

Promoting Your Children's Sabbath: Ideas for All Faiths



Your Children's Sabbath will have the greatest impact if it is effectively promoted and publicized both within your place of worship and to the broader public. This chapter has suggestions and resources for:

- Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship
- Reaching Out to the Community and Media
- Reproducible Resources: bulletin and newsletter inserts

Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship

- ❑ **Bulletin Inserts:** Place the first bulletin insert in this section announcing the Children's Sabbath in your congregation's bulletin or newsletter approximately one month before the date. (The second bulletin insert is intended to be distributed on the Children's Sabbath.)
- ❑ **Newsletter:** Include other information in your congregation's newsletter. (Adapt the sample congregational newsletter article in this section or write your own.)
- ❑ **Posters:** Make posters announcing the Children's Sabbath and display them in the congregation's building. Involve the congregation's youths and children in making these posters.
- ❑ **Announcements:** Request time to make an announcement during the worship service one or two weeks before the observance.
- ❑ **Emails:** If your place of worship has an email list of members, get permission to send an email to the members reminding them of the upcoming Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Yard Sign:** Make a yard sign to place on the grounds in front of your place of worship, announcing the Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Letters:** Send the bulletin insert or a letter about the Children's Sabbath home with the children who participate in your place of worship's educational programs. After securing any needed permission to send a letter to the mailing list for your place of worship, write a letter describing the Children's Sabbath and encouraging members to join in the celebration on the designated weekend.
- ❑ **Website:** If your congregation has a website, put an announcement on the website.
- ❑ **Social Media:** Use various forms of social media such as Facebook pages, blogs, Twitter accounts and other forms of social media to spread the word about your Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Keep it up!** Don't forget to continue to focus attention on the Children's Sabbath and the needs and opportunities for response after the weekend itself. Use these same media channels to report on the congregation's response, announce the total items and money collected, share stories of children and families who were helped, and encourage continued action.

Sample Article for Congregation's Newsletter:

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund, wrote earlier this year, "Minnesota fourth-grader Devin Aryal loved soccer, Spiderman, school, and the color green. On February 11th a middle-aged man began shooting passing cars at random in St. Paul, killing nine-year-old Devin. Upon arresting the shooter, police found the man armed with bullets, loaded clips and two large knives. A judge ordered him to undergo a mental health evaluation; it was unclear how he obtained the 9-mm handgun used in the shooting. Nine-year-old Shayla Shonneker loved playing outside with friends and riding her bike. Unbeknownst to her, in April an Oregon City military reserve member was practicing holstering and unholstering a loaded gun when it accidentally discharged 50 yards away. The bullet shot through the wall of the house, striking Shayla in the face and killing her. In May a five-year-old Kentucky boy was playing with *his* rifle when he accidentally shot and killed his two-year-old little sister, Caroline Sparks, with a single shot to the chest. The five-year-old little boy had gotten the weapon, a .22 caliber Crickett single shot rifle marketed to children, for his birthday. *We can do better.*"

Mrs. Edelman continued, "Since 20 six- and seven-year-olds were mowed down with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle in December [in the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre], more than 1,300 children and teens have likely been killed. The number of children and teens killed by guns in one year in America would fill 134 classrooms of 20 students each. It's time for every parent, grandparent, faith and community leader to stand up to a do nothing Congress and say, "*Enough – do something now!*" The overwhelming majority of Americans agree we can and must do better. Polls show the vast majority of Americans, gun owners and non-gun owners, Republicans and Democrats support universal background checks as a first step to making America safer for our children and for all of us."

On [date], [name of your congregation] will join with thousands of other congregations across the nation in the annual multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend sponsored by the nonprofit, nonpartisan Children's Defense Fund and supported by [add the name of your denomination or religious tradition, if they have formally endorsed], Catholic Charities U.S.A., the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in the U.S., the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, the Union for Reform Judaism, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and more than 200 other religious organizations and denominations.

The 2013 Children's Sabbath, "Beating Swords into Plowshares: Ending the Violence of Guns and Child Poverty," will focus on ending the gun violence that takes a child or teen's life every 3 hours and 15 minutes and on ending the poverty that harms more than 16 million children in our rich nation

At [name of congregation], we will join in this united voice for children by [describe the events, giving dates and times]. This is [name of congregation]'s [number—e.g., first or tenth] time celebrating the Children's Sabbath. Leading the observance of Children's Sabbath are [names of several of those who will be involved]. All are invited. This will be a good time to invite other families or children to visit our congregation. For more information or to find out how you can help, contact [name and phone number of contact person in the congregation].

Reaching Out to the Community and Media

- ❑ **Introduce the Children's Sabbath to clergy and interfaith associations**, civic groups, and other organizations that may be interested in supporting, attending, or publicizing your Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Mail a letter to civic, social, and religious organizations in your community** offering to speak about the Children's Sabbath at their meetings or gatherings. For example, you might contact the PTA, Lions Club, Rotary, interfaith associations, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and others. Invite them to participate in your congregation's Children's Sabbath or to plan their own Children's Sabbath observance.
- ❑ **Attend community events** such as school open houses, local health fairs, and parades to distribute information about the Children's Sabbath, with permission of event organizers.
- ❑ **Put up posters or flyers** on community bulletin boards and in other permissible locations in the community.
- ❑ **Remember the impact of an invitation and the influence of "word of mouth."** Encourage congregation members to invite friends, neighbors, and colleagues to the Children's Sabbath. People who have written off organized religion as irrelevant to them and their lives may be pleasantly surprised to find your place of worship working joyfully for justice to improve the lives of children in our nation.
- ❑ **Adapt the sample news release in this section and submit it to the religion page of your local newspaper and to area religious newspapers or newsletters**, including denominational publications as appropriate. Follow up with a telephone call to each.
- ❑ **Reach out to a newspaper columnist.** If you have any contacts who know a columnist for the local paper, solicit their help in pitching the Children's Sabbath to the columnist.
- ❑ **Contact your local radio station** to learn the requirements and formats for having your Children's Sabbath events publicized as a Public Service Announcement (PSA) or on its community calendar or community bulletin board. You may be asked to prepare a "live read" script—a brief (10 seconds) script giving the basic information.

For example:

"[Name of congregation] located at [cross streets or address] is planning a special Children's Sabbath celebration and events on [date] to focus on ending the violence of guns and child poverty. Every 3 hours and 15 minutes, a child or teen is killed by guns in America. That is the equivalent of the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre every three days, week after week. Every day, more than 16 million children—that is one out of five—are living in poverty, which is another kind of violence, inflicting harm and suffering on young lives. On the Children's Sabbath, congregations of many faiths all across our nation are committing to take action to end gun violence and child poverty. Through worship services, education programs, and activities [congregation] invites young and old to seek justice so that all children can grow up in safety and economic security. For more information, call [name of congregation]."

Type it, double-spaced, with accurate names, times, and addresses. Be sure to include your name as a contact for the station, with daytime and evening phone numbers. Send it to the station at least two weeks in advance.

- ❑ **Invite the local media—television, radio, and print—to attend and publicize the Children's Sabbath.** Tell them about aspects of the events that promise to be visually interesting and emotionally compelling. Point out that the Children's Sabbath is a way to focus attention on serious problems facing children and on positive ways to make a difference. Let them know about any well-known speakers who will be participating in your Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Arrange for a local spokesperson or an interfaith panel of speakers to participate on a radio or television talk show program** about an issue of concern for the children in your community.
- ❑ **If your community has a cable or public access television station, contact the station's producers to arrange an interview.** Check if they will list the Children's Sabbath on their billboard of local events.
- ❑ **Write a letter to the editor** about the gun violence that kills or injures a child or teen every 30 minutes in our nation and about the violence of child poverty that harms more than 16 million children in our rich nation. Offer the Children's Sabbath as a way to learn more and become involved. Watch the newspaper for articles about gun violence, poverty, and children in general so that you can relate your letter to those articles and time it appropriately.

News Release for Local Media

One of the goals of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is to reach a wider, secular audience with a message about children's needs and the religious community's concern and commitment to meeting those needs. We encourage you to use the sample news release below as a model for explaining the Children's Sabbath to your local newspaper's religion or community news editor and as a means of generating a news story. If you know of other congregations in your community that will also be celebrating the Children's Sabbath, contact them about preparing a joint news release.

Here are steps to follow:

- 1) **Call your newspaper** to obtain the name of the religion writer or city editor. If you know someone who works for the newspaper or has contacts there, ask for his or her help in getting the news release into the right hands.
- 2) **Email the news release** to the right person at the paper in early October, two to three weeks before your Children's Sabbath.
- 3) **Follow up with a telephone call a few days later.** Remember, the news media are looking to cover a newsworthy story, not to promote a particular event. In your communication with them, emphasize that the Children's Sabbath is about children's issues of concern to many people and is a practical and inspiring example of how people are taking action. Emphasize that your celebration is part of a growing national movement among religious congregations to improve the well-being of America's children. Suggest that reporters contact the Children's Defense Fund's Communications Department at (202) 662-3585 for background information and a national perspective to supplement your own.
- 4) **Send a letter of thanks to the reporter** if the paper does cover your story, with copies to superiors. Building and maintaining a good relationship with the religion writer or other reporter may help gain coverage of followup efforts developing from your Children's Sabbath and of the Children's Sabbath in subsequent years.
- 5) **Send a copy of any coverage you receive to the Religious Action Division of the Children's Defense Fund** to assist in further promotion of the Children's Sabbath. Send information about your Children's Sabbath to CDF, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001 or email a description to religiousaction@childrensdefense.org

Sample News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October [date], 2013

[Insert Congregation's Name] Joins the Children's Defense Fund in National Multi-Faith Observance of Children's Sabbath

Children's Sabbath to Focus on Ending the Violence of Guns and Child Poverty

[Insert City, State] — [Insert congregation's name] will [describe events planned, such as holding a special worship service or conducting service and advocacy activities] on [Insert date, time, and location] that will focus on "Beating Swords into Plowshares: Ending the Violence of Guns and Child Poverty." Gun violence takes a child's life every 3 hours and 15 minutes and more than 16 million children suffer the violence of poverty in our rich nation.

"The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is galvanizing places of worship and people of faith across the religious spectrum and nation to unite in raising an irresistible moral and nonpartisan citizen voice demanding every one of our leaders protect children, teens, and adults from morally obscene gun violence and poverty," said Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund. "The sacred texts, teachings, and traditions of our religious faiths call on us not to harm others. They point us to the way of nonviolence and the power of love, and to protect the poor and vulnerable. It is time to say enough! The tragic relentless taking of life by gun violence—that takes seven precious children or teens from us every day—will continue if we remain silent and do not act."

[Insert statement from a local religious leader]

According to the Children Defense Fund's [Protect Children, Not Guns 2013](http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/protect-children-not-guns-2013.html), a child or teen dies or is injured from guns every 30 minutes. Guns are the second leading cause of death among children and teens ages 1 to 19, and the number one cause among black children and teens. Since 1963, three times more children and teens died from guns on American soil than U.S. soldiers were killed in action in wars abroad. See the full report at <http://www.childrensdefense.org/child-research-data-publications/data/protect-children-not-guns-2013.html>

[Insert congregation's name] is one of thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques, Bahá'í communities, temples, and other places of worship around the nation celebrating the Children's Sabbath this weekend as part of the Children's Defense Fund's annual observance. The multi-faith weekend seeks to inspire congregations and religious organizations to work on behalf of children through prayer, service, and advocacy throughout the year.

For more information about [Insert congregation's name]'s celebration of the Children's Sabbath, contact *[Insert contact person's name, title, group affiliation, telephone number, and email address, if available]*.

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Reproducible Resources

The following pages provide several resources that may be photocopied. No additional permission is needed.

Announcement Inserts (Page 6)

The first insert for your bulletin or newsletter is to announce to members of your congregation your plans to participate in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend. Distribute it about one month before your Children's Sabbath events to alert your members and build excitement and participation.

This insert makes two half-page size inserts per photocopy.

Photocopy Page 6 and use those two copies of Page 6. Using the one-sided to two-sided function on a photocopier, place those two copies of Page 6 in the copier to make two-sided copies on 8 ½ " x 11" paper and cut down the middle to make two inserts per photocopy.

Children's Sabbath Service Insert (Pages 7 to 8)

The following inserts may be used on the day you celebrate the Children's Sabbath or any time to raise awareness and encourage a prayerful response and commitment to act. Insert it into your bulletin, if your place of worship uses one, or simply hand it out at an appropriate time, perhaps as people arrive or depart.

Each of these insert pages are formatted horizontally to include two panels per 8 ½ " x 11" page. Make two-sided photocopies of the bulletin inserts, and fold down the middle to create one set of 5 ½ " x 8 ½" two-page bulletin inserts.

Beating Swords into Plowshares: Ending the Violence of Guns and Child Poverty

We will be joining religious communities of every faith all across our nation for

The 2013 National Observance of Children's

Sabbaths® Weekend as we affirm our commitment to

ending the gun violence that takes a child or teen's life every 3 hours and 15 minutes in our nation and

ending the violence of poverty that more than 16 million children in our rich nation suffer.

Date: _____ Time: _____

Place: _____

For more information or to help, contact:

The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths*, established in 1992 by the Children's Defense Fund and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations, unites religious communities of every faith in celebrating the blessing of children, focusing attention on the urgent problems facing our nation's children, affirming the divine charge to nurture, protect, and seek justice for children, and putting faith into action through direct service and advocacy with and for children and their families throughout the year to come.

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TO ME
THE SEED IS SO
WIDE AND
MOUNTAINS
SO SMALL


Children's Defense Fund

“Ana’s love for singing was evident before she was even able to talk. In a musical family, her gift for melody, pitch, and rhythm stood out remarkably. And she never walked anywhere—her mode of transportation was dance. She danced from room to room and place to place. She danced to all the music she heard, whether in air or in her head. Ana loved her God, loved to read the Bible, and loved to sing and dance as acts of worship.”

Six-year-old Ana Grace Marquez-Greene was killed in the hail of bullets at the deadly Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting rampage. Adding to the tragedy, every three days since the Sandy Hook massacre—and every three days before it—the equivalent of a classroom full of 20 children has been killed by guns.

As acts of worship, to use the phrase from Ana’s obituary, it is time for us to pray and study and speak and act to end the gun violence that is taking our children’s lives and to end the violence of poverty that harms more than 16 million children every day.

[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 4:1-4)

*“they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning books”*

What can you do?

- Pray for wisdom, courage, and commitment to protect the children God has entrusted to our care.
- **Learn More:** Read the report *Protect Children, Not Guns 2013*, available for download from www.childtensdefense.org to learn about the latest research and actions you can take to protect children, not guns, in your home, in your community, and as a citizen to help create a better, safer America for all children.
- **Speak Out:** Urge your members of Congress to protect children from gun violence by supporting common sense gun violence prevention measures *this year* that will still protect the legal use of guns.
- **Protect:** Parents, consider removing guns from your home and be vigilant about where your children play.
- **Act:** Boycott products and places that glamorize and normalize dangerous weapons and violence.
- **Support:** Offer parents, children, and teens resources to survive and work against the culture of violence, such as offering safe refuge, teaching nonviolent conflict resolution skills, and supporting innovative efforts to promote positive youth development.

Together we can—and must—do better right now. So many child lives depend on it. United, we can “beat our swords into plowshares” and transform our culture from one of weapons and want into one of peace and plenty.

[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 books; 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 4:1-4)

Nearly 2,000 people attended Molly Conley’s funeral in June to mourn the young humanitarian who was the victim of a random drive-by shooting the day after her 15th birthday. She was shot in the neck while walking with friends to a sleepover in a residential neighborhood in Lake Stevens, Washington. Molly was a 4.0 student best known for her kindness, which she used to encourage her parents to care for infants waiting for foster families and to start a group called “Mother’s Helper” that raised money to aid victims of domestic abuse.

Sheriff’s deputies from Caldwell County, Missouri went to the home of the Curtis family after receiving an emergency call on January 11, 2012. Their 12-year-old son Steven had mishandled a gun and accidentally shot himself in the head. Steven loved playing football and being outside. He also spent a great deal of time hunting and grew up learning about gun safety and had a hunter’s safety certification from the Conservation Department. In Breckenridge, Missouri—a town of just 450 people—hunting safety is an important part of the middle school’s agricultural curriculum. Steven’s father didn’t know how his son got the gun from a locked cabinet that was in their living room.

Children’s Defense Fund

“...no one shall make them afraid”

Eleven-year-old Taylani Mazyck was walking near her apartment building in Brooklyn on May 31, 2013 with her mother and niece when she was caught in gang-related crossfire. A bullet crashed into innocent Taylani's chin and lodged in her spine. According to Brooklyn prosecutor Jordan Rossman, she will be paralyzed for life. Instead of walking in her fifth-grade graduation ceremony, Taylani was transferred to Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine for the summer. Her mother says some days Taylani is in intense pain and easily frustrated because she can't do simple things such as scratch her nose; other days she is convinced she will walk some day in the future. Taylani suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), says she is too scared to go home, and wakes up crying from flashbacks of that terrible night.

These are three of the 18,270 children and teens killed or injured by guns in America each year. Like Molly, Steven, and Taylani, every one of these children deserved to live their whole lives. *We can and must do better.*

“... the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Every great religious tradition calls us to nurture and protect children, to seek peace, and stand with and for those who are oppressed by poverty, violence and other forms of harm. Now is the time to put our faith into action, to end the gun violence that takes the lives of our children and to end the violence of poverty that diminishes the lives of more than 16 million children in our rich nation.

“...neither shall they learn war any more”

In Micah's day, the most devastating violence came at the hands of conquering nations, fueling a deep yearning and hope for a day when nation would not lift up sword against nation. In our day, for the past half-century in fact, the most deadly violence has been the gun violence that has killed children and teens here on American soil.

Have we been fighting the wrong wars to keep our children safe? Nearly five times more children and teens were killed by guns in 2010 than U.S. soldiers killed in action that year in Iraq and Afghanistan. America's military and law enforcement agencies have 4 million guns. Our citizens have 310 million. And we have no idea how many of those guns were purchased without a background check. The gun lobby has been enriching gun manufacturers at the expense of our children's safety for far too long. For years the National Rifle Association has blocked the truth and actively fought against the passage and enforcement of gun safety laws. It is time to urge our members of Congress to protect children from gun violence by supporting common sense gun violence prevention measures *this year*, including universal background checks and limits on assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines that will still protect the legal use of guns while better protecting our children. We also need policies that support consumer product safety standards for all guns, public funding for gun violence prevention research, and resources and authority for law enforcement agencies to properly enforce gun safety laws.

It is time to wage peace and protect children from the gun violence and poverty that robs them of life, health, and hope. We can and must do better.