

Children's Defense Fund

Children's Sabbaths Manual 2023

"Each child belongs to all of us and they will bring us a tomorrow in direct relation to the responsibility we have shown to them."—Maya Angelou

I. Table of Contents

Children's Sabbaths Welcome

All of our children belong to all of us, because that's what kinship does. It's a reminder of that dust we came from and of that dust we will return to. It's a reminder that while we are here, we make room for the next generation to spring up from the soil and create a new landscape.

So our Native children lead us. Our children of color lead us. Our daughters lead us. Our queer and nonbinary children lead us. Our disabled children lead us. The ones that are forgotten lead us. The ones that are told to be quiet at the dinner table lead us, and if we are smart, we will let them lead. And if we are smart, we will see that we all return to Mystery, to Kche Mnedo, and we are simply to learn what we can along the way, to embody humility, to stand up to bullies and show them the way to love and peace.
—Kaitlin Curtice¹

II. Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration

*Children are a gift from the Lord. They are a reward from God.*² The psalmist writes this verse as part of a song for people who are going up to Jerusalem to worship God.

¹ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 176-177

² Psalm 127:3

Psalm 127 is meant to be sung, and what better melody to sing than about children. Children are indeed a gift. One way that we honor these precious gifts is to join in the 2023 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?

Perhaps it is a line from the iconic songstress Whitney Houston who 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 Children's Defense Fund's Children's Sabbaths is, "*And a Little Child Shall Lead Them,*" lifted from the verse, 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 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.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of Children's Defense Fund. For five decades, with your help, we have been advocating for these gifts that God has given us—young people made in God's image. It is fitting that the anniversary theme is *Freedom Faith at 50*, celebrating the memory 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 and youth 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 God's children will thrive and be revered as God's rewards.

Your participation in the multi-faith *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 and youth across nationalities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, gender identities, income levels, familial status, and race. You are joining in a commitment to unmute the voices of young people—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 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 Sabbaths is faith rooted in trauma-informed and 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 Sabbaths 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.³

To dismantle the barriers that cause oppression and to liberate the oppressed from oppressive systems that hinder 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 God's people can be free.⁴

The multi-faith resources that have been curated and created to spark your imagination as you participate in *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."⁵

Let us take our cues from the children and youth as their voices lead us forward, mobilizing the multitude to ensure that every young person is treated with dignity, respect, honor, and seen as worthy of having access to every good thriving thing.

III. Centering Children's Voices

Children often are told to express themselves with an inside voice when adults want to quiet down their outbursts and enthusiasm. However, we should not stifle the imaginative spirit of their outside voices. We want children to experience the freedom of being heard. Whether it is the repetition of words and chants that become future freedom songs, or reciting poetry that becomes psalms that become songs, on Children's Sabbaths especially, they deserve to lift and amplify their outside voices. Let them take center stage and lead. Let them remind us how it used to be when we were younger. We invite you to listen and hear, *really hear*, the voices of children as you

³ Thema Bryant-Davis, Bemí Fasalojo, Ana Arounian, Kirsten L. Jackson & Egypt Leithman (2021) *Resist and Rise: A Trauma-Informed Womanist Model for Group Therapy, Women & Therapy*, DOI: 10.1080/02703149.2021.1943114

⁴ Courtney Pace. *Freedom Faith: The Womanist Vision of Prathia Hall*. (University of Georgia Press: Athens), 2019, 1.

⁵ Pace, 5.

ground yourself in this important opportunity for ministry. Hear now the voices of some of God's precious gifts.

We welcome the voices of children and youth, and we welcome the voices of our inner child, asking the children and ourselves:

1. Who is God?
2. What feels fun at school?
3. What is hard about school?
4. What makes you feel happy at school?
5. What does joy taste like?
6. What's your favorite book or character?
7. What makes you laugh?⁶

Children's Sabbaths Story

"Our children cannot dream unless they love, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours? 'If you want us to change the world someday, we at least have to live long enough to grow up!' shouts the child." Audre Lorde⁷

IV. What is Children's Sabbaths?

Children's Sabbaths is a weekend that unites places of worship and all faiths across the nation in shared concern and action for children and youth, and common commitment to improving children's lives and working for liberating justice with and on their behalf. This weekend is the multitudes intentionally working together in their respective communities to center the voices, needs, and concerns of children, and to advocate for them to live a life of health, wholeness, and access to resources that enables them to thrive.

On Children's Sabbaths, places of worship have a strong sense that they are participating in a larger movement for children that includes and also extends beyond their physical location. Some places of worship curate worship experiences, educational sessions, and activities for their congregations where children and youth are leading the way or where there is intentionality in amplifying the voices of children. Others join with

⁶ This question is inspired by the character Baby Suggs in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. In *the Clearing*, the character Baby Suggs preaches a trauma-informed sermon that gifts a community of formerly enslaved folks a moment of freedom, creative expression, passion, and love. Inviting the men to dance, mothers to cry, and children to laugh. Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved* (p. 168). Knopf.; In Whitney Houston's 1986 remake of *The Greatest Love of All*, written by Michael Masser and Linda Creed, Houston sings, "I believe the children are our future/ Teach them well and let them lead the way/ Show them all the beauty they possess inside/Give them a sense of pride to make it easier/Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be." Houston, W. (1986, March 18). *The Greatest Love of All* (0:39). Michael Masser.

⁷ Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. *Poetry is not a luxury*. 1984. Crossing Press, 2007, p. 38.

one or more places of worship in shared services and activities or work collaboratively to curate a public multi-faith service. Often, local organizations serving children or working on their behalf join in curating these community-wide multi-faith Children's Sabbaths.

A Children's Sabbaths weekend typically has four elements:

- 1) A service of worship or prayers during which the divine mandate to listen to, follow, nurture, and protect children calls us to act with an ecclesial urgency in responding to the needs of children today
- 2) Educational programs, during which inter-generational people learn more about the needs of children today and the sociopolitical structures that hinder flourishing and keep children in need; explore the depth of the sacred texts, liberative teachings, and traditions that lead us to serve and seek justice for children; and develop specific, justice-oriented active responses to help children
- 3) Activities that immediately engage participants in compassionate service to help and advocate for children and with action to seek justice (such as engaging, challenging, and writing letters to elected officials)
- 4) Post Sabbath weekend follow-up actions that use the inspiration, information, resources, revival, and motivation of Children's Sabbaths weekend to lead members and places of worship into new, thoughtful, impactful and effective efforts to improve the lives of children in the congregation, community, and nation throughout the year.

Children's Sabbaths is sponsored by Children's Defense Fund, honors a multi-faith lens, and is endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations.

Celebrating 50 years in 2023, Children's Defense Fund envisions a nation where marginalized children flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being, and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive. The only national, multi-issue advocacy organization working at the intersection of child well-being and racial justice, CDF advances the well-being of America's most diverse generation, the 74 million children and youth under the age of 18 and 30 million young adults under the age of 25. CDF's grassroots movements in marginalized communities build power for child-centered public policy, informed by racial equity and the lived experience of children and youth.

From its inception, CDF has recognized the importance of the faith community's partnership in building a movement to unleash the joy in growing up. A nation that lets its children be the poorest citizens has, at its heart, a spiritual and ethical crisis. Thus, the religious community has an ecclesial responsibility to help transform our nation's

priorities so that we defend and protect those who are the youngest, poorest, and most vulnerable. For many years, CDF has worked to support denominations and religious organizations as they develop and maintain child and youth advocacy campaigns.

The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* celebration was launched in 1992 to coalesce these efforts into a united moral witness for children that crosses all lines of geography, faith tradition, race, and ethnicity. Children's Sabbaths observance honors a multi-faith lens and is endorsed by more than 200 denominations, faith groups and communities, and religious organizations. If you are interested in having your organization become an official endorser of the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* movement, please email LDO@childrensdefense.org.

**Children's Sabbaths is a robust mix of joy and sorrow,
celebration and sober commitment.**

To be sure, a Children's Sabbaths exudes the happiness of a wonderful celebration. Children find enthusiasm in their roles of the day and are more conscious of the gift that they are—God's reward. In the midst of the children- and youth-centered celebrations and expressions, we encourage families to hug children a little tighter and speak words of affirmation. The celebration is also a time where eye-catching balloons and visual decor may adorn buildings and children's expressive creations of art, poetry, and recordings may brighten hallways. The attention to celebrating and centering young people does not end there. The time might also include child-friendly snacks as a replacement of the usual after-service fare. It is a day that children, youth, and families look forward to, and those without children at their side can also appreciate the extra energy and excitement that brings memories of child-like joy.

While it is a time of celebration, Children's Sabbaths is also sobering. The carefully curated worship services and activities deepen our understanding of the terrible plight facing millions of children in our country and the injustices that some faith spaces have left unchallenged.

**Part of the work is acknowledging that we have not consistently responded
faithfully and lovingly to the cries of the children in our communities.**

It is painful and disheartening to think about children who are hungry or homeless, without access to health care, who are abused or neglected, victims of community, gun, and gang violence, targets of policies that challenge their identity, suffering from mental health issues, without good quality childcare, or denied a place in Head Start and other supportive formation programs. Children's Sabbaths can be an eye-opening experience. It can expose the myriad of injustices that children face daily. And done properly, Children's Sabbaths will do more than open eyes to the problems facing young people

— it also will lift up new ways to support and advocate for children, youth, and families. It will inspire and motivate people to respond purposely with intentionality and get involved.

Children's Sabbaths is an annual event.

The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is designated for the third weekend of October. However, if that weekend does not work for your place of worship, choose another weekend that does.

Children's Sabbaths is flexible.

We encourage you to be committed and intentional in creating a weekend that amplifies the voices, needs, concerns and lived experiences of children.

For places of worship participating for the first time, you can ease into this moment without feeling overwhelmed or unready. We have curated and created plenty of resources for you to use or modify. For those who are “repeat participants,” and anticipating building on what you’ve done in past years, this is a moment for you to be even more creative and intentional in your observance. What is most important is that you shine a light on the issues affecting young people and that you create intentional space and time to center the voices, needs, and concerns of the children and youth in your worshiping community and wider community.

Because Children's Sabbaths takes place each fall, children look forward to it annually. You have an incredible opportunity to create an experience that centers their voices in the places and communities where they worship. This is your moment to work collaboratively as a community that cares about children and is committed to nurturing and protecting them.

Children's Sabbaths is Trauma-Informed.

A trauma-informed approach is an invitation to consider the psychosocial needs of individuals, groups, and systems; inviting and challenging individuals, groups, and systems to embody values concerned with safety, freedom, wholeness, and wellness. The process of implementing trauma-informed practices and care is recommended to occur with intentionality. Implementing trauma-informed practices and care should not be conducted in haste but with an intentional pace and informed practice.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) indicates a framework for exercising a trauma-informed approach across six elements⁸:

⁸ <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf>

1. Safety
2. Trustworthiness and Transparency
3. Peer Support
4. Collaboration and mutuality
5. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice
6. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues

Re-Imagining a Trauma-Informed Approach: A Trauma-Informed Womanist Model

Resist and Rise Model

At Pepperdine University, Thema Bryant-Davis, Bemí Fasalojo, Ana Arounian, Kirsten L. Jackson, and Egypt Leithman⁹ advance a model rooted in the emergence of womanist psychology by centering the voices, lived experiences, wisdom, and historically subjugated knowledge of Black women and Black women's children. The researchers acknowledge the traditions of a trauma-informed approach ineffectually regarding the distinctiveness of Black women's trauma, and ineptly identifying models of care absent of cultural differences; effectively and adversely creating more trauma cycles without care models. As you imagine and design Children's Sabbaths, do so with this lens in mind. *Whose voice is missing? Who are you freeing? Who are you centering? Who are you leaving behind?*

Developed Trauma-Informed Content

Trauma-informed content includes developing written or visual content that encourages pathways to wellness, wholeness, and freedom. This is content that thoughtfully acknowledges the complexities of the human experience and responsibly integrates care and awareness of trauma in content models, expecting to provide content that heals, and resists activating triggers or furthering trauma.

A Womanist Ethic

Womanist is a term coined by Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Alice Walker in her 1983 seminal work, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Within the four-part definition, womanist is from the Black cultural vernacular "acting womanish," an expression often used by Black mothers to refer to Black girls who were acting audacious or courageous. It is also a term that is committed to survival, liberation, and wholeness of an entire people, including children.

In a theological framing, womanism seeks to liberate those who are oppressed, ask whose voice is missing, unmute the voices of those who have been silenced, and dismantle the walls of patriarchy that hinder all God's people from flourishing. Womanism intentionally amplifies the voices and experiences of those who have been cast to the margins of society and asks what needs to be changed so that everyone has equitable and healthy experiences. When the needs of young people have not been met - whether it is due to insufficient policies and systems or a disregard for their humanity -

⁹ Thema Bryant-Davis, Bemí Fasalojo, Ana Arounian, Kirsten L. Jackson & Egypt Leithman (2021) Resist and Rise: A Trauma-Informed Womanist Model for Group Therapy, *Women & Therapy*, DOI: 10.1080/02703149.2021.1943114

their experiences must be amplified so that the work toward flourishing, thriving, and wholeness can begin.

Pioneering womanist scholar and theologian Katie Geneva Cannon says that “womanism requires that we stress the urgency of the African American women's movement from death to life,¹⁰” and to look back at the errors that have traumatized the most vulnerable in our communities (including children), study those outcomes and do the analysis so that these traumatic experiences are not repeated.

With great care and in a spirit of freedom, we have designed Children's Sabbaths in a trauma-informed way with a womanist lens, and have provided resources for your faith community to do the same.

VII. [Transform Network Letter](#)



We at Transform Network bring you greetings in the universal language of love, wholeness, and healing. As co-creators and co-curators of this year's Children's Sabbaths Manual, we honor the chorus of multi-faith communities who will be inspired by this trauma-informed and womanist work, and committed to amplifying their voices for the sake of children.

As you prepare to engage in this life-giving ministry of transforming the lives of children and youth toward flourishing and thriving, in whatever your faith custom, we invite you to focus on your breath, ground yourselves, and offer up a greeting in this beloved community. You are not doing this alone. In the spirit of Ubuntu, a West African philosophy of interdependence that says *I am because we are*, we are in this together. There is no being without we-ing. We cannot do this work alone. The energy, strength, wisdom, and fortitude that we need to persevere and endure is found in partnerships and in community. Sometimes the simplest way to forge a partnership is to begin with greeting a person in a way that is respectful of their culture.

In the Hindu gesture of *namaste*, where you bring your palms together toward your face, in an almost prayer-like fashion, you are making an offering or an invitation. In the Zulu

¹⁰ Katie Geneva Cannon. *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community*. (New York: Continuum, 1995), 3

custom, people in the villages greet each other with *sawubona*, which means *I/we see you*. The person receives this greeting and responds with *sikhona*, an acknowledgement that *We are/I am seen*. At the heart of this is the understanding that we are part of a shared humanity.

As [Pamela Ayo Yetunde](#), an author and pastoral counselor, notes, the language in our greetings embodies and invokes a sense of interdependence and interconnectedness. She says this about the Zimbabwean greeting: “The traditional salutation in the Shona language is *Mhoro, wakaadii* (“Hello, how are you?”) and *Ndapora kana wapora* (“I am well if you are well”). It is a salutation, which means, in essence, that their state of being was conditioned by my state of being.”¹¹ Imagine if we took this posture with one another in our communities, with our neighbors, our children. To say that we are well only if the children and youth are well is profound and perhaps is the impetus that moves us to activate advocacy, with and on their behalf.

In religious communities, there are customs and greetings that similarly acknowledge our interdependence on God. Whether it is the Baha’i faith of *Alláh-u-Abhá* (*God is the most glorious*) or the Jewish greeting of *Baruch Hashem* (*Blessed be G-d*), these greetings are a way of entering into community with one another for the work that is ahead. Greetings open a door to healing. Greetings begin the work of dismantling barriers and injustices. Greetings are a portal to bringing about change, reform, and restorative justice. Have you ever watched a child on the playground run up to another child and offer a greeting that is then followed by playing together and building community?

Children are the beacons and beneficiaries of our communities and villages. When our children are in need or hurting, they depend on us as former children to listen to them, to stand in the gap and intercede for them, to be advocates for them, to administer wisdom and wellness to their wounds, to resource their needs, and to use our voices for their well-being. This is how you approach this work through a trauma-informed and womanist lens.

So many children today are bullied and traumatized by policies, systems, and behaviors, by people who don’t see the value, dignity and worth of children. It is troubling when young people don’t feel seen or heard, especially in our places of worship. Let us not be negligent in our responsibility to care for children in our communities. Let us remember ourselves as children, and rise in wellness, together, with and for our children.

¹¹ PAMELA AYO YETUNDE, REHENA HARILALL, NOBANTU MPOTULO, DAVID W. ROBINSON-MORRIS AND YAO OBIORA DIBIA. “Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are” in *Lion’s Roar*, January 3, 2022.

Peace, blessings, wellness, and love,



Ash Love
Transform Network



Rev. Vahisha Hasan



Rev. Dr. Yvette R. Blair-Lavallais

Since our founding in 2009, Transform Network extends the invitation to love God, love your neighbor, and take collective action. We activate these values by resourcing and training individuals and communities of faith to join God in transformative impact and social justice.

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Children's Sabbaths History

So we talked about bullying in schools, on the playground, at the park, at church, in our communities. We reminded our children that the way of loving people is never to force them. We talked about consent, about what it means to honor women, and why it's important to sit with the people that no one else pays attention to. We talked about our capacity as people to bully the earth as well.

We found that when we gave our children a little information, they knew exactly what to do. They took our words to school in how they interacted with their friends and teachers. They took our words to the market where we buy groceries from refugees who work for far too little money and are asking to be valued for who they are, not just for the work they do. They took our words to church as they watch women lead. And they had dreams. –Kaitlin Curtice¹²

VIII. Previous Children's Sabbaths Celebrated

Previous Children's Sabbaths Celebrated

A. Previous Celebration:

a. The Riverside Church Children's Sabbaths 2016

- i. TFN Team recommendation for CDF Communications Team: Break up into separate videos highlighting beautiful ways of having a Children Sabbath service. This service can provide a blueprint of what is possible for full integration of Children's Sabbaths.

¹² Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 177

1. Call to Worship, Reading, and Prayer: Pastor Adriene Thorne
 - a. min 35 to min 36:50
2. Prayer of Confession: Rev. Bruce Lamb
 - a. min 40:26 to 42:06
3. Anthems: Sung by children and youth choirs
 - a. min 42:12 to 48:05
4. Message For All Ages: Pastor Adriene Thorne
 - a. min 48:59 to min 56:15
5. Hebrew Scripture Lesson: Emi Hare-Yim, youth
 - a. min 56:45 to min 58:15
6. Gospel Lesson: Elias Huang, child
 - a. min 1:00:55 to min 1:02:22
7. Sermon - Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson
 - a. 1:05:15 to min 1:31:47
8. Hear Your Children's Prayer Responsive Reading and Intercessory Prayer: Pastor Adriene Thorne
 - a. min 1:33:30 to min 1:38:36
9. Prayer of Thanksgiving and Dedication: Rev Nyle Fort
 - a. min 1:53:08 to min 1:53:59
10. Benediction: Pastor Adriene Thorne and Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson
 - a. min 1:57:02 to min 1:59:37
11. Sermon Talk Back: Pastor Adriene Thorne and Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson
 - a. min 2:11:42 to min 2:39:16

Children's Sabbaths Futures

They need to see that we are human.

They need to hear our stories of grief and pain, our stories of celebration and our stories of loss. We need to name some of our mistakes for them. We need to tell the truth about the systems that we work with and against.

Our children will take these stories with them, and they will remember that it is important to listen to the land. They will remember that it is important to pay attention to mistakes and listen to their own souls. They will remember our stories, and our stories will shape them.

Our own vulnerability with the truth will teach them to be vulnerable with the truth, and with that, they will lead us all. –Kaitlin Curtice¹³

¹³ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 174

IV. Planning Children's Sabbaths: Ideas for All Faiths

TFN Team idea/plan was CDF Communications team to record videos of people in parenthesis reading/reciting these sacred texts from their tradition.

Sacred Texts on Love and Justice for Children

(from Shannon Daley-Harris' Hope for the Future)

Following are four excerpts from sacred texts of different religious traditions. There are, of course, many more passages from sacred texts as well as teachings and practices from each tradition related to poverty, love, justice, children, faith, and action. What inspires, guides or sustains you from your tradition? What resonates with you from another tradition?

The Bahá'í Faith (Binta Barringer, Charlotte, NC)

O children of dust! Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian No. 49*)

O ye rich ones on earth! The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease. (*Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian No. 54*)

Be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity. Be worthy of the trust of thy neighbor, and look upon him with a bright and friendly face. Be a treasure to the poor, an admonisher to the rich, an answerer of the cry of the needy, a preserver of the sanctity of thy pledge. Be fair in thy judgment, and guarded in thy speech. Be unjust to no man, and show all meekness to all men. Be as a lamp unto them that walk in darkness, a joy to the sorrowful, a sea for the thirsty, a haven for the distressed, an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression. Let integrity and uprightness distinguish all thine acts. Be a home for the stranger, a balm to the suffering, a tower of strength for the fugitive. Be eyes to the blind, and a guiding light unto the feet of the erring. (*Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 285*)

God has created all, and all return to God. Therefore, love humanity with all your heart and soul. If you meet a poor man, assist him; if you see the sick, heal him; reassure the

affrighted one, render the cowardly noble and courageous, educate the ignorant, associate with the stranger. (*Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 290*)

Buddhism (Jamila, Charlotte, NC)

If beings knew, as I know, the fruit of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart and stay there. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it. (*Itivuttaka 18*)

Better than a hundred years lived in idleness and in weakness is a single day lived with courage and powerful striving. (*The Dhammapada, 112*)

Whatever living beings there may be—feeble or strong, small or large, seen or unseen, those who live far or those near, those who are born and those who are yet to be born—may all beings, without exception, experience a happy mind. Let one not deceive another nor despise any person whatsoever in any place. In anger or ill will let one not wish any harm to another. Let one's thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world without any obstruction, without any hatred, without any enmity. (*Samyutta Nikaya, The Buddha Speaks*)

It is in this way that we must train ourselves: by liberation of the self through love. We will develop love, we will practice it, we will make it both a way and a basis, take our stand upon it, store it up, and thoroughly set it going. (*Samyutta Nikaya, The Buddha Speaks*)

Multi-faith Discussion Outline for Children's Sabbaths

Christianity

Then someone came to him and said, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said to him, 'Which ones?'

And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'I have kept all these; what do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. (*Matthew 19:16-22*)

When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.

He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them,
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (*Luke 4:16-21*)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food,

I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ (*Matthew 25:31-40*)

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

“But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets. (*Luke 6:20-26*)

Hinduism

Ajyesthaso akanishthaso ete sambhrataro vahaduhu saubhagaya
No one is superior, none inferior. All are brothers marching forward to prosperity.
(*Ancient Hindu hymn*)

The husband and wife of the house should not turn away any who comes at eating time and asks for food.

If food is not available, a place to rest, water for refreshing one's self, a reed mat to lay one's self on, and pleasing words entertaining the guest — these at least never fail in the houses of the good. (*Apastamba Dharmasutra 8.2*)

A householder must give (as much food) as he is able (to spare) to those who do not cook for themselves, and to all beings one must distribute (food) without detriment (to one's own interest). (*Manu Smriti 4.32*)

In the kingdom of God there is no premature death or suffering, everyone is healthy and beautiful. No one lives in poverty and want; no one is without learning or virtue. (*The Ramayana*)

Islam (Khalid Raheem, Pittsburgh, PA)

And they feed, for the love of God, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive. (*Qur'an 76:8*)

“The creatures of God (i.e., humans) are the children (i.e., liability and responsibility) of God, and the most beloved to God are those who show kind and excellent treatment to His children.” (*Qur'an 60:8*)

Goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God. (*Qur'an S. 2:177, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem translation*)

They ask thee what they should spend (In charity.) Say: Whatever wealth Ye spend that is good, Is for parents and kindred and orphans and those in want and for wayfarers and whatever ye do that is good, Allah knoweth it well. (*Qur'an S. 2, 215, IFTA translation*)

Judaism (Sam Teitel, Memphis, TN)

Thus said the Eternal: A cry is heard in Ramah, wailing, bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, who are gone.

Thus said the Eternal: Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; for there is reward in your labor — declares the Eternal. They shall return from the enemy's land, and there is hope for your future — declares the Eternal, and your children shall return to their country. (*Jeremiah 31:15-17*)

Defend the poor and the orphan; do justice to the afflicted and needy. (*Midrash Tehillim 82:3*)

You shall not subvert the rights of the stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I enjoin you to observe this commandment...when you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. (*Deuteronomy 24:17-18, 21*)

Although the giving of charity is a sacred obligation, the ultimate aim of tzedakah is to abolish poverty and to enable the poor to help themselves. (*Talmud, Shabbat 63*)

Sikhism

To do good deeds is the best rosary.

Chant on the beads within your heart, and it shall go along with you.

Chant the Name of the Lord, Har, Har, the Lord of the forest.

Have mercy on me, Lord, and unite me with the Sat Sangat, the True Congregation, so that I may be released from Maya's noose of death.

Whoever, as Gurmukh, serves and works hard,

Is molded and shaped in the true mint of the Shabad, the Word of God.

The Guru has revealed to me the Inaccessible and Unfathomable Lord.

Searching within the body-village, I have found the Lord.

I am just a child; the Lord is my Father, who nurtures and cherishes me.

Please save servant Nanak, Lord; bless him with Your Glance of Grace.

(SGGS, Ang 1134 Raag Bhaira-o Guru Ram Das)

One Universal Creator God. By The Grace Of The True Guru:

No one should be proud of his social class and status.

He alone is a Brahmin, who knows God.

Do not be proud of your social class and status, you ignorant fool!

So much sin and corruption comes from this pride.

Everyone says that there are four castes, four social classes.

They all emanate from the drop of God's Seed

The entire universe is made of the same clay.

The Potter has shaped it into all sorts of vessels.

The five elements join together, to make up the form of the human body.

Who can say which is less, and which is more?

Says Nanak, this soul is bound by its actions.

Without meeting the True Guru, it is not liberated. *(SGGS, Ang 1127-1128 Raag Bhaira-o Guru Amar Das)*

As the king is entangled in kingly affairs, and the egotist in his own egotism,
And the greedy man is enticed by greed, so is the spiritually enlightened being
absorbed in the Love of the Lord.

This is what befits the Lord's servant.

Beholding the Lord near at hand, he serves the True Guru, and he is satisfied through
the Kirtan of the Lord's Praises.

The addict is addicted to his drug, and the landlord is in love with his land.

As the baby is attached to his milk, so the Saint is in love with God.

The scholar is absorbed in scholarship, and the eyes are happy to see.

As the tongue savors the tastes, so does the humble servant of the Lord sing the
Glorious Praises of the Lord.

As is the hunger, so is the fulfiller; He is the Lord and Master of all hearts.
Nanak thirsts for the Blessed Vision of the Lord's Darshan; he has met God, the
Inner-knower, the Searcher of hearts. (SSGS, Ang 613)
Those who remember God generously help others. (SGGS)

Native American Prayers

Great Spirit Prayer

Oh, Great Spirit, whose voice I hear in the wind,
Whose breath gives life to all the world.
Hear me; I need your strength and wisdom.
Let me walk in beauty, and make my eyes ever
behold the red and purple sunset.
Make my hands respect the things you have
made and my ears sharp to hear your voice.
Make me wise so that I may understand
the things you have taught my people.

Help me to remain calm and strong in
the face of all that comes towards me.
Let me learn the lessons you have hidden
in every leaf and rock.

Help me seek pure thoughts and act
with the intention of helping others.
Help me find compassion without
empathy overwhelming me.

I seek strength, not to be greater than my brother,
but to fight my greatest enemy, Myself.
Make me always ready to come to you
with clean hands and straight eyes.

So when life fades, as the fading sunset,
my spirit may come to you without shame.

Prayer for Wisdom

O Great spirits of Ancestors
I raise my pipe to you;
To you messengers in the four winds,
and to Mother Earth
who provides your children,
Give us the wisdom to teach our children to love,
To respect and to be kind to one another
So that we may grow with peace in mind.
Let us learn to share all good things
That you provide us on this Earth.

Thus I pause in this unending prayer, ending as was begun, with undying gratitude for everything You have given and for all that You have done.

Mother Earth Prayer

Mother Earth, hear your child. As I sit here on your lap of grass, I listen to the echoes of your voice in my brother, the Wind, as he blows from all corners and directions.
The soft and gentle raindrops are the tears you cry for your children.

Teach me the Lessons you offer: To nurture my children, as you nurture yours,
To learn the Lessons of the Four Kingdoms, that make up this World of Physical Things,
and To Learn to Walk the Path chosen so long ago.

Mother Earth, hear your child,
Be a bond between the Worlds of Earth and Spirit.
Let the Winds echo the Knowledge of the Grandfathers.

Who await, unseen, yet visible if I only turn my eyes to their World.
Let me hear their Voices, in the Winds that Blow to the East.

From the East: I seek the Lessons of Childhood: To see with the trusting innocence of a small one, the Lessons of Spirit, given in love by our Creator.

From the South: to Learn the Ways of Questioning: the fire and independence of adolescence, the Truths, and how they help us grow along this path.

From the West: where the Grandfathers teach us acceptance of responsibility that come during the years of marriage and family.

That my own children grow strong, and true.

From the North: where the Elders, who by their long lives have learned and stored wisdom and knowledge. And learned to walk in balance and harmony with our Mother, the Earth.

Mother Earth, hear your child. Hold my hand as I walk my path in this world. Guide me to the Lessons I seek, bring me closer to Our Creator, until I return to the Western Direction, to once again enter the World of Spirit, where the Sacred Fire awaits, and I rejoin the Council of the Elders, in the presence of the One Who-Created-All.

— Kiiskeen'tum- She Who Remembers

Cheyenne Prayer for Peace

Let us know peace.
For as long as the moon shall rise,
For as long as the rivers shall flow,
For as long as the sun shall shine,
For as long as the grass shall grow,
Let us know peace.

Mohawk Prayer

Oh Great Spirit, Creator of all things;
Human Beings, trees, grass, berries.
Help us, be kind to us.
Let us be happy on earth.
Let us lead our children
To a good life and old age.
These our people; give them good minds
To love one another.
Oh Great Spirit,
Be kind to us
Give these people the favor

To see green trees,
Green grass, flowers, and berries
This next spring;
So we all meet again
Oh Great Spirit,
We ask of you.

Sioux Prayer

Fill us with the Light.
Give us the strength to understand, and the eyes to see.
Teach us to walk the soft Earth as relatives to all that live.

Ancient Indian Proverb

You have noticed that everything an Indian does in a circle,
and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles,
and everything and everything tries to be round.

In the old days all our power came to us from the sacred hoop
of the nation and so long as the hoop was unbroken the people
flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop,
and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace
and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain and the north
with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance. This
knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion.

Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle.
The sky is round and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball
and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls.
Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours.
The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon

does the same and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were.

The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.

- *Black Elk, Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux 1863-1950*

Children's Sabbaths Faith Expression

We believe that children are close to God, because their lives are still fresh from birth; God speaks through our children, so we listen. They have visions of a better world, and they create that world day by day. –Kaitlin Curtice¹⁴

XI. Taking Our Cues from the children

A. [Psalms in the Key of Children](#)

Psalm Templates for Children and Youth

Goal: Invite children and youth to express the psalms through their life lens and how they experience the world

Psalm 1

The Way to Happiness

1 God blesses people who _____
And blesses people who won't _____
And has friends that _____

¹⁴ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 177-178

2 but God's goodness makes us feel _____
and we hold that in our heart all day and all night.

3 We feel special like _____
Then we can have _____
And we will be great everyday.

Psalm 3

A Morning Prayer

1 There are a lot of mean people God.
Many of them tease

2 me and say _____
And say "God cannot rescue you"

3 but God wants me to be safe and _____
and gives me achievement and _____
and great esteem.

4 I pray to God, and God hears me
from God's sacred space.

5 I sleep and wake up feeling _____
because God protects me.

6 So many people who are not kind or _____
but I am not afraid.

7 Come and rescue me God
Take away their meanness and whatever is hurting them,

8 Because you protect
and bless your people.

Psalm 4

An Evening Prayer

1 You are my God and my protector

Please answer my prayer

I had a rough day because

but you are with me.

Now be kind and hear me

as I pray.

8 I can lie down

and sleep soundly

Because you, God,

will keep me safe.

B. Poetic expression

CDF Children's Sabbaths Manual and Design

Poems and Creative Writing

Future Freedom Songs

THEME 1: It will take all our worship traditions to do this transformational work together.

For Kids

All together

That's how we work.

All together

That's how we love.

All together

That's right right right.

All together

We are the light light light.

THEME 2: Urgent problems facing children in our nation.

Cultural Anchor: "The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them."—Ida B. Wells

For Kids

*Turn on the light
It looks a little dark.*

*Turn on the light
see my heart heart heart.*

*Turn on the light
tell the truth, truth, truth.*

*Turn on the light
let's move, move, move.*

THEME 3: Intergenerational participation.

Cultural Anchor: "Each child belongs to all of us and they will bring us a tomorrow in direct relation to the responsibility we have shown to them." Maya Angelou

For Kids**(children and youth)**

*We belong
Yes, we do!*

*We are the future
the future
our voices matter too!*

(adults to children and youth)

*You belong,
Yes, you do!*

All the children and the youth.

*You are the future
the future
your voices matter too!*

(elders to children and youth)

*You belong
Yes, you do!*

All the children and the youth!

*You are the future
the future*

your voices matter too.

(everyone)
We belong
Yes, we do!

We are the future
the future
our voices matter too!

THEME 4: Taking Action

Cultural Anchor: “Action, like a sacrament, is the visible form of an invisible spirit, an outward manifestation of an inward power.” -- bell hooks, *All About Love*

For Kids

ACT!
We take action.
ACT!
We take action.

For our friends
and our family.

ACT!
We take action.
ACT!
We take action.

For freedom and
for justice.

ACT!
We take action.
ACT!
We take action.

Because of love
love love.

THEME 5: Linking places of worship across traditions nationwide.

Cultural Anchor: “When I liberate myself, I liberate others. If you don't speak out, ain't nobody going to speak out for you.” —Fannie Lou Hamer

For Kids

*All across the nation
We gotta speak against hatred.*

*All across the nation
We gotta fight for liberation.
All across the nation
We speak out
Stand tall
and fight for liberation.*

C. Sermon Starters/Worship dialogue

Sermon Starters on the Lectionary Texts

Episcopal Lectionary: Proper 24, Year A

Isa. 45:1-7

Ps. 96

1 Thess. 1:1-10

Matt. 22:15-22

Isaiah 45: 1-7 Common English Bible

The LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whom I have grasped by the strong hand, to conquer nations before him, disarming kings, and opening doors before him, so no gates will be shut: 2 I myself will go before you, and I will level mountains.

I will shatter bronze doors; I will cut through iron bars.

3 I will give you hidden treasures of secret riches,

so you will know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who calls you by name.

4 For the sake of my servant Jacob and Israel my chosen,

I called you by name. I gave you an honored title, though you didn't know me.

5 I am the LORD, and there is no other; besides me there is no God. I strengthen you— though you don't know me—

6 so all will know, from the rising of the sun to its setting,

that there is nothing apart from me. I am the LORD; there's no other.

7 I form light and create darkness, make prosperity and create doom;

I am the LORD, who does all these things.

The Truth Is Always Relevant

By Rev. Dr. Yvette R. Blair-Lavallais

The truth is always relevant - even when it is hard to hear. Imagine how challenging it must have been for the prophet Isaiah to proclaim God's word in the midst of so much turmoil, devastation, and destruction; to preach the word of God for the people of God. The stark reality is that the truth needed to be told because God's people needed to hear about the root causes of all the injustices happening around them, to them, and yes, *even because of them*. In a news cycle of destruction, Babylonian exile, and live action reports that the Temple of Jerusalem has been destroyed, the Israelites are left to wonder where is God in the midst of all this, and moreso, how are they to respond to their own unrepentant behavior? What are they to say to God about how they have not responded to the cries of the needy - the widows, the children, the orphans, the poor, the unhoused?

The truth is, they did respond to the cries.

Those who were in positions of power repeatedly scoffed at the cries of the needy. Repeatedly refused to adhere to God's commandment of *loving your neighbor as yourself*. They responded with selfishness and a refusal to center the needs of the most vulnerable among them, of those who had been marginalized, treated as outcasts and pushed to the margins of the community, including the children.

Sounds a lot like the 24-hour news cycle and headlines of communities that we live in today. Food insecurity. Children and families who do not have permanent homes and are housing insecure. Communities lamenting yet another mass shooting leaving children traumatized and asking the hard questions that sometimes we do not want to wrestle with. Poverty-stricken neighborhoods where running water is a luxury rather than a basic human right. Those who hold the power in their hands often use it for selfish gain.

The truth is always relevant. As we celebrate Children's Sabbaths and think about the impact that these injustices have on young people of all ages, it requires us to wrestle with the hard questions. Often when we read the sacred texts, children are not mentioned, but it does not mean that they are not affected. There is no way for the adults to be the only ones who experience hardships, crises, devastation, famines and plagues. The children do, too.

A womanist reading of this passage in Isaiah 45 invites us to ask whose voices are missing from the text. Who holds the power? Whose stories and experiences are not being centered? What is the oppression and injustice mentioned in the text? As God, referred to as YHWH in this text, speaks through the prophet Isaiah and summons or calls Cyrus as the anointed one, as the vessel, the instrument to be used by God for

God's people, how will Cyrus respond to the children? The God who is the Great I AM, the One who set the stars to shine in the sky, who rolled back the waters of the Red Sea, is the God who is active and has summoned Cyrus as God's instrument to reestablish Jerusalem as the central place of worship; the place where God dwells and reigns and where God's justice and victory will be the order of the day. Cyrus has been called to a position of power as the king of Persia and conqueror of Babylon. He has been anointed. The Hebrew word here for anointed is מָשִׁיחַ, or *mashiach*, and it means messiah, commissioned by divine command. God has grasped or strengthened, made strong or courageous, Cyrus to do powerful things as an instrument of YHWH.

St. Frances of Assisi is quoted as saying, "*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.*" These are not just surface-level words that we read and recite in a liturgy. These words are a plea to God to change our hearts so that we can have the hard conversations and face the relevant truth - the truth that our children are suffering because of the decisions that we are making; because we do not hold our policymakers accountable; because we turn the other way when evil runs rampant, not realizing that we are implicit in the injustices when we choose to do nothing other than offer our thoughts and prayers. Since when did thoughts toward someone give them access to clean water, safe living accommodations, freedom from gun violence, and a healthy meal?

Cyrus has been named an instrument of God. To be the ruler, the anointed one, the messiah, and he is to use this power for the good of Israel. Every act of authority that Cyrus has is for the people of Israel. It is for their good. How then, might we hold accountable the ones in our midst who hold power? Whether it is elected officials, or those who are appointed to boards and commissions and committees, or those who hold leadership in ecclesial places, in our church councils, synagogues, mosques, and temples. This is the time to wrestle with the hard questions of why we allow them to wield their power for self-serving reasons, rather than to use that power to put an end to racism, hunger, poverty, gun violence, housing insecurity, human trafficking, and other traumatic events that harm our children.

In her book, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*, Resmaa Menakem reminds us that trauma happens in the body. "It is a spontaneous protective mechanism used by the body to stop or thwart further (or future) potential damage."¹⁵

Children might not always be able to articulate what is happening, why they are responding the way that they are, nor put words to their non-verbal cues. We cannot

¹⁵ Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending our Hearts and Bodies*. Las Vegas, Central Recovery Press, 2017.

discount trauma nor the things associated with trauma such as what they might have witnessed while they were unhoused or an exchange that they were involved in when their parents were told that they were not eligible for school lunches. “An embedded trauma response can manifest itself as fight, flee, or freeze - or as a combination of constriction, pain, fear, dread, anxiety, unpleasant thoughts, reactive behaviors or other sensations and experiences.” This is why having a trauma-informed approach to ministry is critical if we are going to faithfully respond to the needs and concerns of children.

Many of the people who hold power and use it for self-serving reasons are members of our houses of worship, serving in ministry, tithing, or attending worship regularly. The truth is always relevant, even when it is hard to face. God was calling Cyrus to right the wrongs in the midst of a divided nation where strife was running rampant. God had a great desire to see the community restored, flourishing and thriving. Because the word messiah is used to describe the assignment that Cyrus had, we can find comfort in the assignment of Jesus Christ, our Messiah, God’s beloved Son in whom God was well-pleased. This Messiah is our peace, says Grace JiSun Kim in *Healing Our Broken Humanity: Practices for Revitalizing the Church and Renewing the World*. “The Messiah has abolished division, enmity, fear, discrimination and prejudice. Any life, hope, vitality, forgiveness, and unity the church knows is only found in and through its Lord and Messiah,” she shares. How then do we wrestle with this truth and what do we do as a faith community to press into this power toward eradicating all the injustices that leave our children with life experiences that are void of flourishing and thriving. How do we reconcile and account for the ways in which we are complicit in it? The truth is always relevant.

Reflection Questions for the Text

1. If you could talk back to the sacred text, what questions do you have?
2. In your faith tradition, how do you respond to the cries of the needy?
3. This passage is about appointing someone to be in a position of authority. Consider your faith community and who holds power. What power do those people hold to effect change in a positive way for children and youth?
4. In this passage, Cyrus is considered an instrument to be used by the Holy One. St. Francis of Assisi wrote about what it means to be an instrument of peace.

Consider this activity for the children:

Ask the children to think of an instrument that they have played or would like to play. What instrument is it? What sounds does the instrument make? What kind of song might this instrument enjoy playing?

Young people often have a way of expressing themselves through activities like this one. Pay close attention to what the children reveal about their instrument. Is it a happy song, a song of sorrow, or an “outburst” song? Consider pairing this activity with one of the Psalms activities found in the Resource Section. If you have access to any of the instruments mentioned, consider allowing the children and youth to stand or sit near the instrument and proclaim: *I am an _____ instrument. May God make me an instrument of flourishing.*

Psalm 96 New Revised Standard Version

Praise to God Who Comes in Judgment

1 O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. **2** Sing to the LORD; bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. **3** Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. **4** For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; he is to be revered above all gods. **5** For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. **6** Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. **7** Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. **8** Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts. **9** Worship the LORD in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth. **10** Say among the nations, “The LORD is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.” **11** Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar and all that fills it; **12** let the field exult and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy **13** before the LORD, for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with his truth.

Music to God’s Ears

The world-renowned musician and composer Johann Sebastian Bach is credited with saying “music is an agreeable harmony for the honor of God and the permissible delights of the soul.” Let’s sit with that thought for a moment as we’ve just heard the music and voices of our children and youth today in celebration of Children’s Sabbaths. Across various faith traditions and cultures, whether the music is hymns,

spirituals, songs from the Baha'i religion, Taize, or Pizmonim which are traditional Jewish songs and melodies with the intention of praising God, music is an expression of the heart. It is also a chorus of voices of communities who sing about their faith. Music is also the soundtrack of our lives, and a way to express how our faith intersects with what is happening in our communities, belting out notes and lyrics that amplify and raise awareness about the things that we struggle with. When there are contentious conversations that we try to avoid about the realities of the injustices happening all around us, even if we are not directly affected but our neighbors are, music becomes a way to sing about it, to hear the refrain repeated and to listen and join in the chorus.

The psalmist invites us to sing—to sing to the Lord a new song. It could be a song of joy, of sorrow, of repentance. It could be a song of praising God for giving us the strength to boldly and confidently advocate for the needs and concerns of our children—the ones who are battling depression; the ones who are questioning their identities and don't have a safe space to have healthy conversations; the ones who go home to empty pantries and refrigerators; the ones who are left unattended because their parents or guardians cannot afford after school care. We are invited to sing and when we come to worship, the worship leader extends an invitation for us to sing and praise God and to sing new songs amid the familiar hymns, spirituals, and gospel favorites that calm and soothe us; that quicken our hearts, that remind us that God's grace and unconditional love is available to *all of us*, and songs that help us to remain steadfast in our faith when the troubles of the world try to unsteady us and knock us down.

What would it look like or sound like to sing a new song to God? To sing justice songs. In the children's song, [Justice](#), by Jewish songwriter Emily Aronoff, these opening lyrics paint a picture of what kids today are dealing with today: *Sometimes I think you're hiding, Hearing news stories that are sad; Sometimes I wonder where you are, when I see bullies, I get mad; But then I remember each one of us has a job to do. Justice, I will find you. Justice, we will pursue.*

These words could easily be a psalm; after all, psalms are songs. Canonically, there are 150 psalms in the sacred compendium of The Book of Psalms. Psalms are the love language of us speaking to God. Of us lamenting. Of us praising. Of us offering thanksgiving. Of us confused and in despair and crying out to God when we don't know what to do or which way to turn. I wonder today if we have heard the psalms of our children crying out to us? Have we heard their laments? Have we heard their frustration? Have we heard the songs of their stomachs growling because they don't have enough to eat? Have we heard our children silently crying to us from their experiences of being bullied, labeled, or exploited?

This 96th Psalm is a song about God's splendor, majesty, strength, and glory. It is no doubt music to God's ears. The psalmist sings out of the experience of knowing God and being a beneficiary of God's unfailing love, mercy, and grace. The psalmist, like all of us, undoubtedly has been through some seasons of life where they have witnessed the profound splendor of God in the midst of trying times. Twelve verses sing of the magnificent and wondrous works of God. Then the song pivots in verse 13 to a proclamation of God's forthcoming justice. What justice songs can we sing that are music to God's ears? Can we sing experientially about a community where children and youth grow up with dignity, hope, and joy? Can we sing about our work of ensuring that every child has access to health care regardless of their ethnicity, familial status, or how they identify? Might these songs be music to God's ears, that we are invested in the well-being of all young people every day - not just today on the Children's Sabbaths?

This is not just a moment. This is a movement that is ongoing as we do ministry that is liberating, that dismantles oppressive systems, and that ensures all children flourish and thrive.

Reflection Questions on the Text

1. In verse 10, the psalmist says that God shall judge the peoples with equity. There are some misnomers and untruths circulating about the meaning of equity. The term "**equity**" refers to fairness and justice and is distinguished from equality: Whereas equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances.

With this definition in mind, how do you envision equity for our children?

2. We have some favorite traditional songs that have carried us over generations. How might you "remix" a song to include relevant and relatable words about the injustices that children are facing today. For instance, in the African-American tradition, there is a song, *This Far By Faith*, that says, "We've come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord, trusting in His holy word...can't turn around...we've come this far by faith." What would it sound like to sing, "*We've got to use our faith and stand up for God's children. Pushing for the needed change...won't turn around...til all children flourish and thrive.*"
3. In the hymnal, [The Faith We Sing](#), there is a song called *God Weeps*. The first line says: "*God weeps at love withheld, at strength misused, at*

children's innocence abused, and until we change the way we love, God weeps." Read the words of this song aloud and consider the ways that you hear God calling you to sing a new song of action and justice for our children. How will you respond? Make notes and then make a plan that you will commit to doing.

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 The Message translation

1 I, Paul, together here with Silas and Timothy, send greetings to the church at Thessalonica, Christians assembled by God the Father and by the Master, Jesus Christ. God's amazing grace be with you! God's robust peace!

Convictions of Steel

2-5 Every time we think of you, we thank God for you. Day and night you're in our prayers as we call to mind your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope in following our Master, Jesus Christ, before God our Father. It is clear to us, friends, that God not only loves you very much but also has put his hand on you for something special. When the Message we preached came to you, it wasn't just words. Something happened in you. The Holy Spirit put steel in your convictions.

5-6 You paid careful attention to the way we lived among you, and determined to live that way yourselves. In imitating us, you imitated the Master. Although great trouble accompanied the Word, you were able to take great joy from the Holy Spirit!—taking the trouble with the joy, the joy with the trouble.

7-10 Do you know that all over the provinces of both Macedonia and Achaia believers look up to you? The word has gotten around. Your lives are echoing the Master's Word, not only in the provinces but all over the place. The news of your faith in God is out. We don't even have to say anything anymore—you're the message! People come up and tell us how you received us with open arms, how you deserted the dead idols of your old life so you could embrace and serve God, the true God. They marvel at how expectantly you await the arrival of his Son, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescued us from certain doom.

Good Trouble for Our Children's Sake

In a world where people are hurried, sending text messages, Facebook posts and even business emails using emojis, succinct sentences, and oftentimes, no attention to "rules of grammar," one of the hallmarks of writing that we don't see much anymore is a greeting. Whether formal or casual, there was a time when you could anticipate a

greeting - some kind of opening where the writer took the time to say hello to you by name if they knew you personally or at peer level. If not, you were greeted by title and honorific as a sign of respect. The greeting is a way to establish connection with the person that you are addressing. Before you get into the reason for your message, you set the tone with a greeting.

The apostle Paul writes letters to faith communities that usually begin with a greeting, followed by an extended thanksgiving. It is refreshing to know that even in the midst of heated debates, hot topics and social unrest, an exchange can begin with a simple greeting followed by naming something for which you give thanks to the person to whom you are sending the correspondence. Paul often wrote to faith communities to either commend them for what they were doing or to challenge them to change their behavior, repent and turn toward God.

In this first of two letters to the Thessalonians, Paul commends the faith community at Thessalonica for their work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in following Christ. Then in verse 6, he talks about how the Thessalonians' convictions to be the hands and feet of Jesus—to follow God's Holy word—often meant they found themselves in great trouble for the cause of the gospel. It is perhaps what the late Congressman John Lewis would call *good trouble*. You see, much like the labor that the Thessalonians were doing - even being persecuted for doing what was right - there are times when we are called to step out of our comfort zones and be the example of what it means to be imitators of Christ. Jesus knew what it meant to sit with outcasts, lepers, heal the sick on the Sabbath, have meals with people who were cast to the margins, and challenge the ruling powers to respond to the most vulnerable in society.

Jesus was always getting into good trouble for the cause of the gospel. In fact, Jesus centered the well-being of children in his ministry. He told his disciples in Matthew 19:13-14, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." This is a good time to ask ourselves, on Children's Sabbaths, in what ways are children and youth being hindered?

When children and youth are not flourishing, they are being hindered from the wholeness of life that God intends. When children and youth are housing insecure or do not have access to quality health care, they are being hindered from wellness. Are we ready to get into good trouble and be imitators of Christ for the cause of children and youth? This observance is more than just a weekend; it is an invitation for us to be the hands and feet of Christ and to go into the margins and center the voices of young people - to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs.

In the words of John Lewis: "Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

This is what it means to be imitators of Christ. Christ was never afraid to make some noise and get in good, necessary trouble for the sake of the gospel. Paul affirms the Thessalonians for their good work and tells them that all across the community of believers, people are talking about how the Thessalonians are *living* the word of God. He tells them that the word is out and that because they are so committed to God's word, they are an example of what it means to be a living witness. This is more than just showing up for devotional time, prayer, vespers, or the worship service. To be imitators of Christ means to be actively engaged in the work of eradicating injustices that cause people to be marginalized in the first place.

Reflection Questions on the Text

1. What good trouble can we get into for the cause of our children and youth?
2. What do you need God to do in you so that you can have steel in your convictions for the sake of God's children?
3. Paul tells this specific faith community that other faith communities are looking at them, at what they are doing, and they are the message. What do other faith communities see you doing in this justice work to eradicate the hardships that keep children and youth from flourishing and thriving?

Matthew 22: 15-22 English Standard Version

Paying Taxes to Caesar

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his words. **16** And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. **17** Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" **18** But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? **19** Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. **20** And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" **21**

They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." **22** When they heard it, they marveled. And they left him and went away.

Playing Word Games with the Truth

One of the most popular online word games is Wordle. In a carefully constructed grid, you have six chances to guess the correct five-letter word. It sounds easy enough but it's tricky at times. If you've ever played the game then you know that if you guess a correct letter, not necessarily in the correct spot, that tile is a specific color to alert you that the letter is indeed in the word, but it is not in the space that you guessed. The highlight of the game is when you are down to your fifth try and you have all but one letter left to guess. Sometimes the word revealed is one that rhymes like board or hoard and you're trying to figure out what the final missing letter is in your final guess. When you get to the sixth try, the algorithms in the game are set up in such a way that if you guess correctly, the word game responds with "phew" on the screen. It's as if the game was holding its breath, waiting for you to make the right guess.

In this passage in Matthew, the Pharisees are playing word games with Jesus. It's not Wordle, Words With Friends, nor The New York Times Mini Crossword. The stakes are higher than just guessing a letter. This game that the religious leaders are playing is a word game of entrapment. They know what is right from wrong, yet they make a decision to try an entanglement with their words in an attempt to get Jesus to say or do something other than what Jesus would do.

Specifically, the Pharisees and their own followers or disciples, along with the Herodians (a political party of people who were loyal to Herod), tried to corner Jesus by asking this trick question: "*Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?*" You might recall another more familiar time when they played word games with Jesus. Later, in this same chapter, when they heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees - this same group of religious people - asked him a question to test him: which commandment in the law is the greatest? In that instance, Jesus was more forthright with them than turning the question back at them as he did here in this passage.

What does any of that have to do with our celebration today of Children's Sabbaths? Consider that sometimes the leaders, the ones who already know the right answers and the right thing to do, will look through the lens of word games to stir up confusion, division, and opposition. And it is our children and youth who suffer the most from it. When there is bickering and word games about charter schools, school vouchers, and

whether or not all students will have access to free school meals, adults spend a lot of time arguing their positions; meanwhile children and youth are often food insecure or in under-resourced schools. When policymakers choose the ‘Caesars’ in their pool of supporters, Caesars like lobbyists who push personal agendas that are harmful and that edge out marginalized groups including children and youth, it is our young people who suffer. As a faith community, we must offer more than thoughts and prayers as a response to the injustices that are facing young people in our communities; we must be advocates and amplify our voices for just policies and laws that promote flourishing and thriving for all children and youth.

Jesus pushed back against the Pharisees. “Jesus knew the place of the Pharisees, the priests and the Sadducees and their roles in the life of the community.” ¹⁶*Whose likeness and inscription is this?* Jesus asked. It’s a question for us. In whose likeness are our children created? That’s not all Jesus said. He also replied to the Pharisees, their disciples, and the Herodians, the whole group of people who came to confront and contest what they knew to be right: *Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* Beloved, our challenge is to challenge the “powers that be” to render to God the things that are God’s. To render in the Greek is *apodidómi* (Ἀπόδοτε) which means to give back, restore, make recompense, to *return* (especially as a *payment*), in relation to the source of the giving back. Beloved, this is a call for us to urge our lawmakers and policymakers to give back, make good on, and make payments of justice, of righteousness, of flourishing and thriving for our children. Give back and make good on the payments that ensure housing security, food security, mental health care, access to quality health care. It is time out for our leaders to stop playing word games and to instead render to God what is God’s.

Reflection Questions on the Text:

1. In this passage, the Pharisees use word games when they have a conversation with Jesus. Jesus pushes back and asks whose likeness is on the coin. Here’s a tough question for you: when you see or hear about young people in your community who are without adequate health care, who don’t have access to after school programs, in whose image or likeness do you believe these children are made?
2. Jesus told the Pharisees to render or give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to give to God what is God’s. What has been taken away from children, youth, and their families? How can you help restore it in your community? What needs to happen

¹⁶ Crespo, Orlando. *Being Latino in Christ: Finding Wholeness in Your Ethnic Identity* (Intervarsity Press, 2003), 74.

for children and youth to be whole, healthy, and well?

3. Name one change in policy that you'd like to urge lawmakers to make. How will this policy change give back to children and youth what God intends for all young people to have?

XII. Children 0-3 and Child Bearing Humans

Children's Sabbaths Action, Invitation, and Embodiment

*"In the beginning there were no words.
In the beginning was the sound, and they all knew what that sound sounded like."*

*—Toni Morrison, *Beloved**

Children, Ages 0-3, & Childbearing & Child-homing Humans

Resources for faith communities:

Love Note to Childbearing & Child-homing Humans

In a curved-out place, you hold the heartbeats of our children, curves of your body, and curves of your heart. In these sacred places, you desire love and abundance for your children, and we desire the same love and abundance for you. As you hold children in the womb of your bodies or wombs of your homes, we celebrate the diverse ways families are formed. These gifts from God are your children, and they are our children. Together, we hold each other in community, in families, and in sacred space.

We acknowledge that many claim to care about your wellbeing while failing to support your being well. We acknowledge you do not have enough of what you need to, with great ease, provide for yourself and your children, in the curved places. We plant

ourselves alongside you and listen to, center, and lift your voice as you name your needs.

**Note: Can be read in worship services and shared via social media and print/digital material(s).*

Curating a Listening Session:

Centering the needs of children, youth, and families from their perspective

Curating listening sessions with a womanist, trauma-informed approach means creating a safe, culturally humble, sacred, and empathic space that honors the unique experiences of children, youth, and families, extraordinarily considering the intersections of trauma, race, gender expression, and class. Through the practice of a womanist, trauma-informed approach, listening sessions will also begin to contribute to the social-emotional learning (SEL) of children. Faith communities host listening sessions to hear directly from young people and families. Below is a womanist, trauma-informed approach in curating a listening session and an optional guide to the order of service.

1. Opening Circle

a. Greeting

The greeting is an opportunity for young people and families to utter their names into the space, affirming their presence, the presence of their family, and the presence of their ancestors. Invite children, youth, and families to say their names to foster connection, belonging, and reclaiming of their narrative.

b. Grounding

Create a balanced and welcoming environment that sets the tone for nurturing a sacred space. This is an opportunity for a short activity inviting children, youth, and families to feel centered and rooted. An example of a grounding activity could be listening to music, dancing, deep breathing, meditation, etc.

2. Sacred Space

a. Curating Space

Curate an inviting space for children, youth, and families using warm colors, soft places to sit and touch (if in-person), soft sounds (if virtual); and make room for the fullness of children, youth, and families to be present and to feel seen and heard.

b. Cultural Humility

Center and honor diverse cultural backgrounds through a commitment of developing cultural awareness and an ongoing openness to learn. To understand the vastness of the space we hold for one another by being mindful of the multifariousness of identity and lived experiences.

3. Approach

a. Empathic Listening

A mindful and empathic approach to hearing and understanding. This practice surpasses the simple act of listening but invites the fullness of each human; in this case, children and families. It invites the fullness of our words, emotion, body, and spirit. The elements of empathic listening using a womanist, trauma-informed approach are presence, compassion, affirmation, openness, and curiosity.

4. Connection

a. Storytelling

Honoring the oral traditions of storytelling by inviting children, youth, and families to share their lived experiences.

b. Artist Expression

A gentle approach to sharing and expression. Offer an alternative modality for connection by inviting children, youth, and families to use creative materials to express feelings and thoughts.

5. Care

a. Choice and Consent

The openness to children and youth exercising their agency to say “yes” or “no.” Children and youth get to determine if they would like to share, be touched, participate, or employ their boundaries.

b. Gentle Prompts

Open ended questions that also exercise the patience for children and youth to share, engage, and learn at their open pace.

c. Honoring Boundaries

Exercising the values of children and young people’s agency to establish their limits and comfort levels. To honor the boundaries of children and youth makes room for cultivating safety, trust, and their own realization that they have agency.

d. Validating Feelings

As children and youth discover their feelings, both big and small, create a space where children and youth understand that the fullness of their feelings are welcome. Affirm that their feelings are heard and seen. We may validate the feelings of young people by using statements like, “it’s okay to cry.”

6. Closing Circle

a. Gratitude

“‘Thank you’ is the best prayer that anyone could say. I say that one a lot. Thank you expresses extreme gratitude, humility, understanding.”—Alice Walker

At the close of a listening session, expressing gratitude for the time and commitment of children, youth, and families represents an honoring of the journey that we’ve taken alongside one another. The invitation is to express gratitude for all those participating in the listening session but also to invite children, youth, and families to name something that they are grateful for, contributing to a practice of expressing appreciation for each other, sacred space, love, right relationship, and future.

b. Celebration

A listening session is not complete without the excitement of closing the circle together, signifying that we have completed a journey alongside one another. A celebration activity may be clapping, dancing, or music, sealing the sacred circle cultivated in order to apply this listening session model.

Order of Service: Listening Session

- Opening
 - a. Greetings/Naming
- Grounding Inspiration
 - a. Quote, sacred texts, music, ritual
- Opening prayer
- Framing of advocacy for children, youth, and families
 - a. reason for gathering—share background information
- Framing of a listening session
 - a. how we are gathering— what a listening session is and what we hope to learn

- Questions (options for full group or small groups)
 - a. Harriet Tubman, “If you want to taste freedom, keep going.”
What does freedom taste like, sound like, smell like, feel like, look like?
 - b. What is most difficult about being a parent (or guardian)?
 - c. What is most joyous about being a parent (or guardian)?
 - d. If you can think of anything, absolutely anything that can be supportive to you as a parent, what would it be?
 - e. What do you need to be the best parent (or guardian)?
 - f. How is your parenting style different from the way you were parented?
 - g. How can faith spaces be safer for children, youth, and families?
 - h. What are some of the lessons you were taught as a young person that you will teach your children? What are some of the lessons that you were taught as a young person that you will not teach your children?
 - i. What’s your favorite color? Has your favorite color changed over time and why?
 - j. What do you need from your faith spaces for your children and family?
- Processing/Metabolizing what we heard/shared
- Next steps
 - a. How to share learnings - before leaving determine who is going to organize next steps
 - b. Be creative.
 - Make a visual representation of what was shared.
 - Make a song of what was shared.
 - Document for those of your faith community and beyond not present during the listening session.
 - c. Send learning to Children’s Defense Fund at (email)
 - d. Share via email and social media.
- Closing
 - a. Gratitude, Celebration, Music, Ritual, Prayer

Sociopolitical/Advocacy Education and Organizational Resources: www.startearly.org

- More than one million new neural connections are formed every second in the first few years of life.
- Priority areas: Our goal is to create effective, equitable, and interconnected educational opportunities for our youngest learners and their families. We do that by advocating for robust policies and programs that prioritize and provide prenatal care, early learning, early intervention, and other health and family supports.
- Approach: Start Early's policy and advocacy efforts are grounded in our decades of work with children, youth, families, the workforce, and systems leaders, as well as our work to advance equity. Through systems building, legislative, administrative, and grassroots advocacy, and consultation and thought leadership, we aim to:
 - Improve early childhood experiences for all young people through programs and policies that support early learning and care, maternal and child health and family engagement;
 - Sustain and increase public investments for quality, comprehensive early childhood education; and
 - Support policies and service delivery systems that increase access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education, and positively impact young children's learning, health, and family outcomes.
- Policy Agenda: Our approach to policy and advocacy is outlined in [our Policy Agenda](#). As our vision for policy and systems change nationwide, the Agenda outlines opportunities at the federal, state, and community levels that will help create early childhood systems that promote quality and effectively meet the needs of children, families and providers.
 - As our road map for the next three years (2021-2023), this agenda articulates our commitments, our views on critical early learning and care issues, and the policy levers we aim to pull across three areas: next generation program quality; building connected, comprehensive, and equitable systems; and elevating family voice and the role of families.
 - The Start Early Policy Agenda is our foundation as we work broadly across child, youth, and family-serving systems to influence policy and drive investments that help us advocate for change. We do this work with a recognition that— because of the root causes of structural and institutional racism— many of the practitioners, children, youth, and families whom we serve experience inequitable access and outcomes in early learning and care. Alongside our partners, we aim to advance

policies that center equity and amplify the strengths, innovations, needs, and desires of the children, families, and partners who participate and contribute to our unique early childhood systems. We view the process of setting forward an equity-centered policy agenda as a learning journey and aim to interrogate our biases, weak spots and be accountable to addressing and repairing our mistakes along the way. We aim to work with intentionality and accountability to drive system improvements and policy change for children, youth, and families historically and currently impacted by racism.

- [Congress has failed our youngest generation and their families](#)
- [Start Early celebrates the inclusion of critical early childhood investments in the 117th Congress' omnibus bill](#)
[Start Early celebrates the inclusion of critical early childhood investments in the 117th Congress' omnibus bill](#)

Kindergarten Readiness [Core Education Measures | The Forsyth Promise](#)

The years before kindergarten are critical for the healthy development of a child's mind, body, and capacity to learn later in life. Many children enter kindergarten without the skills necessary to excel in reading and are at risk of falling behind their peers.

[Momentum Building \(pritzkerchildrensinitiative.org\)](#)

Infant Behavior Recognition

Does your baby:

- Look at you and follow the sound of your voice?
- Get fussy when left alone?
- Calm or settle with you?

Verbal Language

- Coos with ooh and aahs?
- Become startled by unexpected changes in surroundings?
- Cry differently for hunger or tiredness?

Motor Skills

- Move all limbs around?
- Hold chin up?

XIII. Affirmations & Activations

“I know I am beloved, I know this earth is beloved, I know my neighbor is beloved.”—Kaitlin Curtice¹⁷

“As we go, let’s pray into the world what we believe is possible.”—Kaitlin Curtice¹⁸

“If you make the world better for kids, you make it better for everybody.”—Robby Novak (also known as Kid President)¹⁹

“We have the trees, and water, and sun, and our children.”—Audre Lorde²⁰

IX. [Grounding Quotes and Quotes for congregational use](#)

Grounding Quotes Quotes for Congregational Use

“We Ojibwe tend to be sentimental about our children, who are the heart and future of the people. Greatly loved as they are, their existence has such importance to not only their families but all Anishinaabeg that they will not know until they are adults themselves just how much they mean to us and the many reasons why.”—Linda LeGarde Groer, Onigamiising²¹

¹⁷ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 176

¹⁸ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 178

¹⁹ In 2016 at the age of 12, Robby launched “The Year of the Kid” as a campaign for kids and adults to take action against hunger. [Watch Kid President's 2016 Campaign to End Child Hunger in the US \(globalcitizen.org\)](https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/watch/kid-president-2016-campaign-to-end-child-hunger-in-the-us/)

²⁰ Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Learning from the 60s*. 1984. Crossing Press, 2007, p. 144.

²¹ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 172

“I believe that all children are liberators, and we must remember what power they hold as our future. They marvel at the stories at prophets. They long to make things right. They see the face of God, Mamogosnan, Mystery, Kche Mnedo, Yahweh. They see the power women hold, before we taint them with toxic patriarchy and lies about what it means to be masculine. Our young women will lead us, and our young men will walk with respect and kindness, but sometimes we must get out of the way.”—Kaitlin Curtice²²

“In our Potawatomi teachings, we believe we are in the time of the seventh fire, the seventh prophecy, when the young people will return to our ways, take up our traditions, learn our language, and put things right again. It must be the young people, because they are our future.”—Kaitlin Curtice²³

“Empowering our children, whether they are our biological children or children in our community, means letting the stories of the oppressed reach them, and if they are descendants of the oppressed, letting their bodies and souls sink into their own reality, so that they become the fire that burns bright for future generations. It means sometimes we need to let our children see our anger, and we need to let them see us channel that anger into good that transforms something, someone, somewhere.”—Kaitlin Curtice²⁴

²² Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 172-173

²³ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 173

²⁴ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 174

“They need to see that we are human.

They need to hear our stories of grief and pain, our stories of celebration and our stories of loss. We need to name some of our mistakes for them. We need to tell the truth about the systems that we work with and against.

Our children will take these stories with them, and they will remember that it is important to listen to the land. They will remember that it is important to pay attention to mistakes and listen to their own souls. They will remember our stories, and our stories will shape them.

Our own vulnerability with the truth will teach them to be vulnerable with the truth, and with that, they will lead us all.”—Kaitlin Curtice²⁵

“If my children can remember that the things they experience, including all the people and creatures around them, are sacred, maybe they won’t grow up commodifying everything and everyone.

Maybe they will learn what it means to live a constantly decolonizing experience, to value what is often forgotten around us, to love people and our creature kin simply because they were created to be loved.”—Kaitlin Curtice²⁶

“Our children must learn that to become a more complete representation of God in the world, we must learn to see the sacred value of God in one another.”—Kaitlin Curtice²⁷

²⁵ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 174

²⁶ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020.

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²⁷ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020.

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“All of our children belong to all of us, because that’s what kinship does. It’s a reminder of that dust we came from and of that dust we will return to. It’s a reminder that while we are here, we make room for the next generation to spring up from the soil and create a new landscape.

So our Native children lead us. Our children of color lead us. Our daughters lead us. Our queer and nonbinary children lead us. Our disabled children lead us. The ones that are forgotten lead us. The ones that are told to be quiet at the dinner table lead us, and if we are smart, we will let them lead. And if we are smart, we will see that we all return to Mystery, to Kche Mnedo, and we are simply to learn what we can along the way, to embody humility, to stand up to bullies and show them the way to love and peace.”—Kaitlin Curtice²⁸

“So we talked about bullying in schools, on the playground, at the park, at church, in our communities. We reminded our children that the way of loving people is never to force them. We talked about consent, about what it means to honor women, and why it’s important to sit with the people that no one else pays attention to. We talked about our capacity as people to bully the earth as well.

We found that when we gave our children a little information, they knew exactly what to do. They took our words to school in how they interacted with their friends and teachers. They took our words to the market where we buy groceries from refugees who work for far too little money and are asking to be valued for who they are, not just for the work they do. They took our words to church as they watch women lead. And they had dreams.”—Kaitlin Curtice²⁹

²⁸ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 176-177

²⁹ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 177

“We believe that children are close to God, because their lives are still fresh from birth; God speaks through our children, so we listen. They have visions of a better world, and they create that world day by day.”—Kaitlin Curtice³⁰

“When I don’t really know what I believe about the world, about God, about who Jesus really is in the mess we have made of history, I look at the kids...if we let them show us the world they see, adverse and full of mysteries of God, even our adult lives can change, and we can learn to be better people in the process.”—Kaitlin Curtice³¹

“The point is that while we are here, Mystery asks us to set aside what disrupts our humanity and belonging for the chance to see what is good and to fix the things that have been broken by hate.”—Kaitlin Curtice³²

“What if all of this, the whole journey, the beginning, the searching, the knowing, the working, the fruit that comes from the work—what if it is all the work of knowing and being known?

What if, at the beginning and at the end of everything, the only thing that matters is that we saw and called it good—called each other good, called this kind earth good, and called the very nakedness that comes with knowing ourselves good?

Maybe, just maybe, that’s the whole point of beginning again. Maybe, just maybe, that’s what the promise of a new world will always bring us.”—Kaitlin Curtice³³

³⁰ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 177-178

³¹ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 178

³² Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 178

³³ Kaitlin B. Curtice. *Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God*. Brazos Press. Grand Rapids, MI. 2020. 179

"Each child belongs to all of us and they will bring us a tomorrow in direct relation to the responsibility we have shown to them." Maya Angelou

"Today I know that such memories are the key not to the past, but to the future. I know that the experiences of our lives, when we let God use them, become the mysterious and perfect preparation for the work he will give us to do."—Corrie Ten Boom³⁴

"I have learned you are never too small to make a difference."—Greta Thunberg³⁵

"When we love children we acknowledge by our every action that they are not property, that they have rights--that we respect and uphold their rights."—Bell Hooks³⁶

"Children are born into a world surrounded by the possibility of communities."—Bell Hooks³⁷

"...we will raise our children free to choose how best to fulfill themselves. For we are jointly responsible for the care and raising of the young..."—Audre Lorde³⁸

³⁴ www.corrietenboom.com

³⁵ Greta Thunberg is an 18-year-old Swedish environmental activist who is seen as the voice of her generation against climate change. When she was 15, she started a climate strike all alone in front of the Swedish parliament. As it gained traction and international attention, over *one million* joined her on her School Strike for Climate Campaign on the 15th of March 2019

³⁶ hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2000, p. 30.

³⁷ hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2000, p. 130.

³⁸ Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. *Man Child*. 1984. Crossing Press, 2007, p. 79.

“Our children cannot dream unless they love, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours? ‘If you want us to change the world someday, we at least have to live long enough to grow up!’ shouts the child.”—Audre Lorde³⁹

“The Black child must learn early to allow laughter to fill his mouth or the million small cruelties he encounters will congeal and clog his throat.”—Maya Angelou⁴⁰

³⁹ Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. Poetry is not a luxury.* 1984. Crossing Press, 2007, p. 38.

⁴⁰ Angelou, Maya. *All God’s Children Need Traveling Shoes.* Vintage, 1986, p. 150.