

# Doing right by God requires protecting children

By Marian Wright Edelman  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

On the third weekend in October, thousands of congregations of every denomination across our country held special Children's Sabbath services. The National Observance of Children's Sabbaths is an annual event coordinated by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) that encourages people of faith to lift up the needs of children in prayer, song, and worship and then make long-term action commitments to help children and families through education, service, and advocacy.

Each year, congregations focus on an area of special need and concern for children and families. This year's Children's Sabbath emphasized justice.

As this critical election season ends, people of faith must keep crying out for justice for children. That's why CDF and nearly two hundred faith denominations and leaders held an interfaith service at the Washington National Cathedral on Oct. 28, just before Election Day, to ask what God required of us in seeking justice for children and the poor. Leaders of ma-

major Christian, Jewish, Islamic and other faith groups reminded us all that the God of the Prophets, Gospels, and Koran requires us to give a preference to the poor and to the weak, to the widow and the orphan, and to stand up for those who have no voice. And they reminded us that this meant people of faith needed to go out and vote for those who have no vote: our children.

Recently, a group of these faith leaders held a news conference to talk about the Oct. 28 Interfaith Service for Justice for Children and the Poor

and the massive non-partisan campaigns that were underway to register new voters in underrepresented communities and encourage all voters to go to the polls on Election Day. The Rev. Robert Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, Rabbi David Saperstein, executive director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, and Sayyid M. Syeed, secretary general of the Islamic Society of North America, all said their religious traditions require them to assure social justice for the weak, the powerless and children. Rabbi Saperstein said faith leaders around the nation endorsed this service because "they want the leaders of the wealthiest nation in the world to recognize that there is still poverty here, and nine million of our children have no health insurance."

"We need to re-establish that bipartisan sense of commitment to the children of America, and that is part of what an ethical society is about," he said. "We want to be sure that at a time when people are focused on Iraq and terrorism and record budget deficits, children don't get lost in this. A country that turns its back on its children will not make it in the long run." Syeed said that it was

fitting that the interfaith service was held in the middle of Ramadan, a month when Muslims fast from dawn to dusk and develop a sense of commiseration and compassion for those who must do without. "We have a core concern for the poor, the dispossessed and the weak," he said. "Islam has made that central to its message."

The huge gathering of 2,200 members and leaders of all faiths at the National Cathedral-America's National House of Prayer for all People was a potent symbol of a mobilization that cut across all religious and denominational lines. "We love the fact that the interfaith community is standing up, being recognized and speaking out on behalf of the poor and especially the children of our nation and the world. This is about all political leaders taking this seriously. We believe that new priorities of focusing on the poor and caring for children are very critical for all of those elected officials to realize," Edgar stated.

I am so grateful the faith community answered God's call for justice for children and the poor with such extraordinary speed. The point of our continuing efforts is that it is never too late for leaders on both sides to do

the right thing. On another recent conference call to encourage people of faith to support political leaders who share their concerns about children, Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton said that she stands for children because she was taught in her Methodist upbringing that "where our treasure is, there our heart will be also." Many of us know that message from the Gospels. Our newly elected leaders will be making decisions that will affect children and the poor in our country for generations to come. Where is our treasure going to be?

The poor don't poll well, but there really is good politics in heaven and on earth in treating the poor justly. Tax cuts for the rich have drained our country of resources. All of us must hold our leaders accountable to address the dreadful, shameful facts of child poverty in this country.

And those of us who are people of faith and have heard the words in Proverbs that teach us to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves and for the rights of all who are destitute, and to defend the rights of the poor and needy, have a special obligation: we need to do what God requires.

Marian Wright Edelman is founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund.

## Student Activism

(Continued from Page 7)

have to hold people accountable and during off election years."

Rock the Vote communications director, Jay Strell, also believes it's important to address major issues after the elections.

"During the off season, we work on issue-based campaigns that deal with stuff like the draft, healthcare, and education," he explains. "We work on issue based campaigns that affect the lives of young people — things they are specifically interested in and care about."

The United States Census reports that young adults are twice as likely to have no insurance and almost 30 percent of people under 30 years old at some point will go without health coverage.

"Young people are tuned in. They aren't just worried about themselves. They are worried about their younger siblings," Campbell says. "There has always been a struggle around civil rights, civil engagement and voting rights. This is not a one time deal. People realize that this is real life."

Coming into the election, the IOP reported that 38 percent of college Democrats said they would vote for Bush 48 percent for Kerry and 11 percent were undecided.

Campbell says neither the winner nor the political party is the real issue.

"People working on the electoral process will work together on issues from the federal level to the local level," she says. "No matter who wins, you have to organize yourself around those issues. Politics is a contact sport, the person who gets most out of the political process is the person who knows how to strategize."

Richardson says that young voters are concerned about a variety of issues and finally realize how important their vote is.

"Young people are tired of the failures of the Bush administration," he said. "We saw in 2000 how close the election was and in 2004 we realize our vote really counts and makes a difference. We now know that who is in the White House directly affects our everyday lives."

## Curry

(Continued from Page 11)

to the nominees' hostility toward civil rights. We can't wait another four years to address this imbalance; we need to start the process now.

After we've dealt with the politicians, let's deal with the Black ministers who blindly bought into George Bush's faith-based initiatives but showed no faith in our ability to determine our political destiny. In their leap-of-faith to support "Dubya" — and that's a very big leap — they failed to realize that his initiative was designed primarily to serve as a reward to Bush's Right-wing religious base. Even if that were the deal, why trade in one's integrity for a few crumbs?

When we were protesting segregation in my hometown, Tuscaloosa, Ala., in the early 1960's, I remember one Black minister asserting, "It's not in my contract with Jesus to be taking part in these demonstrations." At that very moment, I lost all respect for him. What did he mean when he said it wasn't in his contract with Jesus to protest? Perhaps he was looking at the wrong contract. He should have consulted the Bible, where he would have found example after example of Jesus' fulfilling his contract with God. Jesus did not turn his back on injustice. Jesus did not seek permission before correcting a wrong. And he

certainly didn't hide behind a pulpit to avoid dealing with the problems of his day.

When I see Black ministers allowing themselves to be sidetracked by tertiary issues concocted by Republicans or opening their church doors for drive-by political visits, I often think about that minister back in my hometown. I sometimes wonder what would have happened if his congregation had said it wasn't in their contract with Jesus to follow a scared, weak-kneed, misguided pastor and therefore, they were switching their membership to another church?

The minister mentioned above, if he is to be believed, has ascended above. Presumably, he took answers to some of my questions with him. But other ministers are still around. Maybe you should ask them some hard questions about making a choice between serving the needs of their community and serving the political needs of George W. Bush.

If they are confused, you might not want to remain a part of their confusion. Pray for them — from a distance and, as they say after reading the church announcements, govern yourself accordingly.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

## Overstreet

(Continued from Page 10)

needs screwed up, or your boy Maslow didn't know what the hell he was talking about.

Since one of my favorite spots is being out on the proverbial limb, here are two predictions I will make about a second Bush term in office. (1) The war in Iraq will lead to major demonstrations in American cities this summer or next. More and more Americans will

face economic depression. We may even be faced with modern day Hoovervilles which were campsites built in urban areas by homeless families (named after President Hebert Hoover during the time of the Great Depression) in the form of Bushvilles. This will be the result of more and more people being forced to live on the streets due to their economic state of being.

## Walters

(Continued from Page 11)

hol use induce them to follow his lead?" What kind of example does it set to make someone with that background the leader of the city? And when Barry was restored to credibility by the redemption ritual of some prominent ministers, some in the national media said that he was just using religion as a cover and that he really wasn't saved. Where have these voices been recently? Silent when it came to Bush.

I have been saying for some time that when people give you a substantial benefit of the doubt, and keep giving it, that something is at work other than the facts or logic. Something was at work between George Bush and the majority who are his supporters that does not lend itself to the normal, fair functioning of the political system with all of the canons of rational choice that we like to use. What is at work is a deeply cultural basis of choice which gives him a

pass on many of the things that would severely limit others, especially Democrats and, most certainly, Blacks, in this era of history from doing some of the same things.

I think about the relentlessness with which all of our Black candidates for president have been found lacking in their background by the media. And I think about what would have happened to Bill Clinton if he had passed out no-bid contracts like so much Christmas candy, or if he had started a war with the flimsy rationale that was used to promote the war in Iraq. And I think about the theft of the entire election of 2000. And I wonder what will it take to stop the profound corruption of the path toward democratic society in this age that the Bush supporters are waging.

Ron Walters is a professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland-College Park.