Accomplishments and Plans

of the San Francisco Interfaith Council

2019-2020

CONVENING, COMMUNICATING, AND ADVOCACY

The San Francisco Interfaith Council’s work centers on civil rights, homelessness, housing affordability, and disaster preparedness. The SFIC convenes and amplifies the voice of our city’s faith-based community on these important issues.

OUR MISSION

History teaches us that many of the world’s conflicts are rooted in religious strife. Founded in 1988, the San Francisco Interfaith Council (SFIC) seeks to counter this historical trend by “Celebrating our diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, bringing people together to build understanding and serving our community.”

WHO WE SERVE

We count as our constituents the 800 congregations in the City of San Francisco, their respective judicatories, sectarian educational and healthcare institutions, and the faith-based social service agencies that provide the social safety net for our most vulnerable residents.

OUR WORK

During this time of social change in San Francisco, civic leaders and the public view the SFIC as the “go-to” organization for mobilizing our City’s religious communities. Congregations and faith-based agencies turn to us for resources, referral and representation. Our robust relationships and communications network of over 4,500 e-subscribers allow the SFIC to bring together and mobilize San Francisco’s faith-based community to create an effective, combined force for service and issues of public policy, so that we may accomplish together what no single congregation can alone.
ONGOING PROGRAMS

Monthly Breakfast

For over 16 years the SFIC has hosted a free public interfaith breakfast on the second Thursday of each month at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church in San Francisco where 100 congregational and lay leaders network and share a meal. Speakers from a variety of City departments, civic agencies, NGOs and philanthropic programs discuss their important work, ask faith communities to help spread the word, and offer volunteer opportunities for congregants. An individual gives a “meditation” from his or her religious tradition, and another presents a personal “faith journey.” To appreciate the substantive presentations made we invite you to visit: http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/monthly-breakfasts

Aging & Adult Services

• How Different Faith Traditions View Death

On Thursday, April 4, 2019 at the San Francisco Public Library, SFIC Executive Director Michael Pappas moderated a panel of representatives from local religious groups to talk about how faith and beliefs can impact patients’ end of life decisions. This well-attended convening addressed the ways in which different religions comfort those who are in pain and dying, and what kind of spiritual guidance they provide to patients at the end of their lives.
Link to email blast: https://conta.cc/2UeOHJp.
Link to video of panel discussion: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_oEuiF9MWI

• SF Department of Disability and Aging Services and Faith Communities Round Table

The SF Department of Disability and Aging Services (DAS) and Faith Communities Round Table held their inaugural meeting on Friday, August 23, 2019 at Jewish Family & Children’s Services. Communities of faith are hubs where older adults feel safe, valued and are able to overcome social isolation. In October 2017, the San Francisco Interfaith Council (SFIC) collaborated with DAS in hosting a highly successful convening attended by over 200 congregation leaders to promote information exchange and connection between service providers and faith leaders. In 2018, the SFIC/DAS organizing committee worked with a CORO Fellow to survey congregation leaders regarding supportive services for older community members. As a follow up to these activities, the decision was made to convene a cohort of those in communities of faith who are responsible for and lead programs that minister to older adults and people with disabilities in order to discuss strategies and develop an actionable plan to promote deeper coordination across the faith and service networks.

Disaster Preparedness

• Fleet Week 2019

On the occasion of the 244th anniversary of the United States Navy on Sunday, October 13, 2019, the San Francisco Interfaith Council, in collaboration with the Interfaith Center at the Presidio, the Navy League of the United States and the Fleet Week Host Committee offered an “Interfaith Blessing of the Fleet Service” at the Presidio Chapel. In addition to US Navy, US Marine Corps and US Coast Guard officers and enlisted personnel, a large contingent from the Royal Australian Navy was also in attendance as were the Consul Generals of Japan, Indonesia and Hungary, and a representative of the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission. Visiting chaplains participated in the service at this former military chapel.
Link to email blast: https://conta.cc/2VwFAkx
“Security in Houses of Worship and Faith-Based Organizations” Workshop

The San Francisco Interfaith Council, in collaboration with the Walter & Elise Haas Fund and the Jewish Community Relations Council, presented “Security in Houses of Worship and Faith-Based Organizations” workshop on Monday, September 9, 2019 at the Cathedral of St. Mary of the Assumption. In light of recent terrorist attacks on houses of worship around the globe and in our nation, the SFIC and its collaborating partners provided necessary resources at the workshop designed to support and equip religious institutions in addressing this critical and timely need. These resources are available at: https://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/security-houses-worship-resources
Link to email blast: https://conta.cc/32ldxqB

San Francisco Interfaith Winter Shelter

Entering our 31st year, the SFIC has sponsored and coordinated an Interfaith Winter Shelter for the homeless. This shelter provides a hot, nutritious dinner, breakfast and a safe, warm overnight rest for some 100 homeless men every night from the Sunday before Thanksgiving through the end of February. The SFIC coordinates four host-site congregations, 50 meal-providing congregations, shelter staff from Episcopal Community Services and the San Francisco Night Ministry, with input from the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing.

At the request of the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing the Interfaith Winter Shelter will remain open through the end of March 2020. Extending the shelter is made possible, in large part, thanks to our partners at Episcopal Community Services and congregations who volunteer to prepare and serve meals. For additional information about the Interfaith Winter Shelter please visit: https://goo.gl/o3zVdM and https://sites.google.com/site/shelterworkingsite/

The SFIC has created a page on their website with links to resources for the homeless. Please visit: http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/homeless-resources

Winter Faith Shelter Walk

Each year the SFIC hosts a “walk against hunger” around Lake Merced. Proceeds from the walk are used to defray the cost of operating the Interfaith Winter Shelter. The 2019 Walk occurred on Sunday, April 7, 2019 around Lake Merced with picture perfect weather and over 100 participants. Sponsorships and pledges raised close to $17,000 for the shelter. This year’s walk scheduled for Sunday, March 29, 2019 around Lake Merced has been postponed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. For additional information please visit: http://winterfaithshelterwalk.dojiggy.com

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Observance and Interfaith Service

For 10 years the SFIC has organized the City’s annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day observance, including a popular march and interfaith service. The march proceeds from the Caltrain terminal over the Lefty O’Doul Bridge to Yerba Buena Gardens (YBG), bringing together “freedom riders” from the South Bay and others from the wider Bay Area. This march pays tribute to the 1965 crossing made by Dr. King over the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama. Once at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial at YBG, a large crowd participates in the outdoor interfaith service organized by the SFIC to celebrate Dr. King’s legacy. Key religious and civic leaders address the attendees. The theme highlighted at this year’s Interfaith Prayer Service was “The Time for Justice.” Program may be viewed at: http://bit.ly/2tE6EVA

The Vigil: Interfaith Annual Homeless Persons Memorial

Every December, collaborating with the SF Night Ministry, the SFIC hosts the “The Vigil: Interfaith Annual Homeless Persons Memorial.” Religious leaders of different faiths offer prayers for the homeless who have died during the past year, and their names are read. Last year’s memorial service took place on Thursday evening, December 19, 2019 at UN Plaza.
Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Day Service

Each year, the SFIC sponsors San Francisco’s only Interfaith Thanksgiving Day Service which brings together people of diverse faiths for prayer and thanksgiving. The 15th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Day Service on Thursday, November 28, 2019 was held at the Presidio Chapel. The offering collected at this service is used to offset the costs of the Interfaith Winter Shelter. Program may be viewed at: http://bit.ly/2Z2OYOB

Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast

Our major event of the year is the SFIC Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast, attended by 400 people on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Each year we shine the spotlight on a significant contribution made by the faith community to San Francisco. Last year’s 22nd Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast on Tuesday, November 26, 2019 celebrated the San Francisco Interfaith Council’s 30 years of interfaith collaboration in San Francisco. Program timeline may be viewed at: http://bit.ly/38X3mg7. Program booklet may be viewed at: http://bit.ly/2EvGE0z.

Convener of Faith-Based Social Service Agencies (“CEO Roundtable”)

For the past ten years, the SFIC has regularly convened the leaders of the 21 major faith-based agencies to provide a forum to address issues of common concern. The SFIC promotes the agencies’ collective impact and advocates on their behalf to increase the visibility of the economic challenges faced by non-profits and their clients. Since 2009 the CEO Roundtable has responded with a significant unified voice to issues ranging from dramatic budget cuts and their impact on programs and staff, to San Francisco’s affordability crisis that prompted the displacement of numerous constituent agencies. Currently, focus is being placed on the attraction and retention of staff in light of shrinking availability and soaring housing costs. As well, the Roundtable is developing a strategic response to the significant shift in federal policy priorities and the threat of funding cuts. None of this work could be accomplished by any single agency. Its continued impact has established the CEO Roundtable as a major stakeholder at policy-making tables. For a list of the faith-based agencies please visit: http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/social-service-agencies

Crisis Response Communications

It has been the ongoing practice of the SFIC to issue statements, either on behalf of the SFIC Board of Directors or in collaboration with key faith leaders, on occasions when extremists act violently in the name of religion. In chronological order from the most current, the SFIC has issued the following statements. Access to the complete texts is available by visiting: http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/social-justice-statements

• San Francisco Bay Area Religious Leaders Condemn the Killing of George Floyd and Structural Racism (6/2/2020)
• SF Bay Area Faith Leaders Stand in Solidarity in Condemnation of Horrific Terrorist Attacks on Two New Zealand Mosques (3/15/2019)
• SFIC Extends Invitation to Participate in Vigils Against Hate (10/27/2018)
• We Stand With You! SF Bay Area Religious Leaders Stand in Support of Survivors of Sexual Assault (10/5/2018)
• SFIC Proud Co-Signer of Know Your Neighbor Multifaith Encounters Coalition Statement on Today's Supreme Court Decision on Muslim Ban (6/26/2018)
• SFIC Stands with our Partner, the Brady Center, to Respond to Las Vegas Shootings (10/4/2017)
• Communities of Faith Respond to DACA Decision (9/11/2017)
• SF Faith Leaders Stand United Against Hate in Charlottesville and Our Backyard (8/15/2017)
• Bay Area Muslims Condemn Attacks on Coptic Christians SF Chronicle Op Ed (4/17/2017)
• SF Religious Leaders Denounce Massacre of Coptic Christians (4/11/2017)
• A Message from SFIC Founder and Former Chair Rita R. Semel (2/27/2017)
• SFIC Joins Interfaith Partners Nationwide in Support of Our Muslim Neighbors (1/27/2017)
• SFIC Denounces Bomb Threats at Bay Area Jewish Schools (1/19/2017)
• SF Bay Area Faith Leaders Denounce Incidents of Hate Targeting Religion (12/1/2016)
• SFIC Statement of Support for Pacifica Institute (10/13/2016)
• All Lives Are Precious and Irreplaceable (7/8/2016)
• SF Communities of Faith Mourn Victims of Istanbul Terrorist Attack (6/30/2016)
• Communities of Faith Issue Statements in the Aftermath of the 6/12/2016 Orlando Massacre (6/22/2016)
• SF Communities of Faith Share in Grief of Orlando Massacre (6/13/2016)
• SF Faith Leaders Denounce Anti-Muslim Hate Speech (12/11/2015)
• Church Desecration Denounced by Coalition of SF Faith Groups (9/2/2015)
• SF Faith Leaders Respond to Racist Acts of Violence and Destruction (7/2/2015)
• SFIC Issues Social Justice Statement (3/12/2015)
• SFIC Condemns Vicious Anti-Muslim Bus Ads (10/16/2014)
• SFIC and Religious Leaders Speak Out Against ISIS Religious Persecution (9/17/2014)

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks at the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and anti-semitic killings in Paris, the SFIC, Jewish Community Relations Council, and Islamic Networks Group (ING) sent an interfaith delegation to the Consul General of France in San Francisco, to express concern and offer support from San Francisco’s diverse faith communities.

Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, the SFIC leadership participated in a moving interfaith service for peace at Calvary Presbyterian Church.

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS**

*Interfaith Prayer Service for Mayor London N. Breed*


*9/11 Day of Service*

The SFIC was an integral partner for the 9/11 Day of Service and Remembrance’s second Bay Area event on September 11, 2019. This nationwide effort to turn 9/11 from a day of tragedy to a day of service, unity and peace hosted like efforts in New York City, Los Angeles, Phoenix and San Francisco. Collectively, over 8,000 volunteers came together to pack 1.6 million plus non-perishable meals for distribution by local food banks. Here in San Francisco over 1,000 Bay Area volunteers packed an estimated 300,000 of those meals. The SFIC was instrumental in making introductions to the SF-Marin Food Bank, the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission, sf.citi as well as to key civic officials and members of the media. Additionally, the SFIC extended invitations to faith leaders across the religious spectrum who commenced each meal pack shift with poignant blessings. Please visit: [https://conta.cc/32gJUqr](https://conta.cc/32gJUqr)

*Annual San Francisco Ramadan Interfaith Iftar Dinners*

On May 15, 2019 the SFIC was once again a co-sponsor of the Annual San Francisco Ramadan Interfaith Iftar Dinner at Grace Cathedral. Link to email blast: [https://conta.cc/2UGTvY3](https://conta.cc/2UGTvY3). The SFIC also co-sponsored the Ramadan Iftar Dinner at Congregation B’nai Emunah on May 19, 2019. Link to email blast: [https://conta.cc/2KHHHjH](https://conta.cc/2KHHHjH). Additionally, the SFIC participated in Ramadan Iftar Dinners at City Hall on May 10, 2019 and at The Battery on May 21, 2019.

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the Annual Interfaith Ramadan gathering occurred online on April 29, 2020. Please visit: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzTBZe0dPow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzTBZe0dPow)

*“Lest We Forget” Holocaust Remembrance Project*

From April 17 - May 19, 2019, a Holocaust remembrance project designed by German-Italian artist Luigi Toscano, was on exhibit at San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza. Seventy-eight large-scale photographs of Holocaust survivors honored
individuals living in the United States, Israel, Germany, Ukraine, Russia, Austria, the Netherlands, and the Bay Area with dignified portraits. Fifteen of them were taken in San Francisco and the Bay Area. These pictures were at the center of the unique photographic installation, “Lest We Forget” and were designed to inspire ensure that we do not forget the Holocaust and continue to fight hatred today.

In addition to representing the SFIC at the exhibition’s opening, SFIC Executive Director Michael Pappas was invited to emcee the City’s official recognition of the exhibition hosted by Mayor London Breed at City Hall on May 2, 2019, which coincided with Holocaust Remembrance Day. Link to email blast: https://conta.cc/2KHZpUf

**San Francisco Community Vigil to Mourn and Pray for Victims of Christchurch Mosques Shootings**

Elected Officials, the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, the San Francisco Interfaith Council, the Muslim Community, and Community Leaders gathered on the steps of San Francisco’s City Hall on March 20, 2019 for a community vigil to stand together in solidarity with Muslim sisters and brothers in New Zealand and around the globe against Islamophobia, hate, bigotry, and white supremacy. Link to email blast: https://conta.cc/2Fci7xf

**Financial Capabilities: A Social Justice Issue “Mini Summit”**

The San Francisco Interfaith Council, local civic leaders and a planning committee of women of faith and action hosted a “mini summit” at the San Francisco Main Public Library on January 31, 2019 focused on raising awareness about the vast inequities in pay and wealth impacting our diverse San Francisco community, pioneering local efforts responding to this challenge and strengthening economic security and mobility for families. The program featured faith leaders on social justice, San Francisco Treasurer, Jose Cisneros, and the San Francisco Office of Financial Empowerment’s programs, and a keynote from Commissioner on the Status of Women, Carrie Schwab-Pomerantz, on the importance of financial capability. Link to Financial Security and Wellness Resource Guide: http://bit.ly/2CEVNMn

**Interfaith Unity Celebration for Governor Gavin C. Newsom**

At the invitation of Governor-Elect Gavin C. Newsom, the San Francisco Interfaith Council was asked to be the lead coordinator for an Interfaith Unity Celebration that was held on the morning of the gubernatorial inaugural on January 7, 2019 at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Sacramento. The SFIC was responsible for extending invitations to clergy participants as well as developing the order of service for this interfaith prayer gathering. In addition to the governor-elect and his first partner, over 150 faith leaders from throughout the State were in attendance praying for the governor-elect and his family. Program: http://bit.ly/2FrkOvc

**2020 Complete Count (Census)**

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census counts every resident in the nation. A complete and accurate count of California’s population is essential to the state because the data collected by the Census determines the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives and is also used to distribute billions of dollars in federal funds to local communities. More than 70 federal programs that benefit California, including education, health and human services, use Census numbers as part of their funding formulas. Communities of faith are central to the count as they comprise trusted institutions and leaders that are able to identify and convey the importance of the count to marginalized and “hard-to-find” residents (e.g. undocumented immigrants and the homeless). A key challenge surrounding the upcoming count is the transition from paper to electronic surveys and related confidentiality and security concerns. SFIC Executive Director Michael Pappas was selected to participate among community stakeholders on San Francisco’s highly successful 2010 Complete Count Committee and is being designated to assist in the 2020 effort. An expanded role he will play will be to coordinate census efforts of regional religious communities participating in the The San Francisco Foundation’s FAITHS Program. The SFIC received a grant from The San Francisco Foundation and was selected to host a Coro Fellow, which enabled the SFIC to develop a comprehensive Tool Kit tailored for the use of communities of faith in their outreach efforts to their congregants. Additionally, the Tool Kit provides important resources related to census employment opportunities,
linguistic and technological capacities, as well as how houses of worship can become data collection hubs for census responses.

**US State Department International Visitors Program Delegation Visits**

The SFIC regularly hosts visiting delegations from across the globe at the Presidio Chapel organized by the US State Department International Visitors Program. Recently, the SFIC has hosted delegations from Belgium, Germany, North Macedonia, Malaysia, Norway, Pakistan, Poland, Russia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

**Convener of the “SF Interfaith Essential Housing Task Force”**

With the growing scarcity of housing and skyrocketing rents, low paid/middle income workers who provide essential services for the City are leaving San Francisco. By developing religious institutions’ underutilized parcels for affordable rental housing, our faith communities will help stop the outmigration of our essential services workers.

Building upon the important work of the Interfaith Essential Housing Task Force, spearheaded by the Council in 2014, the SFIC continues to counsel and work closely with congregations and religious institutions seeking to repurpose their facilities to create housing units for low paid workers who provide essential services in our City. Additionally, the SFIC, in comments made by Executive Director Michael Pappas to the San Francisco Business Times and Bay City Beacon, helped to shed light on the Federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act, which gives religious institutions the right to develop their properties without interference by entities seeking to place obstacles in their way that cause financial hardship.

Moreover, the SFIC joined its name to those endorsing Prop A, the $600 million housing affordability/general obligation bond ballot initiative, that successfully passed on November 5, 2019.

**Commonwealth Club of California**

The SFIC's Executive Director has moderated several panels for the Commonwealth Club's Middle East Forum and other programs at the Commonwealth Club.


On Tuesday, May 26, 2020, SFIC Executive Director moderated a panel discussion at the Commonwealth Club of California’s Middle East Forum entitled “The Importance of Interfaith Understanding.” Video available at: [https://www.commonwealthclub.org/events/archive/video/importance-interfaith-understanding](https://www.commonwealthclub.org/events/archive/video/importance-interfaith-understanding)


On February 15, 2019, Michael Pappas also moderated a panel “Helping Refugees, Welcoming the Stranger.” The audio podcast is available at: [http://bit.ly/2TX00pm](http://bit.ly/2TX00pm)

All Commonwealth Club video and audio podcasts where the SFIC has been the moderator are available at: [http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/video-and-audio-archives](http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/video-and-audio-archives)
SFIC in the News

For further articles and other media related to the SFIC, we would direct your attention to the following link: http://www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org/sfic-news

Broad Civic Engagement

Because of the important stakeholder role the SFIC plays in many arenas, the SFIC has been invited to take a place at many tables. Executive Director Michael Pappas currently serves on the San Francisco Economic Recovery Task Force, the 2020 Complete Count Census Committee, the SF Disaster Council, and The San Francisco Foundation/FAITHS Leadership Council. He previously served on the SF Aging & Adult Services Commission and was designated as the SF Aging & Adult Services Commission’s representative to the In-Home Supportive Services Public Authority Governing Body.

The accomplishments listed above are the work of two full-time staff (Executive Director, Michael Pappas and Program/Administrative Associate, Cynthia Zamboukos), an active Board of Directors, the tireless volunteer efforts of our Past Chair, Rita R. Semel, and other dedicated volunteers. Thanks to a grant from the Metta Fund, a database of religious institutions claiming non-profit status in the City and County of San Francisco, and a pro bono donation of software from Salesforce, the SFIC is currently engaged in updating, streamlining and creating its comprehensive database. We gratefully acknowledge the funding provided by congregations, judicatories, agencies, individuals, and foundations which makes these achievements and others not listed here possible.