



Dear Faithful Friend of Children,

Welcome to the 30<sup>th</sup> annual National Observance of Children's Sabbaths. Thank you for planning to join in this nationwide, multi-faith observance to unite in common concern to advance child well-being with care, action, and advocacy living out the values of our faith traditions year-round.

The **National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is designated for the third weekend in October** (October 15-17, 2021). Places of worship select alternate dates as needed for their calendars. Many plan events leading up to the weekend. We hope all are taking action long after the weekend is over. This year's theme invites faith communities and leaders to turn their hearts and ears to our children.

## Where Does It Hurt? Listening to Heal Our Children

We stand at a vital moment of crisis and challenge for children and youth and our nation. The pandemic, now in its second year, has broken hearts and dashed dreams, cost families their homes, health, education, security, celebrations, rituals, and routines. The national reckoning with racism and white supremacy, over-policing, and police killing of unarmed Black and brown children, youth, and adults has been traumatic. An attempted insurrection and ongoing assault on democratic institutions adds to the pain. Each of these challenges has surfaced and exacerbated mental health challenges already going unmet.

How a child, youth, parent, or other adult has experienced the past year varied dramatically by age, family, location, and circumstance. The only way we will know what is true for our children hit hardest, is by asking "Where does it hurt?" then listening attentively. Only by asking where it hurts and listening deeply will we be guided by those who feel the pain to know how to help, how to promote healing, how to prevent further harm.

As you plan for your observance this year, please center this question with children and youth in your community.

## Thirty Years of Faithful Engagement

Thirty years ago, CDF launched the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths in partnership with hundreds of denominations, fellowships, faith communities, and religious organizations, recognizing the shared values of justice, compassion, and care for the most vulnerable among us are at the heart of every religious tradition. We knew countless people of faith also recognized that children, youths, and families were struggling to survive amid rising poverty, inequities in income and education, violence, and lack of health care. We sensed a hunger to connect the faith people held with the challenges children faced: for new ways to put faith into action in ways that would span the religious spectrum which might otherwise divide us. **In the first year more than 15,000 Children's Sabbath manuals were distributed** to congregations.

Through Children's Sabbaths, places of worship:

- focus services on the needs of children and the call of faith to respond;
- hold education programs for all ages to learn more about the needs of children, study religious teachings and texts that guide our response, and find ways to put learning into action;
- host activities to engage in outreach and advocacy to make a positive difference for children; and
- launch long-term efforts to serve, advocate, and organize for child well-being.



Most observances take place in individual places of worship, but in many communities, places of worship coordinate efforts, and in some communities a single multi-faith Children's Sabbath celebration is planned to which all may come.

## Resources to Support You

On CDF's website, [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org), you will find resources tied to the 2021 theme. These include:

- Christian Worship Resources and Lesson Plans;
- Jewish Resources including a Youth Group Program;
- A Multi-faith Children's Sabbath Service;
- Resources to plan key actions (Family Suppers Listening Session guide, Child Watch Guided Site Visitation Manual, and CDF Advocates' Book Club program resources);
- Bulletin and newsletter inserts;
- Seven Day Guide for Prayer and Reflection; and
- Video resources for adult education and intergenerational sessions.

In addition to these new resources tied to the theme and year, there are "general" Children's Sabbath resources always available to support your planning every year.

## A Common Hour of Celebration from The Riverside Church

For years, the people and leaders of the historic Riverside Church in New York City hosted CDF's President as the morning preacher on the weekend of the National Observance. In 2021, we are renewing that tradition and invite you to **join us virtually Sunday, October 17<sup>th</sup> at 10:45 a.m. Eastern.** Dr. Wilson will bring the message at the invitation of Senior Minister, Rev. Michael Livingston. If you cannot participate live because you are celebrating in your own places of worship, we encourage you to watch and share as a follow-up to the Children's Sabbath weekend. Streaming information will be available on the CDF and Riverside social platforms.

## Gratitude and Support

For years, the Rev. Dr. Shannon Daley-Harris has written, gathered, coordinated, and crafted supportive resources for Children's Sabbaths. This year's resources are also gifts from her hands for which we are grateful. As you plan your celebration, we are pleased to welcome full-time staff for faith community engagement to the CDF team. In June, Glen Vinson, Jr., joined the CDF team as National Organizer for Faith Communities. Glen previously served as Program Director for the Faith and Politics Institute and Associate Dean for Religious and Civic Engagement at Howard University. Feel free to reach him at [GVinson@childrensdefense.org](mailto:GVinson@childrensdefense.org) for support as you plan.

Again, thank you, your commitment to children and youth, to listening and healing, to joining in this National Observance of Children's Sabbaths and to taking action throughout the year to come. We look forward to learning what you plan, what you hear when you listen, and what you will do.

For our children,



Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson  
President and CEO



Marian Wright Edelman  
Founder and President Emerita