

Welcome Letter from Marian Wright Edelman

[God] shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. (Micah 4:1-5)

Dear Faithful Friend of Children:

Welcome to the 22nd annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® celebration, "Beating Swords into Plowshares: Ending the Violence of Guns and Child Poverty." Your faithful preaching, teaching, service, and hard, urgent, and persistent work for justice are needed now more than ever to create a world in which children are safe from the pervasive violence of guns and poverty. It is way past time people of faith enjoined to protect the poor and to protect children, who are the poorest age group in America, to empower ourselves and others to build a powerful nonviolent direct action movement demanding physical and economic security for all our children and all of us.

The Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, where powerful assault weapons with deadly ammunition clips snuffed out the lives of 20 young children and six adults was, I hope, a tipping point for our violence-infected nation. So many lives gone so young and so many bullets that shattered them so quickly shocked and horrified us. But will this horrific concentrated violence against 6- and 7-year-olds in an affluent town galvanize us to act and stop our nation's destructive culture of violence that goes on and on with our complicity?



Sandy Hook was no fluke. In 2010, a child or teen was killed by guns every three hours and fifteen minutes—that's more than 21 lost lives every three days from gun homicides, suicides, and accidents. A child or youth was killed or injured by a gun every half hour. Between 1963 and 2010, an estimated 166,500 children and teens aged 0-19 lost their lives to gun violence—the equivalent of over 8,328 classrooms of 20 children, and an average of 3,470 deaths a year for 48 years or 174 classrooms of 20 children and teens every year. Of these deaths, 62 percent were among White children and youths and 36 percent were among Black children and youths; 52 percent were homicides, 29 percent were suicides, and 16 percent were accidental deaths.

These unreported and underreported young deaths reflect our citizens' and leaders' refusal to combat and end this massive relentless killer of Americans throughout our history. Over the past 48 years, gun violence within our nation has taken the lives of nearly 1.46 million men, women, and children of all ages—an average of more than 30,000 deaths a year. A little over one million (or 73 percent) of these deaths were among Whites and 26 percent were among Blacks; 52 percent were suicides, 41 percent were homicides, and 5 percent were accidental deaths.

This staggering civilian gun death toll in America is more than twice the loss of American life in battle in all the major wars in our history: the Revolutionary War (4,435); the War of 1812 (2,260); the Mexican War (1,733); the Civil War (214,938); World War I (53,402); World War II (291,557); the Korean War (33,739); the Vietnam War (47,434); the Persian Gulf War (148); the Iraq War (3,518); and the war in Afghanistan (1,720). When is it going to stop? When are we together going to act to stop it?

It's time to say enough! The tragic relentless taking of life by gun violence—that takes seven precious children or teens from us every day—will continue if you remain silent and do not act. The sacred texts, teachings, and traditions of our religious faiths call us not to harm others and point us to the way of nonviolence and the power of love and to protect the poor and vulnerable.

I hope and pray that this **22nd annual *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, October 18-20, will galvanize places of worship and people of faith across the religious spectrum and nation to unite in raising an irresistible moral and nonpartisan citizen voice demanding every one of our leaders protect children, teens, and adults from morally obscene gun violence and poverty.**

Many congregations will do this in their own place of worship during the customary time for prayers and worship, education, and gathering. Others will come together for multi-faith, community-wide Children's Sabbath celebrations. The Children's Sabbath resource manual is available for download from www.childrensdefense.org/childrenssabbaths and has all you need for planning.

Children's Sabbath is not only about prayers and worship, drawing on sacred texts, teachings, and traditions of our religious faiths to guide and strengthen, but it also calls us to action to build a world safe for children with urgency and persistence. It is about educating ourselves in places of worship or communities about the toll of guns and poverty on children's lives and what each of us can do to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Safe Start*, a *Fair Start*, and a *Moral Start* in life in our boastfully wealthy nation with a GDP of \$15 trillion.

In this 50th anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 45 years after Dr. King called for an end to hunger and poverty, it is time to cash America's promissory note for all of God's children. When Dr. King died in 1968 calling for a Poor People's Campaign there were 25 million poor Americans, including 11.5 million children. Today, there are 46 million poor Americans, including 16.1 million children, over seven million living in extreme poverty stalked by hunger and homelessness. It's time for people of faith to say, "No more!"

The Children's Sabbath resource manual has lesson plans for all ages and many traditions, as well as links to curricula and study guides prepared by a variety of religious organizations.

The Children's Sabbath is a time for ACTION. *Every* participating place of worship should plan service and advocacy efforts to make a real difference for children on the Children's Sabbath weekend and throughout the year to come. You will find many suggestions in the Action section of the Children's Sabbath manual, but I want to lift up one urgent call now. **I urge your place of worship to plan a "Turn In Guns and Turn Off Violence"** event by encouraging adults to turn in real guns (coordinating with local police officials) and inviting children, teens, and adults to turn in games, toys, movies, and music that glorify violence, bloodshed, and brutality. Your place of worship may decide to offer incentives in exchange such as books, grocery store gift certificates, or toys which celebrate cooperation and nonviolence. In addition to taking guns and violence-oriented items out of circulation and away from the hands of children who may be harmed by them, a "Turn In Guns and Turn Off Violence" event sends a clear moral message throughout your community about the values of nonviolence, peace, and love for which your place of worship and religious tradition stands.

In his 1959 *Sermon on Gandhi*, Dr. King wrote, "The way of acquiescence leads to moral and spiritual suicide. The way of violence leads to bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers. But, the way of non-violence leads to redemption and the creation of the beloved community." My hope and prayer is that through the 22nd *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, as we help our places of worship, communities, and nation turn away from guns and mount a mighty movement against economic injustice, learning the ways of nonviolent protest to empower our families and children with the means to stand up together for economic and physical security and safety, we will move one step closer to becoming the beloved community.

In faith and hope,



Marian Wright Edelman