



Introduction of “Sanctuary: A Short History” Video

At 18th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast
Tuesday, November 24, 2015

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

Building upon the prophetic wisdom of the ancient Jewish religious leader Hillel the Elder, President John F. Kennedy once famously proclaimed, “If not us, who? If not now, when?” These words have haunted people of faith and conscience for generations and inspired religious leaders to pioneer every major civil and human rights movement in history.

Each year, this breakfast seeks to shine a light on a significant contribution made by faith leaders and institutions that make this City the distinct and special place we call home. This morning we lift up those courageous religious leaders, congregations and institutions that had the resolute courage to stand strong in the face of adversity, open their doors, feed and welcome those with nothing but the clothes on their backs who fled violent political persecution in El Salvador and Guatamala.

Since the inception of the Sanctuary movement, communities of faith have had a strong and consistent record of caring and advocating for our City's vulnerable immigrant residents. This commitment is rooted in our respective theologies' sacred texts and call to put into practice that which we profess.

Harboring and giving sanctuary to those fleeing political persecution, those with no other recourse, those who otherwise would unjustly suffer torture and death, is not a new phenomenon for religious institutions...it dates back to biblical times, continued through the middle ages and unashamedly is foundational to our belief system to this present day. Giving sanctuary is the compassionate response, the human response, it is in the very DNA of people of faith! It is standing bold in the face of those who would attempt to command the airwaves, propagate fear and exploit exceptional instances to promote injustice. I am blessed to have my children Julia and Paul here with us today. If I could teach them one just lesson at this moment, it would be that, giving sanctuary is doing the human thing, the just thing, the right thing.

This morning's recognition of those leaders in the Sanctuary movement is not merely a snapshot of a moment in time, it is an issue that stares us directly in the face today.

Little did we know when we selected the theme, that each and every one of us would have to wrestle with its inherent haunting ethical and political implications, almost daily. Every image of refugees desperately fleeing political persecution, washing ashore or being rescued in Europe, is a haunting moral challenge to the conscience of every human being that has of our obligation to do for those who have not. This challenge is amplified for those who claim to be people of faith.

In just a moment, you will see and hear just a little over four minutes of testimony, of over five hours of footage taken, from those who selflessly and courageously stepped up, followed their consciences and pioneered the Sanctuary City movement then, and those who are fighting tirelessly for the cause today. Listen to their words. Read the history beginning on page ten in your programs books. Remember the struggles of those in your own families, who at one time immigrated to this land with hopes and aspirations. As good people of faith and convicted civic leaders, stand strong and recommit yourselves to protect this ordinance and the protections it provides for who can't protect themselves.

We would be remiss if we did not say a special thank you to all who appeared in this segment and to the very talented and inspired producer Theo Rigby and his team. In reality, thanks to them, the San Francisco Interfaith Council is now the

repository of a wealth of never-before-recorded precious archival footage on this timely subject. It is our vision, perhaps with the support of some of you here today, to produce a more expansive and well-deserved full-length documentary on the Sanctuary movement.

Senator Leno, as he does each year, graciously offered to recognize those we would honor today, by mentioning their names on the floor of the California State Senate and bringing here today a proclamation witnessing that moment. We declined that gracious invitation, not out of a lack of appreciation, but because the names of those who deserve recognition are too vast to include in a proclamation, they include so many of you here today. In that spirit, before viewing the film, may we ask those who were part of the sanctuary movement then, and those actively working for the advancement of immigrant rights today to kindly stand and be recognized.

Without further ado, I would direct your eyes to the two screens in front of us and ask for your undivided attention as we view together this important work.