



## **25th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast**

Hotel Kabuki

Tuesday, November 25, 2025

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

“Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

These words comprise the last sentence of Emma Lazarus' poem the New Colossus, immortalized in bronze at the base of the Statue of Liberty.

These were the words that greeted my four immigrant grandparents to this new land at the turn of the last century. My grandparents came as foreigners, leaving the comfort of their homeland and loved ones, knowing neither the language nor the customs of this place called America. They came not to exploit, not to take from those here, but to work hard, become citizens and contribute to the rich mosaic of this land of possibility, this land of hope. Along with the few personal belongings they were permitted on the journey, they brought the richness of their culture, faith and family values, manifested in the kindness and sacrifice it would take to begin anew and build a better life for themselves, their children and the generations that would follow. Their story is not unlike the many stories of your ancestors. Their story is not unlike the many stories of those arriving on our shores today. Yet distinct today are the painful images we cannot unsee, the images of good, decent and hard working people, sisters and brothers, being forced to live in fear under the threat of family separation and deportation, those who, innocently trying to follow the rule of law, are showing up in places trusted to be safe havens, only to be unjustly detained, physically abused and emotionally tormented.

In this sad historic chapter of a nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all human beings are created equal, these newcomers, following in the footsteps of our ancestors, are being welcomed, not with Emma Lazarus' powerful words of hope and possibility, but with different kinds of words, words that divide, words that demonize them, sacred words, so distorted and manipulated that their once noble meanings and intents are rendered at best unrecognizable, and at worst profane.

One of those words is Sanctuary. By definition, sanctuary is place of refuge, a place of safety. In our religious world it is interchangeable with the sacred space in which we gather to worship, a holy place where all of God's children should feel safe, protected and valued. Throughout the ages, those fleeing persecution have sought refuge in these sacred spaces. In the 1980's, something called the Sanctuary Movement emerged, a movement naturally led by people of faith to provide asylum, refuge and support for Central American refugees fleeing political persecution. Sanctuary was recognized as such a noble cause that Cities like and including San Francisco legally enshrined its spirit in legislation that prohibits the use of taxpayer dollars, civil employees and local law enforcement from aiding and abetting federal Immigration and Customs Enforcers from violating that sacred trust. And in 2017, during the first Trump administration, thanks largely to the efforts of then Assemblyman David Chiu, who is fighting the good fight on behalf of San Francisco to this day, those protections were extended to the whole of the state of California and signed into law by then Governor Jerry Brown.

Words are powerful. Words define us. Words distinguish us as human beings. Keeping one's word is a sign of one's honor. Sanctuary is a sacred word, a sacred call particularly entrusted to the stewardship of people of faith, and people of faith have and are rising up to respond to this administration's exhaustive attempts to diminish, manipulate, demonize, and redefine it. The hateful and divisive rhetoric of this administration, compounded by its cavalier disregard for the rule of law and unconscionable infiltration into cities like ours by masked Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and worse, threats of sending in National Guard troops, are being met by communities of all expressions of faith who are speaking up, protesting, standing in solidarity, accompanying, and in their rich tradition, giving sanctuary to our beloved undocumented siblings. And here, allow me to recognize and single out

the Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, led by the respected and visionary Reverend Deborah Lee and our sisters and brothers of Faith & Action for their leadership and courageous and tireless initiatives in this effort. Likewise, in this season of Thanksgiving, the SFIC extends thanks the San Francisco Labor Council for both the invitation and many public forums to partner in order protect our undocumented siblings.

At this challenging and defining moment in history, we are both reminded and challenged by the words common to many of our sacred texts, "Show me your works and I will show you your faith.

Being faithful to that charge, the San Francisco Interfaith Council (SFIC) is party to two lawsuits, suing the Trump Administration over its draconian immigration initiatives and policies.

In the first case, we have submitted an amicus brief in the City's case challenging the Trump administration's threat to withhold funds from San Francisco because we are a Sanctuary City. We have raised our voice in this case because the funds at the heart of this litigation are critical to the work of our faith-based social service agencies that contract with the City to provide essential services to San Francisco's most vulnerable residents.

In the second case, the SFIC is one of six prominent religious and labor related plaintiffs, nationwide, challenging the Trump administration's rescission of the "sensitive locations" policy, a policy memorialized under President Obama, which has historically prohibited Immigration and Customs Enforcement from entering houses of worship, hospitals, schools and affiliated social service agencies for the purpose of apprehending, detaining and deporting undocumented residents. The significant impact and harm caused by this policy rescission has resulted in amplified fear of good and faithful people to publicly express their faith and attend worship services, receive needed medical treatment, attend classroom education and receive social services critical to their very existence.

Related to this last concern, the SFIC is partnering with the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank to expand its food delivery program to undocumented siblings now fearful to stand in the lines of our congregations that host food pantries. Here, allow me to extend the SFIC's deep appreciation to San Francisco-Marin Food Bank CEO Tanis Crosby who is with us today as well as to friend, colleague and SF Health and Human Services Chief Kunal Modi and the SFIC's largest funder the Crankstart Foundation for the collaboration to protect the 112,000 San Franciscans who were at risk of losing their SNAP benefits

when the federal government shut down.

As we did in the City's response to the COVID pandemic, the SFIC has stepped up to collaborate with the San Francisco Office of Civic Engagement and Immigrant Affairs to dispatch important, credible and time-sensitive immigrant rights resources to its vast network of 5,600 e-subscribers and the leadership of its 800 constituent communities of faith and religious institutions.

...and today, it is my honor to announce that the San Francisco Interfaith Council has re-activated its Immigration Defense Fund, an emergency response instrument created in the first Trump administration, that will allow the SFIC to actively engage in fundraising to support The San Francisco Foundation's Stand Together Bay Area Fund, which is providing critical monies to community led organizations directly responding to the needs of our undocumented sisters and brothers at this fragile time.

In all of these efforts the SFIC is indebted to Board Member, Philanthropic Advisor and Immigrant Rights Activist Tessa Rouverol Callejo for her wise and discerning counsel in navigating the SFIC through these uncharted waters. She is seated today with some of San Francisco's most noteworthy Sanctuary heroes and pioneers, Eileen Purcell and her husband Jose Artiga, Ignatius Bau, John Trasvinia and our own Mario Paz, to whom this City owes great gratitude. We also want to welcome to San Francisco and here today newly appointed Consul General of Mexico Marco Mena and publicly recommit to our rich, longstanding and collaborative relationship with the consulate.

Beloved sisters and brothers, faith and civic leaders, one of the greatest miracles of living through challenging times as this is our innate recognition of injustice and the subsequent inclination to come together to respond. Freedom is both a gift and an inalienable right entrusted to our stewardship by our Creator to preserve and secure for our progeny to come. We Americans, comprising a diversity beliefs, are, by nature, a resilient people. Since this nation's founding, despite the forces of darkness endured by successive generations, our forebears persevered to ensure that Lady Liberty's torch would shine brightly.

At the dawn of America's milestone 250th anniversary as a democratic republic, let us honor their vision, resolve, courage, sacrifice and faithfulness and not shrink from the call before us today, so that, for generations to come, united, we may sing with joy and fervor the words, "This land is your land, this land is my land, this land was made for you and me."

Thank you.