



Children's Sabbath

National Observance of Children's Sabbaths

Say that I Am a Child of God: Assuring Justice and Care to Leave no Child Behind

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. (Deuteronomy 6:5-7)

An ancient African proverb says that if you want to know the story—the state of a people—look into the eyes of their children. What are our children's eyes saying to us? What stories do their eyes tell? What stories are their eyes telling in our homes, congregations, and communities?

Our lives are so busy and complicated today that advocating for children has become yet another entry on a long list of issues that we as adults can choose to be involved in—or not. Furthermore, we have forced our young people to compete for our attention, love, and care by dividing them into categories—babies, toddlers, children, preteens, teenagers, youth. But children are not some issue that we can choose to involve ourselves in or not. Children are gifts to our community, and they are evidence of God's promise to always be with us.

God's words from Deuteronomy, above, give us clear instructions on how to shape the stories our children's eyes will tell. An annual Children's Sabbath can help us—parents, caregivers, faith community, all who love the Lord—set aside a time to take inventory, to celebrate, and to act on behalf of our children of all ages. Therefore, when this resource and those you can receive from the Children's Defense Fund refer to children, they are speaking of young people from infancy to age 18 unless a specific age or category (youth, teenagers) is given.

What is Children's Sabbath?

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is an intergenerational and interfaith event that unites thousands of religious congregations and organizations in speaking out and acting faithfully on behalf of children and families. The goal of Children's Sabbath is to generate new, long-term efforts that meet children's needs by raising awareness, serving children directly, and advocating on children's behalf.

The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is endorsed by more than 200 denominations, faith groups, and religious

organizations and is celebrated annually the third weekend in October.

Since its inception, the Children's Defense Fund has recognized the importance of the faith community's partnership in building a movement by developing resources for people of all ages and faiths to help them learn more about the urgent needs of children. Through worship services, educational opportunities, and advocacy activities, people of faith learn more about the serious problems facing children today and the responses needed to make a difference.

Why do we still need to observe Children's Sabbath?

Children are still the poorest citizens of both our nation and the world. The faith community must help transform our nation's priorities so that we collectively defend those who are youngest, weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable. Today, countless children are being left by the wayside. Many lack health care, face violence in their homes, schools, and communities, and are in a spiritual crisis. There is still much work to be done, and celebrating Children's Sabbath is one way to give voice to the movement.

Planning

Whether planning your first or seventh Children's Sabbath, planning in community to glean from the collective wisdom will yield the best program. Use this opportunity to work with the local interfaith community in planning, and invite the community to participate in your Children's Sabbath activities. It is through opportunities like these that we know all children belong to us and that no child is safe until all children are safe.

Begin your planning by gathering the pastor and representatives of groups in your congregation that are involved with children in your congregation and community (Sunday school and confirmation teachers, youth group leaders, parents, women's groups, men's groups, youth groups, social ministries committee). Also invite representatives from your congregation in general.

This group will be responsible for planning the Children's Sabbath worship service and other activities, as well as publicity.

Note: The Children's Defense Fund prepares a Children's Sabbath Multifaith Manual each year. It includes:

- Planning and promotion ideas
- Liturgical suggestions
- Sermon and homily help for people of all faiths
- A sourcebook for activities and resources for the Children's Sabbath and beyond

Also available is a seven-minute video featuring highlights from past events as well as interviews with a variety of religious leaders. The video serves to inspire communities of faith to participate in Children's Sabbaths and to strengthen their service and advocacy efforts for children.

To order a Children's Sabbath resource manual or video, visit the children's Defense Fund online catalog or print out the Sabbath Manual Order Form at www.childrensdefense.org. You can also call 202-662-3652 or write Children's Defense Fund, Attn: Religious Action Division, 25 E Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. Cost of the manual is \$7, plus \$5.50 handling per order.

Activity suggestions

Assist your youth group in hosting a youth summit or round-table discussion on issues of concern to the children in your community. Encourage them to invite their friends, classmates, and other youth groups. Use this as an opportunity to hear directly from children: what makes them feel afraid, what they need to feel safe, etc.

Designate an agency in your community that helps children (such as a day care, aftercare program, or family shelter) and in consultation with them determine an "in-kind offering" (tangible items) that your congregation can collect to support children at physical risk—diapers, books, school supplies, art and sport equipment, and so on. Don't guess or assume. Ask them what they actually need. Bring these items forward as part of the offering during worship.

Host an open house and forum for the community. Invite local officials (government, law enforcement, education, faith community). Also invite the agencies that will receive your in-kind gifts.

Actions beyond the Sabbath

The goal of Children's Sabbath is to move the participants to action. Gather a group of women to decide how your group will continue working on behalf of children.

Sign up to receive news briefs and the Child Care Advocacy Newsletter from the Children's Defense Fund. It will assist you in staying current with legislation affecting your advocacy efforts and the livelihood of children.

Continue providing support on a regular basis to the agencies that received in-kind gifts during your Children's Sabbath.

Assist the children of your congregation and community in getting involved in servant events and service projects.



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