



## **20<sup>th</sup> Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast**

Hotel Kabuki

Tuesday, November 21, 2017

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

Good morning and welcome! My name is Michael Pappas and for the past decade 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, Damian, Juan and the incredible wait staff of local 2!!!

A year ago this month, life for our nation changed dramatically. A year ago at this breakfast we found ourselves gathered as community, at a time when basic human and civil rights were never more threatened and at risk. We were challenged to face profound new realities never imagined and the time-sensitive call for unity, to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable residents of our City and nation.

Feeling the weight of history, we as the San Francisco Interfaith Council, along with 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, boldly pledged that we would neither shrink from, nor abdicate the critical role we were being called upon, 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!

To do less would betray this Council's mission of bringing people of a spectrum faiths together, to celebrate our diversity, to build understanding and to serve our community.

This morning, I stand before you, with a clear conscience, to profess that we have been faithful to our pledge. Be it arranging for and accompanying our Mayor, just a week after the election, to attend Friday afternoon prayers at the Islamic Society's Mosque, where he brought assurance and his commitment to over 800 Muslim worshippers that San Francisco is and always will be a Sanctuary City, where all of its residents will be protected from discrimination; to the issuance of numerous statements condemning acts of anti-Semitism spawned by this unparalleled present climate of religious tension and animosity. From rising to the

call to create an Immigration Defense Fund, which we pray will realize its intended mission to provide key supplemental funding for legal defense, continued “know your rights” workshops and trainings and aid for vulnerable DACA students, to playing a key role in our City’s response to those who recently threatened to bring hatred, division and violence veiled in the guise of prayer, unity and peace to San Francisco’s sacred shores. These things we, and our constituent communities of faith did, and so much more.

While standing vigilantly and unified in the face of injustice and discrimination, we did not shy away from our commitment to the numerous ongoing and other important undertakings and programs that are the hallmarks of the San Francisco Interfaith Council. For a true appreciation of the vast work of an organization that has just two full time employees, myself and the tireless Cynthia Zamboukos, an indefatigable founder in the person of Rita Semel, an amazing Chair Kaushik Roy, and devoted working Board of Directors, generous funders and contributors and a budget of just \$240,000, I would ask that you turn your attention to page 20 in your program booklets.

Allow me, however, to shine a light on just two particular efforts that deserve your recognition...

Firstly, 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 would be just a one-year emergency shelter, this past Sunday commenced its 29<sup>th</sup> 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. Marks Lutheran Church, The Cathedral of St. Mary the Assumption and the First Unitarian Universalist Society of SF, the 50 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.

Secondly, as communities of faith, we realize that we are sitting on some of the most valuable, yet underutilized, real estate in the City. We both understand and appreciate our moral and theological imperative to be part of the City's response to its affordable housing challenges, and helped to foster a movement that began three 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. It is my hope and prayer to stand before you this time next year to report that the efforts of this task force, in conjunction with guidance from our highly skilled team of consultants, will have given birth to an independent 501c3 nonprofit charged with amassing and reviewing a significant portfolio of properties ripe for development, and of equal importance to serve as the home of a newly created Interfaith Essential Housing Trust Fund to provide key, time-sensitive financing that will enable development projects to move from the drawing board to shovels in the ground.

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 of our mission and the realization of social justice in our City and nation.

THANK YOU!

And now it gives me great pleasure to welcome to the stage my colleague, mentor and dearest friend the San Francisco Interfaith Council's Founder, Past Chair and Matriarch of Interfaith Work in our City the indefatigable Rita Semel, who will introduce this year's esteemed honoree!