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Hope for The Future: Answering God's Call to Justice for Our Children

By Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris

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Overview by Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner, inaugural CDF Proctor Book Club Curator:

Veteran child advocate and long-term Children's Defense Fund colleague, the Reverend Shannon Daley-Harris, in *Hope for the Future* has authored both a wise and thoughtful primer on the relationship of faith commitments to the vocation of child advocacy. It serves also as a kind of "spiritual survival kit" for practitioners of the art. Drawn from scriptural reflections delivered at annual women's spiritual retreats held at Haley Farm, each chapter will provide encouragement, inspiration and solace whether read in the context of a group book club or in the solitary reflections of those who pray and work for the well-being of all our children.

Delving deeply into scripture and then providing examples of historic and contemporary applications of scripture's lesson, Daley-Harris here offers a cool drink to slake the thirst of many child advocates, parents, pastors and teachers whose tireless efforts better the lives of children in diverse contexts across the nation. Child advocacy is often overlooked and undersold as a form of fidelity to scripture and the call of the Holy One to live lives of service, kindness, justice and peace. In this volume one cannot miss the depth of scriptural underpinnings in both Hebrew and Christian teachings compelling the faithful to enable children in the lives for which they were created.

Each chapter concludes with a number of questions for reflection that will provide a jumping off point for book clubs or a stimulus to thought for those reading the book as a part of personal meditation. A particularly appealing feature is that Daley-Harris includes questions that readers might wish to pose in conversation with the children and youth in their lives. This too is a pastoral gesture knowing that child advocates draw renewed strength from direct contact with the children that are so central to their own sense of vocation and calling. Taken as a whole this book will companion advocates of all kinds as they seek the faithful way on behalf of all God's children.

Discussion questions:

1. In this book Shannon Daley-Harris identifies three stages of the journey to becoming an ongoing advocate for justice for children. She refers to these as "Calling"—that first sense that faithfulness requires your involvement. "Challenging"—that is, sticking with the task when confronted by seemingly insuperable difficulties and "Sustaining"—that is, going the distance until justice is achieved. Individually or as a group trace your own path through these stages mapping out where you are right now and how you might find the resolve to move forward.
2. The examples given in the book include both stories of renown and powerful people who take a stand for justice and modest examples of everyday men, women and children who give of what little they have so others might prosper. Can you list aloud or in your prayer life various people of diverse means, ages, races and circumstances who have shown you an example of advocating for God's children?
3. In the concluding chapter, "Godspeed," Daley-Harris makes the point that time is of the essence of our work. Childhood itself is fleeting and a delay in educational, food, juvenile justice or child care programs is

likely to deprive a whole generation of children. How can you better express your “holy impatience” to indifferent lawmakers, administrators or others with the power to move with all deliberate speed? What ways can you, along with other child advocates, make clear the urgency of children’s needs? Are their examples you can think of in scripture or in the lives of those who have helped secure freedom and justice for others that were effective in demonstrating the “urgency of now”?

Discussion questions from the Rev. Dr. Rebecca L. Davis, Associate Professor of Christian Education, Union Presbyterian Seminary

1. Shannon Daley-Harris writes of stumbling blocks in Chapter 3. She links a personal story with a narrative of the exiled Israelites and shows us the connection to our own context and the ways in which we, unintentional though it may be, cause children to stumble. Thinking of children beyond the doors of comfortable congregations, what are some stumbling blocks that impede a child’s opportunity to grow into the fullness for which God created them? What are ways in which we can become cornerstones for children?
2. In Chapter Seven, Daley-Harris bring to our attention the story of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:20-39. She skillfully draws forth the phrase Paul utters in his rebuke of the empire who would hide their injustice and misdeed, “Certainly not!” a rallying refrain that reminds, grounds and ignites a belief in those gathered that injustice will not stand on their watch. It is reminiscent of Dolores Huerta’s rallying cry in the face of unjust practices aimed at farm workers, “Sí se puede!” What are the injustices related to children that you see in your own community and in the nation? In what ways can you live into a “Certainly Not!” and a “Yes, we can!” for children?
3. Continuing her pattern of linking scripture, story and the beckoning call of her narrative, Rev. Daley-Harris reminds us of the importance of persistence in Chapter Nine. The call to and the ministry of child advocacy puts us on a journey. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. quote, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice,” rings as true today as it did over 50 years ago. Our common expedition for justice is a mix of great joy, in even small steps forward, and deep frustration when systems resist the bend. Persistence, community, spiritual disciplines are as much a part of our advocate toolkits, and as necessary, as the ability to stand for children. In fact, they are often the generative source our justice ministries. What is the source of your call and ministry with and for children? Where do you find renewal? What practices deepen your commitment and sustain the arc of your journey?

Opportunities for Action:

The National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths is celebrated each October by congregations of many different religious traditions across the country. It is designated for the third weekend of each October (18-20, this year), but many places of worship select alternate dates if necessary. The weekend is intended to spur new and expanded long-term efforts to serve and seek justice with children and families who are impoverished or experiencing other injustice.

Review the Children’s Sabbath resources available at <https://www.childrensdefense.org/programs/faith-based/childrens-sabbath-celebration/>. If you are a member of a congregation, consider approaching the leadership about engaging with the Children’s Sabbath either in a quick and easy way this month (such as including a bulletin insert or prayer), planning a Children’s Sabbath for later this fall, or laying the groundwork to celebrate the Children’s Sabbath next October.