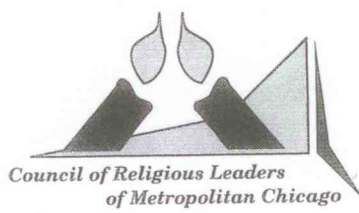


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Council of Religious Leaders
Statement on Hiawatha Park

Recent events on the Northwest side of Chicago, in the Hiawatha Park neighborhood, have reminded us that our metropolitan area still has a long way to go before we realize a vision of all God's children living together in peace, irrespective of our ethnic, racial, religious or economic backgrounds. The decision to locate a three-unit, scattered-site public housing site there generated outrage and fear from large numbers of neighborhood residents. Unfortunately, some public officials fanned the flames of intolerance, and a situation that has been handled successfully in 37 comparable neighborhoods erupted into a firestorm of controversy.

We call attention to this issue not only because we lament the explicit disparagement of people who live in public housing and the implicit overtones of racism that some related public statements have manifested in this particular case. We call attention to it because it reminds us that open and fair housing for all still eludes us. There are injustices that extend throughout Chicagoland. Still, low-income people have very limited housing options, and people of color routinely experience housing discrimination. Opposition to equal housing opportunity continues to present itself in subtle and overt ways.

Most importantly, we call attention to it because we want to encourage people in Hiawatha Park who are striving purposefully to accommodate this decision in a way that will both respond to legitimate local concerns and offer a hand of welcome to new neighbors. By serving their neighborhood in this way, they will provide an example to all of us.

Finally, we call attention to it because we know very well that the metropolitan Chicago area faces great housing challenges in the years ahead. At long last, the transformation of public housing is underway. Questions remain, however, as to whether or not, we are willing to meet them. May all people of good will join together in saying, "Yes we will!"

The Rev. Thomas A. Baima
Acting President