

# About the Children's Defense Fund

The Children's Defense Fund 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 and independent 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 investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble 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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# Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

## **National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual**

A Multi-Faith Resource for Year-Round  
Child Advocacy

**Volume 18**

**By Shannon Daley-Harris**



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# SECTION 1

## Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

Dear Faithful Friend of Children:

Thank you for your care and concern for children and your commitment to create change today so that every child in our nation has a better tomorrow. By participating in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement, now in its 18<sup>th</sup> year, you are bringing to life and putting into action a core conviction of each of our religious traditions: that children are sacred gifts from God and that we as adults bear responsibility for nurturing and protecting children—especially those who are poor, excluded, and most vulnerable.

Earlier this year a small group of women and I gathered for a spiritual retreat at CDF Haley Farm. Over the course of the three days, in addition to times of worship, discussion, prayer, and reflection, we watched two documentaries. The first, “Pray the Devil Back to Hell,” documents the extraordinary women’s peace movement in Liberia that led to the ouster of dictator Charles Taylor and to the democratic election of Africa’s first woman President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. This movement began when one woman—who could no longer tolerate the suffering of children and families from the violence, poverty, and chaos caused by Taylor’s regime—stood up in her church and announced a “crazy dream” she had: that the women of the church would boldly lead the way to peace. A Muslim woman who happened to be there that day stood and embraced Leymah Gwobee’s dream, pledging her commitment to involve her Muslim sisters and brothers. Together, the Christian and Muslim women were determined to bring an end to the violent war and the suffering the children endured. They strategized, organized, mobilized, and protested, determined to create change for children, using peaceful means, and bring a better tomorrow for the entire nation. And they succeeded!

The second documentary describes the moving Birmingham Children’s March, a key turning point in the Civil Rights Movement. On May 2, 1963, thousands of children—some as young as six—gathered at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and went out, in groups of 50, to face the notorious police chief Bull Connor and his men. After the adults had failed to respond, the children were answering Dr. King’s call upon his release from the Birmingham jail to fill the jail, from where he wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” criticizing the silence of White faith leaders to speak and act for racial justice. The police officers packed the paddy wagons full of children and, when they could fit no more, brought school buses to carry children off to the jail. When the school buses could hold no more children, Connor ordered the firefighters to turn their fire hoses and dogs on the children to extinguish their passion for freedom, but the children courageously marched forward, singing freedom songs despite fire hoses, police dogs, and beatings. In ensuing days, thousands of children stayed home from school and went to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church to prepare. They galvanized an entire nation—including President Kennedy and his administration—stunned by the brutality of segregation against our youngest citizens. Children brought Birmingham to a standstill and paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement.

Now it’s our turn. We don’t face cruel, heartless, lawless dictators like Charles Taylor and Bull Connor, but instead the domination of poverty that is crushing the lives of 13.3 million children in our nation and the lack of health coverage that means nine million children in our nation may not be able to see a doctor when they need to,

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resulting in unnecessary illness and even death. We no longer face the systemic, codified evil of legal segregation, but we face the crisis of a pernicious pipeline to prison, with its confluence of poverty, racism, lack of health and mental health care, abuse and neglect, failing schools, and other disadvantages, that places an 8-year-old Black boy at a one in three risk of imprisonment and a Latino boy at a one in six chance of imprisonment in their lifetimes. As in 1963, our school buses are loaded with children being driven to jail—not now willingly for the pursuit of freedom and justice but because of the pipeline to prison's injustice and preventable poverty and racial disparities.

Adults! Will we stand up to break up the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and replace it with a pipeline to college, productive work and healthy family formation? Will we stand up in our places of worship and declare that now is the time for the next civil and human rights movement to rescue our children from poverty, illiteracy, sickness and denied

health coverage? Will we march out of our places of worship, determined to end the growing apartheid of incarceration that is undermining the past 50 years of social and economic progress as young people are put on the path to successful futures?

We can and must work together to bring hope and a safe future through persistent work to assure every child health coverage in 2009, to put into place a high quality, comprehensive early childhood development system, and to dismantle the pipeline to prison.

The 2009 multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, October 16–18, is our time to stand together as leaders and members of places of worship all across the nation to learn more about the needs of our children. And to pray, sing, and preach and participate in other forms of worship that remind us of our sacred responsibilities to protect all of our children. It is a time



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to be inspired and sustained by our religious faith to do whatever is necessary to protect our children and work for justice. The Children's Sabbaths weekend is also a time to study—through religious education classes, special forums, assemblies with a speaker, or discussion within or among places of worship—to increase our understanding of the challenges children face and what and how we can make a difference now. Since children only have one childhood, Children's Sabbath is a time for action, direct service, and acts of compassion—such as preparing and serving meals for families in homeless shelters—and through work for justice—visiting and writing letters to our elected officials demanding health coverage for all pregnant women and children now as a first step towards universal health coverage for all. Children cannot wait! Their blood and bones and minds and spirits are being formed right now. All children need a healthy start now!

We know our immediate action is crucial and that it will take more than a day or a weekend or month to provide all children the building blocks for a successful adulthood. Every place of worship that participates in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend must see it as a beginning and not an end in itself. It is a chance to deepen our understanding, to gain inspiration and insight and to renew our commitment to new, increased, effective action throughout the year to help children. Throughout

this manual you will find over 100 actions that individuals and places of worship can take to make a difference for children. From your first planning meeting for your Children's Sabbath celebration, discuss what actions and outcomes you will create. Please think about, pray about, discuss, and plan for them, and share the special response postcard in this manual with us. Together we can, must, and will build the long overdue new civil rights movement for our children that, like the Liberian women's peace movement and the first Civil Rights Movement in the '50s and '60s, brings hope and a positive future for all our children and everyone.

If ten percent of faith congregations did ten percent more to reach out to and stand up for children, we would have a powerful force for the just treatment of children. Please don't let our children down. As mothers and children, fathers and youths, grandparents and young adults, leaders and members of faith, we have the power to make a difference in millions of children's lives. Let's do it.

In faith and hope,



Marian Wright Edelman



# Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

Creating change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow is the theme of the 2009 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend. By picking up this resource manual, you have already begun to create change for children. Engaging your faith community in learning more about the urgent needs of children, helping them reflect on the teachings of their faith that lead us to respond to children's needs and work for justice, and equipping members with the information and action steps to make a difference for children—that's what the Children's Sabbath is all about!

You make a difference in the lives of children and in the life of your place of worship—by connecting the two, you can help make incredible, important things happen that will improve the lives of children in your place of worship, community, and across our nation and at the same time bring new inspiration, motivation, and excitement to your worshipping 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 spanning our nation and crossing all lines of income, race, ethnicity, and political party. What unites us is the belief that God calls us to protect children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and the conviction that our faith calls us to live out God's justice and compassion.

This inspiring weekend focuses attention on the urgent plight of children in our nation and calls us to put our faith into action to meet children's needs through direct service and work for justice. Through the service of worship, educational programs, and congregational activities, you can affirm what your place of worship already does with and for children while challenging members to take new actions and commit to new efforts to meet the needs of children in your community, state, and our nation. When 13.3 million children in America live in poverty, nine million lack health coverage, and thousands of children, especially Black and Latino boys, are at risk of imprisonment in their lifetime as a result of the powerful forces of the pipeline to prison, your concern and action are needed now more than ever.

## What is the Children's Sabbath?

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

A Children's Sabbaths weekend typically has four elements:

- 1) **The service of worship or prayers**, during which the divine mandate to nurture and protect children calls us to respond to the needs of children today;
- 2) **Educational programs**, during which all ages learn more about the needs of children today and the social-political structures that keep children in need; 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 Sabbaths weekend to lead individual members and the congregation as a whole into new, effective efforts to improve the lives of children in the congregation, community, and nation throughout the year.

**The Children's Sabbath is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, guided by a multi-faith advisory committee, and endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations.** The Children's Defense Fund's (CDF)'s Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start, and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective and independent 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, drop out of school, get into trouble, 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.

From its inception 36 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 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 Sabbaths observance is guided by a multi-faith advisory committee with Muslim, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Bahá'í, and Sikh members. It is endorsed by more than 200 denominations, faith groups, and religious organizations. If you are interested in having your organization become an official endorser of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement, please call CDF's Religious Action Team at (202) 662-3555.

### 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 Sabbaths 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 it might work—as a body or as individuals—to help children not only in the congregation, but in the community and across the nation. Religious leaders, committees, and members may discover additional problems confronting children—like poverty, lack of health care, or violence—and come up with new ways to respond to them. This might include starting a new program sponsored by the congregation. Or it might mean exploring and promoting opportunities for individual members to commit their time, services, or resources. Or it might mean forging a new partnership with another congregation or community organization to help children. It could mean establishing a new child advocacy committee to guide the congregation's work for justice for children.

#### **Pray, study, and reflect!**

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

#### **Take action!**

The Children's Sabbath is a time for action that springs from that faithful study and reflection. It is not only a time to pray, but also a time to put prayer into action. It is not only a time to study, but also a time to serve children directly. It is not only a time to sing, but also a time to speak out to elected leaders and others about the need for justice. So on the Children's Sabbaths weekend, after wor-

ship/prayers or at another time, members and leaders should join in hands-on activities to help children as well as engage in working for justice—perhaps writing letters or planning a visit to an elected official.

### **Commit to new, long-term efforts!**

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

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

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

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

*I am elated to write back to you and let you know how much we appreciate purchasing the manual for the first time. We have often times borrowed the manual from our sister church, and we promised that we would purchase our own this year, so that we could be ready to prepare our children/youth for Children's Sabbath Day.*

*This is our third year doing Children's Sabbath and it has brought so much joy and information, not only to our children/youth, but to the volunteers who help to put our program together. We are a small Methodist church (**Samuel Chapel United Methodist Church**) in **Itta Bena, Mississippi**, with about 125 members on roll.... Again we are just elated to share this manual with those who are interested in sharing Children's Sabbath with their congregation. To us it is used in so many ways, yet the preparation for our worship service is done with our children/youth and it helps us prepare them in the right way. This year's theme is beautiful, with the fact that it is also Domestic Violence Awareness month and Cancer Prevention month, we are able to entangle the workshops that are open for public with our youth and the information is geared in such a way that they (children, youth, and adults) are able to relate.*

*If I can ever be of any assistance in getting the word out throughout our community from your company, just let me know.*

*Please continue to be blessed.*

*Respectfully yours in Christ,  
Sister Mabel Robinson  
Youth Coordinator*

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

**The Children's Sabbath is flexible.** While there is a suggested theme each year, congregations are encouraged to focus on the most urgent problems confronting children and families in their communities. 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 does not 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 About the Children's Sabbath

### **Is the Children's Sabbath the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, or a children's service?**

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

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

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

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

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

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 an interfaith or ecumenical Children's Sabbath in your community. Either option is a valuable way to participate. You should determine what is right for your congregation this year.

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,

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what's most important is to participate at a time that works for your place of worship.

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

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

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

There are a couple of options. You could schedule your celebration for a later date to allow for more planning time. Or, you could still plan to participate on the third weekend of October but just start with what is quickest

and easiest to do, such as photocopying and distributing one of the bulletin inserts, or including one of the prayers or readings provided in 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 an educational program 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 Sabbaths celebration if my congregation already cares about children?**

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

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

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

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

As you'll see in the examples below and those scattered throughout 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.

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

Fifteen years! That's how long **Cathedral of the Incarnation in Baltimore** has celebrated the Children's Sabbath. For their 2008 Children's Sabbath celebration, the Cathedral of the Incarnation hosted U.S. Representative John Sarbanes as a speaker. The sermon at the two services focused on advocacy for at-risk children in

Baltimore City, and they expect that the weekend will reinforce their ongoing advocacy for children.

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

**Good Shepherd and St. Mark's, affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the**

**Episcopal Church in Madras, Oregon**, celebrated their second Children's Sabbath for this rural congregation that averages 35 at worship. They demonstrate that you don't have to be a large congregation to make a difference. Reports the organizer, "We collected toothbrushes, stuffed animals, and soft blankets for children in local foster care at our Children's Sabbath service, which was the main worship service on Sunday, Oct. 19. These items were brought forward during the offering and placed at the base of the altar as part of our worship." The pastor had purchased CDF's America's *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*<sup>SM</sup> report and was able to draw from that resource in her sermon to raise awareness. This year, they plan to join with another church to have a public prayer service for children.

**St. Thomas the Apostle Church, Columbus, Ohio**, began preparing the hearts and minds of their parishioners long before the Children's Sabbaths weekend. Four weeks before the designated weekend, they began inserting selected statistics of children in need and prayers into the weekly bulletin for reflection. On the Children's Sabbath they focused the liturgy, prayers, and music on children's needs, involved children and youths more fully in the service, and offered educational programs on children's concerns. They will build on their Children's Sabbath through the social concerns ministry, focusing on the ongoing problem of poverty.

**The Bahá'í community of Portsmouth, New Hampshire**, partnered with the **North Church of Portsmouth (Episcopal)** for an interfaith Children's Sabbaths celebration. The interfaith gathering was held at the North Church parish house. The program was guided by the prayers and readings from the Children's Sabbaths manual and facilitated by a core planning group comprised of six youths from both communities. The selected readings focused on children at risk and were complemented by a dance performance, presentation of art, and photographs of children. In lieu of an offering, those in attendance were asked to contribute canned goods to a local shelter serving children and families in need. Mr. Calvin Wells of the Portsmouth Bahá'í community considers the event a smashing success and is excited about building upon the momentum and enthusiasm of last year's event for next year's Children's Sabbath!

**Church Women United** distributed copies of the Children's Sabbaths manual to each of its state offices, and urged its members to organize a letter-writing campaign in their faith communities urging Congress to cover all children with health care.

**St. Luke's United Methodist Church** reports that the **Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania**, area saw a big Children's Festival co-hosted by several faith groups that raised several thousand dollars, which was distributed by the Children's Sabbath network of the Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia.

**Otterbein Lebanon United Methodist Church in Lebanon, Ohio**, celebrated its first ever Children's Sabbath through the Chapel of the Air with some 40 in attendance and others watching on closed circuit TV. A speaker from the local Head Start program addressed the group, and the weekly devotional booklet from the Children's Sabbaths manual was made available. To build on the Children's Sabbath, they will continue supporting a project for low-income children's after-school homework and enrichment, and donating needed items for another after-school program.

In **Tucson, Arizona**, **Capilla del Sol Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)** celebrated their first Children's Sabbath in 2008 as the culmination of the Light a Candle for Children 40 Days of Prayer sponsored by their denomination. In addition to the special worship service and speaker, they distributed handouts of volunteer opportunities and are supporting a "shoebox ministry" with children in Nogales, Mexico.

**St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta** has celebrated Children's Sabbath for five years. In 2008, they held three Children's Sabbath services on Sunday morning for between 600–700 people. The service included special prayers and a sermon focusing on the Children's Sabbath. They also had educational signs up around the church and offered a course on issues of poverty and children during their Adult Christian Education hour, as well as a special class for the fifth graders. As a result of the Children's Sabbath, organizers report that there is increased openness to bringing volunteer opportunities for child advocacy to the church.

## Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Manual

**Temple Israel in Greenville, South Carolina**, celebrated with a Friday night Shabbat service for their third year participating in the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration, drawing on the Children's Sabbaths theme, prayers, and blessing.

**First Presbyterian Church in McAllen, Texas**, participated for the eighth year, with the youth and children of the church leading the service.

**South Hills Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Forth Worth, Texas**, collected signatures on a petition issuing a call to conscience and action to ensure comprehensive national health insurance coverage for all children now.

**First Baptist Church of Springfield, Ohio**, used the occasion of their 13<sup>th</sup> annual Children's Sabbath celebration to initiate a mentor program for youth in the congregation and community. Organizer Clara Copeland writes, "We had an adult sermon 'preached' by a freshman in high school, and the adult speaker was the head of the local food pantry," who also served as the speaker at the Adult Forum following worship.

Reports Rebecca Caswell-Speight from **Louisville, Kentucky**, "This was **Broadway Baptist's** first Children's Sabbath experience. We started the weekend with a family camp-out. The camp out focused on the Beatitudes and how our church and families follow the demand for action that we receive from Christ. We closed the weekend with a multi-generational worship. Children and families participated in all parts of the worship service. In this worship service, we flew a pastor in from one of our partner congregations in Argentina to share the pulpit and tell the story of his congregation's attempts to strengthen the children in his community."

**First United Methodist Church in Ames, Iowa**, created a bulletin board featuring ways to help children as part of their Children's Sabbath celebration, which also included distributing the devotional guide the week before and involving children in leading prayers and song, handing out pre-k Bibles, and a youth puppet show.

At **St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Santa Clara, California**, reports the organizer, "The kids started a shoe drive—because 'they won't let you go to school and you can't walk to your piano lessons if you don't have shoes' (the idea came from a 9-year-old)." The church presented Sunday School lessons for grades 2-6 focused on understanding poverty in their neighborhoods, what church- and community-based resources are available and how the church supports them. The children led the service, and the teens gave the sermon based on their experiences on a mission trip to an American Indian reservation during the summer.

**St. Peter's Episcopal Church in Philadelphia** celebrated its first Children's Sabbath in 2008. The event included special prayers during both services with the rector preaching to the topic. Opportunities to take action were included in the service leaflet, and the rector drew attention to ways to act on behalf of children in the sermon. She reports, "I see this involvement as a beginning—a way of raising people's awareness. For next year I would like to start earlier and incorporate Children's Sabbath into our children's and adult education, and then in the future perhaps partner with another faith community to celebrate."

**What will your place of worship plan? Read on, get inspired, bring your own imagination and passion and commitment to the planning process, and be sure to send us a description of your own unique and important participation in the 2009 *National Observance of***

***Children's Sabbaths* movement. We look forward to highlighting what you do!** Send information about your Children's Sabbath to CDF, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001, or email a description to [sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org](mailto:sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org).



## SECTION 2

### Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

#### A Children's Concerns Primer

The theme of the 2009 Children's Sabbaths weekend is "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow."

**We know that children in our nation desperately need change.** The more than 13 million children living in poverty, without enough family income to provide the food, homes, and other basics necessary for them to survive and thrive, need

us to create change. The nine million children without health coverage who may not be able to see a doctor when they are sick or injured or to keep them healthy need us to create change. The children, mostly Black and Latino boys, who are being swept along in the pipeline to prison need us to create change.



## Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

**Children need change, and they need us to create change today.** Every minute we wait, we lose another child. We must step forward now to create a level playing field for all children. In the words of Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, “Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are formed, his mind developed. To him we cannot say “Tomorrow,” his name is Today.” Our children only get one shot at childhood. If we leave them mired in poverty and robbed of the enrichment for which their minds, bodies, and spirits thirst; sick or dying for lack of care we could have ensured they had; or locked up and out of sight in prison, they will never get that lost childhood back. The effects of having their childhood robbed will remain with them—and us—for a lifetime. One pastor, on a video about the church and child advocacy, said with frustration, “People talk about children as the church of tomorrow. Children are the church of today”—just as they are the synagogue, temple, masjid, and other worshipping communities of *today*.

**When we create change today, it will bring hope and a better tomorrow for the children themselves and for all of us.** Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., rightly observed “In a real sense, all life is interrelated. The agony of the poor impoverishes the rich; the betterment of the poor enriches the rich. We are inevitably our brother’s keeper because we are our brother’s brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”<sup>1</sup> When we create change for children, we as a society will all be the better for it. When all our children live in families with enough income to meet their needs, when all of our children are healthy and thriving, when all of our children are set on paths of promise, we will be a stronger, more vibrant, and more tightly knit nation that is ready for the challenges and opportunities of the future.

At the same time, as people of faith we affirm that the driving force for creating change for children is not because of how we will be better off for it, but because it is the right thing to do, and God expects of us nothing less. Of the Hebrew prophet Amos, who proclaimed

“Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious [to you],” Dr. James M. Efird wrote, “How contemporary some of his sayings are! Are there instances of religious hypocrisy in our society? How many people believe that prosperity must be the end result of doing right in the religious sphere? Are there in our society examples of injustice in the courts, of extravagance in the face of hunger and want, of corrupt and deceitful business practices? A society with such elements cannot long survive because it will crumble from the weight of its own oppression and the decay of its moral foundation. Amos did not believe that changes should be made simply because society would be better because of them or because people owed such conduct to each other as people; this is a humanistic understanding. Rather, the changes which Amos proposed, even demanded, were changes rooted in his understanding of God.”<sup>2</sup>

In the Children’s Concerns primer that follows, you will find stories of children that we hope will touch your heart with the reality of their circumstances and lead you to take action that creates change. You will find data and other information about the scope of the problems facing children that we hope will expand your mind. You will find suggestions of what you can do that we hope will stir your hands and summon your voice. You will find a vision of a better tomorrow that we hope will capture your spirit. As you read all of it, we hope that you will read with the eyes of faith, remembering that of the many urgent and important reasons for acting now to create change and bring hope and a better tomorrow for all of our children, there is no more compelling reason than that it is what the Eternal expects of us and calls us to do—and will sustain us with courage and hope as we seek to do so.

<sup>1</sup> *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Efird, *The Old Testament Prophets Then and Now* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1982), pp. 43-44.

## Why a Children's Concerns Primer?

In the Middle Ages, the word “primer” referred to a book of prayers. Later, it came to mean an instructional book that provided basic or elementary information. This new meaning may have come, in part, from the worship book having been the text from which children first learned to read. Both of those meanings, then, are apt for what follows. We hope that it will provide you with the most basic information that you need to know about child poverty, child health, and children at risk of incarceration. We also hope that you will read it with the eyes of a worshipper and with a prayerful heart—that is, these problems and calls for action are deeply linked to our faith life and the work that we are called to do as people of faith.

A third meaning of “primer” also applies to the material that follows. A primer can also mean an “igniter,” a small amount of igniting powder that, when set on fire, creates an even larger explosion. We hope that this material will set your heart on fire and that you, in turn, will be the force that creates an even greater explosion of faithful action to create positive change in the lives of children and families in our nation.

In this primer, we address three urgent areas where we must act together to improve children's lives: ending child poverty; ensuring all children access to health coverage; and ending the pipeline to prison that captures far too many children, especially Black and Latino boys, rather than putting them on paths of promise.

In each area, you will find a story of one child that puts a face on the problem. Then, there is an overview of the dimensions of the crisis. Next, you'll find specific information about what we can do as individuals, communities, and a nation to improve the lives of children and thus of us all. Finally, we'll glimpse the difference it will make when we do.



Use what follows as the basis of an educational program, as a resource for a social action committee or other group in your place of worship to inform and guide their action, and as you prepare your sermon or other address to your faith community. At the end of this section you will find suggested outlines for discussions among adults drawing on the resources and perspectives of various faith traditions.

## A Child Poverty Primer

### A Snapshot of One Child: Living in Poverty

Five year-old Herardo peeks out from behind his mother's protective arm with a sweet and playful grin. His brothers, Alfonso, 10, and Eduardo, 9, stand beside them, looking down with more bashful gazes. Another brother, eight-year-old Antonio, stands off to the side, not wanting to be photographed. Behind them is their home, a cramped weather-beaten trailer, its rusting metal sides a patchwork of paint that reflect efforts at various times to fix it up. The "stairs" in front of the trailer door are an uneven stack of wooden beams, making it more difficult and unsteady to get out than through a traditional home's wide, smooth doorway. The battered, peeling tires of the trailer home have sunken into the dusty dirt—the trailer has been there for quite some time and will be challenging to move. The trailer's buckling sides are somewhat steadied by wood propped against one end while cinderblocks under the trailer help support the worn tires. The trailer is, in many ways, a metaphor for the circumstances of poverty that grip the Torres family.

The father works hard—toiling in the fields as a migrant worker as soon as the school year ends, and caring for people's yards whenever he can get the work. It is hot, sweaty, physical work that is unforgiving should ill health strike and that fluctuates with the season. When he can find yard work, he earns about \$90 a week. Each month, \$75 is spent renting their trailer space. The family does not own a car so the father must rely on co-workers to pick him up and get him to his job. The lack of transportation poses other daily challenges for the family, from accessing supermarkets with the best prices to taking the children to appointments. They live in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, in Hidalgo County, one of the poorest counties in the nation. There is no public transportation where the family lives—the nearest public transportation is in the neighboring city of McAllen, which is approximately 12 miles away. They rely on neighbors or relatives to get around. Fortunately, the father's meager salary is augmented by the food stamps the family receives, so they are able to purchase more food than his salary alone would have provided. When the children were asked recently if they had enough food, they all replied yes, although it is not known

if their diet was bulked up with cheaper, less nutritious food. The boys, all born in the United States, previously received health care through Medicaid but were recently denied coverage. Their mother does not know why and has embarked on the difficult task of working through the system to re-establish that they are eligible and secure their coverage once again. She is trying to work through the school district social worker, but even the social worker has not returned her calls. She has asked the Children's Defense Fund's Rio Grande Valley office to assist. In the meantime, she has not taken the children for medical care. There are no books or a computer in their home. Still, so far the children are doing well in school. But one of their older male cousins who lives nearby was recently sent to a boot camp for continuously missing school. His grades are now improving, according to his mother, but it remains to be seen what influence his choices—bad and good—will have on the young cousins.

### The Big Picture: Children in Poverty Today

More than 13 million children in America live in poverty. Poverty casts long shadows throughout their lives in many different areas, among them health, nutrition, early development, and education. Multiple barriers associated with poverty build upon one another and unjustly deprive children of the opportunity to reach their full potential. Poverty hurts children, and poverty hurts all of us. Poverty affects the entire nation through its drag on the economy, loss of productivity and earnings, and greater crime and public health demands. And it exacts a high moral cost when we, as a rich nation blessed with an abundance of resources, fail to do what we can to protect the youngest and most vulnerable among us.

However, there is hope; child poverty is not inevitable or an act of God. Rather, it is the result of the decisions and actions we take—or fail to take—as individuals and as a society. Many factors and programs can reduce a child's chances of growing up poor or reduce poverty's impact on them. We can make a difference—as individual people of faith, as houses of worship, as communities, states, and as a nation; each of us can take a step to help lift children out of poverty and improve their lives.

### What Is Poverty?

Many would consider a family “poor” if that family cannot afford to meet its basic necessities such as housing, food, child care, health care, and education. Officially, a family is considered poor if it has an income below the official poverty threshold, which is established annually by the U.S. Census Bureau, and is based on the number of family members and children. In 2007, the most recent year for which poverty data are available, a four-person family including two children was classified as poor if their annual income was less than \$21,027 and as extremely poor if their income was less than half the poverty line, or \$10,514.<sup>3</sup> These amounts are generally considered well below what is actually needed to cover a family’s basic expenses; consequently, the number of children whose families are unable to meet their basic needs is underestimated by the official poverty measure.

### Who Is Poor? Basic Facts About Child Poverty<sup>4</sup>

*Note: Facts in this section refer to 2007, the most recent year of available data, unless otherwise noted.*

- **A total of 13.3 million children, or one in six of all children in America, live in poverty.** Of these children, almost half—5.8 million—live in extreme poverty. The number of poor children increased by 1.7 million between 2000 and 2007.
- **Most poor children have working parents.** Seven out of 10 poor children are in working families where someone works full- or part-time for at least part of the year.
- **Children of color suffer disproportionately from poverty.** Black and Latino children are more likely to be poor than White children. In fact, approximately 1 in 3 Black children and more than 1 in 4 Latino children are poor, compared to 1 in 10 White children.
- **Other factors also increase a child’s odds of poor:** being young; having parents who have not completed high school, living in a one-parent family, or living with a caregiver who is not a parent, such as a grandparent.

### How Does Poverty Affect Children?

Poverty is not simply about lack of income security. It affects a family’s ability to provide for their children in many areas. Poor children lag behind their peers in ways beyond material well-being. The challenges they face accumulate and interact, giving poor children an unfair start in life.

- **Health:** Poor children are less likely to have access to health care or to be in good health.
- **Food Security:** In 2007, poor children were almost four times as likely to live in homes with low food security, where not everyone had enough food all of the time, as compared to higher income children.<sup>5</sup>
- **Early Childhood Development:** Much research has found income-related disparities in children’s learning and behavior, which start early in life and tend to last later in life.
- **Home and Family Environment:** Stress and conflict related to low income can undermine the strength of a family. Lower-income parents report feeling more economic pressure, argue more about money, and use more harsh and inconsistent discipline with their children.<sup>6</sup> Low-income women are also twice as likely to report depression, which is linked to infants’ limited language ability and poor performance on cognitive and behavioral tasks.<sup>7</sup>

Home and family activities differ by income as well, with lower-income children having fewer books in the home, being read to less, watching more television, and being less likely to have a computer or visit a museum or library.

- **Education:** Poor children tend to do worse in school and are less likely to graduate from high school; low-income youths and young adults drop out of high school at more than four times the rate of high-income peers.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey, Poverty Thresholds 2007*, at <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/threshld/thresh07.html>. Accessed August, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Estimates in this section (“Basic Facts About Child Poverty”) unless otherwise noted, are from the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Survey, 2008 Annual Social and Economic Supplement*. Calculations by the Children’s Defense Fund.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Nord, Margaret Andrews, and Steven Carlson, United States Department of Agriculture, Household Food Security in the United States 2007, Table 3 “Prevalence of food security and food insecurity in households with children by selected household,” *Economic Research Report*, No. (ERR-66), November 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Arloc Sherman, *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America* (Washington, DC: Children’s Defense Fund, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Jane Knitzer, Jane Suzanne Theberge, Kay Johnson, National Center for Children in Poverty, Project Thrive, Issue Brief No. 2, “Reducing Maternal Depression and Its Impact on Young Children, Toward a Responsive Early Childhood Policy Framework,” January 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics: 2007* (March 2008), Table 106.

- **Crime:** Youths from low-income households have an increased likelihood of participating in serious crimes compared to those from higher-income households.<sup>9</sup>

### What Are the Economic, Social, and Moral Costs of Child Poverty?

In addition to affecting children themselves and the adults they become, child poverty takes a heavy toll on the United States as a whole. The most recent estimates indicate that the social and economic cost of child poverty totals *half a trillion dollars each year*—or the equivalent of nearly 4 percent of GDP—in loss of productivity, higher crime, and poorer health.<sup>10</sup>

Taxpayers ultimately pay for higher expenditures on social services, medical care, and criminal justice or in the diversion of government attention and resources from other pressing needs. Taxpayers also pay when a poor child needs special education or must repeat a grade and when a poor child suffers mental and physical disabilities that require costly care. Businesses pay when poor children grow up with less education and become less productive workers—workers who require more training, cannot work as fast or learn new machinery and techniques, cannot understand an instruction manual, or make costly mistakes with customer orders or valuable equipment. Everyone pays when a child grows up in poverty.<sup>11</sup>

As people of religious faith, is there a moral cost when we as individuals or members of a house of worship don't act to ease or end child poverty? Is there a moral cost to us, as a nation founded on the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, when we allow one in every six children to start life on such an uneven playing field?

### What Works?

#### Selected Public Programs That Combat Child Poverty

Children can't move out of poverty on their own, but there are effective ways that we, as a nation, can help lift children and their families out of poverty or at least protect them from poverty's worst effects. Programs that reduce child poverty by providing cash or near-cash assistance include the Food Stamp Program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (TANF), and the

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). There also are other programs, such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Head Start, and Early Head Start that provide important support to low-income children such as health care and early childhood care and education. (See Glossary on page 18 for more information about these programs.)

Government benefits—both federal and state—have made great strides in easing child poverty, lifting almost one of every three otherwise-poor children above the poverty line in 2003. Furthermore, poverty was made less severe for millions of other poor children than it would have been otherwise.<sup>12</sup>

Yet more than 13 million children remain poor, and millions of children who are eligible for programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start, Medicaid, and CHIP are not enrolled. Much work remains to be done to ensure that all children have access to the health care, child care, early education, and income support they need.

### Create Change: What Can We Do to Alleviate Poverty and Stabilize Families?

1. **Connect with your concern and commitment.** In whatever way is most appropriate and helpful for you—whether it is through prayer, meditation, conversation, journaling, or some other way—connect with your own deepest desire to do whatever you can to end child poverty and improve the lives of children, our sacred charge. Identify the role that your religious faith plays in calling you to act on behalf of children and sustaining you when it is challenging. Look honestly at what gets in the way of your making the difference you want to make, whether it's discouragement, feeling busy, not knowing where to start, or something else. Consider your gifts, talents, and resources that you can bring. Discern what kind of action will be most fulfilling, satisfying, sustainable, and effective. What are you called to do?
2. **Learn more about child poverty.** Visit the Children's Defense Fund's website, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org), for more online resources about child poverty. Check out the bibliography in the Religious Action section of the

<sup>9</sup> David Bjerck, "Measuring the Relationship between Youth Criminal Participation and Household Economic Resources" (Springer, October 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Harry Holzer, et al., "The Economic Costs of Poverty in the United States: Subsequent Effects of Children Growing up Poor" (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, January 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Arloc Sherman, *Poverty Matters: The Cost of Child Poverty in America* (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Arloc Sherman, *Public Benefits: Easing Poverty and Ensuring Medical Coverage* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

## Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

website for resources that you can use in your place of worship. Look for opportunities to learn from low-income families themselves and from the people who serve them most directly.

- 3. Inform others.** Start a small group or class in your place of worship to find out more and come up with ways to take action to ease and end child poverty.
- 4. Get involved in hands-on service.** Volunteer with a program, organization, or agency serving children and families who are poor.
- 5. Start a program in your house of worship to fill an unmet need of poor families in your community** or one near it. Organize trips using your house of worship's van to help poor families reach supermarkets where their money can go furthest. Tutor children to help combat educational disadvantage. Start a book club to foster a love of reading. Host a parents-night-out to ease the stress of low-income parents. Make sure your community has a site during the summer that offers the federally funded breakfast and lunch program. The CDF Freedom Schools® program is a summer and after-school enrichment program that provides meals through the federally funded breakfast and lunch program. See [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org) for more information about supporting or starting a *CDF Freedom Schools* site in your community.
- 6. Help connect poor families with the programs that work.** People just like you are trained to be volunteer income tax preparers to help low-income families claim the Earned Income Tax Credit they are due. Others are helping spread the word about the children's health coverage programs available to poor and lower-income families. Visit [www.tax-coalition.org](http://www.tax-coalition.org) to find out how you can help.
- 7. Be a voice for change and for justice.** The change children need won't come until members of Congress hear a broad, relentless demand from their constituents. Children's needs are easy to ignore because children don't vote or make campaign contributions. Figure out how to get your Representative's and Senators' attention. Start a letter-writing group or have a letter-writing table after services or at another time once a month. Join an advocacy group. Sign up for emails from the Children's Defense Fund so you'll know when action is needed. Make an appointment to

visit your representatives when they are in their district offices. Write a letter to the editor and send a copy to your elected officials. Invite your elected officials to come speak to your house of worship (or a coalition of them) about children's needs. Be prepared with good questions. Even though our lives are busy, we must make time to work for justice. We don't have a moment or a child to waste.

### A Better Tomorrow

Imagine our nation in five years. We have cut child poverty in half and are on our way to ending it. Hard-working families are earning a living wage and have the needed tax credits so that they are bringing in enough income to put nutritious food on the table and provide a safe home for their family. The children leave the table nourished and don't worry about whether there will be enough to eat at the next meal. The youngest children are engaged and stimulated from their earliest days on, exposed to the world of books through their parents or caregivers or Head Start teachers, readying their eager minds for a lifetime of learning. Every school-age child is expected and supported to achieve. Teachers, administrators, parents, and community members work together for the success of every child. Young people are hopeful and strong, equipped with academic skills to expect and achieve success. Opportunities in the future are real enough to young people that they call forth the self-discipline and effort to reach them. Crime rates have plummeted, and there's a greater sense of community as adults and young people are connecting with each other with mutual respect. Every place of worship has found its role in supporting the success of all children. Some are nurturing children's school success, others are supporting positive parenting, while others help with work readiness and connections. Some places of worship house child care programs while others send volunteers into Head Start programs and schools. Members of Congress know that vocal, visible people of faith will stand up and speak out for justice for children, and so the elected officials look for ways to be champions for children.

What's your vision? What is your role in making it real?

## Glossary

**Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):** This federal tax benefit for low- and modest-income workers has been particularly effective at combating poverty; in fact, the EITC lifts more children out of poverty than any other program.<sup>13</sup> In 2003, the EITC lifted 2.4 million children out of poverty. Without it, the child poverty rate would have been almost one-fourth higher. In addition, there is agreement that expansion of the EITC was responsible for large increases in employment of single parents over the past two decades.<sup>14</sup>

**Child Tax Credit:** A tax credit designed to offset some of the costs of raising children, the Child Tax Credit benefits millions of families. However, the credit is only “partially refundable,” meaning that many low-income families have earnings too low to qualify for the full benefit of the credit, if they qualify at all. Even full-time minimum wage workers with children do not qualify for the full credit amount. As a result, its ability to reduce child poverty and supplement low-income families’ income is greatly reduced. In fact, the credit lifts 2.6 million fewer children and adults out of poverty than if it were fully refundable.<sup>15</sup>

**Minimum Wage:** The minimum wage plays an important role in strengthening a worker’s ability to protect his or her family from poverty. After not having been increased in ten years, it was raised in 2007 from \$5.15 to \$7.25 (to be fully implemented in July 2009). Combined with food stamps and the EITC, a family of four with at least one parent working full-time at the new minimum wage when in full effect will not have to raise its children in poverty.<sup>16</sup> This was not the case in the years immediately preceding the raise.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** TANF is the program intended to provide direct cash assistance to poor families in their transition to work, based on eligibility criteria set by states with strict work requirements and time limits that also vary by state. It replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as part of the effort to “end welfare as we know it.” With the main goal of transitioning adult recipients to employment, TANF has strict work participation requirements and a five-year lifetime limit on the time families can receive cash assistance, with some states having even



shorter time limits. TANF restrictions have resulted in weaker protections for the poorest families. Only about half of families with children that are poor enough to qualify for TANF assistance now receive it due to various barriers to enrollment and assistance. Many poor families have also been left deeper in poverty due to the reduction in income assistance provided through TANF.<sup>17</sup>

**Child Care Assistance:** Child care assistance provides important support to low-income working families and an opportunity to enhance their children’s development. In 2007, an estimated 2.7 million children received child care assistance from the Child Care and Development Fund, TANF, and the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG). However, with current funding, that number is expected to drop to 2.5 million in 2009 and later years.<sup>18</sup> According to the most recently available data, only one in seven federally eligible children receives child care assistance, indicating that substantial increases in funding are necessary to meet the needs of low-income working families.<sup>19</sup>

**Job Training and Employment Assistance:** Programs funded by the Workforce Investment Act have, on average, shown significant success in increasing participants’ earnings. However, the federal government’s investments

## Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

in workforce development programs over the past two decades have not kept pace with the increasing demand for skilled workers. The range of workforce training programs—particularly those targeting low-income adults and youth—which have seen significant cuts in recent years, have resulted in substantial lost opportunities for both workers and the businesses that want to hire them.<sup>20</sup>

### **Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program**

**(CHIP):** More than 35 million low-income children currently receive health coverage through Medicaid or CHIP. These two programs have been critical in protecting children’s access to health care, especially as employers continue to reduce coverage to employees and their dependents. Medicaid is an entitlement program, which means that states are guaranteed federal matching funds for coverage of all Medicaid eligible individuals who apply.

CHIP, however, is a block grant program, under which states receive an annual allotment of federal funds regardless of demand or need. When states exhaust their allotted federal CHIP funds, they must increase state spending on the program or shrink the program, which they generally do by limiting eligibility, instituting waiting lists, or using other cost-saving mechanisms. Each state sets its own income eligibility level for Medicaid and CHIP within broad federal guidelines, often with additional variations by age of child. Benefits in the Medicaid and CHIP programs may also differ substantially from each other within a state, and certainly between states. As a result, children’s available treatment regimens for the same condition may depend not just on their family income, but also on their age and where they live.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert Greenstein, “The Earned Income Tax Credit: Boosting Employment, Aiding the Working Poor” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Robert Greenstein, “The Earned Income Tax Credit: Boosting Employment, Aiding the Working Poor” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Aviva Aron-Dine, “Improving the Refundable Child Tax Credit: An Important Step Toward Reducing Child Poverty” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Jason Furman and Sharon Parrot, “A \$7.25 Minimum Wage Would Be a Useful Step in Helping Working Families Escape Poverty” (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, January 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Arloc Sherman, *Public Benefits: Easing Poverty and Ensuring Medical Coverage* (Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, August 2005).

<sup>18</sup> FY 2009 Budget of the U.S. Government, “Analytical Perspectives,” Table 25-5, Beneficiary Projections for Major Benefit Programs.

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Mezey, Mark Greenberg, and Rachel Schumacher, “The Vast Majority of Federally Eligible Children Did Not Receive Child Care Assistance in FY 2000” (Washington, DC: Center for Law and Social Policy, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Robin Spence and Brendan Kiel, “Skilling the American Workforce ‘On the Cheap’: Ongoing Shortfalls in Federal Funding for Workforce Development” (Washington, DC: The Workforce Alliance Report, September 2003): 1.



## A Children's Health Coverage Primer

### A Snapshot of One Child: Lacking Health Coverage

When you look at 9-year-old Kyle, you would never know how hard it is for him to breathe sometimes. Kyle has chronic asthma, as well as migraines and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) that require ongoing medical attention. His mother, Lorna, is a small business owner in Missouri City, Texas, who cannot afford private health coverage. She found out about the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) during the free day at the Houston museums and credits the program with improving Kyle's health and helping him to perform well at school.

Before Kyle enrolled in CHIP three years ago, he had no pediatrician and often went to the emergency room when his asthma and migraines flared up. Without treatment for his ADHD, he also had difficulty at school. Lorna never would have been able to afford the \$770 in medications that Kyle needs each month to keep his ADHD and other health conditions under control. Now with CHIP coverage, Kyle has been earning A and B grades, making friends, and even attended summer camp for the first time.

### The Big Picture: Children Without Health Coverage Today

#### Millions of Children Cannot Get Health Services They Need

Nine million children in America—one out of every nine—have no health coverage. A child is born uninsured every 39 seconds. Far too many infants in the United States are born at low birthweight and/or die in their first year of life. Lack of coverage to ensure access to even basic health screenings and services can have devastating effects. Uninsured children are almost five times as likely as a child with coverage to go more than two years without seeing a doctor, and are twice as likely to die in the hospital when admitted for general injuries.

#### Children Have Special Health Needs

Regular health screenings permit early identification and treatment of potential health conditions and are crucial to a child's healthy development. Children have distinct and immediate health needs because their brain development, physical growth and mental health in childhood lay the

foundation for their adult capabilities and our nation's future.

#### Need for Coverage Starts Well Before a Child Is Born

Health coverage for pregnant women encourages early and regular prenatal care, which in turn is essential to maximize the health of newborns and put them on a path to good health throughout infancy, childhood and adulthood. Yet about 800,000 pregnant women are uninsured each year. One state-based study found that infants born to uninsured mothers are more than three times as likely to die in the first year of life as those born to women who have private health coverage.

#### Lack of Coverage Adversely Affects More Than Just a Child's Health

Children in poor health do not do as well in school as their healthy peers and have lower average earnings as adults. Children born at low birthweight are more likely to be in poorer health throughout their lifetime, and at age 17, are twice as likely to have significant behavioral problems and 50 percent more likely to score below average in reading and math.

#### The Rising Costs of Health Care Affect Everyone—Including Families with Coverage

Since 2001, health costs have risen more than three times as fast as wages. Fewer businesses are able to afford health coverage for their employees, especially as they face the current economic crisis. The average annual premium for employer-sponsored family coverage in 2008 was more than \$12,500. That's about the same amount a full-time minimum wage worker makes in an entire year. On top of that, families and businesses across America are struggling under the burden of skyrocketing health care costs. Those who retained their private or employer-sponsored health coverage have seen increases in costs and reductions in benefits.

#### Ensuring Health Coverage for Children Benefits Communities

Children are by far the least expensive population to cover, between three and five times less than adults or the elderly. Every \$1 spent on vaccinations for children saves \$16 in health and social costs to the community. Communities incur increased costs when their children are not insured, often because of increased use of emergency rooms and



longer hospital stays. For example, in Arizona, an uninsured child costs the community \$2,100 more than a child with Medicaid or CHIP. The annual funding needed to expand health coverage to all children and pregnant women in America would be less than the cost of two months of the war in Iraq.

### **The Opportunity Is Now**

The new Congress and President Obama can build strong families and strong communities by guaranteeing that every child and pregnant woman has access to affordable, comprehensive health coverage. Polls show that 90 percent of Americans believe every child in the U.S. has a right to health care. It is time our leaders listened to the American people and made children's health coverage accessible and affordable for families across America in 2009.

### **Create Change: What Can We Do to Ensure Health Coverage for All Children?**

**1. Connect with your concern and commitment.** In whatever way is most appropriate and helpful for you—whether it is through prayer, meditation, conversation, journaling, or some other way—connect with your own deepest desire to do whatever you can to assure that every child has health coverage so that no child, our sacred responsibility, goes without the care

they need. Identify the role that your religious faith plays in calling you to act on behalf of children and sustaining you when it is challenging. Look honestly at what gets in the way of your making the difference you want to make, whether it's discouragement, feeling busy, not knowing where to start, or something else. Consider your gifts, talents, and resources that you can bring. Discern what kind of action will be most fulfilling, satisfying, sustainable, and effective. What are you called to do?

- 2. Learn more about children's health and health coverage.** Visit the Children's Defense Fund's website, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org), for more online resources about our Health Coverage for *All* Children campaign. Check out the bibliography in the Religious Action section of the website for resources that you can use in your place of worship. Look for opportunities to learn from families without health coverage and from health care professionals and others who serve them.
- 3. Inform others.** Start a children's health campaign task force or a small group or class in your place of worship to learn more and take action. Download CDF's Discussion Guide and other resources at [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org).

4. **Get involved in hands-on service.** Volunteer with a health clinic, or another program, organization, or agency serving children and families without health coverage. What could you do to ease the stress of a long wait in an emergency room or health clinic? If you or someone you know is a health care provider, what about donating your services through the local school?
5. **Start a program in your house of worship to fill an unmet need of poor families in your community** or one near it. Organize trips using your house of worship's van to help pregnant women get to prenatal care appointments. Collect books and games to donate to waiting rooms.
6. **Help connect families with uninsured children to Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).** Places of worship and individual members can help publicize the availability of Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. Contact your state's Department of Health to find out how you can help.
7. **Be a voice for change and for justice.** The change children need won't come until members of Congress hear a broad, relentless demand from their constituents. Children's needs are easy to ignore because they don't vote or make campaign contributions. Figure out how to get the attention of your Representative and Senators. Start a letter-writing group or have a letter-writing table after services once a month. Join an advocacy group. Sign up for emails from the Children's Defense Fund so you'll know when action is needed. Make an appointment to visit your Representative in the district office. Write a letter to the editor and send a copy to your elected officials. Invite your elected officials to come speak to your house of worship (or a coalition of them) about children's needs. Be prepared with good questions. Even though our lives are busy, we must make time to work for justice. We don't have a moment or a child to waste.

### A Better Tomorrow

Imagine our nation in five years with guaranteed access to comprehensive health coverage for every child and pregnant woman. Children all across the country are healthier because they are all able to see a doctor for preventive care to keep them well and for timely care when they are hurt or injured so they can heal quickly before their conditions worsen. On the rare occasion that a child goes to the emergency room for a sudden health crisis, they are seen more quickly now that the emergency rooms aren't crammed with those for whom it was the only and last-resort place to turn for care. Stop by the window of a newborn nursery in a hospital, and you'll see more babies born at a healthy weight thanks to the good prenatal care their mothers received. Sales on tiny coffins have dropped now that the lives of more babies in their first year of life are being saved. Academic achievement is rising in schools across the nation as children miss fewer days of school for illness and more children are entering school healthy and ready to learn. Children are receiving higher grades and exhibiting fewer behavioral problems. Their smiles are bright: their teeth are strong and well-cared for. The improvements in health care coverage are resulting in savings to our local communities and our nation's economy, as parents are missing fewer days to care for sick children, more illnesses are diagnosed and treated in earlier stages when it is more affordable, and fewer people are receiving expensive treatment for critical conditions in the emergency room. Sure, children still get hurt. A tumble from the monkey bars still breaks a second-grader's arm, pneumonia still finds its way into a fifth-grader's lungs, a high school student with asthma still needs his nebulizer in the middle of a school day...but no one is sick with worry about whether the children can get the care they need. Everyone breathes a little easier now.

What's your vision of a healthy future for our children?  
What role do you see for yourself to help achieve it?

## A Pipeline to Prison Primer

### A Snapshot of One Child: Swept Along the Pipeline to Prison

Chief Judge Patricia Clark of the Juvenile Division of King County Superior Court in Seattle gives us this glimpse of Frankie. “Let me tell you about Frankie, who first came before me at the age of 10 (now presumed to have the capacity to commit a crime). He was charged with Assault 4 (a misdemeanor). Frankie was born into the child welfare system. Removed from his mother at birth, Frankie spent his first eight years moving from foster home to foster home, getting angrier and more depressed. His angry outbursts landed him in a ‘therapeutic foster home’ placement for kids with behavioral problems. Of course, once he was placed, he continued to demonstrate his behavioral issues. He hit staff. The police were called. He was arrested and charges were filed. It is clear that the therapeutic foster home is using the courts to ‘enforce the rules’ and provide much needed respite care. But this created a criminal record for Frankie. Over the next five years, this pattern repeated itself several times. I last saw Frankie six months ago. He presented on two counts of Robbery 2 (felony charges). His lengthy criminal history (created from his behavior in placement) counts to increase his score for the purpose of sentencing. Frankie was facing 206-208 weeks in juvenile state ‘prison.’ By the time he is released, Frankie will be almost 18. He has literally been moved through the pipeline from the cradle—next stop, the adult prison system.”

### The Big Picture: Children in the Pipeline to Prison Today

The Chinese character, or word, for crisis is made up of two symbols which mean “danger” and “opportunity.” America’s pipeline to prison crisis indeed represents both danger and opportunity. The grave danger is that if the pipeline is left in place, we will lose the bright potential of tens of thousands of children of God. At the same time, this crisis presents an extraordinary opportunity for us as people of faith, as places of worship, and as a nation to start treating every child and young person as a sacred child of God and do all that we can to ensure that every one has the opportunity, resources, and support to thrive and flourish and live out the lives for which they were created.

The Children’s Defense Fund recently launched the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Campaign, a national call to action to stop the funneling of tens of thousands of youths, predominantly minorities, down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration and, in some cases, death. Race and poverty are the major factors underpinning the pipeline. We created the pipeline and we have the power, knowledge and will to dismantle it. The need is urgent.

### Key National Facts

**A Black boy born in 2001 has a one in three chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Latino boy a one in six chance; and a White boy a one in 17 chance. A Black girl born in 2001 has a one in 17 chance of going to prison in her lifetime; a Latino girl a one in 45 chance; and a White girl a one in 111 chance.**

With the statistics just mentioned in mind, think of entering a third grade classroom made up of 24 students born in 2001, just eight years old. Can you picture eight-year-olds? Bright eyes fixed on the teacher as she reads aloud from a chapter book. Still baby-soft cheeks resting on hands as they listen. That funny mix of baby teeth and permanent teeth revealed by flashing grins at a humorous part of the story. Picture that in this classroom, some of the children live in poverty, and their stomachs may be rumbling because they didn’t get enough to eat that morning—or the night before. Picture that in this classroom, some of the children are uninsured and may be suffering from an untreated cavity or undiagnosed vision problem, or other illness. Picture that this classroom has few resources and a teacher with low expectations. In America, about seven of every 10 fourth graders in our public schools cannot read at grade level. Now, keep picturing the tender faces and bright eyes of this classroom full of eight-year-olds and realize that unless we act now to dismantle the pipeline to prison, many of these children will feel desperation or frustration or hopelessness and fall further and further behind.

**Pervasive Poverty** – Poverty is the largest driving force behind the pipeline, exacerbated by race. Black children are more than three times as likely as White children to be born into poverty and to be poor, and are four times as likely to live in extreme poverty. One in three Latino babies and three in seven Black babies are born into

poverty. More than one in four Latino children and one in three Black children are poor. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of poor Latino children increased by 960,000 (to 4.5 million) and the number of poor Black children increased by 323,000 (to 3.9 million).

**Inadequate Access to Health Coverage** – Latino children are more than two and a half times as likely and Black children are 71 percent more likely to be uninsured as White children. The number of uninsured children has risen two years in a row. The majority of these uninsured children have a parent who works full-time.

**Gaps in Early Childhood Development** – Studies have shown that children who do not get the early intervention, permanence and stability they need are more likely to act out and fail in school because they lack the skills necessary to succeed. Researchers emphasize the importance of early childhood nurturing and stimulation to help the brain grow, especially between birth and age seven, and even beyond, and thus help children thrive and follow a path toward successful adulthood. The importance of stimulation in the first years of life is dramatically underlined in the U.S. Department of Education's study of 22,000 kindergartners in the kindergarten class of 1998-99, which found that Black and Hispanic children were substantially behind when they entered kindergarten.

**Disparate Educational Opportunities** – Eighty-six percent of Black, 83 percent of Latino and 58 percent of White fourth graders cannot read at grade level; and 89 percent of Black, 85 percent of Latino and 59 percent of White eighth graders cannot do math at grade level. Black students are more likely than any other students to be in special education programs for children with mental retardation or emotional disturbance. Black and American Indian children are almost twice as likely as White children to be retained in a grade. The public school suspension rate among Black and American Indian students is almost three times that of Whites. Black, Latino and American Indian children are more than twice as likely as White children to drop out of school. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 59 percent of Black, 61 percent of Latino and 62 percent of American Indian students graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma in 2006. When Black children do graduate from high school, they have a greater chance of being unemployed and a lower chance of going to college full-time than White high school graduates. Only 48,000 Black males

earn a bachelor's degree each year, but an estimated one in three Black men ages 20-29 is under correctional supervision or control. Approximately 815,000 Black males were incarcerated in state or federal prisons or local jails at mid-year 2007.

**Intolerable Abuse and Neglect** – A child is abused or neglected every 35 seconds. Four in ten of the children who are abused or neglected get no help at all after their initial investigation. More than 800,000 children are in foster care each year, about 513,000 on a single day. Black children represent 32 percent of children in foster care but only 15 percent of all children.

**Unmet Mental and Emotional Problems** – A Congressional study found 15,000 children in juvenile detention facilities, some as young as seven years old, solely because community mental health services were unavailable. Studies have reported that as many as three-fourths of incarcerated youths have mental health disorders and about one in five has a severe disorder. Youths who age out of foster care are less likely to graduate from high school or college and experience more serious mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, than youths generally. They are less likely to receive adequate health and mental health care, and are more likely to experience homelessness, and to be involved in the criminal justice system.

**Rampant Substance Abuse** – Drugs, tobacco and alcohol lead our children down the wrong path. Disconnected youths, lacking a decent education or high school degree, job training skills, and social support systems or mentors, often resort to self-destructive acts. Unfortunately, alcohol and other substance abuse treatment for youths and for parents and other adults is in too short supply. Only about 10 percent of youths with a substance use disorder receive treatment.

**Overburdened, Ineffective Juvenile Justice System** – One-size-fits-all zero tolerance school discipline policies are transforming schools into a major point of entry into the juvenile justice system as children are increasingly arrested on school grounds for subjectively and loosely defined behaviors. Black youths are about four times as likely as their White peers to be incarcerated. Black youths are almost five times as likely to be incarcerated as White youths for drug offenses. Of the 1.7 million children with an incarcerated parent in 2007, Black children were more than seven times as likely and Latino children were more

than twice as likely to have an incarcerated parent as White children. Most juvenile correctional facility programs focus on punishment rather than treatment and rehabilitation, often creating environments that further harden youths. This makes it more difficult for them to productively reintegrate into their families and communities.

**We must speak out against policies that contribute to criminalizing children at younger and younger ages, and fight for policies that help children thrive and put them on track to a productive adulthood.**

### **We need to:**

- End poverty by creating jobs that offer livable wages, increasing the minimum wage, expanding job programs, making college affordable for every student, and expanding income supports such as the Child Tax Credit.
- Ensure all children and pregnant woman have access to affordable, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services.
- Make early childhood development programs accessible to every child by ensuring such programs are affordable, available and of high quality.
- Help each child reach his/her full potential and succeed in work and life, by ensuring our schools have adequate resources to provide high quality education to every child.
- Expand prevention and specialized treatment services for children and their parents, connect children to caring permanent families, improve the quality of the child welfare workforce, and increase accountability for results for children.
- Reduce detention and incarceration by increasing investment in prevention and early intervention strategies, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and to the health and mental health care children need for healthy development.
- For those children who do get caught in the deeper end of the pipeline, we must accelerate reforms of juvenile justice policy at the federal, state and local levels to ensure that troubled youths get the integrated services needed to put them on a sustained path to successful adulthood.

**For more information on the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Campaign, please visit [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org) or contact Natacha Blain, lead strategic advisor, at (202) 662-3554.**

### **Create Change: What Can We Do to Dismantle the Pipeline to Prison?**

- Mentor a child through Big Brothers/Big Sisters or another organization.
- Volunteer at an after-school program for youths.
- Educate elected officials about the pipeline to prison.
- Host a house party to educate others about the pipeline to prison and what they can do to dismantle it.
- Volunteer with children who are homeless or in foster care. Explore becoming a foster parent yourself.
- Work through your place of worship, perhaps in cooperation with other houses of worship in the community, and organize a forum on incarcerated youths and the funding disparities between prisons and education in our nation.
- Volunteer your talents or professional services to help a single-parent, kinship care, or foster care family by babysitting, inviting them to events with their children, or providing transportation.
- Invite youths to events at the next educational level (i.e., taking a high school student to a college basketball game).

### **In your house of worship:**

- Institute a “Cradle Roll” within your faith-based institution or community, linking every child to a permanent, caring family member or adult mentor who can keep them on track and get them back on track if and when they stray.
- Promote learning by starting an after-school program for children.
- Ensure that at least one caring community member attends every public school student suspension meeting or court hearing.
- Encourage families to spend quality time together by hosting a movie or game night at your place of worship.
- Start a support group for single-parent or kinship care families.
- Provide job opportunities and guidance for families and youths in need.
- Create college scholarships for children from disadvantaged, foster care, and kinship care families.
- Work with school officials to develop and adopt more child-appropriate discipline policies and procedures.
- Reach out to youths who are homeless or in foster care.
- Prepare care packages of new clothes, personal toiletries and/or a welcome gift for children placed into foster care homes.



- Hold events to celebrate the strengths of our children and provide college scholarships and leadership opportunities to youths.
- Start a halfway house and counseling program for youths who have run away.
- Create a summer job opportunity for a youth.
- Create and distribute a community resource manual so that parents know where to turn for help for their families.
- Start a parent education program to familiarize parents about conflict resolution in the home and how to advocate for their children.
- Work with the local schools to create and distribute a calendar of free family-friendly community events.
- Encourage alternatives to incarceration such as restitution, community service, electronic monitoring, drug rehabilitation treatment, or placement in a “staff secure” (but not locked) community corrections facility.
- Work to ensure that counseling, social services, education, and health and mental health services are provided to at-risk youths.
- Establish partnerships with local businesses, schools and/or places of worship to create quality exit programs for those leaving the juvenile justice system as a way to start them on the “Pipeline to Success.”

### A Better Tomorrow

Imagine a classroom of eight-year-olds a few years from now. Now, none of them is living in poverty, so they arrive at school well-nourished and ready to learn. They are healthy, thanks to check-ups and other appointments with a doctor when needed. The teacher has the children take turns reading aloud to the class. When one struggles, she makes a note to follow up with the extra help he needs so he won't fall behind his classmates, who are now reading on grade level. It is career day at school, and when the class begins to discuss what they want to be when they grow up, the hands go flying up in the air: doctor, vet, teacher, author, pilot, president. The teacher smiles: chances are, now, that that is just what they will accomplish. Not a single child's bright promise will be squandered in the emptying prisons of this new day.

What's your vision of a future in which all children are on paths of promise and the pipeline is a thing of the past? What role do you see for yourself to help achieve it?

## Adult Discussion Guides

The following Adult Discussion Guides suggest how you might engage the adults in your faith community in exploring the preceding material in the Children's Concerns Primer and considering the perspective and teachings of your particular faith tradition. Adapt them as appropriate to fit the unique circumstances of your own place of worship, the size of your group, and the timing and setting for the conversation.

If your faith tradition is not represented in one of the following discussion guides, review them for ideas of how you might engage your own place of worship in a discussion for your religious tradition. Draw from the resources provided elsewhere in the Children's Sabbaths manual to enrich your discussion. These guides also may serve as a resource for developing an interfaith discussion in your community bringing together adults of many different faith traditions.

### Bahá'í Adult Discussion Guide

**Notes for the facilitator:** There are many ways to organize discussion groups depending on the size and interests of the group and the time available. Following is one possible model for your consideration.

#### Materials needed:

- Easel, chart paper and markers OR whiteboard and markers for each discussion group
  - Copies of *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One* for each participant (pages 28–29)
  - Copies of Discussion Questions for each participant with pens or pencils (page 30)
  - Copies of **each** section from the “Children's Concerns Primer” (pages 11–26) – enough of each for 1/3 of total participants:
    - A Child Poverty Primer
    - A Children's Health Coverage Primer
    - A Pipeline to Prison Primer
1. Welcome participants. Consider opening with devotional music and favorite prayers and passages (see Section 5, Bahá'í Resources).
  2. Introduce the theme of the discussion, “Creating Change for Children Today: Bringing Hope and a Better Tomorrow.” Give a brief introduction of the purpose and history of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration. Explain that participants will examine a perspective on the eradication of poverty from the Bahá'í Faith and learn more about one of three challenging issues affecting America's young people: poverty, lack of health coverage, and the pipeline to prison.
  3. Distribute copies of the Bahá'í International Community's Statement on Poverty – *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*. Read this statement aloud together, and summarize the main points if time allows.
  4. Divide into three (or multiples of three) small discussion groups to look at the issues of poverty, lack of health coverage, and incarceration. Provide each group copies of *one* of these sections from the primer, chart paper and markers, and copies of the Questions for Discussion and writing implements for each participant. Ask each group to read aloud together their section from the Children's Concerns Primer and summarize the main points on their chart paper. Have groups go through discussion questions together, recording answers to questions 1–4 on chart paper. Individuals can record responses on their personal copies as desired.
  5. **[Optional]** If time allows, ask each small group to identify a spokesperson to share with the larger group key points that they learned and key conclusions in response to the Discussion Questions. Call small groups back together to discuss what they have read in their small groups. Invite each group's spokesperson to summarize the issue they studied and the results of their consultation. Encourage questions and comments to help clarify and better understand the issues. Show appreciation for each group's contribution.
  6. Allow a quiet reflective opportunity for individuals to respond privately to discussion question #5, making a personal commitment to action. Consider playing quiet music in the background or preceding this reflection with brief devotions using one or two of the selections from the Sacred Writings.
  7. In the large group, review the process. What points really inspired or stood out for people? Has your perception of children's needs changed, and if so, how? What personal actions will come out of this discussion?



### Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One

A statement from the Bahá'í International Community<sup>1</sup>  
February 14, 2008

#### Part I

1. The crisis of global poverty has, at long last, been accorded a high priority on the international agenda. This propitious development has sparked a flurry of discussion and research concerning the means for eradicating this debilitating condition from human life. Yet as renewed pledges for action pour in from governments, as long-held theories and conventional approaches fail to quell long-held prejudices, conflicts, and exploitation, a feeling of rudderlessness looms over the global enterprise of poverty eradication. At the same time, a palpable optimism emerges from the attention and momentum generated by the search for solutions to this worldwide challenge.
2. The mechanisms of poverty eradication have long been defined in primarily material terms. Indeed, the central pillar of the international community's poverty alleviation efforts has been the transfer of financial resources. Approximately \$2.3 trillion has been spent on foreign aid over the last five decades.<sup>2</sup> Tragically, the aid, far from ushering in greater self-sufficiency, has often had a detrimental effect on recipient communities: increased dependency on foreign assistance, subservience to externally dictated priorities, misappropriation of funds and decreased pressure for governance reform. In a resolute push for change, the United Nations has sought to expand the mechanisms for assistance and to galvanize support for poverty alleviation through its Millennium Development Goals.<sup>3</sup>
3. It is now increasingly acknowledged that such conditions as the marginalization of girls and women,<sup>4</sup> poor governance,<sup>5</sup> ethnic and religious antipathy,<sup>6</sup> environmental degradation<sup>7</sup> and unemployment<sup>8</sup> constitute formidable obstacles to the progress and development of communities. These evidence a deeper crisis—one rooted in the values and attitudes that shape relationships at all levels of society. Viewed from this perspective, poverty can be described as the absence of those ethical, social and material resources needed to develop the moral, intellectual and social capacities of individuals, communities and institutions. Moral reasoning, group decision-making and freedom from racism, for example, are all essential tools for poverty alleviation. Such capacities must shape individual thinking as well as institutional arrangements and policy-making. To be clear, the goal at hand is not only to remove the ills of poverty but to engage the masses of humanity in the construction of a just global order.
4. Individuals and institutions must work in tandem to take up this task. One of the goals of poverty alleviation, then, centers on the individual: He must be helped to reclaim his dignity and sense of self-worth, must be encouraged to gain confidence to improve his condition and strive to realize his potential. Beyond the achievement of personal well-being, he must be nurtured to become a source of social good—of peace, happiness and advantage to those around him. It is at the level of service to others that our humanity achieves its highest expression. The second goal centers on institutions: At every level of society, they must serve as channels through which the talents and energies of individuals can be harnessed in service to humanity. Resources that help to develop this individual and institutional capacity represent a true source of wealth to the community.

<sup>1</sup> The Bahá'í International Community represents the worldwide Bahá'í community at the international and national levels. See [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org).

<sup>2</sup> William Easterly, *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, launched in 2000, represent the United Nations' strategy to halve extreme poverty by 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew D. Mason and Elizabeth M. King, *Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice. A World Bank Research Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2001); *Towards Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering Women*. (Washington, DC: International Center on Research for Women, 2005); M. Chen, et al., *Progress of the World's Women 2005: Women, Work & Poverty* (New York, NY: United Nations Fund for Women, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel Kaufmann, Aart Kraay and Massimo Mastruzzi, "Governance Matters IV: Governance Indicators for 1996 – 2004" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2005); "Arab Human Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World" (New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme, 2004) on September 17, 2007, the United Nations News Centre reported that one quarter of the gross domestic product of African States, or \$148 billion, is lost to corruption yearly.

<sup>6</sup> "Human Development Report 2004, Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World" (New York, NY: United Nations Development Programme, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Stern, "Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change" (London, England: HM Treasury, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> "World Employment Report 2004-2005, Employment, Productivity and Poverty Reduction" (Geneva, Switzerland: International Labor Organization, 2004).

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5. Much like the physical principles that govern the material world, the social world, too, is governed by moral principles, which underlie the functioning of an ordered society. Principles such as gender equality,<sup>9</sup> trustworthiness,<sup>10</sup> access to education, human rights and freedom of religion,<sup>11</sup> for example, tend to correlate positively with measures of socioeconomic well-being and stability. The interrelatedness of challenges stemming from poverty calls for the articulation of principles capable of guiding analysis, decision-making and the development of indicators to measure progress. The essential merit of a principle-based process is that it guides individuals and institutions away from a focus on isolated, short-term concerns to consider problems from a systemic and long-term perspective. For any decision to garner support and deliver results, the decision-making process itself must have integrity; it must involve those directly affected by the decisions, and it must be governed by transparent, agreed-upon ethical standards.
6. It is in this context that the Bahá'í International Community would like to offer two principles as guides for efforts in the realm of poverty eradication: justice and unity. These principles underlie a vision of development in which material progress serves as a

vehicle for the moral and cultural advancement of humanity. Justice provides the means capable of harnessing human potential to eradicate poverty from our midst, through the implementation of laws, the adjustment of economic systems, the redistribution of wealth and opportunity, and unfailing adherence to the highest ethical standards in private and public life. Unity asserts that progress is systemic and relational, that a concern for the integrity of the family unit and the local, national, and global community must guide poverty alleviation efforts.

In our efforts to eradicate poverty, we are experiencing no less than the birth pangs of a truly global civilization: New modes of thought, new standards and new legal and institutional arrangements are struggling to take hold. As our understanding of the problems and their possible solutions expands, an unprecedented global consensus and accompanying capacity for international cooperation pave the way for an outcome far greater than any we have been able to achieve. Yet, to generate the knowledge and commitment needed to overcome poverty, the full spectrum of human spiritual and intellectual potential will need to be summoned for the task. And as the fullness of our humanity is engaged, it will regenerate the fabric of civilization.

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<sup>9</sup> See note 3.

<sup>10</sup> See note 4.

<sup>11</sup> The Failed States Index," *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2007, pp. 55-63.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What challenges from the Children's Concerns Primer do you see reflected in your own community – what examples of poverty, lack of health coverage, or the pipeline to prison do you see affecting the lives of children in your community?
2. Identify any lack of ethical, social and material resources that you think underlie these challenges in your community. [See paragraph #3 in *Eradicating Poverty: Moving Forward as One*] Why is it important to apply a broad, community-development approach to finding solutions to these issues?
3. How can the principles of justice and unity be applied to resolving this problem in your community? Can you identify additional spiritual principles that would be vital to the process?
4. How can the activities of Bahá'í community life, including devotional gatherings, study of the Creative Word in small groups to build capacity for service, providing lessons for children that develop their spiritual faculties and lay the foundations of a noble character, and helping adolescents form a strong moral identity and empowering them to contribute to the well-being of their communities, directly impact these concerns facing your community's young people?
5. Use your responses to question #4, along with the suggested activities for creating change in the Children's Concerns Primer, to stimulate your thinking about how you will contribute to eradicating the challenges you identified in your community. Identify one or more action steps that you will carry out in the next three months to help alleviate problems of child poverty, lack of health coverage, or youths facing a future of incarceration in your community.

## Christian Adult Discussion Guide

There are several ways to engage adults in your church in discussing and responding to the material in the primer, “Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow.” Options include:

- A one-hour discussion in which participants divide into three smaller groups (if you have six or more participants), with each small group assigned one of the three concerns: poverty, health care, and the pipeline to prison. Each group could read and discuss the material and then make a brief presentation back to the larger group.
- A four-week study devoting each week’s session to one of the three concerns in the materials and reserving the last, fourth session to discuss taking action and next steps. (If you pursue this option, you can use the following outline but instead of dividing into small groups, work through the same process each week, taking a different section each week.)
- A one-hour discussion in which you summarize and present the information provided and then invite responses to the suggested questions.

### Suggested Outline for a One-Hour Session with Small Groups

#### Materials needed:

- Easel, flip chart paper, and markers (for three groups)
- Copies of Discussion Questions for each participant with pens or pencils
- Copies of **each** section from the “Children’s Concerns Primer” (pages 11–26) – enough of each for 1/3 of total participants:
  - A Child Poverty Primer
  - A Children’s Health Coverage Primer
  - A Primer on the Pipeline to Prison

**Preparation:** Ahead of time, invite several others to be small group facilitators so that each of the three small groups has a facilitator. Reassure them that they are not expected to be the “expert” for the group, but simply to be willing to keep the small group moving through the parts of the small group discussion. Ahead of time, give each of them a copy of the session outline as well as the primer material.

## Session Outline

### 1. Welcome (10 minutes)

- Welcome participants.** If size permits, have each person briefly introduce themselves and name an area where they would like to create change to improve the lives of children. If the group is too large for everyone to introduce themselves, have people turn to their neighbor and introduce themselves answering the question, and then ask for several volunteers to share their responses with the whole group.
- Open with prayer.** (You may want to use one from this Children’s Sabbaths resource manual or offer your own.)
- Introduce the overall theme** of the 2009 Children’s Sabbaths: “Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow,” which is explained on pages 11–12 of this manual.

### 2. Small Group Exploration (35 minutes)

Divide the group into three small groups. Have the small group facilitators lead their small groups in the following:

- Our Inner Thoughts:** Begin by asking for a volunteer to read Mark 9:33–37 and for another to read Luke 9:46–49, printed on the handout. Note for the participants that Jesus was aware of the “inner thoughts” of his followers that might get in the way of their serving him and finding greatness through service. The disciples probably had not thought about their assumptions of greatness; they took them for granted. Sometimes that made it harder to hear or understand what Jesus had to say. Add that before we can take in new information, it is helpful to identify the assumptions, filters, and feelings that we already have that may influence what we hear and how we hear it. Invite participants to jot down words or phrases that come to mind when they hear “poor children,” “uninsured children,” or “children in the pipeline to prison” (according to which small group they are in) on the discussion handout they received. Remind participants that this isn’t about “right” or “wrong,” and the responses won’t have to be shared aloud; the purpose is for each person to become aware of his or her assumptions and “inner thoughts” so that we are open to learning something new. Next, ask participants to jot down

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their “inner thoughts” about solving this problem and themselves—do they feel hopeful or hopeless? What else? Allow time for participants to reflect and write. Afterwards, you may ask if anyone wants to share an insight they had from responding to both questions. Don’t press any participant to share.

- b. Distribute copies of the section of the primer each group has been assigned.
- c. **One Such Child:** Ask for a volunteer to read the personal story of the child affected by the problem in the primer. Invite participants to share their responses to the story.
  - How did you feel hearing the story?
  - Did it bring to mind a story of a child you know who has experienced that problem?
  - When you think about the problem, do you typically think of individual children, or does it remain more of an abstract concept or statistic? How does that impact your actions?
  - Reflecting back on the passages from Mark and Luke: In what ways does allowing a child like the one we read about in the CDF materials to remain in poverty (or without health care, or in the pipeline to prison) mean that we are treating Jesus that way? Can we imagine welcoming one child such as the one described in these materials as a way of welcoming Jesus and God who sent him?
- d. **The Big Picture:** Have participants take turns reading paragraphs from “the big picture” part of your section. When you are done, ask for responses. What was surprising? What was new information? How do they feel hearing such information—discouraged, motivated, concerned, inspired? How do participants see this problem affecting your community?
- e. **From Weeping to Work:** Ask for a volunteer to read aloud Jeremiah 31:15–17, printed in the handout. Ask: Does this picture of child poverty (or uninsured children, or children in the pipeline to prison) make you want to grieve as Rachel does? After hearing responses, say, “Listen to the two parts of God’s promise: First, there is a reward for our work—that is, we need to do more than grieve but we need to actively work to bring our children home; and secondly, our children will come

home—the hope for our future is concrete and real—it is the return of our children to an experience of safety instead of danger, fear, and exile.” Note that the last part of the small group time is to discuss the work that we can do to help children and restore hope for our future.

- f. **Create Change:** Ask participants to reflect and then write on their sheets responses to two questions: 1) How can you as an individual create change to bring hope to children in poverty (or without health care, or in the pipeline to prison)? 2) What could we do as a congregation to create change and bring hope? After they’ve had time to reflect and write, ask for people to share aloud what they came up with, and record the ideas on a sheet of flip chart paper. Then turn to the action steps listed in the handout. Ask: What additional ideas inspire you? Which feel like a good fit for your interests, skills, and resources or the concerns, commitments, and resources of the congregation? What next steps might we take individually or together? Ask participants to prayerfully consider a step to create change for children that they are willing to take and to write it on their sheets.

### 3. Closing (15 minutes)

- a. Bring the small groups back together. Invite a member of each group to briefly summarize their small group’s discussion.
- b. Read aloud (or invite a volunteer to do so) the passage from Isaiah 65 printed on the handout.
- c. Invite a member of each small group to read aloud the vision of a better tomorrow printed in the primer for their section. Ask for participants to add their own visions to that picture.
- d. Close in prayer. (You may want to use one from the Children’s Sabbaths resource manual or one of your own.)

## Discussion Questions

*“An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me, for the least among all of you is the greatest.’”* (Luke 9:46–48, New Revised Standard Version)

1. **Inner Thoughts:** What comes to mind when you hear the “poor children” or “children living in poverty”? What comes to mind when you hear “children lacking health coverage” or “uninsured children”? What comes to mind when you hear “children in the pipeline to prison”? Jot down the words, phrases, first impressions, and assumptions that arise for you.

A version of the story from Mark 9:33–37:

*“Then they came to Capernaum; and when [Jesus] was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, ‘Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.’ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’”*

2. **One Such Child:** What did you think and feel when you heard the story of one child in the primer?
3. How do you see this problem affecting our community, state, or nation?

*“Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for there is a reward for your work, says the Lord: they shall come back from the land of the enemy; there is hope for your future, says the Lord: your children shall come back to their own country.”* (Jeremiah 31:15–17)

4. **There Is a Reward for Your Work:** What is the “work” I could do? What work could our church do to help bring our children out of danger and back to safety? Brainstorm here:
5. One step I will take:

*For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating: for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime.... They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendents as well.* (Isaiah 65:17–20a, 23)

### Jewish Adult Discussion Guide

This discussion guide may be used or adapted to guide a one-hour discussion among adults on the Children's Shabbat weekend, during a sisterhood meeting or men's club, or with another gathering convened just for this purpose.

#### Suggested Format

##### Welcome

- Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and provide a brief overview of the purpose of the discussion and the context of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend.
- If this is not a group that regularly meets together, provide a time for participants to introduce themselves and say what about the topic interested them. If numbers don't permit time for each participant to introduce themselves, have participants introduce themselves to each other in pairs or groups of four.

##### Introduce focus: "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow" and connect it to Jewish teachings.

- Summarize the focus and briefly note the three issues of particular concern: 13.3 million children in poverty in the U.S.; nine million children lacking health coverage, and countless children—especially poor, Black, and Latino boys—in a pipeline to prison.
- Connect the theme of creating change for children today to Jewish teachings. Options for doing this include:
  - Make copies of the passages from traditional Jewish sources on poverty, health care, and youth development in Section 8. Invite participants to discuss how these readings inform their feelings about and actions to address children's needs.
  - Discuss the Jewish concept of *tikkun olam*. How does it speak to the focus of this Children's Shabbat? Where do they see themselves or the congregation carrying out the work of repairing the world, especially for disadvantaged children? Where do they see new opportunities to repair the world for children in poverty, without health care, and in the pipeline to prison?
  - Link the Torah portion for October 17, 2009 (the Children's Sabbaths weekend), *B'reishit*, with the Children's Sabbath theme. Invite participants to

respond after you read the following: "When God created the world, God made everything a little bit incomplete. Instead of making bread grow out of the earth, God made wheat grow so that we might bake it into bread. Instead of making the earth of bricks, God made it of clay so that we might bake the clay into bricks. Why? So that we could become God's partner in the task of completing the work of creation." How do you connect the understanding of ourselves as partners with God in the task of completing the work of creation with the current situation in our nation of more than 13 million children in poverty, nearly nine million without health coverage, and a Black boy born in 2001 facing a one in three risk of incarceration in his lifetime?

##### Engage with the material in the Children's Concerns Primer

- If numbers permit, divide into three small groups with each assigned one of the sections—children in poverty, children lacking health coverage, and children in the pipeline to prison—to discuss. Give each participant a photocopy of their assigned section of the Children's Concerns Primer. (If your group has fewer than 12 people, you may want to stay in one large group. In that case, you may want to select just one of the three concerns to discuss this time, and save the other two issues for a subsequent gathering.) Ahead of time, have a facilitator prepared to lead each small group through the following steps:

- Introduce the story of one child affected by the problem (poverty, lack of health coverage, or the pipeline to prison crisis) by reading the following passage from *Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5*:

"Therefore, man was created singularly to teach you that a) whoever destroys a single soul of Israel, is considered as if he destroys an entire world, and one who saves one soul of Israel, it is considered as if he saves an entire world; b) no one could say to their fellow that my father is better than your father; c) none of the heretics could say, 'There are many powers in Heaven'; d) again, to declare the greatness of the Holy One of Blessing, for man stamps out many coins with one die, and they are all alike. But the Ruler of all Rulers, the Holy One of

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Blessing, stamped each person with the seal of Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow. Therefore, each and every one is obliged to say, 'For my sake the world was created.'

*(Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5)*

Ask for a volunteer in each small group to read aloud the “snapshot” of one child for whom’s “sake the world was created” in their material, and offer their responses to what they heard.

- In each small group, take turns reading paragraphs about “The Big Picture.” (Alternatively, the facilitator of each small group may want to summarize the overview provided in this section.) If the discussion is being held at a time when participants may write, you may want to invite group members to mark their copies as the information is read, with a check mark by information they already knew, an exclamation mark by information that surprised them, and a question mark by information that raised questions for them. When the material has been read, invite participants to identify the information that was most surprising, or to raise the questions that the reading generated. (Reassure facilitators that they don’t have to have the answers to every question. Some questions will serve as prompts for participants to seek more information when they return home.)
- **Creating Change:** Prepare to move the discussion to how each participant individually, or a group or the congregation collectively, can create change for children by reading the following passage from Maimonides:

If one person is able to save another and does not save him, he transgresses the commandment, “Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.” (*Leviticus 19:16*) Similarly, if one person sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by wild

animals, and, although able to rescue him either alone or by hiring others, does not rescue him; or if one hears heathens or informers plotting evil against another or laying a trap for him and does not call it to the other’s attention and let him know; or if one knows that a heathen or violent person is going to attack another and although able to appease him on behalf of the other and make him change his mind, he does not do so; or if one acts in any similar way—he transgresses in each case the injunction “Neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor.”

*(Maimonides, Code, “Laws Concerning Murder and the Preservation of Life,” Chapter 1, Sections 14 and 16)*

Read through the list of suggested actions. Invite participants to add additional ideas of their own. What do they think they could do individually, or a group or the congregation could do collectively, to address the problem? You may want to consider different categories of action, including *tzedakah*, *gemilut hasadim*, and *mipnei tikkun ha-olam*. (If the discussion is being held at a time when you may write, you could write the brainstormed ideas on flip chart paper.)

### Conclusion

Reconvene as one large group. If time permits, have someone from each small group briefly summarize their discussion. Invite participants to share their vision of the world repaired and made safe for our children. Invite one member of each group to read aloud the vision of a better tomorrow at the end of their material. If appropriate, find out which participants are interested in continuing to meet and work together in the coming weeks or year to create change for children, and make arrangements to be in contact about a next gathering. Be sure to coordinate this session and any follow-up that springs from it with the rabbi/s and your synagogue’s social action leadership.



## Muslim Adult Discussion Guide

*Prepared by Shakeel Syed, Executive Director, Shura Council of Southern California*

This brief outline is merely to trigger more creative thinking to foster a dialogue about children and our responsibilities toward them.

1. Select a few verses from Qur'an about children/parents/family – e.g., 40:67; 93:9; 76:8; 25:74; 17:31; 16:72 (not in any particular order).
2. Select a few Prophetic sayings (*Hadith*) about children/parents/family.
3. Have the select verses from the Qur'an and Hadith read by participating members (Combine them—parents and single adults, young and old, in Arabic and English).
4. As the facilitator, frame the discussion in the context of (a) our responsibilities toward children; (b) the status of children in United States; and (c) what can we all possibly do as individuals, families, and as a community. See pages 14–26 of the Children's Concerns Primers.
5. Encourage everyone to participate in the discussion. Here are some examples/ideas:
  - a. Ask a parent and/or a grandparent: "What do children mean to you?"
  - b. Have a parent and/or a grandparent share how they would feel if they could not afford to provide health care for their children/grandchildren when needed.
  - c. As the facilitator, narrate/share a real-life story from someone else's life. Share the "snapshot" stories on pages 14, 20, and 23 that describe a child in poverty, without health coverage, and in the pipeline to prison. Additionally, you may want to use Google or another Internet search engine to find real-life stories; preferably try to find stories with video/audio (for example, on YouTube).
- d. Once the real-life stories are shared, ask the adults to close their eyes and reflect in a "what-if" context: What would it be like to be in the circumstances of the families in the stories that were just shared?
6. Resume the discussion. The facilitator can offer some material for discussions re: our society's neglect of children and their needs vis-à-vis our society's intense focus on material well-being at all costs, our misuse and abuse of resources, misplaced priorities (wars), etc. Draw from the material in the Children's Concerns Primers on pages 14–26. Make sure to add information/data from your own city or town (for example, numbers from budgets and other statistical information).
7. Invite everyone to reflect and lead them to acknowledge our societal obligations toward children.
8. Ask everyone to share ideas of what can and needs to be done, and how they can participate.
9. Suggest ideas, such as self education/raising awareness of the crisis in our country; volunteering for after-school teaching; donating to organizations with a focus on children and legislative advocacy. See the suggested action steps on pages 16, 21 and 25 in the Children's Concerns Primers.
10. Follow up on all of the above. Track success and/or failures and learn for the future.

**Keep the struggle going.**

## Hindu Adult Discussion Guide

This discussion guide may be used or adapted to guide a one-hour discussion among adults about the Children's Sabbaths weekend, during a temple service or with another gathering convened just for this purpose, and should be used in conjunction with the Children's Concerns Primer presented earlier in this section.

### Suggested Format

#### Welcome

Welcome participants. Introduce yourself and provide a brief overview of the purpose of the discussion and the context of the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend.

Sit at round tables in groups of six to eight with one facilitator per table. Choose one aspect of the Children's Sabbaths weekend topic per table: children in poverty, children without health coverage, or children at risk of incarceration.

Introduce the focus: "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow" and connect it to Hindu teachings.

#### An Overview of the Problems Facing Children in the United States and India

- Summarize the magnitude of the problem that we are facing today, in the United States and in India, and how Hindu teachings inform and inspire us to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow.
  - In the United States: 13.3 million children in poverty; nine million children lacking health coverage, and countless incarcerated children—especially poor, Black, and Latino boys—in a pipeline to prison.
  - In America, 9.8 percent of Asian Indians live in poverty, a rate considerably lower than that of the rest of the population.
  - In India, about 470 million people are poor. India has the highest number of poor in the world. India has one of the highest rates of undernourishment among children under the age of five in the world—46 percent in 2007 (World Bank). Street children, gender discrimination, and child labor continue to be major problems.

## Creating Change Based upon Hindu Teachings

**The Ten Principles of Arya Samaj:** Make copies of the ten principles of Arya Samaj and discuss the seventh and ninth principles that talk about social responsibility: "7. Love and Justice: Our conduct towards all should be guided by love, righteousness and justice." "9. Individualism and Altruism: No one should be content with promoting only his own good; on the other contrary, he should look for his good in promoting the good of all."

- **Daan:** Make copies of Revered Ma's teaching about *daan*. "*Daan* means service through the body, mind and intellect. *Daan* in relation to Vedanta means giving up or surrendering our body at the altar of the Lord, in His service. This can happen only if we learn to be generous and kind, even in the smallest of the things."
- Make copies of Daan Sukta of Rig-Veda and discuss it in relation to creating change for children.
- **Daya, Daan and Sewa:** Make copies of the Hindu Perspective on the 2009 Children's Sabbaths theme on pages 101–102 in this resource manual and use it as the basis of a discussion of the Hindu concept of *dayaa*, *daan*, and *sewa*. Discuss building good karma through these three practices. How does it speak to the focus of this weekend focused on children's needs? Where do they see themselves or the samaj (congregation) carrying out the work of creating change for children, especially for disadvantaged children? Where do the members see new opportunities to bring hope and a better tomorrow for children in poverty, without health care, and in the pipeline to prison?

Connect the conversation about *dayaa*, *daan*, and *sewa* to specific projects and opportunities to make a difference for children. Discuss opportunities for supporting causes in the United States, such as those found on pages 16–17, 21–22, and 25–26 in this resource manual, as well as Habitat for Humanity; soup kitchens (connect it to the Hindu practice of feeding the poor at weddings, wakes, and eclipses); health clinics that serve children and others who are uninsured; and faith-based programs for the poor. Talk about ways the Hindu community is supporting or could further support causes to help children in India, such as assisting orphanages or schools.

**The Equality of All God's Children:** Discuss and dispel the myth that the exploitative caste system is an article of

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faith of Hinduism and is responsible for poverty in India. People from all sectors of society can be poor. Talk about the presence of God in every soul and, hence, equality of all God's children.

**Hindu Family Values:** Talk about how Hindu family values lead to good parenting and, hence, less juvenile delinquency and drug abuse, both of which can lead to imprisonment.

Hindu children are being touched by both. Hindu family values can be a model for others to follow. Should Hindu congregations have sermons for teenagers and children on these issues?

### **Develop an Action Plan**

Engage with the material in the Children's Concerns Primer on pages 14–26 in three breakout sessions if more than 12 people, with each assigned one of the sections—children in poverty, children lacking health coverage, and children in the pipeline to prison—to develop an action plan. If not, discuss collectively. Give each participant a photocopy of their assigned section of the Children's Concerns Primer. (If your group has fewer than 12 people, you may want to stay in one large group. In that case, you may want to select just one of the three concerns—poverty, lack of health coverage, and the pipeline to prison crisis—

to discuss this time, and save the other two issues for a subsequent gathering.) The facilitators should prepare ahead of time to lead their small groups. Have a flip chart in each group to write ideas for action. Discuss how each participant individually, or a group, or the samaj (congregation) collectively, can create change for children. You could write the brainstormed ideas on flip chart paper.

### **Conclusion**

Reconvene as one large group. If time permits, have someone from each small group briefly summarize their group's discussion. Invite participants to share their vision of the world made safe for our children. Invite one member of each group to read aloud the vision of a better tomorrow at the end of their material. If appropriate, find out which participants are interested in continuing to meet and work together in the coming weeks or year to create change for children, and make arrangements to be in contact about a next gathering. Make a social action plan for children.