

HUMAN RELATIONS COMMISSION

"WE BELIEVE IN NEW ORLEANS"

VOLUME X

RELIGIONS: JEWISH, MUSLIM, CATHOLIC; OTHER  
CHRISTIANS, BUDDHISTS, RELIGIONS NOT INCLUDED HERE

LISTENING SESSION

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2007

6:00 P.M.

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RABBI EDWARD P. COHN AND FR. FRANCIS KING,  
CO-CHAIRS

REPORTED BY:

DIANE W. MATHEWS, CCR

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- 0 -

## LISTENING SESSION

DR. COWAN:

Ladies and Gentlemen, if I could ask you to take your seats please?

Good evening, my name is Michael Cowan; I'm the Chair of the Human Relations Commission. I want to welcome you to the tenth of our listening sessions to different groups in the community here.

I want to begin by asking the other members of the Human Relations Commission who are here this evening, and our director, if you would just stand up and introduce yourselves, please.

Thank you.

MS. BISSELL:

Michie Bissell.

MR. ABDUL-SALAAM:

Aqeel Salaam.

MR. STEWART:

Craig Stewart.

MR. TRAN:

Manh Tran.

MS. PARKER:

Jane Parker.

RABBI COHN:

1 Edward Cohn.

2 FR. KING:

3 Francis King.

4 DR. COWAN:

5 And our Human Relations Commission  
6 Executive Director.

7 MR. BAGNERIS:

8 Larry Bagneris.

9 DR. COWAN:

10 The purpose of these listening sessions  
11 is an attempt on the part of the Human Relations  
12 Commission to take a year really and try to come to a  
13 deeper understanding of the diversity and the history  
14 and the concerns of different groups that make up the  
15 City of New Orleans. We're going to do our final one of  
16 these in January and after that we're going to make our  
17 report to the Mayor and City Council. That report will  
18 include a series of recommendations on things that can  
19 be to make all of the communities that are a part of  
20 this place feel welcome and more at home here. We want  
21 everyone to feel more fully a part of the life of the  
22 city.

23 The particular things that we would  
24 like to have you talk about this evening are these:  
25 First, we will hear a little something about the

1 contributions of the different traditions that are here  
2 this evening. And after that we would particularly like  
3 to know any ways that you think that people, members of  
4 your tradition, your community, are in some way excluded  
5 or not respected fully in the life of our city. And  
6 secondly, if you have any thoughts or suggestions on how  
7 those things could be addressed, we would love to hear  
8 those as well.

9 The members of the Commission are not  
10 here to answer questions or really have a dialogue with  
11 you; this is our opportunity to listen to you.

12 We have a court reporter here that is  
13 going to be making a record of what is said so that we  
14 go back through the transcripts, study it together,  
15 reflect on it and use that as our basis for our report.

16 So with that I'm going to turn the  
17 microphone over to our two co-chairs for this evening  
18 that is Father Francis King and Rabbi Edward Cohn.

19 RABBI COHN:

20 This is, as Michael said, it's part of  
21 the continuing series, a long continuing series and an  
22 ambitious one. Starting off in December of 2006, was We  
23 Believe in One New Orleans. On January 30<sup>th</sup>, the African  
24 American women and men. In February, Caucasian women  
25 and men. March 27<sup>th</sup>, the Italians, the Irish, the

1 English and French influences. In April we had African  
2 American Activists and organizers. May 29th, members of  
3 the Hispanic Community. June 26th, members of the Gay,  
4 Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Community. In July,  
5 Former Residents of Federal Housing. In September,  
6 Members of the Asian Community in New Orleans. We heard  
7 from the members of the Greek and German Communities on  
8 October 30th. And now, November, tonight we will be  
9 hearing from the Religious Communities, Jewish, Muslim,  
10 Catholic; and others. If there is another here, please  
11 forgive me for not having specified you, but I haven't  
12 been introduced to you as of now.

13 Francis and I thought that since this  
14 is the religious section we would do something  
15 religious. So if you would all take a twenty dollar  
16 bill out and put it in the collection.

17 New Orleans is really such a community  
18 predicated on religion. All of the names, as a person  
19 who has only been here for 20 years, but all of the  
20 names of everything seem to be Christian, a saint of one  
21 kind. There is a religious influence and a feeling  
22 about this community. I have never lived in a community  
23 where Christian holidays, I have never heard of a - what  
24 is it called - an altar?

25 AUDIENCE:

1 St. Joseph.

2 RABBI COHN:

3 St. Joseph, I never had heard of that  
4 and honestly still don't quite get it, but it is  
5 fascinating. It's certainly, and Ash Wednesday was ever  
6 such a thing. I never was aware, as a Jew, of when Lent  
7 began as it is well known here. There are many - there  
8 are many observances surrounding Christian saints and  
9 Christian holidays and the names of saints. So we are  
10 all really so well educated and immersed in other  
11 people's faiths. We might not know the facts but we  
12 certainly do know a little bit about the names and we  
13 recognize them.

14 Tonight we certainly do want to welcome  
15 you and thank you for being here and the introduction of  
16 our guest speakers tonight, we will let Francis do that.

17 FR. KING:

18 Thank you, Rabbi. I'm Francis King, a  
19 member of the Commission and a Priest of the Episcopal  
20 Church. We have four groups of churches here tonight,  
21 four speakers, and we will take them in alphabetical  
22 order, as directed by our executive director.

23 Our first speaker will be Jerome  
24 Anderson from the Buddhist Community, Mr. Anderson is  
25 present. Our second speaker will be Sarah Comiskey,

1 who is here; she is the Communications Director of the  
2 Archdiocese of New Orleans. Our third speaker will be  
3 Catherine C. Kahn, representing the Jewish Community.  
4 And our last speaker will be Kasib Hakeem, I don't see  
5 him as of yet.

6 MR. HAKEEN:

7 I'm right here.

8 FR. KING:

9 He is right here, he has just come in,  
10 so he will be our fourth speaker and he is representing  
11 the Muslim Community.

12 At this time I will hand the mike to  
13 Mr. Jerome Anderson and I would like to welcome you,  
14 sir.

15 Mr. Anderson is here on behalf of the  
16 Buddhist Community.

17 MR. ANDERSON:

18 Thank you and good evening. My name is  
19 Jerome Anderson and I'm a member of the Soka Gakkai  
20 International, which is a Buddhist organization. We are  
21 located in Mid City.

22 Historically our Buddhist movement in  
23 New Orleans began in the sixties, so we have been here  
24 for quite some time. I just want to give you a brief  
25 background on the history of the Buddhism that we

1 practice. The Soka Gakkai is based on the teachings of  
2 a Japanese Buddhist Reformer, Nichiren, who was born in  
3 1222. It was one of the 78<sup>th</sup> affiliate organizations of  
4 the Soka Gakkai International, which now has its  
5 headquarters in Japan.

6 Our national leaders are in Santa  
7 Monica, California and we have approximately 80 centers  
8 of activity throughout the United States. Our  
9 membership in the United States is approximately 300,000  
10 and worldwide it is 12.5 million in 109 countries. In  
11 the New Orleans area there is approximately 500 of us.

12 This Buddhism that we practice was  
13 formed in Japan in 1930 by Tsuneasburo Makiguchi, who  
14 was an educational reformer. It started off as an  
15 educational movement to promote a humanistic approach  
16 to educational students and it was called, in English,  
17 it translates to "Society for Variation Education."

18 It briefly sort of died down a little  
19 around the world war, World War II, and was again  
20 resurrected as a religious organization under the  
21 religious leadership of Josei Toda. Josei Toda became  
22 the second president of the Soka Gakkai. During that  
23 movement the application of Buddhism was always  
24 concerning our daily living. It went through a really  
25 big spurt of growth in the fifties and sixties and

1 actually came to the United States in the late fifties.  
2 In the United States then it spread largely on the West  
3 Coast and made its way throughout the United States.

4 Our teachings and beliefs and our  
5 practice, the main sources are our writings of Nichiren  
6 and the writings come from the Lotus Sutra, which was  
7 the highest teaching by the original historical Buddha,  
8 Siddhartha Gautama. In that teaching, what was unique  
9 about it is that of all of the Buddhist teachings at the  
10 time he was the only one that asserted that everyone had  
11 the possibility to become enlightened in life regardless  
12 of their gender, their race, their national origin,  
13 their social status or their education.

14 Today it's in the same vein as to the  
15 way that we practice our Buddhism. Our focus is in  
16 education and faith and spreading Buddhism to promote  
17 peace throughout the world. Recently our youth in our  
18 organization expressed an interest in participating in  
19 an initiative that started with the youth called Victory  
20 Over Violence.

21 The goals are to promote awareness in  
22 the spirit of non-violence through dialogue among our  
23 youth, our families, schools and communities in order to  
24 inspire energy for positive change. That is one of the  
25 initiatives that we would like to bring to New Orleans

1 soon because of the state of things now. We feel that  
2 it has a lot to offer, that initiative, what it does is  
3 it attempts to get at the root of where violence begins.  
4 It could be something as simple as teasing someone that  
5 turns into something a little more belligerent. I  
6 mean, that is just one small example but there are a lot  
7 of different facets to where the violence begins.

8 I don't want to take up too much of  
9 your time, but I just want to first mention some of the  
10 activities that we have sponsored. One is called, and  
11 it's an exhibit, called "Treasuring the Future:  
12 Children's Rights and Realities." It's an exhibit that  
13 presented issues that relate to children in the  
14 community. It addresses homelessness, education, child  
15 labor, health and nutrition and violence of war and  
16 peace. This exhibit was presented at Xavier University  
17 at some point. We also exhibited in the Rotunda in  
18 Baton Rouge. We also had a building of cultural peace  
19 for the children of the world; that was in 2005 at  
20 Xavier and 2006 at the state capital. What the panels  
21 in those exhibits illustrate is the importance of  
22 building a cultural peace at all levels and across  
23 geographical lines. The panels highlight the work of a  
24 dozen people famous for their roles in conflict  
25 resolution which showcases the essays and artwork of

1 children that are destined eventually to inherit the  
2 same tasks that we are trying to accomplish.

3 The young people in our organization  
4 also have a yearly cultural festival where we try to  
5 invite other youth around the city to participate. This  
6 year Ashe Cultural Center participated with us and in  
7 exchange we also participated in an event that they  
8 sponsored.

9 I'm not sure of the exact year, but we  
10 have a friendship row that was planted in City Park,  
11 it's right at the entrance to the New Orleans Museum of  
12 Art and it was dedicated to the third president and his  
13 wife. He is the current president, Daisaku Ikeda.

14 To close, I would like to read to you  
15 to give you an idea what the Victory Over Violence  
16 Initiative is about. We ask that people make a pledge  
17 when we have this activity going on. The pledge reads  
18 like this, it says, "I will value my own life.  
19 Recognizing that a lack of self-identity and hope for  
20 the future lay at the roots of all violence, I will  
21 reach beyond my limitations, taking concrete steps each  
22 day to uncover my real potential. I will never give up  
23 on my dreams, even if they seem impossible. I will  
24 respect all life. Recognizing that violence comes in  
25 many forms, I will not isolate myself but will create an

1 environment where others feel comfortable and can be  
2 themselves. I will see beyond superficial differences  
3 and reflect on my own behavior. I will inspire hope in  
4 others. With courage, I will resolutely stand up  
5 against violence, be it verbal, physical or passive and  
6 teach others through my own example. I will support  
7 others and encourage them to follow their dreams."

8 To support our practice we have prayers  
9 that we do in the morning and in the evening and in  
10 those prayers we recite portions of the Lotus Sutra,  
11 which is the highest teaching by Siddhartha Gautama.  
12 And at the end of that prayer I will, the last prayer  
13 that we recite says that we are going to put as much  
14 effort - and this is just a loose translation - to help  
15 everyone achieve the enlightenment that we're achieving  
16 as Buddhists.

17 Thank you.

18 (Audience Applause.)

19 FR. FRANCIS:

20 Thank you, Mr. Anderson.

21 At this time we will hear from  
22 Catherine C. Kahn from the Jewish Community.

23 Let me back it up -- I was just so  
24 looking forward to hearing from you.

25 We will hear from Sarah Comiskey from

1 the Archdiocese.

2 MS. COMISKEY:

3 Thank you.

4 I would like to thank you everyone for  
5 being here. I am very happy to be here representing the  
6 Archdiocese of New Orleans and also hopefully go beyond  
7 the Catholic Church into more of the Christian  
8 traditions.

9 Let me start by telling you exactly  
10 what a St. Joseph altar is. I will give you little bit  
11 of the background, it is a huge deal in New Orleans and  
12 unlike it anywhere else, even in Italy, where they were  
13 actually started. The Sicilians were experiencing a  
14 horrible famine and draught and so they prayed to, for  
15 the intervention of St. Joseph to our board to end the  
16 draught. And they said if you do this, we will build an  
17 altar in which we place our food, some of the food that  
18 we grow on the altar and then afterward give it to the  
19 needy. Their prayers were answered, they got a huge  
20 rain, bountiful harvest, they created the altar and the  
21 goodies that were created, cooked and grew were then  
22 given to the poor. So now that you have all had a  
23 history lesson on the origin of the history of the St.  
24 Joseph altar, I will go into the Catholic Church.

25 Do I need this (indicating)? Can you

1 all hear me without it? Okay, I'm sorry. I feel like  
2 I'm echoing too much with the mike in my hand and I'm  
3 reading.

4 Many of you are familiar with the  
5 Catholic Church here in New Orleans. We have about  
6 375,000 Catholics in the metropolitan area. And that  
7 again, that is just the Catholic Church; not even going  
8 into the Christian Church. We have about 114 Catholic  
9 parishes that are active in the metropolitan area. At  
10 this time we have 86 schools that educate 46,000  
11 children open in the metropolitan area. Fifteen  
12 thousand of those students are in the New Orleans area.  
13 Many of those who are in our Catholic schools in Orleans  
14 Parish who are not Catholic, who cannot afford to pay  
15 the tuition, we have a number of generous people in the  
16 community and beyond that help us the Archdiocese with  
17 the school tuition for the students.

18 Beyond that, the Catholic Church has  
19 been active since 1727 with the Social Ministry and  
20 outreach we actually opened the first school, Ursuline  
21 nuns arrived from France, they were the first  
22 educational cause brought to educate people of color  
23 that lived in the city and worked out in the field.

24 We have currently, also because of  
25 Henriette Delille, who is from New Orleans; we founded

1 the Sisters of the Holy Family before the Emancipation  
2 Proclamation. Sister Delille went to educate slaves  
3 when it was illegal to go teach the slaves to read or  
4 tech them anything. She and the other sister teachers  
5 dedicated their lives to God and educating people and  
6 they took the word of the Lord Jesus and took the  
7 education out to the people working in the field. That  
8 is where all of the Christian traditions merged, our  
9 belief in the Lord Jesus, who was born at Christmas,  
10 which we celebrate and that he died on the cross at  
11 Easter to save our souls. From there we kept going, but  
12 we are still united in our belief.

13 I want to share with you a statement  
14 that Archbishop Hughes, who is the Archbishop of the  
15 Catholic Archdiocese, this was for the second  
16 anniversary of Katrina and that Louisiana Bishop Charles  
17 Jenkins of the Episcopal Church in Louisiana and some of  
18 the other parties as well, were invited to add their  
19 signatures to. This was an Interfaith, an Ecumenical  
20 Statement that was developed to offer a vision of hope  
21 to the people who live or previously lived in New  
22 Orleans.

23 "A Vision for a Renewed New Orleans.  
24 We affirm a vision of a just, safe and protected city  
25 where every person is respected and the gifts of each

1 are valued and utilized to plant seeds of recovery,  
2 renewal and rebirth. Center to our belief in God's  
3 vision is that all, especially the poor, the vulnerable  
4 and those in need, are welcome here. All people must be  
5 able to find ways to a good life with adequate and  
6 affordable health care, housing, transportation,  
7 education and employment opportunities. We voice urgent  
8 concern for the well-being of our neighbors. We are  
9 disturbed that some are prevented or discouraged from  
10 returning. We are alarmed that others have decided to  
11 leave. The time is long past for our political leaders  
12 to fulfill the tasks entrusted to them by the people.  
13 Our circumstances demand from our political leaders'  
14 cooperation rather than competition; dedication to the  
15 common good rather than to political or private  
16 advantage. Our vision for a New Orleans in which we:  
17 one, place our youth first in supporting the best  
18 opportunities for their education and holistic growth;  
19 two, develop neighborhood plans to cooperate with police  
20 to reduce crime; three, address the crippled state of  
21 our municipal judicial system and state courts; four,  
22 provide fair housing opportunities for those who can  
23 least afford housing; five, monitor plans for quality  
24 healthcare to ensure that all well served with dignity;  
25 six, encourage economic initiatives which expand the

1 opportunities for wage earners to support their  
2 families; seven, ensure greater availability of public  
3 transportation to connect people with job opportunities  
4 and public services. We believe God commands us, the  
5 clergy of New Orleans, to call men and women of faith to  
6 selfless and constructive action. Silence in our  
7 grievous circumstances amounts to sin. Information is  
8 power and so we labor both to inform our brothers and  
9 sisters of their obligations and to heal their wounded  
10 spirits. All, who today sow seeds of recovery in New  
11 Orleans with tears still in their eyes, are given the  
12 responsibility to nurture tender shoots of renewal and  
13 to welcome others to join. With the blessing of God may  
14 all come home to share in our city's sheaves of hope and  
15 sing songs of joy."

16 That statement was read at the  
17 Interfaith Celebration at St. Paul's School on the  
18 second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. And that is  
19 the axis of where we as the people are united. It  
20 doesn't matter where we come from, that we should always  
21 strive to be. That is where we as Catholics, myself  
22 included, are always striving to be. We as Catholics  
23 are striving to be supportive of life and all of its  
24 sources. That everyone has good healthcare, that  
25 everyone has an education. Everyone has a right to live

1 and a place to live so that can better themselves as a  
2 family in this community.

3           So drawing on that, I think that we  
4 have supported public life, we support, as the founding  
5 fathers said, to include the church, that men, that  
6 everyone would be free to practice their religion in the  
7 way that they believe that it should be practiced.  
8 Should be free in the way, the best spiritual connection  
9 with God and with themselves and be the best person that  
10 they can be. They should include God in their lives and  
11 in speaking right now for the Archdiocese, we see a lot  
12 of times where religion is pushed out and pushed under  
13 the mat. Rather than push religion out, practice  
14 religion and live putting your faith out there, not be  
15 ashamed to say, I'm a Catholic, I'm an Episcopalian, I'm  
16 a Jew, really make that part of your life. Make  
17 religion a part of your lives so that there are not only  
18 for selfish goals or the selfish self as a general  
19 outreach, but rather have grounded moral standing. Have  
20 faith to where you can look at yourself in the mirror or  
21 anyone can look at themselves in the mirror and say, I  
22 am a person of faith and my soul. I will stand up and  
23 take ownership of my faith, your faith.

24           I am not clergy but I would really  
25 like to have this opportunity to answer any questions

1 about Christianity or Catholicism that I can maybe  
2 answer for you.

3 MR. BAGNERIS:

4 We are going to have a question and  
5 answer period after each of the religious groups make  
6 their presentation.

7 MS. COMISKEY:

8 You are? Then well thank you all so  
9 much for your time, and we'll move on.

10 MR. BAGNERIS:

11 Thank you. And let me add that at the  
12 end of the listening session, there is also an  
13 opportunity for everyone to have refreshments and  
14 conversations with others who may want to do the same.

15 MS. COMISKEY:

16 Thank you.

17 FR. FRANCIS:

18 Now we have Ms. Catherine Kahn for the  
19 Jewish Community.

20 MS. KAHN:

21 Thank you. Well it's most appropriate  
22 that for the Jewish presentation. I can do it without  
23 the microphone, can't you hear me? I usually project a  
24 little too loud. Can you hear me from the back? Okay?

25 It is more fitting that the Jewish

1 history follows the Catholics because of course coming  
2 over here, the Catholics came first, but we were not far  
3 behind. As a matter of fact, the Jewish have been in  
4 North America for 350 years, but I have to answer  
5 something you (indicating) said first. My Rabbi, and  
6 this is my Rabbi (indicating) and I'm very proud to  
7 belong to his congregation. My Rabbi has only been here  
8 for 20 years.

9 Oh, hello.

10 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

11 Hello.

12 MS. KAHN:

13 I have been all of my 77 years and my  
14 family has been here since the 1830's, our Jewish  
15 family. So I always grew up with St. Joseph altars. I  
16 never ate a piece of meat in my house, in my  
17 grandmothers, or my parent's house on a Friday in my  
18 life. So all Jewish children in New Orleans grew up a  
19 little bit Catholic. But Jews have been here - oh, and  
20 I never saw lox and bagels until I went to the  
21 University of North Carolina. Jews have been in North  
22 America for 350 years.

23 The first Jewish settlers were in New  
24 York in New York City; Newport, Rhode Island;  
25 Philadelphia; Savannah; and then Charleston, South

1 Carolina, so we came down the seaports. Although a  
2 Jewish presence in New Orleans goes back to the French  
3 colonial period, the Le Code Noir, forbidding Jews to  
4 settle in Catholic Louisiana, also deterred Jewish  
5 immigration. A notable exception was the Monsanto  
6 family, who settled here in 1767. They were originally  
7 from Spain until expelled from there in 1492 by the  
8 Inquisition. After which the family went to Holland,  
9 which was a very liberal and accepting of Jewish people  
10 there. They then came to the New World, made their way  
11 to the Stuart House, which was Dutch, and then to New  
12 Orleans. And then they crossed through here under the  
13 very last French government, which ignored the Code Le  
14 Noir for the most part.

15 After Louisiana was transferred to  
16 Spain in 1763 after the French-Indian war, the Spanish  
17 Inquisition kept out Jews, even expelling the Jews and  
18 Protestants who dared to live in New Orleans.

19 Following the Louisiana Purchase Jews  
20 began to come in increasing numbers. The most important  
21 of these was a noted merchant and real estate magnet,  
22 Judah Touro, founder of Touro Infirmary, where by the  
23 way, I live. His patriotism was displayed in the Battle  
24 of New Orleans in 1815, where he was badly wounded.  
25 Following his death in 1854, his will had reached

1 struggling congregations and benevolent societies  
2 locally, nationally and internationally. He was also  
3 generous to many local Christian churches, especially  
4 Christ Church and First Congregational Church. Another  
5 well known Jewish New Orleanian was Judah P. Benjamin,  
6 Secretary of State of the Confederacy, who moved here in  
7 1828.

8 The early Jewish settlers; like the  
9 Monsanto's, Judah Touro and Judah P. Benjamin, were also  
10 Sephardic Jews, meaning they had their roots in the  
11 Iberian Peninsula. During the years right before the  
12 Civil War, Jews came to New Orleans from areas around  
13 the line, the coast, mostly from Alsace-Lorraine and  
14 German states, which is where my family came from.

15 During Passover in 1827, as the legend  
16 reads, there is no documentation on this but it's too  
17 good not to take you to this past. Isaac Solis, a New  
18 York merchant in New Orleans on business tried to buy  
19 matzo; you know matzo balls, the little flattened  
20 pastry.

21 AUDIENCE MEMBER:

22 Unleavened bread.

23 MS. KAHN:

24 Yes, unleavened. It's hard to convince  
25 New Orleanians, with their culinary pallet and love of

1 spicy and rich food that a matzo was something to eat.  
2 After the holiday you couldn't find them anywhere, so  
3 after the holiday he sought out leaders of the Jewish  
4 community and attempted to organize a synagogue.  
5 Although Solis died before his task was accomplished,  
6 his attempt was followed upon.

7                   The congregation, The Gates of Mercy,  
8 I'm not going to try the Hebrew on that. The Gates of  
9 Mercy was chartered in 1828. In the mid 1840's the  
10 congregation Dispersed of Judah was formed with the  
11 financial aid of Judah Touro, who very skillfully began  
12 Judaism here. If you want somebody to give you money  
13 you go name something after them right away. Both of  
14 these congregations were downtown, I can see Gates of  
15 Mercy's site from here; it's just right over there  
16 (indicating). There is a marker on North Rampart that  
17 you can see. The Dispersed of Judah was at the corner  
18 of Canal and Bourbon Street and then the old building  
19 swapped by Judah Touro - with the, with the, oh, what  
20 was I saying - oh, with the Christ Church. They made a  
21 swap deal with Christ Church because Christ Church was  
22 too big for their own congregation.

23                   Then another group, another French and  
24 German Jews settled uptown in Lafayette City, a little  
25 suburb uptown, upriver. There they chartered the

1 Congregation Gates of Prayer. In the 1850's a few Jews  
2 from eastern Germany, which is now Poland, began to  
3 arrive in New Orleans and founded a Congregation called  
4 The Right Way. So we have had eastern influence very  
5 much earlier than many other parts of the country.

6 To care for the needy, several Jewish  
7 service organizations arose before the Civil War. The  
8 Hebrew Benevolent Association and the late Hebrew  
9 Benevolent Society were among many. As the yellow fever  
10 epidemic gave yearly tolls, Jewish leaders recognized  
11 the need of care for surviving widows and orphans. They  
12 founded the Jewish Widows and Orphans Home, later the  
13 Jewish Children's Home, which is now on the site of the  
14 JCC, the Jewish Community Center, on St. Charles and  
15 Jefferson Avenue. Elderly men were cared for in the  
16 small Orthodox hospital, Touro Infirmary, which was  
17 founded in 1852. Later on, a larger uptown campus of  
18 Touro Infirmary, where the Jewish wives came to care for  
19 the aging. The Jewish wives cared for the aging men and  
20 women and where Touro Infirmary is on Prytania Street,  
21 right where it is now. Let me say that we took care of  
22 men and women not only from New Orleans, but from all  
23 over the south, sponsored by the Jewish National Service  
24 Organization, Milah Brit.

25 Eastern European Jews from Poland and

1 Russia began to arrive in larger numbers after the Civil  
2 War. They formed a community in Central City called the  
3 Dryades Street Neighborhood, formed a small  
4 congregation, some of which later formed together in  
5 1909, the first really large organized Orthodox  
6 community. The United Brotherhood was formed in 1896  
7 and remains the only one of these synagogues that  
8 remains in the Dryades Street Neighborhood as an active  
9 synagogue; it's a very small congregation, it's a very  
10 beautiful building.

11                   And so a new form of Judaism began,  
12 born in Germany and sweeping in the United States in the  
13 latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This movement is called  
14 Reform Judaism, modifying the rituals while obtaining  
15 the basic principles of spiritual Judaism. This was a  
16 welcome opportunity for immigrants who wanted to become  
17 part of the American community.

18                   In 1870 a group of men, most of them  
19 members of The Gates of Mercy congregation defected and  
20 formed a new house of worship based upon the new reform  
21 principles, this congregation, Temple Sinai was built,  
22 the first home on Carondelet Street near Lee Circle was  
23 built in 1872. In 1880 the Dispersed of Judah and Gates  
24 of Mercy joined which gradually followed Temple Sinai's  
25 name to become reformed as Milah Brit.

1                   After World War II the youngest form of  
2 Judaism, Conservative Judaism, which takes a little bit  
3 of both. They kept a lot of the Orthodox Judaism, not  
4 all of it. They are much more integrated into the  
5 American way of life than the script of the Orthodox.  
6 They are a multigenerational, faith based, Shir Chadah,  
7 which means "new song" Conservative Congregation in  
8 Metairie.

9                   Before Katrina there were about 14,000  
10 Jews in the whole Greater New Orleans area, not all  
11 affiliated, but they were counted. Today there are only  
12 about 7500 Jews. Since Hurricane Katrina they have  
13 worked to rebuilding the city and the Jewish Community.  
14 There were and still are in much of these numbers,  
15 involved in almost every aspect of community in New  
16 Orleans much as they were at the time that Judah Touro  
17 first arrived at the time of the Louisiana Purchase.

18                   Thank you.

19                   FR. FRANCIS:

20                   And now Imam Kasib Hakeem.

21                   MR. HAKEEM:

22                   Good evening, shalom, peace be with  
23 you, my name is Kasib Hakeem. I am part of the new  
24 priesthood in the Shalom, so the closest thing to a  
25 preacher; more like a pastor of a church or whatever,

1 but they are not really the same.

2           Anyway I would like to start by saying  
3 that Muslims have been here in the City of New Orleans  
4 for quite some time. According to some historians the  
5 Muslims came to this part of the world before Columbus,  
6 but we do know for a fact that they were. Many Muslims  
7 were brought here by slave traders. A good many of them  
8 were educated. The number of Muslim brothers that were  
9 brought here by slavery, who knows, there is no way to  
10 count them.

11           I'm going to try to deal with the  
12 conception of, I'm going to step up to the 1930's when  
13 there was an Arab that came to this section. His name  
14 was Fard Muhammad, he called himself Farad Muhammad, it  
15 was spelled F-A-R-D, but I don't know if it was just  
16 mispronounced, some say Farad, but anyway Fard Muhammad,  
17 he came with strange teachings. First of all he taught  
18 that all Jews were evil. He taught that the Europeans  
19 were the devil, not a devil but the devil. He claimed  
20 that because of the way that African Americans have been  
21 treated; quite frankly the way we have been treated it  
22 was easy to associate that with the people since the  
23 Europeans did not treat us as equals, for them to be  
24 thought of as evil. Fard Muhammad was taken very  
25 seriously by a man named Elijah Poole.

1                   Let's step back a minute. You know,  
2 Muhammad is the most common name you will find in Arabic  
3 speaking people. People from that region use the name  
4 Muhammad just as you would use Smith, in this western  
5 region in my opinion, if I'm not mistaken.

6                   Fard called himself Muhammad. Elijah  
7 Poole, again who had taken Fard Muhammad teachings very  
8 seriously, began to call himself Muslim and in taking  
9 teachings of Fard Muhammad and he changed his name to  
10 Elijah Muhammad. He kind of changed some of the  
11 teachings that Fard brought in but still it was  
12 generally the same that the Jews were an evil people and  
13 any interests of entities governed by the European  
14 people was by the devil.

15                   I wish I had about an hour to kind of  
16 tell you about it, but at any rate, I will give you a  
17 very brief insight.

18                   Elijah Poole taught his last son, his  
19 name was Wallace Muhammad but he later changed his name  
20 to Warith Deen Muhammad. If you haven't heard of Warith  
21 Deen, I would think you may want to really -- well, at  
22 any rate -- Elijah Muhammad had his son brought up  
23 under Islamic teachings. After some time, in 1975 to be  
24 exact, when Elijah Muhammad died, he was the head of  
25 what was called the head of the Nation of Islam. If you

1 have not heard of Warith Deen Muhammad, I'm sure that  
2 many of you are familiar -- although you may not exactly  
3 have a correct understanding or knowledge of the Nation  
4 of Islam -- but I'm sure you heard the term.

5           Elijah Muhammad had his son brought up  
6 under Islamic teaching so he learned Orthodox Islamic  
7 Practices. After the death of Elijah Muhammad, Warith  
8 Deen Muhammad became the leader of the Nation of Islam.  
9 Right away he began to teach the followers of, or the  
10 previous followers of Elijah, he came to teach them the  
11 beauty of Islam. From that, the understanding of the so  
12 called Black Muslims, who are a part of the Nation of  
13 Islam began to learn more about Islam, became more  
14 knowledgeable of what we know. You will find in most  
15 African Americans that you will find in a Muslim  
16 Community, who were maybe above 30 years old, most of  
17 them came from the Nation of Islam. We know, just as  
18 well as anyone might, that people can change because we  
19 came from that strange rhetoric, strange understanding,  
20 to understand Islam and began to really follow the  
21 influence of Warith Deen Muhammad.

22           Warith Deen Muhammad had since taken  
23 over the Nation of Islam to teach the people and  
24 transform them in understanding Islam. We changed from  
25 the strange teaching to understanding the scriptures,

1 understanding the beauty of Islam, came to the  
2 understanding the wonder of humanity and understanding  
3 that people need to be united.

4 Warith Deen Muhammad, right now is  
5 really working vigorously to reach out to people of  
6 faith, not just people of Islam, people of faith with  
7 the understanding that God did not give one group a  
8 religion, not to one group only. The Creator is a  
9 Creator of everything, the Creator is the Creator of  
10 all.

11 We have found that we began to reach  
12 out to people and began to look for true unity, you find  
13 people of all groups. People of the same sentiment,  
14 people of the same desire. We did a lot of work in  
15 prison circles in bringing the teaching of Islam to the  
16 prison. And we did that in the Nation of Islam and  
17 brought the national strange rhetoric of the Nation of  
18 Islam. Since then you will find that Islam is growing  
19 in all segments, even in the circles of prisons as well.  
20 You will find that many of the officials in the prison  
21 industry really welcome the influence of the Muslims  
22 because it's a teaching that brings humanity. It brings  
23 a sense of civility to anyone that will consider it  
24 seriously.

25 Our efforts today in Islam are really

1 to more or less try to counteract the misrepresentations  
2 that you will find. And many of you may not know this,  
3 but there is concerted effort to distort the images of  
4 the Islam by the Christians. I would use as an example  
5 for the Christians, how many Christians do you think  
6 really would identify with the knights, the Christian  
7 Knights of the Klu Klux Klan? I would say not very  
8 many. By the same token very, very few Muslims will  
9 identify with the suicide bombers and terrorism, that is  
10 a word that is abused very lightly today. But the  
11 overwhelming majority, it's over a billion, and if we  
12 had a terrorist act the world would be in trouble, I  
13 would think. But the Islam itself in one word means  
14 "peace" but its interest really is world peace.

15           The term Muslim by its very definition  
16 would apply to anyone, anyone and everyone who adheres  
17 to the commandments of God, who strives towards  
18 following the prophets. In fact, the major religions  
19 that are being represented, we all look to Brother  
20 Abraham, the founder of what Allah is. Do you really  
21 think that God would bring a religion to teach people to  
22 fight each other or hate each other? No prophet would  
23 ever do that. In Islam you will find that we actually  
24 have to accept all of the prophets. We are here to talk  
25 about prophets and we repeat it over and over again, but

1 one would think that we believe that Muhammad is the  
2 only one that represents God, but quite to the contrary,  
3 Islam dictates that you accept all of the prophets. It  
4 makes no difference between one prophet and another. In  
5 our scripture it says to accept all of the prophets that  
6 God has sent to us not categorize one of the prophets as  
7 being accepted. So if we cannot accept Moses, you can't  
8 accept Muhammad, you can't accept Abraham or Jesus, or  
9 any of the prophets, any of the prophets that God has  
10 sent to us is recognized and accepted by Islam.

11 So we are trying to interact so people  
12 will understand, you will find that those who understand  
13 the religion understand that there has to be a concerted  
14 effort to bring people together and people of faith  
15 together. This has been what we have been doing since  
16 the recent past and in the present our efforts are to  
17 work toward uniting people of faith so that we can bring  
18 an understanding of Islam. If you bring about a  
19 religion and a better understanding, and we have been  
20 working in this community quite often with people of  
21 other faiths. We look forward to really interacting  
22 with the other faiths so that everyone would have a  
23 better understand of us and we can have a better  
24 understanding of other religions.

25 I grew up in Christianity and some time

1 way back in '70, '73, '74, I was introduced to the  
2 Nation of Islam. And then in '75 I began to really  
3 study Islam and began to have a meaningful deep  
4 understanding of what religion is and who God is,  
5 because back during that time that some people had the  
6 understanding that we thought we were God. And so we  
7 are trying to interact with other faiths and really hope  
8 that everyone can have a true understanding of our  
9 religion.

10 Thank you.

11 FR. KING:

12 At this time, although we haven't been  
13 using the microphone, we can pass it around. If anybody  
14 has questions or comments that they would like to offer  
15 based on the speakers presentation, or whatever you feel  
16 that you would like to share with us.

17 The point is that we need to hear  
18 concerns; that is really what we are looking for.

19 We have a wonderful reporter who is  
20 going to take those concerns down so that we can study  
21 each one of these sessions and then with conclusions,  
22 bring the conclusions, have a paper that presents a  
23 spectrum of why, perhaps an unprecedented spectrum of  
24 the community of faiths, the ethnic groups, along with  
25 the wonderful gumbo that makes New Orleans so special.

1 We need the flames, we want to present our report so  
2 that the City Council can know what are people worried  
3 about? What are the challenges that we see that are  
4 facing us? And how are they specific sometimes to  
5 individual groups? In what way does the Islamic  
6 community feel challenged to live in New Orleans of  
7 2008, post Katrina plus three? What are the challenges,  
8 how do you see it? How does the Jewish community feel  
9 challenged? What are we challenged by? What are we  
10 doing? What measures are being taken to face those  
11 challenges? Let those who govern our city know, the  
12 good, the bad, the indifference, about how our group  
13 feels about themselves and about living and facing the  
14 future here in New Orleans.

15 MS. MILAM:

16 Hey. I'm Mindy Milam and I'm a member  
17 of SGI. I'm a member of this Buddhist group here and  
18 there are a few things that I wanted to add about our  
19 practice, our orientation and our philosophy about being  
20 citizens of this city.

21 I became a member of SGI about six  
22 years ago. I was raised Christian and in studying about  
23 different types of Buddhism and that is one thing that I  
24 learned, that there are a variety of types of Buddhism.  
25 This particular sect, as Jerome said, originated in

1 Japan. The core principle is that every person, as he  
2 said, regardless of gender, race, whatever, every person  
3 has unlimited potential. And that we can tap into that  
4 potential and its purpose, the purpose of the practice  
5 of this religion is to become happy and to spread  
6 happiness.

7 I look at this city, I'm a social  
8 worker in private practice in this city, and have really  
9 dealt with a lot as everyone has post Katrina. I own  
10 two houses, both of them flooded. And so the last few  
11 years I have used this practice to get through many,  
12 many challenges and hopefully to help other people get  
13 through their personal challenges.

14 This practice teaches that each one of  
15 us has responsibility for our lives and that we are  
16 interconnected with the environment. So it can't be  
17 just about my own personal happiness and success, that  
18 we're very interconnected, all of us. We believe that  
19 every human life has dignity and worth and every human  
20 has the capacity to tap into that. The way that we  
21 believe that we tap into that is through chanting, it's  
22 a form of meditation, the chant that we cite is  
23 Nam-yoho-renge-kyo which roughly translated, my  
24 understanding is, devotion to domestic law of positive  
25 effect.

1                   When I think about the challenges as a  
2 Buddhist in the City of New Orleans, one of the things  
3 that is difficult about not being affiliated with a  
4 Christian religion is that there are times that I think  
5 that we are very misperceived. For example, I went to  
6 the two year anniversary dedication of the Katrina  
7 memorial site on Canal Street. I felt like I was in a  
8 Christian church service and there was no  
9 acknowledgement of people of any other faith there, that  
10 I could see, and it was very offensive to me. I went  
11 there to memorialize people and the losses that happened  
12 here and was so offended that that I thought it was such  
13 an inappropriate use of a really sacred space. I think  
14 there is so much need in this community for unity, not  
15 for divisiveness and I think that things like interfaith  
16 dialogues are one way to make that happen.

17                   Someone recently said to me, "Mindy, in  
18 some ways you seem like you are a religious fanatic  
19 now." And I said, "Well, if fanatic means feeling an  
20 incredible passion about my beliefs and seeing people  
21 suffering and wanting to offer a way for people to  
22 alleviate some suffering, then I am a fanatic, but  
23 hopefully I'm a respectful fanatic."

24                   I think, you know, that faith is so  
25 personal to people. The passion of the people of this

1 city is so deep and we have gone through so much. So  
2 I'm thrilled that the Commission included this as a  
3 topic. I'm thrilled that Craig found us and invited us  
4 to come. You know, we're a small group in this city and  
5 I think that we're very open to and committed to finding  
6 ways to reach out and connect and do whatever we can do  
7 to try to alleviate the whole myriad of social problems  
8 here.

9 Our young people have a Taiko drumming  
10 group, who have performed at Jazz Fest and who have  
11 performed at some other festivals. I think about their  
12 passion and you know, all of you, the kids, young  
13 people, not just young people, people in this city need  
14 hope. Often faith is what grounds people in difficult  
15 times.

16 So anyway, I think that is enough right  
17 now but I really glad you did this. I would like to say  
18 that any time you do any interfaith anything, I know  
19 that we would be happy to be represented and to be  
20 included.

21 Thank you all for having us.

22 FR. KING:

23 Yes, sir.

24 MR. BRYER:

25 I don't think that I need the

1 microphone because it does echo. Can everyone hear me?  
2 I don't need the mike. Can anyone not hear me?

3 My name is Reuver Bryer. I'm an  
4 Orthodox Jew; I'm new to New Orleans, very new.

5 I'm very impressed with this gathering  
6 that you have here. I would like to say a few things in  
7 preface to my concerns about the environmental  
8 situation. And prefacing it as a student, I spent six  
9 years of my adult life in a rabbinical seminary before  
10 settling in New Orleans. I studied theology for almost  
11 all of my lifetime. My father was a rabbi. One thing  
12 that I know in teaching was we learned in the Talmud  
13 that Jesus of Nazareth was actually mentioned and his  
14 teacher was Helo. One of the main things that Helo was  
15 known for is that he taught that you should not do unto  
16 others that you would not have them do unto you. He  
17 also taught that we must love our neighbor as our-self.  
18 I am bringing that up and my concern, some of my  
19 background also is on anthropogenic causes to the  
20 deterioration of our environment.

21 I happen to know that there are other  
22 issues other than just physical issues that have an  
23 effect on our environment. From the time of Adam in the  
24 bible, we learned that between Adam's time that there  
25 were ten generations to Noah. In that time there were

1 seven precepts that God gave us that apply to all  
2 mankind. They were abused and neglected and on came the  
3 flood.

4           These seven precepts I would like to  
5 acknowledge. For one, there is a supreme being, there  
6 is a God. We must not blasphemy or make fun of this  
7 name or use it in vain. We must not murder. We must  
8 not steal; the world is not ours to do this. You can't  
9 just do whatever you want. We learned, actually Noah  
10 brought down that we mustn't take a limb from a living  
11 animal, that is a symbol of cruelty to animals. We are  
12 all responsible to set up a just society. When we see  
13 our politicians, our policemen or anyone in any type of  
14 power that is doing a good thing, we must commend them.  
15 And if they are not doing the right thing, we have to do  
16 something about it. We also must not practice abnormal  
17 sexual activity, it demoralizes mankind. Let me see,  
18 what am I leaving out, there are seven precepts.

19           By abusing these things, for example  
20 Katrina, I hate to say it but in my opinion it is a  
21 simmon; it was a sign of what is going on  
22 environmentally. We hear people are making fun of  
23 issues like global warming. It's a reality. This year,  
24 2007, was the hottest year ever. These are the issues  
25 and there are other things. My belief, my concern, is

1 for the betterment of not only in New Orleans, but for  
2 the entire world. We all have a power. You may think  
3 that you are very miniscule. In your lifetime, what is  
4 one light bulb? What's breaking one of these seven  
5 precepts, you may think, well it's not a big deal. Well  
6 it all adds up and there is a holistic -- I'm also a  
7 student of quantum physics and each one of has some  
8 power and every one of us has it. Your children, your  
9 babies, every one has some say and some effect on what  
10 is taking place.

11 I don't, I'm not here to scare anyone,  
12 God forbid. I'm just here to reinforce your religious  
13 beliefs. I happen to believe that anyone practicing any  
14 form of modern religion has higher moral standards than  
15 those who don't. I mean, there is no question.  
16 Otherwise it would be chaos if we didn't have a  
17 religious society. I'm thankful for each and every one  
18 of your religions and in the source of my own, mine's a  
19 little older. But anyhow, my concerns, and I assume  
20 that is what this meeting really is about, is that we  
21 have to maintain and speak out on anything that we can  
22 do to improve the moral standards in society in New  
23 Orleans and the entire world.

24 Anyway, thank you very much.

25 Oh, I wanted to say one other thing

1 regarding quantum physics. It's actually proven that  
2 each one of your prayers, physically proven now,  
3 scientists accept it and understand it, that a blessing,  
4 a prayer, has a physical effect, it's measurable. It is  
5 quite fantastic.

6 Of course, my people were known to just  
7 accept things that they had to do religiously just  
8 because we were told by the one above. It's literally  
9 measurable now, I think that is fantastic. And so I  
10 hope all of you, I hope you all make blessings and give  
11 blessings and may we all be blessed.

12 Thank you.

13 MR. BERNARD:

14 My name is Walter Bernard and I'm also  
15 a member of the Buddhist Community.

16 One of the things, you know, I'm a  
17 student, I love Woodson philosophy. That is my  
18 favorite, I read him every day; it gives me a sense of  
19 spirit every morning. I read Woodson and any other  
20 philosophers of faith, of teachings, of literature, even  
21 though I'm a Buddhist. I wanted to get a clearer  
22 universal understanding of all religions and all sources  
23 of spirituality.

24 One of the things that I have noticed  
25 through my studies is that over the thousands of years,

1 you had the original teachers, Jesus, Siddhartha  
2 Gautama, Muhammad, whatever teachers you had. The  
3 spirit of those teachers had a tenacity plan and if you  
4 look at modern times, even if you say, well you belong  
5 to a religious group, or religious exists, the  
6 spirituality is lost. It's a dogma formality and people  
7 don't really take action in society, this is a very  
8 important part of this matter, that we take action.

9 Mindy mentioned something about the  
10 youth and one of the things that I'm noticing is that we  
11 talk about politics and religion but we forget about the  
12 youth. What are they going to do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?  
13 What are we going to give them? You know, we argue  
14 about our differences. In this city my concern is about  
15 the youth centers. They have been closed up because the  
16 city doesn't have any money to put into these youth  
17 centers. These youths need places to play basketball,  
18 learn things; become creative.

19 So that is my only concern; that the  
20 youth need to be given something to belong to and to  
21 grow and, you know, develop their potential. I think  
22 that if they have that, we can transmit our faith and  
23 our spirituality to them.

24 That is all I wanted to say.

25 FR. FRANCIS:

1                   Anyone else?

2                   I just want to acknowledge the presence  
3 of Councilman Fielkow. It means a great deal to us that  
4 you are here with us, Councilman.

5                   COUNCILMAN FIELKOW:

6                   Thank you.

7                   FR. FRANCIS:

8                   Yes, sir, did you have something that  
9 you wanted to say? Did you want to come forward or  
10 speak from there?

11                  MR. MUSTAFA:

12                  Here.

13                  Hello, my name is Bilal Mustafa. I am  
14 from the Carrollton area; I grew up around Claiborne  
15 Avenue. Presently I am in California and I work at a  
16 maximum security prison.

17                  One of the challenges that I think that  
18 you are facing here in New Orleans as well as around the  
19 country is the problem of the African American male.

20                  AUDIENCE MEMBER:

21                  Could you speak up a little bit?

22                  MR. MUSAFI:

23                  One of the challenges I see in New  
24 Orleans, being from New Orleans is the problem of the  
25 African American male. Much of your monies and much of

1 your resources should be aimed at trying to address the  
2 African American male; I see that as a problem that is  
3 not being addressed. You have to remember to go back in  
4 history, that the African American male was the most  
5 targeted individual in our society ever since slavery  
6 and there still hasn't been a strong recovery of his  
7 identity and of his manhood.

8 I would like to know what this group is  
9 going to do. You need to need to address a lot of  
10 endangered species in our society, but yet no one is  
11 addressing the endangered species, that is the African  
12 American male. Too many times we will see that the  
13 graves are filling up with these African American men.  
14 The prisons are filling up with these African American  
15 men. And you just see a plethora of destruction  
16 centered around these African American males.

17 I would like to know from this  
18 committee, from everyone here and people from these  
19 religious groups, what are you doing to address and  
20 preserve this group of endangered species? You see,  
21 because if he fails, you will see the failure of the  
22 African American family, which is part of the human  
23 races. The African American family is in great danger  
24 of not surviving. That is one issue that I would like  
25 to see addressed.

1                   The other one, many times we don't  
2 address race and religion. Race is always addressed in  
3 politics and it always resurfaces. Race is addressed in  
4 social settings and it always resurfaces. Race is  
5 addressed in employment and sports, but it always  
6 resurfaces, but it always hides itself in religion.

7                   One of the things that kind of made me  
8 leave New Orleans, and again I'm born and raised here,  
9 is to try to get a new perspective on God and religion  
10 was that as an African American male in society I saw  
11 images of God or God's family being pictured as a  
12 Michelangelo drawing mirroring an European depiction.  
13 And this affects the minds of young children that are  
14 not of that ethnic group that is being depicted. So you  
15 when you are not of that ethnic group, then you continue  
16 to try and search and figure out if you are in God's  
17 family? Is God a part of you, your connection with God?

18                   So to me, even coming back to New  
19 Orleans and around the country, you still see this  
20 European image in most of the black churches, in most of  
21 your churches, where I don't think that race is being  
22 expressed in the image of God as a religious group. I  
23 want to know what you are doing to address race and  
24 religion?

25                   MR. BAGNERIS:

1 I would like to address that.

2 RABBI COHN:

3 Larry Bagneris, our Executive Director.

4 MR. BAGNERIS:

5 Tonight we're here to discuss religion  
6 in terms of its contributions to what makes up New  
7 Orleans. I would love to share with you, we have folks  
8 from each of the sessions, this is session number 10, we  
9 had the African American Community Professionals here in  
10 January of this year; we had some of those discussions.  
11 As a matter of fact, I was so angry when we had that  
12 group that I tried to push them to get angry about the  
13 issue to bring it up. And many of the things that you  
14 brought up are very prominent questions that ask why  
15 Jesus is pictured with a white face and blue eyes and  
16 long blond hair and that sort of thing. That is just  
17 the market, but you know, we need to discuss that, but  
18 we need to discuss it in a different forum and I will be  
19 more than happy to contribute time for you to do that.

20 I want to turn around and address this  
21 crowd. I can't begin to thank you for showing up this  
22 evening to add this tribute to this conversation that  
23 the Human Relations Commission which has gone on for the  
24 last ten months. We have two more sessions; the next  
25 session will be on the 18<sup>th</sup>. All of our sessions have

1 been held, the last Tuesday of the month from at six  
2 o'clock, from 6:00 until 8:00, with all of these  
3 different groups that you heard of earlier. For  
4 instance, the French, the Germans, the Greeks,  
5 everybody, the Religious Groups, the Hispanics, the Gay  
6 and Lesbian Community, and this commission, I want to  
7 thank my Commissioners who are volunteers who are here,  
8 so would you give them a hand for volunteering their  
9 time.

10 (Audience Applause.)

11 There is a list that we asked everyone  
12 to sign in on so that we can contact all of you. As a  
13 matter of the fact on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December we will be in  
14 the building in an all day retreat putting together the  
15 first ten and then looking at the last two.

16 The next one this month is on the 18<sup>th</sup>  
17 because the last week of the month is Christmas Eve and  
18 we know we wouldn't get any kind of house for Christmas  
19 Eve and Hanukah will just be that big as well, that is  
20 why we brought the Jewish Community here tonight.

21 I wanted to say that because at the  
22 next listening session we will be dealing with Middle  
23 Eastern, the people that have come to this country and  
24 gotten labeled, as a matter of fact, a lot of the Middle  
25 Eastern communities during 911. We made it clear that

1 we were not going to tolerate any kind of ill treatment  
2 of that group of people because they were here and we  
3 were very successful.

4 Then in January, the last Tuesday of  
5 the month we are going to do the gumbo one. If you  
6 didn't feel that you were heard, you can come to this  
7 mixture of everything and speak out. I'm inviting you  
8 to come at that time and ask your questions as well,  
9 after we have spent some personal time together. But  
10 I'm excited tonight because we have our councilperson  
11 here, Arnie Fielkow, and his Chief of Staff, Jill. I  
12 want to give them a hand for showing up and being a part  
13 of this session.

14 (Audience Applause.)

15 And we have a very special guest who  
16 has been with us from the very beginning from the U.S.  
17 Justice Department, Ms. Synthia Demons, and she has been  
18 watching and seeing how we are carrying on and taking  
19 this message. So if everyone would please welcome Ms.  
20 Demons.

21 (Audience Applause.)

22 MS. DEMONS:

23 One of the things that we do is  
24 conflict resolution work in the community and our goal  
25 is to help facilitate and guide and to add to this

1 process. We have been here from the very beginning and  
2 we plan to continue to be here and to do whatever we can  
3 to make sure that you concerns are heard by the city  
4 officials and to ensure that something comes out of that  
5 as far as trying to resolve some of the community  
6 issues. We are building a stronger New Orleans, that is  
7 a goal that we are all working toward and we will remain  
8 a part of that.

9 Thank you.

10 MR. BAGNERIS:

11 Thank you.

12 Tonight we have just scratched the  
13 surface. If you look at each of these denominations  
14 that we're talked about, if you look at the Jewish  
15 Community, there are some Orthodox Jews who have  
16 deliberated religious practices. If you look at the  
17 Christian society, that is where we got in trouble three  
18 years ago when we tried to do an understanding of  
19 religions. We started with the Jewish Community, we  
20 went to the Muslim Community, we got to the Christian  
21 Community and we went, "Wait a minute." We were talking  
22 about Baptists, Lutherans, Episcopalians, the list went  
23 on so long, and then Katrina hit and we had to give that  
24 one up. The same thing with the Buddhist Community, I  
25 mean you've got a long display of traditions, but

1 tonight we have scratched the edges of that, to be  
2 brought into this document that we can speak to the  
3 community, bring to the City Council and to the Mayor's  
4 Office, that is why I'm here. We will take it to the  
5 Mayor's Office in order to discuss some changes that we  
6 feel need to be made in New Orleans.

7 This city has been painted as a black  
8 and white city. If you had sat through the ten months  
9 that this Commission has sat through, you will realize  
10 that this is not a black and white city, this is a black  
11 and white and all shades of gray, and orange and yellow  
12 and everything else. It's the most incredible city that  
13 anybody could ever want to live in because we are so  
14 multicultural, multi religious, and guess what? We  
15 respect one another.

16 I said in the last issue, the last  
17 forum that we had, I haven't ever seen a city where on  
18 St. Patrick's Day, whether you are black, white or  
19 green, everybody is Irish. On St. Joseph's Day,  
20 everybody wants to be Italian. I had a friend in town  
21 and we are on Bourbon Street and there goes a statute of  
22 St. Joseph rocking back and forth, the girls behind it  
23 would shake their booty. That's just, you know, from  
24 the Christian standpoint; that just don't work.  
25 Everybody is begging for the beans, the lucky beans,

1 that is sort of like voodoo stuff, okay?

2 So in order to appreciate this  
3 community and to live here in this multicultural  
4 community, the Commission felt that it had to spend a  
5 year making this study so that we could sit down and  
6 take the pieces apart, take this gumbo apart and put it  
7 back together to show that each part of that ingredient  
8 is very, very special to making us who we are. Tonight  
9 you've leant your voices to this ingredient, to this  
10 gumbo, to this multicultural, multi religious experience  
11 and we can't begin to thank you. With this experience  
12 this evening we can add to our gumbo that religious  
13 factor, no matter how small it is. No matter how small  
14 it is or how big it is for some of you, it adds to that  
15 ingredient of what makes us special.

16 When we finish with this report that we  
17 hopefully will present before the Council in late  
18 February or early March, I think that you will all be  
19 proud of the fact that we have worked hard to present a  
20 city of what it's about. This is a city of  
21 multiculturalism, a city that in a couple of years that  
22 will be 300 years old. A city that before America  
23 bought us; was getting along very well, intermarrying,  
24 and taking care of each other and then Americans came in  
25 and started labeling us. We started treating each other

1 different with Jim Crow, with the Civil War and with  
2 everything else that went on. And then we had the  
3 religious factors that come in. Thank God that you're  
4 here tonight, all those four Gods, that you're here  
5 tonight.

6 Thank God that you made your  
7 contribution and Amen to those that have showed up  
8 because I promise you that when this report is over  
9 with, we will not have City function that is just about  
10 Jesus. I too am tired of it and have spoken to the  
11 President of the Council. And I'm Catholic, on  
12 weekends.

13 We won't have a city that just talks  
14 about black and white. We have got yellow people here.  
15 We've got brown people here. We've got all kinds of  
16 people here, as you look at me and that is why I look  
17 this way, because I come from a multicultural  
18 environment. So for you that have taken your time to  
19 come here, we give you a tremendous thanks.

20 We have refreshments in the back and we  
21 hope that you continue your conversations. From the  
22 bottom of my heart and from each of our commissioners, I  
23 want to thank you.

24 And I would not end an evening without  
25 giving a politician an opportunity to speak.

1 Councilman Fielkow.

2 MR. FIELKOW:

3 He knows me well. I want to tell  
4 everyone that first of all, tonight my voice went out at  
5 some time during the budget hearing today.

6 MR. BAGNERIS:

7 Wait, before you go any further. This  
8 man has been at it since 7:00 this morning with budget  
9 hearings, so thank you for coming up.

10 MR. FIELKOW:

11 This is such an important conversation.  
12 I was here for the first one that you had done and I am  
13 glad I was here tonight for my interest and I will  
14 certainly be here in a couple of weeks because I want to  
15 hear about the Middle East. I have an interest in all  
16 of them, of course, but I think that it's also  
17 appropriate that we're here tonight at a time at a time  
18 when things are happening with the meetings taking  
19 place. I hope that nothing happened negative; I haven't  
20 been able to follow the news. I know that there is a  
21 discussion taking place where the United States is  
22 trying to bring people together. Hopefully the  
23 discussions went well and something comes out of it.

24 I don't think that there is a more  
25 important project than what Larry and the Commission is

1 trying to do here. You know, we spend every day working  
2 on all of the issues, politics, medical care, social  
3 issues that we have to fix as a city. I'm a part of a  
4 group that meets once a month and discuss a lot of  
5 racial and social issues. We actually spent a whole  
6 morning talking about where we have lost the African  
7 American male, at what age, and how we focus on that. I  
8 would love to have that discussion, it was exacerbating  
9 for me to hear it from the African American Community.  
10 Tell us where we need to fill the gap right now, where  
11 we are really losing it. If we don't solve this issue  
12 of trusting each other, to get along and understand each  
13 other, respecting each other, then I don't that the rest  
14 of it really matters. The rest of it is really  
15 temporary; we need a better education system, we need to  
16 fix a lot of the streets and other areas. But the city  
17 will never reach its full potential until we solve the  
18 issues. Yesterday was probably the most dispirited day  
19 in my tenure in New Orleans, because we had a City  
20 Council Chambers meeting that was ugly, really ugly, and  
21 it was ugly because the people didn't trust each other.  
22 It didn't deal directly with the issue of race, it  
23 became an issue of race because of mistrust. We have to  
24 figure that one out. I think it deals with a number of  
25 complicated issues.

1 I think the line of interfaith  
2 community, which is your issue tonight, I think that  
3 there is a blurring of the line because one faith  
4 community unites and then it divides. I hate to say  
5 that, but I think we need to talk about that honestly  
6 with each other because faith is what we need. We saw  
7 that here tonight, all faiths, all walks of life, races  
8 and religion trying to work on a common denominator of  
9 bringing New Orleans to a better place. So I just  
10 applaud all of you for taking part in this. I look  
11 forward to getting the full report in February because I  
12 think if we can make this a gumbo, the way we want we  
13 make it and really work on it, we've got a tremendous  
14 city here.

15 I'm not a native of the city, but like  
16 all of you, I fell in love with the city. To me it's  
17 got the best warmest people of any place that I've ever  
18 been. And it's got more natural assets than any place  
19 that I've ever been. If we can all corral that Katrina  
20 did not discriminate, Katrina affected everybody in the  
21 city. All geographies, all walks of life, all religions  
22 all races. If we can all come through that disaster, we  
23 can accomplish a lot together. My message to all of you  
24 is: Don't let those individual groups, media amenities,  
25 divide you. I cringed when I listened to the news this

1 morning and saw the headlines blaring, the topics  
2 blaring, the City's fourth white member takes office. I  
3 mean, who cares? Who cares about that all day? I  
4 represent the whole city; I don't look at myself as  
5 representing a sector of the community. And I don't  
6 think any of the seven of us do up there.

7 So it's up to people like you that have  
8 taken time out of your schedule to come out and be a  
9 part of this and bring people together. I urge you to  
10 follow through with the City Council on that. Be there  
11 when Larry presents. Support us. Let us know that  
12 there are people that truly care about this. If we can  
13 do that, we can work on all of the other society  
14 problems that we have dealt with and make this a better  
15 city.

16 Thank you.

17 MR. BAGNERIS:

18 On your drive home I want you to do  
19 yourselves a favor; you know we were all shoved out of  
20 the city for about 30 days. I was crying at a table  
21 about three weeks after I was gone and I said to my  
22 friends, "I want to go home." They said, "Go to your  
23 room, you're being ungrateful, we gave you a room, three  
24 meals a day." As you drive home think about the fact  
25 that the city was still closed down. And think about

1       how much you were willing to blend with your neighbors  
2       to make this city closer for everybody, everyone working  
3       together to make this city one New Orleans.

4                       We hope that you have had a good  
5       evening as we have had.

6                       Good evening, have a pleasant evening  
7       the rest of the evening.

8                       Thank you again.

9                       (END OF SESSION.)

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5 CERTIFICATE  
6

7 I, the undersigned reporter, do hereby certify  
8 that the above and foregoing is a true and correct  
9 transcription of the stenographic notes of the  
10 proceedings herein, taken down by me and transcribed  
11 under my supervision, at the time and place  
12 hereinbefore noted, in the above-entitled and numbered  
13 cause(s).

14 I further certify that I am not of counsel nor  
15 related to any of the counsel or any of the parties,  
16 nor in the employ of any of them, and that I have no  
17 interest in the outcome of this action(s).  
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21 \_\_\_\_\_  
22 Diane W. Mathews  
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