



“A Thanksgiving to Remember”

**Honoring the 100th Birthday of
Founder and Past Chair Rita R. Semel**

**Tuesday, November 23, 2021
Congregation Emanu-El**

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

Good Morning. I'm Michael Pappas and for the past 14 years I've been privileged and blessed to serve as Executive Director of the San Francisco Interfaith Council.

The word Thanksgiving means different things to different people. The San Francisco Interfaith Council embraces this word, not as a proper noun, but rather with a small "t," acknowledging it as a foundational tenet, common to all faiths and religious expressions, not on just one particular day, but everyday and at all times.

Today, in particular, we have much for which to be thankful. We, as the San Francisco Interfaith Council, are thankful to be gathering safely together in person for the first time in over a year and half. We are thankful for our City's religious and lay leaders who have so diligently navigated their worshipping communities through the unknown waters of this ongoing pandemic. With great humility, we are thankful for the role entrusted to our Council to be of service and support to our City and its

800 communities of faith and religious institutions, providing them with timely & credible information, in order for them to make critical decisions for the protection, health and safety of those entrusted to their spiritual and practical care.

Today in particular, we are thankful for the life and service of our Founder & Past Chair Rita Semel, the newly minted centennial, and celebrate her 100 years of inspiring and indefatigable hard work, setting an impeccable example of what is possible when people of different religions come together to express through service the best that their faith teachings profess. What more appropriate gift could we give to the Matriarch of Interfaith in San Francisco, on her 100th Birthday, than this celebration of our rich and diverse spiritual and religious traditions. Each and every person in this beautiful and sacred sanctuary is part of our gift to you dearest Rita. Collectively, we are the prayerful expression of all that you've worked so hard to build.

At this moment, we are particularly thankful for the presence and participation of our Member of Congress, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Honorable Nancy Pelosi. Madam Speaker, a few moments ago Fr. Paul so eloquently read the Prayer of St. Francis, the Patron Saint of our City, which is an encapsulation of our San Francisco values. Madam Speaker, you live and speak the powerful words of that prayer. And like the saint himself, who distinguished himself as defender of God's creation and all its creatures, protector of the poor and disenfranchised, champion of interfaith relations, and most importantly, as one who didn't think twice to sacrifice for the greater good, you are the embodiment of faith in action. Know that we love and

pray for you as you continue to persevere and shine on our behalf for the greater good of our Nation!

Please join me at the Bema to offer this year's Thanksgiving Address, as we celebrate this "Thanksgiving to Remember" and Rita Semel's 100 years of life and service.