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**Mayor Barrett Announces Date for 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Strong Baby Sabbath**

*Collaboration with Columbia St. Mary's and faith community to celebrate new Strong Baby Sanctuary locations*

MILWAUKEE – Mayor Tom Barrett has announced that his fifth annual collaboration with Columbia St. Mary's and the faith community will take place on Sunday, Oct. 11, 2015. The Strong Baby Sabbath will continue its focus on the top two most preventable causes of infant death in Milwaukee, premature births and unsafe sleeping environments.

Faith leaders are also invited to an educational luncheon with the Mayor and health officials on Tues., Oct. 6, at Columbia St. Mary's Garden Café. During the luncheon, not only will 10 churches be celebrated for becoming the first Strong Baby Sanctuary locations in the city, but leaders will discuss the impact of violence on chronic stress, and its connection to premature births.

“Faith leaders are able to reach right into the heart of our community,” said Mayor Tom Barrett. “In Milwaukee, too many infants die because they are born too small, too soon. Our faith leaders are instrumental in providing support to their neighborhoods that can help reduce risk factors and connect people to resources. We invite every place of worship to join us this year in sharing a collective message that will help more Milwaukee babies celebrate their first birthdays.”

The effort supports the goal of reducing Milwaukee's overall infant mortality rate by 10 percent and the African-American infant mortality rate by 15 percent by 2017 set by Mayor Barrett and supported by the Milwaukee Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families at United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County, with funding from the Wisconsin Partnership Program.

On average, 100 Milwaukee infants die before their first birthdays, with nearly 60 percent of all infant deaths and 66 percent of African-American infant deaths a result of complications of prematurity. Additionally, half of the approximately 15 sleep-related infant deaths in Milwaukee occur to infants who were born prematurely, making prematurity a significant risk factor for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and accidental suffocation.

“Both prematurity and its complications as well as sleep-related infant deaths are preventable,” said Commissioner of Health Bevan K. Baker. “Prematurity can be prevented through communitywide actions such as ensuring accessible high-quality prenatal care and eliminating smoking during pregnancy. However, the most important thing we must do is reduce chronic stress for all girls and women of childbearing age.”

“Columbia St. Mary's Urban Church Wellness program has built a strong collaboration with area faith communities,” said Bill Solberg, Director of Community Services for Columbia St. Mary's. “Faith leaders who pledge to join the Strong Baby Sabbath will be part of the communitywide effort needed to reduce preventable infant deaths in our city.”

The Strong Baby Sabbath is planned cooperatively by Columbia St. Mary's Urban Church Wellness Program, City of Milwaukee Health Department, March of Dimes Wisconsin Chapter, and the Milwaukee Lifecourse Initiative for Healthy Families at United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County.

Churches can register at [www.urbanchurchwellness.com](http://www.urbanchurchwellness.com) or by calling the City of Milwaukee Health Department at (414) 286-8620.

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