

Astrobiology News August 2023: Astrobiology at the Parliament of the World's Religions

The Parliament of the World's Religions (PoWR) cultivates harmony among the world's spiritual traditions and fosters their engagement with guiding institutions in order to achieve a more *peaceful, just, and sustainable* world.¹ Its origins are rooted in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where the historic first convening of the World Parliament of Religions created a global platform for engagement of religions of the east and west. After one hundred years, the PoWR was back, also in Chicago, and has been convening every few years at different locations around the world since 1993. This year, it's back in Chicago from August 14 - 18.²

More than 200 religious and spiritual traditions around the world will have representatives at the PoWR, with many thousands of participants attending diverse sessions. My fellow Lutherans may be interested to know that our Presiding Bishop, The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, will be among the Opening Ceremony speakers. The Sikh community will provide a beautiful Langar lunch (vegetarian, of course) every day for those who are interested in partaking.³

The *Institute on Religion in an Age of Science*⁴ has organized a Science & Religion track that consists of about a dozen sessions exploring science & religion in various ways, including the importance of science to everyone. I'll be kicking off the first session in this track, *Empowering Diverse Faith Communities through Engagement in People-Powered Research*,⁵ on Monday (8/14) with Katy Hinman, Director of the *Dialog on Science, Ethics, and Religion* at the AAAS,⁶ and I'll also be serving on a panel that will be moderated by Susan Barreto, editor of the online *Covalence* newsletter of the *Lutheran Alliance for Faith, Science and Technology*,⁷ during the last session in this track, *Hyde Park: Home of the Chicago School of Religion and Science*, on Friday (8/18). This session will be a discussion of how Chicago's Hyde Park became a bellwether in science & religion, and has served as a critical hub for interdisciplinary discussions between scientists, religious thinkers, and philosophers for many decades.

A major highlight of the Science & Religion track will be a special event at the Adler Planetarium on Wednesday evening (8/16), when NASA scientist Dr. Jim Spann⁸ will give a presentation on *Searching for Life with a Time Machine* (hence the connection to Astrobiology!) This presentation will be followed by a response from multidisciplinary

¹ <https://parliamentofreligions.org/history/about/>

² <https://parliamentofreligions.org/2023-chicago/>

³ <https://parliamentofreligions.org/2023-chicago/langar-at-the-2023-parliament-of-the-worlds-religions/>

⁴ <https://www.iras.org/>

⁵ <https://scienceligiondialogue.org/resources/engaging-communities-through-zooniverse-summary/>

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<https://www.aaas.org/membership/member-spotlight/aaas-doser-program-makes-inroads-communities-faith-help-citizen>

⁷ <https://www.luthscitech.org/>

⁸ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/james-spann-25717811/>

scientist Dr. Michael Summers,⁹ leading into a discussion about this fascinating topic between Spann, Summers, and yours truly.

Finally, we'll have an exhibit booth (#608) throughout the week that will highlight the work of the *Center for Advanced Study in Religion and Science* (CASIRAS),¹⁰ IRAS, and our relationship with other organizations and the *Zygon Journal of Religion & Science*.¹¹ As a special bonus, our booth will be just around the corner from that of Berkeley's Graduate Theological Union (#509), which is associated with the *Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences*, where CLP signatory and University of Chicago alumnus Rev. Dr. Ted Peters¹² has, among other things, been doing some incredible work in the field of Astrotheology!¹³

Until next month,

Grace

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⁹ <https://science.gmu.edu/directory/michael-summers>

¹⁰ <https://www.casiras.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.zygonjournal.org/>

¹² <https://www.gtu.edu/faculty/ted-f-peters>

¹³ <https://www.ctns.org/publications/books/astrotheology-science-and-theology-meet-extraterrestrial-life>