

This is a program overview of the Faith in the City initiative, a public series exploring the dynamic interplay of faith and the city.

Project Title: “Faith in the City : Reviving the Public Square”

Project Goals

Faith in the City was originally envisaged as a joint venture of Imagine Chicago and Loyola University involving eight public lecture/discussion forums on the dynamic interplay of faith and the city.

- A primary goal was to better understand how faith contributes to the creation and transformation of a city and how the city is a privileged place for an enlarged understanding of faith.
- A second goal was to foster urban theological reflection that renews and sustains social practice: to develop questions, skills and arts that enable the participants to continue this conversation on faith and city within their own neighborhoods, organizations and working groups.
- A third goal was to involve dance as an integral part so participants would learn to use the arts to relate faith to social action and activism (moving from faith to engagement).

The series was expected to be funded by the Illinois Humanities Council in partnership with the MacArthur Foundation.

The Illinois Humanities Council decided that the topics proposed were “too hot to handle” in public (though the proposal received top ratings from its reviewers.) As a result of losing the IHC support, the series was revamped as a graduate course at Loyola, which was designed to incorporate six of the originally proposed forums plus a culminating performance by the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. The Loyola series involved the following public events, which were open to the public and well publicized both by Imagine Chicago and with Loyola-produced publicity posters targeted at the Rogers Park community. Between 75-150 people participated in each session of the series. All of the sessions were video recorded by Loyola.

Public Session 1 - February 3, 2000

Topic: “Faith and City: Strangers, Rivals or Partners?” – Guest Speaker: Dr. Martin Marty (University of Chicago)

For centuries, parishes and religious congregations played an important role in organizing the patterns of city life just as the city contributed to a social understanding of faith. Dr. Marty expounded on the “status of the question” concerning the faith-city connection today. Do individuals and communities still view the city with “eyes of faith” or has faith become a lens that only illuminates people’s private lives? What helps people to make the connection between faith and public life? And what actually happens to faith when it moves into the public square?

Session 2 - February 17, 2000

Topic: “Prophetic Imagination and the City” - Guests: John Haughey, S.J., Bliss Browne and Dick Luecke

Does faith enable us to accept and celebrate what is, while engendering the challenge to move forward and beyond? Can faith help one to maintain a healthy tension between the existing city and the city we are called to build? What kind of imagination does faith make possible? What sort of spirituality is required to sustain and nourish the process of building a city that is more just? Can the different faith traditions find a common ground if they meet in the public square? This evening included a historical perspective on the loss of community and an inspirational perspective on reviving prophetic imagination about cities.

Session 3 - March 2, 2000

Topic: “Sharing Chicago’s Resources” – Guests: Ron Engel and Stephen Perkins (Interreligious Sustainability Project)

Today more than ever before, we are sensitive to our economic and cultural differences. We come from different lands and speak different languages. But we inhabit a common space: the human settlement called Chicago. Often we are not conscious of how our natural habitat sustains us and how we, in turn, must live harmoniously within nature. Does our faith, in fact, invite us to an ethic of care and solidarity? Might a spirituality of common stewardship bring us together around concrete actions to make this space called Chicago a healthy and sustainable home for all? The substance of “One Creation, One People, One Place” was discussed.

Session 4 - March 16, 2000

Topic: “Political Holiness” – Guests: Ed Shurna (Coalition for the Homeless) and Denise Plunkett (Haymarket-Maryville)

In this session, we considered how the city becomes a place for communion with God. What does “divine activity” look like in this urban context and where - or among whom - is God found? What shape does personal witness take when it evolves into “common witness”? How does work in the city become holy and in what ways does the city expand our faith understanding and cause it to grow? How can coalitions be built to work effectively on behalf of the poor? This session included testimony by five people whose lives had led them to life on the street.

Session 5 – March 30, 2000

Topic: “The Politics of Inclusion” – Guests: Rabbi Herman Schaalman (Congregation Emmanuel) and Liz Lerman (Hallelujah Project)

How do we change from being a relatively segregated city of strangers into a place for civic friendship? Are we inevitably bound by “natural” politics of exclusion, or can our faith communities call these boundaries into question? What new forms of hospitality does faith inspire and require of us today? What role might communities of faith play together in making the city a home for all? How is the congregation a bridge to public life? Liz Lerman’s remarks included the power of the arts to create community. She created a dance performance out of the movements used by Rabbi Schaalman in his address and engaged the whole audience in using movement to tell the story of welcoming the stranger.

Session 6 - Thursday, April 13, 2000

Topic: "Sacred Spaces-Public Places" – Guest: Fr. Chuck Dahm (Resurrection Project)

This evening explored the relationship between public expression of deeply held beliefs and social transformation. How do our communal celebrations incorporate, reflect upon and respond to the life and death struggles that take place in the city? How are liturgy and social change inter-related? What new relationships between congregations and artists help move communities from faith to social action?

Session 7: A Celebration of Urban Imagination

June 3, 2000. Field Museum

On June 3, Imagine Chicago hosted at the Field Museum, *A Celebration of Urban Imagination*, to recognize the accomplishments of various participants in its core programs and connect them to others in the broader Chicago community. Those recognized included:

- Parents in the Parent Education program who have made a positive difference at their children's schools
- Teachers in the Teacher Renewal Program who are educational leaders
- Principals at the seven program Chicago Public schools who have supported the development of their schools as centers of Urban Imagination
- Graduates of Imagine Chicago's Citizen Leaders and Imagine Englewood if...program who have created low cost high impact projects in their neighborhoods

During dinner there were performances by school children from Alfred Nobel School in West Humboldt Park. David Holloway, an opera star, commissioned and sang a Chicago sketch by poet Michael Warr set to music by composer Rollo Dilworth. Commonwealth Edison launched a new partnership with the Center for Neighborhood Technology, to be piloted in Pilsen, focused on helping build community wealth in low-income communities by making them more self-sufficient in their power generation. 400 people were in attendance across a wide range of age, economics and geography. Attendees created the centerpieces to tell the story of something growing in their neighborhood or school.

After the dinner, everyone present attended the performance by the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. Many had never seen a dance performance before. Performing original works entitled *Body Scripture: Praise, Prophets and Possibility*, the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange honored the imagination of ordinary prophets. This full length public performance incorporated a piece from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and works from Hallelujah as well as original pieces honoring those in the audience. In attendance were 450 people including attendees from the Imagine Chicago dinner as well as 60 people who had heard about the performance as part of the Field Museum's performance series. After the dance, students from John Hope College Prep performed with Roslyn Jordan, a poet and singer and Michael Jordan's youngest sister, a piece called *Imagining* written specifically for the occasion.

The involvement of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange enriched the series immeasurably. Knowing that many parents from the schools would be involved on June 3 and not be especially comfortable or familiar with dance as a way of storytelling, we enlisted the Exchange to do a workshop for all the parents in the Urban Imagination Network on May 17. 150 parents learned techniques for creating a safe and challenging environment, and using movement to tell stories. They brought to public expression ways they have grown this year through the program. They were especially delighted to be present on June 3 and to participate in the public dance performance.