



17th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast

Hotel Kabuki

Tuesday, November 25, 2014

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

Good morning everybody and welcome! My name is Michael Pappas and for the past seven years I have had the privilege of serving as the Executive Director of the San Francisco Interfaith Council.

Before I say another word, can I ask you to put your hands together and through your applause say a special thank you to our friends at the Hotel Kabuki, Rick, Juan and the incredible wait staff of local 2!!!

As human beings, we celebrate anniversaries as milestones in our relationships with one another; milestones of trust, milestones of joys, milestones of sacrifices and milestones of achievements! They remind us of what is possible and give us hope as we look to the future.

25 years of cultivating interfaith harmony is certainly an incredible milestone and one worthy of celebration...and just what has the San Francisco Interfaith Council been doing for 25 years? Nothing less than *“Celebrating our diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, bringing people together to build understanding and serving our community.”*

More significantly we've been defying logic! As so many of the world's conflicts are rooted in religious strife, we here in San Francisco seek to do locally what is seemingly impossible to do on the global stage. We are all about the business of peace building and fostering good, healthy and strong relationships among faiths.

With our constituency of over 800 congregations, their respective judicatories, religiously founded educational and healthcare institutions, as well as the faith-based social service agencies that provide the social safety net for our most vulnerable residents, the San Francisco Interfaith Council has emerged as that "go-to" organization that has proven its ability to mobilize the religious communities of our City, provide resources, referral and representation and far exceed the meaningful contributions we initially made and continue to make in our core missions of responding to homelessness and disasters.

Most importantly, we bring the religious community together to address areas of need and observance in ways no individual religious tradition can do on its own.

With a quarter of a century of cultivated and trusted relationships the Council has earned the ear and respect of those in decision-making authority and has been engaged as a significant stakeholder as important social policies are deliberated and incubated.

All of this we've accomplished with a bare bones budget, humble office space, only two full-time staff, an indefatigable 93 year-old founder, an incredibly supportive and hard-working Board of Directors and generous contributors, many of whom surround these tables, at this sacred, albeit very early hour.

By virtue of your presence here this morning, we count each and every one of you as partners in our important work and invite you to join us at our monthly breakfasts, seasonal events and to add your names to our 3,600 e-subscribers, thus allowing us to keep you apprised of how you can more meaningfully benefit from and contribute to edifying our City's rich interfaith fabric.

It is our sincere hope that each of you will be inspired and spiritually moved by what you experience in this morning's gathering and consider yourselves part of our interfaith family. In that spirit, the San Francisco Interfaith Council humbly asks for your collective prayers, from your many and rich traditions, as we embark on our next 25 years of service. Embracing the theme of this anniversary breakfast that "Together we can do more," we truly believe that the best is yet to come! (PAUSE)

In sacred text we read, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." I can think of no more powerful a verse to introduce this morning's honored guest and key-note speaker.

... An incredibly successful and visionary entrepreneur, George Marcus along with his amazing wife Judy, have supported innumerable charitable causes and interfaith efforts... and through their philanthropic giving have revealed exactly where their hearts are.

For the past seven years Rita Semel and I have made, what has become an annual ritual visit, to report to George on the status of his investment in the SFIC. Those visits consistently evolve into philosophical discussions on the power and possibilities of religion to be a positive and formidable force to make the world a better place.

On top of these visits are the countless times, at the SFIC's request, that George and Judy have extended their gracious hospitality and hosted religious leaders for a home cooked Greek meal at their acclaimed Kokkari Estiatorio in the Financial District. The "just dessert" at the last course of each of those intimate banquets has been a "symposium" like exchange giving rise to some fascinating and oftentimes surprising topics, always bringing out the best in their guests. It's at these precious moments, George, that we see you sparkle and at your best.

George and Judy in healthy economic times, as well as those challenging seasons, you have consistently, through your inspired support of our work, shown the joy of your heartfelt giving and your hope for greater harmony among faiths. Yours is an example to be emulated. As our nation prepares to celebrate Thanksgiving and our Council its 25th anniversary, we want to say thank you to you both and invite George, to the pulpit to address this congregation!