



We Need Faith...

CHANGING GIRLS' LIVES
10 Actions for Faith Leaders and
Communities in the U.S.



...Faith that no girl is invisible

In Sub-Saharan Africa, only 17 percent of girls enroll in secondary school.

In the next 10 years, over 100 million girls will be married as children.



One third of all women living with HIV are between the ages of 15 and 24.





Adolescent girls in the Global South need our help.

Faced with poverty and cultural bias, they are less healthy, receive less schooling, and have far less freedom than their male peers. Among people who have so little, adolescent girls have the least.

Often these girls are isolated and exploited.

They spend long days carrying water, gathering firewood, caring for younger children, and tending to livestock while their brothers study or socialize with friends. Their parents see them as unworthy of an equal share of the family's food and protection, leaving them vulnerable to disease and sexual violence. Many girls are forced to marry at a young age and must bear children before their bodies are ready, leading to maternal death and terrible health problems like obstetric fistula. Many become HIV-positive from their husbands.

As a faith leader or member of a faith community,

you can encourage your faith community to understand the circumstances that constrain the lives of these girls, and to reach out in the spirit of compassion and communion. Together we can ensure that no girl is denied the blessings of health and hope, the birthright of the entire human family.



Preach

- Share the stories of adolescent girls with your faith community. Encourage worshippers — girls and boys, women and men — to contemplate living in their circumstances. Look within your community for members who can speak about lives of adolescent girls in the Global South; ask them to share their insights.
- Contact the global ministry or international service section of your faith's national or international offices. Invite a spokesperson to speak to your congregation about the good works fellow believers are doing around the world.
- Commemorate international days of observation such as International Women's Day (March 8); World AIDS Day (December 1); and International Day to End Violence against Women and Girls (November 26), highlighting the situation of adolescent girls in relation to each. Incorporate international stories, songs and sermons featuring adolescent girls into your worship services.

“I myself have studied up to 9th standard and then discontinued. There is no high school in my village and I was not allowed to go out of the village to study. I wished to study more but could not.”

—Girl from India, age 15

Teach



- Devote religious instruction classes to teaching about the issues that affect adolescent girls in the Global South. Ask them to contemplate what your faith says about equality, justice, dignity and compassion.
- Ask young people to research a particular country or a particular issue. Hold discussion sessions in which girls and boys explore the ways in which their own lives resemble or differ from those of girls in the Global South.
- Create “safe spaces” where girls can come together to discuss their faith and the issues affecting their lives. Ask them to explore the similarities between their challenges and aspirations and those of their sisters around the world.
- Challenge young people to identify programs organized by a faith service organization, a non-profit organization, or an international organization (such as the United Nations). Ask them to identify the ways these programs make a difference, and how the faith community can support that work.

“Reproductive health and sexuality is not discussed adequately in school and not even at home. Certain behaviors of male members to our community lead our girls’ lives into risk situations. But such things are always kept at a low level and are not able to be reported due to cultural constraints.”

—Girl from Sri Lanka, Age 15



Reach

- Hold a letter-writing or calling campaign to contact your members of Congress and your local newspapers. Ask them to support legislation that will help adolescent girls around the world, such as the Child Marriage Bill, the International Violence against Women Act (IVAWA), and the Global Resources and Opportunities for Women to Thrive (GROWTH) Act.
- Publish newsletter articles on the issues that affect the well-being of adolescent girls and the groups that are working to help them. Collect literature from these groups and display them in the appropriate place in your place of worship.
- Ask your faith community to choose a program within its international section or organization or an international non-profit with a focus on adolescent girls. Allocate a portion of your regular collections or hold a fundraiser to benefit that program or organization. Find out about international campaigns to promote the development of adolescent girls, and get involved!

“One day my father told me I was to be married. I was never asked how I felt. It was my duty to respect his decision...I would have wanted to wait and find the one I love, but now it is too late... It is difficult for me and for the whole country.”

—Girl from Niger, Age 12 (married at age 9)

Outreach



- The Islamic Social Services Association, Jewish Women International, the Mennonite Central Committee, the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church are among the groups that have banded together as the Interfaith Domestic Violence Coalition. Together, they are supporting the International Violence Against Women Act, a bill vital to combating violence against girls and women around the world. Coalition members have pledged to conduct educational and advocacy seminars for both clergy and laity and to mobilize them to meet with their members of Congress.
- In 2007, Anglican Women's Empowerment (AWE) started the Global Fund for Girls to support work around the world which will enable girls to have a better life. The same year, AWE and the Office of the Anglican Observer at the United Nations organized a group of Anglican girl delegates from the U.S., Australia, Hong Kong, India, and Kenya to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. The Anglican girl delegates issued a statement asking the Anglican Communion to "raise every community's awareness" about women's and girls' issues and to "continue to touch the lives of the unfortunate ones in the world."¹
- In Brazil, faith leaders including Catholics, Protestants and Muslims joined with UNICEF, UNFPA, UNAIDS, and adolescents living with HIV to commemorate World AIDS Day by placing a large red ribbon at the base of the world-famous Christ the Redeemer statue overlooking Rio de Janeiro. One young person living with HIV captured the spirit of the event when he proclaimed, "We used to hide to die, but now we are going out in the open to live!"²

¹http://www.episcopalchurch.org/32862_83100_ENG_HTM.htm, Episcopal Church press release, 5 March 2007

²http://www.unicef.org/aids/brazil_42054.html, UNICEF press release, 4 December 2007



**BREAKTHROUGH CAN
MAKE IT HAPPEN**

www.unfoundation.org/girls



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