



Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago

The **Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago (CRLMC)** fosters understanding and collaboration among the faith communities of Chicago to advance the common good. A nonprofit organization founded in 1984, CRLMC is comprised of the head religious leadership of practically every major religious tradition in the greater Chicago area. CRLMC speaks with a unified moral voice on issues of public concern; promotes interfaith understanding and respect; and supports local religious communities with resources. CRLMC conducts activities that advance its work in Metropolitan Chicago. CRLMC also cooperates in other initiatives to serve the broader community.

CRLMC Presidents 1984 to Date

1984	Joseph Cardinal Bernardin *
1985	Bishop James W. Montgomery *
1986	Bishop Paul Erikson
1987	Rev. Sterling Cary *
1988-1989	Rabbi Herman E. Schaalman *
1990-1991	Dr. William E. Leshner *
1992-1993	Rev. Paul H. Rutgers *
1994	Bishop Sherman Hicks
1995	Bishop R. Sheldon Dueker
1996	Rev. Thomas A. Baima *
1997-1998	Rabbi Vernon Kurtz
1999-2000	Bishop Timothy Lyne *
2001	Bishop Kenneth Olsen
2002-2003	Bishop William Persell
2004-2005	Rabbi Ira Youdovin
2006-2007	Rev. Claude Christopher
2008-2009	Bishop Demetrios of Mokissos
2010-2011	Imam Kareem M. Irfan
2012-2014	Rev. Donald Senior, C.P. *
2015-2016	Rabbi Michael Balinsky
2016-2018	Bishop Wayne N. Miller
2018-2019	Rev. Dr. B. Herbert Martin, Sr.
2019-2023	Barbara Abrajano
2024-	Bishop Simon Gordon

* *Deceased*

Member Institutions

African Methodist Episcopal Church, 4th Episcopal District
African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Chicago Conference, Michigan District
American Baptist Churches of Metro Chicago
Apostolic Church of God
Archdiocese of Chicago
Armenian Orthodox Church, Eastern Diocese
Baptist General Convention of Illinois
Buddhist Council of the Midwest
Chicago Bahá'í Community
Chicago Board of Rabbis
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago
Episcopal Diocese of Chicago
First Jurisdiction Illinois Church of God in Christ
Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship International, Midwest Region
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago
Illinois Conference United Church of Christ
Illinois Hispanic Pastoral Coalition
Jain Society of Metropolitan Chicago
Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Orthodox Church in America, Diocese of the Midwest
Presbytery of Chicago
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Serbian Orthodox Church
Sikh Religious Society
Ukrainian Catholic Church
Ukrainian Orthodox Church
Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, Chicago Chapter
United Baptist State Convention of Illinois
United Methodist Church, Northern Illinois Conference
Vivekananda (Hindu) Vedanta Society of Chicago
Zoroastrian Association of Metropolitan Chicago
Catholic Theological Union
Chicago Theological Seminary
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago
McCormick Theological Seminary
Meadville Lombard Theological School
University of Saint Mary of the Lake
Community Renewal Society
Partners for Sacred Places



Executive Committee & Staff

Bishop Simon Gordon, *President*
Dr. Brad R. Braxton, *Vice President*
Rev. Asayo Horibe, *Secretary*
Ms. Shayda Safapour, *Treasurer*
Ms. Barbara J. Abrajano
Mr. David Crawford
Bishop Yehiel Curry
Rabbi Reni Dickman
Rev. Michael Eaddy

Bishop Dwight Gunn
The Rev. Dr. B. Herbert Martin, Sr.
The Rev. Wayne N. Miller
Mr. G. Abdullah Mitchell
Dr. Daniel Olsen
Mr. Rohinton Rivetna
Ms. Sharan Kaur Singh
Nisan Chavkin, *Executive Director*

Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago

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**Council of Religious Leaders
of Metropolitan Chicago**

United for the Common Good

**Celebrating
40 Years
1984-2024**

CRLMC History

The Beginning

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago (CRLMC) emerged from a coalition which had its roots in the 1963 National Conference on Religion and Race convened in Chicago by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This extraordinary meeting brought together leaders from across this country to issue an “Appeal to the Conscience of the American People” to take action and eliminate racism. Under the leadership of Albert Cardinal Meyer, a group of lay and clerical leaders created the Chicago Conference on Religion and Race (CCRR) later that year, which took courageous positions for civil rights, equality, and social justice.

During 1984, however, Chicago experienced another period of racial tensions and political discord. In response, that spring Joseph Cardinal Bernardin invited fifteen local religious leaders to a meeting where they could get to know each other better and share ideas about some of the crucial questions facing the metropolitan area. They also discussed how to cooperate in bringing the moral voice of the religious bodies to bear upon the challenges and opportunities facing the city.

Through that summer these religious leaders decided to prepare a statement on how the city and its people should address these concerns. Issued in September and signed by 21 religious leaders, the statement called for “all citizens of Chicago to participate in the building of a city that has moral and ethical values at its foundation.” The group then hosted meetings between Mayor Harold Washington and leaders of the City Council opposition that resulted in a de-escalation of tensions.

Cardinal Bernardin and the other signatories of the September 1984 letter continued to meet about the political and racial tensions in Chicago. In February 1985, twenty-one religious bodies convened the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago, formally succeeding CCRR. The new organization was dedicated to two interrelated purposes: to increase trust and respect through getting to know each other and their communities; and to build on that trust to address significant public issues facing the people in the Chicago metropolitan area—especially the areas of racism, jobs, housing, health, and hunger.

Growing an Interreligious Community

CRLMC became an institution defined by relationships. The Council became a forum where judicatory heads and other key religious leaders could meet to discuss their experiences and traditions in a framework of honesty, trust, respect, and support.

The Council’s original founders were institutions representing the Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Orthodox Christian, Protestant Christian, and Jewish communities. This circle quickly grew to include local seminaries and interfaith organizations. CRLMC then began a process of expanding to include other faith communities. Soon leaders from the Baha’i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Latter-day Saints, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian communities became members. Today, the Council serves as the place for leadership of the local interfaith community to meet and learn from each other and to address the needs of their congregations and adherents.



Promoting Interfaith Understanding

Increasing awareness, understanding, and cooperation among the many faith communities of the region has always been central to the mission of the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago.

Since 1987 CRLMC has sponsored the Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Observance. Hosted by the United Methodist Church at the Chicago Temple, the observance features expressions of thanks from more than a dozen religious traditions and collects resources for distribution to those in need.

CRLMC publishes the award-winning InterFaith Calendar in cooperation with 17 religious communities that features observances, information, and art from each religious tradition. CRLMC has also sponsored public Prayers for Peace in Daley Plaza and Festivals of Faith in community settings to serve as living symbols of interfaith cooperation and to encourage the general public to act on these values.

CRLMC has become the go-to institution for meeting the needs of all faith communities. After Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, thousands of refugees came north to Chicago to find safety and to make a new start. When the city provided extensive disaster response services in housing, food, schools, and social services, CRLMC stepped in to provide spiritual services by recruiting and training more than 100 volunteers—Buddhist, Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, Muslim, and Protestant—to serve as spiritual counselors for evacuees and aid workers.

CRLMC acted on behalf of all faith communities within Cook County when it moved to address the spiritual needs of patients and their families at newly refurbished Stroger Hospital. While volunteer chaplains had served the County's flagship public hospital for almost a century, CRLMC successfully negotiated with County leadership to create an Office of Chaplaincy.

The Cook County Sheriff's Office turned to CRLMC when it was discovered that employees at the Burr Oak Cemetery in Alsip had exhumed hundreds of bodies and dumped them in the open in order to resell the plots. CRLMC created and delivered an interreligious rededication ceremony for the cemetery.

The Council frequently has partnered with the City of Chicago to provide prayer leadership for the Annual Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Interfaith celebration. And CRLMC participated in the Opening Ceremony of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, with Council members presenting at 20 different plenaries, activities and workshops during the international five-day convening.

Advocating for Peace & Social Justice

From the very beginning, CRLMC has recognized the unique importance of working together and offering a united moral voice on public issues before the community at large.

In January 1989, for example, CRLMC published six papers "to share reflections and recommendations with the electorate and the mayoral candidates about housing, neighborhoods, health care, employment and education." CRLMC prefaced the series by stating, "We do not claim to have every answer to these issues. We are neither infallible nor partisan. We recognize that there can be honest differences among people of good will. Our hope is to stimulate a new consciousness and to point a direction for action."

For four decades, CRLMC has issued statements on critical issues such as gun violence, extremist rhetoric, and budgets that made provisions for adequate and quality health care for vulnerable individuals and communities. CRLMC worked with the City of Chicago to create an equitable water usage fee structure for all not-for-profits (including religious organizations).

CRLMC sponsored events such as "Immigration Sabbath" to increase understanding of immigrants and their experiences and provide a pathway to citizenship for the undocumented.

The Council also responded to a request from the Chicago Police Department to assist CPD with the 2018 Federal Consent Decree. CRLMC provided testimony and a report from congregations in the City of Chicago regarding CPD interactions with religious communities. One result was the development of "Religious Interactions," a new policy—one of the first of its kind in the nation—that defines CPD policy regarding the proper treatment of all persons of any religion by CPD members.

Supporting Faith Communities

Throughout its history, CRLMC has addressed the needs of individual faith communities and their members. The Council has consistently stood together with individual faith communities who faced prejudice, bigotry, or intolerance. CRLMC spoke out against the desecration of places of worship. CRLMC condemned attacks on persons based solely because of their religious dress, customs, or affiliations. CRLMC also defended the right of faith communities to articulate their beliefs in the public square without fear of physical intimidation or recrimination.

During the pandemic, CRLMC delivered multiple resources for faith communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a *Framework for Reopening Illinois Places of Worship*, and *Words of Comfort and Wisdom*. It surveyed more than 120 congregations at more than 120 congregations in 24 different faith traditions in the metropolitan area and published *Religious Congregations Respond During Covid-19*, which documented their experiences and insights. And CRLMC coordinated a vaccination campaign in partnership with 21 congregations in its networks throughout the City of Chicago which included 55 vaccination events in fifteen Community Areas and delivered more than 700 vaccinations.



The Council also has provided critical information and resources for faith communities in protecting their institutions and adherents. CRLMC offered webinars focused on strengthening physical security and cybersecurity, preparing for and managing both natural and anthropic emergencies and financial resources for sustaining and rebuilding communities. CRLMC also was a partner in the successful effort to create a \$20 million annual fund to support Illinois Non-profit Security Grant Program (NSGP).

Building Future Interreligious Leadership

Interreligious understanding and cooperation require knowledge, skills, and opportunities to meet people from diverse backgrounds. CRLMC has always understood that such experience must be shared with the next generation.

Following the attacks of September 11, CRLMC formed the Interfaith Collaboration of Emerging Leaders to combat bias against religious groups. It held breakfasts where youth from various religious traditions spoke on the importance of interfaith work for their generation as part of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Recently, CRLMC has begun the Faith & Trust Future Interfaith Leader Cohort, an intensive program designed to serve emerging faith leaders from religious traditions under age 45 including forums on current issues for future leaders. CRLMC also convenes half-day seminars for young faith leaders to allow them to meet each other Council members in order to better respond to shared concerns in the community.

CRLMC Today and Tomorrow

As it begins the next decade of service, the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago continues to foster understanding and collaboration among the faith communities of Chicago to advance the common good. CRLMC speaks with a unified moral voice on issues of public concern; promotes interfaith understanding and respect; and supports local religious communities with resources. CRLMC conducts activities that advance its work and cooperates in other initiatives to serve Chicago and the metropolitan region.