

## KENTUCKY COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

### **CHILDREN IN CRISIS**

First proposed by the Program Unit on Peacemaking/Racism and Adopted by the 47th Annual Assembly, October 20-21, 1994

Updated and Revised by the 67<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly on October 25, 2014, meeting in Lakeside Park, KY

#### THE CURRENT PROBLEM

Fifty years after a US president declared a “war on poverty,” the richest nation on earth continues to allow 26 percent of our children who are age five or under to live in poverty. In Kentucky in 2011, 37 percent of our children had no parent who was employed both year-round and full-time. As Marian Wright Edelman has written, “We know that poverty makes children more likely to be born too small, to die, be sick, hungry and malnourished, to fall behind in school and drop out, and to cost their families immeasurable suffering and taxpayers billions in later remedial costs and lost productivity. How do we reconcile rampant national child neglect and preventable suffering with the biblical warning that from those to whom much is given, much is expected?” (Edelman, Preface, Welcome The Child, p.v)

The Commonwealth of Kentucky has faith communities, advocacy communities and many leaders who take this challenge to heart. Vigorous efforts and model programs are underway to cover all children with health insurance, to enhance diversion programs that keep children out of jails, and give children a better start in life. And yet, 18 percent of our youths are not graduating from high school on time, one indicator of the many troubles our children face from low birth weights, high substance abuse, high teen pregnancy rates, and exposure to trauma.

#### THEOLOGICAL BASIS

Scripture and Tradition admonish the faithful that one of their responsibilities to God is the care and nurture of children, just as God has cared for and nurtured human beings as our Holy Parent. The Bible proclaims through story, poetry, liturgical words, and history the belief that God is our loving parent. As Christians, we affirm that in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus, God’s promise became even more personal, so that we feel ourselves to be joint heirs with Christ, the adopted brothers and sisters of the Word made flesh in the Son of God.

We trifle with God’s love for us as God’s children when we neglect to make the health, growth, nurture, and education of all children a priority. It is God’s intention that all children should, like our brother Christ, “increase in wisdom and in years, and in divine human favor.” (Luke 2:52 NRSV) Christ himself said that as we welcome children we welcome him (allow him a kindly reception in our lives).

The Kentucky Council of Churches was born from ecumenical roots established in the Sunday School movement, an effort by churches and Christian people to give aid, life opportunities, and nurture in Christian beliefs and values to the orphans and child-workers employed for long hours in slave-like conditions during the Industrial Revolution. The Sunday School movement affirmed the worth of children for their own sake, not as an additional worker.

The nature and quality of children’s lives indicates the health and strength of a community or society. How we value children reflects our stewardship of God’s manifold gifts in creation and our faithfulness to God’s covenant with us. Jesus clearly told his followers to welcome children and warned those who caused children to “stumble”. In our time, we need to hear Christ’s instruction about children in fresh ways. The condition of the world’s children confronts us with a pressing need to refocus our attention on children and their needs in our public programs for the common good, in our churches, and in our families.

#### RESOLUTION

THEREFORE, believing that children, their lives, welfare and nurture are a priority concern for our churches, it shall be the policy of the Kentucky Council of Churches:

1. To support legislation that will alleviate the suffering of children caused by poverty, disease, abuse, racism, sexism, lack of provision of adequate medical treatment, punishments that are divorced from rehabilitation, and

inadequate educational opportunities, and to oppose public policies and legislation that will result in more suffering or create more problems for children and youth.

2. To encourage the churches in every community across the Commonwealth of Kentucky to embrace all the children of their community as their own, reaching out to them with supportive relationships of guidance and friendship, formative experiences and practical services, and advocating policy changes that help them in all the ways we would want our own children to be helped.

To encourage the churches to emphasize the welfare of children, and to participate in the nationwide annual celebrations of the Children's Sabbath, a multi-faith emphasis sponsored by the Children's Defense Fund.

To challenge one another within the Kentucky Council of Churches to renew, strengthen, and develop efforts in our communities to educate children, youth and adults on matters of violence prevention, conflict resolution, and social and economic justice.