



Building Interreligious Communities



Mission

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

Vision

To make Baltimore a model interreligious city.



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Message from the Executive Director and Board President

Dear Friends,



Religion is joyful, instructive, and can help build healthy communities. Religion can also inspire hate and seek to divide people from one another. The news headlines remind us that religious misunderstanding and violence are on the rise. In a diverse nation and world, we must work with purpose to move beyond fear, to engage with religious difference, and build robust interreligious communities together.

At the Institute for Islamic, Christian, and Jewish Studies we strive to confront religious bigotry and bridge faith-based differences through learning. We foster difficult conversations across religious lines, bringing together Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others to acknowledge, understand, and positively engage our differences.

Transformational learning requires trust and takes time. To build lasting change in our community and end religious hatred we must invest in people and institutions. Our programs bring people from many backgrounds — clergy, high school teachers, and civic leaders — as well as others eager to learn from, and connect with, people from different faith traditions.

We are proud to share this report highlighting some of our work this past year building a culture of religious pluralism in Baltimore that continues to be a model for America. We touched many lives, strengthened the bonds among people of different beliefs, and laid the foundation for their life-long conversations.

We invite you to join our work in the year ahead.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Heather".

Heather Miller Rubens
Executive Director and Roman Catholic Scholar

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Ken".

Kenneth Karpay
Board President

Equipping Teachers to be Interfaith Leaders

2018 saw the launch of the ICJS Teachers Fellowship, a year-long program to immerse teachers from a range of schools and disciplines in interreligious thinking. Funded by the Jean and Sidney Silber Foundation, the fellowship immerses 17 teachers in the scholarship and methods necessary for weaving interreligious thinking into lesson plans, whether the subject is English, history, or religion itself.

AMY SCHMALJOHN

Friends School of Baltimore Teacher, Co-founder of ICJS Teachers Fellowship



“Classroom discussions often touch on the role of race, gender, and other social markers in the formation of students’ identity,” says Amy Schmaljohn, a religious studies teacher at Friends School of Baltimore. But secondary educators tend to shy away from discussing religion and spirituality, even though they constitute “another aspect of identity we need to understand and lift up,” she says.

Since 2014, Schmaljohn has worked with ICJS to integrate religious literacy into high school classrooms, equipping educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage young people in discussions of religious identity and difference.

“There was no way for secondary educators to gain access to learning about this subject [before this],” Schmaljohn says. “ICJS is the only place I know in Baltimore where teachers from independent, public, and religious schools can come together.

Our children are going to be working with one another. And we need to be working with one another.”

The program continues to expand, fostering interreligious literacy in a cross-section of public, religious, and independent schools across the Baltimore region. The initiative has generated lesson plans that explore the influence of different faith traditions in history, literature, and art, as well as in theology and religious studies courses.

This year ICJS deepened the work of preparing the next generation of interreligious leaders in the schools by creating the ICJS Teachers Fellowship, a year-long professional development opportunity.

After the fellowship’s first year, Schmaljohn reports success. “Our colleagues in the first cohort have already changed what and how they’re teaching. We’ll continue to monitor that as the program widens.”

Featured Fellowship: ICJS Teachers

NEIL RUBIN

2018-19 ICJS Teacher Fellow, and Jewish History Teacher at
Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School



As a 2018-19 ICJS Teacher Fellow, Neil Rubin found that neither his knowledge of Judaism nor his Ph.D. entitled him to assumptions about other religious beliefs and practices. "Instead of saying, 'Christianity says this...,' I started saying, 'My understanding is that Christianity says this...,' Rubin says. "I realized I may not be right, no matter how many books I've read or degrees I've earned."

A year of lectures by ICJS scholars, as well as readings and discussions with peers, heightened Rubin's respect for other religions as it honed his skills as an interfaith leader in the classroom. "There are multiple truths and there are multiple paths," he says. Rubin has brought his new perspective to Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School, where he teaches Jewish history to high school

students. He cautions them to avoid drawing rigid conclusions about Islam, Christianity, and even Judaism.

Based on his ICJS studies, Rubin also encourages his students to foster an understanding of the Jewish past that allows for contradictions. For example, he explains that although Jews were often treated as second class citizens in Christian and Muslim societies, some rose to high office. "What that means is history is really made by people and not by policies," Rubin says.

“ There are multiple truths and there are multiple paths.”

His ICJS experience reinforced Rubin's resolve to fill glaring gaps for students whose tight-knit Jewish community provides little exposure to other religions. For instance, they typically don't realize that Jesus was a Jew, Rubin says. Within an orthodox Jewish community, these facts may not be relevant, Rubin says. "But when they leave here to enter college and life outside their community, they will have to speak knowledgeably of others' faiths and beliefs."

"To be a good Jew, you can't have a naive understanding of history," Rubin added.

Featured Fellowship: ICJS Teachers

PETER LOMUSCIO

2018-19 ICJS Teacher Fellow, and Social Studies Teacher at Digital Harbor High School

For Peter Lomuscio, the ICJS Teacher Fellowship couldn't have been timelier. It provided him with the knowledge necessary to guide his high school seniors through *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel. Creating a lesson plan for the literary classic was particularly difficult because Lomuscio's students at Digital Harbor High School in South Baltimore were immigrants for whom English was a second language. Nor was Lomuscio, raised in a Catholic home, well versed in religion, let alone "theocracy," the God-driven form of government central to Atwood's book.



"In order for the students to understand, we had to tell them what a theocracy was," says Lomuscio. "We talked about why people use God to form a government," he says. "Once they absorbed that and once they were able to make a connection to it, I was better able to explain the concept in a book."

The lesson enhanced his students' ability to examine their experiences in a new country and form intelligent opinions, Lomuscio says. It also sparked the lively debate Lomuscio strives for in the classroom. At the same time, discussions about religion have become less confrontational and more thoughtful, he says. "Each student needs to see that not everybody is like you," Lomuscio says. "And they need to see and appreciate the differences."

BUILDING AN INTERRELIGIOUS CITY ONE SCHOOL AT A TIME: The Impact of the ICJS Teachers Fellowship



Imagining Justice in Baltimore

Launched in 2016, *Imagining Justice in Baltimore* (IJB) explores the multiple ways religious communities interpret and understand justice. In 2018, for the second iteration of this program, the ICJS brought together a diverse cohort of 23 Civic Leader Fellows to explore how our various religious traditions might interpret the Department of Justice's 2016 Investigation of the Baltimore Police Department. The ICJS scholars encouraged deep discussions grounded in interesting questions such as:

How did the rabbis think about presumptions of guilt? What could we learn from Thomas Aquinas

about just policing? How did medieval Muslim jurists expand the notion of reasonable doubt?

The ICJS Scholars provided the necessary experience and resources for the fellows to lead the same conversations with nearly 200 Baltimore-area residents during four meetings at a midtown community center. With generous funding from the Luce Foundation, Blaustein Foundation, and Suzanne Cohen, and in partnership with Morgan State University, IJB begins its third iteration in January 2020. A new cohort of fellows will investigate the complex and urgent realities concerning water justice.



“ There is comfort when we see something within another that we identify as being one in the same as our own. However, we do not learn and grow from surrounding ourselves with what brings us comfort. It is through productive discomfort and finding those pieces that challenge us that we will grow as individuals and will truly bring us closer together.”

— JOSH SHERMAN, IJB Civic Leader Fellow and former associate at Repair the World Baltimore

Featured Fellowship: ICJS Civic Leaders

AINY HAIDER-SHAH

2018 Imagining Justice in Baltimore Civic Leader Fellow,
President of the Howard County Muslim Council



Baltimore's troubled history wasn't news to Ainy Haider-Shah, a leader in the Howard County Muslim community and public education advocate.

But Haider-Shah didn't fully appreciate the obstacles Baltimore confronted until she was named a 2018 Imagining Justice in Baltimore Fellow. The extent of the city's struggles became clear as she examined the city's policing practices and federally mandated reforms through the lens of Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions.

"There are differences in the way the three religions talk about policing and there are benefits to each," Haider-Shah says. For example, she found parallels between Islamic law and constitutional limits on unlawful stops and arrests. "You can't just walk into a person's home because they're dressed a certain way or stop and then frisk them," she says. The same holds true under Islam, Haider-Shah says.

The advantages of community policing advocated by Jewish law also surfaced. When officers come from the community they patrol, they're less likely to mistreat citizens, Haider-Shah says. "There's no reason why we can't take good ideas from each religion and use them to create a better strategy to keep neighborhoods safe."

Haider-Shah says that IJB gave her a new understanding of Baltimore's assets, as well as its challenges, and inspired her to speak out on its behalf. "It was eye opening," she says. "Having all of these conversations with the ICJS scholars has made me realize that sometimes the negative story being told to the public about Baltimore is not necessarily the story that is helping anyone understand what is happening on the ground. There's a whole other story out there, one of redemption and saving the city that we should be working on."

“ There's no reason why we can't take good ideas from each religion and use them to create a better strategy to keep neighborhoods safe.”

Featured Fellowship: ICJS Civic Leaders

SIDDEEQAH SHARIF-FICHMAN

2018 Imagining Justice in Baltimore Civic Leader Fellow

To understand and accept another's faith is daily life for Siddeeqah Sharif-Fichman, a Muslim woman from Baltimore married to a Jewish man from Israel. In their early years, the couple encountered disapproval from both sets of in-laws. Politics compounded the tension, and the couple avoided discussing the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

Being part of the 2018 cohort of Imagining Justice in Baltimore fellows has given Sharif-Fichman a new ability to listen to others from different backgrounds, including her husband and other Israelis, as well as those with opposing views from her own family.

Sharif-Fichman's fellowship year revealed parallels between Islam and Judaism, such as "similar dietary needs, the idea of humanity as something sacred, and even the way that we pray." Yet, it's important to avoid lumping the two faiths together just "because you want them to be the same," she says.

The diverse group of fellows studied policing and justice in Baltimore and had divergent views about those issues, which surprised Sharif-Fichman. "We're not all going to have the same opinions, even though we're all living here," Sharif-Fichman says.

Sharif-Fichman has kept such conversations going by sustaining friendships with former fellows. "This kind of interfaith dialogue goes beyond just talking about religion or culture," she says. "It's about the relationship and how we see each other less as the 'other' and more as fellow human beings."



“ It’s about the relationship and how we see each other less as the ‘other’ and more as fellow human beings.”

Building an Interreligious Community

THE EMERGING RELIGIOUS LEADERS PROGRAM

Lively conversation, shared insights and laughter graced this year's Emerging Religious Leaders (ERL) program in June. In collaboration with Washington Theological Consortium, the annual ICJS program brings together rabbinical students and seminarians for a week of study and discourse intended to build interfaith leadership skills among the next generation of clergy.

As the program closed, participants shared why interreligious dialogue mattered to them as future clergy.

Leslie Krauland, a student at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., valued the opportunity to make personal connections during the ERL program. "We're getting to know people on a deeper level. We study each other's texts, and we can ask each other questions," she said. "And, we have time to listen and reflect about these questions."

Her week in interfaith dialogue assured Katja Vehlow, a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, that she was not alone in questioning portions of scripture that she found confusing or troublesome. "It's so comforting to me to know there are people who are also struggling with these texts," she said.

Rachel Davidson, a Reconstructionist Rabbinical College student in Philadelphia, had sought to resolve her long-standing resentment against the Christian faith stemming from the acts of anti-Semites. "I need to move through that anger and be in dialogue with Christians," she said.

Through the ERL program, Davidson found allies in the fight against anti-Semitism that she didn't realize she had. "It's heartwarming and exciting to know that Christian clergy are ready to be my partners in this," she said. The conversation concluded with a hardy "Amen!"



Participants in the 2019 Emerging Religious Leaders program

Powerful Public Events

2018 MANEKIN-CLARK LECTURE

By Dr. Beverly E. Mitchell, Professor, Wesley Theological Seminary

Confronting the Threat of White Supremacy



At the 2018 Manekin-Clark Lecture, scholar and author Dr. Beverly E. Mitchell delivered a timely message: "It is a critical moment in the history of our country as we reckon with the threat of white supremacy becoming more mainstream."

Mitchell, a professor of historical theology and church history at Wesley Theological Seminary, spoke ominously of a movement that has gained strength and prominence since the 2016 presidential election. With the recent deadly attacks on synagogues, mosques, and black churches by white supremacists, her message to ICJS rings ever more urgently. Before a full audience at Baltimore's Emmanuel Episcopal Church, she explained how the "overarching ideology" of white supremacy has used the social construct of race to expand the reach of racism.

Although blacks remain the quintessential symbol of non-whiteness, white supremacists also brand Jews and Muslims as non-white to justify their hateful beliefs, she said. As a result, the assault against these groups can no longer be viewed as separate phenomena, but as interrelated expressions of white supremacy, Mitchell said.

"Because the country has been plagued by white dominance since its inception, no one can escape its influence, no matter how well intentioned they are," she said. "It shapes how we view ourselves and how we view others. This is what ideologies do."

Mitchell held out hope for a more harmonious future and made an appeal to those who have benefited from white privilege to take a stand against racism of all forms.

"White supremacy can't take root when people understand that their well-being is tied to that of the other," she said.

Mitchell also expressed compassion for those who continue to hate. "Always keep in mind that we're dealing with human beings created in the image of God," she said. "We must never descend to their level."

Mitchell was a member of the faculty for the ICJS Emerging Religious Leaders program this past year and will return in 2020, deepening ICJS' relationship with this prominent scholar and Wesley Theological Seminary.

Dynamic Partnerships: Religion & the Arts

Exploring the Interfaith Message of Leonard Bernstein's *MASS*



The 2018 performance of *MASS* at New Psalmist Baptist Church
Photo by Britt Olsen-Ecker; Curtis Bannister as the Celebrant

ICJS continues to form dynamic partnerships with institutions that lead to new interfaith insights and alliances. Last year, ICJS joined forces with the Johns Hopkins Peabody Institute to help listeners understand the interfaith message that underscores Leonard Bernstein's *MASS*.

When it premiered in 1971, the piece asked big and controversial questions about organized religion. As she planned logistics for the performance of *MASS* last October, Sarah Hoover, Peabody's Associate Dean for Innovation, Interdisciplinary Partnerships, and Community Initiatives, understood that those questions are no less relevant today.

Hoover reached out to ICJS staff for assistance. Together, they planned a post-performance discussion for audience members led by ICJS scholars. It took place at the Church of the Redeemer, where Hoover's husband, David Ware, is rector.

As participants reflected on the powerful interplay of music and worship in *MASS*, ICJS scholars drew upon their knowledge to enrich the conversation, answer questions, and nurture the interfaith dialogue propelling Bernstein's monumental work.



Sarah Hoover and David Ware

ICJS Leaders in Action

IRFAN MALIK

ICJS Trustee and Board Vice President

"The fear of offending can be as much of a barrier to interfaith solidarity as an offense itself," says Irfan Malik, ICJS Trustee and board Vice President. A Muslim born in Pakistan, he speaks from experience. When Malik told Jewish friends that he and other Muslims planned to attend a memorial service at a Maryland synagogue for victims of the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, they discouraged him. Because the attack was carried out by Muslim militants, "they were concerned for my safety and that I may hear offensive things," he says.

Undeterred, Malik attended the service. Of the hundreds present, "not a single person said anything offensive," he says. Instead, his gesture helped to bring people together rather than divide them at a critical moment.

In the same spirit of unity, ICJS Executive Director and Roman Catholic Scholar Heather Miller Rubens was invited to speak at an interfaith service earlier this year for the Christchurch mosque shooting victims. The service took place at Dar Al-Taqwa mosque in Ellicott City where Malik worships. "Heather's message was about religious tolerance, the dangers of Islamophobia, and how education and learning can help," he says.

That's where ICJS comes in, with its emphasis on dialogue and education to build acceptance on a grassroots level, Malik says. "It all starts with the neighborhood. I speak with 10 people about Islam and those 10 people can then educate their friends about Islam."



“ It all starts with the neighborhood. I speak with 10 people about Islam and those 10 people can then educate their friends about Islam.”

It's also the responsibility of Muslims, themselves, to reach out to people of other faiths, Malik says. When different faith communities pool their talents and resources, it's possible to accomplish more, he says. A case in point: Muslims' request that the Howard County School Board grant a day off for the holiday Eid was bolstered by a local rabbi's testimony. "When school board members who were on the fence heard from the rabbi, a compromise was reached," Malik says. "There's a lot of value in this dialogue."

ICJS LEADERS IN ACTION

MATTHEW TAYLOR

ICJS Protestant Scholar



When Matthew Taylor was named ICJS Protestant Scholar in 2018, he wasted no time getting to know Baltimore's many religious communities. During his first year at ICJS, Taylor met with more than 40 local clergy to introduce himself and learn about the city's different faith traditions and the interreligious and ecumenical networks and friendships that already exist here. Taylor also sought to hear from religious leaders about "the types of programs or offerings ICJS might create to better serve them and their congregations."

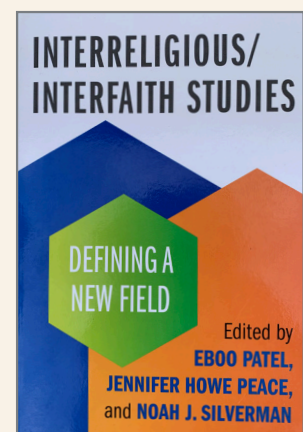
In the Baltimore area, Taylor has maintained a busy speaking calendar at congregations and civic groups, including churches, retreats, Hadassah groups, and teachers' workshops. In March, he offered a keynote lecture at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation's Interfaith Institute on "Evangelical Christians, American Politics, and the State of Israel." He also co-taught a mini-course with ICJS Jewish Scholar

Benjamin Sax and Executive Director and Roman Catholic Scholar Heather Miller Rubens on "Plantations and Death Camps" and led a mini-course on "Evangelical Christianity in America Today."

The goal of interreligious learning is not to merely seek common ground, but to acknowledge the differences among faith traditions and the strength of being grounded in one's own tradition. With that in mind, ICJS supported Taylor's attendance this year at the Christian-Muslim Studies Network conference in Beirut. There he offered a paper analyzing some new trends he's seen emerging in Salafi conversations about politics and democracy in America. Taylor also presented a paper on "Mormons in the Interfaith Dialogue Ecology" at the Mormon Scholars in the Humanities conference in Utah and, while there, continued ICJS conversations with professors about developing an ICJS-LDS dialogue among scholars.

ICJS Scholarship: Creating a National Model

The ICJS understands that cutting-edge scholarship is vital to achieving its mission. In August 2018, Beacon Press published *Interreligious/Interfaith Studies: Defining a New Field*, which has become a go-to text in college and seminary classrooms. ICJS staff scholars co-authored a chapter entitled "Toward an Interreligious City: A Case Study," which focuses on the practical applications of the Imagining Justice in Baltimore program and serves as a primer for communities seeking a framework for considering how interreligious dialogue can inform theological, ethical, and political questions in the twenty-first century. As a result of this publication, interfaith centers around the country have sought out ICJS scholars to create meaningful interreligious learning programs.



Celebrating the Obrecht Legacy of Action

In April 2019, the ICJS Board honored Peggy and Charlie Obrecht, two of its longtime supporters, by funding a public day of study about the Holocaust in partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum (USHMM) and St. Mary's Seminary and University. The ICJS was honored to convene these institutions to lift up Charlie and Peggy Obrecht, who have worked for decades to bridge interreligious divides and to support the educational institutions where this important work is happening.

Hosted by St. Mary's Seminary, the study day had three parts: 1) a public workshop led by USHMM staff scholars that was focused on the interfaith work of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation Rabbi Morris B. Lazaron before and after World War II; 2) an invitation-only session for clergy focused on exploring New Testament texts; and 3) a public lecture by Dr. Mehnaz Afridi, Director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center at Manhattan College.

Dr. Afridi spoke not only about her research on the role of Muslim rescuers in the Holocaust, but also about her experience as a Muslim academic leading this center at a Roman Catholic College.

Peggy Obrecht's deep commitment to the work was galvanized decades ago during her study of the role churches and seminaries played in the Holocaust.

"The shock when examining this history in the early period of the Third Reich and throughout the war was just overwhelming," she says. "To think that my tradition would in any way, shape, or form be part of that was, at the very least, horrifying."

The Obrechts have long shared a commitment to interreligious study and action and are deeply proud of ICJS's rich history as a preeminent center for interreligious research and reconciliation. Charlie Obrecht believes its mission is more vital than ever.

“ The Institute has played a unique and unprecedented role, both in Baltimore and well beyond, by building interreligious understanding among clergy, believers, and those of no religion at all. Such work is an urgent task for the common good of all people. The pressing need is to better understand, honor, and respect the religious differences that exist. Failure to address this reality, I fear, can only lead to the continuation of the religious violence that has too often marked human history. That task is the challenging but fundamental, far-reaching, and inspiring mission of the ICJS.” — CHARLIE OBRECHT

The Sacred Act of Gratitude

We are grateful for your philanthropic support and generosity. Together we build learning communities where religious difference becomes a powerful force for good. The donor roll recognizes gifts from July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019.

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Thank you for your annual gift. Your gift supports ICJS annual programs, services, and operational needs. (Gifts recognized from July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019).

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