Children’s Sabbath 2014

The resources, suggestions, and ideas in this document are taken from the Children’s Sabbath 2014 materials provided for use by the Children’s Defense Fund (except where UMFS is mentioned). Churches are free to modify these materials as appropriate for your congregation. Portions of the sermon were taken from the sample sermon included for use in the 2014 CDF Children’s Sabbath materials. To view the entire CDF Children’s Sabbath materials and additional resources, please visit www.childrensdefense.org and register to download the materials. UMFS unwavering champion for youth and their families strives to serve the children of Virginia who are most at risk. If you would like more information about UMFS please visit our web site at www.umfs.org or visit us at:

3900 West Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23230
Telephone: 804-353-4461
Fax: 804-355-2334
Email: jtorrence@umfs.org
Rev. Joe Torrence, Minister for Youth and Church Relations
GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

Involve children and youth in the service as much as possible. For example:

Ask a youth to deliver the sermon
Review the Children’s Sabbath service and prepare the week before (perhaps in Sunday school classes). They can practice responses and hymns so they may join more fully in the Children’s Sabbath service.

Have children and youth
- Design and paint the altar coverings or make a special banner.
- Draw pictures for the bulletin cover.
- Decorate the sanctuary with drawings or banners that the children have made.
- Assist and greet worshipers, light candles, or collect the offering.
- Lead a procession to begin the Children’s Sabbath.
- Participate through music. The children might sing a special anthem, play an instrumental piece, or perform a song in sign language.
- Read prayers and scriptural passages and lead responsive readings.
- Write a prayer to be used in the service.
- Prepare a dramatic skit for the service.
- Place items on the altar during the offering that serve to remind the congregation of the love and care our children require.

Other Suggestions to Consider:

Collect toothbrushes, stuffed animals, and soft blankets for children in local foster care. The items can be brought forward during the offering and placed at the base of the altar as part of the worship. Or, collect a monetary offering designated to benefit an under-resourced school or an organization serving or working on behalf of children, such as UMFS.

Have a special “time with children” or Children’s Sermon during the service, so that the Children’s Sabbath focus can be presented to them in an especially engaging and age-appropriate way. See the sample Children’s Sermons in this section. Or, in a role reversal, have one of the children give an “Adults’ Sermon”—a short message from a child to the adults.

Incorporate a special blessing of children. Have all of the children and youth come to the altar at an appropriate time in the service. Adults surround them and a special prayer focused on children is prayed.

Dedicate ministries/programs serving children or commission staff and board members of child-serving programs affiliated with the congregation and celebrate their work as part of the congregation’s ministry.

Honor people who are pursuing justice and answering God’s call to protect children through their work or volunteer engagement. At an appropriate point in the
service, invite these professionals and/or volunteers (contacted in advance) to come forward for a brief time of recognition for their work putting their faith into action to seek justice for children, with prayers for God’s guidance in their work and prayers for the children they serve. Present them with a flower, ribbon, or other token so that later others might identify them and offer personal appreciation.

**Collect special offerings for children and families.** In addition to monetary offerings, consider collecting items to help children and families, such as school supplies, books, or warm clothing. One congregation held an “Undie Sunday” to collect new children’s underwear and socks to donate to a homeless shelter. Announce the special offering in advance.

**Organize a “listening team” to discern the needs in your community.** Plan to have team members talk with people in your place of worship and in the broader community. What challenges do they see facing children and families? What do they think needs to be done? How do they think places of worship could improve circumstances facing children and families? Have the listening team members jot down notes from the conversations and develop a collective impression of the problems facing families and what your place of worship could do to help. Be sure to talk to teachers, students, and school administrators to find out how your place of worship can be most helpful in helping all children learn and succeed. Decide what is feasible to take on and plan steps to follow through. You could launch the listening team on the Children’s Sabbath weekend, or you could organize it in the months leading up to the Children’s Sabbath so that on the Children’s Sabbath weekend the team could share with your place of worship some of what it has learned so far.

**Share the faces and stories.** Before the Children’s Sabbath, designate a bulletin board and post photographs of the children (with parents’ permission) and staff members. Following the Children’s Sabbath, invite the program staff to post a monthly note describing what the children are doing and perhaps display some of the artwork and projects. You could also invite them to post requests for needed items on the bulletin board. When your place of worship has family-friendly activities and outings, invite the families served by the weekday child care, Head Start, or preschool program to join in.

**How to Plan a Children’s Sabbath:**

**Begin with prayer.** The success of the Children’s Sabbath—its ability to stir the hearts and minds and hands of people to nurture and protect children—ultimately relies on God’s grace. Seek God’s guidance for your Children’s Sabbath, turn to God for the strength and commitment to plan it, pray for partners to help you in this venture, and thank God for the precious children God has entrusted to our care. Whatever your faith Tradition, and whatever words you choose to pray, knows that God is with you as you embark on planning a Children’s Sabbath.

**Secure support from appropriate church leaders, staff, or committees.** In addition to obtaining approval for planning a Children’s Sabbath, do some preliminary
investigation into potential sources of financial support for your Children’s Sabbath. Of course, you will have a better idea of your budget when you are further into the planning process. You may find that you can plan a Children’s Sabbath with little additional expense.

**Mark the date on the calendar for your place of worship.** The 2014 Children’s Sabbath is October 18-20. Most Children’s Sabbaths will take place on this third full weekend of October during a congregation’s traditional worship and education time. If your congregation has a conflict with this date, select another. Keeping your celebration during the usual worship time promises greater participation and communicates That the Children’s Sabbath is an integral part of your congregation’s worship, work, and witness. If you select a time other than the traditional time for your place of worship, be prepared to do lots of extra promotion to ensure a strong turnout.

**Determine the format of your Children’s Sabbath.** You may decide to start small and build your celebration in future years, or you may want to plan an ambitious celebration now. Choose the approach that is right for your congregation and will provide a successful, affirming experience upon which you can build year after year.

**Recruit a committee to plan the Children’s Sabbath and activities leading up to or following it.** Involving a broad range of people brings a wealth of gifts and experience, builds greater excitement and “ownership” of the Children’s Sabbath throughout the congregation, and helps ensure that no single person gets overloaded. In addition to church leaders and congregation staff, consider involving Christian education teachers, social action committee members, children and youths, and any interested congregation members. Develop a meeting schedule that will allow sufficient planning time. Many committees find they need more frequent meetings in September and October as the Children’s Sabbath draws near.

**Identify leadership within the committee.** Designate a chairperson or co-chairs to guide the planning and ensure that goals are set, responsibilities assigned and fulfilled, and that the process moves forward effectively. You also may want to name a secretary who will keep notes of committee meetings and communicate decisions and other information to those involved. (Be sure to involve or keep informed all who will be affected by Children’s Sabbath activities, such as musicians, educational program teachers and volunteers, and secretaries.) A treasurer could keep tabs on the budget allotted for the Children’s Sabbath and also oversee in-kind contributions donated by the community. As the Children’s Sabbath planning proceeds, the chairperson(s) should assign new tasks and responsibilities as they arise.
Children’s Sermon

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” And he laid his hands on them and went on his way. Matthew 19:13-26

(If you use a Children’s Sermon, you may insert it wherever it is most appropriate for your congregation in the order of worship. It is suggested that children remain in the service and be a part of the entire congregational worship experience on Children’s Sabbath.)

What you need: For this time with children, you will want visual aids like a birthday candle, balloons or even a cake. You will need things to celebrate a birthday party.

Say, “Has anyone here ever celebrated your birthday? What happened and what did you get? Now imagine if you were never given a birthday party how do you think you might feel? Can you believe that there are some kids in our community that no one celebrates their birthday, how do you think they may feel?

In this story about Jesus we hear about him blessing the children and the Disciples getting really mad. This is because in Jesus’ day the children were not considered to be very important in fact they were often not celebrated at all. Jesus turns and says to his disciples let the kids come. Jesus is saying kids are awesome, every kid, that is right every single kid on the face of the planet is important to God. Sometimes as adults we need to be reminded that Jesus loves all of the little children of the world and if that is true we need to do the same.

And there are things children can do to help celebrate other kids. We can share a snack or lunch with another child if they are hungry and don’t have food. We can bring in cans of food to our church to be given to hungry families. If your family grows vegetables in a garden, maybe you will share some of that good food with families that need it. What else could you do to help others?

Thank you for those great ideas. Let’s have a prayer.

Dear God,
Help us to remember that you want us to love and celebrate everyone because we are all your children. Help us to find those in our community and world who need to know that they matter to someone.
Show us how to celebrate each other.
Amen.
ORDER OF WORSHIP

Happy Birthday!
Theme: Precious in God’s Sight: Answering the Call to Cherish and Protect Every Child
(Modify as appropriate for your congregation)

Prelude

Greeting

Call to Worship

We gather to worship God who created each and every child in God’s own image.
We gather in the name of Christ who welcomed and blessed the children.
We gather empowered by the Spirit who moves in and among us as we work for justice.
Come, let us worship God

Hymn of Praise: Gather Us In

Prayer of Confession:
O God of all children, we confess that we love too few and too little.
We fail to glimpse your image in each and every child.
We cherish our “own” children but don’t value others’.
We keep silent when children’s needs cry out for help.
O God, in your tender mercy,
Open our eyes to see every child as a reflection of you.
Open our hearts to cherish each child as we would love our own.
Open our mouths to speak your word of justice to protect children in harm’s way.
(National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths® Celebration
Christian Worship Resources for the Children’s Sabbath
These things we pray as your imperfect but precious children,
in the name of your beloved Child, Jesus. Amen.
(Rachel Smith, Vigils Against Violence from NC Council of Churches website)

Assurance of Pardon
Beloved, we are God’s children. We try again to be who God intends us to be and to be
a voice for children in our world, in our communities and in our lives – in Jesus Christ
we are forgiven. Amen.

Sing: Jesus Loves the Little Children

Children sing:
Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world.
Red or yellow, black or white,
They are precious in his sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Reader 1: Each day in America,
7 children or teens are killed by guns
1,392 babies are born into extreme poverty
1,837 children are confirmed as abused or neglected
2,857 high school students drop out
16,244 public school students are suspended.

Reader 2: Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Do we?
What are we going to do to show in word and deed Jesus’ love for every child?

Reader 3: Prayerfully consider:
How will you reach out to cherish children? [Time for silent reflection]
How will you speak out to protect children? [Time for silent reflection]
What change will you pray for in yourself to help you fulfill those commitments? [Time for silent reflection]

Together:
Because Jesus whom we seek to follow loves all the children of the world, so shall we.
Let us join together to sing:
We will love the little children,
All the children of the world,
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in God’s sight,
We will love the little children of the world.

Prayer for Illumination
Tender God, by your Spirit
help us calm and quiet our souls
like a child with its mother
so that we may hear your Word to us this day
and respond in faith. Amen.

Old Testament Scripture Reading: : Isaiah 43:1-7 (Suggested text for those not following a lectionary)
But now thus says the Lord,
[God] who created you, O Jacob,
[God] who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name,
you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
I give Egypt as your ransom,  
Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for your.  
Because you are precious in my sight,  
and honored, and I love you,  
I give people in return for you,  
 nations in exchange for your life.  
Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;  
I will say to the north, “Give them up,”  
and to the sought, “Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—  
everyone who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made.”

New Testament Reading:  
Matthew 19:13-15  
Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Sermon Starter: DeShawn, age 13, had been in the UMFS program for a few months when his birthday rolled around. Every other month, the Woman’s Auxiliary holds a birthday party for the residents and students. It was DeShawn’s turn to be celebrated. Picking him up from class that day, he was determined not to go because it would be silly and a waste of time. But he was convinced to go anyway. Upon arriving, he had a grimace on his face and sat at the table mad at the world. He was invited to help himself to BBQ with all of the fixings. As he went back for seconds, you could tell his demeanor changing until there was a slight smile on his face. After lunch, birthday cake and ice cream were served as we sang “Happy Birthday” to DeShawn. Later he received a birthday gift, card, and balloon. He was having a great time. The party ended and DeShawn was walked back to his classroom. During the walk back, he became very withdrawn again. After sometime, he was asked what was wrong because we thought he was having fun. DeShawn responded, with a tear running down his cheek, “I had a great time. It is just that this was the first birthday party that I have ever had.”
There are so many DeShawn’s of the world. They all deserve a birthday party. Jesus provides the Grace we need to have the ultimate party. He always invites the little children to come.

Response of Commitment:
O God of the children of Somalia, Sudan, and Syria, of South Africa and South Carolina, Of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and of India, Iraq, Iran, and Israel
Of the Congo and Chicago, of Darfur and Detroit
Of Myanmar and Mississippi and Louisiana and Yemen
Help us to love and respect and protect them all.
O God of Black and Brown and White and Albino children and those all mixed together,
Of children who are rich and poor and in between,
Of children who speak English and Russian and Hmong and Spanish and languages our ears cannot discern,
Help us to love and respect and protect them all.

Hymn of Commitment: O for a World- Mirriam Therese Winter

Prayers of the People
(Prayers of the People)
(Before the prayers of the people, pass baskets containing crayons, pencil stubs, chalk, Band-Aids®, pennies, and pens along the pews. Invite each congregation member to take one item. These items will be referenced in the Prayers of the People. Afterward, encourage members to take the item home and to pray for those it symbolizes.)
Almighty God, the challenges facing children and those who care for them can seem so huge and so abstract that we lose touch with reality. Help us to remember that the needs and prayers of each child, each parent, each teacher, each caring person are as real and as individual to you as the items in our hands.

(Holding up a crayon)
And so we pray this day for the child care providers and parents who provide safe, warm, stimulating environments to spark a love of learning and fuel the curiosity of our youngest children as they scribble with crayons, pet the hamster, and try to taste the Play-Doh®. We pray especially for those providers who are underpaid and undervalued, for those parents who can’t find quality, affordable care for their children while they work, and for the children whose potential is squelched in poor care. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

(Holding up a piece of chalk)
We pray for the teachers, covered in chalk dust, who devote themselves to educating our children and helping them flourish to their potential. For their dedication, imagination, and concern we give you thanks.
We pray especially for those teachers who have given up on themselves or on the children, those who feel unsafe, those who feel unappreciated. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

(Holding up a pencil stub)
We pray for students gripping pencils as they strive to learn, especially those faced with the challenges of disability, unsafe schools, low expectations from their parents, teachers, and selves, and inadequate resources.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer
(Holding up a Band-Aid®)
We pray for children who are sick and injured, whose ability to learn is hampered by vision and hearing problems or illness. We pray especially for those children who don’t have health insurance to get the care they need, and for their parents who worry about what to do, who rely on temporary solutions when prevention or treatment is needed. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.
(Holding up a penny)
We pray for the youths who are preparing for the world of work, that you will guide them in discovering their gifts and talents, skills and aptitudes, and surround them with teachers and adults who will get them ready to succeed. We pray especially for those young people who fear they will not be able to find work and earn a living, who don’t have adults to help them prepare, and who despair of ever succeeding. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.
(Holding up a pen)
We pray for our leaders in government, business, and the media, that the laws they write, the bottom lines that are inked, and the stories they pen will demonstrate an investment and priority in our children today for our future tomorrow. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

**Offertory Prayer:**
Creator of all good things and giver of every gift, Jesus we thank you for the blessings you give us and ask you to help us to be good stewards of those gifts. Allow our blessings to be a blessing to others.

**Offering of Our Tithes and Gifts** (include a time when tangible donations for children can be brought to the altar if your church publicized and invited this)

**Act of Commitment:**
(If desired, children could develop a dramatic scene to accompany the reading of Greenless Child by Ann Weems below. Perhaps one child would be dressed in drab gray, while the other children are dressed in bright oranges, yellows, and other vibrant colors and carry streamers. These children could dance and swirl bright streamers while the child in gray sits quietly and forlornly. On the last line, she could look straight out at the congregation. Any number of people, of a variety of ages, could take turns reading the leader lines.)

Leader:
I watched her go uncelebrated into the second grade,
A greenless child,
Gray among the orange and yellow,
Attached too much to corners and to other people’s sunshine.
She colors the rainbow brown
And leaves balloons unopened in their packages.
Oh, who will touch this greenless child?
Who will plant alleluias in her heart
And send her dancing into all the colors of God?
Or will she be left like an unwrapped package on
the kitchen table —
Too dull for anyone to take the trouble?
Does God think we’re her keeper?

Leader: Who will touch the greenless children, and work to see that every child enters
school ready to learn, with strong early childhood experiences that are safe and
nurturing?

People: We will, with the grace of God.

Leader: Who will believe, and act on the belief, that all children can succeed and
perform at high levels?

People: We will, with the grace of God.

Closing Hymn: The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve (Words: Delores Dufner, OSB,
Music:U.S.A. Folk Melody)

Charge and Benediction:
Go forth knowing that you are a precious child of God.
Go forth to cherish every child of God,
Go forth to protect and seek justice for children.
May the love of God who created you, the grace of Christ who blessed the
children, and the communion of the Spirit whom Jesus called the Advocate,
be with you and every child of God this day forth and forever more. Amen.