



Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Worship is at the heart of most Children's Sabbaths. It is in worship that we praise God who has blessed us with children and charged us with their care. It is in worship that we hear again the prophets and their warnings against injustice and their call to justice. It is in worship that we renew our commitment to follow Jesus who said to welcome the children because in doing so we welcome him and not just him but the one who sent him. As we go forth from worship, may we continue to praise God with our work to nurture and protect all children.

Following you will find:

- ◆ Worship suggestions drawn from Children's Sabbath worship services celebrated by congregations all across the country. Use or adapt those that would be appropriate for your church.
- ◆ Suggestions for creative ways to include the children and youths of your congregation in the Children's Sabbath service.
- ◆ Prayers, readings, and music from a variety of traditions: Protestant, Catholic, and Episcopal. Use or adapt them as appropriate for your congregation's tradition.
- ◆ Daily Devotional Guide intended for adults to use in the week leading up to the Children's Sabbath to prepare their hearts and minds.

Lesson plans for all ages will be available to download after August 15, 2008 from www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

Worship Suggestions

- The week before the Children's Sabbath, distribute copies of the Daily Devotional Guide in this resource to help adult congregation members prepare their hearts and minds for the Children's Sabbath, as did **Covenant United Methodist Church in Arlington, Texas**, and others.
- Include a special reading, prayer, or poem in the bulletin to help congregation members prepare their hearts and minds for worship before the start of the service. **Meyers Park Baptist Church in Charlottesville, North Carolina**, included Ina J. Hughs's "A Prayer for Children" for The Silent Meditation before the beginning of worship.
- Decorate the sanctuary with images and materials that bring to life the focus on children and justice.

The United Methodist Women of **First United Methodist Churches of Beach Haven Terrace and Kynett in Long Beach Township, New Jersey**, coordinated their 2007 Children's Sabbath and incorporated its theme, "My Boat Is So Small: Creating a Safe Harbor of Hope and Health Care for *All* Children," throughout their service. A string of colored origami boats with children's drawings was hung from the altar rail alongside life jackets, fish nets, and oars. During the Children's Sermon, the leader folded an origami boat as she talked with the children about our nation's nine million children without health insurance. At the conclusion, each child received a boat as a reminder to pray for children. The church convened a team to follow up on the Children's Sabbath by finding ways they can help connect eligible families with the state Children's Health Insurance Program.

- **Focus the sermon or homily on children and our responsibility to act on their behalf.** Dr. Otis Moss, Jr., provided a Christian perspective in the Faith Voices section on page 52 on which you may want to draw. The Daily Devotional Guide beginning on page 111 relates a variety of scriptural passages to this year's Children's Sabbath focus and may provide a jumping off point for your sermon development, for those not bound by a lectionary cycle. Sermon notes on the designated lectionary texts for the Revised Common Lectionary, Roman Catholic Lectionary, and the

Episcopal Lectionary for the third weekend of October can be read or downloaded at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths Other religious sections of this resource provide information and stories about children that you may want to include in your sermon or homily.

- **Invite on-site child care or Head Start staff, administrators, parents, and children, and others to attend your Children's Sabbath.** **De Lisle Mount Zion United Methodist Church in Pass Christian, Mississippi**, invited children of the community, legislators, and school personnel to attend their Children's Sabbath service.
- **Use bulletin covers that emphasize the Children's Sabbath.** **The United Methodist Church of Berea, Ohio**, had a cover with a photo collage of children copied from the resource manual; **Malcolm Church in Tappan, North Dakota**, used a commercially printed bulletin cover with images of babies and the heading "A Gift from God... Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." **Woodside United Methodist Church in Silver Spring, Maryland**, used a digital photo of a child from the congregation dressed in a Halloween costume and holding a trick-or-treat for UNICEF container, for their bulletin cover. Many congregations use drawings by children in the congregation for their bulletin.
- **Leading up to and on the Children's Sabbath, distribute the bulletin inserts beginning on page 27.** If you don't use the bulletin insert, prepare your own announcement about the Children's Sabbath to include in the bulletin so that worshipers, especially visitors, will understand the special focus and significance of the service. **St. Philips Episcopal Church in Columbus, Ohio**, prepared a special 20-page bulletin that began with a statement about the Children's Sabbath excerpted from one of the inserts, followed with the order of service using prayers and other resources from the manual, and included pages from additional bulletin inserts providing facts, stories, and action steps. In addition, a copy of the letter from Marian Wright Edelman in the welcome section of the Children's Sabbath resource manual was folded and inserted into the bulletin.

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- **Distribute special tokens to every child** attending the Children’s Sabbath, such as ribbons or stickers.
- **Use or adapt some of the prayers and other worship resources provided in this section**, as did [Shannondale Faith Community in Maryville, Tennessee](#), and many others. Or, use readings from prayer and worship books that include a social action theme, or create your own materials on the theme of answering the call to justice and peace to keep our children safe from the threats of poverty, violence, and racism.
- **Explore the resources of other faith traditions** in this section; some may be appropriate to include in your service.
- **Incorporate resources from your denomination** that focus on children and child advocacy.
- **Select hymns and anthems that focus on children and our responsibilities to them.** See the music suggestions on page 109. [Asbury United Methodist Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia](#), not only selected special music, but also used hymn notes in the bulletin to deepen its meaningfulness. In addition to providing background on the composition, “God Hears the Children Crying” by Constance Cherry (Hope Publishing Company, CCLI License #1109313), the bulletin notes commented on the instrumental voluntary played at the beginning of worship: “Composers use the title, Nocturne, for works pertaining to the evening. Today is Children’s Sabbath and the theme for the 2007 observance is ‘My Boat Is So Small: Creating a Safe Harbor of Hope and Health Care for *All* Children.’ As the Asbury Handbell Choir plays Michael Helman’s Nocturne No. 2, imagine the children in the United States and throughout the world whose nights are far from restful because they do not receive adequate health care.” What suggestions can you make to members of your congregation that would invite them to powerful reflection on the Children’s Sabbath theme during a musical selection?
- **Have a special “time with children” or Children’s Sermon during the service**, so that the Children’s Sabbath focus can be presented to them in an especially engaging and age-appropriate way. Or, in a role reversal, have one of the children give an “Adults’ Sermon”—a short message from a child to the adults.
- **Use various media to focus more powerfully on children and their needs.** Some congregations create PowerPoint presentations or slide shows with images of children in need. [Davis Street United Methodist Church in Burlington, North Carolina](#), reports they “did a slide presentation to highlight ways people could be involved in making a difference in children’s lives and on the condition of children in the United States.”
- **Offer prayers for children.** Specifically name problems afflicting children in your community, as well as crises affecting children across our nation and throughout our world.
- **Invite congregation members to pray for the children in your church, too.** [Prairie View United Methodist Church in Ollie, Iowa](#), printed these special instructions in the bulletin about the offering: “During the offering, children will first go into the congregation collecting

“Everything just seemed to fall into place once I decided to use Swimmy [a children’s book that had been suggested for the time with children in last year’s resource manual] as the sermon focus.... I thought it would be really neat to read the book to our congregation. We then put the book on a disc on the computer. We had each page on the big screen for the congregation to see the great artwork in the book as Patty Wilson gave her sermon—elaborating, of course—after she read the book to them. She related ‘Swimmy,’ the eye of the big fish, to Jesus—and if we all work together with Jesus as our guide, we can accomplish anything. And we as a congregation can help get the health care the children need! The children loved it!!

“This is a wonderful program—and I look forward to getting it each year. Can’t wait ‘til 2008. You can tell by the bulletin that our United Methodist Women did the service as our ‘Women in the Pulpit Sunday.’ Worked out great!”

Sherry Rouzee, [Eldora United Methodist Church, Bridgeport, West Virginia](#)

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One look at the special *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* tee-shirts worn by the children last year at **Prince of Peace Episcopal Church in Dallas, Pennsylvania**, let you know the congregation was participating in the nationwide observance. For its fifth year of participating in the Children's Sabbath celebration, Prince of Peace used the Episcopal liturgy from the Children's Sabbath Manual and engaged the children and youths of the church as lay ministers serving as acolytes, ushers, and readers, and in other roles. A ten-year-old was the guest organist for the second year. The Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Bethlehem led the parish in reciting the Baptismal Covenant and spoke to the congregation about the responsibility shared by all in uplifting children and families who are unable to reach their full potential without the support of others. Writes one of the organizers, *"The parish family of Prince of Peace had much to give thanks for on Sunday, October 21st: an extremely talented guest organist, a new Priest-in-charge, and a visit by the Assistant Bishop of the Diocese of Bethlehem. But on this day, [our] worship was directed toward the children."*

change for missions. Then, each [child] is invited to come to the table to make an outline of their hands on a 'prayer page.' Then, adults will be asked to volunteer to accept a 'prayer page'—one each—committing to pray for their young person every day from now until the next Children's Sabbath."

- **Dedicate ministries/programs serving children or commission staff and board members of child-serving programs affiliated with the congregation and celebrate their work as part of the congregation's ministry.** **First United Methodist Church of Dixon, Illinois**, dedicated their Children's and Adult Education Ministry as part of their Children's Sabbath celebration.

- **Incorporate a special blessing of children.**

- **Honor people who work with and for children.**

At an appropriate point in the service, invite these professionals and/or volunteers (contacted in advance) to come forward for a brief time of recognition for their work putting their faith into action to seek justice for children, with prayers for God's guidance in their work and prayers for the children they serve. Present them with a flower, ribbon, or other token so that later others might identify them and offer personal appreciation.

- **Collect special offerings for children and families.**

In addition to monetary offerings, consider collecting items to help children and families, such as toothbrushes and children's toothpaste, nutritious food, or diapers. Announce the special offering in advance.

- **Invite guest speakers to preach or give another address** on the needs of children and our call to respond. Encourage the speaker to highlight opportunities for members to become involved themselves and to speak

out for children. **First United Methodist Church of Dixon, Illinois**, had a speaker, Tryna Baker, who addressed foster parenting. They even included facts on foster children right in the bulletin in the order of service. Laurie Francis, a speaker from Community Health Partners, was the speaker at **Holbrook United Methodist Church's Children's Sabbath in Livingston, Montana**. The Children's Sabbath organizer writes that the speaker "brought information about children in poverty in Montana, how many are uninsured, getting public assistance, etc. She also spoke about our local literacy program and what individuals could do to make a difference. She opened the discussion for comments, and many people asked questions. It was very well received. She also had handouts with information that she passed out at the beginning of her talk."

- **Include a dramatic presentation** to engage especially children and young people, as well as adults.
- **Invite members to light candles for the 40 days leading up to the Children's Sabbath**, as suggested by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, and then light a symbolic 40th candle on the Children's Sabbath. For more information, visit www.homelandministries.org/FamilyandChildren/candle.htm.
- **Use this day to welcome children into the family of faith.** **Buffalo United Methodist Church in Kosciusko, Mississippi**, baptized 12 children during their Children's Sabbath service in 2007. **The United Methodist Church of Berea, Ohio**, and **Pilgrim United Church of Christ in Bozeman, Montana**, both distributed Bibles to the third-graders on their Children's Sabbath Sunday.

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Involve Children and Youths

The Children's Sabbath, unlike a traditional Youth Sunday or Children's Day, is intended to involve adults in the planning and leadership of the day. As members of the congregation, adults must recognize the challenges facing children in our nation and their collective responsibility to respond. However, the Children's Sabbath is an important time to include children and youths in the planning and leadership of the worship service and all other events.

For example, children and youths can:

- Prepare for the Children's Sabbath during a "Kids' Night Out" overnight, or other event. **Herndon United Methodist Church in Herndon, Virginia**, conducted a Homelessness Experience Camp from Friday to Saturday followed by a special guest speaker on children, homelessness, and poverty at the Sunday morning service. **St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, Minnesota**, held an intergenerational forum the week before the Children's Sabbath. The prayers that participants wrote during the forum were then read during the Children's Sabbath the following week.
- Review the Children's Sabbath service the week before (perhaps in church school classes) and practice responses and hymns so they may join more fully in the Children's Sabbath service.
- Design and paint the paraments (such as the cloth draping the pulpit).
- Draw pictures for the bulletin cover.
- Decorate the sanctuary with drawings or banners that the children have made.
- Bake the communion bread (if appropriate for your tradition).
- Assist and greet worshipers as they arrive or leave, light candles, or collect the offering.
- Lead a procession to begin the Children's Sabbath. **The Church of St. Philip in Minneapolis, Minnesota**, invited as many children as wished to process in with the pastor and other liturgical ministers at the start of the Mass.
- Sing a special anthem, play an instrumental piece, or perform a song in sign language.
- Read prayers and scriptural passages and lead responsive readings, as did the youth at **Prince of Peace Episcopal Church in Dallas, Texas**.
- Write a prayer to be used in the service.
- Deliver the sermon or other presentation.
- Prepare a dramatic skit for the service.
- During the offertory procession, place items on the altar that serve to remind the congregation of the love and care our children require.
- Invite friends to attend. The children and youth of **West-Park Presbyterian Church in New York City** invited friends from the neighborhood food pantry that works with the church.

A letter from Kay Rodgers, the Chair of the Christian Education Ministry at **United Christian Parish in Reston, Virginia**, is a terrific reminder of the importance and value of including children and youths in worship leadership on the Children's Sabbath and beyond. Her letter reads in part:

"Nearly every part of our service was provided by our young people, from covering the sound system to delivering the sermon. Two of our senior high members gave the sermons, one at each service. They conveyed, with their sincere and heartfelt words, the importance of our responsibility for the welfare and health of every child, and especially for poor children. This was the first time some of United Christian Parish's children had ever participated in leading a worship service, and the fact that the service was dedicated to caring for other children and young people was an important part of their experience. The self-esteem and pride in being a part of a service to worship God and to speak out on behalf of other children was evident in their faces and in their voices.... This year's services brought such spirit and joy to everyone fortunate enough to have attended the services as was evidenced by comments overheard after the services and by phone calls made to the church office. Several people suggested that the added freshness of having worship led by young people might be something to carry over into other services during the year. I'd say that is a great idea."

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

Some will choose to follow their customary schedule and have the children engage in the Children's Sabbath lesson plans while the adults remain in worship. This may free the preacher to speak more seriously to the adults about the plight of children and their responsibility to respond without concerns about trying to engage or upsetting the children. The children can learn about the concerns in an age-appropriate setting in their classes.

Other congregations will see the Children's Sabbath as a good opportunity for the children to remain in worship throughout the service. If the children are not accustomed to this, however, it will require forethought. The whole service, including the sermon, can be carefully planned to be engaging and accessible to all ages. The more that children are involved in the planning and implementation, the more interested they will be. Or children's activity bulletins and other quiet activities can be distributed to engage the children during the sermon and other "listening" times.



Christian Worship Resources

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

Call to Worship

(The Call to Worship can be offered by one leader, three leaders of various ages, read in unison, or read in alternating sentences between the leader and the people.)

We come to this place from a world where children suffer harm,
to glimpse the vision of the Prince of Peace.
We come to this place from a world where children suffer hate,
to discover anew the love of God for each one of us and all God's beloved children.
We come to this place from a world where children suffer need,
to be energized by the Holy Spirit who moves us to seek justice.
Come, let us worship God, Source of peace, love, and justice!

Call to Worship

Come, let us worship our God who creates each child in God's own image;
Come, let us worship our God who blesses the children with enfolding grace;
Come, let us worship our God who sustains us in the work for justice;
Come, let us worship the Triune God.

Call to Confession

Like a mother who searches for a lost coin, like a father who welcomes a straying child home, God seeks us and loves us even when we have lost our way. Trusting in God's forgiveness, let us confess our sins before God and one another.

Litany of Confession

Tender and tenacious God,
We confess that we have closed our eyes, hearts, and hands when you have reached out and tried to teach us.

Making us in your image and calling your creation good, you tried to reveal yourself to us in each child,
and yet we still try to divide people into "us" and "them."

Sending us Jesus, the Prince of Peace, you tried to show us how to love one another,
and yet we still resort to violence and might to solve our conflicts.

Feeding your people with manna sufficient for the day, you wanted us to trust that we will have what we need and to share what we can,
and yet we still try to hoard the blessings meant for all.

Forgive us, we pray, for failing to hear and heed what you have tried to teach us.
Open our eyes that we see you in all children, not just our own,
that our children may be free from hate;

Open our hearts that we seek to manifest your peace in our lives and our world,
that our children may be free from harm;

Open our hands that we resist the urge to hoard, and embrace the call to share,
that our children may be free from need.

This we ask as children made in your image, safe in your love, and showered by your blessings. **Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon (from Ephesians 2:17-19)
(You may wish to adapt for inclusive language.)

Hear the good news! "Christ came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God." Sisters and brothers, members of God's one family, I declare to you in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. **Amen.**

Prayer for Illumination

Help us hear your word to us this day, O God. By your Spirit, unstop our ears to hear your call to justice; open our eyes to see your love for all; ease our fears to hear your message of peace. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

O God, we come to hear your word today with ears distracted by wiggles and giggles, minds trapped by tensions and to-do lists, and hearts dulled by habit. By your Spirit, sharpen our ears to catch your word to us this day. Open our minds to grasp your truth. Quicken our hearts to respond to your message to us that together we may create the world you intend for your beloved children. Amen.

Prayer

Remember the children, O God, who have no voice to protest the violence and deprivation which, through no fault of theirs, befalls them. Remember the children in this nation who have no choice about whether they will be healthy and well-fed or sick and hungry. Remember the children of the world whose bellies are swollen with hunger and cannot protect themselves from the systems that keep them in poverty. Remember the children who are taunted and excluded because of the color of their skin and are helpless against the racism of their society. Remember the children who do not ask to be born under the shadows of bombs and who have no way to stop the destruction. Remember the children, O God, and make us remember what we owe them. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.²⁹

Prayers of the People

We see the darkness of war, violence, and terrorism.

The bright light of Christ makes your way plain... Find what will please Christ, and then do it. Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork—the barren pursuits of darkness.

May we be prisms of Christ's light bringing peace, shalom, and reconciliation.

We see the darkness of oppression and injustice.

The bright light of Christ makes your way plain... Find what will please Christ, and then do it. Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork—the barren pursuits of darkness.

May we be prisms of Christ's light bringing freedom, opportunity, and justice.

We see the darkness of illness, HIV/AIDS, lack of medical care.

The bright light of Christ makes your way plain... Find what will please Christ, and then do it. Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork—the barren pursuits of darkness.

May we be prisms of Christ's light bringing healing and wholeness.

We see the darkness of rejection, exclusion, and fear.

The bright light of Christ makes your way plain... Find what will please Christ, and then do it. Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork—the barren pursuits of darkness.

May we be prisms of Christ's light bringing love, inclusion, and acceptance.

We see the darkness of poverty, homelessness, hunger, and thirst.

The bright light of Christ makes your way plain... Find what will please Christ, and then do it. Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork—the barren pursuits of darkness.

May we be prisms of Christ's light bringing assistance, aid, and respite.

We see the darkness of apathy, uncaring, and hate.

The bright light of Christ makes your way plain... Find what will please Christ, and then do it. Don't waste your time on useless work, mere busywork—the barren pursuits of darkness.

May we be prisms of Christ's light bringing compassion, kindness, and love.³⁰

Closing Act of Commitment

Leader: In the Gospel of John, we read Jesus' post-resurrection words to the disciples. How might they call us to new life, new hope, and a new day for ourselves and for all children? Listen!

Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Friends, we know the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves. Every child is our neighbor and deserves and needs our love. Let us love the children as we love ourselves.

People: We will work for a world free from racism, where children are safe from hate. We will work toward a world of love.

²⁹ Bread for the World's *Banquet of Praise*. Reprinted with permission.

³⁰ Ephesians 5:8-11, The Message, Lectionary Reading March 2. By Edie Harris, Social Justice Prayer Network facilitator of the Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA). Visit www.mfsaweb.org for additional information and resources.

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Leader: *“But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit...will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.”*

The Holy Spirit binds us together into community and sends us out to work for justice.

People: We will work for a world free from poverty and materialism, where children are safe from need. We will work toward a world of justice.

Leader: *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”*

People: We will work for a world free from violence and militarism, where children are safe from harm. We will work toward a world of peace.

Leader: Jesus bids us, *“Rise. Let us be on our way.”* Stand with me now as we prepare to be on our way, singing Guide My Feet [or other appropriate sending hymn, such as Called As Partners in Christ's Service, They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love, or I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me].

Charge and Blessing

A world where children suffer hate awaits. Go now to bear Christ's love to all.

A world where children suffer need awaits. Go now to work for God's justice for all.

A world where children suffer harm awaits. Go now to live out the peace of Christ.

May the peace made known in Christ, the love of God given to all, and community created by the Holy Spirit be with you and each child of God now and forevermore. Amen.

Charge

Now let us go forth into a world where children suffer hate to bring God's love.

Go forth into a world where children suffer harm to bring God's peace.

Go forth into a world where children suffer need to bring God's justice.

This we ask as ones claimed as children of God. Amen.

The World Methodist Social Affirmation

We believe in God, creator of the world and of all people; and in Jesus Christ, incarnate among us, who died and rose again; and in the Holy Spirit, present with us to guide, strengthen, and comfort.

**We believe;
God, help our unbelief.**

We rejoice in every sign of God's kingdom:
in the upholding of human dignity and community;
in every expression of love, justice, and reconciliation;
in each act of self-giving on behalf of others;
in the abundance of God's gifts entrusted to us that all may have enough;
in all responsible use of the earth's resources.

**Glory be to God on high;
And on earth, peace.**

We confess our sin, individual and collective, by silence or action;
through the violation of human dignity based on race, class, age, sex, nation, or faith;
through the exploitation of people because of greed and indifference;
through the misuse of power in personal, communal, national, and international life;
through the search for security by those military and economic forces that threaten human existence;
through the abuse of technology which endangers the earth and all life upon it.

**Lord, have mercy;
Christ, have mercy;
Lord, have mercy.**

We commit ourselves individually and as a community to the way of Christ;

to take up the cross;
to seek abundant life for all humanity;
to struggle for peace with justice and freedom;
to risk ourselves in faith, hope, and love,
praying that God's kingdom may come.

Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

For Children

Great God,
Guard the laughter of children.
Bring them safely through injury and illness,
So they may live the promises you give.
Do not let us be so preoccupied with our purposes
That we fail to hear their voices,
Or pay attention to their special vision of the truth;

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But keep us with them,
Ready to listen and to love,
even as in Jesus Christ you have loved us,
your grown-up, wayward children. Amen.³¹

Prayer from the Philippine Church

Lord, in these times,
When we fear we are losing hope,
Or feel that our efforts are futile,
Let us see in our hearts and minds
The image of your resurrection.
Let that be the source of courage and strength.
With that, and in your company,
Help us to face challenges and struggles
Against all that is born of injustice.³²

For Racial and Cultural Diversity

O God,
You created all people in your image.
We thank you for the astonishing variety
of races and cultures in this world.
Enrich our lives by ever-widening circles of friendship,
and show us your presence in those who differ most from us,
until our knowledge of your love is made perfect
in our love for all your children;
Through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.³³

God's Power Shown

Leader: Out of love comes celebration
All: **And God's kingdom is among us:**
Men: Where peace is the means of making
us one,
Women: Where truth does not stumble and
justice is done.

Leader: Out of change comes possibility
All: **And God's new creation is begun:**
Men: Promise of splendor and signal of worth,
Women: Source of all goodness, renewing the
earth.

Leader: Out of freedom comes responsibility
All: **And God calls us to discipleship:**
Men: In our compassion, making love known,
Women: In our conviction, God's power shown.

Leader: You did not choose me; I chose you.
All: **This, then, is what I command you:**
Love one another.³⁴

Greeting (Roman Catholic liturgy)

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the
Holy Spirit.

Amen.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

We greet you on this day that is celebrated as the
Children's Sabbath by congregations of many faiths across
our nation. As the U.S. Bishops noted more than a decade
ago in their statement, *Putting Children and Families First*,
"[We] seek to call attention to this crisis and to fashion a
response that builds on the values of our faith, the experience
of our community and the love and compassion of our
people. We seek to shape a society—and a world—with
a clear priority for families and children in need and to
contribute to the development of policies that help families
protect their children's lives and overcome the moral,
social, and economic forces that threaten their future."
Today we commit to hear and heed that call, like the call
of Dr. King and that of the prophets throughout biblical
witness, that we may help manifest the justice and peace
for all children which God intends.

Penitential Rite (Roman Catholic liturgy)

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

Lord Jesus, you gathered the little children to yourself.

Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

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

Christ, have mercy.

People: Christ, have mercy.

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

Lord, have mercy.

People: Lord, have mercy.

³¹ Reprinted by permission from *Book of Common Worship*, © 1993, Westminster/John Knox Press.

³² Taken from *A Wee Worship Book*, ©1999, Wild Goose Worship Group, The Iona Community, Glasgow (www.ionabooks.com).

³³ Lutheran Book of Worship, © 1978. Used by permission of Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

³⁴ Kathy Galloway, © 2001, taken from the *Iona Abbey Worship Book*, The Iona Community, Glasgow (www.ionabooks.com).

Gospel Acclamation (Roman Catholic liturgy)

Priest: Alleluia.

People: Alleluia.

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

People: Alleluia.

Prayers of the Faithful (General Intercessions) (Roman Catholic)

"To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing." Calling to mind those words of Martin Luther King, Jr., and recommitting ourselves to the biblical vision of justice and peace, let us join our voices together in prayer. With gratitude that the God who created heaven and earth calls us each by name and hears our prayer, please respond: Lord, hear your children's appeal.

Martin Luther King called upon the church to recapture its prophetic zeal. God of faith, we pray for all the prophets of the church: our pope, Benedict XVI, our bishops, priests, deacons and all the faithful Christian women and men who lead by word and example, that the Holy Spirit may make us a church unified in our passion for the needs of all the world's children. Let us pray to the Lord,

Lord, hear your children's appeal.

Martin Luther King noted that progress is neither automatic nor inevitable, but comes through a continuous effort to do justice and love goodness. God of justice, we pray for all our world leaders, especially for those seeking leadership positions in our own country, and for all women and men who seek true justice and lasting peace, that each may walk humbly with God in the daily work of faith and labor of love. Let us pray to the Lord,

Lord, hear your children's appeal.

Martin Luther King reminded us that life's most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others? God of mercy, we pray that all people may recognize our inescapable network of mutuality, and that we may be Christ for one another, doing all that is possible to lift the burden of poverty, hunger, violence and oppression from each and every one of the world's most vulnerable population, our children. Let us pray to the Lord,

Lord, hear your children's appeal.

Martin Luther King challenged us to recognize that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. God of hope, we pray for those children in our own parish community who live in unsafe environments, lack enough to eat, attend struggling schools and suffer daily disappointments and fading hopes, that they may be given good reason to hope for a better life and that they be given the grace of an enduring and infinite hope. Let us pray to the Lord,

Lord, hear your children's appeal.

Martin Luther King articulated a choice between walking in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness. God of love, we pray that in our own families we are taught to be children of the light. May our families teach us that we are called by name to serve and praise the living God, glorifying God through selfless love. Let us pray to the Lord,

Lord, hear your children's appeal.³⁵

The Marginalized

For those deprived of their human needs
and their human rights,
that they may be given the dignity
which God confers on all his people;
We pray to the Lord.

For all who are forgotten or thrown away,
and especially for the poor, the sick and the aged,
that God might change our hearts
and move us to love them as the image of Christ
We pray to the Lord.

For all who are lonely or afraid,
for teenagers on the street,
old people in nursing homes,
prisoners with no one to visit them,
and all whom the world has forgotten;
that Christ might lead us to them;
We pray to the Lord.

For all who are forgotten or cast off,
that we might value each human life,
as a priceless gift from God;
We pray to the Lord.³⁶

³⁵ by Liz McCloskey, Ph.D. candidate in Spirituality, Catholic University of America.

³⁶ Excerpted from the Respect Life Program of the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities © 2001, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Used with permission. All rights reserved.

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

On the Children's Sabbath

(The Collect of the Day, Episcopal rubric)

Loving God, through Christ born a poor baby to parents in a strange land, you showed us your care for those who are poor, excluded, and in harm's way. Send us this day to your beloved children who suffer need, hate, and harm, that we might be agents of your justice, love, and peace, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

People: Amen.

The Prayers of the People and Confession of Sin (Episcopal rubric)

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

For the Church, that we live out our calling to be the body of Christ who came as the Prince of Peace, preaching good news to the poor, and welcoming all the children in his loving embrace, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, listen to your children praying.

For our nation, that we keep all children safe from poverty, harm, and hate, and that our leaders have the courage to champion the cause of justice and peace, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, listen to your children praying.

For our world, that we free the children who bear scars seen and unseen from warfare, crushing poverty, and discrimination to live joyful lives of justice, safety, and love, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, listen to your children praying.

For the children in our lives—source of joy, sign of hope, embodiment of love, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, listen to your children praying.

For the children who know the sorrow of violence, the hopelessness of poverty, and the hurt of racism, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, listen to your children praying.

For all who have died, especially the children whose lives of promise were cut short by the effects of poverty, violence, and hatred, we pray to the Lord:

Lord, listen to your children praying.

Leader and People:

God of all mercy,

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

We have not loved each other as sisters and brothers,
We have not welcomed all children and so welcomed you,
We have left stumbling blocks in the way of too many children.

Forgive us our sins,

As a woman searching for a cherished coin,

As a father welcoming a beloved child home,

And uphold us by your Spirit

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

Through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(by Shannon Daley-Harris)

Proper Preface for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Option 1:

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

Option 2:

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

Eucharistic Prayer for Children's Sabbath (Episcopal rubric)

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Celebrant: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Celebrant: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Celebrant: We give you thanks and praise,
amazing God,
who made heaven and earth and sea,
and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever,
who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry;
You watch over the strangers,
uphold the children and most vulnerable parents,
and have triumphed over sin and evil.

(from Psalm 146)

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

On this Children's Sabbath day, we give you thanks, O God, especially for children, for the blessing they are and the blessing we may be to them, as we seek to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you.

And so we join the saints and angels in proclaiming your glory, as we sing (say),

Celebrant and People:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

The Celebrant continues:

We praise you, O God,
for sending your beloved child Jesus
born as a baby
nurtured by his family,
and protected by strangers,
who grew as a child
who was taught in his temple,
surrounded by his community,
and guided by his parents,
who became an adult
who loved and blessed the children,
who cared for those who were sick,
poor, and left out,
who taught that God loves us like a parent,
and who called us his friends.

This one who was born a baby needing us
died our Savior whom we all need,
triumphant even over death,
freeing us to live as your beloved children.

(At the following words concerning the bread, the Celebrant is to hold it or lay a hand upon it; and at the words concerning the cup, to hold or place a hand upon the cup and any other vessel containing the wine to be consecrated.)

On the night before he died for us, Jesus was at the table with his friends. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them, and said: "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. As you do this, remember me."

As supper was ending, Jesus took the cup of wine.

Again, he gave thanks, gave it to them, and said: "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is poured out for you and for all for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, remember me."

Around your table, as your children,
O God, we remember Jesus Christ,
Who came in love, lived in love, and died in love,
Who was and is and is to come.

We offer to you our gifts of bread and wine,
And we offer to you our lives.

Pour out your Spirit upon these gifts that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ, that they strengthen us to welcome the children, to show your love, to work for your justice. Through Christ and with Christ and in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, to you be honor, glory, and praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Let All the Little Children Come

Let the little children come unto me and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of Heaven, Jesus said.
He did not say let only rich or middle-class White children come.
He did not say let only the strapping boys but not the girls come.
He did not say let only the able-bodied children come.
All the children He bade come.

He did not say let all my children or your children or our friends' children or those in our families and neighborhoods and who look and act like us come.
He did not say let only the well-behaved nice children come or those who conform to society's norms.
He did not say let a few, a third, half, or three-fourths come—but all.
Jesus said let the little children come and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of heaven.

(by Marian Wright Edelman)

Christian Resources for the Children's Sabbath

Affirmation of Faith

God has not taken the covenant people out of the world, but has sent them into the world to worship God there and serve all humankind. We worship God in the world by standing before our Lord on behalf of all people. Our cries for help and our songs of praise are never for ourselves alone. Worship is no retreat from the world; it is part of our mission. We serve humankind by discerning what God is doing in the world and joining in that work. We risk disagreement and error when we try to say what God is doing here and now. But we find guidance in God's deeds in the past and promises for the future, as they are witnessed to in Scripture. We affirm that the Lord is at work, especially in events and movements that free people by the gospel and advance justice, compassion, and peace.³⁷

Prayer for a New Society

All-nourishing God, your children cry for help
Against the violence of our world:
Where children starve for bread and feed on weapons;
Starve for vision and feed on drugs;
Starve for love and feed on videos;
Starve for peace and die murdered in our streets.

Creator God, timeless preserver of resources,
Forgive us for the gifts that we have wasted.
Renew us for what seems beyond redemption;
Call order and beauty to emerge again from chaos.
Convert our destructive power into creative service;
Help us to heal the woundedness of our world.

Liberating God, release us from the demons of violence.

Free us today from the disguised demon of deterrence
That puts guns by our pillows and missiles in our skies.

Free us from all demons that blind and blunt our spirits;
Cleanse us from all justifications for violence and war;
Open our narrowed hearts to the suffering and the poor.

Abiding God, loving renewer of the human spirit,
Unfold our violent fists into peaceful hands:
Stretch our sense of family to include our neighbors;
Stretch our sense of neighbor to include our enemies
Until our response to you finally respects and embraces
All creation as precious sacraments of your presence.
Hear the prayer of all your starving children. Amen.³⁸

A Franciscan Benediction

May God bless you with DISCOMFORT...
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with ANGER...
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with TEARS...
To shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, starvation,
and war
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
And to turn their pain into JOY.

And may God bless you with enough FOOLISHNESS...
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can DO what others claim cannot be done.
Amen.

³⁷ From *A Declaration of Faith* (alt.), Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

³⁸ From Pax Christi USA, national Catholic peace movement, www.paxchristiusa.org. Item No. 552-244. Used with permission.

Music Suggestions

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

Hymns of Praise

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

Hymns After Passing the Peace

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

Hymns of Thanksgiving and Communion

For the Fruits of This Creation
God Whose Giving Knows No Ending
Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether

Hymns of Petition

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

Hymns of Commitment and Closing Hymns

All Who Love and Serve Your City
Called as Partners in Christ's Service
Christian Women, Christian Men
Guide My Feet
Help Us Accept Each Other
Here I Am, Lord
I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me
Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love
Let Justice Flow Like Streams
Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us
Live into Hope
Lord of All Nations, Grant Me Grace
Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service
Lord, You Give the Great Commission
Now Praise the Hidden God of Love
O, For a World
Our Cities Cry to You, O God
Song of Hope (Canto de Esperanza)
The Church of Christ in Every Age
There's a Spirit in the Air
Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples
We Are Your People
What Does the Lord Require
When a Poor One
When We Are Living



want to glimpse God's vision of a world lived in right relationship with God and each other, if it meant a criticism of what they were doing. "Do not see," they said to the visionaries. "Do not prophesy," they demanded to the prophets. How much more comfortable to hear smooth things, what we want to hear, than the truth of God's expectations for how we live in community.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., knew what it was like to be a visionary with a prophetic message, only to have people on all sides urge him to settle for smooth words that would be more palatable to the crowds, to stick to visions that were familiar, and not to use a wide-angle lens that included the suffering caused by the war in Vietnam or by poverty here at home. "Do not see" the suffering of White children in Appalachia or Black children in Chicago as a result of poverty; some demanded in the last years of his life, as he prepared to launch the Poor People's Campaign. "Do not proclaim" that the war in Vietnam is wrong, others demanded when he took to the pulpit at Riverside Church. Tell us again about that dream. But prophesy he did, warning us of the dangers of materialism and poverty, of militarism, and of continuing racism. But many did not want to hear the warnings.

Today, we see those unheeded warnings manifest in the problems confronting our children—some children suffering from "affluenza" while others struggle in poverty; violence used to solve problems in neighborhoods and among nations; and continuing racism subtle and strident, known in low expectations and high incarceration and drop-out rates, in denied opportunities and dignity denied.

"My mother and brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it," Jesus said. (Luke 8:21) On this Children's Sabbath weekend and throughout the year to come, let's find the courage not to settle for smooth words and illusions, but to take a hard look at the threats that undermine the lives of our children, boldly challenge the status quo in a sometimes hostile world, and commit in faith to do what God calls us to that all children may know justice, love, and peace.

Prayer

Dear God, speak to me this day not what I want to hear but what you want me to do. Help me to see your vision for your beloved children, and grant me the courage to seek justice, love broadly, and work for peace. Amen.

National Observance of Children's Sabbaths®

Daily Devotional Guide

When Will We Hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Call to End Poverty in America?

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Monday: You Can't Take It with You

Scripture: Luke 16:19-31

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.... [The rich man] said, "Then, father, I beg you to send [Lazarus] to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them." He said, "No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Reading

The time has come for an all-out war against poverty.... The well-off and the secure have too often become indifferent and oblivious to the poverty and deprivation in their midst. The poor in our countries have been shut out of our minds and driven from the mainstream of our societies, because we have allowed them to become invisible. Ultimately a great nation is a compassionate nation. No individual or nation can be great if it does not have a concern for "the least of these."³⁹

Reflection

Dr. King preached on this passage from Luke at Washington National Cathedral on the Sunday before his assassination, and just weeks before he planned to bring a Poor People's Campaign to Washington. He preached that the rich man didn't go to hell because he was rich; he went to hell because he didn't realize "that his wealth was his opportunity... to bridge the gulf between him and his brother, Lazarus," because he passed by him, never saw him, because "he allowed his brother to become invisible."⁴⁰ Our nation, still astoundingly rich compared to others despite a recent economic downturn, faces a moment of decision now as we did in King's day. "This is America's opportunity to help bridge the gulf between the haves and the have-nots... there is nothing new about poverty. What is new is that we now have the techniques and the

Whether God's children feast on communion bread, Challah after Friday services at the synagogue, or Indian naan at the Hindu temple, God's love is there to nourish and sustain us, strengthening us for the work ahead creating God's Beloved Community.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for sustaining me with your love and renewing me by your grace. Strengthen me to show your love for all your beloved children, and guide me to help create the Beloved Community you intend. Amen.

Sunday: Smooth Words or the Hard Truth?

Scripture: Isaiah 30:9-11

For they are a rebellious people, faithless children, children who will not hear the instruction of the LORD; who say to the seers, "Do not see"; and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right; speak to us smooth things, prophesy illusions, leave the way, turn aside from the path, let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."

Reading

Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal hostility to poverty, racism, and militarism. With this powerful commitment we shall boldly challenge the status quo and unjust mores and thereby speed the day when "every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain."⁴⁹

Reflection

"Do you want me to just love it, or do you want to know what I really think?" That's the question a long-married couple have learned to ask each other when one of them asks the other for an opinion. Earlier in their marriage, one spouse would provide candid feedback, even criticism, and meet hurt, irritated resistance from the other to whom they spoke. They learned to distinguish between the times they really did want to hear the hard truth, and the times they just wanted to hear soothing appreciation and affirmation. Usually, they just wanted the smooth words!

In Isaiah, the rebellious people who were failing to live out God's justice and compassion didn't want to hear the hard truth from the prophets. They didn't

³⁹ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*

⁴⁰ "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution," sermon at Washington National Cathedral, March 31, 1968.

⁴⁹ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break the Silence," address delivered at Riverside Church, NYC, on April 4, 1967, www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/speeches/Beyond_Vietnam.pdf

Reading

This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern before one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men.... When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force which all great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life.... This Hindu-Muslim-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up... "Let us love one another: for love is of God: and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God...."⁴⁷

Reflection

It sounds like a page-turner. Dr. Martin Luther King related that some years ago a famous novelist died leaving behind a story plot of an estranged family who inherits a house in which they all must reside. Commented Dr. King, "This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together—Black and White, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu—a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interests, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace."⁴⁸

Already, we can catch glimpses of that world house where all are welcome and there is love and peace and plenty for all. It was Worldwide Communion Sunday at a little New Jersey church. The pastor invited all of the children present to join her at the front of the church for the children's message. The church custodian's sons were in worship, and the youngest eagerly joined the throng of children headed to the front. The older son, too cool at age ten to join the little kids, hung back in the pew. The pastor began her message, adapting Dr. Seuss' book, *One Fish, Two Fish*, to "One Church, Two Churches." As the children's message concluded, with its celebration of the diversity of God's beloved people, the pastor offered the gathered children bread with origins in many parts of the world. The younger brother, sitting amidst the children with their eyes wide in wonder at the bounty, sprang to his feet and ran down the church aisle toward his brother in the pew, calling at the top of his lungs, "Come on! Come with me! There is bread for everyone!"

There is bread for everyone. We are all invited to feast at God's table. On this *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, let's celebrate the beautiful diversity of God's children—different hues, many languages, a variety of faiths, all kinds of shapes and sizes, the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong.

resources to get rid of poverty. The real question is whether we have the will." At the time of Dr. King's sermon, one in every eight of America's children lived in poverty—from rural Appalachia to urban cities in the north.

Today, the child poverty rate is even worse: One in every six of our children lives in poverty, from Maine to Miami, Washington State to Washington, D.C. With an uncertain economy, our tendency is to "circle the wagons," to draw an ever-smaller circle of concern, trying to take care of "our own" as if that can actually work in isolation from the rest of our nation and world. But we are reminded that we will be judged not by how we take care of our own, or the better off, but by how we serve the least of these our brothers and sisters. King reminds us that "In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."⁴¹

Prayer

God, you came to us as a poor baby and many failed to see you. When the hungry were not fed and the naked were not clothed, they didn't realize it was you they were failing to care for. Open my eyes this day so that I don't miss the chance to glimpse you, feed you, house you, love you. Fill my heart with the certain knowledge that whatever I do to the least of these, the poorest children among us, I am doing to you. Amen.

Tuesday: Gimme

Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

⁴⁷ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*

⁴⁸ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., excerpt from Noble Prize speech.

⁴¹ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *The World House* Essay, Copyright 1967, heirs to the estate of Martin Luther King, Jr., www.theworldhouse.org/whessay.html

Reading

The stability of the large world house which is ours will involve a revolution of values.... We must rapidly begin the shift from a "thing"-oriented society to a "person"-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives, and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered. A civilization can flounder as readily in the face of moral and spiritual bankruptcy as it can through financial bankruptcy.⁴²

Reflection

All the parenting books and articles I have read said it was the right thing to do. We announced to our children that they would begin to receive an allowance. We patted ourselves on the back for adding that one-third (\$2) would be to spend, one-third to save, and one-third for the children to give to a charitable cause. We would be raising such fine children, moderate in their spending, prudent in their saving, and generous in their giving. So we thought. Now, we *are* raising great children overall, but the whole moderate, prudent, and generous bit isn't working out so well just yet. Our six-year-old is really good at counting by twos, but it's not to see how much money she has to give—it's to see how close her "spend" portion of the allowance is to affording another Webkinz stuffed animal. If you looked at the abundance of stuffed animals in her room, you'd think Jesus was talking to her in the parable above. But surely not her mom. Ahem. Or to anyone you know. Or you.... It was just "someone," mercifully left anonymous, who asked that greedy question.

The materialism about which Dr. King warned our nation 40 years ago, and Jesus 2,000 years ago, is a hardy weed that has wrapped itself around our hearts and the hearts of our children, threatening to strangle our best intentions and impulses. What is fueling the growth of that materialism weed? Is it thinking we can create security if we surround ourselves with enough stuff? Is it thinking we can assure our popularity, become better loved, if we have the right stuff? Is it feeling judged by the quantity and quality of our stuff? Is it lack of purpose and an emptiness that we think we can fill with more stuff? Where does that weed take root in your life? In the lives of the children close to you?

What would it feel like to really rest in the security of God's love? To trust in that love? To remember that in God's reckoning, the last will be first? To recall that how we will be judged is by how we treat Christ in the least of these, our brothers and sisters? To be filled with a sense of purpose and find satisfaction in service? How much richer will we and our children be when we do so!

Those segregationist signs were no match for the great and awesome signs and wonders that God worked through Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the countless known and unknown heroes of the freedom movement of the sixties.

While it's true that the "Whites Only" signs are now museum objects, far too many of our nation's Black and Latino children, and poor children of every color, encounter unwritten signs that tell them they aren't welcome. They read them in the low expectations of a teacher, in the tattered pages of an outdated textbook; they see them in the fearful glance of a passerby, in the suspicious eye of a store clerk. They see the signs in movies and on television shows that reflect an image of who they are imagined or expected to be, and in the comments of some friends who tell them not to act "White" by studying hard. Too many children see the signs that point them toward prison and not Princeton, jail and not Yale. They read the signs on the crumbling walls of apartment buildings and in the long lines of emergency rooms to which the uninsured must turn for health care. Others in the majority who can't read the signs, don't notice them, or can't even see them, are amazed to be told that they exist.

Like Moses, we are invited to replace signs of racism, oppression, and injustice and make *God's* signs and wonders known today. We are invited to challenge all the systems and figures and forces that keep us all from the true freedom of a community in which we know the equality, dignity, beauty, and belovedness of each one. Those are signs and wonders that we need to keep around.

Prayer

God, open my eyes to see your signs and wonders all around me. Open my mouth to declare your wonder and move my hands to work to free all your children from the racism and oppression that keeps all of us bound. Fill my heart with your forgiveness for those who have hurt me, fill my heart with your love for those whom I have kept at a distance. Amen.

Saturday: Beloved Community

Scripture: 1 John 4:16b-21

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.... There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts our fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

⁴² Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*

our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. Then the LORD commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right."

Reading

As a sermon illustration, King recalls Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," a story about a man who falls asleep for twenty years. King highlights an important yet often overlooked detail: the impact of the signs of the times. As Rip left town before his long nap, the sign that hung above his local hangout depicted King George III of England. When he came back to town, years later, the same sign changed to depict President George Washington. Unfamiliar with this new leader, Rip felt confused and lost: "And this reveals to us that the most striking thing about the story of Rip Van Winkle is not merely that Rip slept twenty years, but that he slept through a revolution.... And one of the great liabilities of life is that all too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change, and yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental responses, that the new situation demands. They end up sleeping through a revolution."⁴⁶

Reflection

When my son was little, each night we would read a bedtime story. On this night it was *Martin's Big Words*, a moving children's book that tells about the injustice of segregation with its "Whites Only" signs, of Dr. King's struggle for justice, and of his death. As I read, I tried to explain the unfairness of that time. When we finished reading, Micah opened his book journal to write down the name of the book, as we do each night. As he bent over the open journal, however, he didn't write. Instead, he looked up with eyes brimming, a face stricken with sadness, and pointed to his throat choked with tears to indicate that he couldn't speak. "Are you feeling sad, honey?" I asked, and he nodded as tears and questions spilled out. "Will they ever come back?" he wanted to know. "Will who come back?" I asked, wondering if he meant the people who had killed Dr. King. Was that fear the source of his anguish? He responded, "The signs. Will the signs ever come back? Will it ever get unfair again?" I told him that the signs had all been thrown away, but that a few had been saved and put in museums so we could remember the unfairness and make sure the unfairness of segregation never happened again.

Prayer

Bountiful God, your love is the most precious treasure I'll ever have. Help me to keep from burying it under a mountain of stuff. Use me, freed from the distraction of accumulation, to serve children who don't have what they need to meet their most basic needs. Amen.

Wednesday: Who's in Charge?

Scripture: Isaiah 60:17a-19

I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

Reading

[If we are to have peace on earth, our] loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation, and this means we must develop a world perspective. No individual [or nation] can live alone... and as long as we try, the more we are going to have war in this world. Now the judgment of God is upon us, and we must either learn to live together as brothers or we are all going to perish together as fools.⁴³

Reflection

What a promise God made through the prophet Isaiah to war-weary, battle-scarred, heavy-hearted Israel. Imagine the glad prospect of a land without violence, an end to devastation and destruction. On the heels of this promise of peace comes the well-known proclamation of Isaiah 61, "The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;... They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations." With the people no longer consumed by war, their attention could turn to building up the next generation.

⁴⁶ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake through the Revolution," www.stanford.edu/group/king/publications/sermons/680331_000_Remaining_Awake.html

⁴³ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace," Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, Dec. 24, 1967.

Have we given up on the promise of peace? Have we resigned ourselves to building up armaments instead of the next generation and the ruined cities? Have we been blinded by what is so that we fail to see what God intends for us?

Think of all the war-weary hearts that long to hear Isaiah's word of peace this day. Think of all those that mourn who yearn for comfort after these many years of war—children who lost parents, parents who lost children, soldiers who lost comrades, families who lost loved ones. Imagine the heavy cloud of war being lifted, and Peace as the overseer of every land. Imagine an end to the killing and atrocities committed one against another, and Righteousness in charge. With Peace as our overseer, and Righteousness our taskmaster, it is time to repair the ruined cities and the devastations of many generations.

Prayer

Come, O Prince of Peace, into my heart. Come, O Prince of Peace, into our community. Come, O Prince of Peace, into our nation. Come, O Prince of Peace, into our world. Take hatred, suspicion, bitterness, and violence from every heart and replace it with your love, peace, and hope. Take weapons from every hand and use mine this day to help build up a more loving and peaceful world for our children. Amen.

Thursday: Blessed

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-24

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Matthew 5:1-12)

Reading

One of the most persistent ambiguities we face is that everybody talks about peace as a goal, but among the wielders of power, peace is practically nobody's business. Many men cry, "Peace! Peace!" but they refuse to do the things that make for peace. The large power blocs talk pas-

sionately of pursuing peace while expanding defense budgets that already bulge, enlarging already awesome armies and devising ever more devastating weapons.⁴⁴

Reflection

"God bless America." We sing it, we say it, we stick it on the bumpers of our cars, we emblazon it on billboards. It is our hope, it is our prayer. It is a plea for safety and well-being. In the face of an uncertain world and an unknown future, it gives voice to our love for the people and places we know best. Now, some have rewritten the bumper sticker to say, "God bless America—and the rest of the world, too." Why limit our hopes for God's blessings; why not shower God's children everywhere?

Jesus' description of who will be blessed, who will know God's blessing, invites us to look beyond place of residence as a qualification for blessing, and to consider the actions we take and the circumstances we experience as what will make us know blessing. If we want to be blessed, we are called to be peacemakers. To make peace in our personal relationships. To make peace in our congregations. To make peace in our neighborhoods. To make peace in our communities. To make peace in our nation. And to make peace in our world.

Dr. King wrote, "It is not enough to say, 'We must not wage war.' It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the eradication of war but on the affirmation of peace."⁴⁵ What can you do to make peace in any one, or more, of these areas?

Prayer

Gracious God, it is easy to sit here and wait to be blessed. It is harder to stir myself to take actions that will lead to blessing, to make peace my active commitment. Show me ways, I pray, not to hope for peace, not to feel peaceful, not to appreciate peace, but to actively make peace. This I pray in the name of your beloved child, the Prince of Peace. Amen.

Friday: Signs of the Times

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:20-25

When your children ask you in time to come, "What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the LORD our God has commanded you?" then you shall say to your children, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The LORD displayed before

⁴⁴ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *The World House* Essay, copyright 1967, heirs to the estate of Martin Luther King

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*