



47 Holy Spirit, and tending to their physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Gathering the  
48 community of faith together, the Lord's Table is a visible witness to the welcome we are to offer  
49 to all children – an invitation to a life of abundance whereby the body is fed and the soul is  
50 nourished. Having been provided for by God's grace, we are sent out into the world to be  
51 partners in creating a commonwealth for children whereby the measurement of our faithfulness  
52 is God's standard of justice and mercy.

53

#### 54 **Biblical Mandate**

55 The witness and authority of the Bible provide a mandate for our work with and for children.  
56 The account of God's creation in the Hebrew Scriptures reminds us that God created human  
57 beings in God's own image. All children are sacred and good. From the beginning of the Story  
58 of the people of God, children have had a central role. It is through the child Isaac, and  
59 subsequent generations, that the making and blessing of a nation occurs. The deliverance of  
60 enslaved people is foreshadowed in the rescue of a baby found in the bulrushes. The guidance of  
61 Eli and the faithful response of young Samuel witness to a pattern of call and response to which  
62 servants of God still aspire. The contributions that the young can make to the Kingdom of God  
63 are modeled in the youthful David against Goliath, the girl, Esther, who became a Queen for  
64 such a time as protecting her people and the prophetic voice of the boy Jeremiah. And when the  
65 time came for the redemption of those whom God loved yet could not by their own capabilities  
66 keep the covenant, God became incarnate, born of a young girl, Mary, to bring light and life to  
67 all the world.

68

69 Jesus grew from boyhood to manhood within the shelter and nurture of the community of faith.  
70 He taught, healed, proclaimed and welcomed those whom society would toss aside. His  
71 teachings, through word and deed, on children rebuked a cultural standard of excluding and  
72 devaluing children. By taking them in his arms, he pronounced them full members of the family  
73 of God. When placing them in the midst of the disciples, he declared them exemplars of what it  
74 meant to be the "greatest." In welcoming them, he said, we welcome not just Jesus but the God  
75 who sent him. Children, Jesus taught, are among the most cherished of God's cherished. The  
76 covenantal standard of justice and mercy extended to all is especially tendered for children. To  
77 remove stumbling blocks, to clothe, to feed, execute justice for the orphan, the widow and the  
78 stranger are requirements of communal living for those who are recipients of the Promised Land  
79 and the conditions of the covenant constitutionalized in Deuteronomy and realized in the  
80 commonwealth of Christ.

81

#### 82 **The Contemporary Context<sup>1</sup>**

83 For many, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is a time of renewed commitment to communities,  
84 families and neighbors and of hope for a prosperous today and a better tomorrow for ourselves  
85 and future generations. Yet for too many children, today is far from prosperous and tomorrow  
86 holds precious little hope. Each day in the United States, every ...

87           35 seconds a child is abused or neglected

88           40 seconds a baby is born into poverty

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<sup>1</sup> The information used in analyzing the contemporary context is based on current data as of 2004. Recognizing that contemporary context changes over time, supporting data and analysis will be reviewed every five years and the policy adjusted to reflect new information and understandings about the needs and concerns of children.

90  
91           51 seconds a child is born without health insurance  
92           5 hours a child or teen commits suicide<sup>2</sup>  
93  
94 These statistics show a harsh reality that too many children in America face today. As we gather  
95 in safe sanctuaries to worship God in any hour of the week  
96           102 children will be abused or neglected  
97           90 children will be born into poverty  
98           70 children will be born without health insurance  
99 and at the close of every day  
100           5 children or teens believing themselves to be without hope will die at their own hands.

101  
102 Too many U.S. children face increasing levels of poverty and hunger. A 13 percent increase in  
103 the first two years of this new century for families at risk of hunger in a nation that is first in the  
104 world in Gross Domestic Product is too high.<sup>3</sup> In the summer of the Poor People's Campaign in  
105 1968 15% of America's children lived in poverty. In the second summer of the 21st Century  
106 16.7% of America's children lived in poverty.<sup>4</sup> "Without a vision the people will perish."  
107 (*Proverbs 29:18 KJV*) Without basic food, shelter, employment, education and community hope  
108 perishes.

109  
110 Even children who seem to be economically secure and have access to the advantages of quality  
111 healthcare, education and positive social relationships, are part of a society that is beset with  
112 violence and fear. More children than we like to consider are not even safe in their own homes  
113 no matter how great the material assets.

114  
115 Despite the abundance of knowledge and resources available to ensure their well being, too  
116 many of today's children live in increasing danger and are at risk of not being able to reach their  
117 full potential. Fear and uncertainty permeate many of these young lives. Violence, sex and  
118 disillusionment can confront them each time they turn on the TV, read a newspaper, walk down  
119 the street, or go to school. For many, poverty, neglect, inadequate healthcare, lack of quality  
120 childcare and education are an all too cruel reality. The increasing number of neighborhood  
121 shootings and incidents of school and domestic violence have numbed the will to prevent these  
122 horrors.

123  
124 Too many parents struggle to meet life's basic needs (food, safety, social) and to understand how  
125 to support their children's developmental and learning process. Many children in the United  
126 States feel the stress of being on a fast track of seeking "success" or material possessions and are  
127 bombarded with so many choices that it is difficult to discern what is really important in their  
128 lives.

129  
130 Habits developed in childhood will be present throughout their lives. Relationships in childhood  
131 affect one's ability to trust and to hope. Experiences of childhood shape a person's attitude  
132 toward racism, intolerance, violence, and other challenges as we strive together for true justice

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<sup>2</sup> 2004 *State of America's Children*, Children's Defense Fund, Washington, DC.

<sup>3</sup> USDA 2003 Statistics on Hunger in Households and Bread for the World.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Census Bureau.

133 and peace. A child's faith grows as the child grows. Adults who model faith and provide  
134 opportunities for children to participate positively in a faith community influence children's  
135 future involvement in worship, education, stewardship, and service to others. If we are to grow  
136 and nurture the church of the future, children must be primary participants.

137  
138 Every child is a unique gift from God. For children to prosper, we must meet all their basic  
139 needs. We must love, shelter, protect and defend children committed to our care and in our  
140 communities. We must nurture and support families in caring for their children, acting in their  
141 children's best interest, and recognizing and fostering their children's spirituality and unique  
142 gifts. We must advocate for the integrity of childhood and the dignity of all children at every  
143 level of our religious, civic and political structures. When children realize their potential and  
144 fulfill their dreams, our communities flourish and all are enriched beyond measure.

145  
146 **Public Witness**

147 The Church is in a unique position to proclaim God's blessing and justice for children. Charged  
148 with a theological imperative and grounded with a Biblical mandate, the Church is called to be  
149 the voice of the voiceless as it calls a people and a nation to faithfulness for children within the  
150 church and beyond.

151  
152 While the Church voices concern for children and many outreach ministries of compassion and  
153 mercy help children, public witness and advocacy will be necessary to create a political will for  
154 the common good that will address the root causes of children in peril and effect lasting systemic  
155 change. National priorities and budgets must reflect a lasting commitment to children's positive  
156 development and acknowledge that decisions that affect adult lives also have lasting impact on  
157 the lives of their children. Adults without adequate education, housing, jobs and healthcare are  
158 not equipped to meet their own needs, much less focus on the deep needs of their children.  
159 Adults without community supports and positive relationships are less likely to ensure that their  
160 children know positive, trusting relationships that lead them to become loving, contributing  
161 members of society. If we are truly committed to overcoming poverty, racism, violence and  
162 desolation, we must work together to ensure that all of our citizens have opportunities for joyful  
163 and productive lives.

164  
165 **Vision and Goals for Children**

166  
167 As Christians, we are called to make a commitment to work together, as families, congregations,  
168 denominations and as an ecumenical community of member communions, to ensure that all  
169 children have the opportunity to develop and flourish. Therefore we, the member communions  
170 of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, working with others in  
171 communities of faith and concern, strive to achieve the following Vision and Goals for Children.

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172  
173 **FAITH COMMUNITIES**

174 All children need to be part of nurturing faith communities where they are included as full  
175 members and participants in the common life of worship, prayer, witness and service. Therefore,  
176 we commit to:

- 177 • Ensure through leader development and assignment of resources that faith communities  
178 are places of joy, nurture and safety for children

- 179 • Nurture the spiritual life of children and teach them of the love, grace and fellowship of  
180 God
  - 181 • Receive, nurture and treasure each child as a gift from God
  - 182 • Give high priority to the quality of planning for children and the preparation and support  
183 of those who minister with them
  - 184 • Foster community beyond the family unit, in which children, youth and adults know each  
185 other by name, minister to each other, and are partners together in serving Christ in the  
186 world
  - 187 • Appreciate children's abilities and readiness to represent Christ and his Church, to bear  
188 witness to God's grace wherever that may be, and according to gifts given them, to carry  
189 on the faithful work of reconciliation in the world, and to take their place in the life,  
190 worship, ministry of the community of faith and governance according to each  
191 communion's distinctive polity.
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#### FAMILY

194 All children have a right to be a part of loving and safe families. All segments of society share  
195 responsibility for supporting families in raising their children and future generations. Therefore,  
196 we commit to:

- 197 • Protect the dignity and value the diversity of every family
  - 198 • Respect and preserve the child's bond and covenant with parents, family and community
  - 199 • Ensure that families have the skills, knowledge and resources to develop, support and  
200 sustain loving homes
  - 201 • Nurture families in recognizing and appreciating their children's abilities and their gifts  
202 for ministry and in supporting their spiritual development
  - 203 • Provide families resources and systems that enable them to balance the demands of  
204 parenting, work and education and make time for recreation
  - 205 • Encourage parents to be active in their communities, in the democratic process, and in the  
206 promotion of the interests of children and families
  - 207 • Encourage adoption as a healthy and appropriate means of securing for children a  
208 permanent family structure
  - 209 • Be intentional in providing church and community support in those kinship care  
210 situations when children are being cared for by relatives other than their parents
  - 211 • Encourage congregations to become caring partners with institutions and systems  
212 providing care for children, and engage in advocacy for children in those settings.
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#### EDUCATION

215 All children have a right to quality public education that fosters their intellectual, social,  
216 emotional, physical, cultural and creative development. Therefore, we commit to:

- 217 • Respect and support family as the child's first teacher, recognizing that learning begins at  
218 birth
- 219 • Value and invest in teachers as a key component of every child's development
- 220 • Create an educational system that is a partnership of family, community, and school
- 221 • Respect and provide for each child's differences and capacities to learn, recognizing the  
222 needs of those children with disabilities and with special gifts
- 223 • Ensure the availability of remedial education for children and their adult caregivers who  
224 need special help to be ready for further education and eventually to become employable

- 225 • Support an equitable, fully-funded system that prepares every child for life-long learning
- 226 • Ensure that every community provides safe, excellent, well-funded public schools for all
- 227 their children
- 228 • Develop the use of schools as community resources during and beyond school hours
- 229 • Teach children to understand, respect, and celebrate diversity, multiple cultures and
- 230 languages, and a global perspective
- 231 • Actively support the realization of the NCCC Public School Policy.

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#### SAFETY

234 Every child has a right to live in a physically and emotionally safe environment that cultivates  
235 acceptance and peace and in which they are protected from the myriad of dangers confronting  
236 them. Therefore, we commit to:

- 237 • Provide child protection policies, safe church training and other resources that promote
- 238 and ensure safe, non-violent family and community environments
- 239 • Promote legislation that eliminates children's access to handguns
- 240 • Teach and practice healthy conflict resolution in all segments of society
- 241 • Promote social justice through the elimination of prejudice and discrimination
- 242 • Promote non-violent, positive images and language that respect the dignity of every
- 243 human being
- 244 • Advocate for reducing violence on TV, in movies, video games and on the Internet
- 245 • Ensure equal protection and due process of law for all children and youth in a system,
- 246 which recognizes their differing capacities and promotes rehabilitation and learning.

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#### ARTS, RECREATION AND CULTURE

249 All children have a right to express and celebrate their souls and spirits through arts, culture and  
250 recreation. Children need to have open time to dream, play and create. Therefore, we commit to:

- 251 • Advocate for the integration of arts, culture and recreation into the core curriculum of
- 252 education
- 253 • Provide access to a wide variety of affordable, quality arts, cultural and recreational
- 254 programs for children of all ages
- 255 • Promote an increase in safe indoor and outdoor neighborhood recreational activities
- 256 • Create ongoing opportunities in congregations, schools, and before and after-school
- 257 programs to discover, recover, preserve and celebrate traditions across cultures
- 258 • Ensure that museums, libraries, parks and diverse cultural resources are supported as vital
- 259 parts of our communities.

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#### ECONOMIC SECURITY

262 All children have a right to economic security and economic justice: meaning that all families  
263 have access to food, clothing, transportation and safe, affordable housing, and that all families  
264 have equal opportunities to provide these basic economic needs. Therefore, we commit to:

- 265 • Continue to strengthen the commitment to overcome poverty
- 266 • Promote family-friendly policies in the workplace
- 267 • Actively pursue a just tax policy
- 268 • Cultivate marketable job skills through providing congregational and community models
- 269 of training and education
- 270 • Provide accessible, affordable, high-quality child care

- 271 • Promote corporate partnerships that strengthen communities  
272 • Provide economic security through government initiatives for the children whose parents  
273 cannot support them  
274 • Enhance access to jobs through sound policies for housing and transportation.

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276 **HEALTH**

277 Every child and family has a right to guaranteed quality, comprehensive health care. All children  
278 deserve to live in a healthy environment that allows them to thrive. Therefore, we commit to:

- 279 • Ensure quality pre-natal care is available for all  
280 • Focus on prevention as a key to preserving the health and well-being of children  
281 • Ensure that no children go hungry  
282 • Implement an effective health and nutrition education curriculum  
283 • Work for publicly funded, integrated, accessible and high quality mental health care  
284 • Develop partnerships for clean air, water, land and a healthy ecosystem.

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286  
287 *Adopted by the General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA*  
288 *November 11, 2004*