



SECTION 9

Muslim Resources for the Children's Sabbath

In this section you will find:

- Suggested activities to engage your mosque, Islamic center, school, or group in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration
- "Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Perspective" by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Ph.D.
- Materials for khutbahs and discussions, including:
 - Passages from the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.); and
 - A sample Friday sermon/khutbah by Syed Shakeel, Islamic Shura Council of Southern California
- Two duas

Suggested Activities

- 1. A Friday sermon on the vulnerability of children and the urgent need to care for them.** Material provided here in addition to other materials from the Qur'an, Sunnah, Islamic law and biography of early Muslim generations can be used to illustrate the care given to children. One great story is that of the second great rightly guided caliph Omar when he declared that infants and children must be given allowances like adults in order to allow their parents to provide adequate care for them.
- 2. An evening or weekend congregational event** where parents and children who lack proper care, adequate education, or health insurance can speak to the community in order to raise awareness among members of the Muslim community.
- 3. A public and community-wide forum organized by the Islamic center or the Muslim community** in which experts on child poverty, childhood hunger, housing and homelessness, health care, health insurance, and school districts, and public officials can attend to provide information on existing resources and, at the same time, direct the public on productive ways of activism to change existing public policies and commit themselves to helping in these noble tasks.
- 4. A gathering of various ethnic and religious groups to raise awareness and commit themselves to producing the necessary and desirable change.** The Muslim representative can read the Islamicly based public prayer written by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy included in this section.

Care for the Children of America: An Islamic Perspective

By Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Islamic Society of Central New York

Generally speaking, children are the most precious, yet vulnerable, most innocent, yet fragile, of all age groups. The future of any nation depends greatly on how that nation educates, treats, and nurtures its children. Due to the unique position and role of the United States in the world as the sole superpower, not only the future of the United States but also that of the world will be greatly affected by the way American children are educated, nurtured, and treated today. Although the United States is the most advanced in the world industrially, scientifically, and militarily, among other things, statistics on children are not encouraging. A great percentage of American children are left in poverty, in harmful environments, and without adequate nourishment, health care, or education.

To illustrate:

In poverty:

- Every 33 seconds a child is born into poverty.
- Today, there are 1.7 million more children living in poverty than there were in 2000, an increase of 15 percent.
- Children under the age of five remain more likely to be poor than older children.
- Every year that 13 million children live in poverty costs the nation \$500 billion in lost productivity.

In health care:

- There are nine million uninsured children in America.
- Every day more than 2,200 children are born without health insurance.
- Every two minutes a baby is born at low birthweight.

In education:

- Every 10 seconds during the school year a student drops out.
- Only 14 percent of Black, 17 percent of Latino, and 42 percent of White 4th graders are reading at grade level.
- States spend on average almost three times as much per prisoner (\$22,650 a year) as per public school student.

In harmful environments:

- Every 35 seconds a child is confirmed abused or neglected.
- Every three hours a child or teen is killed by a firearm.
- In 2007, the United States' inmate population of more than 2,300,000 exceeded China's, whose general population is more than four times as large.
- On any given night, 200,000 children are homeless.

Materials for the Sermons and Discussions

Passages from the holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.):

Use verses that assert the honor and dignity which Allah assigned to the human race, equality among all people, the essentiality of justice and standing for justice, the obligation to cooperate with everyone—Muslim or non-Muslim—on issues of justice and mutual good, the mercy of Islam and the kind treatment Muslims are required to give to the vulnerable and weak. Some illustrations are included below. Muslim leaders are encouraged to utilize the abundant sources in the Qur'an and Prophetic tradition to support the activities related to this program.

a. The nobility and honor bestowed on human beings

﴿وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْوَجْرِ وَالْبَحْرِ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ نَجْدًا وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِّمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَجْذِيلًا ﴿٣٧﴾﴾

We have honored the children of Adam; provided them with transport on land and sea; given them for sustenance things good and pure; and conferred on them special favors, above a great part of Our creation.

(Qur'an 17:70)

b. Justice

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُونُوا قَوَّامِينَ لِلَّهِ شُهَدَاءَ بِالْبِرِّ وَلَا يَكْرِهَنَّكُمْ شَتَانُ قَوْمٍ عَلَىٰ أَلَّا تَعْدِلُوا أَعْدِلُوا هُوَ أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾﴾

O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah, as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of others to you make swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear Allah. For Allah is well-acquainted with all that ye do.

(Qur'an 5:8)

c. The Islamic obligation to support just causes regardless of religious affiliation

﴿لَا يَنْهَىٰكُمْ اللَّهُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ وَلَمْ يُخْرِجُواكُم مِّن دِيَارِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوا إِلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٨١﴾﴾

Allah forbids you not, with regards to those who fight you not for your faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just.

(Qur'an 60:8)

d. The mercy of Islam and kind treatment required

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ وَالْإِحْسَانِ وَإِيتَايَ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَيَنْهَىٰ عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَالْبَغْيِ يُحِبُّكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿١٩٠﴾﴾

Allah truly enjoins justice and Ihsan (kind and excellent treatment). Prophet Muhammad (p.b.u.h.) states that which means: “The creatures of Allah (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of Allah, and the most beloved to Allah are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children.”

Suggested Sample Friday Sermon (Khutba)

By Shakeel Syed, Islamic Shura Council of Southern California

O our Lord! Grant our spouses and offspring that are joy to our eyes, and help us to be a model among those who are conscious of You." (25:74)

It is God alone who has made for you from among yourselves pairs, male and female. And He has made for you from your mates, children and grandchildren. He has provided you, moreover, with all that is wholesome in life. Then is it in falsehood they shall believe, while in the blessings of God they disbelieve? (16:72)

These two verses reflect on the priceless gifts that the Most Compassionate God Almighty has bestowed upon us the gift of children and grandchildren.

Our most grateful response toward this awesome gift of children and grandchildren ought to be:

- In our gratefulness to God Almighty for His awesome gifts;
- In our absolute commitment to take care of these gifts by protecting and sheltering them;
- By being a source of comfort and means to their needs;
- By helping them reach their full potential;
- And, most importantly, making our lives revolve around their well-being.

Brothers and Sisters – as people of faith and people of conscience, we most regrettably are living in a society that seems to have misplaced our priorities, almost completely.

Children seem to have become the last and not the first priority of our society.

This is best demonstrated by virtue of our dismal record in protecting them:

- Records indicate that a child is killed by gunfire about every three hours.
- Data reveals that more than 13 million of our children are poor; nine million of them are without health insurance; close to one million of them are victims of abuse and neglect; more than 10 million of them live on subsistence levels receiving food stamps, and we spend on average approximately \$8,000 to educate each child but have the audacity to spend more than \$22,000 on each prisoner...and the list goes on.

As people of faith and people of conscience, brothers and sisters, we have a responsibility, and an urgent one, toward this most awesome gift from the Most Compassionate God Almighty.

We are reminded by Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) that the "best of you are those who are best to your family."

The questions we ought to ask ourselves are: Am I the parent who is best to my family? Am I the citizen who cares for my own and other children? Is the community and society that I live in the one who takes care of "all" the families and not just "some"? Have we abdicated our responsibilities or embraced our obligations?

These important and urgent questions are the need of the day, my dear brothers and sisters.

As a nation we have spent hundreds of billions of dollars for death and destruction in Iraq and Afghanistan but did not have enough to provide shelter, health care and education to our own children affected by Katrina.

As a nation we chose to remain blind to the hundreds of millions of tax dollars as bonuses to Wall Street while voiceless children and their helpless parents are being asked to remain silent.

As a nation that claims to be the "richest" and "most powerful" of the planet, how can we possibly reconcile the disparity in our priorities?

A nation that cannot take care of the most vulnerable ought to be ashamed of itself rather than boasting as a leader of the world – we have become the immoral cheerleaders of a corrupt system and a society that we lead.

Brothers and Sisters – as people of faith and conscience, we ought to uphold **"the God granted dignity and right of every child born to Adam"** (*"laqad karramna bani Adam"*) – and not only some.

Brothers and Sisters – as tax-paying citizens of this country, we ought to hold responsible the perpetrators of the crimes of highest magnitude by their neglect of our children.

Brothers and Sisters – as members of a human society, we ought not to ask whose child it is but rather embrace each one of them, with a name or no name, with a parent or none, as ours.

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Let us remember what Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace be upon him) reminded us, that those **“who take care of the orphans will accompany him just as twin fingers in the best of heavens in the eternal life here-after.”**

Let us remember that it is most noble to give before we are asked for it...

Let us remember that our gratefulness to God's awesome gifts is to protect them...

Let us remember that children are a mighty and priceless blessing to us and not a curse...

Let us remember as parents and guardians our imperative to be a source of comfort to them...

Let us remember that we'll be remembered by our care and concern for the voiceless...

Let us remember that our joy is in giving rather than in receiving...

Let us remember that in God, we seek refuge and find strength in reclaiming and restoring the lost rights of His most awesome creation and gift to us—our children.

In closing, my dear brothers and sisters, I would like you all to dedicate a day a month, if not more, to nothing else but to find ways to be a source of comfort and joy to children. I invite you to join me and Islamic Shura Council and the Children's Defense Fund to engage in this noble struggle to defend those who are defenseless, to give voice to those who are voiceless, and to be a reason for smiles and joy to those who are full of tears and without hope. Their voiceless cries must be heard because in it is our salvation and in them is our present and future!

Amen.

Two Duas

A Dua by Dr. Ahmed Nezar Kobeisy, Ph.D., Islamic Society of Central New York

Our Creator, The Lord of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad,

Our beloved God and Our Loving God,

We know Our Lord, Most Wise, that You Created humans purposely to proliferate on Earth, to reproduce and have children and for their children, when they mature and become responsible, to have children, and it is Your Grace which has allowed us to draw from this... an immense joy.

But, we also know that along with the pleasure you have graciously planted in our hearts, Our Lord, Most Just, You have placed on our shoulders a hefty responsibility. Deeply embedded in Your Divine Purpose, is our obligation to defend all that is weak, to nurture all that is vulnerable, to protect all that is innocent, to safeguard all that is fragile and to cherish all that is precious.

And who should know better than You, O' Lord, Who is Most Cognizant, that our children are all of these things?

So graciously, O' Lord, assist us in fulfilling our duties towards them so that they can grow up to be whoever they wish to become and we hope them to be.

Please shape us into the perfect examples for them to follow as they inevitably become the adults of tomorrow.

Our Lord, Most Forgiving, we are horribly ashamed of the way in which we failed You by failing our children.

Alarming statistics of hunger, deprivation, lack of adequate health care, and closed doors of opportunities deprive us of our humanity and civilization.

Daily images of children being abducted from their homes, raped, killed, and brutally mutilated rob us all of any sense of accomplishment.

Other children indicted and convicted as adults pass the conviction to all of our societal institutions.

We have foolishly let our greed, arrogance, and apathy get the best of us by letting these vices cloud our judgment and darken our hearts and souls.

So we ask You, Mighty Lord, to turn the eagerness of our greed into a spirit of selflessness so that we may give back to our children the innocence we so voraciously took.

Please turn our arrogance and false pride into humility and servitude so that we may rightfully nurture them the way they so deserve.

And Lord, Most Gracious, please turn our apathy and inertia into empathy and compassion so that we may change the tears we so wrongfully caused into smiles our children so direly need, and the cries we so unjustly provoked into giggles and laughter carried by the gentle breeze.

After all, until our children succeed and prosper, our hearts will know no peace... and torment will continue to replace the joy that once was.

Our Lord, help us learn the lessons from all that goes on around us.

Grant our members, religious leaders, city officials, public policy makers, and national caretakers the will, strength, resolve and wisdom to nurture, educate and support our children towards excellence in life, health, the opportunity to learn and virtue in values.

Guide our society members, officials, educators, and parents to join hands in preparing the children of today to become the peacemakers of tomorrow.

Help us make the world a safer place for them.

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A Dua by Afeefa Syeed

Our Prayer for Children: A Muslim Call to Justice

I begin with the name of God. The God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The God whose everlasting compassion and never ending mercy are the saving grace of all humanity. God who is the source of Peace and Perfection. God who is the Protector.

Our nation has been blessed with abundance. At this moment, Dear God, help us to remember and reflect on Your words:

*There will be a time We will test you with affluence—
avoid arrogance and practice justice and equality.*

Oh Lord, Oh God! To every life afflicted with senseless, mean acts, grant your everlasting Mercy. We are comforted in the thought that innocent children whose lives were ended are safe now in Your embrace.

Your Prophet, Muhammad, said,

The best community will be known because of its kindness to children.

In this time of such suffering of the children, help us to remember that our children are a trust from You. We are their guardians and You will be the judge of how we guide and protect them. Guide us to teach them how to be better than we.

Help us to teach our children that a true believer's success is how close he is to God, how relevant and beneficial he is to mankind. The more pain we inflict on fellow human beings the more distance we put between us and God.

As parents in this nation, Lord, help us to sense and know that our children are born in a state of purity and innocence. They are gifts from You.

Remind us, oh Lord, of the story when a man came to Your prophet, Muhammad, and asked "Do you kiss your children? I have ten and have never kissed them." The Prophet replied with a sorrowful tone and a clenched jaw, "That shows you have no mercy or tenderness at all. Those who do not show mercy to others will not have God's mercy on them."

Our Prophet drew great joy and happiness even in times of despair and loss at the sight of children. His supplication should be our supplication:

I commend you, oh children of this world, to the protection of God's perfect words from every evil.

Help us to raise children who are gentle and polite, not timid, afraid, or cowed down. Help us to raise children who are helpful and considerate, not arrogant and loud.

Help us teach our children to know Your prophet's words:

*The strong person is not the one who is best at wrestling;
but the one who controls himself in anger.*

Help us as parents to be tolerant, kind, understanding, truthful, reverent so our children will be tolerant, kind, understanding, truthful, reverent. Help us, Oh Lord, to utter often the verse from the Qur'an:

God truly enjoins justice and kind and excellent treatment.

Oh Lord, those of us who carry Your trust now in our wombs pray to you. Help us to dedicate our offspring to the founding of justice. Let us take the example of Hanna, mother of Mary, who beseeched her Lord to protect and guide her child who was not yet born. Make us conscientious and steadfast parents, not accidental or incidental ones.

Lord, help us to know that Justice is Your Attribute. Justice is a balance. Most importantly, we know from Your words, Justice is a call to action.

Oh Lord, as children of this country, help us to grow as citizens who work for the betterment of our brothers and sisters—no matter how small the action.

As children of this country, guide us to be leaders who will not be blinded to the injustices of this world.

As children of this country, grant us the wisdom to know what our country must do to seek Your Pleasure.

Our nation is great. Our nation is vast. America is beautiful. Guide us, Oh Lord, to know that justice for all is not a luxury or a choice. Help us to remember You give all children the right to a good name, shelter, good health, and an education. We will work for these rights for those who are without—help us be passionate and proactive in the preservation and practice of justice.

Our children are the future, Lord. Do not let us forsake our future by harming the trust You have bestowed on us. We are ready as children and as parents of this country, as Americans all, to pass this test together.



Oh Lord! Guard our children with Your never slumbering eyes. Hold them fast with your embrace of mercy. Shower them wherever they go with love from Your bottomless well of compassion.

Let us remember the mission of all Your prophets from Adam, to Jesus, Moses, and through to Muhammad who said:

If any of you witness an injustice, he should change it with his hand, and if he is not able, then with his tongue, and if he is not able, then detest it with his heart. But that shows the weakest of faith.

Finally, we remember Your words to us:

Oh ye who believe! Seek help with patient perseverance and prayer. For God is with those who patiently persevere.

Amen.





SECTION 10

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

A multi-faith community service offers a powerful and meaningful opportunity to bring together people from all across your community who may not have ever connected before. It is a chance to highlight our shared concern—across religious traditions—for children and families in need, whether in poverty, without health care, or

at risk of incarceration. It is a meaningful time to discover what our different faith traditions hold in common as well as to learn about the unique perspectives, texts, and traditions that each brings. It is a time to unite in shared commitment to take action to solve these problems.

Resources for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Celebration

Be sure to read the planning steps, outlined on pages 43–45, for organizing a multi-faith community-wide service. Follow them to bring together a planning committee that represents the many religious traditions in your community.

Here you will find a suggested outline and resources for you to create your own multi-faith Children's Sabbath service that is inclusive, respectful of different traditions, focused on the Children's Sabbaths' core themes, and adaptable to your particular community and leadership.

- **The suggested outline** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service is the “recipe.”
- **Resources** for your multi-faith community-wide Children's Sabbath service are the “ingredients”: readings, prayers, and other resources from many religious traditions from which you may choose. Select those resources that appeal to your planning team, supple-

ment them with your own, or adapt them as desired. Add readings or prayers from other traditions as appropriate to reflect the leadership and participation in your community. You may also wish to invite one or more to offer brief (1-3 minutes) reflections on the religious traditions' call to do justice and bring hope and health care to children.

Please note: You are not expected, nor is it recommended, to use every one of the options or resources provided below, as that would make the service run too long. (Aim for a service that is about an hour. A service much longer than that may lose the attention of children and youths present—adults, too!)

Be sure to intersperse readings, prayers, and other parts of the service with musical selections sung by the congregation or choirs. This will help to keep the service lively and engage congregation members.

Suggested Outline for a Multi-Faith Children's Sabbath Service

I: Gathering of the Community

The service begins with a “Gathering of the Community” that creates a sense of welcome and inclusion and affirms a sense of shared purpose. These earliest moments in the service should be planned with care to reassure people that this service is a “safe” space in which their own faith will not be denigrated and ease any anxieties that people may bring to a multi-faith experience.

The Gathering of the Community segment of the service may include some or all of the following:

- **Prelude:** Choose choral or instrumental music that either creates an atmosphere for contemplation and reflection or that builds excitement and generates enthusiasm. One or more choirs could each offer a selection, for instance, or an organist or pianist could play.
- **Opening Procession of Religious Leaders and Children:** This can provide a visual appreciation for the range of religious traditions represented and add a sense of importance and broad support for the event. You may want to include symbolic elements to the procession or other visual enhancements, like banners, liturgical dancers, drummers, candle-lighting, or another creative element.

- **Welcome:** The religious leader in whose place of worship the multi-faith service is being held may offer a very brief welcome. If the service is not being held in a place of worship, one of the key leaders involved in planning the Children's Sabbath may give a brief welcome. Or the welcome may be omitted and the service may move directly from the Opening Procession to the Gathering Words.
- **Gathering Words:** Beginning with an opening prayer, call to worship, or another form of “Gathering Words” can make people from many different communities feel united in why they are there and reassured that all are welcome. See the sample resources below for Gathering Words that can be used, adapted, or simply serve as an inspiration for your own creation.
- **Congregational Hymn or Choral Anthem:** A musical selection at this point may keep the service lively. (Remember: If *everyone* is asked to sing or say it, the words should include *everyone*. For instance, if the *congregation* will be singing, remember to select a song with inclusive words that people from many different faiths will feel comfortable singing—ensure that it does not use language specific to just one tradition, such as “Jesus Christ.” If a *choir* is presenting an anthem to

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which the congregation will listen, singing music specific to that choir's tradition, remember to balance the choirs represented and to ensure that no anthem while specific to a tradition puts down another faith tradition.)

II: Time of Lament

This is a time to focus attention on the serious problems affecting children, to declare our concern for children's suffering, and recognize our responsibility as people of faith, adults, parents, citizens, and community members for how we have contributed to or failed to prevent or end child suffering and ensure justice and care for all children.

The time of lament portion of the service might include one or more (but not all) of the following:

- **Prayer**
- **Litany**
- **Responsive reading**
- **Creative or symbolic action**
- **Visual experience** that underscores the problems to which we have come to respond (e.g., PowerPoint or slide presentation or a brief video, liturgical dance)
- **Anthem, hymn or song**

III: Call to Service

This part of the worship service proclaims the call to justice, compassion, and faithful action for children that is central to our religious traditions.

This part of the service could include some of the following:

- **Readings from sacred texts** such as Torah and other Hebrew texts, the New Testament, Qur'an, Baghavad Gita, and others. If the readings are recited in another language, either have the readers also read the English translation or, to keep the service from becoming too lengthy, provide written translations into English in the service program.
- **Hymns, anthems, and songs focused on our call to service**
- **A reflection on the Call to Create Change for Children Today to Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow:** a brief reflection—perhaps five minutes—during which a leader reflects on the shared concerns for children and the strong call to work for change for children to achieve justice heard in our faith traditions.

IV: Commitment to Action

After the gathering, lament, and call to service, people should be ready to respond to what they've heard and experienced with a commitment to action on children's behalf. This enables them to channel the experience into a positive, forward-looking, hopeful response that puts their faith into action.

The commitment to action section of the service might include one or more of the following:

- **A Charge to the Congregation:** a brief, inspirational charge from a powerful speaker that encourages those present to respond to the call to service just heard with a commitment to action manifesting the justice and peace God intends. Five minutes may be an appropriate length to give the speaker for her/his charge.
- **Prayer of Commitment**
- **Act of Commitment:** a responsive reading that invites the congregation to respond aloud and declare their intention to act on behalf of children.
- **Symbolic action:** a creative action or response through which the people or one or more leaders make visible the commitment to act. Options include each person writing a commitment on a slip of paper that is collected with the others; distributing a small item to each person present that will serve as a reminder of their commitment; or lighting candles.
- **Song, hymn, or anthem** with words that emphasize the commitment to faithful action (e.g., "This Little Light of Mine" with words adapted for the multi-faith congregation and action for children).

V: Blessing

The last portion of the multi-faith service prepares the people to leave the time together inspired and committed to action, reassured that the gathered community will be dispersed but still joined in commitment and that they will continue to be guided and sustained by the divine.

The blessing portion of the service might include one or more of the following:

- **Blessing of the children:** Many traditions have rituals for blessing the children that could be adapted for a multi-faith gathering. Consider ways that those who have not come accompanied by children can feel part of the blessing experience.

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- **Charge:** Not as lengthy as the “charge to the congregation” in the commitment to action, this very brief charge can precede the final blessing as a reminder of what we go forth to do.
- **Final Blessing:** The last words offered by a religious leader, reminding the congregation that God goes with us as we depart to do God's work.
- **Closing hymn or song:** A final song that has a “sending forth” theme, such as the traditional spiritual, “Guide My Feet.” The religious leaders who processed in may process out during the closing hymn or remain in place.
- **Postlude:** Instrumental (or choral) music as the congregation disperses

Resources for Observances and Related Activities

In addition to the resources provided below, and those which your planning committee creates or finds, draw from faith resources offered elsewhere in this resource manual.

Remember: You are not expected to use all of the resources offered below in one service!

Unless otherwise noted, all resources were written by Shannon Daley-Harris.

Resources for the Gathering of the Community

Gathering Words/Call to Worship

All: We come with heavy hearts...

Leader: Hearts burdened by the knowledge that millions of children in our nation live in poverty, lack health coverage, and are swept along a pipeline to prison.

All: We come with hopeful hearts...

Leader: Hearts that believe that as people of faith we can unite in concern and commitment to make a life-changing difference in children's lives.

All: We come with passionate hearts...

Leader: Hearts that burn with a desire for justice for the little, the lost, the last, and the left out.

All: We come with happy hearts...

Leader: Hearts that recognize that now is the time to make a difference, here are the faithful partners for that work, and working together we can be more powerful than the problems facing our children.

All: We come with ready hearts. Let us begin.

Gathering Words/Opening Prayer

Eternal source of love and justice, we gather here from many places, different traditions, and diverse experiences. We give you thanks for the richness of our diversity and the treasured uniqueness of each one here.

We also gather here, brought together by what unites us and makes us one: concern for children in need—those pressed down by poverty, passed over for health care, pushed along a pipeline to prison. We give you thanks for planting in each of us a heart that cares for your most vulnerable children and a passion for justice so that every child may grow and flourish. We give you thanks for our shared concern and commitment.

Use us now, we pray, to create change for your children so that each will know the hope of a better tomorrow. Let all people of love and justice say, **Amen.**

Gathering Words

(For a dynamic effect, the young people could be in different locations around the worship space. The candle lighting and water pouring should take place in the front where all can see it, but the striking of the drum and the bell ringing could take place from either side, a balcony, or even in the midst of those seated. Experiment ahead of time in your worship space to see what will work best.)

Young person beats a drum: We come here to be, in the words of Martin Luther King, “drum majors for justice”!

Young person lights a candle: We come here to spread the light of love and compassion until it brightens and warms the lives of all children.

Young person rings a bell: We come to let freedom ring as we commit to freeing children from poverty, lack of health care, and all that oppresses them.

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Young person pours water from a pitcher into a basin:

We come to seek ways to bring the life-giving waters of justice and compassion, faith and family, community and care to every child.

Young people (together): We come together, from different places and many faiths, to share our concern for children, our determination to create change for them, and our hope for a better tomorrow.

Gathering Words

Leader 1: Here we gather, to create change for children in poverty, children without health care, and children swept along a pipeline to prison.

Leader 2: Here we gather, to create change for children *today*, because we don't have a minute to wait or a child to waste.

Leader 3: Here we gather, to bring hope for a better tomorrow through the change we create, because we know that each child is beloved by the Holy.

Leaders (together): Here we gather, for change, for children, for hope for a better tomorrow. Let us begin.

Gathering Words

Leader: Why are we here?

All: To create change.

Leader: Who are we here to create change for?

All: We're here to create change for children.

Leader: When are we going to create change for children?

All: We're going to create change for children today!

Leader: Why are we going to create change for children today?

All: To bring hope and a better tomorrow.

Leader: As we gather here to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow, let us each seek the guidance and sustenance of our faith and the support and partnership of each other. May it be so.

Resources for the Time of Lament

Prayer: Quiet Us Now

Quiet us now, Eternal Source of Compassion. Quiet us now and help us to hear the pain in the voices of our nation's 13.3 million children living in poverty. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would the children who live in poverty say to us? *[Provide a time of silence before continuing.]*

Quiet us, Holy One. Quiet us now and help us to hear the cries of our nation's nine million children who don't have health coverage and may not be able to see a doctor when they need to. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would the children without health coverage say to us? *[Provide a time of silence before continuing.]*

Quiet us, Source of Mercy. Quiet us now and help us to hear the pleas of our nation's children pushed along a pipeline to prison by racism, failing schools, abuse and neglect, hopelessness, and poor choices. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would the children in the pipeline to prison say to us? *[Provide a time of silence before continuing.]*

Quiet us. Quiet us now and help us to hear what you would say to us. Help us listen. Help us hear. What would you say to us? *[Provide time of silence before continuing.]*

Eternal One, Lover of Justice, help us know when to be quiet and when, having heard, to speak up, to give voice to the pleas of our nation's children, to give voice to your call for justice, to give voice to our desire for a better tomorrow for all of our children. Amen.

Litany of Lament and Hope: Weeping and Work

Child 1: Every day in our nation, more than 2,500 babies are born into poverty.

Child 2: Every day in our nation, more than 2,400 children are abused or neglected.

Child 3: Every day in our nation, 2,224 babies are born without health insurance.

Child 4: Every day in our nation, more than 75 babies die before their first birthday.

Child 5: Every day in our nation, 4,520 children are arrested.

Leader: "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.

People: We have come together with hearts that weep for our nation's children.

Leader: "Thus says the Lord: Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears: For there is reward for your work, says the Lord."

People: We have come together to be moved from weeping to hear the promise of the work we can do.

Leader: “[The children] 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.”

People: We have come together to glimpse your vision of homecoming that would bring our nation's children from an experience of need to one of safety, plenty, and love.

Unison: Be with us in this time together and in our days to come that we may commit our hearts and hands and minds to realizing your vision of homecoming for the children of our nation. Amen.

A Prayer from Zaire

O God,
You love justice and you establish peace on earth.
We bring before you the disunity of today's world:
The absurd violence, and the many wars,
Which are breaking the courage of the peoples of the world;
Militarism and the armaments race,
Which are threatening life on the planet;
Human greed and injustice,
Which breed hatred and strife.
Send your Spirit and renew the face of the earth;
Teach us to be compassionate toward the whole human family;
Strengthen the will of all those who fight for justice and peace;
Lead all nations into the path of peace,
And give us that peace which the world cannot give.
Amen.

[from Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship*]

Resources for the Call to Service

Bahá'í Readings

Options include:

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring.¹

God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger.²

The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government, the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind.³

¹ Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 285.

² Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 290.

³ Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 107.

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Buddhist Reading⁴

A mother, even at the risk of her own life, protects her child, her only child. In the same way should you cultivate love without measure toward all beings. You should cultivate toward the whole world—above, below, around—a heart of love unstinted, unmixed with any sense of differing or opposing interests. You should maintain this mindfulness all the time you are awake. Such a state of heart is the best in the world.

Christian Readings

Options include:

Mark 9:33–37 (Welcome the Child)

Mark 10:13–16 (Blessing the Children)

Luke 10:25–37 (Parable of the Good Samaritan)

Luke 18:1–8a (Widow and the Unjust Judge)

Luke 21:1–4 (Widow's Offering)

Matthew 5:13–16 (Salt and Light)

Matthew 7:12 (Golden Rule)

Matthew 10:40–42 (Whoever welcomes you...cup of water)

Matthew 18:10–14 (Parable of the Lost Sheep)

Matthew 25:31–45 (Judgment of the Nations)

Jewish Readings

Options include:

Genesis 21:8–20

Jeremiah 31:15–17

Isaiah 65:17–25

Muslim Reading

(If the passage is read in Arabic, either print the translation in the program or ask the leader to also read aloud the English translation.)

“O you who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to justice, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety: and fear God. For God is well-acquainted with all that you do.” (Qur'an 5:8)

Native American Reading: A Prayer of the Chippewa⁵

We pray that someday an arrow will be broken,
Not in something or someone,
But by each of humankind,

To indicate peace, not violence.
Someday, oneness with creation,
rather than domination over creation,
will be the goal to be respected.
Someday fearlessness to love and make a difference

Will be experienced by all people.
Then the eagle will carry our prayer for peace and love,
And the people of the red, white, yellow, brown, and
black communities
Can sit in the same circle together to communicate in love
And experience the presence of the Great Mystery in their
midst.
Someday can be today for you and me. Amen.

Sikh Hymn

The Lord is my Mother and Father. He it is who blesses
me with sustenance.
And the Lord takes care of me. For I am the child of God.
He abandons me never and feeds me steadily,
And minds not my demerits and hugs me to His bosom,
And He blesses me with all I seek; yea, He the Bliss-giving
Father,
And He has blessed me with Words of Wisdom, yea,
the riches of the name,
And made me worthy of Himself.
And made me a partner (of His Grace) with the Guru,
and now I possess all joys.
May my Lord forsake me not; yea, He, who is my All
powerful Lord.

*(Hymn composed by Guru Arjan thanking
the Lord for the gift of life)*

Responsive Reading: “We Cannot Merely Pray to You”

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end war;
For we know that You have made the world in a way
So that all of us must find our own path to peace,
Within ourselves and with our neighbors.

*We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end hunger;
For you have already given us the resources
With which to feed the entire world,
If we would only use them wisely.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God,
To root out our prejudice;
For You have already given us eyes

⁴ From *The Buddha Speaks*, edited by Anne Bancroft, ©2000 by Anne Bancroft. Reprinted by arrangement with Shambhala Publications, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts. www.shambhala.com.

⁵ Attributed to Wanda Lawrence from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, (c)1992.

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With which to see the good in all people,
If we would only use them rightly.

*We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end despair;
For You have already given us the power
To clear away slums and to give hope,
If we would only use our power justly.*

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;
For You have already given us great minds
With which to search out cures and healing,
If we could only use them constructively.

*Therefore, we pray to You instead, O God,
For strength, determination, and courage,
To do instead of just to pray,
To become instead of merely to wish.*

Praised are You, O God,
You bless our people...
And all peoples, with peace.

(By Rabbi Jack Riemer)

Resources for the Commitment to Action

Rise Up⁶

This prayer could be read different ways. The "Leader," "All Men," "All Women," and "All Children" designations below are just one possibility. It could be read by one or several leaders with the congregation listening. Or it could be read responsively with the congregation reading some lines together—the congregation could read aloud the lines that begin "God," with individual leaders reading the pairs of lines in between, or a leader could read the lines beginning "God," and the congregation could read together the pairs of lines in between.

This prayer was inspired by Psalm 10:12, "Rise Up, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; Do not forget the oppressed."

Leader: God of justice,
Hear our prayer and rise up, we pray.

All Men: Remember the brokenhearted people
And provide them strength.

All Women: Listen to the orphans of the world
And answer their cries.

All Children: See the helpless
And lend your support.

Leader: God of the troubled,
Hear our prayer and rise up.

All Men: Remember oppressed people
And provide release.

All Women: Listen to those filled with grief
And offer comfort.

All Children: See the evil threatening life
And break it.

All Together: God of justice,
Let our prayers and your hand
Make us bold enough to rise up
And follow you.

A Prayer for Children by Ina J. Hughs⁷

This prayer could also be read different ways, including in unison, with different leaders (including children) reading sections, or alternating sections between "left" and "right" sides of your worship space (be sure to clarify with the congregation which side is which before beginning).

Leader: Let us join in this prayer with not only the words of our mouths but pledging the work of our hands.

We pray for children
Who sneak Popsicles before supper,
Who erase holes in math workbooks,
Who can never find their shoes.

And we pray for those
who stare at photographers from behind barbed wire,
who can't bound down the street in a new pair of sneakers,
Who never "counted potatoes,"
Who were born in places we wouldn't be
caught dead,
Who never go to the circus,
Who live in an X-rated world.

We pray for children
Who bring us sticky kisses and fistfuls of dandelions,
Who hug us in a hurry and forget their lunch money.

And we pray for those
Who never get dessert,
Who have no safe blanket to drag behind them,

⁶ By J. Bradley Wigger, in *Together We Pray: A Prayer Book for Families*, St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2005.

⁷ "A Prayer for Children" by Ina J. Hughs. © 1995 by Ina Hughs. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

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Who watch their parents watch them die,
Who can't find any bread to steal,
Who don't have any rooms to clean up,
Whose pictures aren't on anybody's dresser,
And whose monsters are real.

We pray for children

Who spend all their allowance before Tuesday,
Who throw tantrums in the grocery store and pick
at their food,
Who like ghost stories,
Who shove dirty clothes under the tub,
Who get visits from the tooth fairy,
Who don't like to be kissed in front of the carpool,
Who squirm in church or temple and scream in
the phone,
Whose tears we sometimes laugh at and whose smiles
can make us cry.

And we pray for those

Whose nightmares come in the daytime,
Who will eat anything,
Who have never seen a dentist
Who aren't spoiled by anybody,
Who got to bed hungry and cry themselves to sleep,
Who live and move, but have no being.

We pray for children

Who want to be carried and for those who must,
For those we never give up on and for those
Who don't get a second chance,
For those we smother and for those who will grab
the hand of anyone kind enough to offer it.

Prayer of Commitment: I Care and I Am Willing to Serve and Stand for Children

One leader or several can read the lines in regular type while the people respond with the words in bold, "but I care...." Perhaps before reading the prayer, the leader could invite each person present to reflect in silence what "I can't" or "I'm not" is in their head or heart that keeps them from most fully living out their calling to create change for children today to bring hope and a better tomorrow.

(As an additional activity, in preparing for the Children's Sabbath celebration, you could engage the children and young people in researching the names mentioned below—especially those that may be unfamiliar to some—and writing up a sentence or paragraph description of these courageous change-makers and heroes for justice, and create a display in the building where the Children's Sabbath will be

held. Alternatively, you could prepare a booklet or bulletin insert with their findings.)

Lord I cannot preach like Martin Luther King, Jr.
or turn a poetic phrase like Maya Angelou
but I care and am willing to serve and to stand up for children.

I do not have Fred Shuttlesworth's and Harriet Tubman's courage
or Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt's political skills
but I care and am willing to serve and raise my voice with others for children.

I cannot sing like Fannie Lou Hamer
or organize like Ella Baker and Bayard Rustin
but I care and am willing to serve.

I am not holy like Archbishop Tutu,
forgiving like Mandela, or disciplined like Gandhi
but I care and am willing to serve and sacrifice to build our children a better future.

I am not brilliant like Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois or
Elizabeth Cady Stanton, or as eloquent as
Sojourner Truth and Booker T. Washington
but I care and am willing to serve and use the talents I do have to keep children safe.

I have not Mother Teresa's saintliness,
Dorothy Day's love or Cesar Chavez's
gentle tough spirit
but I care and am willing to serve and make a difference for children.

God it is not as easy as it used to be
to frame an issue and forge a solution
but I care and am willing to serve and to keep struggling until we find the way to build the 21st century movement for children.

My mind and body are not so swift as in youth
and my energy comes in spurts
but I care and am willing to serve and to vote for children.

I'm so young
nobody will listen.
I'm not sure what to say or do
but I care and am willing to serve.

I can't see or hear well,
speak good English, stutter sometimes, am afraid of criticism

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and get real scared standing up before others
but I care and am willing to serve.

God, use us as You will to save Your children today and tomorrow and to build a nation and world where no child is left behind and everyone feels welcome. Amen.

(By Marian Wright Edelman)

Affirming Our Commitment

Make copies of the "Affirming My Commitment to Create Change for Children Today, Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow" form below. Cut down the middle to make two forms per copy. As people arrive for the service, distribute the forms with the bulletin/program and a pencil (perhaps buy a box of short "golf pencils" which come pre-sharpened and are fairly inexpensive).

Following the "Call to Service" section of the Children's Sabbath, and perhaps preceded by a "charge to the congregation," invite participants to take a moment to reflect on their responses to the questions on the form, and then to write their response. You may have instrumental or other music playing while participants take time to reflect and write.

Resources for the Blessing

Bahá'í Blessing of the Children

Before the blessing of the children, you might invite the parents and other caregivers present to hold the hand or place a hand on the children with them as they receive this blessing:

O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handiwork of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, graciously assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity. O God! These children are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of Thy loving-kindness. Thou art the Bountiful, the All-Loving.

Charge and Blessing

Now let us go forth to create change in a world that knows injustice;

Let us go forth to create change for children, sacred gifts of the Divine;

Let us go forth to create change for children today, who don't get a second chance at childhood;

Let us go forth to bring hope to children and families that know despair;

Let us go forth to work for a better tomorrow, for all our sake.

May we go forth with the blessing of the Source of all love and justice. And let all people of compassion and commitment say, **Amen.**

Blessing

May the blessing of the divine whom we know by many names be with you and all whom you love; and with children who are loved and those who wait still to know our love. Amen.

**Affirming My Commitment to Create Change for Children Today,
Bring Hope and a Better Tomorrow**

Who are the children for whom you would like to work for change?

What kind of change do you seek to create?

What will you do today to take a first step in making that change?

What is your vision of the better tomorrow that you can help bring about?

**Affirming My Commitment to Create Change for Children Today,
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