

2023 Parliament of World Religions

A Call to Conscience: Defending Freedom and Human Rights at the

Anita Knight and Rebecca Guengerich recently participated in the 100th anniversary of the First Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago. They were joined by ELCA Lutheran Bishop Elizabeth Eaton, along with various faith leaders and 8,000 individuals representing 200 faith traditions from over 90 countries.

The original Parliament, held in 1893, played a pivotal role in initiating the modern interfaith movement. This movement promotes dialogue, understanding, and collaboration among various traditions that share common values of love, compassion, and mutual respect.

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, the son of a Baptist minister, welcomed the attendees. "It is our world's religious and spiritual traditions that bring us together on a path toward peace and mutual respect and ignite change so that the world can receive the greatest gift to humankind and that is the gift of love." He added, "This is an urgent moment which requires us to not simply rely upon the recitation of scriptures of our sacred books, but it requires us to demonstrate this gift of love through action."

The weeklong event featured plenary speakers such as Jane Goodall, presidential candidate Marianne Williamson, Jesse Jackson, Kamala Harris, and hundreds of religious leaders from around the world. There were workshops on topics about persecution due to religious beliefs or lack thereof, confronting the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, feeding the hungry, and addressing gun and racial violence. There was time to listen to musings from NASA scientists about God's work in our larger solar system (Did you know there are 5490 planets, with 2 to 3 new planets discovered daily...all teeming with the elements of life?) and to Mayor Ron Nirenberg of San Antonio as he described using the Charter of Compassion as their guiding principle and driving force to address issues that cause pain and suffering in their community.

Participants engaged in diverse religious services, including Catholic Mass, silent Quaker worship, Jain meditation, and Indigenous sacred fire rituals. Meaningful discussions unfolded around religious and cultural attire and interactive art installations (such as the symbolic transformation of guns into tools for planting), while dance and song brought people together from around the world.

Dealing with these issues requires practical solutions but it also requires a change of heart—a call to consciousness where we come together and find the courage to speak of the power of love and the healing that comes from opening our hearts to one another. We have this to offer the world!

Make a note to join the next Parliament of World's Religions in approximately three years, to be part of this dynamic movement that embodies love through action. ~Rebecca Guengerich

