



15th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast

Hotel Kabuki

Tuesday, November 20, 2012

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

Good morning and welcome to the 15th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving prayer Breakfast. My name is Michael Pappas and I'm privileged to serve as the Executive Director of the San Francisco Interfaith Council. For almost a quarter of a century the San Francisco Interfaith Council has and continues to celebrate our diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, bring people together to build understanding and serve our City. With a constituency of over 800 congregations, their respective judicatories and the faith-based social service agencies that provide the safety net for San Francisco's most vulnerable citizens, the SFIC has become that portal through which public officials and non-governmental organizations can speak to and work with our City's collective interfaith community.

The line of homeless men I witnessed on Sunday afternoon in front of St. Mark's Lutheran Church, waiting for a warm meal and safe place to sleep at the Interfaith Winter Shelter, was a stark reminder of the genesis of our Council, a response to the City's homeless crisis. The Interfaith Winter Shelter, a collaboration of the SFIC, Episcopal Community Services, the City's Human Services Agency, four host site congregations, 40 meal providing congregations and the San Francisco Night Ministry is just one of the programs sponsored by the SFIC. The Council undertakes this essential program and so many others. Be it our work with our partners in disaster preparedness to energize the faith community to make available vital facilities and volunteers in the event of a crisis, to answering the call of City Hall and becoming engaged in the critical matters of violence in our City, hate crimes, human and civil rights issues and aiding in the effort to protect those who have become the victims of predatory lenders, the SFIC has always found itself there, on the front line.

Today's gathering of so many faith and lay leaders, representing the great diversity of our City, is a celebration of both the important work of the SFIC as well as the best of San Francisco values!

Celebrations are occasions to pause and give thanks. In this season of Thanksgiving, we at the SFIC have much for which to give thanks. We are blessed with

an incredibly talented and dynamic Board of Directors under the leadership of our iconic Chair, Rita Semel. Rita, Members of the Board please rise for a deserved round of applause. We also give thanks to the congregations, foundations, judicatories, faith-based social service agencies and individuals who recognize our important work and respond with their financial gifts. Without their generous support we would be hard-pressed to offer all that we do. We invite you to join us in our work by taking home today's program, reading about our accomplishments and goals and simply making a gift by way of the contribution envelope included in your program. Every gift is appreciated. We'd also like to extend a heartfelt word of thanks to the Committee that worked so hard to organize this Breakfast. In thanking our Chairs, Betsy Dodd and Mary Zamboukos, we extend thanks to the entire Committee.

The recent horrific storms that devastated families and neighbors on the East Coast were a stark reminder of the fragility of our ecosystem and a clarion call to be concerned about and take action on the real issue of Climate Change. How providential it is that the overarching theme of this morning's Prayer Breakfast is shining a spotlight on the interfaith contribution to environmental stewardship. No greater leadership in this arena can be found than the vast and visionary work being undertaken by Interfaith Power & Light under the inspired direction of its President and Founder, The Rev. Canon Sally Bingham.

The Regeneration project of Interfaith Power & Light is an interfaith ministry devoted to deepening the connection between ecology and faith. Its goal is to help people of faith recognize and fulfill their responsibility for the stewardship of creation. They do this through educational programs for clergy and congregations that achieve tangible environmental results and impact public policy. Headquartered here in San Francisco, Interfaith Power & Light works to help congregations throughout the United States become ecologically efficient and responsible. So many of the congregations being honored today for their environmental initiatives are the beneficiaries of Interfaith Power & Light's discerning counsel and guidance.

As an organic tribute to the ministry of Interfaith Power & Light, the San Francisco Interfaith Council has directed the Friends of the Urban Forest to plant a tree in our City in IPL's honor. At this time, we would ask the Founder and President, The Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, to come forward to accept this award.