

Chicagoland Pastors Call for Religious Freedom and Release of Detained South Korean Religious Leader

International assembly connects faith leaders in Chicago area with pastors and activists across six global locations; participants unanimously adopt resolution supporting religious freedom, due process and humane treatment



Hazel Crest, Illinois Sep 23, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - Chicagoland pastors joined religious leaders and activists from around the world Thursday in calling for the protection of religious freedom and the release of 95-year-old Shincheonji Church Chairman Lee Man-Hee, who has been detained in South Korea since June 2026.

The international Assembly of “Human Rights, Religious Freedom and Essence of Faith” brought together 15 Chicagoland pastors and activists at Hillcrest Christian Church, [3223 W. 175th Street](#) in Hazel Crest, with approximately 100 attendees and speakers participating from seven locations around the world.

Through live video streaming, the Hazel Crest gathering was connected with assemblies in New York City; South Korea; São Paulo, Brazil; Sri Lanka; Liberia; and New Delhi, India.

During the two-hour assembly, speakers called on religious leaders across denominations, nationalities and racial backgrounds to stand together in defense of justice, freedom and the right of individuals to

practice their faith.

The international gathering focused particular attention on the detention of [Chairman Lee](#), a peace advocate and Chairman of Shincheonji Church who has traveled around the world 32 times promoting peace and religious dialogue.

Minister Leslie Green of New York welcomed participants to the international assembly and said the gathering provided an opportunity for pastors from around the world to examine challenges facing Christianity and religious freedom.

“The World Pastors Joint Assembly is a gathering where pastors from around the world come together to reflect on the challenges facing Christianity in our time. We revisit the essence of our faith and explore the future of Christianity and the direction of reform,” Green said.

“At this assembly, we will take a special look at the issues of human rights and religious freedom, with particular attention to the current issues [concerning religion and human rights being raised in the Republic of Korea.](#)”

Green served for more than 30 years at Upper Room Baptist Church under the leadership of Bishop William G. Bennett and has represented International Chaplaincy at the United Nations as a licensed chaplain.

“We must raise our voices for truth and justice,” Green said. “Following the teachings of Jesus, putting freedom, peace, and justice into practice is the sacred mission entrusted to us through today's assembly.”

Green said the international gathering provides an opportunity to build greater understanding among religious leaders.

“I hope we can share the experiences and perspectives of pastors from different countries, build a shared understanding of human rights and religious freedom, and make this a meaningful occasion for solidarity that transcends borders and denominations,” Green said.

Reverend Mark Thompson, who participated in the assembly from the Bronx, New York, said religious leaders coming together across international borders sends a strong message in defense of religious rights and freedoms.

“Justice continually shapes how people, leaders, churches, and communities across the globe work together. Justice should be upheld and practiced by churches throughout the world,” Thompson said.

“Today, I am saddened as I think about 95-year-old Chairman Lee, who is currently incarcerated, and the concerns that have been raised regarding his treatment and the issues of religious freedom. From different parts of the world, many of us are looking at his situation and asking whether justice is being fairly applied.”

Thompson called on churches and religious leaders around the world to take constructive action in support of religious freedom.

“The real church in New York and Brazil and Africa, in India and countless other parts of the world should stand together on behalf of Chairman Lee and in defense of religious freedom,” Thompson said.

“Every person should have the right to practice their faith and study according to their beliefs while seeking God and pursuing true righteousness.”

“Religious freedom must apply even when a person's beliefs are different, or when the situation is taking place far beyond our own neighborhoods where we live,” Thompson added.

Pastor Lucilla Richards-Seaton of Power, Prayer and Praise International Ministries said she spoke out for religious freedom after learning about the detention of Shincheonji Chairman Lee.

“A few weeks ago, on August 13th, I personally learned about a pastor who had been jailed over allegations of violations of election law,” Richards-Seaton said. “However, when examining how the case had been handled and the history of this individual's treatment, it seems that the detention that was taking place, and is taking place, is because he spoke God's word boldly and truthfully.”

Richards-Seaton said the case should concern religious leaders regardless of denomination or nationality because the protection of religious freedom extends beyond any one church or religious organization.

“When I heard his testimony, it changed and touched my heart. It changed my mind. It helped me to see the signs of the times in which we are living today. God has called us as His people to look at the times in which we are living,” she said.

Several religious leaders addressed the assembly through live video from locations around the world under the banner “Human Rights, Religious Freedom and the Essence of Faith.”

International participants included Pastor Krishani Sandika Ferrera of Yeshuwa's Battle Army in Sri Lanka; Pastor Joelson Oliveira of Apostolic Ministry Church Rescuing Lives in Brazil; Fabrício Leonardo Vasconcelos of Cathedral of Apostolic Miracles (Catedral dos Milagres Apostólicos); Subhash Chandra Yadav of Assembly Builders Church; and Pastor Joe D. Kerkula of God Fellowship International Ministries in Liberia.

Following the presentations, attendees in Hazel Crest discussed issues involving religious freedom and unanimously approved a joint resolution calling on faith leaders to stand together across denominational lines.

Participants at the other international assembly locations also unanimously adopted the resolution.

The resolution states:

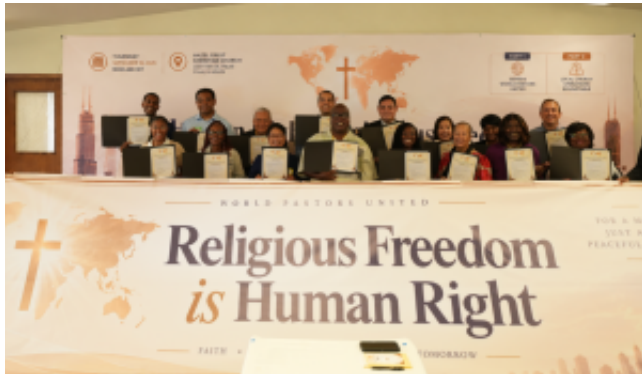
WHEREAS, Chicago's faith leaders, across all denominations, share a belief in human dignity and the right to worship freely; and

WHEREAS, the recent pretrial detention of a 95-year-old religious leader abroad has called our attention to the importance of due process and humane treatment for people of faith everywhere;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that we, the undersigned faith leaders of Chicago:

- Stand united, across denominational lines, in support of religious freedom as a right belonging to all people.
- Affirm our commitment to due process and humane treatment for any person of faith, anywhere.

- Pledge continued unity among our congregations, ready to speak with one voice on matters of conscience.



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