



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Interfaith Service

Yerba Buena Gardens
Monday, January 15, 2018

Remarks by Michael G. Pappas, Executive Director

Good afternoon, I'm Michael Pappas, Executive Director of the San Francisco Interfaith Council. I join our Chair Kaushik Roy and Founder/Past Chair Rita Semel in welcoming you to this auspicious celebration, the Birthday of Civil Rights Leader the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Allow me to extend a huge shout out of thanks to our friends at the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival and MJM Management Group, for their incredible generosity in making this precious public space, in the back-drop of the magnificent MLK Memorial, available for this event.

Let's also have a resounding round of applause for the Tabernacle Community Development Corporation, whose generous support helped to underwrite expenses for today's Interfaith Service.

It is appropriate that we should come together today for prayer and thanksgiving, in an interfaith celebration as, not only was Dr. King a Pastor of immeasurable faith, but every social justice and civil rights movement marked in our nation's history has been led by leaders of faith. In particular, here in San

Francisco, in the early days of the Civil Rights Movement, before there was the San Francisco Interfaith Council, faith leaders from every tradition came together, through the Conference on Religion, Race and Social Concerns to proclaim, with a unified and prophetic voice, the Almighty's call for freedom and equality for all people.

Continuing in that rich tradition, the San Francisco Interfaith Council brings to this stage today the voices and prayers of the 800 congregations in our City, their respective judicatories, the religious based health care and academic institutions and those critical social service agencies that provide the social safety net for our City's most vulnerable residents.

Together we seek to bring people of different faiths together to celebrate our rich diverse religious and spiritual traditions, build understanding and serve our community.

This year's MLK observance is of particular significance as today we commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination.

In seeking to assassinate Dr. King, those with hate in their hearts and malice in their souls sought to put asunder the very foundation of liberty and freedom upon which this great nation was built. But the voices of righteousness and truth prevailed, great advances in civil rights became enshrined in law and judicial decisions, reminding us that Dr. King's horrific death was not suffered in vain.

Sadly, a half a century later, we find ourselves gathered as community, at a surreal time when basic human and civil rights were never more threatened and at risk. When the ugliness of racism and discrimination is unbelievably being voiced

from the lips of the President of these United States. We are challenged to face profound new realities never imagined and the time-sensitive call for unity, to stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable residents of our City and nation.

To do less would betray this Council's mission and the call of each of us to fulfill our most noble potential, to treat others as we ourselves wish to be treated.

The theme of this year's convening is appropriately THE URGENCY OF NOW!

Now is the time to speak truth to power! Now is the time to fearlessly stand in the face of and challenge injustice! Now is the time, in the words of Leader Pelosi, not to agonize, but to organize!

As we lift up the voices, passages and music heard at Dr. King's three funeral services and beyond, let us be inspired, stand arm and arm with our neighbors and continue Dr. King's struggle for freedom and equality for all!