

## A Letter from Marian Wright Edelman

Dear Faithful Friend of Children,

Welcome to the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths resource manual, *Precious in God's Sight: Answering the Call to Cherish and Protect Every Child*. You are joining many thousands of people of faith and places of worship across the religious spectrum who share concern for our nation's children and are united in faithful commitment to respond through prayer, education, hands-on service and persistent justice-seeking advocacy on the Children's Sabbath weekend and throughout the year to come.

This year the Children's Sabbath is focusing on assuring every child a Strong Start in life through quality nurturing early childhood development 0-8. Recently, some child advocates were discussing the prospects of passing legislation for major new investments in early childhood programs such as pre-kindergarten for every child and Early Head Start and Head Start for eligible children in low-income families.

The child advocates worried legislators would not support an investment that would not have an obvious and immediate "pay off" before the next election. Can we expect our elected officials to make decisions not for their own benefit and not for the short-term but for the benefit of our children — who do not vote, lobby, or make campaign contributions — and for the long run? It brings to mind this passage from Jewish teaching:



“While the sage Choni was walking along a road, he saw a man planting a carob tree. Choni asked him: ‘How long will it take for this tree to bear fruit?’ ‘Seventy years,’ replied the man. Choni then asked: ‘Are you so healthy a man that you expect to live that length of time and eat its fruit?’ The man answered: ‘I found a fruitful world because my ancestors planted it for me. Likewise, I am planting for my children.’”

All of us — our elected representatives included — need to take that faithful, long-term perspective that what we do is not just for our own, immediate benefit but is to plant for our children just as others planted before for us.

This excerpt, above, comes from a longer passage in which the sage wondered about Psalm 126's line that when God returns the captives to Zion, “they will be like those who dream.” Can one dream for 70 years, the sage Choni wondered? After the encounter on the road described above, the sage fell asleep for 70 years and awoke from his decades of dreaming to find the tree grown to fullness, bearing fruit for the generations that followed him.

Can one dream for 70 years or more? As the Children's Defense Fund, for more than 40 years we have been dreaming about *and working for* a day when every child has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Safe Start, a Fair Start, and a Moral Start in life with the help of strong families and caring communities. For more than fifty years we as a nation have dreamed about a day when our children will be judged by the content of their character and not the color of their skin. For more than 200 years, we as a nation have been dreaming of a time when we recognize that all of us are created equal and entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And I believe that since the beginning of humankind, God has been dreaming of the day that we will recognize ourselves and each other as made in the image and likeness of God. I believe God dreams of the day we will understand that each and *every* child is precious to God and finally cherish and protect every child.

We can begin to fulfill the dream by ensuring that all children have what they need to develop to their God-given potential through nurturing early childhood development at home through home visiting, quality child care and Head Start, and in universal pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. High quality early childhood development and learning opportunities effectively help get children ready for and to succeed in school and in life, and provide a substantial economic return to society. A safe, nurturing, stable and stimulating environment is crucial to ensuring that a child's brain develops appropriately during these earliest years of rapid brain development children who receive a high- quality early childhood experience are more likely to graduate from school, maintain a job, and contribute to society and they are less likely to be funneled into the prison pipeline. High quality early childhood programs have been shown to return at least 7 percent a year for every dollar invested, paying for themselves. Most importantly, investing in children is planting for the future. Fulfilling our moral responsibilities to the next generation is priceless.

In this Children's Sabbath resource manual, you will find all that you and your place of worship need to plan for the Children's Sabbath weekend and ways to build for continuing involvement in the year that follows. Whether you are planning a Children's Sabbath celebration for your own place of worship or joining with other places of worship for a community-wide, multi-faith celebration, you can make an important difference. Through your prayers, learning more and raising awareness, responding through hands-on service and speaking up for justice, you can respond to the truth that every single child is precious to God and answer the call to cherish and protect every child. I look forward to learning how your place of worship participates and seeks to move America forward to ensure every child a level playing field.

In faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marian Wright Edelman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marian Wright Edelman