

*April is Child Abuse Prevention Month*

*April 23 is Blue Ribbon Sabbath*

## **BLUE RIBBON OBSERVANCES**

Blue Ribbon observances can be tailored to fit a particular congregation's interests, needs, and resources. Some of these ideas may be useful to your church or temple in building or strengthening a community of faith in which children and families know that help is available when they need it.

### **Celebrate or Initiate Services for Families**

Blue Ribbon Sabbath can provide an opportunity to celebrate existing programs or establish new ones to support families within the congregation or the community as a whole. These efforts may be undertaken by an organization within the congregation (for example, an adult Sunday School class), the congregation as a whole, or multiple congregations across the community.

- *Launch emergency relief services*
- *Renovate unsafe housing*

Parents who must constantly struggle to meet families' basic needs may be too overwhelmed to provide proper care. Even if parents are coping as well as they can under such circumstances, they may lack the resources to provide adequate shelter and nutrition.

- *Organize volunteers to provide emergency child care*
- *Host or support a Family Activity Center to include activities such as playgroups, Parents' Night Out program, financial education opportunities, and more*
- *Join with other congregations to make such services easily available to the whole community*

The most common reason for referral to Child Protective Services is a child's being left alone. Knowing that child care is easily available when an emergency occurs or simply when one needs a break is one of the most powerful elements of social support for parents.

- *Provide Family Friends, who are volunteer helpers or partners, to parents of young children*
- *Create parent networks or family clusters*
- *Through school partnerships, facilitate parents' interaction with each other and their engagement and leadership in the community*
- *Encourage young adults to assume important roles in service to the congregation and the community as a whole*

Mutual assistance is important in sustaining social support and alleviating worries about care of children. Having someone to call when a baby won't stop crying may be an important step in prevention of maltreatment. The development of parent leadership and

civic engagement helps to strengthen family life and to support children's successful development.

- *Establish a task force to develop and implement other strategies for child protection and family support*

Such planning could be a direct outgrowth of adult Sunday School discussions on Blue Ribbon Sabbath or at a family-night supper.

### **Have Special Observances in a Worship Service**

- *Build the entire worship service around themes of building community, supporting families, and caring for children*
- *In adult Sunday School classes, discuss the myths and facts about keeping children safe (you might invite a STRONG COMMUNITIES staff member or volunteer to lead the discussion)*
- *Ask members of the congregation to bring items to replenish the supplies of a community organization serving children and families*
- *During the worship service, include a brief presentation about Blue Ribbon Sabbath, the reasons for its observance, and the possibilities for follow-up*
- *Honor members who are leaders in support for families in the congregation and the community*
- *Sign pledges to watch out for families of young children*
- *Wear blue-ribbon stickers to signify such commitments*
- *Include inserts in the bulletin or newsletter that explain Blue Ribbon Sabbath and describe opportunities for volunteer service*

**For help in implementing these ideas, finding resources, or linking with other organizations, feel free to contact the STRONG COMMUNITIES outreach worker who serves your community, or call the STRONG COMMUNITIES office at 688-2214.**