

Celebration of a Public Education Sabbath

Planning Resources

Purpose: The purposes of a Public Education Sabbath are:

- To affirm all who learn and labor in all our schools.
- To call attention to the importance of public education in our state.
- To pledge ourselves to increased activity on behalf of public education

Invitation: We invite every religious and faith community in North Carolina to celebrate a Public Education Sabbath on their day of worship before each school year begins or at another appropriate time during the school year. Please consider:

- Asking God’s blessings on our public schools.
- Praying for all children, parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and school boards.
- Reflecting on scripture and holy teachings about education.
- Planning ways that your religious/faith community can support public education in your area.

Worship

In worship, God’s people are formed and re-formed in faith, hope, and love. God’s people are sent forth from worship to express God’s love for the world in acts of service to neighbor. This guide is an abbreviated selection of resources from a longer packet of resources available on the Council website. It includes brief suggestions for Scripture, prayers, hymns, and sermon preparation. At the end, we have provided links to these and other worship resources available on the Council website. These selections are meant to be suggestive, not determinative or exhaustive. We hope worship leaders and planners will adapt these materials to suit their local contexts.

We also acknowledge that the resources offered here are predominantly Christian. We hope that those suggested here will remind you of appropriate resources in your own tradition. We ask you to share your traditions with other religious and faith communities in your own area and to send them to the Council to use for future Public Education Sabbath materials.

Scripture

Psalm 19: 7-10
 Proverbs 4: 10-13
 Proverbs 22: 6
 2 Timothy 1: 13-14; 3: 14-17

Hymns

“O Master, Let me Walk With Thee”
 “This Little Light of Mine”
 “Bless Thou the Gifts”
 “Be Thou My Vision”

Prayers

For the Care of Children

Almighty God, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom as we bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

From Book of Common Prayer

Congregational Prayer for Children

Loving Parent, we praise You for Your watchful eye of Mercy that protects Your children from the evil one. We thank You that You have blessed us to be loved by You, even when we fail to be obedient. Please, we pray, continue to keep Your children of all ages, in the Hollow of Your Holy Hand. This we ask in the name of Jesus, Our Redeemer. Amen.

From African Methodist Episcopal Zion Book of Worship

A Responsive Prayer for Public Education in North Carolina

Leader (L): We give you thanks, O God:

L: For the splendor of your creation and the amazing beauty of our world.

Response (R): We thank you, Lord.

L: For the wonder of life; for minds to think and hearts to love and hands to serve.

R: We thank you, Lord.

L: For our parents and grandparents, for teachers, for friends, for all who have helped us to grow and learn to love whatever is just and true and good.

R: We thank you, Lord.

L: For the gift of all children today in our family and in our community and the blessing and joy of caring for them and bringing them up.

R: We thank you, Lord.

L: Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings.

R: Guide us and help us, O Lord.

L: In our homes that we may have calm strength and patient wisdom to bring up our children.

R: Guide us and help us, O Lord.

L: In our communities of North Carolina as we “offer all children the quality and varieties of education and other services they need to participate fully in the creation of a just and peaceful society.”*

R: Guide us and help us, O Lord.

L: In giving our ideas, talents, and support to our public schools, to local and state school boards and legislative bodies which are responsible for educating 90% of the children of North Carolina, so that we may ensure quality education for all.

R: Guide us and help us, O Lord.

L: In finding ways to assist teachers and staff and administrators of our public schools so that they may be renewed continually in their chosen vocation to help all your children to develop their gifts fully – “physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual.”*

R: Guide us and help us, O Lord.

L: That our children and young people may be inspired and mentored and grow in their will and the vision to learn.

R: Guide us and help us, O Lord.

All: Loving God, we are beginning a new school year. We will learn more about your creation and what we can do to make it a good place for all. We will make new friends and be with old friends. We do not expect it to be easy. Still we know you will be with us every step of the way, to guide us, to give us understanding and strength, to pick us up if we fall, and help us to make new beginnings. We promise we will do all we can to find ways to serve you and all whom you have made and love. Amen.

* Quotations are taken from Final Report of the Joint Public Education Task Force of the American Missionary Association and the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ, 2001.

Sermon Preparation

The following inquiries into these passages of scripture are given as examples of how Biblical passages might be used to introduce issues concerning Public Education. Please use these suggestions as a springboard for your own spiritual discernment as you prepare to share with your congregation.

From the Bible:

- **God provides Mentors** – 1 Samuel 1-3. The story of Eli and Samuel.
 - Although the human family is the basic instrument God has ordained for the nurture of children, the scripture also gives us examples of people mentoring children. Eli had a family of grown children when Samuel was placed in his care. Elkanah and Hannah appeared to have been good and loving parents, but God’s plan for Samuel included Eli’s involvement as well as theirs. It may have been tempting to Eli to say, “I raised my children, this boy is not my concern,” but Eli’s obedience to God’s leading helped Samuel “to grow both in stature and favor with the Lord and with the people” (1 Samuel 2:26). Likewise, God leads us to understand that the growth and development of all children, (not just “our” children), should be of concern to us.
- **A Snapshot of Creation – The Eager Learner** – Luke 2: 29-46. The boy Jesus learning in the temple.
 - This is the only story in the gospels that tells of Jesus’ childhood, or, indeed, illuminates any of the time between the infancy stories and Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan that was the beginning of his public ministry. The birth story and this childhood story remind us that Jesus started life like the rest of us – small, weak, vulnerable. It was part of God’s plan that Jesus experience babyhood, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. That this story, above all other possible stories, is the one that

Luke shares suggests that learning and growing are an integral part of God's plan for humankind, even for Jesus who was called the Christ. The progress he made in this growth is summed up by the gospel writer in the passage, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). A picture of learning and growth – exactly what we pray is life's outcome for every one of God's children.

From the Holy Qu'ran:

- Surah 016 (AN-NAHL): Ayah 078. It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when ye knew nothing; And He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections; that ye may give thanks (to God).

From the Jewish tradition:

- Each morning, God looks down upon the world and sees so many people being unkind to one another, and doing evil contrary to God's word. So God sends forth an angel to destroy the world and all its wickedness. But then God looks down again and sees the schoolchildren studying with their teachers and learning from their parents, and God moves from the Throne of Justice to the Seat of Mercy, and recalls the angel of destruction for the sake of the schoolchildren. So the world endures because of schoolchildren. No one is more precious or more worthy of our attention.

Other Ways to Explore the Relationship Between Faith Communities and Public Education During Worship

Invite:

- Several families in the congregation, both children and parents, to share their reflections on the importance of public education in their lives and suggest ways we all can support our public schools;
- Several teachers to tell about the way their calling to be teachers is fulfilled in their teaching and ways in which they need the support of the community;
- Members of the school board, the superintendent, or other administrators to share their vision of how religious and faith communities and schools might work together for the sake of children.

Additional Resources

Lectionary

<http://www.ncchurches.org/lectionary/year-a/public-education-proper-21/>

<http://www.ncchurches.org/lectionary/year-b/public-education-proper-20/>

Devotional Guide for Lent

<http://www.ncchurches.org/2014/02/time-mend-social-justice-study-lent/>

Publications

Celebrating a Public Education Sabbath, <http://www.ncchurches.org/publications/>

Thy Kingdom Come: A Call to Prophetic Ministry, Ch. 7, <http://www.ncchurches.org/publications/>