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December 16, 2009

THE COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

IN RESPONSE TO THE DOCUMENT

A COMMON WORD BETWEEN US AND YOU

MEMBERS INCLUDE RELIGIOUS LEADERS FROM THE:

African Methodist Episcopal Church
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
American Baptist Churches of Metro
Chicago
Armenian Orthodox Church
Baptist General Convention of Illinois
Baptist Ministers' Conference of
Chicago and Vicinity
Chicago Board of Rabbis
Christian Church/ Disciples of Christ
Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints
Church of God in Christ
Church of the Brethren
Council for Islamic Organizations of
Greater Chicago
Episcopal Church (U.S.A.)
Evangelical Covenant Church
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Greek Orthodox Church
Orthodox Church in America
Pentecostal Assemblies of the World
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
Reformed Church in America
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Roman Catholic Church
Salvation Army
Serbian Orthodox Church
Ukrainian Catholic Church
Ukrainian Orthodox Church
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Baptist State Convention
United Church of Christ
United Methodist Church
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago Theological Seminary
Lutheran School of Theology
McCormick Theological Seminary
Meadville-Lombard Theological School
Chicago Center for Cultural Connections
Community Renewal Society

The members of The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago warmly welcome the document, *A Common Word Between Us and You*. Highlighting the values we share, the document brings us closer together. In the midst of a world that repeatedly divides peoples and religious communities.

Until recently, our Council has been composed of chief leaders of Metropolitan Chicago's Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, Protestant, Jewish, and Islamic communions and institutions. For 25 years the religious communities and traditions represented around the Council's table have embraced nearly four million men, women and children.

Over the past year, however, the Council welcomed the leaders of several non-Abrahamic faiths and traditions as well.¹ Even more than before, the Council is a microcosm of religion as it exists in a great city and urban area, the "global village" in which we live.

The members of the Council determined that the study and discussion of *A Common Word* not be an empty exercise. Acting on the recommendation of its Executive Committee, the Council voted to set aside a major part of each Council meeting over the past year for this purpose and to include Judaism in this engagement through the participation of our Jewish representatives.

The document was introduced, contextualized, and explained at the first meeting by one of our Muslim members, Imam Abdul Malik, then Chair of the Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago. The Rev. Dr. Larry Ulrich, a representative of the Church of the Brethren, shared documents from the National Council of Churches, informing us of that organization's response.

In subsequent meetings, four distinguished members of the Council further enhanced our study with prepared papers, responding to the document from their individual faith traditions. They were: the Rev. Donald Senior, C.P., President of Catholic Theological Union and a member of the Pontifical Biblical Commission; the Rev. Dr. Larry L. Greenfield Ph.D., Executive Minister, American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago; Rabbi Michael Balinsky, Executive Vice-President, Chicago Board of Rabbis; and His Grace, Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, Chancellor of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago and President of the Council.

What follows are some of the observations of the four presenters, as well as responses from the members of the Council at-large.

This call for dialogue is especially significant because it comes from a wide spectrum of Muslim thinkers and responds to a desire, often expressed in the Christian and Jewish world, to hear a common voice for peace.

We greatly valued the respectful way in which Christian and Jewish sources are employed, referencing Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek original languages.

Our Council welcomes the fact that the document, while conceding considerable differences between Christianity and Islam, identifies common elements and values, among them: belief in one God; mutual respect for one another, a call for solidarity and peace; and the significance of the love of God and neighbor as key elements in the moral obligations of both traditions and, which the Council recognizes, as clearly applicable to Judaism along with many non-Abrahamic traditions.

Establishing the of love of God and neighbor as "foundational," central in both faiths, provides the basis for approaching much that is common among Muslims and Christians. At the same time, the concept of "foundational" has multiple interpretations. For example, Christians are likely to maintain that other realities are at least as foundational and essential, the concept of the Trinity and the Incarnation of God in Christ being examples.

In summary, throughout our discussion, there was appreciation for the opportunity to engage in the document's explorations and challenges. As members of this inter-religious body, it is our hope that the conversation itself will lead to greater cooperation among members of our different faiths in promoting justice, compassion and hope, and help us continue the search for the common ground which nurtures and shapes our appreciation and understanding of one another.

The courageous call in *A Common Word between Us and You* not only reminds us of our mutual love for God, but that this love is embodied in a depth of compassion for all humanity, in a resolve for caring for the earth, and in embracing one another in the common cause of reconciliation and peacemaking..

Bring about reconciliation between your brothers, and fear God, that you may receive mercy.

Qur'an, Surat al-Hujurat (49):10

God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

New Testament, 2 Corinthians 5:19

You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Torah, Leviticus 19:18

Thanks be to God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop Demetrios". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Signed: His Grace Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos, President of CRLMC

ABOUT THE COUNCIL

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago is composed of chief leaders of the Greater Chicago faith communities. For a full list of membership, visit the Council's website at www.crlmc.org.

The Council embraces a broad diversity of theological and religious traditions. It is a microcosm of American religion as it exists in a great city and urban area in the American heartland.

As the members of the Council meet together, they strive to create a climate of understanding by sharing the insights of the various religious faiths on issues affecting the common good.

The Council seeks to act with a unified voice on social issues affecting the people of Chicago land.

For more information, contact Co-Executive Directors
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