



Summary of Sojourners' New Research to Strengthen Early Childhood Development Opportunities in Black and Latine Faith Communities

How Church Leaders Can Advocate for Equitable Policies That Support Young Children and Their Families

Positioning Clergy as Early Childhood Development Advocates

Churches are the heart of our communities. We gather together in faith and worship, building community with our neighbors. As clergy and leaders of our faith communities, it's up to us to truly understand our community and how to use church resources to best support them.

Churches have always supported and shown up for young children and their families. We preach sermons about how Jesus called “the little children”; create family services like clothing exchanges and food pantries; and we even create childcare and preschool education centers so that young children may learn in safe, welcoming spaces.

These efforts are essential to our communities, yet the question remains: Are we providing families and young children the supports they truly need?

Families with young children, especially Black and Latine families in lower-income communities, need additional resources to help young children grow and develop.

As clergy, we are well-positioned to act as powerful advocates who can end social injustices and call for equitable early childhood development opportunities.

But, where to start?

The new report, “*Flourishing Futures: Early Childhood Development in Black and Latine Churches and Faith Communities*” asked parents, caregivers and faith leaders in Black and Latine communities about the church’s role when it comes to supporting families and young children.



The findings provide clear recommendations for how we can use our position as faith leaders to take action and support the youngest members of our communities.



What We Learned by Listening to Latine and Black Communities

Structural Context in Black and Latine Faith Communities

“Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.” MARK 10:14

The Scripture says that all children are fearfully and wonderfully made. But, without addressing the systemic barriers that keep young children and families from accessing early childhood development opportunities, they don’t have what they need to develop and reach lifelong happiness and success.

As clergy, we must first **understand and address systemic barriers** if we hope for our own church-based supports to **make a difference in our communities**.

Barriers exist throughout local, state and federal systems, including:

- Lack of affordable **healthcare** coverage and employment benefits

- Lack of affordable, safe **housing** options, and discriminatory housing policies
- Persistent links between **socioeconomic status and race**
- Persistent **language barriers** and a lack of information in accessible languages
- Ongoing **food insecurity** and little access to food assistance programs and health food sources



Perceptions Among Black and Latine Parents and Caregivers Differ From Clergy Perspectives

From our surveys with focus groups and workshops with clergy, parents, caregivers and community members, we know that Black and Latine parents and caregivers value the early childhood development supports offered through their local churches.

However, **our research points to a significant gap in how parents and caregivers experience early childhood development opportunities in the church and how clergy and ministries do.** While clergy feel that preaching, blessing children or conducting a church service meet families' needs, parents and caregivers report that, despite what exists, they still want more tangible support, such as small group gatherings, food security efforts, and childcare support during the week.

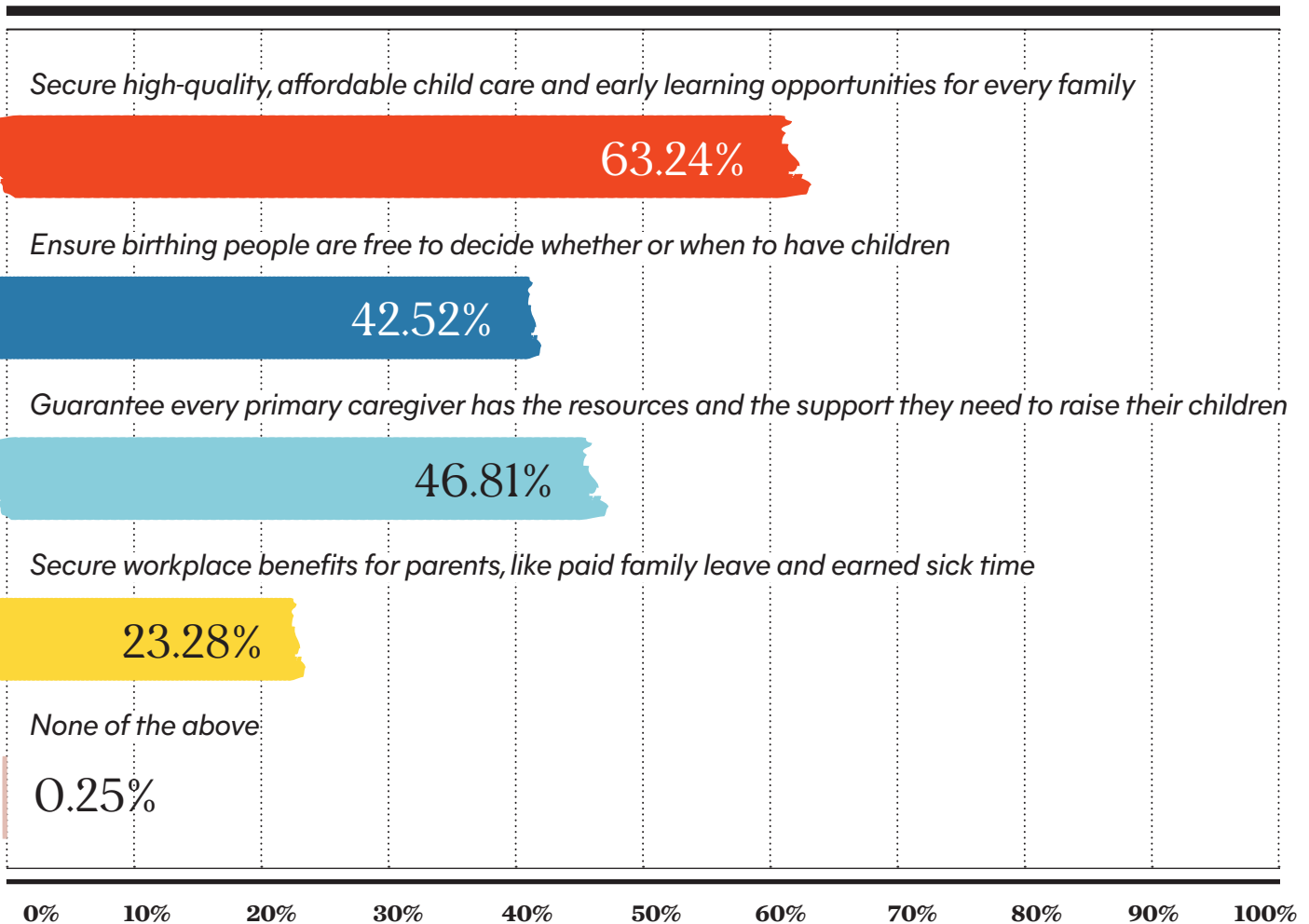
Many participants agree that churches offer some early childhood development opportunities.

- More than half of research participants say their churches offer **group-based information gatherings**, such as book clubs or parents groups, as well as **welcoming messages geared toward parents or children.**

- Forty percent of respondents say their church has **faith-based education and learning programs.**

Our research showed that there is space for clergy leaders to **better meet communities' needs by advocating for systems-level or transformative policy reforms that lead to long-term changes for families.**

Across all races, clergy and community members believe **the number one policy priority the church should support is securing high-quality, affordable child care and early learning opportunities for every family.**





The Opportunity for Faith Leaders

These findings show that there is **enormous potential for faith leaders to play a role in dismantling historic barriers and helping communities thrive.**

When we support our youngest members and their families both at the systems level and in our own church communities, we are living out our commitments to each other. We must work to build a better world for our youngest congregants today, and for future generations.

Key Recommendations for Clergy to Take Action

The *Flourishing Futures* report recommends that both church leaders and ultimately policymakers create meaningful change for young children and families.

Below are the **top recommendations for clergy to take action and fulfill their purpose to support the well-being of every child:**

Recognize and name historical trauma and disenfranchisement.

- Examine the **persistent link between socioeconomic status and race in order to dismantle extensive, systemic discrimination** that creates barriers for Black and Latine communities to access basic services
- **Call for safe, stable housing** options for families
- Ensure healthcare and education **information is offered in accessible languages**

Support policies, reforms and direct services that meet basic needs and build community power. Advocate for increased access to:

- **healthcare** coverage and employee health benefits
- affordable **housing** options
- **federal food assistance** programs and widely accessible **affordable, fresh and healthy food sources**



Healthcare



Employment and Access to Financial Resources



Community Investments and Opportunities



The Church and Faith Communities

Advocate for equitable early childhood development policies, such as:

- **family friendly workplace policies** such as **paid parental leave universal access** to reliable, safe and **affordable early childhood development spaces**



You can learn more about how you can end social injustice and advocate for equitable early childhood policies and practices by accessing the full report here: sojo.net/flourishingfutures.



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About Sojourners' Mission to Strengthen Early Childhood

At Sojourners, we're committed to sharing information on how to create culturally inclusive child programs, spotlighting opportunities to join social justice and advocacy efforts and more. This report and our recommendations are part of our mission to ensure you, as a leader, have resources that can help support your faith communities and their early childhood needs.