



SECTION 3

Planning Your Children's Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths

There are two kinds of Children's Sabbath celebrations. First, there are Children's Sabbath celebrations in your own place of worship. A Children's Sabbath in your own place of worship typically takes place during the customary time for services, prayers, or other worship, and often follows the customary order of worship although enriched with a special Children's Sabbath focus.

The other kind of Children's Sabbath is a community-wide multi-faith Children's Sabbath celebration that brings together many different places of worship. A community-wide, multi-faith service is planned for a day and time that do not conflict with customary times of worship, prayers, or services of other places of worship. As a multi-

faith service bringing together many different religious traditions, this form of the Children's Sabbath service is flexible, creative and unique to your community and the leadership involved.

Both kinds of Children's Sabbath celebrations—one held within your own place of worship for your members or one held in the community for members of many places of worship—are terrific ways to participate in the Children's Sabbaths movement. Decide what is best for you this year.

In this section you'll find:

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

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

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

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

❑ **Mark the date on the calendar for your place of worship.** The 2009 Children's Sabbaths weekend is October 16–18. Most Children's Sabbaths will take place on this third full weekend of October during a congregation's traditional worship and education time. If your congregation has a conflict with this date, select another. Keeping your celebration during the usual worship time promises greater participation and communicates that the Children's Sabbath is an integral part of your congregation's worship, work, and witness. If you select a time other than the traditional time for your place of worship, be prepared to do lots of extra promotion to ensure a strong turnout.

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

find they need more frequent meetings in September and October as the Children's Sabbath draws near.

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

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

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

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

- **Service of worship/prayers:** This is the heart of most Children's Sabbath celebrations: lifting up, in prayer, sermon, and song, God's call to people of faith to nurture and protect children. (See Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 for ideas and resources.)
- **Educational programs:** Educational programs for children, youths, and adults help everyone learn more about the problems facing children, the faith-based call to respond, and ways to make a positive difference. Discussion guides for adults are found in Section 2 beginning on page 27. Children's lesson plans for a variety of faith traditions may be downloaded from the Children's Defense Fund website at www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths.
- **Advocacy and hands-on outreach activities:** When people have been inspired and called in the service of worship and have learned more through the educational programs, they are eager to start making a difference for children immediately. Providing concrete outreach and advocacy activities on the Children's Sabbath, perhaps following the service of worship, helps people respond and put their faith into action. (See Section 11 for ideas and the Children's Defense Fund website, www.childrensdefense.org, after September 1, 2009.)
- **Commitment to longer-term responses to children's needs:** This is the goal of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement. The Children's Sabbath is about more than one weekend a year; it is about inspiring new, long-term responses to the needs of children. Provide opportunities for individuals to find out about, and make commitments to, ongoing action through information tables, presentations, and sign-up sheets. The ongoing action could include participating in existing programs in your congregation, volunteering with a community child-serving program or organization, or even joining a planning committee to develop a new program in your congregation. (See Section 11 for ideas and Section 12 for resources.)

☐ **Involve children and youths.** The Children's Sabbath is an important time to highlight the gifts, contributions, and leadership of children and youths. However, the Children's Sabbath should not be completely turned over to children, with adults serving only as the advisors and "audience." The Children's Sabbath is meant to be an intergenerational event that demonstrates and celebrates how everyone—children, youths, parents, singles, and

seniors—must respond faithfully to God's call to nurture and protect children. (Other occasions celebrated by many congregations, such as Youth Sundays or Children's Day, are more appropriate times to put the service entirely in the hands of children and youths.) Be sure to involve children and youths in the planning process as well as in carrying out parts of the Children's Sabbath. The various sections of this manual offer specific suggestions on how children and youths can participate in promoting the Children's Sabbath, leading the service of worship, and engaging in outreach and advocacy activities. Be sure to solicit young people's ideas and suggestions to supplement those found here.

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

☐ **Recruit volunteers to help prepare for and conduct Children's Sabbath activities.** Some who may not have been able to join the ongoing planning committee would welcome responsibility for a specific task in preparation for the Children's Sabbath or during the weekend itself. In addition to recruiting volunteers through personal contact, publicize opportunities through the announcement time during the service, in the congregation's newsletter or bulletin, at meetings, and at gatherings. Tap seniors, children, youths, singles, parents—everyone! The Children's Sabbath is about the role each person can play to nurture and protect children.

☐ **Plan to build on the Children's Sabbath.** While you are planning the Children's Sabbath, keep your focus on the ultimate goal of stimulating new, long-term congregational and individual commitments to help children year-round. Don't wait until after the Children's Sabbath weekend to think about where you hope it will lead.

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath



Instead, make the long-term result of the Children's Sabbath a focus of the planning process. Some Children's Sabbath committees have found it useful to designate a sub-committee for follow-up to begin working on this from the start. (See Section 11 for ideas and Section 12 for resources.) As you plan long-term follow-up, make sure that you involve the necessary religious leaders, staff, and committees, as well as other interested individuals.

Your resource people can also provide input about community needs and opportunities for partnerships. Be sure you have a meeting date on the calendar after the Children's Sabbath to convene members of the Children's Sabbath Planning Committee and any others, as appropriate, to move ahead on the follow-up plans.

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

❑ **Put next year's Children's Sabbath on the calendar.** The 2010 Children's Sabbath will be held October 15–17, 2010.

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

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

Over the past 18 years, many communities have come together to proclaim and respond to that mandate through multi-faith Children's Sabbath celebrations. These community-wide Children's Sabbaths stand as an important example of the promise and power of multi-faith partnership for a common cause. If planned with care, sensitivity, and a commitment to inclusion, a multi-faith Children's Sabbath can be a time of new understanding, of celebration, and most importantly, of uniting and strengthening your community to nurture and protect children with even greater justice and compassion.

Following you will find suggestions for planning the practical aspects of a multi-faith Children's Sabbath. See Section 10 for tips on planning the content and leadership of the service, a suggested outline for a multi-faith service, and resources for a community-wide multi-faith service from which you may select and may supplement with additional resources.

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

□ Recruit a team. Connect with two, three, four, or more people to help you get started. Then convene an advisory committee of eight to 15 members. Strive to build an advisory committee that represents the full range of religious bodies, races, and ethnicities of your community. Be sure to involve all of the faith groups you hope to include from the outset, so no one feels like an afterthought.

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

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

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

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

Strategies for a particular place of worship include:

- Inviting a choir to perform by itself or as part of a combined choir with other places of worship, or a dance troupe, or a step group.
- Making the multi-faith service a planned event of a group such as the youth group, women's group, or church school.
- Planning decorations that will feature the artwork of many children from each of the sponsoring congregations, with the young artists standing on-hand before the service to talk about their pictures to adults who come to view them.
- Posting a sign-up sheet for a ride in the congregation's van or in carpools.
- Posting a sign-up sheet or having a bulletin insert to fill out indicating whether a member plans to attend.
- Meeting at the place of worship before the service for an ice cream social or a simple meal like pizza or spaghetti and then traveling to the service together.
- Discussing in planning meetings how many attendees are needed from each place of worship for a desirable turnout, so each leader has a goal or sense of expectation.
- Having a light-hearted "competition" for each sponsoring place to be the "Children's Champion" by generating the greatest turnout from their members (you can weight the competition to account for the different sizes of congregations), with a "Children's Champion" plaque/statue/trophy to reside with that congregation until the next year.
- Sending out a congregation-wide email reminder the day before or the day of the community service.
- Sending notices home with the children who attend the education program, so they can encourage their families to attend.
- Talking it up during the announcement time in each place of worship for several weeks prior, and passionately conveying the urgency of the problems confronting our children, the moral imperative for people of faith to act, and the inspiration, joy, and excitement that the community service will provide

in bringing together an array of others with shared concerns and common commitment.

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

- Offering fun, family-friendly activities before or after the service, like face painting, simple crafts, or balloon animals. If it is outside, you could even consider something like a hay ride.
- Providing goods or services that many children and families really need, like a health check; "dental health" goody bags donated by an area dentist with toothbrushes and toothpaste; help for eligible families to enroll in the Children's Health Insurance Program; and a chance either to serve (as a volunteer, or by making a donation) or be served by community organizations and programs.
- Arranging for simple food for purchase that can stand in as the closest meal (lunch or dinner) for time-pressed families, or providing free coffee (perhaps donated by a coffee shop in the community), juice, and water, or inexpensive, kid-popular treats like popsicles.
- Offering an inexpensive but appealing item for the first 100 people (there are several websites through which one can purchase items in quantity surprisingly inexpensively, from pencils to stickers to Frisbees to small stuffed toys to hats to tee-shirts). Talk to managers of stores in the community to see what they would be willing to donate.
- Publicizing a chance to meet and greet a well-known person after the event. This could be an elected leader like the mayor, a popular musician or athlete from the area, or a radio or television personality, for instance. You might be surprised by who on your planning committee knows someone (or knows someone who knows someone) who could be a "draw."

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

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

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

❑ **Choose a good day and time.** Schedule the multi-faith service for a time that does not exclude any group's participation. For example, scheduling a multi-faith service on Saturday afternoon, during the Jewish Shabbat, would prevent some Jews from attending. Similarly, Sunday morning scheduling is likely to conflict with most church services. Sunday afternoon or evening is usually the best time for a multi-faith event. Be aware, however, that you will need to do lots of outreach and promotion to generate strong attendance for a multi-faith service, whenever it is scheduled. See the promotion suggestions later in this section and the ideas listed above.

❑ **Find a suitable location.** Seek advice from people who have done similar events and choose a site as early as possible. Feasible sites for multi-faith activities include auditoriums, hospitals, convention centers, atriums of public buildings, parks, and schools. Of course, religious places of worship are also good sites. If you use a congregation's building, be sure the religious leader is involved in the planning, since he or she will know the logistics of the site.

Consider the following in selecting a site:

- **Size:** Make sure it is large enough to accommodate the crowd you expect, but not so large that when the congregation has arrived it looks half-empty and makes your turnout appear small.

- **Staging:** Will it accommodate choirs and a procession? Is there a good sound and lighting system? Sound and, depending on the time of the service, lighting are especially important to consider if the event will be outside—which also calls for contingency plans in the event of rain.
- **Location:** Is it centrally located and convenient for all segments of the community? If not, can you arrange for shuttle buses to transport groups from other areas of the community to encourage and enable them to attend?
- **Cost:** Try to find a site that will host the service without any charge.
- **Worship space:** Is it conducive to multi-faith worship? Will it foster unity among persons who don't know each other? Consider temporary removal of symbols or objects that might cause others distress that can be easily removed. Also, consider the addition of banners and symbols or expressions of welcome that may make guests feel more at home.
- **Parking:** Is parking available or is public transportation nearby?
- **Accessibility:** Is it accessible to people with disabilities? (Remember to have a sign language interpreter for those who are deaf or hearing impaired.)





SECTION 4

Promoting Your Children's Sabbath: Ideas for All Faiths

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

- Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship
- Reaching Out to the Community and Media
- Reproducible Resources: bulletin and newsletter inserts and a reproducible Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer that, if appropriate for your faith tradition, may be photocopied and distributed to your members

Spreading the Word in Your Place of Worship

❑ **Bulletin Inserts:** Place the first bulletin insert in this section announcing the Children's Sabbath in your congregation's bulletin or newsletter approximately one month before the date. (The second bulletin insert is intended to be distributed on the Children's Sabbath.)

❑ **Newsletter:** Include other information in your congregation's newsletter. (Adapt the sample congregational newsletter article on page 50 in this section or write your own.)

Example of what one congregation wrote last year:

Children's Sabbath at St. Mark's

Each year, during October, Children's Sabbaths are celebrated across the country. Sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund, the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths Weekend is an annual, multi-faith holiday that celebrates children as sacred gifts of the Divine, and provides the opportunity for communities of faith to renew and live out their moral responsibility to care, protect, and advocate for all children. This year's theme, based on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Call to End Poverty in America, focuses on poverty how it affects children, their health, education and opportunity, and what we do and what can do to help and lift others who are less fortunate than we are.

At St. Mark's, we join thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques and temples in this celebration by holding special worship services, education programs, and advocacy activities to engage people of faith in the lives of children and their families. More than the Sunday "where the kids get to do the whole service" (Wofie Smith), it is a time when we focus on the hopes, dreams and needs of our children and the children in our communities and around the world.

In preparation for Children's Sabbath, the Sunday School has focused on Matthew 25:40, "I tell you with certainty, since you did it for one of the least important of these brothers, you did it for me."

We have learned about how God wants us to live together and care about one another and:

Identified things all children need to live and grow—food, clothing, shelter, love, education, recreation;

Talked about how we can and do respond to the needs of others, including collecting school supplies, the socks box, and yesterday we took a tour of the FISH closet food pantry housed here at St. Mark's.

We hope that you will listen for these themes in today's service and music as:

The Youth share their summer service experience in the sermon;

We pray for all children and their families;

We hear in our music that God is ever present, learn that His sanctuary is anywhere we are, that we walk side-by-side with each other, and that we are all in His hands.

Enjoy!!

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

- ❑ **Posters:** Make posters announcing the Children's Sabbath and display them in the congregation's building. Involve the congregation's youths and children in making these posters.
- ❑ **Announcements:** Request time to make an announcement during the worship service one or two weeks before the observance.
- ❑ **Emails:** If your place of worship has an email list of members, get permission to send an email to the members reminding them of the upcoming Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Yard Sign:** Make a yard sign to place on the grounds in front of your place of worship announcing the Children's Sabbath.
- ❑ **Letters:** Send the bulletin insert or a letter about the Children's Sabbath home with the children who participate in your place of worship's educational programs.

After securing any needed permission to send a letter to the mailing list for your place of worship, write a letter describing the Children's Sabbath and encouraging members to join in the celebration on the designated weekend.

- ❑ **Website:** If your congregation has a website, put an announcement on the website.
- ❑ **Keep it up!** Don't forget to continue to focus attention on the Children's Sabbath and the needs and opportunities for response after the weekend itself. Use these same media channels to report on the congregation's response, announce the total items and money collected, share stories of children and families who were helped, and encourage continued action.



Sample Article for Congregation's Own Newsletter

[Name of Congregation] to Celebrate Children's Sabbath to Create Change for Children

On [date], [name of your congregation] will join with thousands of other congregations across the nation in the 18th annual multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® weekend sponsored by the non-profit, non-partisan Children's Defense Fund and supported by [add the name of your denomination or religious tradition, if they have formally endorsed], Catholic Charities U.S.A., the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in the U.S., the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, the Union for Reform Judaism, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and more than 200 other religious organizations and denominations.

The Children's Sabbath will focus on creating change for children to bring hope and a better tomorrow. In our congregation, community, state, and nation, there are children who need us to create change for them now. Nationwide, there are 13.3 million children living in poverty, nine million children without health coverage, and countless children caught up in the pipeline to prison—a Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of going to prison in his lifetime.

As people of faith, we recognize the sacred responsibility to nurture and protect children and to work for the world God intends. On the Children's Sabbath, we will remember the children in poverty, without health coverage, and at risk in the pipeline to prison; we will reflect on the teachings of our faith that lead us to respond; and we will commit to putting our faith into action to help bring about a better tomorrow for children and for us all as we work to end poverty, ensure all children health coverage, and put children on paths of promise.

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

Reaching Out to the Community and Media

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

For example:

"[Name of congregation] located at [cross streets or address] is planning a special Children's Sabbath celebration and events on [date] to involve young and old in creating change for children to bring hope and a better tomorrow. Today in our nation, one in six children lives in poverty, one in nine children doesn't have health coverage, and a Black boy born in 2001 faces a one in three chance of imprisonment over his lifetime. On the Children's Sabbath, congregations of many faiths all across our nation are committing to create change for children so that children are lifted out of poverty, assured health care, and kept out of the pipeline to prison and put on the path to a positive future. For more information, call [name of congregation]."

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

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

Planning and Promoting Your Children's Sabbath

News Release for Local Media

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

Here are steps to follow:

- 1) Call your newspaper** to obtain the name of the religion writer or city editor. If you know someone who works for the newspaper or has contacts there, ask for his or her help in getting the news release into the right hands.
- 2) Email or fax the news release** to the right person at the paper in early October, two to three weeks before your Children's Sabbath.
- 3) Follow up with a telephone call a few days later.** Remember, the news media are looking to cover a

newsworthy story, not to promote a particular event. In your communication with them, emphasize that the Children's Sabbath is about children's issues of concern to many people and is a practical and inspiring example of how people are taking action. Emphasize that your celebration is part of a growing national movement among religious congregations to improve the well-being of America's children. Suggest that reporters contact the Children's Defense Fund's Communications Department at (202) 628-8787 for background information and a national perspective to supplement your own.

4) Send a letter of thanks to the reporter if the paper does cover your story, with copies to superiors. Building and maintaining a good relationship with the religion writer or other reporter may help gain coverage of follow-up efforts developing from your Children's Sabbath and of the Children's Sabbath in subsequent years.

5) Send a copy of any coverage you receive to the Religious Action Team at the Children's Defense Fund to assist in further promotion of the Children's Sabbath. Send information about your Children's Sabbath to CDF, 25 E Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001 or email a description to sjacobsen@childrensdefense.org.

Sample News Release for Community Newspapers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October [date], 2009

[YOUR CONGREGATION'S NAME] JOINS THE CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND IN MULTI-FAITH NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS® WEEKEND

[Name of your town, state]—[Your congregation's name] will [*describe events planned, such as holding a special worship service or conducting service and advocacy activities*] on [date and time] to draw attention to the needs of the children in our nation who suffer from poverty, lack of health coverage, and are in the pipeline to prison.

[Your congregation's name] is one of thousands of churches, synagogues, mosques, Bahá'í communities, temples, and other places of worship around the nation celebrating the Children's Sabbath this weekend as part of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF)'s 18th annual observance. The multi-faith movement seeks to inspire congregations and religious organizations to work on behalf of children through prayer, service, and advocacy throughout the year.

The Children's Sabbaths theme this year, "Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow," recognizes that there are millions of children in our nation today that urgently need adults to create change for them. More than 13 million children live in poverty in our nation—one in every six children. Nine million children lack health coverage—that means one in nine children may not be able to see a doctor when they need to. Countless children are caught in the pipeline to prison created by poverty, failing schools, lack of health and mental health coverage, racism, and other factors. A Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of imprisonment in his lifetime, and a Latino boy born that year stands a one in six chance of imprisonment.

"These statistics are not acts of God; they are the result of our political, economic, and short-sighted choices as a nation, states, and communities," asserts CDF President Marian Wright Edelman. "Religious congregations know that allowing children to be the poorest group of Americans, allowing children to suffer without health coverage, and allowing children to face a future of prison rather than promise stands against everything that they stand for and that the one they worship intends. That's why on the Children's Sabbaths weekend places of worship across the nation and across the religious spectrum are standing together and committing to create the kind of change our children need and the kind of change that will bring hope and a better tomorrow for children and for us all."

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

The multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is sponsored by the non-profit, non-partisan Children's Defense Fund and supported by Catholic Charities U.S.A., the Islamic Society of North America, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., the National Spiritual Assembly of Bahá'ís in the U.S., the Sikh Council on Religion and Education, the Union for Reform Judaism, the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and more than 200 other religious organizations and denominations.

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

###

Reproducible Resources

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

Announcement Insert (pages 55–56)

The first insert for your bulletin or newsletter is to announce to members of your congregation your plans to participate in the 2009 *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend. Distribute it about one month before your Children's Sabbath events to alert your members and build excitement and participation.

This insert makes two half-page size inserts per photocopy. Photocopy these two pages back-to-back on 8 ½" x 11" paper and cut down the middle to make two inserts per photocopy.

Children's Sabbath Service Insert (pages 57–58)

This is an insert that may be used on the day you celebrate the Children's Sabbath or thereafter. Insert it into your bulletin, if your place of worship uses one, or simply hand it out at an appropriate time, perhaps as people arrive or depart.

The second announcement insert makes one folded insert with four half-size pages. Here's how to make it: Remove the page from the book (it is perforated, so you should be able to remove it easily). Make photocopies using a two-sided function on your copier, if possible. Fold each paper in the middle for a four-page insert.

If you are able, compile a list of specific ways that congregation members can serve by volunteering with or donating to community- or congregation-based programs serving

children or advocating on their behalf, with local contact information. Photocopy it and distribute along with the insert.

"Moments in America" Insert and "Each Day in America" Insert

These two inserts may be distributed at any time to raise awareness and encourage a prayerful response and commitment to act. Each of these inserts makes two half-page size inserts per photocopy. Photocopy each back-to-back on 8 ½" x 11" paper and cut down the middle to make two inserts per copy.

Reproducible Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer (pages 61–66)

While this guide will not be appropriate for every tradition, those for whom it is appropriate may wish to make photocopies and distribute it to their members the week before the Children's Sabbaths weekend to prepare their hearts and minds. To make the guide: Remove the pages from the book. Stack them on the photocopier in the order they were in the book. Use a two-sided photocopy function (two-sided to two-sided) and fold the completed stack in the middle. (Although it appears that the order of the pages is scrambled in this manual, if you keep the pages in that order and use a two-sided copying function, it will result in the pages being in the correct order for the final booklet.)

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

The 18th Annual Multi-Faith National Observance of Children's
Sabbaths® Weekend, October 16-18, 2009

What needs to change?

- More than 13 million children in our nation live in poverty.
- Nine million children in the U.S. don't have health coverage.
- A Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of going to prison in his lifetime.

When does it need to change?

Today! Children only have one childhood. We don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste.

Who is going to create the change?

We are! All across the nation, people of every religious tradition are joining in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend to bring hope and a better tomorrow for all children through serving children directly and working for justice on their behalf.

Why are we determined to create change for children today and bring hope and a better tomorrow?

Because our religious faith, our sacred texts, our religious traditions and teachings all recognize children as a sacred gift and responsibility and call us to act with justice and compassion, especially for the youngest, poorest, and most vulnerable.

What will a better tomorrow look like?

- Children and their families will have the income, nutrition, housing, and other things they need so that every child has the rich childhood experiences that help them grow and develop to their greatest potential...and our nation will be enriched by their well-being.
- Every child will have health coverage and can see a doctor to keep them healthy or to treat them when they are sick or injured...and our nation will be stronger because they thrive.
- All children will be set on paths of promise, with the family income, health and mental health care, safe and loving families and communities, and successful, supportive schools needed to put them on the path to a bright future...and our nation will be more successful through the positive contributions of every young person.

We will be joining the 18th Annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

We will join with other places of worship in:

- Learning more about the urgent needs of children in our nation, especially the needs of our nation's children in poverty, those lacking health coverage, and those in the pipeline to prison;
- Reflecting on the call of our faith to respond to the needs of those who are young, poor, and vulnerable;
- Creating change for children through hands-on service and work for justice; and
- Committing to help children throughout the year, through prayer, raising awareness, compassionate service, and justice-seeking advocacy.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

For more information or to help, contact:



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

The 18th Annual Multi-Faith National Observance of Children's
Sabbaths® Weekend, October 16-18, 2009

What needs to change?

- More than 13 million children in our nation live in poverty.
- Nine million children in the U.S. don't have health coverage.
- A Black boy born in 2001 stands a one in three risk of going to prison in his lifetime.

When does it need to change?

Today! Children only have one childhood. We don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste.

Who is going to create the change?

We are! All across the nation, people of every religious tradition are joining in the multi-faith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend to bring hope and a better tomorrow for all children through serving children directly and working for justice on their behalf.

Why are we determined to create change for children today and bring hope and a better tomorrow?

Because our religious faith, our sacred texts, our religious traditions and teachings all recognize children as a sacred gift and responsibility and call us to act with justice and compassion, especially for the youngest, poorest, and most vulnerable.

What will a better tomorrow look like?

- Children and their families will have the income, nutrition, housing, and other things they need so that every child has the rich childhood experiences that help them grow and develop to their greatest potential...and our nation will be enriched by their well-being.
- Every child will have health coverage and can see a doctor to keep them healthy or to treat them when they are sick or injured...and our nation will be stronger because they thrive.
- All children will be set on paths of promise, with the family income, health and mental health care, safe and loving families and communities, and successful, supportive schools needed to put them on the path to a bright future...and our nation will be more successful through the positive contributions of every young person.

We will be joining the 18th Annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

We will join with other places of worship in:

- Learning more about the urgent needs of children in our nation, especially the needs of our nation's children in poverty, those lacking health coverage, and those in the pipeline to prison;
- Reflecting on the call of our faith to respond to the needs of those who are young, poor, and vulnerable;
- Creating change for children through hands-on service and work for justice; and
- Committing to help children throughout the year, through prayer, raising awareness, compassionate service, and justice-seeking advocacy.

Date: _____

Time: _____

Place: _____

For more information or to help, contact:

DEAR LORD
BE GOOD TO ME
THE SEER IS SO
WIDE AND
MY BOAT IS
SO SMALL


Children's Defense Fund

mentoring programs. Think through the kind of service that you will find most satisfying and sustainable and find a child-serving organization that needs that kind of help.

Speak Up.... While we work to ease children's immediate suffering through reaching out directly to them, we must speak up for justice to prevent the problems from arising in the first place. Your voice is needed to call for changes that will lift children and families out of poverty, assure that every child has health coverage, and replace the pipeline to prison with paths of promise. Connect with one or more sources of information that can alert you when advocacy actions are needed. (CDF's Action Council is one good source. Visit www.childrensdefense.org to sign up for action alerts.) Call, email, and visit your elected officials and others in leadership positions who can put the policies, systems, and structures in place to create the better tomorrow our children need and deserve.

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

contact: _____

To connect with the faith community resources and other work of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), the non-profit, non-partisan organization sponsoring the multi-faith *National Observance of*

Children's Sabbaths celebration, visit

www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths

or contact CDF's Religious Action staff

at sjacobson@childrensdefense.org.



The 2009 Multi-Faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration Create Change for Children Today: Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Millions of children desperately need change:

Children living in poverty need us to create change. In our nation, one out of every six children—13.3 million children—live in families that are poor and don't have enough money for basics like nutrition, housing, utilities, and health care. Our children living in poverty need us to create change.

Children without health coverage need us to create change.

In our nation, one out of every nine children—nine million children—lack health coverage. During their most critical developmental years, uninsured children may not be able to see a doctor for check-ups to keep them healthy or for treatment when they are sick or injured. Untreated vision and hearing problems can snowball into problems learning at school where they can't see the blackboard or hear the teacher. Untreated dental problems can, at worst, lead to death, as was the case with Deamonte Driver, a 12-year-old boy in Maryland who died in 2007 from an infection caused by an abscessed tooth. Our children without health coverage need us to create change.

Children in the pipeline to prison need us to create change.

In our nation, the "land of opportunity," a Black boy born in 2001—just eight years old today—stands a one in three chance of imprisonment in his lifetime. The pipeline to prison is created by many factors, including poverty, lack of health and mental health care, abuse and neglect, inadequate schools, too few positive role models and caring adults engaged in a young person's life, and poor choices. Our children in the pipeline to prison need us to create change.

Children don't just need us to create change; they need us to create change *today*.

Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral wrote, in *Su Nombre es Hoy* (His Name is Today),

"We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer 'Tomorrow; his name is Today.'"

To the 13.3 million children living in poverty, we cannot answer, "Tomorrow;" their name is Today. Right now is the time they need nutritious food to eat, safe housing to shelter them, warm clothing to protect them, school supplies, and books and music and all of the enriching experiences that will help their minds and spirits to grow along with their bodies.

To the nine million children lacking health coverage, we cannot answer, "Tomorrow;" their name is Today. Right now is the time their bodies and minds are developing, when they need regular check-ups to keep them healthy, timely treatment when they are sick or injured, and vision and hearing screenings to ensure their learning isn't hindered.

To the children, especially Black and Latino boys, swept along the pipeline to prison by poverty, lack of health care and mental health care, abuse and neglect, poor schools, and other factors, we cannot answer, "Tomorrow;" their name is Today. Right now is the time they need families with adequate income, successful schools, health and mental health care, caring families, and safe communities to put them on a path of promise and help them succeed.

Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.

Nothing which is true and beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love.

*No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint; therefore we must be saved by the final form of love which is forgiveness.**

With hope, faith, and love, we must do what we can to help usher in a better tomorrow for our children. What can you do?

Pray.... Pray for children in need, especially children in poverty, lacking health care, and trapped in the pipeline to prison. Pray for the strength, courage, persistence, and wisdom to do all you can do to help children and work for justice. Pray for hope, faith, and love.

Learn more and tell others.... Find out as much as you can about the problems facing children and families in our nation, especially poverty, lack of health coverage, and the pipeline to prison crisis. Visit www.childrensdefense.org for information, downloadable resources, and links to other organizations working on behalf of children and families. Ask around and find out what organizations are working in your community and what kind of help they need.

Reach out.... Find an opportunity to serve children and families in need, especially those living in poverty, lacking health coverage, or in the pipeline to prison. There are countless options, from Head Start programs to health clinics to

*Reinhold Niebuhr, in *The Irony of American History*, 1952.

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

Moments in America for All Children

- Every second a public school student is suspended.*
- Every 11 seconds a high school student drops out.*
- Every 19 seconds a child is arrested.
- Every 20 seconds a public school student is corporally punished.*
- Every 21 seconds a baby is born to an unmarried mother.
- Every 33 seconds a baby is born into poverty.
- Every 35 seconds a child is confirmed as abused or neglected.
- Every 39 seconds a baby is born without health insurance.
- Every minute a baby is born to a teen mother.
- Every 2 minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.
- Every 4 minutes a child is arrested for a drug offense.
- Every 7 minutes a child is arrested for a violent crime.
- Every 18 minutes a baby dies before his or her first birthday.
- Every 44 minutes a child or teen dies from an accident.
- Every 3 hours a child or teen is killed by a firearm.
- Every 5 hours a child or teen commits suicide.
- Every 6 hours a child is killed by abuse or neglect.
- Every 14 hours a woman dies from complications of childbirth or pregnancy.

*Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each)

Prayer

- O God, help us to recover our hope for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our courage for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our discipline for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our ability to work together for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our values for our children's sake.
 - Help us to recover our faith in Thee for our children's sake. Amen.
- (By Marian Wright Edelman)

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

Data calculated by the Children's Defense Fund.

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

Each Day in America

- 1 mother dies in childbirth.
- 4 children are killed by abuse or neglect.
- 5 children or teens commit suicide.
- 8 children or teens are killed by firearms.
- 33 children or teens die from accidents.
- 77 babies die before their first birthdays.
- 192 children are arrested for a violent crime.
- 383 children are arrested for drug abuse.
- 906 babies are born at low birthweight.
- 1,153 babies are born to teen mothers.
- 1,672 public school students are corporally punished.*
- 1,839 babies are born without health insurance.
- 2,261 high school students drop out.*
- 2,383 children are confirmed as abused or neglected.
- 2,411 babies are born into poverty.
- 4,017 babies are born to unmarried mothers.
- 4,302 children are arrested.
- 17,132 public school students are suspended.

* Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each)

Prayer of Commitment by Marian Wright Edelman

- God did not call us to succeed,
- God called us to serve.
- God did not call us to win,
- God called us to work.
- God did not call us to live long,
- God called us to live for [God.]
- God did not call us to be happy,
- God called us to be hopeful.
- God did not call us to fame,
- God called us to faith.
- God did not call us to seek power,
- God called us to seek peace.
- God did not call us to loot the earth and each other,
- God called us to love our earth and each other. Amen.

Data calculated by the Children's Defense Fund.



Saturday (continued)

we must be saved by faith. Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we are saved by love. No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our standpoint. Therefore we must be saved by the final form of love, which is forgiveness.” It has hung there for the nearly 20 years that I have served the Children’s Defense Fund and was there before I arrived as Marian Wright Edelman has persisted in her life’s work for justice for our nation’s children.

It is a reminder to all of us who would work to create change for our children today and bring hope for a better tomorrow that while we are responsible for the work of our hands, we rely on the everlasting love of God to prosper our work. As we join in the *National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths* weekend, and as we commit ourselves to new, faithful efforts, we must put our trust in God to make the results of our work evident to our children and our children’s children.

Prayer

Everlasting God, Thank you for loving me as a faithful mother whose love has no end. Help me to cherish and seek justice for all of your beloved children with that same persistent, faithful, enduring love. Remind me that I am called to do my best, to work as your servant, and trust you to prosper my work for the benefit of the children. Amen.

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

**A Seven-Day Guide for Reflection and Prayer
For the National Observance of Children’s
Sabbaths® Celebration**

By Shannon Daley-Harris



Sunday: Create

Reading: Genesis 1:26–2:3

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” So God created humankind in [God’s] image, in the image of God [God] created them; male and female [God] created them. . . . God saw everything that [God] had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1:26a, 27, 31)

Reflection

We see different things when we look into the face of a child. If it is a child in our extended family, perhaps we see a younger version of ourselves, or a grandparent’s characteristic nose, or a spouse’s smile. We might see in them the anticipation of who they will become; the embodiment of our hopes and dreams. If it is a preschooler having a tantrum in the grocery store or a child playing on a school playground or a teen laughing on the sidewalk with friends, we may focus more on the behavior and how it makes us feel about the child—irritated, delighted, anxious, uncertain, nostalgic, upset, happy, or amused. If we see the image of a child flash on the TV screen or frozen in a newspaper or magazine photo, many of us bring assumptions or expectations about who that child is and what the story will be—often based on the child’s age, race, ethnicity, and other aspects of their appearance.

Imagine if we would behold each and every child as made in the image of God. Imagine, if each time we saw a child, we heard the sound of God’s voice regarding God’s handiwork and declaring it “very good.” How differently might we nurture the children in our lives? How differently might we regard the children we encounter in public? How differently might we advocate on behalf of the children whom we will never meet, who may be represented only by a statistic or an image captured in the media, but who likewise bear the image of God?

Saturday: O Prosper the Work of Our Hands!

Reading: Psalm 90

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. . . . Let your work be manifest to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands! (Psalm 90:1-2, 16-17)

Reflection

“Mums don’t retire.” That’s what a group of very poor women in Nairobi told Ingrid Monroe when she announced her intention to retire from her microcredit work providing very small loans for self-employment that was helping these families move out of poverty. Their words rang true to Ingrid, and so to this day she continues her work to end poverty, expanded now to ensure health care and decent housing as well as microloans. “Mums,” or mothers, don’t retire. Twice in the second verse of this psalm, the Hebrew word for childbirth is used to describe God’s actions creating our world. God, forming the world as a mother, never retires; “from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

The psalm goes on to remind us that while God is eternal, we humans are all too finite and fallible; “our years come to an end like a sigh.” (verse 9b) We are called to do all that we can as God’s servants to work for the world that God intends, but at the end of our days—or of our lifetimes—we must rely on God to prosper the work of our hands.

As I read this psalm, it called to mind a passage from Reinhold Niebuhr that is framed and hangs in the office of Marian Wright Edelman, the Children’s Defense Fund’s president: “Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope. Nothing which is true or beautiful or good makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore

Friday (continued)

But set aside your hopelessness and dream with the imagination of a child. What is your vision for the better tomorrow we are called to create, with God's help? What would it be like if no child is born for "calamity" but every child experiences blessing? What would it mean for us, God's people, to be "a delight"? What would we be doing, how would we be living?

There's an extraordinary new documentary, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*, about the women's movement in Liberia that led to the downfall of the dictator Charles Taylor and the eventual election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. And it all started with a woman, Leymah Gbowee, who had what she described as a "crazy dream" of standing up in church and calling on the women to lead the way to peace. She acted on her dream, and not only did the women of the church respond, but a Muslim woman who happened to be there that day broadened the dream to include engaging the Muslim women as well. What ensued was long, hard, determined work, at times dangerous and at times thrilling, at times scary and at times joyous. But it started with a dream and a belief that we can act on our dreams of a better world for our children and all of us. And that better tomorrow can come.

Prayer

God of all possibility, attune my heart to your dream for our world. Move my hands to act to make it so. Open my mouth to speak up for a better world for your beloved children. Amen.

Now, what if you remembered each and every day, as you stood before the mirror while getting ready for the day, that *you* bear the image of God. What responsibility would you feel for caring for and being a worthy steward of this very good creation?

Prayer

Loving Creator, help me to see your image in the face of every child. Help me to treat all children with the love, respect, and dignity that would honor your likeness in each of them and in me. Amen.

Monday: Change

Reading: Genesis 21:8-20

And God heard the voice of the boys and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink. (Gen. 21:17-19)

Reflection

Many of us are familiar with the prayer, "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other." (*The Essential Reinhold Niebuhr: Selected Essays and Addresses*) It has been needle-pointed onto pillows, airbrushed on posters, shellacked onto plaques, and otherwise thoroughly domesticated! It is commonly known as the "Serenity Prayer," and it is easy, and comforting, to focus on the first phrase about accepting what we cannot change. Far more challenging is the call to find courage to change the things that should be changed, and most essential is the plea for the wisdom of discernment.

Monday (continued)

In our passage today, Hagar and her child are up against grim odds. They've cruelly been sent into the wilderness without all the resources they need to survive.

When the water runs out, Hagar is in despair and can't bear the prospect of watching her beloved child die, so she thrusts him under the bushes and sits down "a good way off," begging, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." God's word to Hagar, and to us, is that this is not the time to throw our hands up in the air, to give up in grief and despair and accept that the child must die. God hears the cries of our children and bids us to get up, lift up our children, and open our eyes to find new and unexpected resources that can save our children.

When we feel like there's nothing we can do to help our children, when we're ready to sit down and avert our eyes from their suffering, pay attention. This may be the time that God is summoning you to get up and raise up the children with you. This is the time to look with new and ever attentive eyes to find new resources and opportunities to save our children. Courage.

Prayer

God, give me the grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other, for the sake of your beloved children. Amen.

right paths and restored to their families and communities as the blessings that they are meant to be. Hope. It's real, if we get to work. Hope. It's real, when we create change for our children and a better tomorrow.

Prayer

Dear God, I know your heart weeps as does my own at the loss of so many children and young people. Keep my heart tender enough to feel that grief, but guide me to do the hard work that will, by your grace, create hope for our future and bring our children home to communities of love, support, encouragement, and positive paths forward. Amen.

Friday: A Better Tomorrow

Reading: Isaiah 65:17-25

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 descendants as well. (Isaiah 65:17-20a, 23)

Reflection

Young children are often effortless visionaries, frequent dreamers. Ask a young child how the world should be, what we should do about big problems like children going hungry or homeless, how they think God wants people to act. They will quickly paint an extraordinary vision with their words, unhampered by an adult's cynicism, despair, or self-limiting need to be "realistic." Too often, when we try to envision a "better tomorrow" that reflects God's intentions for our world, we get bogged down in hopelessness.

Thursday: Bring Hope

Reading: Jeremiah 31:15–17

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.

Reflection

Hope. It can sound so ethereal, so intangible, so passive, as if hope can be found by sitting around and thinking positive thoughts. Our passage from Jeremiah presents a different perspective on hope. First, hope is created here by our work. Sitting and weeping, no matter how heartfelt, isn't what creates hope. Hope comes as "a reward for your work." And that hope takes a very concrete form: The hope for our future comes in the form of our children returned to safety from an experience of exile. Hope: a reward for work. Hope: the restoration of our children to safety.

When we hear that one out of every three Black boys born in 2001 is at risk of imprisonment in his lifetime, we might well weep bitterly. Imagine, losing thousands upon thousands of young boys, bright with promise, to a grim future locked up far from those who love them and from a world to which they could contribute. Bitter weeping is understandable in the face of the overwhelming and destructive confluence of forces that make up the pipeline to prison crisis: poverty, failing schools, lack of health care and mental health care, too few positive adult influences, and the insidious influence of racism.

But our hope will come from our work to bring our children home by dismantling the pipeline to prison; our hope will come in the very real form of our children who are no longer sent into the exile of imprisonment but kept on

Tuesday: For Children

Reading: Deuteronomy 24:17–18

You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

Reflection

We are called to create change for children because they bear the very image of God, and we are called to create change for children because they are among the most vulnerable for whom God demands particular protection, especially fierce defense and unassailable justice.

Again and again in scripture we hear God's demand to ensure justice for the widow, the orphan, the alien. Why? Because they were the society's most vulnerable. The orphan, like today's child, had no power to provide for herself or himself, was dependent on adults to meet her or his basic needs. With the death of her husband, the widow had lost the source of her family's income and faced the vulnerability of poverty, like many of today's families in poverty struggling with job loss or jobs that don't pay a living wage. Without income, she too relied on a principled society that ensured a minimum standard of living, that didn't ignore her difficult circumstances. The resident alien, like many of today's immigrants with various legal standings, lacked many of the connections and cultural ties to the broader society and could easily be taken advantage of or excluded.

Why must we assure justice, protect their rights, provide for the most basic needs of children, vulnerable families, and immigrants? Is it out of the goodness of our hearts, a sense of charity, a passing impulse or whim when it's convenient? No, we are called to protect the most vulnerable at all times because each of us is reminded by God that we have been dependent on God's protection, by God's standing up for us. At some time in our ancestry, at some point in our lives, as part of the history of God's people—we have been vulnerable, have shared an experience of oppression, and we have known deliverance, justice, and rescue.

Tuesday (continued)

Some years back there was a movie titled *Pay It Forward* that depicted how ordinary people, when they've been the recipients of unexpected and needed care and help, can respond by "paying it forward," expressing their gratitude by doing the same to someone else in need. Perhaps God is really just telling us, in today's lingo, to "pay it forward" through acts of compassion and justice for all children.

Prayer

Lover of Justice, you stand up for all who are oppressed and demand liberation from oppression. You have been my sure and strong defense. Help me to stand up for children, families in poverty, immigrants, and others who might be excluded. Amen.

Wednesday: Today...

Reading: Psalm 70

Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me! Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life. Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who desire to hurt me. Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!" turn back because of their shame.

Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore "God is great!" But I am poor and needy; hasten to help me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O Lord, do not delay!

Reflection

"How long, O Lord?" is a cry often heard on the lips of the psalmists. The writer of Psalm 70 urges, "Do not delay!" There is an urgency, a need for relief. That cry of pain, "How long?" might well be on the lips of our nation's nearly nine million children without health coverage, who may not be able to see a doctor when they need to. That cry of "Do not delay!" might well be on the

lips of parents and all who love and care about children suffering needlessly because they lack the health care we certainly have the capacity to provide and that many of us enjoy ourselves.

That sense of urgency is something Chilean poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature Gabriela Mistral understood. She knew the depths of loss and pain over children; her nephew committed suicide as a teen, and a child she had adopted also died. In *Su Nombre es Hoy* (His Name is Today), she wrote, "We are guilty of many errors and many faults, but our worst crime is abandoning the children, neglecting the fountain of life. Many of the things we need can wait. The child cannot. Right now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood is being made, and his senses are being developed. To him we cannot answer, 'Tomorrow,' his name is Today."

Many things compete for our attention on an individual level: work or school deadlines, bills to pay, laundry to wash, meals to prepare. On a congregational level, we also find many demands: classes to conduct, worship to plan, committees to meet, buildings to be maintained. As a nation, our elected leaders find there is much that clamors for attention and our resources: economic woes, international crises, partisan wrangling, campaign fundraising. But to all of us, we must hear the cry, "Do not delay!" and know that as God's hands and feet on earth, we must do all we can, today, for children who are "poor and needy," in the words of the psalmist, whose need for health care and other basics remind us that we cannot answer, "Tomorrow." The child's name is Today.

Prayer

Our Help and Our Deliverer, make haste to help children in need, and use me to bring your relief to them. Keep urgency burning in my heart so that I don't delay for a moment to do all that I can for your beloved children. Amen.