

AWE...Child Advocacy...what's that??

“Child Advocacy...what's that??” More often than not, as I travel about and meet new people both within and out of the church, this is the response I'm greeted by when I begin to explain who I am and what I'm about.

Advocacy has its root in the word “Advocate” which comes from the Latin word *advocare* (“to summon”). Essentially an “Advocate” is one who pleads the cause of another. “Advocate” (as in “advocate and guide”) is one of the attributes of the Holy Spirit as illuminated by the *Te Deum laudamus* (BCP 95). Child Advocacy is standing up for children. It is an attitude, a process you go through, and all the steps along the way that bring about changes to help children grow and develop physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Churches that advocate for children make sure that children are not only included in worship, but also fully participating. They not only operate Sunday Schools, but also sponsor after school programs or day care programs. Churches that advocate for children offer feeding programs, collect clothes or school supplies. They even train parents, raise community consciousness, and participate with other groups to effect positive legislative and policy changes.

Child Advocacy work can be almost anything that has a positive impact on children's lives. And any church can have a big voice if it is creative and capitalizes on opportunities within its local community, the state or our nation. Within our Diocese there are several opportunities for your parish to get involved in the ministry of Child Advocacy.

The *National Observance of Children's Sabbaths* takes place on October 21st! *Children's Sabbath* is an opportunity for people of all ages and faiths to learn about the urgent needs of children (such as poverty, lack of health care, and violence) and to commit to respond to them. Several months ago, each parish received a study guide and worship service planner to assist in planning a *Children's Sabbaths* celebration. Contents included: worship suggestions, study guides for both adults and children, an intergenerational event for your whole parish and more! If you don't see a *Children's Sabbaths* observation on your parish calendar, why not use that same manual and help plan an observation for later in November and start raising consciousness right where you are?

Another opportunity to become a public policy advocate for children is to get involved in *Every Kid Counts – Good Schools Pennsylvania (GSPA)*. *GSPA* is a statewide grassroots organization that seeks to mobilize parents, students and concerned citizens to advocate for improved public education. We all know that getting a good education is key to our children's future, yet Pennsylvania is one of only 14 states that does not offer full day kindergarten. The state government's share of education expenses for public schools dropped from 55 percent to 35 percent in the last 25 years. With a \$9,000 gap per child between the highest and the lowest-spending district it is easily apparent that children

across our state and across our Diocese experience a great inequity in educational funding.

There are national opportunities to take action as well. Our National Church stands behind the *Act To Leave No Child Behind* (S. 940/H.R. 1990). It is my hope that we also will embrace this legislation as a Diocese at our upcoming Convention. Over 12 million American children (1 out of every 6) remain in poverty and 26% of poor children live in extreme poverty, with family incomes below half of the federal poverty line. Three out of four poor children live in families where someone works. The *Act to Leave No Child Behind* encourages effective education, training, and job placement programs so parents can compete for better jobs. It ensures that families receive the support they need and are entitled to, such as food stamps, Medicaid, and child care assistance. It also provides health coverage to all of America's nearly 11 million uninsured children and has provision to afford young people with the opportunities they need to learn, serve, work, and stay out of trouble.

In the Book of Micah we read: "And what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" As faithful people committed to justice, we need to work to provide a quality education that is adequately funded for every Pennsylvania child. Just as Christ's model of ministry sought justice for the most vulnerable and marginalized, so must we minister with compassion and seek justice for the most vulnerable and marginalized children, until each has the opportunity to develop to her or his God-given potential. I ask you to join with me and millions of people of faith on this journey of celebrating and loving our own, our congregation's, our Diocese's, our state and nation's, and all of God's children. Let us "Leave No Child Behind" – no, not even one.

Bill: For a sidebar??

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

- Attend a monthly Prayer Vigil on the state Capitol steps.
- Form a study group for *Good School Pennsylvania* in your parish.
- Write a letter to one of your legislators or pay them a visit.
- Sign up to be on the Diocesan email list serve and receive updates on how you can take action.
- Attend the "kick-off" March on Washington for "Leave No Child Behind" on November 14th.

More information is available about all of these opportunities through the Diocesan Office. Prayer Vigils are held on the second Wednesday of each month. There is an opportunity to speak with one of our legislators following the Vigil. If 10 members of your parish will commit two hours once a month for eight months you can become one of the 17 groups that Bishop Paul has committed, on behalf of our Diocese, to the *GSPA* effort! Both training for group leaders and an engaging curriculum are provided by

GSPA. Six churches have already stepped up to the plate: St. Andrew, Allentown; Grace, Allentown; St. Margaret's, Emmaus; Trinity, Bethlehem, Nativity, Bethlehem and Christ, Stroudsburg. Won't you be one, too?