several missed years.

As you'll see in the examples below and those scattered throughout the Children's Sabbath resources, the emphasis and the extent of the celebrations vary—some congregations plan a full weekend of events, while others focus on just one element, whether worship or education or service.

Together, they comprise a marvelous witness and work that bring our nation closer to the justice and compassion God intends for our life together.

The Children's Agenda re-introduced the Children's Sabbath to the Rochester, NY community in 2011, with 19 participating faith communities from a variety of faith traditions - Jewish, Presbyterian, Hindu, Episcopal, and Catholic. The initiative was very successful, particularly given the limited staff time available to support it. As a result of the advocacy component, a total of 251 letters were sent to the Monroe County Executive, urging her to preserve stable funding for the Nurse Family Partnership home visiting program for first-time, low-income mothers and their infants up to age 2. In the context of a worsening fiscal situation and cuts to other programs, 2012 County funding was indeed kept at a steady level. In addition to this victory, The Children's Agenda added more than 160 individuals to its online Advocacy Network and built the base for an ongoing advocacy partnership for kids with the faith community. As a result, 2012 sponsors of the Children's Sabbath include: ***Faith in Action Network/GRCC; Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester; Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester; Presbytery of the Genesee Valley; First Unitarian Church; The American Baptist Churches of the Rochester-Genesee Region; Urban Presbyterians Together; Interfaith Forum; The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester; Genesee Finger Lakes Conference of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; First Universalist Church of Rochester; Episcopal Diocese of Rochester; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; United Church of Christ; Temple Sinai; Brennan Goldman Institute for Jewish-Catholic Understanding and Dialogue; The Rochester Commission on Christian Jewish Relations; Temple B'rith Kodesh; NEAD CDF Freedom Schools; Temple Beth***

David; Pentecostal Power of Deliverance Church; Hindu Temple of Rochester; The M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence; Temple Beth-El; The Genesee Valley District of the United Methodist Church

First Baptist Church of Greenville South Carolina participated in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths for the 15th time in 2011, combining their Children's Sabbath celebration with Family Dedication. Children's choirs sang, the sermon was titled "A Little Child Shall Lead Us," and the congregation followed worship with a church picnic. Throughout the month of October, the congregation was invited to contribute to The Frazee Dream Center which offers "after-school care and love" for children ages 6-13 in downtown Greenville. Congregation members were invited to donate no-sugar apple juice boxes, children's athletic socks, Play-Doh®, staplers/staples, and other items. The congregation also contributes nutritious food to the Mission Backpack program and participates in Operation Christmas Child to extend their care for children in the community throughout the year.

Memorial United Methodist Church in Thomasville, N.C., collected items for Thomasville Primary School as part of their 2011 Children's Sabbath. They also planned worship using resources from the Children's Sabbath including Prayers of the People and an Act of Commitment.

Durham County, N.C., celebrated a community-wide, interfaith Children's Sabbath in 2011. Rev. Laura J. S. Benson, Executive Director of Durham's Partnership for Children, delivered the main message with a team of diverse faith representatives presenting other parts of the service. The service included a performance by KidZnotes, a call to action and affirmation of commitment, as they shared facts about Durham's children in poverty. Durham's Children's Sabbath 2011 was co-sponsored by **Durham's Partnership for Children, End Poverty Durham, and Durham Congregations in Action**. Also in Durham, *The Herald-Sun* newspaper noted, "The plight of Durham children will be discussed at **First Presbyterian Church** on Sunday as part of Children's Sabbath observances. Ted Whiteside of Durham's Partnership for Children will lead a discussion on "The State of Durham's Children"....[including] issues related to child abuse and neglect, and poverty and health in Durham, with emphasis on birth to five years. The public is invited." **Trinity United Methodist Church** and other congregations in Durham also celebrated the Children's Sabbath during their customary worship time.

Bon Air United Methodist Church, Richmond, Va., joined the celebration of the National Observance of Children's Sabbath on October 2, 2011. The speaker for the service was the Director of Communities in Schools for Chesterfield County. Families from Bon View School for Early Childhood Education, an NAC accredited ministry of the church, were especially invited to the service.

Temple De Hirsch Sinai in Bellevue, Washington, used the prayers and worship resources from the Children's Sabbath celebration during their Shabbat services to raise awareness of America's children living in poverty.

First Presbyterian Church of Jackson, Tenn., celebrated the 2011 Children's Sabbath with a worship service and engaged leadership of children and youths. They promoted their Children's Sabbath plans in the newsletter, writing "On October 16, First Presbyterian Church, along with other churches across the nation, will celebrate the *National Children's Sabbath*. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. More than ever, children need the

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voice of the faith community to be strong, and for the actions of congregations on behalf of vulnerable children to be a vital witness. In our congregation, our worship that day will include leadership by some of our children, and reminders of our call to care for the children of the world. Make plans to be here!" During the worship service, the children joined the pastor in providing the sermon, "Children of God," sang, and the children "adopted" a service project. The congregation extends its care for children into the community and throughout the year with Snack Back Packs for local school children who at risk of hunger over the weekend, a Parenting Class, "Threads of Love" handmade burial garments donated to a hospital for babies that die in infancy; and participating in "Room in the Inn," a rotating shelter program for homeless families and individuals, and more. They also encourage kid-friendly donations to the food pantry including macaroni and cheese, peanut butter, and jelly.

A youth delivered the sermon at **St. James Episcopal Church's 2011 Children's Sabbath** in Gates Ferry, CT. They then posted the young person's sermon on YouTube to spread the message further.

The West Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church encourages congregations celebrating Children's Sabbath to make it an "Undie Sunday" by collecting new underwear to be distributed by the clothing closets of various mission projects. **Wesley United Methodist Church in Morgantown, W.V.**, was just one of the many who responded. In addition to collecting new underwear, they made the Morgantown Ronald McDonald House the focus of their Children's Sabbath caring response. They set a goal of filling the sanctuary with balloons on the Children's Sabbath, with each balloon signifying a donation to the Ronald McDonald House in honor or memory of someone.

First Central United Church of Christ in Omaha, Neb., joined in the 2011 Children's Sabbath celebration and helped spread the word about their participation and the justice concerns of the service through their blog.

Franklin Circle Christian Church in Cleveland, Oh., celebrated the Children's Sabbath for the first time in 2011 with a Family Fun Night in the park on Oct. 15 a special worship service on Oct. 16. They also participated in the Light a Candle for Children: 40 Day Vigil leading up to the Children's Sabbath, an initiative of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)

For the Children's Sabbath at **First United Methodist Church of Oak Ridge, Tenn.**, the children drew covers for the bulletin, helped lead worship, 3rd graders received Bibles, and sang. Two weeks before the Children's Sabbath they held a Pizza and Planning Party for the children to provide a fun and festive opportunity for children to learn about the roles they could play in the day and prepare for leadership.

The Jackson, Mississippi **Congregations for Children** (CFC), an ecumenical children's advocacy program sponsored by the United Methodist Conference and Episcopal Diocese of Mississippi and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Jackson, encourages congregations throughout the region to participate in the Children's Sabbath each year.

Dallas United Methodist Church in Dallas, Tex., celebrated the 2011 Children's Sabbath to "celebrate the children in our midst and renew our commitment to nurture and protect all children." The children's choir sang and there was a special skit involving the children. Their on-going efforts for children included providing a "Foster Parents Night Out" to give foster parents a break while the children were "happily entertained with Wii games, a Halloween cookie decorating contest," and more.

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A letter from the pastor of **Haddonfield United Methodist Church** in the church newsletter reminded congregation members of the sobering statistics about the state of children in America and in our world, and then invited them, "On **Children's Sabbath**, make a renewed commitment to pray, give time and talent, and financial resources to ministries that better the lives of children. When we think about the good we can do on behalf of children, of the lives we can influence God-ward – well, the lines to help in Sunday School, Nursery School, Youth Fellowship, and Youth Choirs ought to be a mile long. The following are a few reminders of opportunities for worship, nurture, service and witness....

1. "How Are The Children?" – Children's Sabbath Sermon Consider reading and reflecting on Mark 10:13-16 where we read: "Then Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them by placing his hands on them." How are we, followers of Christ, blessing children? How do we give witness to life as followers of Christ to the children in our lives and children whose future may well be diminished by poverty, violence, lack of family, and few opportunities to be encouraged in education? How are the children? Not just ours, but the children of our 'village'. Jesus loves the little children of the

world...Do we? **2. Benefit Concert for the Neighborhood Center – Saturday, Oct. 22nd** Gospel singer and comedienne, Sue Duffield, will offer a performance at HUMC on Saturday the 22nd at 8:00 p.m. for the benefit of the Neighborhood Center. **3. Family Skating Party – Sunday, Oct. 23rd**

Did you notice the word 'family'? That means everyone in the church family!! This is for all ages." In addition, the pastor invited members to an education session on supporting families living with mental illness and also joining in the hospitality ministry to greet newcomers.

What will your place of worship plan? Explore the other downloadable sections of the Children's Sabbath resource manual, get inspired, bring your own imagination and passion and commitment to the planning process, and be sure to send us a description of your own unique and important participation in the 2012 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement. We look forward to highlighting what you do! Send information about your Children's Sabbath to CDF, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001, or email a description to SDaleyHarris@childrensdefense.org.