

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 never have connected before. It is a chance to highlight our shared concern—across religious traditions—for justice and protecting and nurturing children. It is a

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

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 the Children’s Sabbath 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 suggested outline** for your multi-faith community-wide Children’s Sabbath service;
- **A sample multi-faith Children’s Sabbath service** that can be used “as is” or adapted;
- **Additional resources** for your multi-faith community-wide Children’s Sabbath service 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.

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 engage congregation members.

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

I: Gathering of the Community

The service begins with a “Gathering of the Community” that creates a sense of welcome and inclusion and affirms a sense of shared purpose. These earliest moments in the service should be planned with care to reassure people that this service is a “safe” space in which their own faith will not be denigrated and ease any anxieties that people may bring to a multi-faith experience.

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

- **Prelude:** Choral or instrumental music that either creates an atmosphere for contemplation and reflection or that builds excitement and generates enthusiasm. One or more choirs could each offer a selection, for instance, or an organist or pianist could play.
- **Opening Procession of Religious Leaders and Children:** This can provide a visual appreciation for the range of religious traditions represented and add a sense of importance and broad support for the event. You may want to include symbolic elements to the procession or other visual enhancements like banners, liturgical dancers, drummers, candle lighting, or another creative element.
- **Welcome:** The religious leader in whose place of worship the multi-faith service is being held may offer a very brief welcome. If the service is not being held in a place of worship, one of the key leaders involved in planning the Children's Sabbath may give a brief welcome, or the welcome may be omitted and the service may move directly from the Opening Procession to the Gathering Words.
- **Gathering Words:** Beginning with an opening prayer, call to worship, or another form of “Gathering Words” can make people from many different communities feel united in why they are there and reassured that all are welcome. See the sample resources below for Gathering Words that can be used, adapted, or simply serve as an inspiration for your own creation.
- **Congregational Hymn or Choral Anthem:** A musical selection at this point may keep the service lively. (Remember, if *everyone* is asked to sing or say it, the words should include *everyone*. For instance, if the *congregation* will be singing, remember to select a song with inclusive words that people from many different faiths will feel comfortable singing—ensure that it does not use language specific to just one tradition, such as “Jesus Christ.” If a *choir* is presenting an anthem to which the congregation will listen, singing music specific to that choir's tradition, remember to balance the choirs represented and to ensure that no anthem, while specific to a tradition, puts down another faith tradition.)

II: Time of Lament

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

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

- **Prayer**
- **Litany**
- **Responsive reading**
- **Creative or symbolic action**
- **Visual experience** that underscores the problems to which we have come to respond (e.g., PowerPoint or slide presentation or a brief video, or 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 “Beating Swords Into Plowshares: Ending the Violence of Guns and Child Poverty”**: 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 end violence and poverty heard in our faith traditions.

IV: Commitment to Action

After the gathering, lament, and call to service, people should be ready to respond to what they've heard and experienced with a commitment to action on children's behalf. This enables them to channel the experience into a positive, forward-looking, hopeful response that puts their faith into action.

The commitment to action section of the service might include one or more of the following:

- **A Charge to the Congregation**: a brief, inspirational charge from a powerful speaker that encourages those present to respond to the call to service just heard with a commitment to action manifesting the justice and peace God intends. Five minutes may be an appropriate length to give the speaker for her/his charge.
- **Prayer of Commitment**
- **Act of Commitment**: a responsive reading that invites the congregation to respond aloud and declare their intention to act on behalf of children.

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

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

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.

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

Sample Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

Prelude

(The prelude could feature music from a variety of groups representing different faith and music traditions.)

Opening Procession

(Religious leaders from all of the traditions represented could process in, perhaps each with a child, and be seated at the front facing those gathered—or in a designated section in the front rows—to provide a visual reminder of the broad and united religious representation. Liturgical dancers, bearing candles, or carrying diverse, representative banners would also add visual interest.)

Welcome

(The chair of the Children's Sabbath planning committee or the leader in whose place of worship the multi-faith service is taking place might offer very brief—a minute or less—words of welcome that affirm the purpose of the gathering, reassure all from every faith tradition that they are welcome, and generally convey that all religions will be respected.)

Gathering Words

(The Gathering Words could be led by one or more leaders—adults and/or children.)

Leader: We come with hopes—

People: **Hopes for our children and for ourselves.**

Leader: We come with hurts—

People: **Our own and the wounds of so many children and families.**

Leader: We come with faith—

People: **We are loved as children by the Holy.**

Leader: We come with doubts—

People: **We wonder how such suffering can exist in our world.**

Leader: We come for challenge—

People: **We seek renewed vision and bold commitment to bring justice to all children.**

Leader: We come to pray—

People: **To pray for children wounded by the violence of guns and poverty, and to pray for ourselves, for the strength to respond.**

Leader: We come to praise—

People: **To praise the Holy for the gift of children.**

Leader: Come, let us celebrate the Children's Sabbath.

Song: Lead Us From Death to Life

The text for the refrain of this hymn is known as the "World Peace Prayer." It is a paraphrase of a verse from the Upanishads, the most ancient scriptures of Hinduism. Since its introduction at a service in Westminster Abbey on Hiroshima Day 1981 the prayer has been translated into numerous languages and circulated around the world.

Refrain

Lead us from death to life, from false-hood to truth, from de -
 spair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to
 love, from war to peace; let peace fill our hearts, let peace fill our
 world, let peace fill our u - ni - verse. Still all the an - gry cries,
 So man - y lone - ly hearts,
 Let jus - tice ev - er roll,
 still all the an - gry guns, still now your peo - ple die, earth's sons and
 so man - y bro - ken lives, long - ing for love to break in - to their
 let mer - cy fill the earth, let us be - gin to grow in - to your
 daugh ters. Let jus - tice roll, let mer - cy pour
 an - guish. Come, teach us love, come, teach us
 peo - ple. We can be love, we can bring
 down, come and teach us your way of com - pas - sion. to Refrain
 peace, come and teach us your way of com - pas - sion.
 peace, we can still be your way of com - pas - sion.

For congregational reprint permission, including overhead projection, contact OneLicense.net, 1-800-663-1501.

World Peace Prayer" Refrain by Satish Kumar, verses and music by Marty Haugen. Copyright © 1985 by GIA Publications, Inc. 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638, www.giamusic.com 800.442.1358. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Time of Lament and Renewed Vision

Leader 1: The Jewish prophet Habakkuk lamented, *“O Lord, how long shall I cry for help and you will not listen, or cry to you ‘Violence!’ and you will not save?”*

Leader 2: We too despair at the violence around us. Every 30 minutes, a child or teen dies or is injured by guns. Our children are wounded by poverty, too. In our rich nation today, more than 16 million children are living in poverty, crying silently or aloud for help.

Take a moment now to offer in the silence of your hearts the children for whom you pray.

[Time for silent prayer and reflection.]

Leader 1: The prophet Habakkuk asked God, *“Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble?”*

Leader 2: We too are heartsick at the violence we witness and by our temptation to look away and ignore it.

In silence, let us offer prayers for ourselves—comfort for a troubled heart and courage to face the challenges our children suffer.

[Time for silent prayer and reflection.]

Leader 1: Habbakuk concluded, *“Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.”*

Leader 2: We too are frustrated by the failures of our laws to protect children and by the injustice which continues to harm them.

In silence, let us pray for those leaders who have the capacity to ensure greater justice and protection for our children to safeguard them from the violence of guns and poverty.

[Time for silent prayer and reflection.]

Leader 1: *“Then the Lord answered...and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”* (Habakkuk 2:1b-4)

Leader 2: We too have a vision. Our religious traditions call us not to harm others and point us to the way of nonviolence and the power of love.

(The following may be read by various readers/leaders of the traditions represented or by one reader:)

Hinduism teaches, “Do not hurt others, do no one injury by thought or deed, utter no word to pain thy fellow creatures,” (Manu 2:161) and “When one injures another, the injured turns around and injures the injurer. Similarly, when one cherishes another, the other cherishes the cherisher. One should frame one’s rule of conduct according to this.” (Maha, Anusasana Parva [Book 13] CXIII)

Mahatma Gandhi said, “If we are to teach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won’t have to struggle; we won’t have to pass fruitless, idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which, consciously or unconsciously, the whole world is hungering.”

Buddhism teaches, “Hurt none by word or deed, be consistent in well-doing.” (Dham. 185), and “Conquer your foe by force, and you increase his anger. Conquer by love and you will reap no after sorrow.” (Fo-Sho-Hing-Tsan-King)

Jainism teaches, "One should do no harm to any living being, neither by thoughts nor words nor acts." (Sutrakritang 1.11.12).

In **American Indian tradition**, the Lakota teach, "Force, no matter how concealed, begets resistance."

From the **Baha'i faith** we learn, "When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love." (Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, October 21, 1911.)

Sikh scriptures teach, "Fight with no weapon but the word of God; use no means but pure faith."

Islamic hadith teaches, "There should be neither harm nor reciprocating of harm," and "Repay evil with good and lo, he between whom you and there was enmity will become your warm friend." (Qur'an 41:38)

Christian tradition teaches, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God," and "But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you." (Luke 6:27-30)

In **Jewish tradition**, the Talmud teaches "He who takes one life it is as though he has destroyed the universe and he who saves one life it is as though he has saved the universe" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5), and the theme text for the 2013 Children's Sabbath: "[God] shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:1-5)

All: This is our vision: a time of love and justice, when the violence of weapons and poverty is replaced by peace and plenty. Let us work to make it so.

Reflection

(About 5 minutes may be appropriate for a leader to reflect on the call, heard across religious traditions, to work for peace and an end to poverty, especially as they harm children.)

Song or Anthem

Charge to the Congregation

(About 5 minutes may be appropriate for a leader to convey a sense of urgency and moral responsibility for those present to act to end the violence of guns and poverty.)

Act of Commitment

(Optimally, but not necessarily, have a young person or leader from those traditions read the lines from their tradition.)

Leader:

Hear these words from Jewish tradition: "A voice is heard in Ramah, wailing and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children who are gone." Will you be a voice for children who are being lost to violence and poverty? Will you live so God can use you to help all children know safety and security in their homes and community? Will you?

People: Yes!

Leader:

Hear these words from Buddhist tradition: *“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.”* Will you love all children and show your love by demanding that all children have what they need to survive and thrive? Will you?

People: Yes!

Leader:

Hear these words from Christian tradition: *“Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”* Will you serve and call others to service so that our nation, communities, and families put children first and assure that every child is cared for? Will you?

People: Yes!

Leader:

Hear these words from Baha'i tradition: *“O God! Rear this little babe in the bosom of Thy love, and give it milk from the breast of Thy Providence. Cultivate this fresh plant in the rose garden of Thy love and aid it to grow through the showers of Thy bounty.”* Will you work so that every child has the family, health, school, and community supports to grow and thrive, blossoming as God intends? Will you?

People: Yes!

Leader:

Hear these words from Islamic tradition: *“And why should you not strive in the cause of God and of those who are ill-treated and oppressed?—men, women, and children, whose cry is ‘Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from The one who will protect, and raise from Thee one who will help.’”* Will you speak out to protect those who are ill-treated and oppressed, especially children beaten down by injustice? Will you?

People: Yes!

Song of Commitment: I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

I'm gonna live so God can use me, anywhere, Lord, any time.

I'm gonna live so God can use me, anywhere, Lord, any time.

I'm gonna love so God can use me...I'm gonna serve so God can use me...

I'm gonna work so God can use me...

I'm gonna speak so God can use me...

Sending and Blessing

Shalom. Salaam. Peace.

May the Eternal source of love who called us into being
go with you now to bring love and justice and peace to every child.

Shalom. Salaam. Peace.

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

You may wish to create your own multi-faith Children's Sabbath service, combining prayers, readings, music and other resources from faith leaders in your community. You may choose to include some of the following resources in your multi-faith Children's Sabbath service. It is not expected or recommended to use all of them in a single service.

Gathering Words

Leader: As-salam alaykum (مكّيٰل ع مآلسل) is a traditional Arabic greeting, translated "peace be upon you." The standard response to the greeting is Wa alaykumu a-salam.

As we begin our time together, seeking to end the violence of guns and child poverty, I invite you to greet each other with these words of peace: As-salam alaykum

All: **Wa alaykum a-salam.**

Gathering Words

All: **How good it is when brothers and sisters live in unity.**

Jewish Leader: Great is peace, since all blessings are in it.

Great is peace, since even in a time of war one should begin with peace.
Great is peace, since the Holy One is called Peace." (Leviticus Rabbah 9:9)

Buddhist Leader: "Hurt none by word or deed; be consistent in well-doing." (Dham. 185)

Christian Leader: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:9)

Hindu Leader: "Do not hurt others, do no one injury by thought or deed, utter no word to pain thy fellow creatures." (Manu 2:161)

Muslim Leader: "Repay evil with good and lo, he between whom you and there was enmity will become your warm friend." (Qur'an 41:38)

Bahai Leader: "When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a strong thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love."
(Ab-du'l-Baha)

All: **We come from many places and many traditions
but with one hope and purpose:
to end the violence of guns and child poverty.
Welcome to this celebration of the Children's Sabbath!**

Someone's Crying: A Prayer of Lament with Sung Response

(The sung response can be led by a confident singer without accompaniment, or with instrumental support such as piano or guitar.)

In introducing this prayer, the leader could note that "kum ba yah" means "come by here.")

Leader: A child or teen dies from a gun every 3 hours and 15 minutes.

All: **Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. O God, kum ba yah.**

Leader: A child or teen is injured by a gun every 34 minutes.

All: **Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. O God, kum ba yah.**

Leader: A child is born into poverty every 32 seconds.

All: **Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. O God, kum ba yah.**

Leader: One out of five children lives in poverty every minute of the day...

All: **Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. Someone's crying, God, kum ba yah. O God, kum ba yah.**

Leader: It doesn't have to be this way; we can do better as a nation, as communities of faith, as families and as individuals. With God's help, may we act with courage and commitment.

All: **We are praying, God, come by here. We are praying God, come by here. We are praying, God, come by here. O God, come by here.**

Call to Service: Let's Begin with the Children

(This Call to Service could be led different ways. One leader—adult, youth, or child—could read the entire Call to Service, or different leaders (of any age) could each read one line, or all of those assembled could be invited to join aloud in the repeated phrase, "Let's begin with the children..." in which case that phrase should be printed in bold type throughout, and the leader might say before beginning that all are invited to join in the refrain.

After the Call to Service, there could be one more leader line: "Let's begin with the children. Hear now the voices of children and young people as they share with us how we can work together to end the violence of guns and child poverty." Ahead of time, invite children and youths to prepare brief responses that would be read aloud by them at that time. Having them prepare written responses in advance will both help them to feel prepared and will give organizers an opportunity to manage the length of this portion of the service if needed.)

Mahatma Gandhi said, "If we are to teach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with children; and if they will grow up in their natural innocence, we won't have to struggle; we won't have to pass fruitless, idle resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which, consciously or unconsciously, the whole world is hungering."

Let's begin with the children and ensure that every child has a healthy start with the health and mental health care they need to grow strong and thrive.

Let's begin with the children and ensure that every child has a head start with the education they need to be prepared for successful futures.

Let's begin with the children and ensure that every child has a fair start with the family income to meet their needs and stay out of poverty.

Let's begin with the children and ensure that every child has a safe start and no child is injured or killed by guns or other violence.

Let's begin with the children and ensure that every child has a moral start and knows that they are precious and beloved.

Let's begin with the children and act so that we Leave No Child Behind® and all children know the peace and love and justice for which they hunger.

Commitment to Action

Leader: Seven children and teens are killed by guns every day. As a nation, as communities of faith, and as individuals we can do better to give our children a safe start.

All: **We can do better and we will!**

Leader: Forty-three children and teens are injured by guns every day. We can do better to give our children a safe and healthy start.

All: **We can do better and we will!**

Leader: Countless children bear the invisible wounds of trauma from witnessing violence in their homes, schools, and communities. We can do better to give our children a safe and healthy start.

All: **We can do better and we will!**

Leader: Most poor families have a parent who works and yet without a living wage the family remains in poverty. We can do better to give families a fair start.

All: **We can do better and we will!**

Leader: More than 16 million children live in poverty every day. We can do better to give our children a fair start.

All: **We can do better and we will!**

Leader: Our elected officials hear more from the lobbyists of the powerful than from those of us who stand with and for children and families. We can do better to make our voices heard so that we leave no child behind and assure every child the start they deserve.

All: **We can do better and we will!**

Sending Forth

May we go forth
to live, serve, and speak faithfully
to make real God's vision
of love, justice, and peace for all children.

Sending

Send us, Holy One, to replace weapons with tools to earn a living.
Send us, Holy One, to wage peace and not war.
Send us, Holy One, to make our world safe for children, so no one will make them afraid.
Send us, Holy One, to hear and heed your voice and your vision for our children.

Sending

Shalom. Salaam. Peace.
The Eternal source of love who called us into being
sends us now to bring love and justice and peace to every child.
Shalom. Salaam. Peace.

Closing Song: Shalom Chaverim

Shalom, chaverim,
Shalom, chaverim,
Shalom, shalom;
L'hitra'ot,
L'hitra'ot,
Shalom, shalom.

Shalom, O my friends,
Shalom, O my friends,
Shalom, shalom;
Till we meet again,
Till we meet again,
Shalom, shalom.