

ECUMENICAL/INTERFAITH PRAYER ON RACISM

God of justice and peace,
we yearn for the advent of Thy Shalom.
Instead of Shalom, our city is challenged by racial conflict
and ethnic divisions;
Instead of Shalom we are a city of privilege for some,
While others are unemployed, homeless and dehumanized;
Instead of concern for the health and welfare
of the entire human community,
We isolate Thy love and seek to limit Divine Compassion
to our particular racial, ethnic or class regrouping.

God of justice and peace, deliver us from the illusion
that peace can dawn when justice is absent.

We confess our sin,
our failure to be instruments of Thy justice
Have mercy upon us.

Strengthen our resolve to join Thee in Thy struggle
to make our city a city of Shalom
— for that is a city of Peace.

COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS
OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO
Thanksgiving, 1988

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An Open Letter to the People of Chicago

Chicago is a great city, one of the greatest in the world. It is the most American of cities in terms of its diversity, energy and the creation of specifically American ideas and traditions. Chicago has had a deep influence on America. It has led the way in many fields in our national life from innovative leadership in higher education to the creation of social work as a profession; from the development of modern architecture to dramatic breakthroughs in science; from hard-won reforms by the labor movement to seminal leadership in the field of community organization. There is a power and greatness about Chicago that has been good for America in the past. Our hope for Chicago's future means that we must do our best to overcome the problems of today.

Obviously, in Chicago as in other cities of our country, not all persons have participated in the city's accomplishments in an equitable manner. That indeed is one of the problems of today which must yet be overcome.

At the present time we are deeply troubled by expressions of racial and religious hate and fear which have re-surfaced in Chicago in recent months. These incidents have inflicted deep pain. Left unchecked, they can seriously damage the city's social fabric and blight its future.

We represent major religious groups and traditions in our community. Our hope for the future of our city is founded in part in our own experience of seeing genuine progress take place in the growing sense of closeness among the many religious groups. While maintaining our respective beliefs and traditions, we have seen the bigotry and fear of the past diminish and be replaced by a new spirit of mutual respect, trust and cooperation. We must not permit events of the recent past to undermine or destroy the progress which has been made.

Our city and society are founded on some fundamental ideas which have their roots in our jointly held religious values and traditions. We believe in the God-given dignity of human beings. We believe that all men and women are created equal and that governments are created as servants of the people. We believe in freedom as a sacred human right. We believe that we are one community of diverse people who must strive to be united by these ideals and who are responsible for safeguarding the rights and dignity of all, especially the weak and defenseless among us.

When we have been true to those ideals, we have flourished as a community and a city. When we have failed these ideals, when we have allowed racial injustice and religious bigotry to become entrenched, the result has been the destruction of freedom and hope and the growth of anger, bitterness and despair.

Our message to Chicago today is that peace is the work of justice. Interracial and interreligious peace and good will depend on our willingness to work together for the ideals which make us a community. In particular, let us work for those reforms which will end the scandal of widespread poverty in the midst of affluence. The poor among us, are our brothers and sisters. There can be no lasting peace in our city while they languish on isolated islands of poverty and despair.

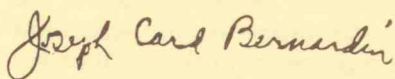
We appeal, therefore, to all Chicagoans — Black, White, Hispanic and Asian; Christian, Jew, Moslem, Buddhist and Hindu — to work together to eliminate racial injustice, religious bigotry and poverty in our city. We appeal to all institutions, neighborhoods and suburbs to do their share.

In a particular way we call upon leadership in the political community, the world of education, business, labor and communications to be sensitive to these issues and to participate in the solution of the problems that remain. Many things must be done, but nothing will work until we accept each other as members of the same family.

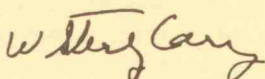
To bring about such a united community, we must also have the courage to transcend our racial and ethnic identity and pride. It is good to be dedicated to one's ethnic or racial group, to celebrate its traditions, culture and contributions; but this kind of loyalty can be self-destructive. Once we place our own group's interests and advancement above all other loyalties, we forfeit any claim to the attention, conscience or sympathy of the larger society. We cannot choose to go it alone.

Group status should not be the primary organizing principle of our lives. We belong to a wider community. We are Chicagoans. We are members of the same human family. We are children of God. We believe profoundly that the more we work together for a united city, the more we will succeed in achieving true justice and peace.

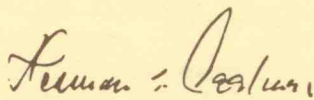
Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago
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