



FLOURISHING FUTURES:

*Early Childhood Development in Black and Latine
Churches and Faith Communities*

SOJOURNERS
SojoAction

<https://sojo.net/flourishingfutures>



Early childhood development is an essential part of the church's work. 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 faith and commitments to each other.

At Sojourners, we see first-hand the many ways that churches have supported young children, families and communities. We also see first-hand the challenges that faith leaders face when it comes to not only designing and building early childhood development programs, but making systemic, lasting change in their communities. That is why we worked to build Flourishing Futures.

We must work to build a better world for our youngest congregants today, and for future generations – and that starts with this report. Led by Sandra Ovalle – Sojourners' Senior Director of Campaigns and Mobilizing – Sojourners has begun the process of this deep listening through Flourishing Futures so that we can truly understand our communities. The information shared in this report from clergy, parents and caregivers is essential as we work to understand the challenges that families face supporting their young children. When we have this level of deep understanding, we, as clergy, can create supports that align to our communities' needs, our values and our faith. **Through Sojourners' workshops, surveys and focus groups, it is our hope that Flourishing Futures gives clergy the information they need to make their church a cornerstone in their community.**

Thank you for your support of Sojourners' early childhood development work.

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“Clergy are well-informed and positioned to engage with and advocate for early childhood policies. We must live out the Lord’s calling to end social injustice and advocate for the policies that will build a better world for our communities today and for future generations.”

Reverend Adam Russell Taylor
Sojourners president

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Research and data by Monica Curca, Activate Labs.





Our faith calls us to end social injustice, which includes supporting young children's development

Churches are the heart of our communities. As clergy, we have dedicated our lives – both personally and professionally – to ending our communities' suffering.

Supporting young children and their development is a cornerstone of our work and heart. We preach sermons about how Jesus “called the little children”; we provide family services such as clothing exchanges and food pantries; we create childcare and preschool education centers so young children may learn in safe, welcoming spaces.

“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

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

We must not only offer resources, we must also create conditions for flourishing – this starts with understanding our faith communities. Through this report, we hear directly from parents and caregivers to better understand their day-to-day challenges. We also learn more about the historical, systemic challenges that keep families from accessing the resources they need to ensure their young children can grow and thrive.



“He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.’”

Mark 9:36-37



Support for young children is echoed beyond the Bible

Our faith is clear: the church must support young children and their families. Child development experts echo this calling. Faith and research both highlight a window of opportunity to make a difference in young children's lives.

When churches help ensure young children have the physical, mental and spiritual supports they need, children can reach lifelong success and happiness

This approach has deep roots. Throughout history, scholars and religious leaders have created theories and theologies that ground the church's role in early childhood development. These include:

Child Liberation Theology (CLT)

Child liberation theology views Jesus as identifying with children's suffering and oppression.

- CLT focuses on liberating and empowering people in the most vulnerable circumstances. It provides a moral and ethical foundation for the church to create equitable early childhood programs that affirm Black and Latine children's identities and potential.
- CLT compels us to question and reform the societal structures that contribute to power-based disparities in current early childhood systems.



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“Children do not have the education or the resources necessary to speak for themselves or, having spoken, to effect any change. Their plight is worse than a lack of education or resources. An outstanding feature of their oppression is that their feelings and perceptions of reality are often denied.”

Janet Pais, child liberation theologian

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Early Childhood Development Theories (ECDT)

ECDT provide principles for understanding overall child development, helping churches create evidence-based early childhood programs. These theories:

- Are studied at colleges and universities.
- Are used in training programs for child care providers.
- Include approaches such as The Froebel Approach (play-based learning) and Stages of Development Theory (explanations of milestones that many children meet as they grow).



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“Parents, caregivers, peers and the broader culture play a crucial role in developing the brain’s higher-order functions. Human development depends on social interaction, which can vary across cultures.”

Lev Vygotsky, psychologist

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Intersectionality in Power, Justice, Equity and Peace

This viewpoint integrates power, justice, equity and peace into early childhood development, supporting analysis and advocacy grounded in lived experiences.

- Rooted in its mission to embody the teachings of Jesus, the church can draw from biblical principles to advocate for equity, justice and peace.

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“Intersectionality refers to how multiple factors or systems of power and oppression – such as gender, race, class, age and sexuality – intersect in defining the societal structures and people’s lived experiences.”

**Kimberlé W. Crenshaw,
legal theory scholar**

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What This Means for Clergy and Churches



To provide lasting support to young children and families, clergy must listen to our congregation’s needs and find the root issues behind these needs – both at an individual church level and on a larger systemic level.

Flourishing Futures: Early Childhood Development in Black and Latine Churches and Faith Communities is the first-of-its-kind research project that asked parents, caregivers and faith leaders in Black and Latine communities – especially in less economically stable communities – for their views on the church’s role in 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.

Every child
deserves a
Flourishing
Future.

Sign up today and join
Sojourners in advocating
for early childhood
development. <https://sojo.net/flourishingfutures>.



Listening for the Root Cause

Systemic Challenges to Early Childhood Development

Parents face many challenges in supporting their young child and their development. To better understand these challenges, Flourishing Futures asked more than 1,000 parents, caregivers and faith leaders in Black and Latine communities about the church's role when it comes to supporting families and young children.

Through national surveys, focus groups and workshops, Sojourners heard that the resources and programs that individual churches offer their faith communities are critical.



But early childhood development doesn't just live in a single church.

One of the most impactful ways to **truly** support young children is by engaging with the larger social systems, like housing and healthcare, that can impact a child's success.

By listening for the systemic issues underlying these challenges, clergy can better identify the systemic social injustices that may prevent their supports from helping young children develop.

In Sojourners' research, parents, caregivers and clergy identified many systemic challenges that make raising a family difficult. These challenges fall into four key areas:



Healthcare



**Employment and
Access to Financial
Resources**



**Community
Investments and
Opportunities**



**The Church
and Faith
Communities**

In the following sections, you'll "meet" families struggling with **interconnected challenges**. These families illustrate how intersected these systemic issues are, along with what our communities need from us.



Advocacy Priorities for Clergy

At Sojourners, we know that when clergy advocate, they tear down social injustices and help young children and families access the critical support and resources they need. **Clergy must provide support at individual churches, but also advocate for large-scale societal change.**

The interconnected challenges that parents, caregivers and clergy all identified level up to several priority advocacy issues. We've included our findings and recommendations below.

Advocacy at the local, state and federal level is essential.

Keep up with Sojourners for how you can give every young child in your faith community a flourishing future:
<https://sojo.net/flourishingfutures>





ADVOCACY RECOMMENDATIONS

How to Change Harmful Systems in Your Community

Advocate for policies, programs and services that:

- create **family friendly workplaces**, including paid parental leave.
- offer young children **affordable, safe, age-appropriate spaces and places to learn and grow**.
- prioritize birthing people and their **right to quality care throughout their pregnancy**.
- support families and young children's healthy development, such as **home visiting programs, nutrition and other maternity programs**.
- can help relieve families' burdens, such as **affordable housing, accessible jobs with livable wages and health insurance, sick leave, access to affordable healthy foods**, and more.
- create opportunities for building an inclusive, **representative pipeline of talented workers**.
- ensure all workers, such as social workers, healthcare specialists and government program officers, have **trauma-informed training to work with and serve all communities**.
- provide affordable, nondiscriminatory and reliable **healthcare and mental health** coverage that includes pre and postnatal care – coverage that takes care of young children, too.
- provide information and services in **accessible languages and formats**.
- work to eliminate discrimination in **housing and human services, hiring, banking practices and discipline** (such as suspensions and expulsions) in our schools.

Ensure families can easily understand:

- what programs are available to them – including housing, food security, education, etc. – and how to navigate application and enrollment processes (including information in their preferred language).
- what quality pre and postnatal care should look like, and how they can advocate for themselves.

When churches take these advocacy positions, they can build a Flourishing Future for all children.

How is your church supporting young children and families?

Download Sojourners' Early Childhood Development Ministry Evaluation Guides:
<http://sojo.net/ECDguide>



Meet Anna.

Anna and her husband live in a safe neighborhood, close to family, friends and a church community they love. They both have steady jobs, allowing them to live comfortably, pay their rent and manage other monthly expenses. They're excited to grow their family, but are facing major challenges as they do.

Insurance

As hourly employees, Anna and her husband don't have access to health insurance through their jobs – and can't afford the exchange options, either.

This leaves them with expensive out-of-pocket medical bills.

Mental health

After her first OB-GYN visit, Anna's excitement quickly turns to worry. She's not sure how they'll pay for additional visits, but she also knows that Black women in America are three to four times more likely to die of pregnancy related complications than their white peers.

Discrimination

Even if she could afford healthcare, as a Black woman, Anna can't find a doctor in her area who takes her concerns and symptoms seriously.

Employment

On average, pregnant women must visit their OB-GYN about 16 times throughout their pregnancy. Anna cannot miss that much work! Anna's take home pay would significantly decrease if she misses that many shifts.





What this means for Anna and her children

- Anna is stressed about not being able to give her baby the prenatal care they both need. She loses her appetite and can't sleep – and worries her stress is impacting her baby.
- Anna has always wanted a big family. However, the financial burdens she and her husband are facing because our systems are not built to support women like her are making her question her future.

Anna's challenges are not unique...they exist in your community.

**START
HERE**

Start by understanding the unique healthcare challenges families in your congregation face.

Start by leading conversations with your faith community to better understand if and how they are struggling with accessing healthcare. Do they run into roadblocks with:

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accessing health insurance, federal health supports, mental health resources, and pre and postnatal health supports?

⋮

stress?

⋮

biased or low-quality healthcare options?

⋮

their roles as expecting or new parents?

Use these conversations to create your advocacy plan both for your church specifically and to change harmful systems overall.

LEARN MORE

Your congregation is full of families and young children, all facing unique challenges. Learn more about the challenges they face and how you can help.

The challenge	How it might show up in your community	Actions you can take
<p>Access to healthcare coverage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination in the health system based on legal status • Lack of medical health insurance • A complex and confusing healthcare system • Discrimination based on insurance type • Lack of care coordination and referrals to support services • Jobs without health benefits • Feeling overwhelmed and stressed when navigating early childhood health and support systems • Higher rates of chronic illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Partner with local medical professionals to host free health fairs during which community members can receive vaccines, check-ups, prenatal and postpartum care, etc. <i>Note: Ensure that health professionals represent the community.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Host a job fair with local businesses that offer jobs that provide health insurance. <input type="checkbox"/> Offer information and resources that connect families with affordable healthcare in your community, and tools to help them determine what they can afford. <input type="checkbox"/> Find out what – if any – local or state healthcare coverage is available; you can do so by visiting healthcare.gov and talking to healthcare workers in your community. <input type="checkbox"/> Make a list of resources your congregation can use, such as free clinics in your community.
<p>Access to mental health supports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher rates of chronic illness, which impact mental health as well • Drug or alcohol misuse • Anxiety and depression • Lack of nurturing relationships • Loneliness and social stress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Partner with local mental health professionals to host free health fairs, where community members can receive mental health supports, information on how to relieve stress and nurture relationships, etc. <i>Ensure that health professionals represent the community.</i>

Stress and health disparities

- Chronic stressors such as: immigration status; forced assimilation; language access; transportation; community violence; food, housing and financial insecurity; and more
- Chronic stress caused by health disparities
- Enduring constant racism, discrimination and stress, which leads to premature aging and poor health outcomes
- History of slavery, colonization and other negative experiences can change a person's genetics, affecting health and well-being
- Higher chronic illness rates
- Loss of appetite and trouble sleeping, which especially impacts pregnant women

- Create a **list of free or low-cost mental health programs** that your community members have had positive experiences with.
- Host **support groups** led by facilitators trained in trauma and stress.

Prenatal and postpartum care and supports

- Pregnant patients are unsure of what to expect during and after their pregnancies due to lack of prenatal and postpartum information
- Lack of transportation to doctor's visits
- Black and Latine birthing people often live far from prenatal care facilities – and facilities are often inaccessible by public transportation
- Inadequate prenatal care leading to poor infant health outcomes, such as low birth weight
- High cost of copays and tests

- Provide **transportation** to OB-GYN appointments. Churches can work with volunteers to arrange this transportation.
- Offer **designated breastfeeding rooms** during church services.

Prenatal and postpartum care and supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate or delayed prenatal care makes Black and Latine women more at risk of undetected and unaddressed high-risk health conditions that can impact birth outcomes • Lack of accessible information about prenatal needs, supports and breastfeeding 	
ECD federal supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of care coordination and referrals to support services • Federal and state health systems are overwhelming and may have limited eligibility limits • Low levels of education, family income and participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) are all connected with inadequate prenatal care • Age limits on WIC program eligibility do not meet actual needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide resources on available federal assistance programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Help families complete paperwork and get connected to WIC program enrollment officers. <input type="checkbox"/> Keep a list of local providers who your congregants have had positive experiences with and who understand your unique population.
Mortality and morbidity of birthing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of early illness diagnosis • Lack of access to postpartum care • Lack of access to prenatal care • Increasing rates of mortality for birthing people • Higher rates of chronic illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Become active with your local representatives, advocating for policies that support birthing people. <input type="checkbox"/> Create a doula program to ensure birthing people have in-hospital advocates during birth. <input type="checkbox"/> Connect elders and mentors in your community to work with pregnant people to advocate for what they need throughout pregnancy and beyond.

Institutional racism and discrimination

- Discrimination of Black and Latine birthing people causes worsening maternal and infant health outcomes
- Health professionals can be dismissive and lack empathy toward patients
- Patients are rushed during prenatal care visits
- ECD healthcare professionals often don't empower or reassure patients, provide care coordination or suggest improvements on health or well-being
- ECD healthcare professionals often don't adequately address or offer interventions for pregnancy complications
- Patients don't know about early childhood development support services
- Black birthing people are more likely than white women to have a C-section, causing longer postpartum recovery and long-term negative health outcomes
- Inflexibility to help patients change appointment times
- Disparagement and disrespect based on racial identity or language abilities from doctors, nurses and staff
- Lack of cultural and racial competencies

- Provide a library of health-related early childhood **development resources and information** for families.
- Provide **translation services** for families as they make medical appointments, etc.
- Ask **volunteers to accompany birthing people to medical appointments** to take notes and ask questions.



Employment and Access to Financial Resources

Meet Marcus.

Marcus is a proud father of three children, ages 9, 6 and 2. He dreams of a better childhood for them than the one he had growing up – and a better future. He’s doing everything he can to give them this future, but he’s facing many challenges.

Unstable work and income

Marcus is a member of the growing “gig economy” and works as an UberEats driver. He never knows how many requests he’ll get or how much income he’ll earn in a day. Gig economy positions like Marcus’s rarely include benefits.

Job training

Marcus wants to switch careers to a full-time job to give his kids a more stable childhood and a bright future. However, he doesn’t have time or access to the right training to do so.

Predatory lending

Marcus isn’t making enough to fully fix his car, which he relies on to make his deliveries. When his car breaks down, Marcus can’t work. He took out a loan from a local moneylender to make much-needed repairs, and is now forced to find the money for the loan and the accompanying sky-high interest rates. Even though Marcus is working to fulfill even more UberEats requests than ever before, working late into the night, he’s not sure he’ll ever be able to pay it off.





What this means for Marcus and his children

- His older two children attend the local public elementary school. They take the bus at the end of the day home, where their mom is waiting with a snack and a clean space for them to start their homework.
- Marcus’s two-year-old daughter stays home during the day with her mom. Marcus has the car for work, and public transportation is extremely limited, so his daughter and wife are unable to participate in the library’s weekly storytime or Mommy and Me groups at their local church.
- Without being able to afford child care on top of their growing debt, Marcus’ wife works hard to entertain their young daughter, playing and reading books with her during the day. But this keeps her from actively looking for job opportunities for her or her husband.

Marcus’s challenges are not unique...they exist in your community.

**START
HERE**

Start by understanding the unique employment and financial challenges families in your congregation face.

Start by leading conversations with your faith community to better understand if and how they are struggling. Ask about:



employment and financial challenges.



banking and financial resources.



institutional racism and discrimination that impacts their day-to-day lives.

Use these conversations to create your advocacy plan both for your church specifically and to change harmful systems overall.

LEARN MORE

Your congregation is full of families and young children, all facing unique challenges. Learn more about the challenges they face and how you can help.

The challenge	How it might show up in your community	Actions you can take
<p>Employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of living wage jobs and inability to cover basic essentials like the high cost of food • Jobs without health insurance, paid family leave or other important family benefits • Wage theft • Low income rates • Work demands of long hours, few days off • Underemployment • Informal economy, daily labor work and gig economy work that leaves workers vulnerable and with unreliable work • Discriminatory hiring practices • No job training or training opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Work with local businesses to offer job trainings and resume coaching on church premises, using a flexible schedule. <input type="checkbox"/> Connect with local community colleges and career and technical education certification programs in order to share upcoming opportunities with your congregants. <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate to raise the minimum wage and for fair employment laws. <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate for fair, living wages for all workers.
<p>Institutional racism across many systems</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank systems with discriminatory practices • Discrimination in hiring • Racism in other systems – from housing to education to child care – impacting financial and employment futures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Offer financial coaching and advice to congregation members. For example, church members with finance expertise could offer volunteer coaching hours. Churches could also bring in outside experts for free sessions. <input type="checkbox"/> Connect congregants with local nonprofit credit unions that don't use predatory lending practices.

<p>Banking and other financial challenges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predatory lending and payday lending issues • Challenges exacerbated by debt • Poor credit history or lack of credit history • Banks unwilling to loan credit due to legal status, race or other discriminatory factors • Lack of access to financial institutions and basic banking services like checking accounts • Lack of assets or opportunities to build wealth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Bring in representatives from un-banked and under-banked support programs from local nonprofits who can help connect congregants with the right credit cards for their circumstances.
<p>Language barriers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs, supports and services are often only available in English – leading to major barriers for families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Provide all information in accessible languages for your congregation. <input type="checkbox"/> Offer information about programs to support your congregation, including employment and financial learning opportunities.
<p>Healthy childhood development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because of the challenges their parents and caregivers face, some kids are missing physical, emotional and social safety • Kids often don't have access to age-appropriate toys, books and activities, which help them learn and grow • Lack of physical, emotional and social safety, which are essential for healthy growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Offer age appropriate, welcoming spaces for your congregation's children. <input type="checkbox"/> Use these guides from Sojourners to explore the early childhood focused places and spaces your church can easily implement.



Meet José.

José and his husband have a beautiful baby girl, Catarina (14 months old). The family has been living happily in a neighborhood surrounded by family and friends. Unfortunately, the city is implementing plans that will ultimately push them out of their home. As a family who doesn't make much money, they're facing challenges such as:

Food security

Rising food costs are making it harder and harder for José to feed his family healthy meals. He knows there are programs out there to help, but he doesn't know what they are or how to navigate them.

Housing

José's neighborhood is gentrifying. As a result, he can no longer afford the home he's lived in for more than a decade – the home he lived in when he met his husband, planned their wedding and welcomed Catarina. Now, the city is working to build larger, luxury apartments and new retail spots in his neighborhood, which is projected to raise property taxes and general cost of living. José and his husband just barely exceed the requirements for affordable housing grants, so they know that isn't an option. They don't know what they're going to do when they're forced out of their home.

Education

José and his husband haven't been able to find an affordable child care option for Catarina. They're worried she'll start school behind as a result. They're already stressed that if they're forced to move, she'll have to attend an underfunded school as well.



What this means for José and his family

- José and his husband are worried that Catarina will fall behind her peers, due to a lack of affordable child care options. If they stay in their neighborhood, a new child care center will open, but is even more unaffordable than any of the current options.
- José worries that his family will be forced to compromise on housing quality and safety as they look for more affordable housing options.
- Currently, José and his husband shop at their local grocery store and are also able to visit their church’s food bank in months when money is tight. Through the grocery store and food bank, José gets his family healthy meals and introduces Catarina to many of their culture’s local foods. They worry about losing this connection to their culture.

Jose’s challenges are not unique...they exist in your community.

**START
HERE**

Start by understanding the unique housing and community challenges families in your congregation face.

Start by leading conversations with your faith community to better understand if and how they are struggling with:



housing and food insecurity.



neighborhood quality of life.



institutional racism, impacting regular parts of their lives such as education and community engagement.

Use these conversations to create your advocacy plan both for your church specifically and to change harmful systems overall.

LEARN MORE

Your congregation is full of families and young children, all facing unique challenges. Learn more about the challenges they face and how you can help.

The challenge	How it might show up in your community	Actions you can take
Food deserts and access to food security assistance programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families in our communities are going hungry • Families don't know what food-related services and programs they can turn to • Food-related services and programs are often difficult to navigate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Put together a resource that helps families learn about the food-related services and programs available to them. Ensure it's available in accessible languages for your congregation. <input type="checkbox"/> Help connect families with food related services and programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Organize food drives for the neighborhoods with the highest need.
Housing and housing policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of availability and access to affordable housing • High density housing, i.e., multiple families sharing one home • Gentrification, including displacement of current residents and changing of a neighborhood's cultural character • Lack of accountability for developers and rental property management • Discrimination in the housing market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Help connect families with housing-related services and programs. <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate for affordable housing lottery programs in new developments, grants for first-time home buyers and other government support. <input type="checkbox"/> Work with local officials to increase housing voucher programs, and help recruit landlords to take vouchers.
Neighborhood quality of life and community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of economic development in less wealthy neighborhoods • No safe community gathering places, such as parks and recreation centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Open your church as a safe, welcoming gathering place for families, even outside of church services. <input type="checkbox"/> Create more events and celebrations that your community can take part in.

<p>Neighborhood quality of life and community engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of community-wide celebrations and cultural events • Siloed communities across ethnic, racial, language, immigration status or economic status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Consider launching church leagues, such as sports teams that families can join. See this Sojourners article on starting a sports ministry. □ Partner with your local park and recreation programs to get kids connected to free or affordable youth sports programs and help parents find community. Read about the role of faith in sports here.
<p>Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who don't attend quality early learning programs often start school already behind • Many students attend underfunded, understaffed schools • Many schools don't offer students the right services to help them learn • Black and brown youth are disciplined at significantly higher rates than their peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Use these guides to help assess how welcoming your church is for families with children, including if your church is ready to create a child care center.
<p>Criminal justice system</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on policing in schools leads to Black and Latine students entering the school-to-prison pipeline • Racial disparities in the criminal justice system • Hurdles assimilating back into the community (such as getting a job) after incarceration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> □ Create a re-entry program with the help of a local nonprofit to ensure former incarcerated individuals are welcomed in your church community. See more about re-entry in this Sojourners article 'Jesus' First Week Home From Prison'. □ Advocate with your local policymakers to eliminate early childhood suspensions and expulsions that feed the school-to-prison pipeline. Read more about how church partnerships can help.

Institutional racism across many systems

• This includes, but is not limited to, employment, criminal justice, banking, policing and education

- Examine the link between socioeconomic status and race to dismantle extensive, systemic discrimination and advocate for federal policies that revolutionize the existing systems.
 - Support progressive Get Out the Vote campaigns and encourage your congregants to vote in all elections.
 - Provide transportation to polling places for all elections.
 - Become a Poll Chaplain.
 - Use the Faiths United to Save Democracy toolkit to educate and empower voters in your community.
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The Church, Faith Communities and Early Learning

Meet Mia.

Mia is a single mom with two kids – a six-month-old daughter and a three-year-old son. Mia made many sacrifices to move to a new neighborhood where her children attend the top-ranked local public school and preschool. She's not the only one – more and more families from many cultures are moving into her new neighborhood, changing the face of the community. As part of this move, she's facing many challenges:

No faith-based programs for families

Mia is craving a space where she can meet and learn from other parents and caregivers, where she can learn about services that could help her family, and enjoy time with her kids and other church families. However, her church doesn't offer these kinds of programs.

Unwelcoming church environment

Church has always been extremely important to Mia and her family, and they started attending a new local church as soon as they moved. Unfortunately, the experience was not what she hoped for. When Mia brings her children to church services, she rarely sees other families, and never sees families who look like them. Her family and their culture aren't reflected in the messages the church shares, the church space or the available programs. Mia's church doesn't have a breastfeeding room where she can nurse her daughter, or a family room where she can listen to the service with her kids. She feels like the church isn't set up for families, and she doesn't feel comfortable or welcome attending church as a result.

Child care deserts

Like more than 50 percent of people in America, Mia lives in a child care desert. This means there are no affordable, high-quality childcare options near her home. She hoped to find an early learning program through her church community, but her church doesn't offer this kind of service. She doesn't know where she'll find child care she trusts, that fits her budget, too.





What this means for Mia and her children

- Mia looks to community-based programs and services for things like child care, after care and more, rather than her church.
- Mia feels disconnected from her church and is unable to build a strong faith-based community for her or her children.
- Mia’s children learn to look beyond the church as they build their own communities.

Mia’s challenges are not unique...they exist in your community.

**START
HERE**

Start by understanding the unique church, community and early childhood challenges families in your congregation face.

Start by leading conversations with your faith community to better understand what they need when it comes to:

⋮

childcare and early learning opportunities.

⋮

a church community that welcomes parents, caregivers and families.

⋮

services that help parents and caregivers raise their families.

Use these conversations to create your advocacy plan both for your church specifically and to change harmful systems overall.

LEARN MORE

Your congregation is full of families and young children, all facing unique challenges. Learn more about the challenges they face and how you can help.

The challenge	How it might show up in your community	Actions you can take
<p>Church programs for young children and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church communities don't know what programs to offer young children and their families • Lack of volunteers or people willing to help with early childhood-focused needs in the church • Ministry staff are overwhelmed and overworked, and often don't prioritize early childhood development as a result • Family friendly events "don't fit" in church calendars because of other ministry events • Birthing persons and young children feeling unwelcome in church services • Some faith communities don't welcome anyone outside the bounds of a "traditional" family (a two person, heterosexual married couple with children) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Use this 101 ECD Ministry Evaluation Guide to help assess how welcoming your church is for families with children, and to create a plan that serves families and young children even better. <input type="checkbox"/> Share welcoming messages as part of your church's communications, making it clear that all families are welcome in your faith community. <input type="checkbox"/> Create an early-childhood focused volunteer program. <input type="checkbox"/> Support universal pre-k at the local, state and federal levels.
<p>Church funding for early childhood development opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple, competing funding priorities in churches; ECD is not a priority in church budgets • Lack of fundraisers and grant writers • Churches are under-resourced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> If your church doesn't already have a budget focused on young children and their families, start with low-cost options, as outlined in this guide. <input type="checkbox"/> Begin incorporating early childhood into your budget and fundraising efforts.

**Advocacy
organizing
among church
leaders**

- Churches often don't lead when it comes to advocacy – and don't help their congregations advocate, either
- Lack of collaboration with other churches, service providers, community-based organizations and city partners
- Church buildings and spaces are not easily opened for community activities

- Once you have your initial conversations with your congregation, create a list of advocacy priorities.
 - Tap into coalitions and networks of clergy to work on these issues together. Start by signing up for SojoAction.
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Advocacy at the local, state and federal level is essential.

Keep up with Sojourners' advocacy work to see how you can get involved and support young children and families in your faith community:
<https://sojo.net/flourishingfutures>



Conclusion

Supporting young children and their development is grounded in faith. As clergy, we work hard to give all members of our congregations, including young children and families, the supports they need to develop and thrive.

And while the individual work we do is so important to our members, we are called to do more.

To fully support young children and families in our faith communities, we can't just look to those in our church pews – we must look to our communities and the systems they exist in.

We must first listen for the root issue at the base of our congregation's needs. **We can then advocate to dismantle the systemic social injustices that may keep our faith-based work from making a difference.**

The insights and data provided in Flourishing Futures, and the corresponding Research and Methodology Report, offer us that initial understanding.

With these insights, we can transform our churches into welcoming, supportive spaces for young children and families.

We can help the little children grow in their development and faith.

We can fulfill the word of God and love one another.

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*“I give you a new command.
Love one another. You must
love one another, just as I
have loved you. If you love one
another, everyone will know
you are my disciples.”*

John 13:34-35

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