

## **Interreligious Leaders Dialogue Group**

June 17, 2010

JCRC, Jewish Community Center, hosting

1. **WELCOME**, Sign ins and self-introductions
  
2. **REPORT FROM PLANNING GROUP** (Andrew Kille- see below)
  
3. **PANEL FROM BAY AREA INTERFAITH COUNCILS**
  - a. Panelists:
    - i. **Michael Pappas**, Executive Director, San Francisco Interfaith Council
    - ii. **Brian Stein-Webber**, Executive Director, Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County
    - iii. **Rita Semel**, Vice-Chair, SFIC
    - iv. **Jim DeLange**, Chair, SFIC
  - b. Opening remarks: a brief overview of your council's history, organization, and scope
  - c. San Francisco:
    - i. Michael: Council serves 800 congregations and several agencies
    - ii. Rita Semel:
      1. Origins with two disasters: crisis of homelessness in 1988 and Loma Prieta Earthquake in 1989—both times had set up separate interfaith committees to deal with crisis. Realized it was not possible to create a new group for every crisis, so formed Council
      2. The council is able to bring together the faith community in ways no single group can do
      3. Council was volunteer run for 19 years
      4. Every interfaith council is *sui generis*—it must arise from and address the realities of its own location. Do what is right for you.
    - iii. Jim DeLange:
      1. If you get involved in social advocacy, you always alienate someone
      2. The key is to focus on Interfaith relationship building for its own sake
      3. They hold monthly breakfast meeting (attendance up to 80) with opportunity for conversation around tables, a speaker from an NGO or City office on a program or need, a personal faith journey, and announcements of opportunities and events
        - a. Meet in the same location; hold fast to time frame
      4. Used to have an Annual Meeting of all members, but lack of clarity about who was a member. Board of Directors actually guided the council.
      5. Board has 21 members with overlapping terms.

6. They do not speak for the religious community (get many requests for advocacy, but do not take them). “We speak on behalf of no one, but give a voice to everyone.”
  7. Only recently hired full-time director (Michael). Their 18 year history gave credibility to the organization and it was not difficult to raise funds
  8. Connect with congregations; that’s where religious life happens
- iv. Michael:
1. People are “members” by virtue of who they are; they have a mailing list of 1,800
  2. Communications network is an essential tool for the work; they have collected business cards wherever they go, worked with Constant Contact and their own tech volunteer to grow their e-mail list
  3. E-mail newsletter is linked to the website; congregations can post community events
  4. The homeless shelter program is a keystone effort; also disaster preparedness. In preparing for disaster, congregations in neighborhoods meet one another and help to create a “culture of preparedness”.
- d. Contra Costa County- Brian Stein-Webber
- i. ICCC is a membership organization with 105 members; it began as the Council of Churches in order to provide chaplaincy in the jails, now includes other kinds of chaplaincies. It moved from being a primarily Protestant Christian group in 1997 to becoming Interfaith.
  - ii. Staff: Full-time chaplain, part-time director and part-time staff
  - iii. Supported by membership. They don’t use grants (grants tie down the program and when funding ends, may not be sustainable)
  - iv. There are other interfaith organizations in the county, such as Greater Richmond Interfaith Program (GRIP); ICCC works mainly in central and eastern areas
  - v. Decisions made by an Executive Committee of 17 people—work to keep diversity as much as possible. Board members are from religious communities, not specifically corporate types.
  - vi. There is a Social Justice Alliance that deals with advocacy and “hot topics”; members of the board may speak as individuals, but they do not speak “for” the Council
- e. Specific Issues:
- i. Board Composition: how do you constitute your board; what is the role of laity and clergy?
    1. Important to have laity on the board (Rita as an example); clergy are just too busy and “tend to take over”; a combination of both is good; don’t emphasize the difference
    2. People should be affiliated with a faith group, not just floating

3. A Nominating committee looks at the balance of faith traditions, men and women, ethnic diversity
  4. Source of candidates—people who come to events and take an active part in the work;
  5. There's a list of the San Francisco Board Members on their website [www.sf-interfaith.org](http://www.sf-interfaith.org)
  6. Important to have representation from larger and more prominent congregations; does not necessarily have to be senior leader, but they need to be connected. Representatives should be actively engaged in interfaith efforts, not just holding a place
- ii. What about Humanists and other minority groups?
    1. "All are welcome."
  - iii. How do you deal with the "hot potato" issues?
    1. Decline all requests for political advocacy (can refer people to other groups that do that work)
    2. Example of Thanksgiving Interfaith Prayer Breakfast (formerly "Mayor's" breakfast); Mayor Newsome spoke critically of supporters of Proposition 8 (anti- gay marriage initiative), especially Catholics. Needed to make clear it was not the Mayor's breakfast, and that the Council was not taking a position on the issue.
  - iv. What kind of ethnic diversity is represented on your boards and what efforts are being made to reach out to groups such as Latinos, African-Americans, or Vietnamese?
    1. Other groups have emerged on specific groups like immigration; council has "shined a spotlight" on those groups and given a forum
    2. There is a real challenge in getting interfaith involvement from many cultures; it is not a particular concern or focus
  - v. In response to various questions:
    1. SF mission statement: "Celebrating our diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, the San Francisco Interfaith Council brings people together to build understanding and serve our community."
      - a. [ICCC mission statement (not mentioned at meeting): "We as people from a diversity of religions, spiritual traditions and sectors of society, gather to manifest our unity as we promote the spirit of community, service and cooperation through the work of the Interfaith Council."]
    2. Make efforts "to shine a light" on programs and groups, develop networking, spiritual support, and skills training
    3. Ask yourselves: "What do we want to do? Why do we want to do it?" that will begin to give shape to the organization
    4. Importance of community gatherings and prayer services

5. Education, understanding and dialogue are sufficiently compelling concerns to bring the community together
  6. Note Jay Miller's Peninsula Clergy Network and its unique structure and purposes
  7. Communications: SFIC has become a communications portal through which government and community agencies can speak to the wider community. With 1,800 recipients, an e-mail blast can get information out and ensure that religious leaders will receive it. this increases the likelihood that something will be mentioned in a bulletin, announced in a service, or included in a sermon.
    - a. It is essential to be discerning about what is disseminated by way of the portal; not every issue or announcement needs to be sent
  - f. Thanks to the panel; they indicated a willingness to stay in touch and talk more about these issues if it would be useful for us.
4. **NEXT STEPS:**
- a. Planning Team continuing to meet—goal is to have proposal by September
  - b. Should we have another group gathering in July and/or August?  
Consensus is that we should; Planning Group will set up a summer meeting and notify people.

#### 5. **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CONCERNS**

- a. Alleged attack on Muslim main in Sunnyvale; Delorme McKee-Stovall described the status. Law enforcement taking it seriously; suspects have not yet been apprehended. The individual involved does not want a lot of attention; CAIR (Council on American Islamic Relations) is working with him.
  - i. There have been two other attacks aimed at Muslims this year; the Human Relations Commission is seeing an increase.
- b. Imam Mubashir Ahmad of the Ahmadiyya community asked all to pray for the families of the 90 Ahmadiyya Muslims who were killed in an attack on their mosques in Pakistan
  - i. Comment from SFIC folks: because of the relationship building, the Interfaith community can and does speak out at such times—not as an organization, but as individuals from different communities standing together.
  - ii. Comment from Jean Ramaciotti: Palo Alto Ministerial Association convened around addressing hate crime attacks on Jewish community. Over time, the founders moved on and the younger generation did not see the value in getting together (they wanted action). Now there is no network to enable community response.
- c. Habitat for Humanity is planning an interfaith building project in Cupertino. Interested people should contact Andrew Condon (Acondon@hfhsv.org)

## **PROGRAM GROUP REPORT**

At the last meeting, the Planning Group was appointed to meet and develop a plan for organizing this new cooperative organization.

Members of the group include Bruce Bramlett, Diane Fisher, Jian Hu, Alan Jones, Nancy Palmer Jones, Andrew Kille, Joy-Ellen Lipsky, Clarissa Moore, Chuck Rawlings, Boo Riley, Girish Shah and Samina Sundas.

Chuck Rawlings has made Kimberly Aagaard, an intern at the Council of Churches, available to the group as part-time staff. We have met three times since May 12<sup>th</sup> to lay out the dimensions of the task and to identify the essential components required for the process.

We understand that our role as the Planning Group is to gather pertinent information and recommendations, to reflect and digest that material, and to bring back to this general group a specific proposal on how to move forward.

Following the last meeting, Bruce Bramlett composed a questionnaire that was sent out to most of you. We request that you take time to fill out the questionnaire so that we have your input. If you do not have a copy of the questionnaire, it is available at the SouthBay Interfaith website: [www.southbayinterfaith.org](http://www.southbayinterfaith.org), under Files > Discussion Documents. We continue to add additional updates and information to that site.

We will also be inviting you to help with doing research or interviews or with drafting portions of the report.