

"And How Are The Children?"

Election Year Congregational Resources

Fall 2012



Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network

Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network is a ministry of the
Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA)
a ministry of the Compassion, Peace and Justice Ministry Area
Presbyterian Mission Agency
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

www.phewacommunity.org



“And how are the children?”

Congregational resources for candidate forums in an election year provided by the Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network

Introduction:

The Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network (PCAN) exists to promote the health and safety of every child. We do this by approaching all of today's issues and challenges through the lens of child advocacy. Perhaps the traditional African greeting best expresses what we are about: “And how are the children?” This deceptively simple question reflects a basic truth: the health and stability of any society, neighborhood or family can be accurately determined by the wellbeing of its children.

Scriptural underpinnings

(New International Version)

Scripture reinforces this understanding. While the world has always been a dangerous place for children, the Bible provides us with God's vision for a world of peace and safety for all children, where “The infant shall play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child shall put its hand into the viper's nest. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain.” Isaiah 11:8-9.

The Old Testament also calls those in places of power and authority to consider carefully their responsibility to tend to the most vulnerable in the community including the children: “May the King defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.” Psalm 72:4.

In the New Testament we witness God's desire for the protection and care for children as Jesus makes room for them at his feet and in his company: “Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” Matthew 19:13-14

In our commitment as followers of Jesus Christ we are keen to remember Christ's call to care for the hungry, the naked, the stranger and the prisoner and the most vulnerable among us: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these members of my family, you did for me”: Matthew 25:40. In our modern world children continue to be the most vulnerable and most in need of the compassion that Jesus teaches us.

Finally, as Presbyterians, we affirm the scriptural witness to our God who is like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child and like the father who runs to welcome the prodigal home. As children of this same God, created in God's image



we grow into that God-given identity in the ways that we care for children through nurture, support and advocacy.

Why questions for candidates?

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a long tradition of civic engagement with many of our faith communities hosting non-partisan candidate forums during election years. The Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network has developed the following series of questions and accompanying facts that a voter could ask as they decide which candidate would most closely represent the best interests of children. **Congregations and mission committees are also encouraged to ask themselves these questions as they seek to discern their own ministry to and with children.**

The questions

There are two sets of questions. The first is based on the candidate's own track record; the second is based on the candidate's goals for the future. For more information as well as accessing the Children's Defense Fund's (CDF) own very useful candidate questions link to: <http://www.childrensdefense.org/be-careful-what-you-cut/assets/documents/questions-of-candidates.pdf>. Sources are listed with each fact. A more complete resource list is attached.

Question 1

What have you done to improve the lives of children, either in a private or professional capacity, when it comes to the areas of (a) poverty, (b) incarceration and the Cradle to Prison® pipeline, (c) mental health care, (d) pre-k through secondary education, and (e) abuse and neglect?

Question 2

If elected, what legislative steps will you take to improve the lives of children when it comes to (a) poverty, (b) incarceration and the Cradle to Prison® pipeline, (c) mental health care, (d) pre-k through secondary education, and (e) abuse and neglect?

Question 1:a

What have you done to improve the lives of children, either in a private or professional capacity, in the area of poverty?

a. Poverty

- **Fact:** In the United States 18% of children under age 18 and 24% of children under age 6 live in poverty. It is estimated that 12 million children do not have enough food to meet their basic needs and approximately 3.2 million are suffering from hunger.

National Association for the Education of Young Children,
<http://www.naeyc.org>

Fact: In the United States 15% of children under age 18 and 24% of those living in poverty are not covered by health insurance. *National Association for the Education of Young Children,* <http://www.naeyc.org>

Fact: Approximately one-third of children and nearly one-half of African American children born in the United States have at least one health risk at birth. *National Association for the Education of Young Children,*
<http://www.naeyc.org>

Fact: More than 20% of 2-year-olds in the United States are not fully immunized. *National Association for the Education of Young Children,*
<http://www.naeyc.org>

- **Fact:** Of all of the world's industrialized nations, the United States ranks first in relative poverty. *Children's Defense Fund,*
<http://www.childrensdefense.org>
- **Fact:** The annual average number of unemployed teens and young adults ages 16 to 29 in America more than doubled in the last 10 years, rising to 5.9 million. This age group also saw sharp increases in rates of underemployment. *Children's Defense Fund,*
<http://www.childrensdefense.org>

Question 1:b

What have you done to improve the lives of children, either in a private or professional capacity, in the area of incarceration and the Cradle to Prison® pipeline?

b. Incarceration and the “Cradle to Prison®” pipeline*

- **Fact:** Among children born in 2001, one of three African American boys, one of every six Latino boys and one out of every seventeen Caucasian boys will be imprisoned in their lifetime. *Children’s Defense Fund*, <http://www.childrensdefense.org>
- **Fact:** On August 10, 2012, the U.S. Justice Department announced that officials in the city of Meridian, Mississippi are operating a "school-to-prison pipeline" that incarcerates students for minor infractions like dress code violations, affecting mostly black children and children with disabilities.
U.S. Department of Justice
<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/2012/August/12-crt-993.html>) *The Equal Justice Initiative*, <http://www.eji.org>
- **Fact:** Until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the practice unconstitutional, there were 2200 children under the age of 18 in the United States serving life sentences with no possibility of parole. *The Equal Justice Initiative*, <http://www.eji.org>
- **Fact:** The “zero tolerance” approach to educational discipline combined with the high stakes testing of “No Child Left Behind,” has motivated and allowed schools to rid themselves of “low performance” students in order to increase test scores and subsequent funding. This phenomenon has contributed significantly to the school to prison pipeline. *The Advancement Project*, <http://www.advancementproject.org>

*” **Cradle to Prison®**” pipeline is a trademark of the *Children’s Defense Fund*



Question 1:c

What have you done to improve the lives of children, either in a private or professional capacity, in the area of mental health care?

c. Mental Health Care

- **Fact:** Only 1 in 5 affected children receive appropriate treatment. *National Council for Community Behavioral Health Care*, <http://www.thenationalcouncil.org>
- **Fact:** The onset of major child mental health disorders may occur as early as 7 to 11 years old. *National Council for Community Behavioral Health Care*, <http://www.thenationalcouncil.org>
- **Fact:** 50% of children and youth in the child welfare system have mental health problems. *National Council for Community Behavioral Health Care*, <http://www.thenationalcouncil.org>
- **Fact:** 67% to 70% of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder. *National Council for Community Behavioral Health Care*, <http://www.thenationalcouncil.org>

Question 1:d

What have you done to improve the lives of children, either in a private or professional capacity, in the area of pre-K through secondary education?

d. Pre-K through Secondary Education

- **Fact:** Although quality pre-school education is key to future academic success, only 41% of 3 and 4 year old children living in poverty are enrolled in preschool, compared to 58% of those whose families have higher incomes. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, <http://www.naeyc.org>
- **Fact:** Nationwide, only 10% of preschool programs meet national accreditation standards. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*, <http://www.naeyc.org>
- **Fact:** More than sixty per cent of all public school students and seventy five per cent or more of African American and Latino students in the fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades in American cannot read or do math at their grade level. *Children's Defense Fund*, <http://www.childrensdefense.org>
- **Fact:** (Also listed here under "Incarceration") The "zero tolerance" approach to educational discipline combined with the high stakes testing of "No Child Left Behind," has motivated and allowed schools to rid themselves of "low performance" students in order to increase test scores and subsequent funding. This phenomenon has contributed significantly to the school to prison pipeline. *The Advancement Project*, <http://www.advancementproject.org>

Question 1:e

What have you done to improve the lives of children, either in a private or professional capacity, in the areas of abuse and neglect?

e. Abuse and neglect

- **Fact:** America's child population is 73,904,493. In 2010, approximately 3.3 million allegations of child abuse and neglect, representing 5.9 million children, were made to child protective services agencies. Of those 1,581,882 reports were referred for investigation, as reported by 45 states. *Child Welfare League of America*, <http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/statefactsheets/2012/NationalFact2012.pdf>
- **Fact:** During FFY 2010, an estimated 695,000 children in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico were determined to be victims of abuse or neglect. Of these children, 78.3% were neglected, 17.6% were physically abused, and 9.2% were sexually abused. <http://www.cwla.org>
- **Fact:** In 2010, 1,537 children died as the result of abuse or neglect. *Child Welfare League of America*, <http://www.cwla.org>
- **Fact:** Nearly 40% of substantiated abuse cases do not receive follow up services. *Child Welfare League of America*, <http://www.cwla.org>
- **Fact:** In 2010 15,446,037 children were living in poverty; 32,467,000 lived in low-income homes. <http://cwla.org/advocacy/statefactsheets/2012/NationalFact2012.pdf>
- **Fact:** In 2008, 8.2% of all live births in the United States were categorized as low birth weight. *Child Welfare League of America*, <http://www.cwla.org>



Question 2

If elected, what legislative steps do you plan to take to;

- a. end childhood poverty?
- b. reduce the incarceration rate of children?
- c. improve the mental and physical health of children?
- d. improve the educational system for children?
- e. reduce abuse and neglect of children?

Who we are: The Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network (PCAN) is a network of the Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association (PHEWA). PHEWA's volunteer networks operate at the intersection of health and justice, inspiring, equipping, and connecting Presbyterians as they seek to answer God's call to ministry in the church and the world. The leadership team of the Presbyterian Child Advocacy Network includes: Rev. Theresa Cho, Mr. Frank Dimmock, Rev. Shannon Daley Harris, Rev. Rebecca Kirkpatrick, Rev. Doug Mitchell, Mr. Paul Ronningen, Ms. Brandi White, Dr. Dianna Wright; staff advisors: Ms. Martha Bettis Gee, Ms. Susan Stack, Rev. Trina Zelle; Presbyterian Criminal Justice Network (PCJN) liaison: Ms. Gail Tyree.



Helpful links:

The following links connect to denominational resources, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) partners and entities organized around child advocacy issues. There are many other organizations not mentioned here due to space and time limitations, however each link below itself connects to a wealth of other resources.

Presbyterian Health, Education and Welfare Association
(<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/phewa/presbyterian-child-advocacy-network/>; <http://www.phewacomunity.org/pcanchildadvocacy.html>)

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Child Advocacy Office
(<http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/child/>)

The Children's Defense Fund (www.childrensdefense.org)

The National Council for Community and Behavioral Health Care
(www.thenationalcouncil.org)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org)

The Advancement Project (<http://www.advancementproject.org>)

The Child Welfare League of America (<http://www.cwla.org>)

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
(<http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/KIDSCOUNT.aspx>)

National Council of Churches Public Education and Literacy Committee;
"Repairing the Breach: A Just Agenda for Public School Reform- Questions for Federal and State Candidates in This 2012 Election Year."
(<http://www.nccusa.org/pdfs/DRAFTELECTIONYEAR%20RESOURCE7.pdf>)

"And How are the Children?" DVD, PC(USA) Online Church Store,
<http://store.pcusa.org/243541004>