



What Can Your Congregation Do?

Educate the Congregation about the Needs of Children and the Poor.

- Celebrate Children's Sabbath.
- Hold study series on needs of children and the poor.
- Have a sermon series on needs of children.
- Hold a series of seminars on needs of children in your community.
- Hold a series of educational sessions on new research on brain development in young children.
- Keep congregation informed through bulletin inserts, newsletters, bulletin boards.
- Go to continuing education events on children/poverty.

Make Church Facilities Safe and Welcoming for Children and Families.

- Evaluate facilities and assure that certain safety protections are in place.
- Identify ways to make the church hospitable and welcoming for children.
- Review and implement child care facilities for safety and hospitality.

Reduce the Risk of Child Abuse.

- Develop policies and procedures for prevention of child abuse.
- Hold adult education series on child abuse identification and response.
- Obtain and use age-appropriate abuse prevention curriculum for children.
- Offer parent support groups and parenting classes.

- Provide "safe corridors" for children walking to and from school.
- Sponsor before/after school program that provides a safe haven.

Help Children Grow as Faithful Disciples.

- Evaluate your program of faith formation for children.
- Provide new opportunities for children to practice being disciples.
- Help children understand and participate in rites of baptism and communion.
- Establish a "Sprouts" program, using Sprouts curriculum available from Cokesbury.
- Include children in your stewardship campaign.
- Provide human sexuality learning experience for older children/younger youth and their parents.
- Provide learning opportunities for parents.
- Match adult faith mentors and children.
- Design study for parents on faith development in the home.
- Sponsor an annual mission study series for children.

Involve Children in the Life of the Church.

- Regularly involve children in worship in specific ways.
- Help children and adults prepare to worship.
- Have children regularly lead adults as a reversal of "Children's Time."
- Include children and/or youth as

- members of all church committees.
- Provide a children's column in your newsletter or a special children's newsletter.
- Institute meaningful multigenerational activities and programs.

Reach Out to Children in the Community.

- Find specific ways to support public schools.
- Study *Education: The Gift of Hope*, available from Cokesbury.
- Offer ongoing tutoring and mentoring programs.
- Provide supervised before and/or after school programs.
- Offer weekly "Parents' Day (or Evening) Out."
- Offer a drug prevention program for neighborhood children and youth.
- Offer Vacation Bible School that is open to community children.
- Sponsor a Family Health Fair.
- Provide school supply kits to neighborhood children.
- Send community children to camp along with children of the church.
- Sponsor a summer day camp program for community children.
- Develop a community garden on church property for neighborhood families.
- Offer free music or art lessons.
- Provide a "lending closet" of costly items needed by families.
- Provide transportation to prenatal classes and clinics.
- Sponsor partnerships between new and experienced parents.

Advocate for Legislation and Public Policies that improve Children's Lives and Lives of Poor Families.

- Join a child advocacy network.
- Publish child advocacy information and action alerts in your church newsletter.
- Sponsor monthly forum on legislation.
- Establish a child advocacy information center or bulletin board in church.
- Hold a community-wide voter registration drive.
- Arrange free transportation to voting polls.
- Hold a Candidates' Forum on Children and Families and challenge candidates for public office to put children and their families first.

Relate to Children around the World.

- Sponsor an educational event or series on the impact of war on children.
- Sponsor an educational event on the issue of child labor.
- Sponsor an educational event on the issue of child prostitution.
- Use mission magazine stories about children around the world in reports to the congregation.
- Study needs of children around the world, and send gifts through the Advance.
- Have an annual focus on mission for children of the church, using *Children's Prayer Calendar* and Children's Fund for mission resources.
- Encourage children to relate to children around world through pen pals.

Build Administrative Supports for Ministry with Children and the Poor.

- Establish a Children's Advisory Council.
- Evaluate your congregation's ministry with children and make three changes or additions.
- Evaluate and revamp teacher training for workers with children.
- Assign responsibility for oversight of the church's role as advocate for poor families.
- Hold an annual church council meeting to hear from all committees on work with children and the poor.

Grace Note

The Initiative on Children and Poverty has been a means of grace for me. Through ministries with impoverished children and their families, I experienced God's love:

Visiting prisons and jails I met Jesus.

- In worship services led by children I experienced God's presence—in churches, during sessions of annual conference, and on the State House steps.
- Establishing a meaningful, on-going relationship with a disadvantaged child was a channel of blessing.
- Some of our church's finest theologians challenged and strengthened my understanding of and commitment to the Christian gospel according to John Wesley.
- Collaborating with gifted, committed staff members of United Methodist boards and agencies enlarged and deepened my appreciation of our connection.
- I saw a rich man open his storehouse to help provide housing for the elderly poor.

All across the church I saw evidence of God's work through the Initiative:

- Dying congregations came to life as they opened their doors to all the children of their neighborhoods.
- Retired persons, living in boredom and loneliness, came alive with purpose and hope as they reached out to disadvantaged children.
- Communities were transformed as they developed ministries of hospitality for new immigrants who were moving in.
- Faithful stewards among the people called Methodists gave generously of their time, talent, and treasure.
- Congregations grew and blossomed when they put children first.

The Initiative opened doors for ecumenical and interfaith advocacy, witness, and service, challenging state decision-makers to ask before every vote, "How will this affect children?"

For me the Initiative was a sign, foretaste, and instrument of God's Kingdom. It refocused my ministry and reordered my priorities. It became the lens through which I looked at congregations and appointments. My hope in the commitment of Jesus' followers was confirmed by clergy who responded to the Initiative and to the gospel by requesting appointments to inner-city churches, to rural congregations, and to launch storefront churches.

When I was weary with the minutia of the episcopacy, burdened by clergy family trauma, and frustrated by appointment making, I would visit Bethlehem Center. When I was tutoring the children, playing ball, and watching videos, I experienced the healing, renewing grace of Christ. The Initiative revealed to me that it is not children and the poor who are on the margin. It is the church. Children and the impoverished are in the very heart of God.

What has the Initiative been for me and my ministry? Absolutely indispensable.

Bishop Jack Meadors
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