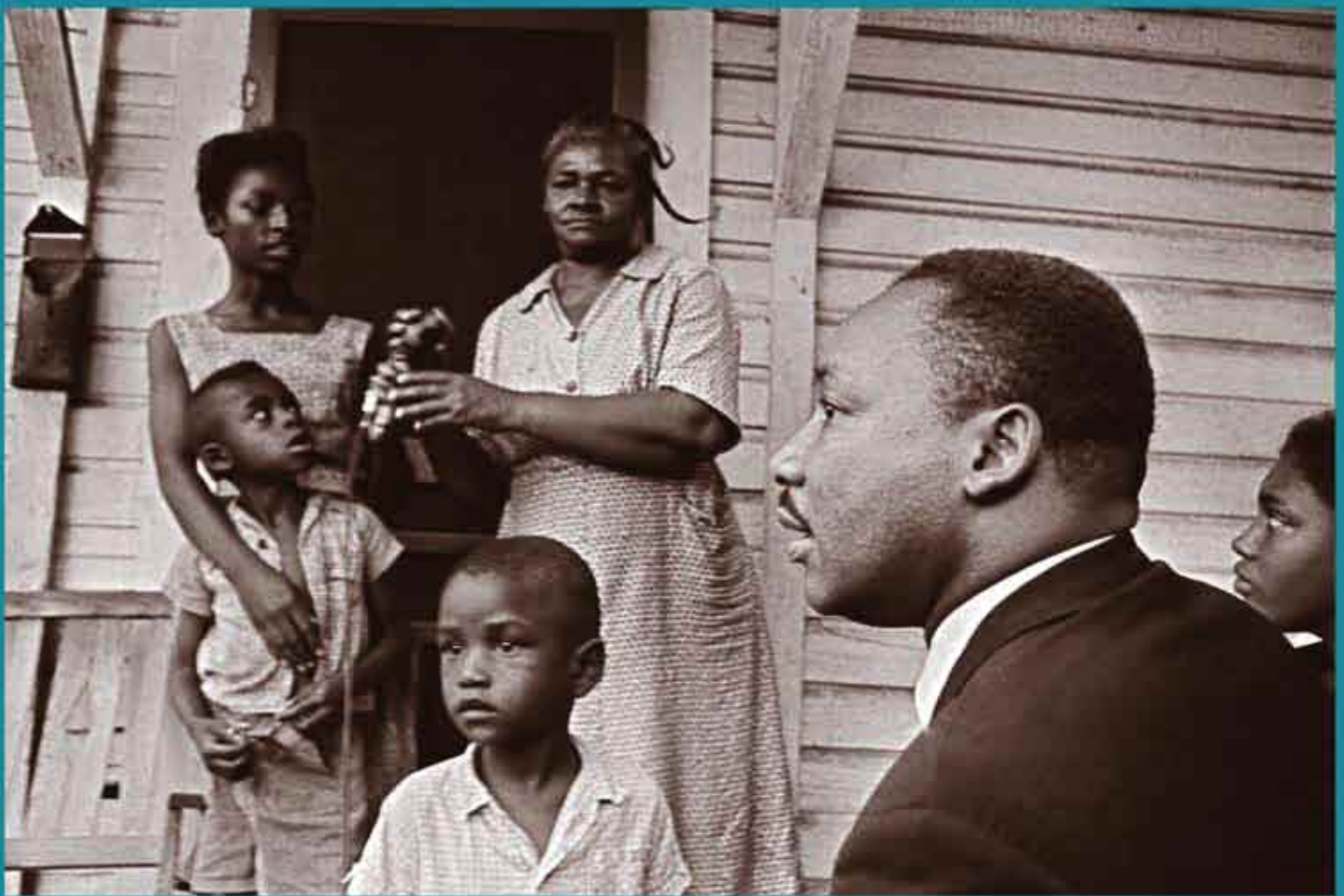


National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round Child Advocacy

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



Children's Defense Fund

35th Anniversary
1973 – 2008

About the Children's Defense Fund

The Children's Defense Fund's Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investment before they get sick or into trouble, drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundation and corporate grants and individual donations. We have never taken government funds.

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**National Observance of
Children's Sabbaths® Manual**
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Child Advocacy

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

Volume 17

By Shannon Daley-Harris

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the late Father Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., whose passion for justice, powerful teaching, and prophetic preaching enriched the Children's Sabbath Manual and the work of the Children's Defense Fund for fifteen years and inspired the efforts of the faithful to improve the lives of children everywhere.



Children's Defense Fund

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Please note that all statistics and facts are current as of May 1, 2008. For updated information, please visit the Children's Defense Fund website at www.childrensdefense.org.

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All pages are perforated for easy removal.

Section 1

Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Movement. Let's Get Started!

Dear Faithful Friend of Children,

What would Dr. King think if he returned to be with us for just a day? Would he be surprised if he stood again on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial to learn that there will be a monument to him erected on the same grassy Washington Mall that extends from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol? Would he be amazed by the federal holiday in his name or by the number of streets named for him, including Martin Luther King Boulevard less than a mile away?

Or, from his vantage point on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, would he look in his mind's eye past the monuments to the dilapidated schools and neighborhoods and places of worship still largely segregated, not by law but in fact, and feel utter dismay and disbelief that so many still have been left behind in poverty in our rich nation? Would he look at elementary school children—Black, Latino, Asian, Native American, and White—on a school field trip to the Mall lining up to use the water fountain by the souvenir sellers, and feel shocked to learn that one in three Black boys born in 2001 will go to prison in his lifetime, as will one in six of the Latino boys and one in 17 of the White boys? Would he weep to see young children standing on milk crates to reach the police officer's desk for fingerprinting, children arrested and detained not for acts of courage in the Children's March of his day as they worked so bravely against injustice, but jailed today for school yard behavior that could have been and used to be handled in the principal's office or with a call to parents?

Would it stop him in his tracks to realize that our nation has failed to make the needed and possible progress over the past 40 years and that on the day celebrating his memory this year, and every day in America, 2,483 children are born into poverty? Would he look around the Mall for the protest when he hears that one in every six children lives in poverty today?

Would he pick up a newspaper and wonder if the headlines about war casualties, civilian deaths, and military budgets are about Vietnam, the war he spoke out against despite enormous criticism... only to realize that our nation is engaged in a new war in Iraq because we didn't work hard enough to instill in enough of our leaders the resolve for nonviolence that he lived and died for? Would he look at the Vietnam veterans selling souvenirs and POW stickers at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial steps and wonder if in 2048, veterans of Iraq will likewise still be caught in the grip of a war with no winners? Would he look to the nation's Capitol at the other end of the Mall and wonder how they found the money to go to war over weapons of mass destruction that didn't exist, yet can't find the money to ensure the health coverage for every child and pregnant woman that our government automatically provides for all Senators and Representatives and their families? Would he hear a new sermon forming in his mind when he heard that the money spent on Iraq in four months could have lifted every child in America out of poverty for a year? Would a passage of scripture come to mind?

Would he ask what would Jesus, or Moses, or Buddha, or Muhammad, or Bah'a'ullah or any of the prophets make of it if they were in our midst today? Would they think we've done all we could and should to make peace? Would they see our rich nation's 13 million poor children and wonder how hard you and I have spoken up and organized and protested to help them?



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

Would they see teeming prisons and less full graduation stages and think we had done all we could to help every child reach her or his God-given potential?

Are they wondering—what will it take? What more can be said to tell you of the Eternal's intention for us to live in justice, love, and peace and to protect the vulnerable?

What don't we know? We know what God requires of us, in the words of the prophet Micah: "...to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." We know that millions of children are facing terrible problems: poverty that no child deserves, racism that no child should experience, and militarism and war that cost us precious, irreplaceable lives and moral standing in the world, and desperately needed resources. They and Dr. King would probably ask us, "What and who are we waiting for?"

I'm sure that some of you have heard a version of the story of a man sitting on a small island. As the tide started to rise, he realized it would soon cover the whole island. As the waters rose, he climbed onto a large rock at the water's edge. Someone in a rowboat came by and offered him a ride. "No thanks," he declined, "God will save me." The waters rose and he climbed part-way up a palm tree. A woman in a motorboat came by and offered to save him. "No thanks," he replied, "I have faith that God will save me." Finally he climbed to the tippy-top of the tree as the waters rose. A helicopter hovered over and dangled a rope. The man declined the help, saying, "God will save me." Soon, waters covered the island and everything on it, and the man died. When he encountered God, he said, "I had perfect faith. Why didn't you save me?" God said, "First I sent you a rowboat. Then I sent you a motorboat. Then I sent you a helicopter. What were you waiting for?!" Dr. King's frequent telling of the Parable of the poor man Lazarus and the rich man Dives also reminds us of the consequences of our failure to share our riches with the poor who we refuse to see and help.

When Dr. King died in 1968 calling for a campaign to end poverty in America, there were 25.4 million poor Americans including 11 million children. Today there are 36.5 million poor Americans including 13 million children. When he died, the country was stealing resources to wage an unjust war in Vietnam; today we are waging an unjust war in Iraq. What is it going to take for the people of God to learn and get others to learn and act to end the triple threats of racism, poverty, and militarism that Dr. King warned could destroy us?

We can't sit around waiting for God to save us. God has given us all we need: We have been given the sacred charge and the calling to do justice. We have the resources, we have each other, and we have our faith to strengthen us to do the hard work we must do.

I hope you will use the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend and movement as a vital step towards saving our children and launching a new campaign to end child poverty in America now. Dr. King urged a united movement we must build together, writing, "This call for a worldwide 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 [people].... When I speak of love, I am speaking of that force that 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....'"¹

Thank you for joining in a united effort to make God's love manifest for every child and each other in justice and peace. Please use this resource manual to plan worship, educational events, and activities to serve and advocate for children, not just on the October Children's Sabbaths weekend, but throughout the year. Matt Rosen, CDF's

¹ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).

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

Deputy Director of Religious Action, stands ready to support your important work. He can be contacted at mrosen@childrensdefense.org.

In *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., wrote, “Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal opposition 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 God’s intended reign of justice and peace is realized. Let’s courageously stand up, challenge injustice and a “status quo” that is destroying the lives of millions of our children, and enable America to live into the bright promise of her founding dreams.

Faithfully and hopefully,



Marian Wright Edelman



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

We are so glad that you have this resource in your hands, whether you are ready to dive right in to planning a Children's Sabbath or are taking your first look to see what it's all about. Whether this will be your 17th Children's Sabbath or your very first, welcome! You make a difference in the lives of children and in the life of your place of worship— by connecting the two, you can help make incredible, important things happen that will improve the lives of children in your place of worship, community, and across our nation while at the same time bringing new inspiration, motivation, and excitement to your worship community.

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

The Children's Sabbaths celebration is an inspiring weekend to focus attention on the urgent plight of children in our nation and calls us to put our faith into action to meet children's needs through direct service and work for justice. Through the service of worship, educational programs, and congregational activities, you can affirm what your place of worship already does with and for children while challenging members to take new actions and commit to new efforts to meet the needs of children in your community, state, and our nation. When 12.8 million children in America live in poverty, 9.4 million lack health insurance, and thousands are homeless each day, your concern and action are needed now more than ever. When the threats of poverty, violence, and racism are the living nightmares of too many children, your concern and action are needed to give all children the life of their dreams and the life for which God created them.

What is the Children's Sabbath?

The Children's Sabbath is a weekend and a broader movement that aims to unite religious congregations of all faiths across the nation in shared concern for children and common commitment to improving their lives and work-

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

A Children's Sabbath weekend typically has four elements:

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

Who sponsors and supports the Children's Sabbath?

The Children's Sabbath is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, guided by a multi-faith advisory committee and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations. The Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start,

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and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investment before they get sick or into trouble,

drop out of school, or suffer family breakdown. CDF is a private, nonprofit organization supported by foundations and corporate grants and individual donations, and has never taken government funds.

From its inception 35 years ago, CDF has recognized the importance of the faith community's partnership in building a movement to Leave No Child Behind. A nation that

About the 2008 Resource Manual

This resource manual is organized differently than the manuals from recent years. Here's a quick run-down of what's different:

In the first section, **Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths Movement.**

Let's Get Started! you will find a letter from CDF President Marian Wright Edelman, an explanation of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement with examples from last year's celebrations, along with planning steps for two kinds of celebrations: a Children's Sabbath held within a single congregation and a multi-faith, community-wide Children's Sabbath. Whichever kind of Children's Sabbath celebration you plan, next you'll find strategies for spreading the word about it to boost participation and increase attention to children's needs and what we can do.

The second section, **Where Are We? Where Do We Need to Go?** is an extended reflection by Marian Wright Edelman that looks at the current state of America's children in light of the three threats about which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., warned our nation: poverty and materialism; militarism and other violence; and racism. After a look at where things stand for children today, this section looks ahead to where we need to go to keep children safe from want, harm, and hate. How can we respond to Dr. King's call to end poverty in America?

The third section, **How Do We Get There? Resources for Your Place of Worship,** looks at the resources of faith communities—our sacred stories, texts, and traditions, prayers and preaching, lessons and learning—from which we can draw to create meaningful and motivating Children's Sabbath celebrations. Instead of sermon and homily notes based on the lectionary texts or Torah portion for the Children's Sabbath weekend (which can be downloaded from www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths), this year we've introduced a collection of "Faith Voices," theological perspectives by religious leaders from a range of faith traditions on Dr. King's call to end poverty and warning about the threats of materialism, militarism, and racism, and on other dimensions of social action. Instead of presenting these reflections separately in the various faith sections, as in previous manuals, they are presented together to complement and enrich each other and present the multi-faceted, multi-faith conversation the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend aims to generate as we look at shared concerns and common commitments to children and justice. Following the multi-faith perspectives, you will find all you need to plan for the service of worship, which lies at the heart of the Children's Sabbath, whatever your faith tradition and whether you are planning a service just for your own place of worship or whether you are planning a multi-faith service for the whole community.

The fourth section, **The Road Ahead: Action Ideas for the Children's Sabbaths Weekend and Throughout the Year,** outlines strategies and programs that your place of worship can use throughout the year to protect children from need, harm, and hate and help create congregations, communities, and a nation in which every child may experience justice, peace, and love.

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

lets its children be the poorest citizens has at its heart a spiritual and ethical crisis. Thus, the religious community must help to transform our nation's priorities so that we defend those who are youngest, weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable. For many years CDF has worked to support denominations and religious organizations as they develop and maintain child advocacy campaigns. The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration was launched in 1992 to coalesce these efforts into a united moral witness for children that crosses all lines of geography, faith tradition, race, and ethnicity.

The Children's Sabbath observance is guided by a multi-faith advisory committee with Muslim, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Báha'í, and Sikh members. It is endorsed by more than 200 denominations, faith groups, and religious organizations. If you are interested in having your organization become an official endorser of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, please call CDF's Religious Action Division at (202) 662-3641 or visit www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths for an online sign-on form.

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

Celebrate and strengthen existing efforts for children.

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

Discover new opportunities to help children.

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

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

Pray, study, and reflect.

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

Take action!

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

Commit to new, long-term efforts.

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

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® event is...

A mix of joy and sorrow, celebration and sober commitment.

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

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

An annual event.

The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is designated for the third weekend of October each year. Because it is an annual event, congregations participating for the first time can just “stick a toe in the water” and participate in small, simple ways... although some want to jump in completely right from the start. Others build their participation year by year, adding more elements to their observance. Because it occurs annually, congregations have the opportunity to evaluate what worked well and what didn't and improve their plans for the following year. Most importantly, because the Children's Sabbath takes place each fall, children look forward to it from year to year, having a consistent experience of their congregation as a place and community that cares about children and is committed to nurturing and protecting them.

Flexible.

While there is a suggested theme each year, congregations are encouraged to focus on the most urgent problems confronting children and families in their communities. This

resource manual is chock-full of materials from which you can pick and choose those that are best suited to your congregation. Most can be used as is, or adapted, or simply serve as inspiration for you to create your own materials. Materials prepared for one faith tradition may be enriching for the congregation of another tradition. And while the suggested date is the third weekend of October, if that date doesn't work for your congregation's calendar, pick a different date that does. What is most important is finding a time to focus on the needs of children and our responsibility to nurture and protect them.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, or Children's Service?

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

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

Many congregations have Youth Days when they turn the service over to the young people to plan and lead. Like a Youth Day, on the Children's Sabbath children and youths participate in the planning and leadership of the day. But on the Children's Sabbath, the adults aren't only the “audience,” because the Children's Sabbath is an intergenerational event drawing on the leadership and involvement of *all* ages. Its message is that each of us, no matter what our age, has a role to play in nurturing and protecting children and working for justice.

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

I want to get involved in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement. Where do I start?

Getting this manual is the first important step in getting involved in the Children's Sabbath, so you are already on your way! The next planning steps are outlined later in this section. One of the first decisions you and those who join you in the planning will need to make is whether to plan a Children's Sabbath just for your congregation or to join with congregations of other faiths or denominations to plan a multi-faith or ecumenical Children's Sabbath in your community. Either option is a valuable way to participate. You should determine what is right for your congregation this year.

This manual provides planning suggestions, promotion ideas, worship resources, educational resources, activity ideas, and suggestions for building on your Children's Sabbath to help children throughout the year.

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

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

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

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

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

There are a couple of options. First, you could schedule your celebration for a later date to allow for more planning time. Second, you could still plan to participate on the third weekend of October but just start with what is quickest and easiest to do, such as photocopying and distributing one of the bulletin inserts, or including one of the prayers

or readings provided in this resource. (You might still have time to invite a guest speaker who is engaged in work to improve the lives of children.) Then, you could plan educational programs or activities to serve or seek justice for children to take place in the months and year that follow.

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

Every day, places of worship welcome children and families. Every day, congregations learn more about their faith and its implications for their lives. Every day, religious congregations provide food or clothing or other emergency assistance to families in need. Every day, religious leaders and members work for justice in their communities, nation, and world.

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

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

How Congregations Celebrated the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Last Year

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

As you'll see in the following examples and those scattered throughout this book, the emphasis and the extent of the celebrations vary—some congregations plan a full weekend of events, while others focus on just one element, whether worship or education or service. Together, they comprise a marvelous witness and work that bring our nation closer to the justice and compassion God intends for our life together.

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Just a few examples are provided below. Look for other inspiring examples of Children's Sabbath celebrations throughout this resource.

All the children were invited to process in with the pastor and other liturgical ministers, reported **The Church of St. Philip in Minneapolis, Minn.** At the start of the Mass there was a special recognition of the children and of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, which was referenced in the homily as well. One of the young people proclaimed one of the readings, one young girl sang with the adult choir, and seven children each read one of the petitions at the time of the General Intercessions. Several children assisted the ushers in taking up the weekly collection and many participated in the offertory procession, carrying not only the bread and the wine, but also canned and boxed food for the parish's food pantry, arranging it in front of the altar.

Writes Pastoral Associate Cindy Boggs,

"There was a wonderful reception of so many young people participating in our liturgy—had many happy comments from parishioners at the end of Mass. We have participated in previous years, bringing attention to children at risk and in need and to the good work of the Children's Defense Fund.... We are a small urban parish in a challenged and challenging neighborhood and have several programs for children and teens of the neighborhood in after-school, evening, and weekend programs. Thank you for keeping the needs of children at the forefront, for the on-going work you do, and for the great resources for the annual celebration of Children's Sabbath."

The Jewish congregation at **Mount Zion Temple in St. Paul, Minnesota**, celebrated Children's Sabbath this past October as part of a year-long organizing initiative to uncover their social justice focus for *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

As part of Mount Zion Temple's partnership with Jewish Community Action, a state organization, this journey began with social justice house parties among Temple members to discuss their individual interests, concerns, and stories. The outcomes from these meetings were gathered and categorized into three issue areas, then presented to the congregation. At a congregational gathering, Mount Zion members voted to focus their social justice efforts on children, with the vision of making the lives of Minnesota children better by connecting them and their families with already established programs and services that would boost their economic stability.

The next step was the celebration of Children's Shabbat. The director of CDF-Minnesota presented the Shabbat sermon and prayers, and readings were used from the manual. An action table was set up with information and a sign-up for an opportunity for involvement.

The Children's Shabbat service was later followed up with a training session for members to use the CDF-Minnesota Bridge to Benefits website that helps families assess their eligibility for program assistance. This has developed into an ongoing outreach as members of the congregation continue to contact community-based service providers with the information about Bridges to Benefits and link them with CDF training to use the site.

Several members of the congregation participated at the interfaith community's Day at the Capitol to speak out for children's health care coverage in response to their Children's Shabbat experience.

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East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, made the most of the Children's Sabbaths weekend. Their events started on Saturday evening, with activities for children, a dinner for all ages, and worship with music, prayers by and for our children, and a sermon by guest preacher Dr. Eileen Lindner, author of *Thus Far on the Way: Toward a Theology of Child Advocacy*. Following worship, there was an educational program for adults and displays by agencies providing assistance to children and families. Their observance of Children's Sabbath continued the following morning with three services of worship focused on the Children's Sabbath theme and an education hour with classes focused on learning more about children's needs and the call of faith to respond. The morning concluded with fellowship time in a hall with displays of organizations seeking volunteers to work with children and postcards that members could fill out with child advocacy concerns to send to their elected representatives.

Shakeel Syed, Executive Director of the **Islamic Shura Council of Southern California**, reports that over 20 mosques participated in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration on Friday, October 19, 2007. Khutbahs focused on the over nine million children in America without health insurance, and statistics were used from the 2007 Children's Sabbaths Manual to illustrate the need for Muslims to encourage their state and federal elected officials to pass comprehensive health legislation that covers all children. The success of the Children's Sabbath celebration led the Shura Council of Southern California to host a follow-up conference highlighting the voiceless plight of children from faith perspectives.

Davis Street United Methodist Church in Burlington, N.C., held its fifth annual Children's Sabbath. In addition to using information about healthy children from the Children's Sabbath Manual, they prepared a slide presentation to highlight the condition of children in the United States and ways that people could be involved in making a difference in a child's life. During the service, school kits were presented at the altar as a "Response to the Word," and were later donated to Zimbabwean orphans. Their observance didn't end with the worship service, but included educational programs about UNICEF and eight different outreach opportunities, including: Angel Tree Christmas, which connects parents in prison with their children through the delivery of Christmas gifts; Nothing but Nets, which provides mosquito nets to protect children in developing countries from malaria; tutoring in the church's after-school program; and taking advocacy action using materials provided by the Children's Defense Fund's Healthy Child Campaign. The congregation intends to build on the Children's Sabbath by starting English as a Second Language classes for Hispanic families in the community.

Throughout the Children's Sabbaths weekend, members of the church and community could visit **Central Baptist Church in Norwich, Conn.**, to experience a mixed media presentation that included photography and poetry from a local artist, Peter J. Crowley. Halls were draped in white linen, which accented the photography that was placed on easels draped in black. Various broken toys were placed down the church hallway reminding visitors that many children's lives are broken and in disrepair. An example of a typical kitchen cupboard showed samples of government issued food and the food received from a typical food pantry. Music played in the background as visitors walked down the hallway and into the sanctuary to meditate.

Although **Union Presbyterian Church and Centerville Presbyterian Church in Union, West Virginia**, only have a handful of children, that did not stop them from expressing their commitment to children in a 2007 Children's Sabbath. They focused their prayers and sermons on children's needs and hope to use the inspiration of the Children's Sabbath to start "at home" by establishing a Sunday School and Youth Group program for the congregation's own children.

Shannondale of Maryville (Tenn.) Faith Community's Retirement Center Chapel shares that same commitment to child advocacy. The Children's Sabbath at the Retirement Center Chapel included prayers, music, a sermon, and bulletin inserts focused on the unmet needs of children and our call as people of faith to respond. Congregants received a copy of the Daily Devotional Guide from the Children's Sabbath Manual as they departed from the service.

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Everyone was welcome at the Interfaith Children's Sabbath service celebrated in Elmwood Park, Virginia. The service was drawn from the Children's Sabbaths resource manual and enlivened by the talents of the Praise Dancers and Youth Choir of **Kingdom Life Ministries**, the Children's Choir of **Louden Avenue Christian Church**, and music from the Kemp family. The outdoor event included a host of children's activities under tents, from storytelling and crafts to a juggler and face painting. The coalition of community groups and places of worship that sponsored the service included **Mental Health America, Temple Emmanuel, Clarence Sabree Islamic Center, Old Southwest Congregation in Action, National Alliance of the Mentally Ill – Roanoke, Local Colors, New Horizons, and Valley Character**. An article in the *Roanoke Times* noted, "Representatives of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist faiths were on hand for the afternoon gathering. 'This is a symbolic effort to show a commitment to unity,' said the Rev. Kirk Ballin, chairman of the interfaith committee for Valley Character, one of the sponsoring organizations. 'Hopefully this is the beginning of an annual event. The idea is that as a diverse community made up of diverse faith groups, there are certain values that we share in common,' he explained, specifically citing, 'the health and welfare of all the children of our community.'"



Planning Your Participation in the Children's Sabbaths Movement

Now that you have a better idea of what the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement is, and how other places of worship have celebrated it, it's time to plan your own special celebration and prepare for and follow-up on your congregational commitment to children. Following you will find all you need to get started:

- **Steps for planning a Children's Sabbath celebration in your place of worship**
- **Steps for planning a multi-faith Children's Sabbath celebration in your community**

Steps for Planning a Children's Sabbath Celebration in Your Place of Worship

❑ **Begin with prayer.** The success of the Children's Sabbath—its ability to stir the hearts and minds and hands of people to nurture and protect children—ultimately relies on God's grace. Seek God's guidance for your Children's Sabbath: Turn to God for the strength and commitment to plan it, pray for partners to help you in this venture, and thank God for the precious children God has entrusted to our care. (Those of the Christian faith may want to use the Daily Devotionals provided in Section 3.) Whatever your faith tradition, and whatever words you choose for prayer, know that God is with you as you embark on planning a Children's Sabbath.

❑ **Secure support from appropriate religious leaders, staff, or committees.** In addition to obtaining approval for planning a Children's Sabbath, do some preliminary investigation into potential sources of financial support for your Children's Sabbath. Of course, you will have a better idea of your budget when you are further into the planning process. You may find that you can plan a Children's Sabbath with little additional expense.

❑ **Mark the date on your congregation's calendar. The 2008 Children's Sabbath weekend is October 17-19.** Most Children's Sabbaths will take place on this third full weekend of October during a congregation's traditional worship and education time. If your congregation has a conflict with this date, select another. Keeping your celebration during the usual worship time promises greater participation and communicates that the Children's Sabbath is an integral part of your congregation's worship, work, and witness. If you select a time other than the traditional time for your place of worship, be prepared to do lots of extra promotion to ensure a strong turnout.

❑ **Recruit a committee to plan the Children's Sabbath and activities leading up to or following it.** Involving a broad range of people brings a wealth of gifts and experience, builds greater excitement and "ownership" of the Children's Sabbath throughout the congregation, and helps ensure that no single person gets overloaded. In addition to religious leaders and congregation staff, consider involving religious education teachers, social action committee members, children and youths, and any interested congregation members. Develop a meeting schedule that will allow sufficient planning time. Many committees find they need more frequent meetings in September and October as the Children's Sabbath draws near.

❑ **Identify leadership within the committee.** Designate a chairperson or co-chairs to guide the planning and ensure that goals are set, responsibilities assigned and fulfilled, and that the process moves forward effectively. You also may want to name a secretary who will keep notes of committee meetings and communicate decisions and other information to those involved. (Be sure to involve or keep informed all who will be affected by Children's Sabbath activities, such as musicians, educational program teachers and volunteers, and secretaries.) A treasurer could keep tabs on the budget allotted for the Children's Sabbath and also oversee in-kind contributions donated by the community. As the Children's Sabbath planning proceeds, the chairperson(s) should assign new tasks and responsibilities as they arise.

❑ **Focus your vision for the Children's Sabbath.** What do you hope will happen during and as a result of your Children's Sabbath? Do you want the Children's Sabbath to highlight and affirm the gift and gifts of children? To

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underscore the responsibility of adults to nurture and protect children? Do you hope to increase awareness about the serious needs of many children today? To broaden the congregation's concern for children to encompass those in the community? Do you want to energize and increase participation in existing congregational programs serving children as a result of the Children's Sabbath? Do you hope to build excitement and commitment for starting a new congregational effort to help children? To stimulate new, individual commitments to giving time or resources to help children? Clarifying your vision for the Children's Sabbath and its impact will help guide your planning for a successful experience.

❑ **Determine the format of your Children's Sabbath.**

You may decide to start small and build your celebration in future years, or you may want to plan an ambitious celebration now. Choose the approach that is right for your congregation and will provide a successful, affirming experience upon which you can build year after year. These are the major components to consider for your Children's Sabbath:

- **Service of worship/prayers:** This is the heart of most Children's Sabbath celebrations: lifting up, in prayer, sermon or other message, and song, God's call to people of faith to nurture and protect children. (See Section 3 for ideas and resources.)
- **Educational programs:** Educational programs for children, youths, and adults help everyone learn more about the problems facing children, the faith-based call to respond, and ways to make a positive difference. Lesson plans for a variety of faith traditions may be downloaded from the Children's Defense Fund website at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.
- **Advocacy and hands-on outreach activities:** When people have been inspired and called in the service of worship and have learned more through the educational programs, they are eager to start making a difference for children immediately. Providing concrete outreach and advocacy activities on the Children's Sabbath, perhaps following the service of worship, helps people respond and put their faith into action. (See Section 4 for ideas.)
- **Commitment to longer-term responses to children's needs:** This is the goal of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement. The Children's Sabbath is about more than one weekend a year; it is about inspiring new, long-term responses to the needs of children. Provide opportunities for individuals to find out about,

and make commitments to, ongoing action through information tables, presentations, and sign-up sheets. The ongoing action could include participating in existing programs in your congregation, volunteering with a community child-serving program or organization, or even joining a planning committee to develop a new program in your congregation. (See Section 4 for ideas and resources.)

❑ **Involve children and youths.** The Children's Sabbath is an important time to highlight the gifts, contributions, and leadership of children and youths. However, the Children's Sabbath should not be completely turned over to children, with adults serving only as the advisors and "audience." The Children's Sabbath is meant to be an intergenerational event that demonstrates and celebrates how everyone—children, youth, parents, singles, and seniors—must respond faithfully to God's call to nurture and protect children. (Other occasions celebrated by many congregations, such as Youth Sundays or Children's Day, are more appropriate times to put the service entirely in the hands of children and youths.) Be sure to involve children and youths in the planning process as well as in carrying out parts of the Children's Sabbath. The various sections of this manual offer specific suggestions on how children and youths can participate in promoting the Children's Sabbath, leading the service of worship, and engaging in outreach and advocacy activities. Be sure to solicit young people's ideas and suggestions to supplement those found here.

❑ **Involve resource people.** After you have determined the basic format and activities for your Children's Sabbath, involve resource people from the congregation and community. These may include health care professionals, public education teachers and administrators, staff of after-school programs, child care providers, Head Start teachers, staff of organizations serving families in poverty, juvenile justice professionals, police officers, staff of community organizations serving children, elected officials, and representatives of advocacy organizations working on children's behalf. Secular organizations working for children are often eager to find ways to link with religious congregations and draw on the rich resources congregations can offer. Forging these connections will not only assist you in planning your Children's Sabbath weekend, but also should create partnerships for long-term projects that build on the Children's Sabbath.

❑ **Recruit volunteers to help prepare for and conduct Children's Sabbath activities.** Some who may not have been able to join the ongoing planning committee would

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welcome responsibility for a specific task in preparation for the Children's Sabbath or during the weekend itself. In addition to recruiting volunteers through personal contact, publicize opportunities through the announcement time during the service, in the congregation's newsletter or bulletin, at meetings, and at gatherings. Tap seniors, children, youths, singles, parents—everyone! The Children's Sabbath is about the role each person can play to nurture and protect children.

❑ **Plan to build on the Children's Sabbath.** While you are planning the Children's Sabbath, keep your focus on the ultimate goal of stimulating new, long-term congregational and individual commitments to help children year-round. Don't wait until after the Children's Sabbath weekend to think about where you hope it will lead. Instead, make the long-term result of the Children's Sabbath a focus of the planning process. Some Children's Sabbath committees have found it useful to designate a sub-committee for follow-up to begin working on this from the start. (See Section 4 for ideas and resources.) As you plan long-term follow-up, make sure that you involve the necessary religious leaders, staff, and committees, as well as other interested individuals. Your resource people can also provide input about community needs and opportunities for partnerships. Be sure you have a meeting date on the calendar after the Children's Sabbath to convene members of the Children's Sabbath Planning Committee and any others, as appropriate, to move ahead with the follow-up plans.

❑ **Take care of “wrap-up” details.** After the Children's Sabbath, be sure to attend to details to wrap things up. These may include evaluating the Children's Sabbath (what worked and what you would do differently next time); writing thank-you notes to those involved in the leadership and planning and any others who made contributions; marking next year's Children's Sabbath on the congregation's calendar; setting a date for the first planning committee meeting (even though the planning committee membership may change); and closing the books on the Children's Sabbath budget. Some congregations gather the planning committee members for a special appreciation luncheon and awards or other tokens of appreciation. If videotapes or photographs were taken during the Children's Sabbath, you may want to arrange a time to display them to extend the Children's Sabbath experience. Or begin a scrapbook chronicling your congregation's Children's Sabbath and plan to add to it next year.

❑ **Put next year's Children's Sabbath on the calendar.** The 2009 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend will be held October 16-18, 2009. Wrote the organizer of **Pilgrim Congregational Church-UCC's** first Children's Sabbath in **Bozeman, Montana**, “We will be putting together a Children's Sabbath Task Force as part of the social justice team that will be brainstorming next year's celebration and how it ties into existing mission projects.”

Steps for Planning a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration in Your Community

The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths'* power and inspiration comes, in large part, from the connections it makes across faith traditions, across our nation, and across generations. It is an extraordinary opportunity to recognize and celebrate our shared commitment to assuring justice and care for children and to affirm the unifying message of our religious traditions that calls us to nurture and protect those who are young, poor, sick and vulnerable. Indeed, central to every great religious tradition is the mandate to protect the young, the weak, and the poor with justice and compassion.

Over the past 17 years, many communities have come together to proclaim and respond to that mandate through multi-faith Children's Sabbath celebrations. These community-wide Children's Sabbaths stand as an important example of the promise and power of multi-faith partnership for a common cause. If planned with care, sensitivity, and a commitment to inclusion, a multi-faith Children's Sabbath can be a time of new understanding, of celebration, and most importantly, of uniting and strengthening your community to nurture and protect children with even greater justice and compassion.

Following you will find suggestions for planning the practical aspects of a multi-faith Children's Sabbath. See page 137 for tips on planning the content and organizing local leaders, a suggested outline, and other resources for a multi-faith, community-wide service. Feel free to select from these resources and supplement your service with your own additional resources.

Organizing a community-wide multi-faith service may sound like a daunting task, but it can be done successfully, and has been, with tremendous contributions to the communities. Here are suggested ways to coordinate the event. Feel free to adapt this process to suit your needs.

1. Recruit a team. Connect with two, three, four, or more people to help you get started. Then convene an advisory committee of eight to fifteen members. Strive to build an advisory committee that represents the full range of religious bodies, races, and ethnicities of your community. Be sure to involve from the outset all of the faith groups you hope to include, so no one feels like an afterthought.

2. Prepare a game plan. Develop an efficient agenda for the initial meeting of the advisory committee. A productive meeting will generate energy, enthusiasm, and continued commitment. Key items to determine include the date, site, range of events, and point people to assume responsibility for aspects of the event. You may find it helpful to use one of the Children's Sabbath Power Point presentations to convey the purpose and power of the Children's Sabbath. The Power Point presentation may be downloaded for free from www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

3. Build broad support and participation. Begin to contact as many congregations and community organizations as you can to get them on board. Be sure to invite congregations of all ethnic and racial groups. Network with ministerial, rabbinical, and interfaith associations, Islamic centers and associations of mosques, schools, social clubs, and organizations dealing with children, health care, juvenile justice, poverty, violence, hunger, homelessness, education, and parenting. Contact them by letter and include a response form for those who wish to participate. Follow up with a phone call. Make a quick reference list of those who respond affirmatively that you can add to later.

Even if places of worship have signed on as co-sponsors of a multi-faith service, that doesn't necessarily mean that their members will attend, so work together to identify strategies that will be most successful with each place of worship and with potential attendees overall.

Strategies for a particular place of worship include:

- Inviting a choir to perform by itself or as part of a combined choir with other places of worship, or a dance troupe, or a step group.
- Making the multi-faith service a planned event for groups such as the youth group, women's group, or church school.
- Planning decorations that will feature the artwork of many children from each of the sponsoring congregations, with the young artists standing on hand before the service to

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talk about their picture to adults who come to view it.

- Posting a sign-up sheet for a ride in the congregation's van or in carpools.
- Posting a sign-up sheet or having a bulletin insert to fill out indicating whether a member plans to attend.
- Meeting at the place of worship before the service for an ice-cream social or a simple meal like pizza or spaghetti and then traveling to the service together.
- Discussing in planning meetings how many attendees are needed from each place of worship for a desirable turn-out, so each leader has a goal or sense of expectation.
- Having a light-hearted "competition" for each sponsoring place to be the "Children's Champion" by generating the greatest turnout from their members. (You can weight the competition to account for the different sizes of congregations.) Have a "Children's Champion" plaque/statue/trophy to reside with that congregation until the next year.
- Sending out a congregation-wide email reminder the day before or the day of the community service.
- Sending notices home with the children who attend local education programs, so they can encourage their families to attend.
- Talking it up during the announcement time in each place of worship for several weeks prior and passionately conveying the urgency of the problems confronting our children, the moral imperative for people of faith to act, and the inspiration, joy, and excitement that the community service will provide in bringing together an array of others with shared concerns and common commitment.

Turnout strategies for the community at large, if your budget allows:

- Offering fun, family-friendly activities before or after the service, like face painting, simple crafts, or balloon animals. If it is held outside, you could even consider something like a hay ride.
- Providing goods or services that many children and families really need, like a health check; "dental health" goody bags with toothbrushes and toothpaste donated by an area dentist;

help for eligible families to enroll in the State Children's Health Insurance Program; and a chance either to serve (as a volunteer or by making a donation) or be served by community organizations and programs.

- Arranging for simple foods to be available for purchase that can stand in as the closest meal (lunch or dinner) for time-pressed families, or providing free coffee (perhaps donated by a coffee shop in the community), juice, and water, or maybe even an inexpensive, kid-popular treat like popsicles.
- Offering an inexpensive but appealing item for the first 100 people. (There are several websites through which one can purchase items in quantity surprisingly inexpensively, from pencils to stickers to Frisbees to small stuffed toys to hats to tee-shirts.) Talk to managers of stores in the community to see what they would be willing to donate.
- Publicizing a chance to meet and greet a well-known person after the event. This could be an elected leader like the mayor, a popular musician or athlete from the area, or a radio or television personality, for instance. You might be surprised to find someone on your planning committee who knows someone (or knows someone who knows someone) who could be a "draw."

While you won't want to let the fun, festival-like offerings overshadow the goal of the Children's Sabbath, which is to focus attention on the serious problems facing children, including child poverty, militarism and violence, and continuing racism and to urge people of faith to respond, if planned carefully you can offer a combination of appealing fun that draws families in and an important message that sends them out to act faithfully and urgently to improve the lives of children.

4. **Assign areas for coordination.** Areas to coordinate include site selection, administration and funding, worship planning, music, outreach/promotion/media, and activities to raise awareness and generate service and advocacy.

5. **Choose a good day and time.** Schedule the multi-faith service for a time that does not exclude any group's participation. For example, scheduling a multi-faith service on Saturday afternoon, during the Jewish Shabbat, would prevent some Jews from attending. Similarly, Sunday morning scheduling is likely to conflict with most church services. Sunday afternoon or evening is usually the best time for a multi-faith event. Be aware, however, that you will need to do lots of outreach and promotion to generate strong attendance for a multi-faith service, whenever it is scheduled. (See the promotion suggestions later in this section and the ideas listed on the previous page.)
6. **Find a suitable location.** Seek advice from people who have done similar events, and choose a site as early as possible. Feasible sites for multi-faith activities include auditoriums, hospitals, convention centers, atriums of public buildings, parks, and schools. Of course, religious places of worship are also good sites. If you use a congregation's building, be sure the religious leader is involved in the planning, since he or she will know the logistics of the site.

Consider the following in selecting a site:

- **Size:** Make sure it is large enough to accommodate the crowd you expect, but not so large that when the congregation has arrived, it looks half-empty and makes your turnout appear small.
- **Staging:** Will it accommodate choirs and a procession? Is there a good sound and lighting system? Sound and, depending on the time of the service, lighting are especially important to consider if the event will be outside—which also calls for contingency plans in the event of rain.

Five congregations came together for a community-wide Children's Sabbath in Morrisville, Pennsylvania. **FLOC (For Love of Children), a task force of the Lower Bucks Center for Church and Community,** sponsored the community-wide service, along with **Langhorne Baptist Church, Neshamony United Methodist Church, First Presbyterian Church of Morrisville, Yardley United Methodist Church, and Morrisville United Methodist Church,** which hosted the event in their building. They invited groups serving children to exhibit during refreshment time following the service. Organizer Mary Ann Bentz wrote, *"We had information from Good Schools PA, CHIP, the Red Cross Homeless Shelter along with information on our own efforts for advocacy, the CHIP override issue, FLOC's Tooth Fairy Bag project, and the County Dental Project that helps uninsured needy children get the dental care they need—also information on our parent organization, the Lower Bucks Center for Church and Community."*

In her email, Bentz noted the difficulty of generating strong turnout for a community service "on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in October," and noted that a good portion of the attendees were children from the **Norton Avenue Baptist Church's** Precious Voices Children's Choir who sang during the service. It is challenging, though possible, to build attendance for a community service; Bentz' note is a good reminder that it is helpful to invite many choirs to participate, as you're likely to have family and friends boost the attendance!

A variety of faith groups and community groups came together for the multi-faith Children's Sabbath held at the Riggio-Lynch Chapel at CDF Haley Farm in Knoxville, Tennessee. Among the many who came together to lead the service: the Young Judea Group from the **Jewish Congregation of Oak Ridge, Tennessee,** led several musical selections; Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders read passages from sacred texts; a pastor from **the African American Episcopal Zion Church** led a blessing of the children and issued the call to action; a nurse practitioner from **REACHS Community Health Center** offered the charge to the congregation; representatives from various organizations presented on children's services in the county; and a leader from **St. Francis Episcopal Church of Norris, Tennessee,** led a Godly Play story for the children, while their rector offered the benediction.

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

- **Location:** Is it centrally located and convenient for all segments of the community? If not, can you arrange for shuttle buses to transport groups from other areas of the community to encourage and enable them to attend?
- **Cost:** Try to find a site that will host the service without any charge.
- **Worship space:** Is it conducive to multi-faith worship? Will it foster unity among persons who don't know each other? Consider temporary removal of symbols or objects that might cause others distress, if they can be easily

removed. Also consider the addition of banners and symbols or expressions of welcome that will make guests feel more at home.

- **Parking:** Is parking available or is public transportation nearby?
- **Accessibility:** Is it accessible to people with disabilities? (Remember to have a sign language interpreter for those who are deaf or hearing impaired.)



Spreading the Word About Your Children's Sabbath

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 larger community. This chapter has suggestions and resources for:

- **Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship**
- **Reaching Out to the Community and Media**

Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship

Bulletin Inserts: Place the bulletin insert in this section announcing the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration in your congregation's bulletin or newsletter approximately one month before the date.

Newsletter: Include other information in your congregation's newsletter. (Adapt the sample congregational newsletter article in this section or write your own.)

I heard it through the Grape Vine! United Church of Hayward (United Church of Christ) in Hayward, California, included an article in their newsletter, the Grape Vine, that told congregation members about the upcoming Children's Sabbath and the 40 days of prayer preceding it. In addition, the article talked about the donations that the congregation was invited to make for the Children's Sabbath, provided background information about the food needs of families in the area and the related advocacy actions they were taking to ensure that families in need received the important benefits for which they were eligible. They used some of the same information to prepare a press release for the community newspaper.

Posters: Make posters announcing the Children's Sabbath and display them in the congregation's building. Involve the congregation's youth 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, post an announcement on it.

Keep it up! Don't forget to continue to focus attention on children's 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.

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 the 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.

Buffalo United Methodist Church in Kosciusko, Mississippi, announced the Children's Sabbath in the community newspaper, *The Star Herald*. But they didn't stop there in their efforts to build participation. They invited others, as individuals and as congregations, to attend, and information about the service was announced at their own and other churches in the denomination.

❑ 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.

❑ If you have any contacts who know a columnist for the local paper, solicit their help in pitching the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend to the columnist.

The word was out about **Malcom Congregational United Church of Christ's Children's Sabbath in Tappen, North Dakota**. A brief article appeared in the county newspaper, *Steele Ozone*, as well as in the church's own newsletter, *Prairie Circuit*. Throughout the service, the needs of children were lifted up. Following the sermon, which included statistics about child poverty in Kidder County and uninsured children throughout the state, the pastor guided the congregation members in folding origami boats using paper printed with a prayer by Marian Wright Edelman that had been inserted into their worship bulletins as a reminder to pray and work so that all children may reach harbors of health and safety. A sample letter to members of Congress calling for child health coverage was also inserted into the bulletin.

❑ 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 celebration and events on [date] to involve young and old in responding to the urgent needs of children. Today in our nation, 1 in 6 children lives in poverty, a child is killed by guns every 3 hours, and a Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison during his lifetime. On the Children's Sabbath, congregations respond to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call to end poverty that is as urgent today as it was when he first proclaimed it four decades ago. Together, we can end poverty, violence, and racism so that all children can live out the lives for which God created them. For more information, call [name of congregation]."

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(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.)

Radio stations and newspapers received announcements from **Pratt Memorial United Methodist Church in Jackson, Mississippi**, to help spread the word about their Children's Sabbath Health Fair on Saturday and their Children's Sabbath Worship Service on Sunday.

- ❑ 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.

Shakeel Syed, Executive Director of the **Islamic Shura Council of Southern California**, Richard Bolin from **Culver-Palms United Methodist Church**, and Nina Moreno, Field Organizer for the Children's Defense Fund's California office, participated in a radio interview about the Children's Sabbath with Public News Service in California. More than 50 radio stations picked up and replayed the interview. This year they hope to have leaders from additional faith traditions participate in the interview.

❑ If your community has a cable or public access television station, contact the station's producers to arrange an interview. Ask if they will list the Children's Sabbath on their billboard of local events.

❑ Write a letter to the editor about the crises facing uninsured children and call for justice so that every child has health coverage. Offer the Children's Sabbath as a way to learn more and become involved. Watch the newspaper for articles about health care, poverty, and children in general so that you can relate your letter to those articles and time it appropriately.

Think outside the box! Come up with creative and effective promotional ideas. Organizers of a multi-faith Children's Sabbath in Kalamazoo, Michigan, printed paper placemats with information about their event and distributed them to restaurants that had agreed to use them in the weeks leading up to the Children's Sabbath.

Sample Article for Congregation's Own Newsletter

**[Name of Congregation] to Celebrate
Children's Sabbath to Respond to
Dr. King's Call to End Poverty in America**

On [date], [name of your congregation] will join with thousands of other congregations across the nation in the 17th annual multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration sponsored by the non-profit, non-partisan 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 Children's Sabbath will focus on Dr. King's warnings about materialism and poverty, militarism, and racism—threats that still jeopardize our nation's children today. These threats are seen in America's child poverty rate, which leaves one in six children in poverty; seen in violence in neighborhoods and among nations; and seen in continuing racism.

Together, our congregation and others will consider children suffering from need, harm, and hate and determine what we can do—in light of our faith—to ensure that all children know justice, peace, and love.

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 the Children's Sabbath here are [names of several of those who will be involved]. All are invited. This also would 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].

News Release for Local Media

One of the goals of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration 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 on page 24 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) **Mail 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 news-worthy 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 Division at (202) 628-8787 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 follow-up 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.



Sample News Release for Community Newspapers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October [date], 2008

**[Your Congregation's Name] JOINS THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND
IN ANSWERING DR. KING'S CALL TO END POVERTY IN AMERICA**

**OR: [Your Congregation's Name] JOINS THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND
IN MULTI-FAITH NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S
SABBATHS® WEEKEND**

[Name of your town, state] – [Your congregation's name] will [describe events planned, such as holding a special worship service or conducting service and advocacy activities] on [date and time] to draw attention to the needs of the children in our nation who suffer from poverty, a culture of violence, and racism.

[Your congregation's name] is one of thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, Bahá'í communities, and other places of worship around the nation celebrating the Children's Sabbath this weekend as part of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s 17th annual observance. The multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® movement seeks to inspire congregations and religious organizations to work on behalf of children through prayer, service, and advocacy throughout the year.

The Children's Sabbath theme this year, "When Will We Hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Call to End Poverty in America?" focuses attention on King's warnings of the threats of materialism and poverty, militarism, and continuing racism. Four decades later, those unheeded warnings are evident in our nation's child poverty rate that stands at one in six children; the violence in neighborhoods and among nations that raises questions about Iraq that King asked of Vietnam; and continuing racism. Unequal outcomes for children that correlate to race are seen in areas from the rate at which babies die in their first year of life, the likelihood of being poor, the rate at which children graduate from high school and college, and the likelihood of incarceration in a child's lifetime. The Children's Sabbath weekend aims to engage people of faith and places of worship in efforts to protect children from need, harm, and hate, and ensure that every child can experience justice, peace, and the opportunity to thrive and grow to his or her full potential.

"While great progress has been made since Dr. King's death, America remains an unequal playing field for our children," said CDF President Marian Wright Edelman. "Today, 12.8 million children still live in poverty, 9.4 million don't have health coverage, and countless others are forced to live in dangerous communities and without adequate education—all of which disproportionately affects minority and poor families. The most dangerous place to live in America remains at the intersection of race and poverty. To honor Dr. King's legacy and keep his dream alive, we must finish the job that he and so many before him started."

[Add a statement from a local religious leader or young person.]

The multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend is sponsored by the non-profit, non-partisan Children's Defense Fund and supported by 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.

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

###

Reproducible Resources for All Faiths

The following pages provide several resources that may be photocopied. No additional permission is needed. These resources can also be downloaded at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.

Announcement Bulletin Insert (pages 27 and 28)

The first bulletin insert is to announce to members of your congregation your plans to participate in the 2008 *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. When you are done, at the top of one side it will say, "The Children's Sabbath weekend is coming!" and at the top of the reverse side it will say, "We're participating in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend." Here's how to make it: Photocopy these two pages back-to-back on 8 1/2" x 11" paper and cut down the middle to make two bulletin inserts per photocopy.

Children's Sabbath Service Bulletin Insert (pages 29 and 30)

This is a bulletin insert that may be used on the day you celebrate the Children's Sabbath or thereafter.

The second announcement insert makes one folded insert with four half-size pages. When you are done, at the top of the front it will say, "When Will We Hear..." Inside at the top on the left side it will say, "On the Children's Sabbath weekend..." and at the top on the right side it will say, "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., proclaimed..." The back of the insert will say, "This call for a world-wide fellowship..." Here's how to make it: Remove the page from the book. (It is perforated, so you should be able to remove it easily.) Make photocopies using a two-sided function on your copier, if possible. Fold each paper in the middle for a four-page insert.

If you are able, compile a list of specific ways that congregation members can serve by volunteering with or donating to community- or congregation-based programs serving children or advocating on their behalf, with local contact information. Photocopy it and distribute along with the bulletin insert.

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





The Children's Sabbath weekend is coming!

Get ready for inspiration!

You'll hear anew the divine call to nurture and protect children everywhere.

Get ready for information!

You'll learn more about problems facing children in our nation—like poverty and racism.

Get ready for motivation!

You'll find out what YOU can do to improve the lives of children.

You won't want to miss it, as we...

- Celebrate the gift and blessing of the children in our lives and of children everywhere.
- Focus our attention on the children in our nation who suffer need, harm, and hate.
- Deepen our understanding of the divine call for justice, peace, and love.
- Participate in action to improve the lives of children.
- Join in this weekend with other places of worship from many traditions, in many places all across our nation.

**We're participating in the National
Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend,
"When Will We Hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s
Call to End Poverty in America?"**

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Want to know more or help out? Contact: _____



Children's Defense Fund

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

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Want to know more or help out? Contact: _____

...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 [people]."

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

We have joined in the multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebration this weekend to express our concern for God's children who still suffer from poverty, war, and racism, and to renew our commitment to working for a world in which all our children know justice, peace, and love.

What will you do? We invite your prayerful reflection, after which you might write down your ideas or commitments.

How will you include these concerns and commitments in your prayers?

How will you serve children in need?

How will you speak out for children?

How will you work with others for children?

To connect with others here who care about children and to get involved in our place of worship's work for children, contact:

To connect with the faith community resources and other work of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), the non-profit, non-partisan organization sponsoring the multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebration, visit www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths or call CDF's Religious Action Division at (202) 662-3641.



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

2008 Multi-Faith National Observance of Children's
Sabbaths® Weekend

Before his death 40 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., warned our nation of the triple threats of materialism, militarism, and racism. Four decades later, we still see those threats borne out in our nation's rate of child poverty, unequal outcomes that correlate to race and ethnicity, and other key measures of how well our children are doing.

"While great progress has been made since Dr. King's death, America remains an unequal playing field for our children," reports Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund. "Today, 12.8 million children still live in poverty, 9.4 million don't have health coverage, and countless others are forced to live in dangerous communities and without adequate education—all of which disproportionately affects minority and poor families. The most dangerous place to live in America remains at the intersection of race and poverty. To honor Dr. King's legacy and keep his dream alive, we hear and heed his call to justice and peace, and to finish the job that he and so many before him started."

"We have both ancient habits to deal with, vast structures of power, indescribably complicated problems to solve. But unless we abdicate our humanity altogether and succumb to fear and impotence in the presence of the weapons we have ourselves created, it is as possible and as urgent to put an end to war and violence between nations as it is to put an end to poverty and racial injustice."

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

On this Children's Sabbath weekend, places of worship all across our nation are hearing and heeding Dr. King's call to replace war with peace, and poverty and racism with justice. His prophetic call echoes the voices of others through the ages and across religious traditions who have called the people to account for the harm, need, and hate that children suffer and to seek to fulfill the divine intention for a world of peace, justice, and love for all of God's beloved children.

When will we hear? Children wait for our answer:

- Children, caught in the crossfire of wars raging in neighborhoods and among nations, wait for peace.
- Children, caught in the jaws of poverty that tears at their bodies, minds, and spirits, wait for justice.
- Children, caught in the stranglehold of racism that would choke off their hopes and opportunity, dignity and dreams, wait for love and respect.

"We are confronted," said Dr. King, "with the fierce urgency of now." We don't have a moment to wait or a child to waste.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., proclaimed "Our only hope today lies in our ability to recapture the revolutionary spirit and go out into a sometimes hostile world declaring eternal opposition 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 God's vision for our world is finally realized.

- Together, places of worship and people of faith must commit to working for peace in neighborhoods and among nations. Will you?
- Together, places of worship and people of faith must commit to working to end poverty so that every child has what he or she needs to survive and thrive, from food and housing to health care and a quality education. Will you?
- Together, places of worship and people of faith must commit to challenging racism and assuring that every child is treated as a beloved child of God and given the love, respect, and opportunities they deserve. Will you?