

First 2000TM DAYS

FAITH SUMMITS



"It is a moral obligation for us to provide an environment that enables children to fully explore their innate potential with human dignity."

— Global Network of Religions for Children

FAITH LEADERS: A SOURCE OF STRENGTH FOR FAMILIES

For many children, their first connection to the community beyond their immediate family is their church, synagogue or mosque. It is a time when young parents often

"My faith calls me to ensure that each child in every community has the opportunity to become the very best person God has created him or her to be."

Reverend Tommy James, First Baptist Church
Burnsville, North Carolina

reconnect to their faith and turn to their religious community for support and guidance.

As such, it is an opportunity for religious leaders to have a powerful impact on the future of their youngest congregants.



ALLOWING ALL CHILDREN TO REACH THEIR POTENTIAL



The most rapid period of development in human life happens from birth to age eight. The brain, one of the only organs not fully developed at birth, experiences 90% of its development in these early years.

Brains are built, not born. Children's earliest experiences determine whether brains are wired to provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning, behavior and health. Because brains are built from the bottom up, much like a house, the first eight years set the foundation for all of the years that follow. To build a strong foundation, children need good health, strong families and high quality early child development experiences during this critical period.¹

A MORAL CHALLENGE

Even with our state's numerous accomplishments, too many of our children are not meeting critical early child development milestones needed to build a strong foundation for learning. As a result, by the time they reach third grade, the majority of North Carolina children are not able to read proficiently.² The impact is life-long. Third grade reading proficiency is a predictor of academic achievement, high school graduation and career success.³

This challenge calls upon faith leaders to contribute to every child attaining their full potential – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, moral and social – in a loving environment.

"Children are created in God's image, 'crowned with glory and honor' (Psalm 8:5). When we honor them, we honor God."

Reverend Jerry Lewis, Grace for All Church
Marion, North Carolina



TAKING ACTION

Faith leaders have a voice that few others possess. Whether it's in a weekly sermon, a counseling session or as a community leader, members of the clergy are sought out for guidance and spiritual wisdom. Imagine the impact that voice could have if used to ensure that all children have the early experiences they need to thrive!

In 2013, faith leaders from across North Carolina came together to discuss the role places of worship play in building a strong foundation for learning and health for their youngest congregants.

The ideas that follow come from these discussions:

USE YOUR VOICE

- ✓ Sign the Faith Leaders Commitment to Children.
- ✓ Deliver a sermon on the importance of early child development.
- ✓ Include articles on child development in the bulletin.
- ✓ Add a link to the First 2000 Days website to your web page and electronic newsletters.
- ✓ Host a First 2,000 Days presentation for your congregation.

SUPPORT PARENTS

- ✓ Host evidence-based parenting programs.
- ✓ Educate parents on how to identify high quality early care and its importance.
- ✓ Share information about community resources with parents.
- ✓ Participate in the child care subsidy system if you have a child care program.
- ✓ Develop a pre-parenting counseling program modeled after pre-marital counseling.

PROMOTE HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

- ✓ Become a high quality 5-star child care program.
- ✓ Provide scholarships for child care teachers in your community to advance their education.
- ✓ Train those who work with young children in your congregations on developmentally appropriate practices.

"The Talmud teaches us "whoever saves a life, saves the world." All the more so, when it comes to children. If we religious leaders do not speak up for these oft-times voiceless, young people, then our world—God's world—will perish."

Rabbi Eric Solomon, Beth Meyer Synagogue
Raleigh, North Carolina

PROMOTE LITERACY

- ✓ Provide age-appropriate books throughout your building.
- ✓ Donate books to local child care programs.
- ✓ Organize opportunities for congregants to read to young children in child care programs or tutor children in elementary school.

CREATE COMMUNITY IMPACT

- ✓ Advocate on behalf of early child development issues within your community.
- ✓ Host a local faith summit.
- ✓ Organize the congregations in your community to jointly advocate on behalf of children.



The First 2,000 Days Initiative is a campaign of the North Carolina Early Childhood Foundation, www.buildthefoundation.org. For more information, email ncecf@buildthefoundation.org.

Learn more at www.first2000days.org

¹The Science of Early Childhood Development, Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University

²NC Department of Public Instruction, Accountability and Testing Results, <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us/accountability/reporting/>

³Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation. <http://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/Double-Jeopardy-Report-030812-for-web1.pdf>