

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



**T**hank you for your interest in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths® Celebration. Whether you are ready to start planning right away or are just beginning to learn about the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, this section is a great place to start. In this section you will find:

- Welcome to the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths, an overview that explains what the Children's Sabbath is and answers frequently asked questions.
- Examples of past Children's Sabbaths celebrations which will give you a glimpse of the varied and inspiring ways that places of worship bring their concern, commitment and creativity to planning Children's Sabbaths.

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

Welcome to the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* Celebration. Whether your place of worship has participated for decades or this will be the first time, we are so grateful that you are a part of this multifaith effort. You make a difference in the lives of children and in the life of your place of worship—by connecting the two, you can improve the lives of children in your place of worship, community, and across our nation and bring new inspiration and excitement to your worshipping community. We encourage you to use the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* manual in your planning.

By participating in the multifaith *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend, you are part of a powerful, diverse multifaith voice for children spanning our nation and crossing all lines of income, race, ethnicity, and political party. What unites us is the belief that God calls us to protect children, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and the conviction that our faith calls us to live out God's justice and compassion.

This inspiring weekend focuses attention on the urgent plight of children in our nation and calls us to put our faith into action to meet children's needs through direct service and work for justice. Through the service of worship, educational programs, and activities, you can affirm what your place of worship already does with and for children while challenging members to take new actions and commit to new efforts to meet the needs of children in your community, state, and our nation.

"Each year CDF provides a new title and suggested focus for the Children's Sabbath weekend. The suggested focus might be ending child poverty, ensuring all children have health coverage, or ending child gun deaths, or another concern that is particularly urgent or holds the possibility for effective legislative and other action. However, your place of worship may modify the title or select a different concern to focus on, depending on what is especially compelling to your members and your community. What's most important is connecting the very real problems confronting children and families with the call in religious traditions to respond with justice and care, and translating that faithful concern into action. Check CDF's website at <https://www.childrensdefense.org/programs/faith-based/childrens-sabbath-celebration/> to find out what this year's title and focus are and to download materials developed specifically for this year's worship, study, and action."

## What is the Children's Sabbath?

**The Children's Sabbath is a weekend that unites places of worship and all faiths across the nation in shared concern for children and common commitment to improving children's lives and working for justice on their behalf.** In that respect, it is bigger and more powerful and more inspiring than the efforts of any one congregation on its own. On the Children's Sabbath, places of worship have a strong sense of participating in a larger movement for children. Some places of worship plan services, educational sessions and activities for their own place of worship. Others join with one or more places of worship in shared services and activities. In some communities all of the faith communities work together to sponsor a multifaith service to which the entire community is invited. Often, local organizations serving children or working on their behalf join in the planning of these community-wide multifaith Children's Sabbaths.

**A Children's Sabbath weekend typically has four elements:**

- 1) **A service of worship or prayers**, during which the divine mandate to nurture and protect children calls us to respond to the needs of children today;
- 2) **Educational programs**, during which people of all ages learn more about the needs of children today and the sociopolitical structures that keep children in need, explore the sacred texts, teaching, and traditions that lead us to serve and seek justice for children, and develop specific, active responses to help children;
- 3) **Activities** that immediately engage participants in compassionate service to help children and in action to seek justice (such as writing letters to elected officials); and
- 4) **Follow-up actions** that use the inspiration, information, and motivation of the Children's Sabbath weekend to lead individual members and places of worship as a whole into new, effective efforts to improve the lives of children in the congregation, community and nation throughout the year.

**The Children's Sabbath is sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund and has been endorsed by hundreds of denominations and religious organizations.** The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a *Healthy Start*, a *Head Start*, a *Fair Start*, a *Safe Start* and a *Moral Start* in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by individual donations, foundation, corporate and government grants.

From its inception, CDF has recognized the importance of the faith community's partnership in building a movement to *Leave No Child Behind*. A nation that lets its children be the poorest citizens has at its heart a spiritual and ethical crisis. Thus, the religious community must help to transform our nation's priorities so that we defend those who are youngest, weakest, poorest, and most vulnerable. For many years CDF has worked to support denominations and religious organizations as they develop and maintain child 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.

**The Children's Sabbath observance has guided by a multifaith advisory committee with Muslim, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Báhá'í, and Sikh members.** It is endorsed by more than 200 denominations, faith groups, 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 [sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org](mailto:sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org).

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

To be sure, a Children's Sabbath exudes the happiness of a wonderful celebration. Children delight in their roles of the day, parents hug children a little tighter, more conscious of the gift that they are, balloons may adorn buildings, children's artwork may brighten hallways, and child-friendly snacks may replace the usual after-service fare. It is a day that children and families look forward to, and those without children at their side can also appreciate the extra energy and excitement of the event.

At the same time, the Children's Sabbath is sobering, as the service and activities deepen our understanding of the terrible plight facing millions of children in our country and the injustice that we have left unchallenged. It is painful to think about children who are hungry or homeless, without access to health care, abused or neglected, victims of gun violence, without good quality child care, or denied a place in Head Start. The Children's Sabbath can be an eye-opening experience. And done properly, the Children's Sabbath will do more than open eyes to the problems facing children—it also will lift up new ways to help children and families and inspire and motivate people to respond and get involved.

**The Children's Sabbath is an annual event.** The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend is designated for the third weekend of October each year.

Because it is an annual event, places of worship participating for the first time can just “stick a toe in the water” and participate in small, simple ways...although some want to jump in completely right from the start. Others build their participation year by year, adding more elements to their observance. Because it occurs annually, places of worship have the opportunity to evaluate what worked well and what didn't and improve their plans for the following year.

Most importantly, because the Children's Sabbath takes place each fall, children look forward to it from year to year, having a consistent experience of their place of worship as community that cares about children and is committed to nurturing and protecting them.

**The Children's Sabbath is flexible.** While there is a suggested theme each year, places of worship are encouraged to focus on the most urgent problems confronting children and families in their communities. The Children's Sabbath downloadable resources are chock full of materials from which you can pick and choose those best suited to your places of worship. Most can be used as is, adapted or simply serve as inspiration for you to create your own materials. Materials prepared for one faith tradition may be enriching for another tradition.

And while the suggested date is the third weekend of October, if that date doesn't work for your place of worship's calendar, pick a different date that does. What is most important is finding a time to focus on the needs of children and our responsibility to nurture and protect them.

## **The Children's Sabbath is a time to...**

**Celebrate and strengthen existing efforts for children.**

The Children's Sabbath seeks to affirm and celebrate the important work that places of worship are already doing with and for children. The faithful, week-in and week-out efforts of places of worship make an enormous difference in children's lives, and the Children's Sabbath seeks to

highlight, applaud, and build even greater support for those important, ongoing efforts. Hopefully, by the end of the Children's Sabbath weekend, existing efforts in your place of worship to help children and families will have more visibility, new volunteers, increased resources, and fresh energy.

**Discover new opportunities to help children.**

The Children's Sabbath provides an opportunity for each place of worship to consider in what new ways they might work—as a body or as individuals—to help children not only in your midst, but in the community and across the nation. Religious leaders, committees and members may discover additional problems confronting children—like poverty, lack of health care, or violence—and come up with new ways to respond to them. This might include starting a new program sponsored by your place of worship. Or it might mean exploring and promoting opportunities for individual members to commit their time, services, or resources. Or it might mean forging a new partnership with another place of worship or community organization to help children. It could mean establishing a new child advocacy committee to guide your work for justice for children.

**Pray, study, and reflect.**

The Children's Sabbath is a time to look deeply at what one's faith tradition says about our responsibility to nurture and protect children. This is done through the worship service—in prayer, readings, songs, and sermon or other aspects of your place of worship's devotional life. It is also done in educational sessions, whether classes for children and youths or adult forums or inter-generational discussions.

**Take action.**

The Children's Sabbath is a time for action that springs from that faithful study and reflection. It is not only a time to pray, but also a time to put prayer into action. It is not only a time to study, but also a time to serve children directly. It is not only a time to sing, but also a time to speak out to elected leaders and others about the need for justice. So on the Children's Sabbath weekend, after worship/prayers or at another time, members and leaders should join in hands-on activities to help children as well as engage in working for justice—perhaps writing letters or planning a visit to an elected official.

**Commit to new, long-term efforts.**

The Children's Sabbath is intended to inspire new long-term efforts to help children and families. However wonderful the weekend celebrations may be, what matters most is what individuals and places of worship do in the following weeks and months and years to help children. Some places of worship will start new service or advocacy efforts (on their own or in partnership with other places of worship or community organizations), such as an after-school tutoring program or housing a Head Start program or an outreach and enrollment campaign to help uninsured children get health care. Other places of worship will work to encourage individual members to find new ways to volunteer time or resources to help children and change the systems that keep children in need.

## Frequently Asked Questions About the Children's Sabbath

### **Is the Children's Sabbath the same thing as Children's Day, Youth Sunday, Tot Shabbat or Children's Service?**

The Children's Sabbath shares some aspects of Children's Day, Youth Sunday, Tot Shabbat, and children's services, but it is distinct and unique in some vital ways.

Some congregations celebrate June Children's Day, often to congratulate and celebrate youngsters who have completed Sunday school. Like a Children's Day, the Children's Sabbath celebrates the gift of children and has a sense of hopefulness and joy. But the Children's Sabbath also focuses attention on the urgent problems facing children across our nation and provides a call and support to respond to improve children's lives. And while Children's Day is more typically celebrated only in churches, from the start the *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* weekend has been a multifaith movement.

Many congregations have Youth Days when they turn the service over to the young people to plan and lead. Like a Youth Day, on the Children's Sabbath children and youths often participate in the planning and leadership of the day. But on the Children's Sabbath, the adults aren't only the "audience," because the Children's Sabbath is an intergenerational event drawing on the leadership and involvement of **all** ages to convey its message that each of us, no matter our age, has a role to play in nurturing and protecting children and working for justice.

Some places of worship have separate services designed just for children to attend. Like those "children's services," or a "Tot Shabbat," worship on the Children's Sabbath is intended to be engaging and meaningful to the children who attend. But the Children's Sabbath is a service for everyone, and it aims to speak to all ages.

### **I want to get involved in the Children's Sabbath movement. Where do I start?**

Reviewing these Children's Sabbath resource materials is the first important step in getting involved in the Children's Sabbath, so you are already on your way!

The next planning steps can be found in the "Planning Your Children's Sabbath Celebration: Ideas for All Faiths" section on CDF's website. One of the first decisions you and those who join you in the planning will need to make is whether to plan a Children's Sabbath just for your place of worship or to join with other faith communities or denominations to plan a multifaith or ecumenical Children's Sabbath in your community. Either option is a valuable way to participate. You should determine what is right for your place of worship this year.

These Children's Sabbath resource materials provide planning suggestions, promotion ideas, worship resources, educational resources, activity ideas, and suggestions for building on your Children's Sabbath to help children throughout the year.

### **What if my place of worship can't participate on the designated dates?**

Choose an alternate date! While it's great to celebrate on the same weekend as thousands of other places of worship, what's most important is to participate in the movement at a time that works for your place of worship.

**Which is a better to do, a Children's Sabbath in my own place of worship or a multifaith, community-wide service?**

Both are valuable. A service in your own place of worship communicates that this concern is an integral part of the life of your congregation and makes it easier to plan follow-up efforts.

A community-wide service is an exciting experience and expression of the shared concerns and common commitment to children of many faith traditions. They can create new partnerships for effective community efforts to help children. But they can also take a lot more work to plan and generate turn-out!

**We just heard about the Children's Sabbath weekend and don't have much time left to plan. What can we do?**

There are a couple of options. You could schedule your celebration for a later date to allow for more planning time. Or, you could still plan to participate on the third weekend of October, but just start with what is quickest and easiest to do, such as photocopying and distributing one of the bulletin inserts, or including one of the prayers or readings provided in the Children's Sabbath resource materials. (You might still have time to invite a guest speaker who is engaged in work to improve the lives of children.) Then, you could plan an educational program or activities to serve or seek justice for children to take place in the months and year that follow.

**Should we bother participating in the Children's Sabbath celebration if my place of worship already cares about children?**

The Children's Sabbath is an opportunity to affirm what we already do and at the same time deepen our understanding both of God's call and the current crises facing children so that we may more fully, persistently, effectively, and faithfully live out that calling not only on the Children's Sabbath weekend but throughout the year.

There is an extraordinary power in participating in the Children's Sabbath, knowing that all across the country, in places of worship of many different faiths, we are united in our concern for children and in our commitment to respond.

## Examples of Children's Sabbath Celebrations

### **What a joy to see the varied ways that places of worship celebrate the Children's Sabbath!**

Like our children, each celebration was unique and wonderful in its own way. Read on for inspiration and ideas for how you might celebrate this year.

*Please send us an email describing what you are planning for your Children's Sabbath celebration. We would love to hear about your plans in advance, and then would welcome copies of your sermon, homily, khutbah, bulletin, newsletter, or any other resources from your Children's Sabbath events afterwards. Please send them to Rev. Shannon Daley-Harris at [sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org](mailto:sdaleyharris@childrensdefense.org).*

**Brown Chapel AME Church in Columbia, South Carolina**, celebrated the 2017 Children's Sabbath to focus on ending child poverty. They wrote, "Brown Chapel AME Church will hold a special worship service on Sunday, October 29, 2017. It will begin with breakfast at 8:00-8:45 a.m. The youth will then break out into workshops for elementary, middle and high schools girls, middle and high school boys and adults for Church School on topic led by lay and community leaders. The youth will be in charge of the morning worship service at 10:00 a.m. The theme for 2017 is "Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child." This year the Children's Sabbath is focusing on ending child poverty. Various vendors will be present from 2:00-4:00 p.m. in the afternoon to include food, fun and educational activities. Members from the Fire Department and Richland County Police Department [will be present] and bags donated from various vendors will be distributed. Socks will be given out to those children in need." *'Seeding and building a transformative social justice movement requires a deep and strong spiritual base and reaching out and listening to and engaging a wide variety of constituencies who share their deepest hopes, fears, and concerns over time. Movements do not happen overnight,'* said Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund. *"Working in partnership with people of faith and people of moral courage in communities across our nation, we will keep planting and nurturing seeds to organize a movement to end immoral, indefensible, and costly child poverty in America as the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign approaches in 2018. The Poor People's Campaign gave birth to CDF's parent organization, the Washington Research Project, in 1968. I know Dr. King would be calling for a campaign to end child poverty in rich America today when wealth and income gaps between rich and poor are at historic levels. That children are the poorest age group in America is morally indefensible and economically costly and a great threat to our future economic and national security. The 2017 Multi-faith National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebration is a vital part of building the transformative movement we need. Together, we can and must move forward with hope to ensure love and justice for every child.'* The members of Brown Chapel believe that the multifaith weekend seeks to inspire congregations and religious organizations to work on behalf of children through prayer, service, and advocacy throughout the year."

**St. Luke United Methodist Church in Dubuque, Iowa**, invited the principal of Prescott Elementary School to deliver the message for their Children's Sabbath last year, reinforcing the congregation's on-going partnership with the elementary school. They also incorporated prayers by CDF founder and president Marian Wright Edelman into their worship service.

**The Episcopal Church of Our Saviour in Placerville, California**, celebrated the 2017 Children's Sabbath with worship services on the theme, "Moving Forward with Hope: Love and Justice for Every Child," and speakers that included Reverend Christopher Chase, founder of Braid Mission; Stephanie Carlson, Teen Court coordinator; and Juline Aguilar, Foster Care & Resource Families.

**Peace of Christ Catholic Parish, in Rochester NY**, wrote on the Children's Sabbath last year: "Dear Parishioners, Today is World Mission Sunday. Our prayers in the intercessions and our gifts in the 2<sup>nd</sup> collection help the work of bringing the Gospel to the 4 corners of our globe. Thank you for your care for this special work of the Church on the part of Christ who left it behind for us all! It is also Children's Sabbath. Each year on this day, we have a ministry minute to apprise us of what current need calls out for our attention in applying the Gospel to our daily life. Shoring up local Child Protective Services has been in the local news lately with the tragic story of little Brook Stagles' death. We'll hear more about what we can do from members of our Peace & Justice/Social Ministry committees... [at the] 4:30, 8:00, 11:00 and 5:00 Masses, ...9:00 Mass, and ...9:45 Mass. Thanks for your attention to this critical need and to the signing of the items requested."

**First Presbyterian Church of Dallas** celebrated Children's Sabbath with a "Minute for Mission" highlighting Presbyterian Children's Home, distributing the devotional guide in advance, and a display of how the congregation supports children and youths in the congregation and community with information for how members could get involved.

**Congregation Rodeph Shalom** hosted **Philadelphia's multifaith Children's Sabbath** celebration in 2016. The multifaith, community-wide service, Philadelphia's 23<sup>rd</sup> Children's Sabbath, featured a keynote address from Kevin Johnson, President and CEO of Opportunities Industrialization Center, and music by the Keystone and New Jersey Boychoirs, Pennsylvania and Garden State Girlchoirs, and the Youth and Children's Choir of the Church of Jesus Christ and Latter-Day Saints.

**Grace University Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, MN**, highlighted the Children's Sabbath theme at the top of the bulletin. Children sang and provided other forms of leadership throughout the service. During the time of prayer, the bulletin noted, "We sing the names of all the children at Grace ages 18 and younger – and pray for children throughout the world." The sung response was "peace be yours" with the refrain, "For all children near and far, we pray to you, O God. Bless the children ev'rywhere, they are precious in your sight." During the week after the Children's Sabbath, the Lutheran Campus Ministry hosted a forum, "Faith, Politics, and Finding Common Ground" featuring two state senators—one a Democrat, one a Republican, both Lutheran—sharing how "faith informs their vocation as an elected official" followed by a conversation about "what shared values inform their work together."

**Union Church in Berea, Kentucky**, printed an excerpt from Marian Wright Edelman's letter in the Children's Sabbath materials in its bulletin for "Meditation" before worship. At the end of the bulletin, they included information about the Children's Sabbath, CDF, and core facts about child poverty. Union Church then used its website to follow up on the Children's Sabbath with suggestions for prayer and action.

**Newport Lutheran Church in Newport, MN**, celebrated its Children's Sabbath in November, and designated the Children's Defense Fund as the recipient of its mission giving that month.



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**The Communities of Christ** based in Independence, MO, developed worship suggestions and sermon helps for their congregations, posted on the denomination's website.

**First United Methodist Church of Park Ridge, IL**, celebrated the Children's Sabbath with leaders from the child advocacy organization ChildServ preaching during the service and speaking at an after-church forum.

**Temple Emanuel in Greensboro, NC**, marked the Children's Shabbat with a guest speaker, Sharon L. Contreras, Guilford County Schools' new superintendent.

**East Liberty Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh** wrote about one of their Children's Sabbath celebrations, "Children's Sabbath Sunday at ELPC is a time for us to lift up and celebrate the children in our midst, offer prayers for children everywhere, and remind ourselves of God's call to work for the well-being of all children. It also is a Sunday where we educate ourselves about programs and mission efforts that work on behalf of children who are in need. This year, we are pleased to welcome the Rev. Saleem Ghubril as our guest preacher at our 11 a.m. service. The Rev. Ghubril is the executive director of the Pittsburgh Promise, a program that offers hope through the promise of providing college scholarships to all students enrolled in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. Following worship, a reception and opportunity to hear more from the Rev. Ghubril about the Pittsburgh Promise will be held." During the adult education hour, the congregation heard about the work of a volunteer team that had gone to Waveland, Mississippi to serve. The Sunday following the Children's Sabbath featured a Community Health Fair sponsored by the Health Ministry and a celebration of mission following worship week after that. The congregation was urged, "During the coming weeks, keep in mind how Christ sends us out into the world as the witnesses to the gospel and agents of peace and change for what is just and faithful."

In Tucson, Arizona, **Capilla del Sol Christian Church** (Disciples of Christ) celebrated their first Children's Sabbath as the culmination of the Light a Candle for Children 40 Days of Prayer sponsored by their denomination. In addition to the special worship service and speaker, they distributed handouts of volunteer opportunities and are supporting a "shoebox ministry" with children in Nogales, Mexico. St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Atlanta has celebrated Children's Sabbath for five years. They held three Children's Sabbath services on Sunday morning for between 600–700 people. The service included special prayers and a sermon focusing on the Children's Sabbath. They also had educational signs up around the church and offered a course on issues of poverty and children during their Adult Christian Education hour, as well as a special class for the fifth graders. As a result of the Children's Sabbath, organizers reported that there was increased openness to bringing volunteer opportunities for child advocacy to the church.

**St. Thomas the Apostle Church**, a Catholic parish in Columbus, Ohio, began preparing the hearts and minds of their parishioners long before the Children's Sabbaths weekend. Four weeks before the designated weekend, they began inserting selected statistics of children in need and prayers into the weekly bulletin for reflection. On the Children's Sabbath they focused the liturgy, prayers, and music on children's needs, involved children and youths more fully in the service, and offered educational programs on children's concerns. They will build on their Children's Sabbath through the social concerns ministry, focusing on the ongoing problem of poverty.

**The Bahá'í community of Portsmouth, New Hampshire**, partnered with the **North Church of Portsmouth (Episcopal)** for an interfaith Children's Sabbaths celebration. The interfaith gathering was held at the North Church parish house. The program was guided by the prayers and readings from the Children's Sabbaths manual and facilitated by a core planning group comprised of six youths from both communities. The selected readings focused on children at risk and were complemented by a dance performance, presentation of art, and photographs of children. In lieu of an offering, those in attendance were asked to contribute canned goods to a local shelter serving children and families in need.

**Big Bethel AME Church in Atlanta**, a long-time leader in the Children's Sabbath weekend, celebrated a recent Children's Sabbath with an informational forum focused on legislation affecting children, youth, and families. The forum also addressed concerns for community action such as bullying, gangs, gun violence, and academic achievement. Panelists included local leaders such as a state senator, child advocacy staff, and counselors, as well as young organizers. The day included small-group discussions for children and youths.

**In Southern California**, over twenty mosques participated in the National Observance of Children's Sabbaths celebration. Khutbahs focused on the over nine million children in America without health insurance and statistics were used from the Children's Sabbaths manual to illustrate the need for Muslims to encourage their state and federal elected officials to pass comprehensive health legislation that covers all children. The success of the Children's Sabbath Celebration led the **Shura Council of Southern California** to host a follow-up conference highlighting the voiceless plight of children from faith perspectives.

