



ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PLANS OF THE SAN FRANCISCO INTERFAITH COUNCIL 2015 - 2016

History teaches us that many of the world's conflicts are rooted in religious strife. Here in San Francisco, the San Francisco Interfaith Council (SFIC) seeks to "*Celebrate our diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, bring people together to build understanding and serve our community,*" and thus, counter that historical trend.

We count as our constituents the 800 congregations in the City and County of San Francisco, their respective judicatories, sectarian educational and healthcare institutions, as well as the faith-based social service agencies that provide the social safety net for our most vulnerable residents.

Civic leaders and the public increasingly view the SFIC as the "go-to" organization for mobilizing the religious communities of our City. Congregations and faith-based agencies look to the SFIC for resources, referral and representation. Our relationships with key civic agencies and non-governmental organizations alike are strong, enabling us to enhance our core missions of responding to homelessness and disasters. Perhaps most importantly, by bringing the religious community together, the SFIC creates an effective, combined force for service and issues of public policy, allowing us to accomplish what no single congregation or organization can.

ONGOING PROGRAMS

Monthly Breakfast

On the second Thursday of each month the SFIC hosts an Interfaith Breakfast at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in San Francisco that brings together nearly 100 congregation and lay leaders to network, share a meal, and hear a speaker, a meditation, and a "faith journey." Speakers from a variety of City departments, civic agencies, NGOs and philanthropic programs discuss their important work, ask faith communities to help spread the word, and offer volunteer opportunities for congregants. An individual presents a meditation from his or her religious tradition and someone describes a personal "faith journey" from another faith perspective.

Navigation Center

The SFIC facilitated a gift of \$3 million to set up and operate the new Navigation Center at 1950 Mission Street, a pioneering approach to combating homelessness. The Center is unique among homeless shelters in the City in allowing homeless adults to maintain existing relationships. The Center accommodates couples, friends, even entire homeless encampments at once, permitting people to stay with their community, keep their pets, and bring along their belongings. This approach recognizes the important role that social and emotional connections play in recovery.

The Navigation Center provides comprehensive services. It provides beds, showers and meals at one location where staff are on hand 24/7 to assess the clients' needs for health care, substance abuse and mental health treatment; help them access benefits; and move them expeditiously into stable housing and rehabilitation programs, or reunite them with their families through the successful Homeward Bound program. One third of the \$3 million gift is for leasing Single Room Occupancy units around the City, where clients will move from the Navigation Center and continue to receive support services. The Navigation Center shelters up to 75 clients who generally stay three to ten days before moving to housing or residential treatment.

The SFIC coordinates a "Sunday Suppers" program at the Center, in which different congregations cook and serve dinners to the homeless clients each week.

A plethora of agencies contribute to the Center's operation. Episcopal Community Services is the lead on-site service provider, assisted by the City's Human Services Agency, Department of Public Health, Project Homeless Connect and others. The City's Human Services Agency takes the lead on SRO master leasing. Other key partners are the Mayor's Office, the Mayor's Office of Housing, Opportunity, Partnerships and Engagement (HOPE), the Planning Department, the Department of Building Inspection, the Department of Animal Care and Control, Recreation and Parks Department, and Adult Probation.

The Navigation Center is a pilot program designed to operate for 18 months or less. The City plans to develop affordable housing on the site, supporting Mayor Lee's goal of building or rehabilitating 30,000 homes over six years, with half for low and middle-income San Francisco residents.

San Francisco Interfaith Winter Shelter

For over 26 years, the SFIC has sponsored and coordinated an Interfaith Winter Shelter in cooperation with the City. This shelter provides a hot, nutritious dinner, breakfast and a safe, warm overnight rest for some 100 homeless men every night from the Sunday before Thanksgiving through February. The shelter depends on a coordinated effort among four host-site congregations, 40 meal-providing congregations, shelter staff provided by Episcopal Community Services and the San Francisco Night Ministry, and the City's Human Services Agency.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Observance and Interfaith Service

For six years, in what is becoming a San Francisco tradition, the SFIC has assumed primary responsibility for organizing the City's annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day observance. The SFIC coordinates the annual march over the Lefty O'Doul Bridge, which brings together "freedom riders" from the South Bay as well as those who gather at the Caltrain Terminal. This march to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial at Yerba Buena Gardens (YBG) pays tribute to the 1965 crossing made by Dr. King over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Once at YBG, the estimated 10,000 attendees participate in an outdoor Interfaith Service organized by the SFIC. Key religious and civic leaders address the crowd.

With a mini-grant from the FAITHS Program of The San Francisco Foundation, the SFIC will partner with the University of San Francisco to convene a half-day symposium as a follow-up and complement to the 2016 MLK Day Observance and Interfaith Service. At the symposium, scholars, activists and faith leaders will examine the historical role of faith communities in the Civil Rights Movement, assess the current state of the movement, with a particular focus on new voices at the table, and explore ways that faith communities can reclaim their prophetic voice as the Civil Rights movement looks to the future.

Biennial Disaster Preparedness Workshop for Congregations

On April 30, 2014, at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, the SFIC hosted the 5th Biennial Disaster Preparedness Workshop for Congregations. Past workshops have focused exclusively on the faith community's response to catastrophic disasters. Last year's theme, "*Congregations Responding to Everyday Disasters*," examined the role of the faith community in responding to the needs of those impacted by fires, floods and other regularly occurring crises. Our partners in this important event were the SF Department of Emergency Management, the SF Police and Fire Departments, the SF Human Services Agency, the American Red Cross Bay Area Chapter, SF CARD and The San Francisco Foundation.

San Francisco is one of a hundred "Resilient Cities" around the nation. As a follow up to the workshop, the SFIC was invited by San Francisco's Chief Resiliency Officer, Patrick Otellini, to join other stakeholders in developing a resiliency plan for San Francisco. With the participation of its disaster preparedness partners, the SFIC is working with Mr. Otellini and a graduate student from the University of San Francisco to spearhead a pilot program in the Mission neighborhood designed to engage congregations to enter into agreements with the City to operate as emergency shelter sites in the event of everyday and/or catastrophic disasters.

WinterFaith Shelter Walk

Each year the SFIC hosts a "walk against hunger" around Lake Merced. Proceeds from the walk are used to defray the cost of operating the Interfaith Winter Shelter. This year's WinterFaith Shelter Walk was held on September 20, 2015, and raised close to \$16,000 for the shelter. Picture perfect weather, 10 teams, 100 walkers and over 20 volunteers contributed to the success of the day!

Annual "Bike to Worship" Week

The SFIC has partnered with the SF Bicycle Coalition to promote "*Bike to Worship*," an opportunity that encourages congregants to pedal to their worship services. Employing its large communications network, the SFIC helped to spread the word, share the free "BIKE TO WORSHIP Toolkit," and enlist registrants. This year's "*Bike to Worship*" Week took place May 24 - May 31, 2015. It was an enormous success with 22 congregations and over 200 bicyclists participating. There was also an "Interfaith Ride!"

Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast

Our major event of the year is the SFIC Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast, attended by 400 people on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving Day. Each year we shine the spotlight on a significant contribution made by the faith community to the life of San Francisco. At the 18th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast on November 24, 2015 our theme was "*Faith and Sanctuary: There Are No Strangers*." We honored congregations who helped San Francisco become a Sanctuary City, recognized those who continue the tradition, and highlighted young people for whom the City's commitment has provided hope and safety.

Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Day Service

Each year, the SFIC sponsors San Francisco's only Interfaith Thanksgiving Day Service bringing together faith leaders and congregants from the City's rich diversity for prayer and thanksgiving. The 11th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Day Service was hosted by the Baha'i Community of San Francisco on Thursday, November 26, 2015. The offering collected at this service is used to offset the rising cost of the San Francisco Interfaith Winter Shelter.

Annual Interfaith World AIDS Day Service

For the past several years, the SFIC has collaborated with St. Mark's Lutheran Church in co-hosting the City's only Interfaith World AIDS Day Service. This year's observance took place on Sunday, November 29, 2015. The theme of the service, "*New Light, New Life*," was expressed by the inspirational music, prayers and reflections from many different faith traditions.

Annual Interfaith Memorial for the Homeless Dead

Collaborating with the SF Night Ministry, the SFIC co-hosted the "*Annual Interfaith Memorial for the Homeless Dead*." This moving observance will take place on the evening of December 21, 2015 outdoors on the steps of City Hall. In addition to prayers for the dead offered by religious and civic leaders of many faith traditions, a solemn reading of the names of the homeless who died in the past year was offered.

Annual Interfaith Calendar

Interfaith harmony begins with mutual understanding and respect among faiths. Each year the SFIC produces and distributes a calendar that lists religious holidays of the major world religions. The calendar is useful for scheduling by the San Francisco Unified School District, the schools of the SF Archdiocese, various agencies of City government and the Consular Corps. This invaluable resource has sensitized these agencies and organizations to important religious observances and helped them avoid conflicts when scheduling events.

Convener of Faith-Based Social Service Agencies ("CEO Roundtable")

In the midst of crisis emerges unique opportunity. Proof positive of this axiom is the coming together, sustained relationships, growth and recognition of the Faith-Based Social Service Agencies CEO Roundtable. For the past six years, the San Francisco Interfaith Council has regularly convened the leaders of the 12 major agencies, providing a forum for exchanging ideas and for addressing time-sensitive issues directly affecting agency clients. Six years ago, San Francisco was in a very different economic place. Deep cuts in the City's budget forced these agencies to cut staff and programs, and the CEO Roundtable convened for the first time to coordinate an effective response to the City. When the tech boom created prosperity for the City, these agency budgets were never fully restored. Again, the CEO Roundtable was able to speak, with a unified voice, reminding the City of the vital role the agencies play in protecting the City's most vulnerable residents. This important coalition also brought to the City's attention the effect of the boom's "affordability crisis" not only on agency clients but also on nonprofits and their staff who lost both office space and housing. Further, the CEO Roundtable, along with the City's religious leaders, have been critical in the SFIC's "essential housing" efforts and in promoting the upcoming \$310 million Housing Affordability General Obligation Bond ballot measure. None of this work could have been done by any single agency and today, the CEO Roundtable is an established stakeholder at key policy-making tables.

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Responding to Homelessness on Our Doorsteps

On April 30, 2015, partnering with the SF Office of Housing, Opportunity, Partnerships and Engagement (HOPE), the SFIC convened over 200 congregational leaders for a workshop entitled, "*Responding to Homelessness on Our Doorsteps*." Individuals affected by homelessness and poverty often seek respite in the doorways of religious houses of worship and institutions. Held at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption, this training provided attendees with resources and tools to meet the needs of these individuals as well as congregants who may be homeless or marginally housed.

Collaboration with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA)

As San Francisco braces itself for a significant increase in residential and corporate building, the impact new structures and increased inhabitants will have on our City's transit system is a growing concern. The San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) asked the SFIC to convene congregations in the Cathedral Hill neighborhood to pilot a survey of how congregants travel to worship. In addition, the SFMTA has asked the SFIC to work with congregations along the Dolores/Guerrero Streets corridor on the controversial issue of median parking. Recognizing the SFIC's role as advocate for its constituent congregations, the Director of the SFMTA has initiated a regular, quarterly "check-in" with the SFIC Executive Director regarding the impact of SFMTA policies on faith communities throughout the City.

Convener of the "SF Interfaith Essential Housing Task Force"

With the growing scarcity of housing and correlating skyrocketing rents, low paid/middle income workers are being driven out of San Francisco. Their exodus has placed additional stress on the capacity of those public and nonprofit employers to provide essential services upon which our City depends. By developing religious institutions' underutilized parcels for affordable rental housing for this sector of workers, San Francisco's faith communities hope to help stabilize the outmigration and ensure a sufficient residential workforce for essential services.

The San Francisco Interfaith Council convened the City's key religious leaders and the CEOs of the major faith-based social service agencies on September 11, 2014, for the purpose of developing a response to income inequality and the local housing affordability crisis. At that meeting, the group decided to form the "SF Interfaith Essential Housing Task Force." The Task Force agreed to work with the City to identify parcels of property owned by religious institutions that could be developed for rental housing, using private funding, for low paid workers who provide essential services to the City; in particular, employees who work in the fields of health care, social services, education and the arts and public safety. As an expression of support, SF Mayor Ed Lee directed key staff in the Mayor's Office of Housing and the SF Office of Economic and Workforce Development to advise the Task Force on its mapping efforts, site recommendations, and funding strategies and to make introductions to prospective developers. A number of parcels are presently under consideration for such development.

San Francisco Pathways to Citizenship

After the 2010 Census, San Francisco learned that approximately 100,000 people living in the City were legal permanent residents who were eligible for citizenship. In 2012, the City's Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs (OCEIA), and several foundations including The San Francisco Foundation, formed the San Francisco Pathways to Citizenship ("SF Pathways"). SF Pathways is a "one stop shop" designed to encourage citizenship-eligible residents to naturalize. Numerous eligible residents do not apply for citizenship because of costly applications, lack of legal services, communication barriers, and fear. SF Pathways responds to these obstacles by offering innovative, cost-efficient, large group processing workshops for residents.

A recent grant from The San Francisco Foundation enables the SFIC to bolster the work of SF Pathways through its longstanding relationships with faith communities. The SFIC can effectively educate congregations and their citizenship-eligible congregants about SF Pathways, and can readily obtain congregational volunteers to help at the workshops. Last year, the SFIC entered into a partnership with the OCEIA, used its broad network of contacts to promote SF Pathways, devoted an "SFIC Monthly Breakfast" to educating about the workshops, and secured an important workshop venue. More recently, the SFIC is working to identify workshop volunteers with particular skill sets, such as foreign language capability.

“San Francisco Medicine”: Journal of the San Francisco Medical Society

The Journal of the San Francisco Medical Society devoted its April 2015 issue to the theme “*End-of-Life Care: Advances and Controversies*.” Recognizing the spiritual challenges and pastoral care needs of end-of-life patients and their families, the Medical Society engaged the San Francisco Interfaith Council to solicit religious perspectives on death and dying from a diverse cross section of faiths. In addition to a brief introduction by the SFIC's Executive Director, contributions came from pastoral care experts from the Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Episcopalian and Hindu traditions. Link to article: <http://goo.gl/wY2zNV>

Interfaith Concert

Music and song are central to many faith traditions, and help us share our spirituality and hope for peace. As part of our 25th Anniversary Celebration, the SFIC sponsored an interfaith concert at the historic First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco on November 9, 2014. Performers included the Unitarian Universalist choir, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a Buddhist singer, St. Dominic's Schola Cantorum, Taneen Sufi Music Ensemble, Kol Emanu-El choir with Cantor Roslyn Barak, and the Providence Baptist Church choir.

Concluding Thoughts

Because of the important stakeholder role the SFIC plays in these many arenas, the SFIC has been invited to take a place at many tables. SFIC Executive Director Michael Pappas currently brings the SFIC's voice and presence to those tables through his membership on the SF Human Rights Commission, the SF Disaster Council, American Red Cross Bay Area Chapter Board of Directors and The San Francisco Foundation FAITHS Program Advisory Board.

This narrative represents only a part of our work. We have been able to do all this with just two full-time staff persons (our Executive Director, Michael Pappas and Program/Administrative Associate, Cynthia Zamboukos), a vibrant Board of Directors, the tireless volunteer efforts of our Past Chair, Rita R. Semel, and other dedicated volunteers.

The funding provided by congregations, judicatories, agencies, individuals and foundations has made these important achievements possible.