San Francisco Interfaith Council

14th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast

Repairing the World: Honoring the Work of Rita R. Semel

Tuesday, November 22, 2011
7:00 - 9:00 AM
Hotel Kabuki
Celebrating our diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, the San Francisco Interfaith Council brings people together to build understanding and serve our community.

San Francisco Interfaith Council
Michael G. Pappas, M. Div.
Executive Director
P.O. Box 29055, San Francisco, CA 94129
415 474-1321
Email: mgpappas.sfic@gmail.com
Website: www.sfinterfaithcouncil.org

Honoree Rita R. Semel
Welcome to the 14th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast

The San Francisco Interfaith Council welcomes you to the 14th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast. The Council exists to serve and give voice to the 800 congregations and faith-based social service agencies in the City and County of San Francisco. The Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast is our major event of the year when representatives of the faith community, civic leaders and citizens come together to give thanks for the gifts bestowed upon our city and nation and to pray for their well being.

Each year, at this breakfast, we shine the spotlight on one of the many contributions the religious community makes to the life of San Francisco. This year, we are shining the light on the work of a single individual, Rita R. Semel, on the occasion of her 90th birthday. Rita was a major force in bringing the religious leaders of San Francisco together to form the San Francisco Interfaith Council in 1989-1990. Her efforts were a continuation of more than fifty years of advocacy for interfaith cooperation in civil rights, education, homelessness, and women's health. As the long time Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, she has also been active in Jewish affairs and has led 23 trips to Israel for religious and civic leaders, and public officials. Her decades of public service epitomize a core teaching of the Jewish tradition: "Tikkun Olam" - Repairing the World.

Today we are launching the San Francisco Interfaith Council's Rita R. Semel Endowment Fund for Interfaith Work. Through gifts and bequests this will provide a continuing legacy that will give recognition to Rita and her contributions to our City.

We are grateful for your presence here today and we invite you to participate in the interfaith activities of the San Francisco Interfaith Council.

Rita R. Semel

Rita Semel, a native New Yorker, first came to San Francisco when her parents moved here in 1939. After graduating from Barnard College, she married and traveled with her soldier husband until he was shipped overseas. Returning to San Francisco, Rita worked first as a copy boy, then as a reporter for the San Francisco Chronicle. When she went to work for the Chronicle, she had to sign a document, as did many women at that time, that she would give up her job when the men returned from the War. When her husband, Max, returned from Army service in Europe in 1945, they settled in San Francisco and Rita became the first Associate Editor of the newly formed Jewish Community Bulletin. She retired from the Bulletin in 1950 when her first daughter, Elisabeth, was born and began doing free lance public relations for the March of Dimes, the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and the Israeli Consulate (then located in Los Angeles).

The 1950s and 1960s were a tumultuous time when San Francisco and the nation were struggling for integration, civil rights, and inter-ethnic and inter-faith harmony. In 1964, Rita served on the committee that organized the San Francisco Conference on Religion and Race, and she became its coordinator for the next 25 years.
It was during this period that she became a consultant to the Jewish Community Relations Council, and eventually joined the staff as Associate Director. Among the issues she worked on was overturning Proposition 14, a successful ballot initiative that had nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Law which prohibited racial and other discrimination in housing. Ultimately, Proposition 14 was declared unconstitutional by the California Supreme Court.

Rita served as Associate Director and then Executive Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council, where she built important coalitions and organized campaigns to advance a just society and a secure Jewish future. For more than five decades, Rita has mobilized broad coalitions to advance common causes of social concern, worked to advocate for those most in need, and built lasting relationships among the Bay Area’s many communities.

In addition to her important role as a founder of the San Francisco Interfaith Council, Rita has served in a prominent leadership role as the first Chair of the Global Council for the United Religions Initiative. She has served on the boards of Catholic Charities CYO, Family Services America, San Francisco Resource and Leadership Council, Friends of the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, Jewish Family & Children’s Services, San Francisco Children’s Rights Coalition, San Francisco Family Service Agency, Interfaith Center at the Presidio, San Francisco Homelessness Board, and Intergroup Clearinghouse. Rita currently serves as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She has been recognized for her distinguished service by many of these organizations, and recently was acknowledged by the Islamic Society of San Francisco, Bay Area Cultural Connections, and United Muslims of America for her work as a “longtime Jewish activist and interfaith pioneer.” Rita was honored by the California State Assembly as the Woman of the Year from the 13th District, as well as with the United Way’s Mortimer Fleishhacker Jr. Volunteer Award and the National Council of Jewish Women’s Hannah G. Solomon Award for her leadership contributions. In 1990, Rita received the Rosa Parks Award from Women in Community Service. In 1995, she was a delegate to the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in China. She also attended the 1985 conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

Rita helped found the San Francisco Interfaith Council in 1990, and her tenure has been marked by orchestrating significant programs which have a direct impact on the lives of San Franciscans—from the emergency winter shelter program for the homeless, for which she has galvanized multi-faith and City cooperation, to the chaplaincy program at the Youth Guidance Center.
Rita has served as the unofficial, trusted ambassador of the Jewish community to other religious communities for decades. Through the Jewish Community Relations Council, and later working on a national level through Project Interchange, Rita has led dozens of clergy from other faiths to Israel, to learn about the Jewish community’s relationship to the land, people, and their history. She has introduced religious leaders from throughout the Bay Area to Judaism, Jewish history, and the American and worldwide Jewish experience.

After 51 years of marriage, Max Semel died in 1994. He was preceded in death by their daughter, Jane, who died in an accident shortly before her 18th birthday. Their daughter, Elisabeth, is a criminal defense attorney and is the Director of the Death Penalty Clinic at the University of California Berkeley School of Law.

Today, we honor this “Repairer of the World” on her 90th birthday and for her many years of dedicated service to San Francisco and the world.

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Dr. Charles B. Wilson
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FOR TODAY’S BREAKFAST

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Old St. Mary’s Cathedral
St. Stephen School
Swedenborgian Church
University of San Francisco, University Ministry
President Abraham Lincoln's Thanksgiving Proclamation
October 3, 1863

It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations are blessed whose God is the LORD.

We know that by His divine law, nations, like individuals, are subjected to punishments and chastisements in this world. May we not justly fear that the awful calamity of civil war which now desolates the land may be a punishment inflicted upon us for our presumptuous sins, to the needful end of our national reformation as a whole people?

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth and power as no other nation has ever grown.

But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us, and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that God should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November as a day of Thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens.

PROGRAM

Buddhist Ceremonial In Kin Bell
The Rev. Ronald Kobata
Buddhist Church of San Francisco

Muslim Call to Prayer
Khaled Olaibah, Administrator
Islamic Society of San Francisco

Prayer of Thanks for the Meal
Rev. Dan Nascimento, Pastor
St. Brendan's Roman Catholic Church

~ Breakfast is served at your table ~

Welcome by Breakfast Co-Chairs
Sandy Rechtschaffen, Congregation Emanu-El
Mary J. Zamboukos, St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church

President Lincoln’s Thanksgiving Day Proclamation
Rachel Finn and Nina Pine, Faiths Act Fellows
The Tony Blair Faith Foundation

Introduction of Public Officials and
Personal Tribute to Rita
Rev. James Delange,
Chair of the San Francisco Interfaith Council

Song: “Abi Gezunt” by A. Ellstein
Cantor Roslyn Barak, Congregation Emanu-El
Accompanied by Rodney Gehrke

Rita’s Role in the Development of the SFIC
Michael G. Pappas, M.Div.,
Executive Director, San Francisco Interfaith Council
and member of Grace Episcopal Cathedral
**PROGRAM**

(continued)

Youth Speaks
*Queen Nefertiti Shabazz*

Remarks
*Belva Davis*

Remarks
*The Honorable Nancy Pelosi,
Democratic Leader of the House of Representatives*

Song: “Count Your Blessings” by Irving Berlin
*Cantor Roslyn Barak, Congregation Emanu-El
Accompanied by Rodney Gehrke*

Prayers for Rita’s Causes
*(page 18)*

Youth Speaks
*Queen Nefertiti Shabazz*

My Mother – A Tribute
*Elisabeth Semel*

Purification Rite
*Rev. Mas and Alice Kawahatsu,
Konko Church of San Francisco*

Presentation to Rita R. Semel from the SFIC
*Rev. James DeLange and Michael G. Pappas*

Remarks
*Rita R. Semel*

Song: “You Are I” by Rev. Heng Sure
*Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D., Director, Berkeley
Buddhist Monastery*

**PROGRAM**

(continued)

Song: “Happy Birthday” led by Cantor Roslyn Barak
*Congregation Emanu-El
Accompanied by Rodney Gehrke*

The Rita R. Semel Endowment Fund for Interfaith Work
*The Rev. James DeLange, Chair of the
San Francisco Interfaith Council*

Closing Prayer: The Prayer of St. Francis
*(said by all – on page 19)*
*Led by Ms. Nancy McCormick Kovacich, St. Benedict*
*Parish for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired*
*SSG Brad Hatton, CSMR Recruiter - Interpreter*

Song: “Blessings Upon Blessings”
*Sister Elizabeth Padilla*
*The Bhrama Kumaris Community*

Closing Remarks by Co-Chairs
PRAYERS FOR RITA'S CAUSES

Civil Rights - G. L. Hodge, Administrator, Providence Baptist Church and Vice Chair of the San Francisco Interfaith Council

Education - Ana B. Gutierrez, St. Paulus Lutheran Church

Homelessness - Ken Reggio, Executive Director, Episcopal Community Services

Interfaith Work - Maha ElGenaidi, President & CEO, Islamic Network Group

Judaism & Commitment to Israel - The Honorable Akiva Tor, Consul General of Israel

Women's Health - Janet Reilly, Co-Founder and President, Clinic by the Bay

PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

(said by all)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND PLANS OF THE SFIC
2011/2012

- As we have done for the past 21 years, we continue to coordinate with 30 congregations to provide shelter at four sites and hot dinners for 75-100 homeless men throughout the rainy winter months.

- We continue our bi-annual workshops for disaster preparedness for congregations. Working with the Red Cross, SF CARD, and the City Department of Emergency Services, we have held three workshops. The next one will be May 2, 2012. In 2010, 175 people from 68 congregations and 25 agencies attended the half-day workshop. The role of the SFIC as a major stakeholder in this arena was recognized further this year with the mayoral appointment of our Executive Director to the City’s Disaster Preparedness Council.

- With the blessing of the Rev. Cecil Williams of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, the SFIC has taken on the responsibility of organizing the City’s annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day observance. Working with the local NAACP chapter and other organizations in the City and the South Bay, this year’s observance at Yerba Buena Gardens drew over 6,000 people.

- We were designated by Mayor Ed Lee to organize the City’s commemoration of 9/11. This was done in collaboration with the San Francisco Opera at the annual Opera in the Park at Sharon Meadow in Golden Gate Park, attended by 20,000 people. At the event, we remembered those who lost their lives in 2001, honored the first responders, and emphasized lessons learned. Participating were representatives of San Francisco’s diverse faith communities as well as the mayor, the Police and Fire Departments and the Department of Emergency Management. A smaller interfaith observance was held at Crissy Field beach at 5:47 am in concert with events in New York.

- We have taken on the role of convener in bringing together the CEOs of the City’s ten faith-based social service agencies to address common concerns, including Jewish Family and Children’s Services, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Social Services, Episcopal Community Services, the Salvation Army, St. Anthony Foundation, Glide Memorial UMC, and others, especially as they deal with an increasing demand for their services to the elderly, the homeless, the unemployed and children in the face of severe cuts to the social service safety net.

- On the second Thursday of each month we host an Interfaith Breakfast that brings together some 100 community religious leaders and laity to network, share a meal, hear a community speaker, and listen to an individual’s faith journey. The breakfast meetings are held at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m. The public is invited.

- Our major event of the year is the Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast, attended by 400 people on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving Day. Each year we shine the spotlight on a contribution of the faith community to the life of San Francisco. In 2010, for example, we honored the 40 hospital and hospice chaplains of many faith traditions who serve in our hospitals and hospice organizations.

- On Thanksgiving Day, we hold an interfaith service at one of San Francisco’s religious buildings that attracts some 500 people who join together for prayer and music. On Thanksgiving Day 2011, the service will be held at 10:00 a.m. at the Konko Church of San Francisco at 1909 Bush Street, corner of Laguna Street.
• The SFIC was chosen by the Tony Blair Faith Foundation to place two Faiths Act Fellows to work side by side with our Executive Director, Michael Pappas. The Fellows are focusing on the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and also supporting our local work.

• The SFIC organizes the annual CROP Hunger Walk to benefit the Interfaith Winter Shelter Program, Church World Service and other international relief organizations. The next walk will be held on April 29, 2012, around Lake Merced. Last year’s walk raised over $20,000.

• Last year the SFIC distributed 1,000 calendars delineating major holidays of the world’s religions to public and private schools, Mayor’s Office of Neighborhood Services, the Consular corps, the major social services agencies and NGOs. We will repeat this calendar distribution for 2012.

WE THANK THOSE WHO HAVE SUPPORTED THE SAN FRANCISCO INTERFAITH COUNCIL IN 2011

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Old First Presbyterian Church
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St. Mary’s Cathedral

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St. Mary’s Cathedral

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Stuart Hall High School
Swedenborgian Church
Zion Lutheran Church

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Mary Zamboukos, St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Co-Chair
Rev. James DeLange, St. Francis Lutheran Church
Betsy Dodd, Calvary Presbyterian Church
Nancy Sheftel-Gomes, Congregation Sherith Israel
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Joan Rinde, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church

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Administrative/Program Assistant
SSG Brad Hatton
CSMR Recruiter, Sign Interpreter
Sr. Elizabeth Padilla
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Bro. Mario Reyes
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Cynthia S. Zamboukos
St. Nicholas Orthodox Church
A Taste of Peace:

The coffee you are enjoying this morning is Mirembe Kawomera Delicious Peace, grown by the Peace Kawomera Cooperative in Uganda composed of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim coffee farmers, working together under an initiative for peace.

This coffee is roasted by Thanksgiving Coffee Company and was generously donated for this event.

The San Francisco Interfaith Council has been a supporter of the Delicious Peace coffee project since 2006.

To find out more about how you can bring this coffee into your community please visit: www.deliciouspeace.com

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