

A Week of Prayer For Our Children and Youth

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon; "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." ~ Jeremiah 29:4-7

Welcome to the Second Annual Week of Prayer for Our Children and Youth. You are joining with thousands of other people who are praying in unity around some specific topics that we face in our city. CHILDREN AT RISK, the leading research and advocacy group in our city, provided the "Did you know" information at the beginning of each prayer request. For more information you may visit their web site at <http://www.childrenatrisk.org>.

In addition to praying these prayers with others on a daily basis, please share them with those in your circle of friends.

FAITH SUMMIT

On August 12, pastors, ministry leaders, and those who serve and advocate for children will be gathering for our second annual Faith Summit. Bob Sanborn, CEO of CHILDREN AT RISK will bring an update on the seven issues for which we are praying and we will spend considerable time praying in unity as the gathered Faith Community in the greater Houston area. The Summit will be held at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church from 11 am – 1 pm in their fellowship hall. To purchase a ticket, go to the CHILDREN AT RISK web site (listed above) or call Laura Nelson at 713.869.7740.

PRAYER GUIDE

DAY 1

Prayer for the Children and Families of Many Nations across Houston

***Did you know that** in 2007 an estimated 75% of children between birth and 17 are non-Anglo? Houston is the second most diverse city in the U.S. with over 140 nations, more than 200 languages spoken and over 300 people groups. Let us pray for the growing diverse population of children at-risk across our city.*

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we worship You as King of kings and Lord of lords and as God of all people. There is no god like You. We celebrate Your love and guiding Hand as many

nations have come to our city to live, work, attend educational centers and experience the many blessings and benefits in our city. We declare that fullness in life comes ultimately from You, the Author of life.

Forgive us Lord for consciously or unconsciously allowing walls of prejudice and hatred to form in our thoughts and actions. Forgive us Lord for erecting walls of division and classism that grieve Your heart and damage relationships. Take the bricks that we have used to build walls and use them to build bridges of love, goodwill and unity. During this special season of prayer for our city's most vulnerable children, we pray that You would especially bless the remarkable diversity across our city and in every community.

We especially pray for children of all nationalities in every community. We ask Your Spirit of Truth and justice to inform our thoughts and guide our actions as we seek to be loving witnesses to our neighbors – rich or poor, regardless of race or ethnicity. Lord God, You have deposited rich gifts in all people – from all nations. Cultivate a climate within our hearts and community that blesses and calls forth the inherent gifts You have given to the children and parents of many nations you have brought to our city.

We worship You, God of all nations and King of Glory. These things we ask in the strong Name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

DAY 2

Prayer for Children and Families in Poverty

Did you know that 24% of Harris County children live in poverty and a total of 47% live in low income families? Texas is ranked 46th in percentage of children living in poverty, with only Alabama, Louisiana, New Mexico and Mississippi are doing worse. Related to poverty, Texas has the highest percentage of uninsured children in the nation at 24.6%.

Let us pray: Almighty God, source of life and every good gift, we worship You as Savior, Lord and Provider today. In You the scriptures declare there is no want. Thank You that You love all people with an everlasting love, and that You are for us! Your heart, Lord, breaks when people are in pain. Thank You for the many times You have come to our lives when we suffered during times of physical, emotional, spiritual and material need. For those times when You provided in remarkable ways we say "Thank You!" We thank You for programs and ministries that are effective, not only in providing for the financial needs, but to also empower parents to become financially stable and to invest their God-given gifts to provide for their future.

As we focus our prayers and supplications on the material day-to-day needs of children and their families, we call upon Your Name, Lord God, for help and hope. During this season of national financial crisis we ask that You would move our hearts ever deeper into a relationship with You, Lord Jesus, to seek You and Your Kingdom first. We ask You

Lord to move in the life of every parent, every business institution, and through the marketplace of every community. Forgive us for confusing our “wants” with our “needs.” Forgive us for our financial indebtedness at a personal and national level.

Come, Lord, during this season of financial challenge and shower Your rain upon us from the dark clouds that hover over us. At every level of life and commerce, renew us with an urgent sense of faithful stewardship of money, time and talents. May we make the needed changes in us today - to live, work and manage finances wisely. Come, Lord, today and deal with systems of injustice we have either created or allowed to perpetuate through passivity. As the Church, may we be renewed in our hearts to the spirit and practice of loving our neighbors and sharing “all things in common.”

We praise and worship You as the One who guides and provides. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

DAY 3

Prayer for our Educators and Educational Systems

Did you know that we have only a 48% freshmen-to-senior same school graduation rate in Houston? Only 15% of Texas students will complete a four year degree. In Houston that means that out of 58,000 students that are 18, only about 8,700 will finish college within 6 years. (44 states scored higher). Our education system is broken. Education is the way out of poverty. If we want to see those we reach out to break the cycle of poverty, we need to insure all children have a quality education.

Lord, You are great and greatly to be praised. Father, You simply spoke, and the worlds were created. Father, we give thanks to You for a nation that makes education a priority. We thank You for the public and the private education in America. Father, we thank You that every child born in this great nation has an opportunity to receive an education.

Father, the educational system in our city stands in need of Your healing. We pray that more children will complete both primary and secondary school. Father, the drop out rate in Houston schools is too high. We ask that You give school administrators and government official’s wisdom on how to improve our educational system. Lord, we ask blessings on our teachers and school administrators. We ask that You give us the wisdom on how to raise the salaries of all those in the school system.

Father, forgive us where we have not wanted to invest in our educational system. Forgive us for not making education a priority in our homes. Forgive us for abdicating our responsibilities to the educational system. Lord, help us to work together so our children can achieve more.

Lord, restore our educational system in Houston. May You be glorified as our children's test scores rise, as our drop-out rate declines, as our educational system becomes a model for the nation. To You Father, be all honor, glory and majesty. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

DAY 4

Prayer against Human Trafficking

Did you know that the U.S. Department of Justice estimates 14,000 to 17,000 persons are trafficked into the United State each year? Human trafficking involves both international and domestic victims and can include labor and/or sex trafficking. The victims are largely women and children, with runaways being especially vulnerable. Houston is the American hub for human trafficking. The Church in Houston must stand up against this injustice. We cannot continue to worship in peace and safety while our city is being used for such an evil endeavor. That stand starts with prayer.

Let us pray: Lord, You only are Holy. Father, You alone are worthy of all glory, honor and praise. Lord, we praise Your Holy Name for all that You have done in our city. We thank You for the growing unity in the Body of Christ in Houston. We thank You that You have brought to our attention the plight of those that are being forced into slavery. We want as Your people to stand against the trafficking of human beings through our city. Lord, this cannot and will not stand in our city. Houston is a city of freedom. We, the Church, choose to stand in the gap against this injustice.

Father, we pray that You expose the trafficking rings, especially those in charge of the trafficking. We pray for the Houston Police Department and all law enforcement agencies in this city. We ask that You give them wisdom in locating and breaking up all the trafficking rings. We, the Church of Houston, declare freedom for all those forced into this system. In the Name of Jesus Christ, we decree that all the captives must be set free.

Father, forgive us for our apathy and complacency. Forgive us for not taking up this cause and standing against it in a greater measure. Father, help us to stand, pray, invest, and not allow this activity to stand in our city. No longer will Houston be known as the hub of human trafficking for North America. We declare freedom.

Father, let your Name be exalted in this city. May Your Name be glorified as this activity is defeated. Glory to You, Lord, for You are great. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

DAY 5

Mental Health and Juvenile Justice

Did you know that at least one in five children and adolescents in the U.S. have a mental health disorder?ⁱ One in ten of these children suffer from a serious emotional disturbance severe enough to disrupt daily functioning in the home, school, or community.ⁱⁱ Despite these statistics, it is estimated that only about half of all affected children receive specialty mental health services.ⁱⁱⁱ When untreated, mental health disorders can lead to school failure, family conflicts, drug abuse, violence, and even suicide.^{iv} In 2008, approximately 229,055 the children in Harris County were living with a mental illness and approximately 22,906 were suffering emotional disturbances serious enough to disrupt daily life.^v

Let us pray: God of Heaven and Earth, we worship you today as the Sustainer of life. You are the Alpha and Omega. In you we live and breathe and have our being, and we come today to seek your face. Your love is from everlasting to everlasting; it never fails. Thank you, Lord, for all the ways that your love is demonstrated to us on a daily basis. Today we celebrate that you are a God who is intimately involved in our lives, deeply concerned for our well being.

We lift our voice today, Loving God, on behalf of those children in our neighborhoods and communities who are suffering from mental illness. We cry out to you on their behalf. Hear our cry, Abba Father. We pray for healing in each of their lives. We ask you for parents and homes where love and understanding are present. We pray with the Apostle Paul for the transforming of the minds of those with mental health disorders. We ask, Lord, to grant grace and insight to uncover all the social issues and injustices that need to be addressed to create significant change and reflect noticeable progress relative to these needs.

We ask you to raise up in your Church an army of loving, compassionate mentors and advocates who will come along side these children and youth and lovingly guide them to your love. We pray for our District Attorney and for all of those who have influence in the criminal justice system. Give them compassionate hearts and Godly wisdom to know how to deal with the massive numbers of children that they deal with on a yearly basis. We pray for the transformation of the criminal justice system in our city even as we pray for the children it serves.

Forgive us, Lord, when we stand by in apathy unconcerned for the children impacted by mental and emotional illness. Forgive us when we have judged them and their families. Give us repentant hearts that lead us to action.

You and only you, Father, can give us what we need to face the enormous challenges in this prayer we are lifting today. We exalt your name as the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We know you as the One who always stands on the side of the weak and the oppressed, and it is to You that we turn to for intervention and guidance. In the Name of Jesus, the Christ, we pray. Amen.

DAY 6

Childhood Obesity

Did you know that over the past 20 years, the prevalence of overweight children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 19 has nearly tripled with one-third of children overweight or at-risk of becoming overweight? The increase in the number of children who are overweight or at risk of becoming overweight is an alarming public health epidemic of this generation. Texas ranks 32nd (50th being the worst) in overall prevalence with 32.2% of children considered either overweight or obese.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, we worship You as King of kings and Lord of lords and as God of all people. There is no god like You. You alone are worthy of all glory, honor and praise. Today we join our voice with thousands of others across the greater Houston area who are praying for the children and youth of our city. With our fellow brothers and sisters who love you, we worship you, O God!

Father, we face an epidemic of childhood obesity in this great city. While children in many places in the world starve every day for a lack of nutrition, our children, raised on a lifestyle of consumption, face alarming physical distress as a result of over eating. Help, O Lord! Create a sense of urgency in us. Give us eyes to see the deep systemic ties between our consumerist life style and the impact on our children.

We turn to You, Lord, for wisdom and discernment as we search for ways and means to reverse this pattern and trend. Come, Holy Spirit! Show us what is needed to protect and bless the lives of all children at every stage of development. We thank You for people and programs You have provided in our communities and pray that You would encourage them, bless them and multiply their efforts. We pray for the parents in our city who make choices daily about what to feed their children. We pray for public school cafeteria workers who plan and provide meals daily. We pray for school administrators who make decisions about what will be served in the cafeteria and in the vending machines on the campuses.

We ask you, Father, to convict us of our propensity to take the easy way. Raise up leaders with an urgent sense of passion for the physical health of our children, and give them a prophetic voice among us. Forgive us as parents from our own poor health habits, and help us to repent and lead the way in teaching our children that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Lead us to fasting and simplicity as a way of life in the midst of a land of consumption.

As Creator and Sustainer of life, we ask You to give us everything we need to address the great challenges we face in this epidemic of poor health among our children. And where human hands leave off and fall short of needed remedies, we ask that Your

mighty Hand would move among us. We pray this in the Name of our Lord, Jesus. Amen.

DAY 7

Advocacy Works

Did you know there are people, programs and organizations all across Texas who faithfully serve the needs of at-risk and vulnerable children? Many have been doing so tirelessly for decades. Organizations have recently been successful in influencing public policy, specifically on Human Trafficking, and continue to advocate for Texas' children. There's also a growing commitment by the Church to reach up in prayer and out in love to reverse these damaging trends in the lives of at-risk children.

Let us pray: All-knowing and all loving God, we are in awe of Your great concern for the world You have created. We are privileged beyond words to call You "Father" and humbled that You call us "friend." As we consider this idea of "advocacy" for vulnerable children, we want to first thank You for the amazing "advocacy" You have provided for our lives. There is no god like You!

We are blessed and privileged in this brief life to reflect, pray and invest in things that really matter. Throughout this week of united prayer, we are reminded that children really matter to You - deeply! We praise and bless You for all those who experience and express Your heart and concern for children – especially children at-risk and who are in vulnerable home, neighborhood and school environments.

Thank You for every person, organization and congregation who have been serving, advocating, and "standing in the gap" for those the gospel describes as "the least of these." Almighty God, please open Your loving heart and Your limitless heavens to every person, program and place of worship who labor in love for the cause of the weak and defenseless. Pour special grace and favor upon them. Provide wisdom to every human and spiritual resource needed to help parents to reverse every destructive trend and trap of Satan. Refresh and renew all who serve our city and the children from many nations born and being raised in the Houston area.

Forgive us, Lord, for overlooking this dire human need that breaks Your heart every day. Forgive us, Lord, for the times when You called us to help vulnerable children in practical ways and we have opted for the "couch of convenience" and personal comfort. Joined with thousands of voices across our city today, we declare "May Your Kingdom come, may Your will be done, in our city as it is in heaven."

We declare by faith that the days ahead for children at-risk in our city will be much better as we speak blessing to parents, blessings to marriages, blessings to educators,

blessings to children and youth pastors, blessings to every organization willing to intervene and assist. By faith we look for the damaging trends and reports of vulnerable children to stop. By faith we believe that a new body of research in the near future will indicate evidence of answered prayer for all we have prayed for during this *Week of Prayer, Service and Generosity* for our city's most vulnerable children.

All these things we pray for in the Name of Jesus, who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. According to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the Church and in Jesus Christ throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.
