

A Week of Prayer and Service For Our Children and Youth

God's Heart for Children

God's word has a lot to say to us about children. They were a top priority for Jesus during his earthly ministry. He spoke to his followers about the special value children have in God's sight and he challenged us to treat them as he did. Two examples include:

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And **whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.** But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." Matthew 18:1-6*

*People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.** I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." **And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.** Mark 10:13-16*

Welcome to the Third Annual Week of Prayer for Our Children and Youth. You are joining with thousands of other people of faith 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 11th, pastors, ministry leaders, and those who serve and advocate for children will be gathering for our third 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 St. Martin's Episcopal 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.

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## **PRAYER GUIDE - Focus for 2011 - Children and Education**

### **DAY 1**

#### **Prayer for Children who are Hungry and Struggle to Focus in School**

*Did you know that many of the children within our community don't have enough to eat? In 2009, 24.1% of households with children reported they did not have enough money for food within the last 12 months. While a School Breakfast Program and a National Lunch Program are available in a number of our schools, many children in Harris County do not participate because of the stigma associated with receiving free meals.*

*School breakfast is not only effective in reducing hunger among needy children, it is also effective in improving nutrition; preventing obesity; improving students' attendance, attentiveness and achievement. With growing budget challenges facing our families and our schools, it is likely that more of our children will be affected.*

#### **Let's Pray**

Father, none of us would want our own children to struggle in school because of a lack of food or proper nutrition. And yet we know this is true for many of the children in our community.

First of all we ask you to help our policy makers to make the right choices for our children as they address this important issue. Give them wisdom and direction from heaven.

Jesus, when your disciples told you that the crowd of 5,000 was hungry, you said, "You give them something to eat." (Matthew 14:16) Awaken your people across this city to be involved. Raise up advocates who can make a difference in the lives of children, families and schools. (Matthew 9:38)

Give us your heart of compassion for those who are hurting. Fill us with your wisdom, power and grace so that we, your people, can respond in tangible and practical ways. (Isaiah 11:2) All of this we ask in your name, the name of Jesus, and for the sake of the children of our city.

## Can We Be The Answer?

- *Children at Risk* wants to see the universal free school breakfast programs made available to every school that has at least 80% of their students living at or below 185% of the federal poverty level. Perhaps you can help.
- *Other Resources Related to Hunger:*
  - *The Houston Food Bank:* [www.houstonfoodbank.org](http://www.houstonfoodbank.org)
  - *Mission Centers of Houston:* [www.missioncenters.org](http://www.missioncenters.org)
  - *Memorial Assistance Ministries:* [www.maministries.org](http://www.maministries.org)
  - *Braes Interfaith Ministries:* [www.braesinterfaithministries.com](http://www.braesinterfaithministries.com)
- *One community decided to get involved – after hearing a presentation during the first Week of Prayer, a staff member from Sterlingwood Church, Melanie Ayers, went to the Galena Park ISD to lobby for Universal Free School Breakfast. Because of her voice, the information provided by Children at Risk, and all of our prayers, GPISD has instituted this program.*
- *Do you know other stories that you can tell about where people are making a difference?*

## DAY 2

### Prayer for Children from Disadvantaged Homes

**Did you know that** 23% of Harris County children live in poverty and in 2009, 50.6% of children in Texas were living in low-income families, compared to 42.2% nationally? This means that one half of the children in Texas are set up to be unsuccessful.

*There are many long term risks associated with child poverty, as children living in poverty have a higher risk of dropping out of school, poor adolescent health and adult health, poor employment outcomes, and experiencing poverty as adults. Child poverty can have life-long repercussions for those children and the future of our community.*

### Let's Pray

Jesus, when you began your ministry you declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoner and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18)

We understand that the poor and disadvantaged are at the very top of your priority list. You have called us to follow in your footsteps. (John 17:18) We're asking you to help us have those same priorities. You instruct us by saying, "and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday." (Isaiah 58:10)

Help us to see them with your eyes and to serve them as if we were serving you. Your word says, "He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what

he has done.” (Proverbs 19:17) Empower your people across Greater Houston to make a difference. Let your Spirit rest upon us to serve the poor and the oppressed. All of this we ask in your name, the name of Jesus, and for the sake of the children of our city.

### **Can We Be The Answer?**

to hear one of their stories of impact.

- Resources:
  - Change Happens (<http://www.changehappenstx.org>)
  - Communities in Schools (<http://www.cishouston.org>)
  - Citizen Schools (<http://www.citizenschools.org>)
  - Collaborative for Children (<http://www.collabforchildren.org>)
  - Other resources that you know

## **DAY 3**

### **Prayer for our Educators to be Extraordinary**

*Did you know that while every child has the capacity to achieve at high levels, there are a variety of social and economic circumstances that threaten a student’s potential? Effective teachers can help students overcome these barriers, and excel academically and personally. Quality education is the anchor for success in career and life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; every student deserves a highly effective teacher to provide him/her with the high level knowledge and skills he/she needs to prepare for the college and career.*

*We need to recalibrate our educational system to ensure that we are providing every student with a highly effective teacher that will provide them with the tools they need to reach their full potential.*

### **Let’s Pray**

Father, we understand that teaching is more than an occupation. It is a gift from you. (Rom 12:7) First of all we want to thank you for the many dedicated teachers and educators that serve the children of our community. We ask you to strengthen them with your wisdom, counsel, knowledge and power. (Isaiah 11:2)

Where our educational system is functioning ineffectively, we’re asking for your help. Give grace, courage and creativity to our policy makers, administrators and educators. Help them to make decisions that will provide students with the most effective teachers and educational resources possible.

Father, thank you for raising up ministries like Moms In Touch that have a vision and a strategy to adopt and cover every school in prayer. Your word teaches us that we are to pray for all those in authority and we know that teachers and educators have a place of authority in the lives of our students. (1 Timothy 2:1-4) Raise up a movement of prayer

that will touch every school and every educator across our community. All of this we ask in your name, the name of Jesus, and for the sake of the children of our city.

### **Can We Be The Answer?**

- Moms In Touch is making a difference, one school at a time.  
[www.MomsInTouch.org](http://www.MomsInTouch.org)
- Resources
  - Teach for America (<http://www.teachforamerica.org>)
  - Generation One Academy (<http://www.generationone.net/academy>)
  - Yes Prep Public Schools (<http://www.yesprep.org>)
  - KIPP Academy (<http://www.kipp-houston.org>)
  - Other resources that you know

## **DAY 4**

### **Prayer for Student Engagement and Extended Day**

*Did you know that Texas ranks last in the nation in the percentage of adults with high school diplomas; only 79.6% of Texans have a high school diploma. In 2009, 34% of Texas 4<sup>th</sup> graders and 27% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders tested below basic reading levels. Moreover, low-income children achieve approximately 23% below their more affluent peers.*

*Extended learning time opens the possibility of a wider range of study and exposure to subjects such as history, science, music, and art. Adding quality time to the school year would serve as an opportunity for our children to boost academic performance, to close achievement gaps, to stay in school and reduce drop-out rates, and to take advantage of expanded enrichment in order to compete in a globalized market.*

### **Let's Pray**

Father, we find the fact that Texas ranks last in the nation in the percentage of high school diplomas to be unacceptable. We know you want our children to be equipped to succeed in life.

We are calling out to you for help. Please give us, your people, the wisdom and tangible strategies to turn this situation around. (James 1:5) We know that nothing is impossible with you so we are asking you to come to our aid. (Luke 1:37)

Help us to engage this problem with vision and passion. Raise up a sustainable movement in the midst of our city to address this critical need head on.

Thank you for the many mentoring programs that enable local churches to adopt and care for at-risk students. We see the tangible fruit as 99.3% of students with a mentor demonstrate academic improvement. Thank you that every independent school district in Greater Houston is welcoming the church to provide mentors for students. Bless these

efforts and multiply them until every at-risk child is served across our community. All of this we ask in your name, the name of Jesus, and for the sake of the children of our city.

### **Can We Be The Answer?**

- Check out the many mentoring programs available across our community.
- List current mentoring opportunities.
- Resources
  - Neighborhood Centers (<http://www.neighborhood-centers.org>),
  - Kids Hope USA (<http://www.kidshopeusa.org>)
  - Spring Branch ISD (<http://www.springbranchisd.com/partners>)
- Other resources that you know

## **DAY 5**

### **Prayer for Parents to be the Best Advocates for their Children**

*Did you know that there are people, programs and organizations all across Texas who faithfully serve the needs of at-risk and vulnerable children? Did you also know that your voice can and will make a difference in the lives of children? As parents become better advocates for their children and agents of change, they can choose the right schools for their children and get more involved in their kids' education. There's also a growing commitment by the Faith Community to reach up in prayer and out in love to reverse these damaging trends in the lives of at-risk children.*

### **Let's Pray**

Father, your word declares, "How great is the love the Father has lavished upon us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are!" You are the ultimate parent and you want the very best for each of your children. We are so thankful.

Father, you have called parents to both nurture and impart your values to our children. (Deuteronomy 6:6-7) But we need your help. Many of the families in our city are struggling. They are facing enormous pressures and are often lacking in the parenting skills they need to care or advocate for their children. Many among us are attempting to fill the role of both father and mother.

Please help us, the Faith Community, to see how we can serve the parents and families of our communities. Show us what you have already raised up to engage and strengthen families. Help us to share resources, models and experiences that can effectively meet the needs of families, especially families of at-risk children.

Thank you for the commitment that is growing in our midst. Bless these efforts and cause them to multiply across the Greater Houston area. All of this we ask in your name, the name of Jesus, and for the sake of the children of our city.

### **Can We Be The Answer?**

- Do you know groups whose specific mission is to empower parents to effectively advocate for their children?
- Share a story where a parent's advocacy made a difference in the life of a child.

## DAY 6

### Prayer for College Readiness

*Did you know that only 24% of high school graduates (ages 25-29) have completed a bachelor's degree or higher? We should encourage all students to prepare for college admissions, including taking college entrance examinations, completing college-level coursework, visiting college campuses, and completing college admittance and financial aid applications.*

*The best way for a child to make their way out of poverty is through quality education. We need to act as a guide and support for the children in our city, so their top priority is to attend college and become educated citizens.*

### Let's Pray

Father, many of us have been through this process with our own children. We recognize it is a daunting challenge. We also recognize there is a wealth of experience across our city that has the potential to impact the lives of thousands of other children.

Help us respond to this opportunity to serve the youth of Greater Houston. Show us how to work together, with our many gifts, talents and experiences, so that we can address this need. (1 Cor 12:12) Connect us to those who are already engaged so we can be effective. Where there are few resources, raise up, call out and empower additional leaders for this task. (Matthew 9:37-38)

We know you have plans and purposes for each of our youth, plans that are greater than we can fathom. (Jeremiah 29:11) We also know that you want to use us, your people, to help others see those plans. Help us to steward this opportunity well. All of this we ask in your name, the name of Jesus, and for the sake of the children of our city.

### Can We Be The Answer?

- Are there Youth Groups or others that are meeting this need effectively?
- Resources
  - Project GRAD Houston (<http://www.projectgradhouston.org>),
  - Ed Pioneers (<http://www.community.educationpioneers.org>)

# DAY 7

## Engagement of the Church in the Community

***Did you know that** the Faith Community has the potential to transform our community? With more than 4,100 local churches in the Greater Houston Area and more mega-churches than any city in the United States, Houston is uniquely positioned to serve God's purposes and plans for the children of our city.*

*Many churches and organizations are already engaged. Can you imagine what might happen if all of the churches across the city got involved in serving the needs of our students, educators and schools? Do we see this as our place of service?*

*We know God has instructed us to focus on children. **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.*  
(Mark 10:13-16)

### Let's Pray

Father, you have called us to be your witnesses in our community and beyond. (Acts 1:8) We understand this includes expressing your heart and care for the children and youth of Greater Houston. Thank you that you have been helping us recognize the needs in our community. Thank you that you have been helping respond as your people - together. (John 17:23)

Our first action has been to seek you in prayer. We recognize that you alone have the capacity to meet the many challenges before our children. We are not relying on our own capacities but upon yours. (Luke 18:27)

Father, we are asking you to come and do more than we can ask or imagine. (Ephesians 3:20-21) Give us your heart for the children and youth of this city. Break our hearts with the things that break your heart. Raise up Houston to be a city that is know for whole and healthy children. All of this we ask in your name, the name of Jesus, and for the sake of the children of our city.

### Can We Be The Answer?

Tracks are forming to connect and network advocates for children in the following areas:

- Senior Pastor Track
- Children's Pastor Track
- Advocate Organization Track
- Prayer Mobilization Track

What else is God asking us to do?