



## **16<sup>th</sup> Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Prayer Breakfast**

Hotel Kabuki

Tuesday, November 26, 2013

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

Good EARLY morning friends of the San Francisco Interfaith Council. I'm Michael Pappas and for the past seven years I've been privileged to serve as Executive Director of this amazing organization!

For those of you skeptics out there...Those of you who might not believe in miracles, and there might be some of you out there, I'd submit, a gathering of almost 400 smiling faces at 7:00 in the morning, just two days before Thanksgiving in San Francisco at an event that sold out over a month ago! I'd call that a miracle! The only folk that were here earlier than us were the amazing wait staff of the Hotel Kabuki! Let's give huge round of applause for our sisters and brothers of Local 2!

Just the other night Rita Semel and I were standing in the basement of St. Boniface Church with our partners at Episcopal Community Services and an army of volunteers from the Noe Valley Ministry, holding hands, praying, as we commenced the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the City's Interfaith Winter Shelter. What was supposed to be a single year's emergency relief effort, along with an important interfaith response to the Loma Prieta Earthquake gave birth to this Council ... For a quarter of a century the SFIC, with its constituency of over 800 congregations, their respective judicatories, the sectarian academic and healthcare institutions along with the faith-based social services agencies, that provide the safety net for our City's most vulnerable residents, has been celebrating our diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, bringing people together to build understanding and serving our community!

We are grateful to the City, and especially to Mayor Lee for the opportunity to engage the best of our resources not only in the arenas of homelessness and disaster preparedness, but in so much more. You need only turn to page 25 in your program books for a comprehensive look at all the SFIC has done and plans to do for the betterment of our City!

All that we do, we do on a barebones budget. We are grateful to our Board of Directors for their selfless service and to all who financially support the work of the Council. Their names are also listed in program. As we rely on donations and grants to

sustain our ongoing work, in the spirit of the season of Thanksgiving, won't you make a thanksgiving offering? There are envelopes in your program. Your donations to the general operating of the SFIC are greatly appreciated! Our volunteers are available as you exit to accept your gifts!

Before introducing our keynote speaker allow me to take a moment to say a special thank you to the two main sponsors of this event. For his great generosity, I'd like to acknowledge an incredible benefactor not only of this Council, but to so many important causes in our City, let's have a big round of applause for the Honorary Consul General of Monaco and great Humanitarian Tom Horn and the H.B. and Lucille Horn Foundation. Tom, please stand and take a bow! In the same breath, allow me to say an incredible thank you to Home Box Office. Visiting us from HBO's NY Office is my dear friend Beth Main and her wonderful husband Donald. Thanks to HBO's generosity, in each of your bags you will find two important DVDs, "Wartorn 1861-2010" from executive producer the late James Gandolfini and "Taking Chance" starring Kevin Bacon! Thank you HBO! Beth, please rise and accept a round of well-deserved applause.

Each year, at this breakfast, we shine a spotlight on the important ways the faith community makes a difference in the life of our City. Today we pause to give thanks and honor the incredible work of the Veterans Administration, Swords to Plowshares and the myriad of academic and faith communities that support our returning veterans and their families.

As the son of a decorated Korean War veteran, I've spent the better part of my life observing how military service can shape the integrity and character of someone I dearly love. Being a man of incredible faith, there's not a conversation about dad's time in Korea that doesn't somehow circle around to that one military chaplain with whom he frequently prayed or received a hopeful word at a moment when it was most needed. Today we are here to pay tribute to those incredible organizations and faith communities that find themselves on the frontlines here on these shores, assisting and supporting those service women and men and their precious families, whose sacrifices for us pale in comparison to anything we could ever offer back.

For the better part of this past year, our Council has been blessed to be working with friend Christine Pelosi on a gun violence reduction art program, which she will tell you about later. When Christine heard about the theme for this year's breakfast, she got that oh-too-familiar sparkle in her eyes and said, you really need to invite Joan Mooney to speak at this event. Now, we've been doing this breakfast for 16 years and have welcomed some pretty important people to the podium. I've got to admit, this is the first time we've ever had to submit our program to the White House for review at a Cabinet Meeting in order to get permission for our Breakfast's Keynote Presenter to speak. That was the case with this year's speaker. Nominated by President Obama and confirmed by the US Senate, Assistant Secretary For Congressional and Legislative Affairs for the US Department of Veterans Affairs Joan Mooney has served in this post since 2009. Her impressive bio can be found on page 16 of your programs. Joan, we know that Washington DC can often be a real battlefield. We here in this great City, where wishes can come true, want to give you a warm San Francisco welcome! Friends, please join me in welcoming to the podium Assistant Secretary Joan M. Mooney!