



**COUNCIL FOR A
PARLIAMENT OF THE
WORLD'S RELIGIONS**

Partner Cities Network:

Profile Questions for Case Study

Metropolitan Area/City, Country:

San Jose / Santa Clara County (Silicon Valley)

California, USA

Submitted by The Silicon Valley Partner City Group:

Girish Shah, Rev. Dr. Andrew Kille, Dr. Philip Boo Riley, Joy-Ellen Lipsky, Rev. Bruce Bramlett, Rev. Ann Hayes, Rev. Ellen Grace O'Brian, Rev. Margo Tenold, Delorme McKee-Stovall

Population /Demographics/Background:

Describe the demographics and diversity of the metropolitan area, any historical framework or recent context that helps shed light on the area's desire to foster peace and harmony among religions, civic society, government and other guiding institutions.

Layered History

History is inevitably perspectival; and in a community as complex and diverse as ours, the perspectives from which to recount our past are many. For example, contemporary descendants of the indigenous people of this region, who are still battling with the federal government for tribal recognition and have only recently begun to be represented in our local public squares, have a different story to tell than those who seek to chronicle how the high tech industry has shaped the economy, culture and workforce of this Valley over the past 50 years. Similarly, the immigration that defines this Valley is far from monolithic, and doing justice to its varied stories and contributions to our communities—e.g., in the past twenty years alone, political refugees from Africa, high tech workers from Asia, undocumented laborers from Mexico, Eastern European Jews, not to mention internal migration from different regions in the United States--in a regional narrative is a challenge with which Silicon Valley's cultural institutions and civic agencies continue to struggle. The significant economic disparities in the Valley—homeless families make their way alongside corporate executives whose salaries are among the highest in the country—also give rise to different experiences and stories.

Thus we present the following description of our region more as illustrative than definitive, with hopes that the dynamics, events and trends we chose to include in this presentation provide some context for the interfaith work that occurs here, and can serve

as starting points for further analysis and discussion among those who want to learn more about the Silicon Valley.

The history of our region begins with indigenous peoples known today as the Ohlone tribe. Their displacement by European explorers and the accompanying missionaries was soon followed by influx of ranchers from Mexico and a blend of Spanish, French and African migrants that would be called Mulattos by early historians. These people were enticed by significant land grants and opportunities of political leadership in Mexico's emerging Los Angeles, San Jose and San Francisco regions. Six of the founding families of San Jose were Mulatto ex-patriots of the Louisiana Territory. These families settled in the area that is now hallmarked with the oldest African American Church in California, the Antioch Baptist Church located on 6th and St. James Streets (18th century) and by one of the first Chapters of the NAACP (19th century with the gold rush). Settlers from the Southern and Eastern seaboard of the USA and laborers from Asia laid the groundwork for the coast to coast rail transport and migration in the 19th century and for the agricultural industry of the 20th century that earned our region the name, Valley of the Heart's Delight. That story line changed dramatically during World War II with the internment of Japanese Americans and following World War II, when California's population growth was spurred by the third migration out of the Southern Regions of the nation to the California Coast. By 1965 the immigration from Asia and South East Asia; the establishment of internationally known research universities (e.g. Stanford and the University of California); a culture of innovation and social experimentation (culture, education, and spiritual as well as business arenas) coalesced in the most recent transformation of the region into a global epicenter of high tech innovation that is known to the world as "Silicon Valley."

Changing Demographics

The pace and complexities of the changes that define the region are reflected in current demographics.

- ❖ **Size:** San Jose, the "capital" of Silicon Valley, became the 10th largest city in the United States three years ago. The 2007 US Census lists the population of San Jose as 939,899 while the California Department of Finance study from 2009 lists the population as 1.8 million.
- ❖ **Geography:** Santa Clara Valley is a sprawling territory that rests in a deep basin bordered by mountains on the South and the East. On the West is the great Pacific Ocean. The valley is decentralized into several small to medium sized urban centers. It boasts an international airport among six regional airports, a metropolitan train station with the El Camino Real cutting across the landscape from North to South as a reminder of the trail of the earliest travelers in the region. The community is an expansive blend of suburban and open spaces that at one time were sprawling orchards and farms for as far as the eye could see.
- ❖ **Immigration:** The region experienced a 60% growth in immigration from 1990 to 2000; today 1 in 3 residents was born outside the USA; over 177 different languages are spoken, and over one-half of our homes are multilingual. Our variety of transnational diaspora communities—anchored by religious institutions, shopping centers and corner

- markets, public art and parks, restaurants, annual events, etc. —make globalization a lived and daily occurrence for the region’s citizens
- ❖ Ethnic diversity: There has been no “majority” group since the late 1990s; reflecting the post-1965 era when Immigration of refugees from South East Asia in the wake of the Vietnam War, immigration reform impacting land ownership of Asians and Hispanic/Latino populations and the boom in HB1 visas granted to Asians and South Asians associated with the expansion of the computer chip industry increased to match that of European immigrants and European American and African American migrants.
 - ❖ Women: The history of women in California dates back to the earliest native nomads and settlers. Women from a wide variety of cultures (Native American, European, Asian, African and more, contributed to the extensive establishment of townships that transformed male dominated tent/mining towns to hubs of where culture, the arts and education flourished. Women’s rights work going back to the 19th century coupled with women’s creative influence in high tech and government led San Jose’s first female mayor in 1974 to call the region the “feminist capital of the world”. Mayor S. Hammer was first in the integration of San Jose government through affirmative hiring practices that gave the underrepresented a chance to establish a voice.
 - ❖ Homeless: according to the most recent census. San Jose’s homeless population is greater than San Francisco’s, at over 7,000 people.

Complex community

Recent comparative studies of the region (“Social Capital” [2000], “Soul of the Community” [2008]) suggest our community tends towards segmentation and enclaves—to some extent driven by ethnicity, as suggested by a 1990’s culture wars/identity politics type controversy over public art representations of the regions cultural heritage, but it seems more decisively by income. The latter is reflected in our geographic diversity, with significant inequities in infrastructure, education, and cultural opportunities across a region with multiple suburban centers and an urban core in decline with signs of revitalization. Some commentators worry that diversity undermines the civic identity and engagement that is key to a healthy community and vibrant economy; others find in it the impetus for entrepreneurship and networking that characterizes our high tech industry and interreligious movement.

Diverse Religious Landscape

Our region is home to some 50 Buddhist centers, the largest Sikh Gurdwara in North America, a Jain temple, a Silicon Valley “store front” (converted technology assembly plant) mosque whose Friday prayer service draws over 3000 participants, several Hindu centers that host cultural programs and religious ceremonies, one of the Zoroastrian fire temples in North America, numerous Baha’i spiritual assemblies, and synagogues—reflecting the fact that the Valley is home to one of the most religiously diverse landscapes in North America. The percentage of individuals who identify with faith traditions other than Christianity—10%-- is double that of the United States; but we also have a higher percentage of residents—17%--who identify themselves as non-affiliated compared to other parts of the country.

There is a history in our region of religious communities civic engagement and partnerships—e.g. in the 70’s with native son Cesar Chavez’s farm laborer movement, the 1990s with

immigration rights, today with our Interfaith Council's hotel workers rights, Catholic Charities work with refugees and the recent interfaith pledge to end poverty.

Leading Voices:

The Entrepreneurial Spirit

Perhaps reflecting the entrepreneurial spirit and frequent fragmentation of Silicon Valley, no single formal interreligious organization stands out as a clear center of multifaith cooperation or encounter in the community. Instead, a number of organizations of varying size and purpose have emerged as community needs or common interests have led people to make common cause.

The most visible umbrella organizations include *The Interfaith Council on Religion, Race, Economic & Social Justice*; the *Peninsula Clergy Network*; the *Santa Clara County Council of Churches*; the *South Bay Interfaith Steering Committee*; and the *Silicon Valley FACES Religious Leaders Dialogue Group*. *TIC* is primarily focused on economic and labor issues; *PCN* includes clergy and religious leadership along with public officials from cities, and schools. The Council of Churches, while retaining its basic identity as a Christian organization, is intentional about supporting interfaith involvements including their work with *California Interfaith Power and Light*, an interreligious educational campaign for environmental sustainability and their recent *Torture as a Moral Issue* conference. The *Religious Leaders Dialogue Group* sponsored by *SVFACES* for over thirty years began as a Jewish/Christian dialogue and, with the increasing religious diversity of the valley, has come to include Baha'is, Buddhists, Muslims, Wiccans and more. From this group the *SBIF* emerged as an organizing committee for community-wide events, including working with the *Center for Spiritual Enlightenment* on our application for Partner City status with the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

Many other organizations, both ad-hoc and ongoing, are involved in various ways in developing interfaith understanding, education, relationship-building, and joint public action. These would include the *Interfaith Speakers Bureau* sponsored by *Islamic Networks Group*; the *Center for Spiritual Enlightenment* (which has sponsored a series of annual *Carry the Vision* community nonviolence conferences including religious leaders, governmental representatives, and community people); *Interfaith Network for Community Help*; *Multifaith Voices For Peace and Justice*; *Peninsula Interfaith Action (PIA)*; *People Acting in Community Together (PACT)*; and *Regeneration Project/ California Interfaith Power and Light*. Local government involvement includes the San Jose Mayor's annual Faith Leader's Appreciation Breakfast and the Santa Clara County Office of Human Relations.

Local universities have recognized the particular religious mix and have developed interfaith ministries such as the Chapel at Stanford University, and academic programs like the Local Religions Project at Santa Clara University.

Finally, there are many religious congregations and associations that visibly active in interreligious activities: Baha'i Community of San Jose; Chung Tai Zen Center; Jain Center of North America; Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation; Jewish Community Relations Council of the Peninsula; Muslim Community Association (MCA); the

Ahmadiyya Mosque; the Pacifica Institute; the South Bay Islamic Association; and the Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation.

There is no lack of opportunities for individuals and organizations to be engaged in interreligious cooperation. However, it is often difficult for people to know what is happening and how to get involved. Two entities, *Interfaith Space* (local), and the *Interfaith Center at the Presidio* (regional), publish monthly calendars of events and provide listings on their websites and help to connect the various interfaith efforts.

Actions Taken:

From Many Possibilities, A Look at Three Actions

San Jose / Silicon Valley as a culturally and religiously diverse area has always had interreligious dialog and engagement on various levels taking place in the community. In the last decade, as diversity has increased and tensions have mounted due to both local and international events, more formal interreligious *rapprochement has begun to take shape with new umbrella interfaith groups forming and existing groups or events becoming more inclusive. (*the establishment or renewal of friendly relations between people or nations that were previously hostile or unsympathetic toward each other)

We see the interreligious movement as meeting three over-arching needs of the community:

- **Education**
- **Fellowship**
- **Social Action**

There are several groups in Santa Clara County doing work to meet those needs with much overlap that occurs in any given project or situation. Thus an event or campaign that is focused on social action is by its very nature educational and the experience of people from diverse backgrounds working together toward a common goal for the betterment of the community naturally leads to the experience of fellowship. Taking this into account, a sample of three specific interreligious programs follows.

Education:

SV FACES has continued the history of over 35 years of enabling groups of religious leaders to meet together for dialogue, mutual understanding, and community relationship-building.

Interfaith Leaders Dialogues

Growing out of a Jewish/Christian dialogue first begun in 1972, the Interfaith Leaders Dialogue group has broadened its focus and involvement as the religious diversity of the Santa Clara Valley has changed. Participants in the dialogues have included Baha'is, Buddhists, Christians (Catholic, Protestant, and Mormon), Gnostics, Hindus, Jains, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and many others.

Members of the group take turns hosting the gathering at their own religious community, and the discussions may include learning about one another's traditions, focusing on issues of

community concern, or exploring common issues of religious leadership in our time and location. See www.SVFaces.org (interfaith dialogs)

Fellowship

South Bay Interfaith Circle of Palms Gatherings

In 2005, several participants in what was then the SVCCJ Interfaith Religious Leaders Dialogue wished to develop an event to celebrate the October convergence of Ramadan, Yom Kippur, World Communion Sunday, and the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Together they formed the South Bay Interfaith Steering Committee, and sponsored “*Fasting and Feasting Together: A Family Reunion of Abraham’s Children*” at the Circle of Palms, an outdoor community gathering site in downtown San Jose. About 300 people gathered to share prayers from Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, and to break bread together at sundown.

The following year, the group wished again to gather a shared celebration, but recognized that the religious diversity of the Valley extended beyond the Abrahamic traditions. They expanded the Steering Committee, and in September 2006 came together for “Breaking Bread Together: An Interfaith Reunion.” The program included Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Jain, Muslim, Buddhist, Mormon, Wiccan, Unitarian, Kriya Yoga, and Baptist religious leaders.

In 2007, a third event was held, centered on music from different traditions. "Keep the Diversity; Seek the Harmony" brought together musical and chanting groups from Jewish, Unitarian, Roman Catholic, Mormon, and Hindu traditions.

The SBIF Steering Committee has continued as a meeting point for communication and occasional shared action. For example, SBIF has been a co-sponsor of interfaith events, members of the group issued joint statements of concern about the situation in Gaza in early 2009, and commissioned the subgroup that is working on the application for Partner City status with the Parliament.

Go to the South Bay Interfaith for further information and photos from the community gatherings and the Gaza statement: www.southbayinterfaith.org

Social Action

Carry the Vision Community Nonviolence Conference (CTV)

Beginning in 2003 as a way for diverse religious communities and organizations in Silicon Valley to participate in the Season for Nonviolence (which was launched by the Association for Global New Thought in partnership with the Gandhi Institute as a grassroots nonviolence educational campaign commemorating the memorial anniversaries of Mahatma Gandhi and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) the initial gathering convened by the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment in a downtown park featured clergy from a few faith traditions and a keynote address on the life and message of Dr. King by a local Superior Court Justice. Over the last five years, this conference has successfully worked to build bridges of peace within our greater

community expanding to bring together over 30 diverse participating organizations including religious congregations, nonprofit organizations, educational institutions, government offices and business representatives serving groups of 500 – 700 participants annually.

There are four key objectives for the conference: (1) To build bridges of peace and understanding within our own community. The day conference provides opportunities to meet others, to experience the world through the diverse cultures of our own community, and to develop mutual respect through education and dialog. (2) To raise awareness for participants of the resources that are available in our community. (3) To further capacity building for individuals and organizations by providing new tools for working with individuals and groups. (4) To provide the inspiration, tools and support that make it possible for participants to commit to simple and profound acts that contribute to peace.

In 2008, CTV sponsored the *Make a World of Difference Community Nonviolence Conference*, and Pre-Parliament event offered in collaboration with the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment, Santa Clara University, San Jose Vice Mayor Dave Cortese's Office, and the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions providing an introduction to the 2009 global convening of the Parliament in Australia. See www.carrythevision.org for more information

Results/Successes:

Share some key results and successes of the leading voices or the interreligious organizing group in the metropolitan area within the past 3 years. (Examples could be a big event that was hosted, an article that was written, a fundraising goal achieved.)

A Window of Possibility from the Three Actions

The results and successes from the three actions/ programs noted above are as follows:

SVFACES Religious Leaders Dialog

The religious leaders dialog has broadened the base of understanding and friendship among diverse religious groups in Santa Clara County. Over time, the diversity of the group has grown and contributed to raising awareness of all voices in the community. Out of the fellowship that has evolved from this group, grew the South Bay Interfaith steering committee which not only opens interfaith events to the general public and helps to build understanding but has also provided an online presence and dialog which allows group members to share concerns about issues affecting their religious communities. There have been several occasions when this interfaith community has been able to respond to specific requests for support from a member group whether it was to offer a shared voice of concern about an anti-Islamic speaker scheduled to speak at the local university, or prayers for members of the Baha'i community imprisoned in Iran.

South Bay Interfaith Circle of Palms Events

The interfaith events open to the larger community organized by the South Bay Interfaith steering committee have positively changed the “face” of interreligious gatherings in Santa Clara County. At one time, our mayor’s interfaith breakfast was a gathering largely attended by Christians of different denominations and Jews. But in 2008, there were nearly 200 representatives at the breakfast, this time reflecting the greater diversity of our valley’s religious landscape. When the mayor’s office was approached with the question as to whether leaders of all religious and spiritual communities were invited the response was “yes, of course.” But until these groups began to show up together, and request inclusion, they were not readily seen or connected to community events such as this.

Carry the Vision Community Nonviolence Conference

Since 2004, the Community Nonviolence Conference has used some of the structure and processes put forth at the 2004 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Barcelona. Central to the conference has been the small group dialog process to engage community participants in reflection, dialog and commitment to action. Each year, over 200 people have participated in the dialogs, and individuals have made profound commitments to foster a culture of peace. Since 2005, over 600 commitments have been made, many that directly affect the lives of both individuals and the greater community. Examples include: (1) a religious leader committing himself to greater interfaith understanding by deciding to visit a different religious community each month throughout the year; (2) a young woman learning at the conference that there is a support system for freedom from gang activity which enabled her to make the commitment to leave gang life and (3) another young woman founding a nonprofit organization to educate girls on how to have self-respect and command it from others. These types of commitments, made by hundreds of people, filter into the vibrant life of our community and make a difference in countless ways.

The conference has also had an empowering effect on our interfaith movement showing that we can bring together religious communities with other guiding institutions to focus on a cause (in this case overcoming violence in our families, community and world) that we all care deeply about.

Community Aspirations:

What do you aspire to achieve in the next year and in the next 2 to 5 years for your community through interreligious activity?

The metaphor for our aspirations for the Partner City Program in our area is to secure “A Place at the Table” for religious and spiritual leadership in our greater community. Over the years, even as our diversity has grown and the need for interreligious understanding has increased as well as the necessity for the values driven voice of our religious traditions in the public square and their significant contribution to social cohesion, we have witnessed an erosion of the presence and voice of these voices in our community and their ability to contribute in a organized and significant way. Some of this is due to the nature of our area being diverse and dispersed, and is also a product of the times, when many are focused on the concerns of their

own particular group. Currently, our religious diversity is not represented on the web site of the city of San Jose along with other facts about our area. Our primary newspaper has discontinued the religion and ethics segment of the paper. Over the years our interfaith airport chaplaincy program has had no place in the San Jose airport. Instead, representatives of the clergy have had to walk the terminals to be available. The inclusion of an interfaith chapel and offices for the interfaith airport chaplaincy in the new city of San Jose multi-million dollar international airport would be a positive step forward. Through our partnership with the Parliament Council we are seeking an avenue for strengthening the awareness and impact of the already vital interreligious presence in our community.

Interreligious communities in other parts of the world have assemblies or forums that work directly with local leaders in other guiding institutions, such as advisors on matters of religious education to government departments, (ie police officer or health worker education). Such potential exists in our area.

In his inaugural speech, San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed said: *San José is the 10th largest city in the nation, the 3rd largest city in California, a state that alone would be the world's 8th largest economy, but our role in the world is more than just economic development and technological innovation. We have an opportunity and an obligation here in San José to demonstrate to the world how people from different ethnicities, religions and cultures can live, work, play and prosper together.*

San José will be a beacon of peace and prosperity to show the world what can happen when people from around the world come together and focus on what they have in common rather than on their differences. In a world full of ethnic and religious hatred and violence we have a chance to show the world a better way of life. We can do it and we will do it.

We envision the interreligious community being a vital part of this demonstration of peace and prosperity.

Partnership Aspirations:

How do you envision a partnership with the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions through its global network would serve your community and the network?

Our initial inspiration is that the assessment process that our interfaith steering committee worked on to provide entry into the Partner City Network will become a springboard for dialog and visioning in the greater interreligious community in Santa Clara County. It is our intention to use it to bring together a broader interreligious contingency and representation to articulate a vision of possibility for our area and to find ways to work together to realize those visions. One question we are asking is: *what becomes possible for us as a part of the Global Partner City Network that was not possible before?*

We envision the partner city nexus in our community as a way to showcase and connect the existing interreligious organizations within our community—to support community awareness

and access to these vital organizations and interfaith efforts. And, we sense that this global connection will strengthen the voice of our interreligious efforts in the local community.

We also see the ability to connect globally with other partner cities in the network. The potential for dialog, education, exchange of best practices and enrichment is vast. The opportunity for such an exchange helps us to expand our vision locally, assisting us with articulating our strengths as well as providing an avenue to reach out for support in areas of challenge and growth.

An organized “hub” in our area would assist us our participation in the periodic global Parliaments, by having a base for supporting local pre- and post- Parliament events and on-going involvement in initiatives that are fostered at the global convening. It will also give us direct access to resources developed by the Council for interreligious enrichment.