

**CREATING COMMUNITY VISION IN CHICAGO**  
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On June 24, four SGI-USA members from Ravenswood District in Chicago attended a “Getting To Know Our Neighbors” exchange sponsored by the Council for a Parliament of World Religions. Initiated in 1996 in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago, the Parliament’s “Creating Community Vision” project encourages dialogue and inter-religious encounters, hoping that ultimately this will lead to a shared community vision and action on shared concerns.

The project, guided by the Parliament’s representative Ann Woelk, is formatted to bring various religious groups together on a rotating basis with a different host for each exchange. At the event, the host community welcomes its visitors, shares its particular history and practice then provides a meal during which informal dialogue flourishes. The June 24 event was hosted by a Zen Buddhist temple.

When the group broke for lunch, everyone was encouraged to pair up with someone from another religion, and while enjoying a vegetarian feast utilized questions provided by Ms. Woelk to help break the ice and get to know one another. Among the questions: “How did you come to worship in Ravenswood/Albany Park? Describe a time when your spiritual values influenced your involvement in your community? What would you like to see religious and spiritual communities do together in Ravenswood/Albany Park?”

Besides representatives of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism (SGI-USA), other communities of believers included: Muslim, American Baptist, a lay Catholic minister, the Jain community, Sikh, a Tibetan Buddhist monk, the North Shore Theosophical Society, Hindu Temple, the Presbyterian Church, African Community United Methodist Church, Bethany United Church of Christ and three nuns from the Brahma Kumari Spiritual University.

According to Ms. Woelk: “The key is to build rapport between diverse groups of people, promoting recognition of our similarities and an appreciation of our differences. Dialogue serves as a vehicle to reveal points where mutually shared purposes converge. These points assist people in the neighborhoods to discern a vision for their community, a vision which will serve to foster collaborative projects and sustain relationships beyond the initial encounter. I’d like to see us rediscover solidarity.”

In keeping with the SGI’s history of practice for oneself and others, Ravenswood District members enthusiastically look forward to supporting two upcoming activities: a “Stop the Hate” inter-faith vigil on Oct. 5; and the Rogers Park “Creating Community Vision” Peace Festival on Nov. 5.