

***The Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County Showcases
Innovative ICARE Program at
The 9th Parliament of World Religions in Chicago***

For immediate release

August 25, 2023

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By Greg Kremenliev and Terri Moss

Seven leaders from the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County (I4C) journeyed to Chicago last week to present a workshop at the 9th Parliament of the World's Religions (dating back to 1893). This year's gathering featured 7,000 participants from 90 countries and more than 200 faith traditions, revolving around the theme: "A Call to Conscience – Defending Freedom and Human Rights" with a focus on combating authoritarianism and the climate crisis.

The I4C representatives came to The Parliament to present a program, ICARE, that they inaugurated in Contra Costa County during the pandemic. Their purpose was to encourage interfaith organizations around the world to implement and benefit from ICARE. Terri Moss created ICARE which provides opportunities for two or more faith communities to work together on community service projects that improve the lives of people in need. In addition, ICARE fosters understanding and friendships among people of various faiths, which strengthens our communities and serves as an antidote to hate. Often, people's networks are limited to their own faith community. ICARE introduces peoples of different faith communities which enriches and broadens everyone's lives. Terri co-presented the Chicago workshop with I4C Executive Director, Rev. Will McGarvey and Dave Longhurst, ICARE co-chair and Co-President of I4C. ICARE sparked a lively discussion among attendees.

The Parliament kicked off with a colorful and boisterous parade on Sunday, August 13th:



Members of
the Tai Ji Men
Qigong
Academy

perform during the Parliament of World Religion Parade of Faiths, Sunday, Aug. 13, 2023, in Chicago.
(AP Photo / Paul Beaty)



The pre-Parliament parade was uplifting and focused on the celebration of faith diversity. A long line of people processed down the street who were proud, loud, and vibrantly-dressed dressed in bright, audaciously-colored costumes reflecting their culture and religious beliefs. They danced to music and drums and chanted at the top of their lungs on the street. They strutted their cultural stuff in front of the bland backdrop of the Hyatt

McCormick. There was a steady stream of turbans, tunics and white feathered headdresses, a Chinese dragon, rows of reds, yellows, greens, glitter and all colors of hair. In multiple languages, they proudly proclaimed their call for world peace in primary-colored banners adorned by gold tassels. The world was literally parading at our doorstep and their messages were pride in their religion or culture, declarations of world peace and a call for saving our planet from climate demise.

Chicago's mayor, Brandon Johnson, welcomed the 2023 Parliament to the City, which was the site of the first Parliament in 1893, emphasizing unity and compassion: "Your spiritual traditions have the power to guide people to a path of peace, and nurture a spirit of mutual respect and collaboration" Johnson said. "The urgency in this moment requires us to not just simply rely upon the recitation of scriptures and our sacred books, but it requires us to demonstrate the most incredible act and power known to humankind and that is the act of love."

Cardinal Blase Cupich, the Catholic Archbishop of Chicago, noted at the Opening Session "The very word 'conscience' means 'knowing together with,' which implies that we have to look at the whole truth, the whole reality, which includes the voices of others, past and present."

Rev. Phyllis Currott, a Wiccan high priestess, served as the Program Chair of the Parliament, stating a theme heard more than once around the McCormick Convention Center: "Every faith has, at its core, a summoning to ease the suffering of others and to contribute to a just, peaceful, and sustainable world. Today, the Parliament of the World's Religions issues its 'Call to Conscience' to people of faith and spirit, to the people of Chicago, to all people of conscience, to stand together in defense of the dignity, freedom, and human rights of all." Mohammad A. Siddiqi, an imam and educator with the World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations, pointed out "Because essentially, if you look at religious teachings, no religion teaches that a dictator can control an entire nation and oppress the people."

Over the five days hundreds of workshops, booths, events and people we met randomly competed for our time and attention. Three events stood out: the Sikh Langar, the blacksmiths who beat "swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks," and Orthodox rabbis confronting issues of gender identity in a very personal sense.



Jonor Lama, right, demonstrates the vibrations of singing bowls for Diane Maltester, left, in the exhibit hall of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago on Aug. 15, 2023. Maltester, a classical clarinetist, said she was interested in incorporating singing bowls into her music. Photo by Lauren Pond for RNS

The take away was that there are ways to engage with people of differing views and opinions by

starting with common ground. Listening is key as is discovering that basic common ground from which to start the conversation.

The Parliament of World Religions was a feast of spiritual ideas and a forum that showed how diversity of thought, culture and tradition strengthens our world and us as human beings. Contra Costa County was proudly represented as an innovator of thought and vision. We hope our ideas are carried out into the wider world and that The Parliament's vision of world peace, a lessening of oppression and a halt to our climate damaging ways come to fruition in the coming years.



Christine Nadeau, Greg Kremenliev, Rev. Will McGarvey and Dave Longhurst, all with the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County.



Terri Moss, Dave Longhurst, and Diane Maltester