ICJS

NAVIGATING RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

2020 ANNUAL REPORT

INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC · CHRISTIAN · JEWISH STUDIES

ICJS

MISSION

We build learning communities where religious difference becomes a powerful force for good.

"[Promoting] interfaith dialogue and understanding…is something very close to my heart because for almost 25 years I served as a board member of the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies in Baltimore, which was every day trying to promote that kind of dialogue among communities of faith. Understanding that the common bonds of reaching out and strengthening community bring us all together; even though we come from different faith traditions, we stand humbly before the faith traditions of others."

Rep. John Sarbanes, D-MD 3rd District

Dear Friends,

Our lives have been altered by the global pandemic in ways that none of us could have predicted. What we will be afterwards—as individuals, as institutions, as a society—is yet unknown. We feel unmoored from our previous lives. What comes next will be shaped by our collective answers to the deepest ethical and theological questions: **What is essential to a good life? Who is our neighbor and what are our obligations to them? How should I use my time on earth?** The best answers to these questions will draw from diverse religious and ethical sources.

We must envision a common good that is fundamentally interreligious.

At ICJS, we believe that our religious differences will become a powerful force for good. This moment requires us to boldly live out our mission. To do anything else would be to deny the lived realities of religious diversity and deprive ourselves of the wisdom that surrounds us. At ICJS, we are called to convene conversations that cross religious divides and equip the next generation of interfaith leaders to guide us through this moment. At ICJS, we will ask the big questions and connect with cutting-edge religious thinkers and leaders who are grappling with possible answers. At ICJS, we remain focused on increasing interreligious knowledge and creating resilient interreligious networks that will help us all mourn what we have lost, as well as provide hope for the future.

We are grateful to be able to share this report with you, highlighting the ways in which ICJS has been able to rise to the challenge of the times. But we could not have done this without a vibrant interreligious community of colleagues, friends, and supporters. We have been inspired by so many—from community members to religious leaders, teachers, and justice leaders—who have joined with us over the past year to ask the big questions and work to build a shared interreligious future.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Karpay
2019-20 Board President

Heather Miller Rubens, Ph.D.
Executive Director and Roman Catholic Scholar

COMPASS:

an instrument containing a magnetized pointer that shows the direction of magnetic north and bearings from it

ICJS VALUES

Difference

Equity

Dialogue

Learning

Community

FINDING OUR COMPASS

Does ICJS have a compass? What is the instrument that points to our "magnetic north," that place where we are going and want to go? As an organization steeped in sacred texts—scriptures, commentaries, and all manner of religious writings both ancient and current—we have plenty of ethical wisdom to guide us. And yet, we knew we needed a distillation of accumulated wisdom that specifically **grounds interreligious work.**

We needed to easily and readily name what directs our course. We needed to orient ourselves to the broad terrain of our interreligious work to fully encompass the dynamic religious traditions of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

In a word, we needed to name our values.

In 2018, the ICJS Board of Trustees launched an organization wide effort to identify and explain the distinctive values that define our interreligious organization. Trustees and staff reflected on our past and envisioned our future. As we dreamed, hopes for the future of ICJS gave us something to which we can aspire. Indeed, in naming our values, we identified areas where we can improve, develop, and learn as an organization, striving to embody our professed ideals. In May 2020, the ICJS Board of Trustees unanimously adopted these values for our organization.

A deceptively simple list, the ICJS values are: Difference, Equity, Dialogue, Learning, Community.

Although only recently named, these values have always animated the vision and work of ICJS, making this naming exercise a work of reclamation. These values ground us during times of uncertainty, yet allow us to dream of our future. They animate our vision and give us the power of possibility.

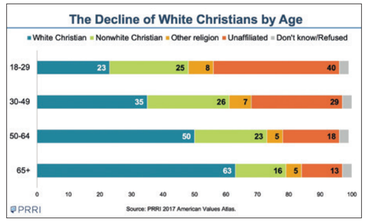
In the following pages, we bring these values to life in text and story. We hope you will agree that in all we do—and will do—ICJS strives to use these values to navigate and to guide us.

MANEKIN-CLARK LECTURE: THE END OF WHITE CHRISTIAN AMERICA

The 2019 Manekin-Clark Lecture, *"Religion and Politics in Transition: The End of White Chrisitan America,"* featured Robert P. Jones, Founder and CEO of Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI).

Jones presented shifts in demographic, cultural, and attitudinal data, demonstrating a major change in the religious make-up of the United States today. "For example, among seniors, 63 percent identify as White and Christian, yet less than one-quarter of young people do so. That is a tremendous sea change," Jones said.

The Manekin-Clark Lecture is presented annually to honor Bernie Manekin's lifelong commitment to the work of Jewish-Christian relations and bear witness to the deep and resilient interreligious friendship of Bernie Manekin and Jim Clark. Made possible by endowment grants from the A. James and Alice B. Clark Foundation and the Manekin family, these lectures are free and open to the public.



"Generational breaks, along with race, religion, and partisanship are going to make for a pretty volatile cocktail."
Robert P. Jones, Founder and CEO of Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI)

DIFFERENCE

Religious difference is integral
to life in the United States. Each religious tradition
and community exists wtihin a mosaic
of cultural, historical, social, ethnic, and racial contexts.
We believe engaging religious difference
is necessary and transformative.

The commitment to religious diversity and pluralism has animated the ideals of our nation since its founding. While never fully realized, this is the work to which ICJS aspires. ICJS challenges people to find commonalities, but then to go further and truly engage religious difference. This is why ICJS—for more than 30 years—has been **building spaces for adult learners** to develop interreligious understanding to disarm tensions, encourage civil discourse, and deepen spiritual pursuits.
Learn more: icjs.org/public-programs

PUBLIC PROGRAMS OFFER CHALLENGE

For Bishop Aubrey Harley, ICJS feels like home, not in spite of—but because of—the myriad religious traditions, cultures, and texts present here.

Founder of Healthy Choice Ministries, Harley has been a frequent traveler around the globe, often joining in dialogue with people of different religious practices. Raised in the Black Pentacostal Christian tradition, Harley appreciates that religious differences exist within a mosaic of cultural, historical, social, ethnic, and racial contexts.

He feels a connection with the people of different religions that he has met around the world, and is grateful that these personal connections allow him to experience empathy more fully. These interreligious connections also help Harley appreciate his own religious tradition and the choices he has made in his spiritual journey.

It is no wonder, then, that Harley was drawn to ICJS, or what he likes to call "The School." Since attending his first Muslim-Christian dialogue mini-course, he has participated in a wide cross-section of ICJS programming. From mini-courses to lectures, dialogues to congregational leaders' calls, Harley says these ICJS experiences are transformative because he is studying and dialoguing in the company of his peers.

ICJS regularly presents programming (including online events during the COVID-19 pandemic) to equip adult learners to develop interreligious literacy, that is, knowledge and competency in the texts, practices, and traditions of religions other than one's own. In addition to learning about other religions, participants learn with others who are different from themselves.

For example, ICJS helped lead a timely conversation in November 2019, following attacks on a number of religious congregations. The focus was on how to balance security concerns within a religious gathering place with the shared value for hospitality. The event was hosted by an interreligious partnership in Lutherville, where the Episcopal Church of the Holy Comforter and Kol Halev, a Reconstructionist synagogue community, share a campus.

If we are to achieve a truly interreligious community, it is essential to engage the religious differences found among our neighbors and understand the motivations and hopes of those with different religious traditions.

"I would urge and encourage anyone to come in. ICJS allows you to help induce change through your opinions, through your writings, and through your discussions. I take [what I learn at ICJS] and I get behind a pulpit and I get it out there."

Aubrey Harley, Bishop, Healthy Choice Ministries

EDUCATOR WORKSHOPS

In addition to hosting the yearlong Teachers Fellowship, ICJS uses its local, regional, and national partnerships to present timely professional development opportunities for area educators:

While teachers in independent and public schools can't teach religion itself, they can teach *about* religion. Benjamin Marcus of the **Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute** made the difference clear at his ICJS Educators Workshop.

In the lead-up to the Civil Rights Era, Baltimore's Black and Jewish populations held complicated alliances. The fall 2019 ICJS Educators Workshop was held at the **Jewish Museum of Maryland** *(pictured below)*, where historians Charles Chavis and Deborah Weiner presented two case studies of how these communities intersected in 20th-century Baltimore.

EQUITY

We engage religious difference
in a society marred by inequities
rooted in race, gender identity, sexual orientation,
age, abilities, socioeconomic status,
and other differences. These inequities
should have no influence on how we value each other.
However, our religious traditions continue to be complicit
in the perpetuation of these inequities,
and interreligious dialogue often reflects them.
We refuse to privilege any individual's or community's
perspective or to interpret their experiences for them.
We commit to fostering a culture of equity and inclusion
in interreligious conversations.

Many young people first encounter religious difference in the classroom, uniquely positioning teachers to foster a culture of equity and inclusion that benefits students, fellow educators, and families. ICJS equips teachers to build interreligious literacy in their classrooms and to become interreligious leaders in their schools. Through **educator workshops** and a yearlong **Teachers Fellowship**, ICJS provides professional development opportunities for teachers to explore religious diversity and classroom pedagogy. ***Learn more: icjs.org/teachers***

TEACHERS TRANSFORM CLASSROOMS

Now in its third year, the ICJS Teachers Fellowship brings together a committed cohort of Baltimore-area educators from public, private religious, and independent nonreligious schools to study, learn, and dialogue together as they work to transform their classrooms into spaces that support religious diversity and interreligious literacy.

By participating in this Fellowship, Ghani Raines, social studies department chair and director of the Law and Social Action Program at Mercy High School, is now in a position to share the knowledge and experience gained through the ICJS program with his students, fellow teachers, and all those in his personal and professional spheres. In the Fellowship, Raines said he felt like there was both "food for my soul [and] information that could improve my institutions. Some elements were very actionable and could help students and other adults with their perspectives."

Coming to terms with not privileging one's own perspective is at the heart of the Teachers Fellowship and the work of ICJS.

"It takes a lot of work to research things outside of your own comfort zone," said Joy Bacon, 2019-20 ICJS Teacher Fellow and English teacher at Baltimore School for the Arts. "Having the conversations with our students to help them realize it's worth the work to find more representative examples is essential."

By expanding and improving interreligious dialogue in a way that not only engages religious differences, but addresses inequities, ICJS is working to create a community in which interreligious learning fosters a culture of equity and inclusion.

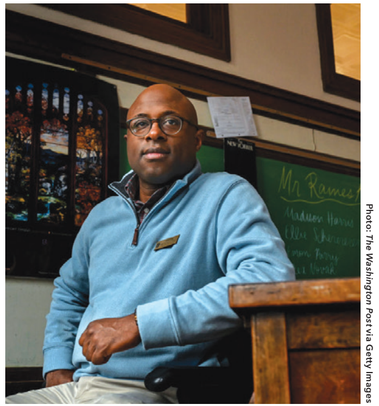


Photo: *The Washington Post* via Getty Images

"The more able we are to have productive interfaith conversations, I think it makes us better citizens, and that is absolutely something that we need now … just the capacity to share common values, common goals."

Ghani Raines, 2019-20 ICJS Teacher Fellow
Social Studies Department Chair and Director of the Law and Social Action Program, Mercy High School

Left: Joy Barnes, 2019-20 ICJS Teacher Fellow
English Teacher, Baltimore School for the Arts

JUSTICE IN ACTION

When ICJS Justice Leader Fellow Amy Greensfelder *(pictured below)* responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by helping to found the Baltimore Neighbors Network (BNN), ICJS reached out to its larger religious leaders network to help recruit volunteers qualified to provide interreligious pastoral and mental health services in the community.

"For so many people, faith is what brings them comfort and brings them peace and is where they are getting social interaction," said Greensfelder. "I was much more open to faith entering these conversations around organizing this project than I would have been if I had not been involved in the ICJS Fellowship."

BNN is a coalition training and organizing volunteers to make social support calls to neighbors to check in during the uncertain times brought on by COVID-19. Neighbor-volunteers are then able to tap into a second layer of support from "Mental Health Ambassadors," who provide further assistance and help connect people to ongoing mental health support.

DIALOGUE

Dialogue invites us to bring
our commitments to each conversation
and calls for patience, humility,
curiosity, and courage. The outcome of dialogue
does not require agreement,
and meaningful relationships can exist
even where there are irreconcilable differences.
We believe that dialogue around religious difference
deepens understanding and is an essential tool
for connecting communities.

The religious diversity of our communities can anchor the health and growth of our cities. Yet community and civic leaders need spaces to study and dialogue together to uncover how interreligious learning can inform the work of justice-making in our cities. Through the **Justice Leaders Fellowship**, ICJS provides space for nonprofit and community leaders to draw upon the rich resources of diverse religious traditions in order to inform and inspire the building of a more just Baltimore. ***Learn more: icjs.org/justice-leaders***

JUSTICE LEADERS STRENGTHEN CIVIC SPACE

Our religious traditions call on us to build just communities. But what do we, as a society at large, know about various religious responses to some of our most difficult challenges? What do we know about theological demands to build a better world from one's own tradition or the religious tradition of one's neighbors?

The ICJS Justice Leaders Fellowship brings together a diverse and interreligious group of community and civic leaders for a yearlong learning experience to answer such questions. Fellows join in dialogue and study with ICJS scholars to consider how religious texts and traditions can provide rich resources to inform the work of doing justice in our community.

Amy Greensfelder, 2020 ICJS Justice Leader Fellow and executive director at the Pro Bono Counseling Project, gleaned from the Fellowship "a deeper understanding of where different people are coming from." Both professionally and personally, Greensfelder works with people of differing religious traditions. Her experience as an ICJS Justice Leader Fellow helped her to appreciate and empathize with this religiously diverse community.

"It takes courage to ask someone to explain their faith to you," said Greensfelder. "When talking about very specific faith-based texts as we did in this Fellowship, it takes courage to enter into this conversation knowing that what comes of it will make us all stronger and have a better connection and better understanding of each other."

For Danette Zaghari-Mask, compliance attorney at the Council on American-Islamic Relations, involvement in the 2020 Justice Leaders Fellowship gave her "a truer understanding of history and the way that we all have shared and disparate experiences."

As one who leads educational workshops for adults, Zaghari-Mask relished being a student for a change, noting a welcome sense of humility in herself when joining in dialogue and study with those of different religious traditions and life experiences.

Greensfelder and Zaghari-Mask were just 2 of the 24 ICJS Justice Leader Fellows who joined together in dialogue and study in order to create meaningful relationships and to connect communities to make Baltimore a model interreligious city.

The Justice Leaders Fellowship is supported in part by the Henry Luce Foundation in partnership with Morgan State University's Center for the Study of Religion in the City, with additional funding from the David and Barbara B. Hirschhorn Foundation.

"You have to walk in another person's shoes to understand where they are coming from. This program provided a window of access into different perspectives, shedding light on how other people also experience the world."

Danette Zaghari-Mask, 2020 ICJS Justice Leader Fellow, Nonprofit and Compliance Attorney, Council on American-Islamic Relations

SCHOLARSHIP IN COMMUNITY

ICJS scholars support national and international efforts to increase interreligious learning. Working closely with key academic institutional partners, ICJS hosts significant initiatives each year.

ICJS co-hosted the Baltimore premier of *Holy Silence* with the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies**. *Holy Silence* is a documentary on how the Roman Catholic leadership responded to Nazi brutality. The film event occurred on the day that Pope Francis opened the Vatican archival records of Pope Pius XII, who was head of the Roman Catholic Church during World War II.

ICJS hosted 10 Islamic Studies scholars *(pictured below)* from Morocco participating in **Georgetown University's Study of Religion Across Civilizations** program. Over the course of four days in Baltimore, the scholars were guided through an interreligious tour of the city and introduced to ICJS' unique model of interreligious dialogue. Some of the scholars shared that the tour provided their first time visiting a Jewish synagogue.

LEARNING

We use scholarly and educational resources
to challenge religious bigotry
and to confront the historical injustices
that have divided our religious communities.
Through the give-and-take of learning together,
our understanding of ourselves and others
expands through a process of encounter;
translation; interpretation and/or
misinterpretation; and clarification.
We endeavor to create learning spaces
where productive discomfort stretches us
toward mutual discovery and deepens relationships.

As a country, we say we value religious freedom and pluralism, but how and where do we learn about our religious differences? At ICJS we know the power of language and the importance of knowledge in accomplishing this task. That is why interreligious **scholarship** is at the heart of ICJS, serving as the foundation for our public programming and fellowships. In addition to teaching in our own programs, our scholar staff are leaders in the academic field of interreligious studies and regularly offer interreligious expertise to other organizations. ***Learn more: icjs.org/scholarship***

SCHOLARSHIP ADVANCES RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

ICJS could not have asked for a more perfect learning partner than the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. While the Sisterhood's mission centers on building trust, respect, and relationships between Muslim and Jewish women, since the 2016 Presidential election, the women of the Sisterhood sought to understand more about Evangelical Christian communities in which anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim sentiments often flare up. The leaders of the Sisterhood wanted to see if they could expand their outreach, relationship-building, and social action work to include Evangelical Christians.

"I think that a lot of the women who may have been around the Sisterhood for awhile feel like they have gotten to break down some of those barriers between their Jewish and Muslim communities. Then they look at the rest of the world, and there are just so many more people out there with whom you can break down barriers and build up partnerships, working together on common issues and really building up strong communities," said Samantha Facciolo, assistant director of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom. "But how do you engage in that conversation? Where is that starting point? How do you get the skills, and what information do you need to know, to be able to start building those bonds?"

To help address some of these questions, the executive director of the Sisterhood set out to find a scholar and interfaith dialogue practitioner who could help educate their leadership and members on how to best approach and appeal to Evangelical Christians. She found ICJS Protestant Scholar Matthew D. Taylor and invited him to develop and lead a workshop for the Sisterhood's national conference *(pictured above)* to help Jewish and Muslim women engage Evangelical women in dialogue.

"There were some tough questions in that crowd, but [Taylor] was really honest," Facciolo said. "Some women had some experiences that, unfortunately, hadn't been great, and they came in wanting to know why. They wanted to know how we can do this better."

The fall 2019 workshop was such a success that the Sisterhood invited Taylor to do a more in-depth program for the Greater Washington, DC Women's Gathering of the Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, which was interested in applying the learning with a more coordinated approach in a smaller geographical area. Taylor helped participants better understand the landscape of Christianity in the United States, explore strategies for Evangelical-Muslim-Jewish interactions, and develop outreach strategies. There is talk that these trainings could reach more Sisterhood chapters across the country.

Interreligious learning and relationship-building lie at the heart of ICJS' work. To grow and expand knowledge often requires unlearning misunderstandings and letting go of biases before there can be mutual discovery and co-learning with those who are religiously different. ICJS is proud to help prepare communities for deep relationships that come with this kind of transformative learning.

PREACHING GOES VIRAL

We are living through a historic moment in which religious communities are responding to the COVID-19 crisis in real time. As a society, we need to build a public archive to document the depth and diversity of sermons, prayers, ritual adaptations, and other religious responses to the coronavirus.

As one way of doing this, ICJS is supporting *Preaching Goes Viral*, a collaborative research initiative started by Miami University's Department of Comparative Religion and led by Dr. Hillel Gray *(pictured below)*.

"The immensity of this tragedy and our capacity to make sense of it is actually beyond the capacity of ourselves right now because we are living through it," said ICJS Executive Director Heather Miller Rubens at her public forum with Gray on May 27. "One of the most productive ways that we can reckon with this ongoing disaster is by creating a record for the future."

COMMUNITY

Responsible civic life requires
more than tolerance and coexistence.
It requires participation in community,
respectful dialogue, mutual understanding,
and flexibility with resources and positions.
We build robust interreligious communities
that interweave the civic, educational,
and religious dimensions of our lives together.

Since its founding, ICJS has worked to bring together Baltimore-area **religious leaders** to build relationships and learn across religious traditions. From interreligious study of texts and dialogue on today's most pressing theological and ethical topics, ICJS provides local religious leaders the knowledge and connections needed to lead an interreligious city.
Learn more: icjs.org/religious-leaders

CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS PROVIDE SUPPORT, GUIDANCE

The Rev. Dr. Carletta Allen, pastor at the Asbury United Methodist Church in Annapolis, and Rabbi Andrew Busch of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation first met through ICJS more than a decade ago. Their interreligious friendship and working relationship is just one example of how ICJS helps religious leaders stretch community beyond their own congregations.

ICJS brought the friends together again in June—this time to lead a Zoom call as part of ICJS' weekly "Congregational Creativity in the Time of Crisis" calls with local religious leaders. The calls originally developed as a way for religious leaders to talk with one another about what they were facing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and expanded over the course of the three-month series to address other timely issues as they arose. The nature of the calls allowed participants to share openly with their peers the struggles, questions, and learnings particular to religious leaders during this pandemic.

Along with 20+ religious leaders from across the state, Allen and Busch served together as part of the Maryland Strong Roadmap to Recovery Faith-based Advisory Group making recommendations to Governor Larry Hogan on how and when to reopen their congregations in light of concerns around COVID-19. On Allen and Busch's Congregational Creativity call with religious leaders in ICJS' network, they shared recommendations from their experience on the advisory group, and participants shared a range of examples of how local congregations and religious leaders were handling the process of reopening.

For both Allen and Busch, community goes far beyond the bounds of a particular congregation: Both are civic leaders who have a vested interest in ensuring that wider communities have the necessary resources and support to thrive. In work within their congregations, communities, and larger society, both Allen and Busch personify the ways in which the civic, educational, and religious come together.

"When people know that your heart is true, that you really are trying to learn, grace abounds. It comes down to relationships, you've just got to know somebody—make some new friends—and then it all changes."

Carletta Allen, Pastor
Asbury United Methodist Church (Annapolis)

Left: Andrew Busch, Rabbi
Baltimore Hebrew Congregation

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