

## Moment for Mission: Children's Sabbath

Rev. Dr. Suzanne Webb, Senior Minister  
Union Avenue Christian Church, St. Louis



In 1886, six St. Louis women gathered in prayer to discern how they might help the orphaned children of this city.

The National Benevolent Association began shortly thereafter as these women developed an orphanage in our city. Soon orphanages were started around the country, and thousands of children were cared for through the decades.

In the late 20th century, there were honestly fewer orphans in our country, but there was an incredible need to care for children who were hurting in other ways—whether they had been in abusive homes, or not able to intellectually stay focused in school, or myriad other concerns. Thus, NBA changed its focus, and the children's homes became more specifically helpful to the variety of needs of children.

I was fortunate to work at the Atlanta Children's Home in the early 1970s. One of the wondrous experiences of that home was that the governor of Georgia came to dinner, usually once a week. He would ask his drivers to stay outside the building, and he would merely walk in, sit down with the children, eat with them, and have wonderful conversations. I was privileged to introduce him to our Georgia Regional Assembly, and he chastised us all for not supporting that home and NBA in more significant ways. He shared story after story about the value of life the children were learning and receiving from their experiences there. When Jimmy Carter became President, he invited a few of the children from that home (and paid their way) to his inauguration!

Since then, the National Benevolent Association has grown with the needs of our country. Though we still have several children's homes that are related to NBA, each one is unique in its ministry and care.

NBA's mission statement now is: "Following God's call, the National Benevolent Association exists to inspire and connect the people and ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to accompany one another in the creation of communities of compassion and care, and to advocate for the well-being of humanity."

Today, as we continue to raise awareness of the children of our congregation and the world, we do celebrate the continuing witness of NBA and how over 130 years they have served children in very significant ways.