



19th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast

Hotel Kabuki

Tuesday, November 22, 2016

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

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

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

On December 14th 1967, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. addressed a crowd staging a protest outside of the Santa Rita Prison. In that legendary speech he proclaimed, "There can be no justice without peace and there can be no peace without Justice!" Those prophetic words came, not from a politician, but from a pastor, not from a government official, but from a charismatic and courageous faith leader. Dr. King, in every speech, in every sermon, reminded his listeners that his

courage to speak truth to power was rooted, not in himself, but inspired by his God and that timeless tradition of fearless people of faith who have led every civil rights and social justice movement in history. Gathered here, in this morning's assembly, are civic officials and faith leaders. To our civic leaders let me say this... In the wake of over a year and a half of contentious national campaigning, with its unprecedented, painful and divisive rhetoric, and in these post-election days, when basic human and civil rights have never been more threatened and at risk, we the leaders in San Francisco's communities of faith, intend and pledge to exert our moral authority, reclaim our prophetic voice and fearlessly stand at the forefront of the movement to protect, advocate for and advance human rights, social justice and equality for all!

Many months back, when we selected this year's breakfast theme of social justice, I must confess, I never imagined the profound challenge before us, nor the time-sensitive call for unity, to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable residents of our City and nation. Thankfully, this Council has a rich history and successful track record of bringing people of a spectrum faiths together, to celebrate our diversity, to build understanding and to serve our community. On behalf of our rich 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, we pledge to you this morning, that we will neither shrink from, nor abdicate the critical role we are being called to play at this fragile time in our nation's history.

Proof of our capacity to fulfill this pledge can be seen in the accomplishments noted in your program book starting on page 24. In particular, allow me to briefly highlight just three:

When called upon, in 1988, by the City to step forward, open our doors, shelter and feed the homeless we did so. What we thought to be just a one-year emergency shelter, this past Sunday commenced its 28th year of providing safe and welcoming space, delicious meals and needed refuge for between 60 and 100 homeless men during the most inclement months of the year. The success and longevity of this program would not be possible without some important partnerships, namely, the staffing and oversight of Episcopal Community Services, our four shelter sites, St. Boniface Church, St. Mark's Lutheran Church, The Cathedral of St. Mary the Assumption and the First Unitarian Universalist Society of SF, the 40 congregations that prepare and serve meals, adjunct staffing provided by the Night Ministry, funding from the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing and the tireless scheduling efforts and follow up of the SFIC's own Cynthia

Zamboukos. In 2011 Rev. Cecil Williams of Glide Church passed the baton of leadership for the Annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Celebration to the San Francisco Interfaith Council and the Northern California Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Community Foundation. Since then, with support from The San Francisco Foundation and the Tabernacle Community Development Corporation, our Council has coordinated the annual march and interfaith service. Realizing that Dr. King's dream has yet to be fully realized and in this climate of heightened racial tensions, we knew that there was much more work to be done. Earlier this year, the SFIC convened a crucial meeting of over 150 faith leaders at Calvary Presbyterian Church, to meet with Interim Chief of Police Toney Chaplin to discuss the impact of new policies of engagement that have saved precious human life and began a discussion of how San Francisco's interfaith community could be of support in fostering greater harmony, where community relationships are strained. Earlier this month the SFIC, in collaboration with the University of San Francisco's Office of Diversity, The San Francisco Foundation and The SF Human Rights Commission, hosted a full day of implicit bias training for congregation leaders, led by the same trainer who navigated SFPD law enforcement officers and City Department heads through the same training. The chief intent in offering this training was to challenge the consciences of and prepare faith leaders to reclaim their prophetic voice and take

action in today's civil rights movement. I am pleased to report that the incredible success of that training has led to plans to replicate the program at key anchor congregations throughout San Francisco.

And finally, as communities of faith, we are sitting on some of the most valuable, yet underutilized, real estate in the City. Realizing our moral and theological imperative to be part of the City's response to its affordable housing challenges, a movement began just two years ago, led by some of the most prominent faith leaders in our City, which has come to be known as the Interfaith Essential Housing Task Force. This Task Force has tirelessly sought to identify properties in its possession to be developed for rental housing for low paid workers that provide essential services in our City. I am pleased to report that the efforts of this task force, in conjunction with guidance from the Mayor's Office of Housing, the invaluable counsel of Dutra, Cerro and Graden Consultants, and the Boldt Corporation, have accelerated the process and, forgive the pun, led to concrete developments that provide hope for struggling nurses, teachers, social workers and so many who otherwise would not be able to afford to live in San Francisco.

All of this, along with our myriad of ongoing and other special programs, we've accomplished with a budget of just \$240,000, humble office space, only two full-time staff, an indefatigable 95 year-old founder, an incredibly supportive and

hard-working Board of Directors and generous contributors, many of whom surround these tables.

In these times of great uncertainty and unwelcome change, the demands upon the San Francisco Interfaith Council to intensify its critical convening, communicating and advocacy roles are imminent. Our success is wholly dependent upon our relationships and support from each and every one of you. By virtue of your presence here this morning, consider yourselves partners in our important work and join us at our monthly breakfasts, seasonal events and add your names to our 4,500 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 at this morning's gathering and consider yourselves part of our interfaith family. In that spirit, the San Francisco Interfaith Council humbly asks for your continued collective prayers, from your many and rich traditions, for the advancement our mission and the realization of social justice in our City and nation.

THANK YOU!