



WELCOME TO THE NATIONAL OBSERVANCE OF CHILDREN'S SABBATHS® CELEBRATION

Children are a gift from the Lord. They are a reward from God. The psalmist writes this verse as part of a song for people who are going up to Jerusalem to worship God. Psalm 127 is meant to be sung and what better melody than to sing about children. Children are indeed a gift. One way that we honor these precious gifts is to join in the 2024 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend. What songs – hymns, spirituals, a pizmonim or a nasheed, can be sung to bring about love, justice, wellness, healing, and joy for every child?

Whitney Houston fervently proclaimed, “I believe the children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way.” What a bold and radical statement; it is one that we should open ourselves to embrace and activate: let them lead the way. Let the children lead the way. In your prophetic imagination, can you envision what that would look like? The umbrella theme of The Children's Defense Fund's Children's Sabbath is “And a Little Child Shall Lead Them,” a verse lifted from Isaiah 11:6. It is a promise of peace and rest, wholeness, and flourishing.

It is also a foreshadowing that God's chosen one, the one who would come to subvert the establishment of the ruling power, would be a baby – a child – whose foray into the world begins in a makeshift house, a manger because Jesus and his parents were temporarily housing insecure. Houston goes on to say: Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be.

These lyrics are an invitation to us, that as we are led by the children and center their voices, that we as adults, might locate ourselves, our inner child in this work of the importance of freeing and giving voice to our own inner child so that we can experience love, justice, and healing, all while still augmenting children's futures. Imagine this experience through the lens of the tenderness of what it means to lean fully into uncomplicated joy.

In that spirit, we are excited to announce that The Children's Sabbath inspiration for 2024 is Unleashing Joy. This year's grounding passage is found in Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans that I have for you declares the Lord; plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a future with hope.” What better gift than joy as part of God's hope-filled future, right now, for these gifts that are our children.



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For over five decades, with your help, CDF has been advocating for these gifts that God has given us – children made in God's image. It is fitting that CDF has reimagined the annual gathering at the Alex Haley Farm as the Hall Proctor Conference, celebrating the memory, legacy and liberating ministry of civil rights activist and womanist theologian Rev. Dr. Prathia LauraAnn Hall, whose last public campaign as co-chair of the Black Church Initiative of CDF's Black Community Crusade for Children, reinforces the necessary theological work that we must do in child advocacy. Her legacy continues to bolster the work that we do. There are freedom songs to be sung, as together we sing about shaping a world where all of God's children will thrive and be revered as God's rewards.

This is what it means for children to unleash joy – a joy that is innately nestled in each smile, freckle, laugh, sad face, and longing. Think of unleashed joy as a beautiful panoramic kaleidoscope of colors and shapes that are an expression of the freedom to be authentically who God designed us to be. How might this joy be a balm to a weary world? Amid the noise of worry, inequities, and policies that compromise the well-being of our children, joy washes over us, refreshing us anew. Unleashing joy is such a liberating and beautiful practice for all of us because it is a reminder that we are made in the image of God. Even when worry comes to unseat joy, we can be assured that the joy is still there. In the children's book, *Isaiah and the Worry Pack* Isaiah is a child with the burden of so many things on his mind, to the point that it becomes worrisome for him. In the midst of it, he learns to discover joy through the imaginative expression that is so freeing and child-like when his mother helps him to unleash it...because unfettered joy was deep inside of him.



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Your participation in the multifaith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths weekend means that you are joining a chorus of diverse voices who are engaged in intercessory work on behalf of children across nationalities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, income levels, familial status, and race. You are joining in a commitment to unmute the voices of children – those who are in what may be considered traditional and non-traditional families, whether fostered, adopted, or orphaned – who have been marginalized; to work toward their liberation and transformation; to ensure that their real-lived experiences are anchored in health, wholeness, wellness, and access to a quality of life that helps them to thrive as God intends.

This approach to the Children's Sabbath is faith-rooted, trauma-informed, and grounded in womanist theology. A trauma-informed approach is an invitation to consider the psychosocial needs of individuals, groups, and systems. It challenges individuals, groups, and systems to embody values concerned with safety, freedom, wholeness, and wellness. We need this approach for the well-being of our children. In the Resources Section of this Children's Sabbath manual, you will find the Resist and Rise Model, a model that is rooted in womanism that integrates care, awareness, and healing while resisting triggers that cause further harm and oppression.



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The multifaith resources that have been curated and created to spark your imagination as you participate in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths while striving toward the well-being and welfare of children are an extension of Dr. Hall's legacy. "Through Freedom Faith, the belief that God wants people to be free and equips and empowers those who work for freedom, Dr. Hall's life's work proclaimed truth to power, mobilizing thousands to do the same."

Let us take our cues from the children as their voices lead us forward, mobilizing the multitude to ensure that every child is treated with dignity, respect, honor and seen as worthy of having access to every good thriving thing. Unleash the joy and join the chorus in singing this refrain from the hymnal: this joy that I have the world didn't give it to me and the world can't take it away.



We are called to build community so that young people grow up with dignity, hope, and joy. It's our job to create the conditions for unleashing the joy.



Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson

To dismantle the barriers that cause oppression and to liberate the oppressed from oppressive systems that hinder the flourishing and wellness of all God's children is part of our ecclesial response as people of faith. Womanist theology centers the voices of the oppressed toward the arc of liberation, transformation, and freedom. The gospel, as Dr. Prathia Hall, often noted, involves both the liberation of individuals and the redemption of systems so that all of God's people can be free.

